

Daily life 171

Chapter 171 Dangers And Opportunity For Survival For The Ranked

"Are all people from the Order that powerful?" Murong Yan asked in a daze as she looked at the spot Yang Qing and the Zou siblings had just disappeared from.

The whole experience was surreal and also the most frightened she has ever been. She had a feeling today's experience would stay with her for a very long time.

"It's a given since they're known as the watchful eagles of the Southern continent. To evoke fear and respect from the whole continent, they need abilities that stand above the masses.

Even though there are clan records describing those from the Order, it still doesn't do them justice. I felt like an ant beneath his gaze," Murong Jie said as he chuckled bitterly.

One of his hands hidden beneath the sleeves of his robes was still shaking, so he had to clench it into a fist to reduce the shaking.

"Yan'er, you are one of the best talents our Murong family has seen in close to 500 years. In here, your talent is worthy of the reverence and respect you get from the clan members but out there it's a different story.

Even without pitting ourselves against the Order, since it's a monolith we may never reach, just in Green Pine County alone, we are not even worth mentioning.

There are already over a dozen rank 5 organizations with more seniority and power than us. Our family only has one person in the foundation establishment stage, while the likes of the Shen clan, Liu clan, Pan clan, and Thunder peak sect have about 20 of them and that number may keep growing if nothing unexpected happens.

Above them, are the noble families with core formation experts. And this is just Green Pine County, which can't even be considered in the top five among the powerful counties of the Red Maple Empire.

The reason I mention this, Yan'er, is so that you can set your sights on a wider world. Don't let your perspective be shackled within the Murong family otherwise, it's easy to grow complacent and prideful.

I won't ask much, since you have already fulfilled the wish of hundreds of generations of Murong members but all I ask, as your grandfather, is do the very best you can.

Every time you rise up, the world seems a bit different every time," Murong Jie said as he cast a solemn gaze on Murong Yan.

"I will," answered Murong Yan.

"Good. Now that we have an attendance quota for the Order, you will be the one who will be going. Make sure to make the very best of the opportunity while you are there.

Learn as much as you can and don't be like that brat from the Song family, who went there only to have fun and fool around, that he ended up getting kicked out even before the three years were out.

Those three years are a chance to change your fate. I heard there are even rewards for those who perform well," Murong Jie said as he lightly chuckled when he remembered how livid the Song patriarch was when the kid came back.

He chased him around with a whip for almost a month around the mountains next to their territory. Those mountains got later nicknamed the wailing mountains because of the Song kid's cries.

"But grandfather, with my talent will I really be able to stand out? It's the Order, and if they all have the same talent as the judge who was just here, won't I be embarrassing myself by competing against them?" Murong Yan asked with worry showing on her face.

"You silly girl, I'm not asking you to compete against them. I may be getting on in my years but I'm not that senile," Murong Jie said as he softly smiled.

"During your training at the Order, you will be evaluated in comparison to those at the same level and circumstances as you.

From what the Song patriarch told me, those coming from rank 5 organizations will be trained together, separate from the students of the Order or other quota attendees from higher-ranked organizations. Though there are some classes that you will share with them, but those are only the theoretical classes such as history.

But for the practical exercises such as meditation techniques and cultivation arts, and other hands-on subjects such as formation arrays, alchemy, and the like, you will be trained together with the other rank 5 members.

Your performance evaluation will be based on how well you perform against them. The better your performance, the better the rewards. For example, you may be rewarded with cultivation resources such as alchemy pills, artifacts, and extended personal guidance on the various cultivation arts.

He told me these are only the base rewards. If your performance is really exceptional enough to stand out, you may get a chance at rebirth by having the grade of your pillars improved and your foundations reset.

A few counties over, the Red Clay County, there is a prominent sect there called the Snow pearl sect. It is now a rank 4 sect, but 20 years ago, it was just a rank 5 sect that didn't particularly stand out. However, all that changed when their current sect master went to the Order.

She performed very well during her stay there for those three years and she had her body cleansed and strengthened within those three years.

I heard when she went in, she was at the second stage of the foundation establishment realm but when she came out, she was in the sixth stage. She went into closed-door cultivation immediately after coming back and 17 years later, she broke through to the core formation realm.

That speed drew the attention of some of the mighty figures from the Red Maple Empire, like the noble families and some of the royal princes who wanted to recruit her. She rejected them but they didn't do much to her even with the rejection, do you know why that is?"

Murong Jie asked.

Murong Yan shook her head sideways to indicate she didn't.

"The special reward she got from the Order was a chance at a rebirth for her, but it was also a form of recognition from the Order for her efforts, which also doubles as a protective halo for her since she stood out enough to be noticed by the Order.

Other powers would have to put that into account before they act. You understand what I'm getting at?" Murong Jie asked as he narrowed his eyes.

"I do," Murong Yan answered as a fighting will ignited in her heart.

Chapter 172 Yang Qing's Consideration

Even with the Order's presence, the competition for resources and dominance was still very much volatile among cultivating organizations and it was even more so for those at the bottom. They would compete both openly and in the shadows and the competition was as ruthless as it could get.

It wouldn't be a surprise for some genius from those families 'disappearing' when he or she was out on a mission more so for those who had received some form of training from the Order and showed some potential.

The Murong family was insignificant before, but it had now joined in on the game the moment they got promoted.

While they were happy to become a ranked family, there was also the other side. The dangers of finally being seen.

If Murong Yan wanted a safe room to grow and realize her potential, gaining recognition from the Order with her performance was the best way since the Murong family wasn't anywhere near capable of shielding her.

They could form alliances like the norm, but even they were littered with numerous dangers like back stabbings. The only real and safe option for both her and her clan was to gain recognition from the Order through her performance.

Will the Murong family survive its first test as a ranked organization or will it be buried because of it? Only time will tell.

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"Big brother Yang Qing why did we have to leave that fast? The good part was about to start?" Zou Yi asked as he pouted.

He had already prepared himself to join in on the fun of the Murong family and let loose but before he knew it, they were already on Ellie's back and the Murong clan's ground was but a dot in the ground now.

"If I remained there, they wouldn't be able to celebrate to their heart's content. They'd be reserved with their attentions subconsciously drawn towards me. A party without freedom is just an event.

It's a great day for them and they should celebrate as loud and as free as they can, while they still can before the dark side of the cultivation world rears its ugly head.

Besides, I have a lot more evaluations to get through," said Yang Qing as he closed his eyes.

With just as many rank 5 promotions they do, the number of rank 5 organizations that disappear into obscurity were just as many. Very few rarely survive beyond a couple of years on their own.

The Order could only do its best by offering them some little bit of training here and there along with tools that improve their odds at survival. But whether that would be enough, depends on their luck and effort.

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"Like how many?" Zou Yi eagerly asked with his eyes shining. Zou Liqin was looking expectant too.

"Removing the Murong family, I'm left with 1,399 more," Yang Qing said as he sighed. However, to the Zou siblings, it was like they had heard the best news ever.

"Wipe those smirks off your faces. I'll be dropping you both off to my colleague once we reach Deer mountain kingdom," Yang Qing said dampening their mood.

"Can't we stay with you as you do your evaluations, then we can go back together when you return?" Zou Yi asked expectantly.

"Ordinarily I wouldn't mind it but during my stay in Purple city, I may have angered someone powerful who may or may not target me. It's dangerous for you to be with me at the moment," said Yang Qing as he opened his eyes.

"But you're from the Order. Who would be bold enough to target anyone from the Order?" Zou Liqin asked in confusion.

Not even their clan with all its prestige would try something like that.

"Just because your background is powerful doesn't mean someone won't attack you especially if they have the means and the power to do it without anyone noticing. There are numerous ways of pulling it off.

Having a strong background doesn't guarantee your life. Take the Zou clan as an example, since its inception how many talents or other members have died when out of the sect?" Yang Qing softly asked.

The Zou siblings fell silent with pensive looks on their faces. To their recollection, the Zou family had indeed lost a few talents over the years. There was even one whose talents rivaled that of their father but he died when exploring a mysterious realm.

Even though that was the story, the higher-ups always felt that maybe their enemies may have had a hand in it, since the realm the prodigy died in, had only three fatalities, of which, one of them was the prodigy from the Zou clan, while the other two were prodigies from rank 3 organizations who had a close friendship with the Zou family.

Everything seemed suspect from that death, especially when their bodies couldn't be found. The only way the Zou clan knew of his death, is the prodigy's soul lamp shattered, indicating his death.

"I hope you can maintain the same cautious and observant attitude you had in Purple city even when you do make it into the Order," Yang Qing solemnly said as the two siblings nodded their heads.

He didn't want them to get complacent into thinking the Order was some omnipotent organization that would guarantee their survival. Especially if they were to be adopted into the shadow hawk division, an abundance of caution and paranoia would be their best friend there.

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After an hour they were finally within shouting distance of the Deer mountain kingdom.

Yang Qing had already communicated with the branch in Deer Mountain kingdom, to come pick up the two siblings and the blood fiend cultivator before he continued on in his evaluations.

He saw a storm grey-headed albatross flying their way from about five kilometers away.

Ellie seemed to have sensed it as she suddenly released a combative aura with a loud screech that blew the clouds away.

Another screech came from the direction of the storm grey-headed albatross which seemed to collide with Ellie's sound.

The Zou siblings who had been napping on Ellie's back, woke up visibly frightened and confused. As they were looking around they were shocked to see a swirling dark cloud charging their way with occasional sounds of thunder.

"Relax, it's just a friend. He is here for you," Yang Qing casually replied as he chuckled at their frightened appearance.

Chapter 173 Hao Da's Transformation (1)

The Zou siblings' expressions eased up once they heard Yang Qing's words.

Within a few seconds, the dot of dark clouds and thunder had already arrived a few meters away from them.

They became visibly petrified once they saw the source of that dark cloud up close.

It was a grey-headed albatross that had a wild and tempestuous aura to it, that even made it difficult for them to breathe.

It had rough-looking dark grey feathers that faintly produced thunder noises, though they were less intense than before when it was announcing its presence. Its irises were swirling like it was brewing a storm.

"Don't look at its eyes for too long, otherwise your souls will be swallowed into its swirling storms."

Yang Qing's voice pulled the two siblings from the brink just as they were about to be sucked in.

Yang Qing's voice was the tether that pulled them back in. The moment they regained their senses they immediately started choking as they breathed heavily. Their skins had already turned pale white and their robes were soaking wet.

Yang Qing waved his sleeves as a green mellow qi surrounded them like a warm blanket. Within a few seconds, their breathing had turned normal, however, their skin tones were still pale as they kept their eyes firmly trained on the ground, afraid to look up even for a second.

That brief exposure made them feel like they had been drowning for months. They could still feel a liquid sensation in their lungs and throats. And their wet robes were evidence that what they went through wasn't an illusion.

"Senior Hao Da, can you tell your little friend there to stop harassing my young friends here? You too Ellie," said Yang Qing as he turned his gaze towards Ellie whose combative aura was increasing more and more.

"Where was this posturing when the palace stage realm cultivators were attacking you," Yang Qing muttered in dissatisfaction.

"Hahaha junior Yang Qing, your demeanor is turning more and more expert-like. It's hard to reconcile the mischievous kid who used to cause the instructors endless grief back then and the palace stage expert I see before me.

Congratulations on your promotion by the way."

There was a handsome, blue-haired young man on top of the storm grey-headed albatross. He had smooth long flowing hair and sharp sword-like eyebrows.

He was in half-dark gold half red robes which only further added to his charm.

He was calmly seated on top of the storm grey-headed albatross as he looked at Yang Qing and his group.

"Please senior, don't bring up the past, I've been trying really hard to forget it," Yang Qing said as he smiled bitterly when the memories of his institute days surged into his mind.

While it was one of his best years since he didn't have an unforgiving schedule, it was also one of his hardest years. The instructors were seasoned experts at sniffing out schemes and he was always in the thick of it, either as the mastermind or the lackey in for the ride.

Whatever the case, it always ended up with him on the receiving end of some creative punishment from the instructors. A couple of times he wanted to turn over a new leaf due to how extreme those punishments were, but a number of factors prevented him from doing that.

For one, he already had a reputation to uphold and if he let it go, the tongue-lashing he would have gotten from his fellow students would have been way worse than the punishment he would get from the instructors. Atleast, that's what he told himself, to console himself every time he got caught and suffered under the mighty hand of the instructors.

Yang Qing hurriedly shook his head to cast out those pain-inducing thoughts once his mind touched on those punishments.

"Those instructors were beasts in human skins," Yang Qing muttered under his breath.

"That they were," said Hao Da as he sighed fearfully too.

"So how are things at the headquarters?" Hao Da asked trying to change the topic.

"Same old, same old. Being worked to the bone every day with no end in sight, hopefully, the palace courts will be better. By the way, I should also be offering my congratulations to you, senior Hao Da.

I heard you will be taking over as the branch chief at the Three fires branch. That's a pretty big promotion, though I thought you'd choose to come back to the headquarters," Yang Qing said in admiration.

"Thanks. They did ask me if I wanted to come back but I've worked at the branches for so long that I'd feel uncomfortable any place else. When a post at the three fires branch opened up, I accepted it instead." Hao Da answered with a carefree smile.

"Your change is even more drastic than mine, senior Hao Da."

Yang Qing sighed as his gaze fell on Hao Da who looked free and unfettered like the sky could fall and he would still be seated calmly enjoying the sights.

"It can't be helped, people change. I was nothing but a troublesome brat back then who held on to hate a little too much that it almost buried me.

Being made a rotational inquisitor was the greatest gift the Order could have given me, otherwise, I'm afraid if things went on as they were, I'd have ended up as a resident of the Requiem, being specially taken care of by my seniors.

As a rotational inquisitor, I got to see a lot of things and experience a lot of things that helped open my eyes. My life wasn't as tragic as I thought it was, in comparison. Knowing that, helped me let go of the bitterness and resentment I was holding to.

It helped me come to terms with my past, which was I was even able to break through into the palace realm. Otherwise, with the way I was, my mental demons from back then would have swallowed me whole.

Now I'm looking forward to the new experience as a branch chief. The pay and working schedule isn't bad either," He meaningfully said as he poked fun at Yang Qing's well-known lifelong desires.

"Senior, can you not take pleasure in other people's misfortunes," Yang Qing said as he ruefully smiled.

He couldn't help but admire the complete transformation of this senior of his. He didn't have that many friends at the institute but Yang Qing could be considered one of the few. It was why Yang Qing could pick up the change in his entire persona.

Chapter 174 Hao Da's Transformation (2)

Hao Da was two years ahead of him at the Institute when Yang Qing joined. They became friends through punishment. Hao Da had been a trouble maker too, though Hao Da's troubles were a bit different from Yang Qing's. While Yang Qing was always up to harmless mischief like faking an injury during cultivation so he could get a few days off, Hao Da's troubles were more of attitude.

He was from a well-respected rank 3 clan called the Hao clan that had deep roots in a rank 2 empire. However, his background made it hard for him to stand out in the Hao clan. His mother was a maidservant in the clan and became pregnant with Hao Da from one of the elders.

However, after his birth, both he and his mother were constantly harassed by the main wife of that elder. The elder acted nonchalant about the whole thing. Other than acquiescing to Hao Da getting the Hao family name, he never stepped in to defend them.

Under the constant harassment, Hao Da's mother took her own life and Hao Da having nothing tying him to the Hao clan, run away when he was out on a mission.

He decided to join the Order after his escape and disclosed his background after when he passed the entrance examinations. When he joined the institute, he started off okay, however, he would occasionally act erratically and attack his fellow students.

Unlucky for him, the institute was a hotbed of monsters, so it wasn't like he could bully anyone.

He had high-rank blue-grade pillars which would make him stand out anywhere but at the Institute having blue-grade pillars was expected, in addition, there were those with gold-grade pillars and even the rare purple-grade pillars like Yang Qing and Kang Huilang.

Even though the numbers were not many, atleast one in a hundred of the students had purple grade pillars whilst in the foundation establishment realm.

So when Hao Da instigated the fights, he either got pummeled or it ended in a bitter drawn-out fight to the end, since everyone at the Institute had exceptional combat sense drilled into them. Winning flawlessly, no matter the grade of the pillar, was almost an impossibility among fellow students.

The institute was tolerant of his incessant fights since those who came in through their doors, some of them brought baggage and tragic pasts with them.

The Order would help them confront their past in phases and one of them was to give them an outlet for those fears and frustrations. That outlet was fighting. So even if Hao Da was a menace, they still tolerated it, it's not like the Institute had scrubs that he could bully.

So Hao Da continued on with his fights but then he escalated and did something that was inexcusable for an Order recruit. When he saw he was the only one losing out in the fights he started, he turned his attention to the exchange students who came in via quotas.

The students of the Order would normally spar with the quota entrants to help expand their horizons, but they never went all out against them and always held out since the disparity was always too huge, not unless the entrants were from organizations that were rank 2 and above.

He started off with those from rank 1 and rank 2, then he moved downwards to those from rank 3 and rank 4. It was at that point that the instructors finally intervened. Even though he never went too far, he

would torture his opponents from the lower-ranked organizations to the point that some had considered leaving before their three years were up.

Hao Da received an expulsion warning and a potential temporary residency at the Requiem if he didn't find a different way to address his issues.

Hao Da transformed into a new person from the moment the warning was issued and in his final year, he never caused a single incident.

When he finished, he requested to be a judge, however, the Order couldn't trust him due to his past behavior so his request was denied and he was made into a rotational inquisitor.

He would be deployed to different branches for a specific time period before he was transferred to another branch. He was to remain in that post until the Order deemed his character to be stable. The branch chiefs were also in charge of evaluating him, along with a special inquisitor who was sent to secretly monitor him.

Hao Da has been in that post for almost 15 years. Yang Qing kept in touch with him, though with the black-hearted schedule of the Order, it wasn't as much.

Even though the communication wasn't as frequent, he still managed to get wind, that about a year ago, Hao Da was offered a post as an outer palace court judge at the main headquarters.

Yang Qing had thought he'd jump at the opportunity since it was his dream but Hao Da turned it down, in exchange for taking over as branch chief at the three fires branch, whose chief chose to become an instructor at the institute and settle down with his family at the headquarters.

'Well, it's not like it's a trade down. Branch chiefs receive astronomical resources. Even though he is at the third stage of the palace realm he will most likely receive resources that are fit for an early-stage domain expert.

If it wasn't for the risks I'd apply to be a branch chief. Great pay and I get to decide my schedule' Yang Qing enviously thought.

However, it would only be just that, a thought. He would never risk leaving the comfort of the trusty protection at the main headquarters for greater pay. He would be too wary outside to enjoy the resources and authority.

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Yang Qing shook his head clear of such thoughts since he had a schedule to uphold and little time to do it.

"Senior Hao Da, I'll be leaving these two with you. As I mentioned earlier, please have them sent to the Order in time before the entrance examination begins, which is a week away.

I will also be leaving the blood fiend cultivator with you. Who knows, you may be able to dig up information from him. He had this on him when I grabbed him," Yang Qing said as he passed over the amulet he had taken off the blood fiend cultivator.

"It's a pretty decent artifact even for a sky-grade product. It is strange for someone with such a weak cultivation to have something this good not unless he pilfered it somewhere. But it seems to be geared specifically for blood fiend cultivator," Hao Da murmured as he closely examined the artifact.

"My thoughts exactly. I suspect he may be part of an organization of blood-fiend cultivators. Since I caught him in Purple city, maybe the organization he is a part of may have a location close by. Either in Red Maple Empire or other organizations that border it, like the Deer mountain kingdom.

Leaving him with you will be better."

Yang Qing picked up the unconscious blood fiend cultivator and passed him over to Hao Da. He also dropped off the two Zou siblings who were still looking down.

"Zou Yi, Zou Liqin, I'll see you after three days. When you get settled up and are given a place to stay, ask for someone called Cai Ying he can show you around. You will find him in the Thousand flavors restaurant," said Yang Qing.

"Okay," said the Zou siblings as they hesitantly looked up.

"Don't worry junior Yang Qing, I'll make sure they get there safely. And take care of yourself. Speaking of which, how are Lai Lei and Dai Chen?" Hao Da asked as he sighed.

"Lai Lei is okay, he already got discharged from the medical valley. As for Dai Chen, he is just hanging in there waiting for the investigation into Lai Lei's attackers to bear fruit.

Right now all he can do is wait," Yang Qing somberly said.

Dai Chen was in the same year as Hao Da, even if they couldn't be considered close friends they were acquaintances and Dai Chen was one of the few people Hao Da never picked a fight with.

Yang Qing wasn't sure if it was out of fear on Hao Da's part or just because Dai Chen had an easygoing nature. Yang Qing felt the odds were more likely the former.

Dai Chen was an easygoing person by nature and it was hard to trigger him but in a fight, he was among the worst opponents you could have. He was undefeated throughout his whole time at the institute from both his fellow students and the ruthless convicts from Requiem.

That is a record that is not held by many people since you'd be competing against fellow monsters. Even Yang Qing with his self-proclaimed brilliance got pummelled a few times, which always ended up with a glorious party being hosted by the instructors.

Yang Qing exchanged a few more words with Hao Da and then they each went their own way after. Hao Da would transport the Zou siblings to the nearest major Order branch with a spatial array while Yang Qing made his way north in the Deer mountain kingdom.

His next target was the Clear sword river sect. This was an evaluation that he didn't particularly want to do. It was because, unlike the one from the Murong clan, his next evaluation would be a potential demotion sinking the sect into an unranked sect.

Chapter 175 The Bizarre Deer Mountain Kingdom

Yang Qing's sighs grew more and more the closer he got to the location of the Clear sword river sect. The flight over had taken close to two hours. It was mostly because the area was a lot further away and Ellie had to be on a higher alert, the moment they entered the Deer mountain kingdom air space.

The Deer mountain kingdom was a rank 3 kingdom same as the Red Maple Empire, however, its territory vastly exceeded that of the Red Maple Empire, despite both being rank 3 organizations.'

Its size closely matched rank 2 kingdoms and empires. It was about 40 million square kilometers. Its size wasn't the only thing that stood out as Deer mountain Kingdom could be considered an oddity.

It has rich lands, and an enormous territory but despite that, it never grows and is rarely attacked by its neighbors.

The kingdom, just like its name, is hugely filled with mountains all over. Each more dangerous than the other. Some are surrounded by forests filled with spirit beasts, others are filled with poisonous miasma, while others have unexplained phenomena associated with them, such as a mountain that rains blue lightning every month.

The lightning is so dangerous that it can threaten the life of an early-stage palace realm expert.

Because of the large territory, coupled with the dangers surrounding it, the royal family of the Deer mountain kingdom has a loose control over its territory.

Most of its forces and efforts are concentrated in the central area of the kingdom while the further away from the center the territory moves, the lesser the attention is given.

There was once a king who had tried to bring the whole kingdom firmly under their control but it ended up in complete failure.

The idea was cooked up during one of their highest periods when they had over 20 palace realm experts, with even three of them being in the late stages, with one of the three late-stage palace realm experts being the ambitious king.

They pooled all their manpower and resources together, and little by little, they conquered mountain after mountain. It wasn't easy but thanks to their enormous manpower they managed to gain ground.

But their run ended in one of the mountains. It didn't look any different than the rest except for the fact that it seemed a bit barren at the foot of the mountain. However the further up they moved, the verdant it seemed.

The king and his men charged up the mountain with momentum, assuming there was definitely a natural treasure at play here and indeed there was a treasure up there, an ascendant-grade spirit-weaving orchid. The orchid is an alchemist's dream because it can promote or induce the evolution of other plants around it.

Having a spirit-weaving orchid would ensure you would never lack quality herbs for life as long as the orchid exists. With it, the Deer mountain kingdom could even rise to a rank 2 kingdom, if given enough time and sufficient talent. The orchid would ensure the resource part of the equation would not lack.

However, it wasn't meant to be for the Deer mountain kingdom, as along with the spirit-weaving orchid, there were two half-step domain spirit beasts who immediately retaliated the moment the royal family stepped on that peak.

Three-quarters of their forces got decimated and those that survived ended up with fatal injuries. The only reason there were even survivors was due to the intervention of the king, who used a secret sacrificial art to buy enough time for his people to escape and send the information back.

From that moment forth, they never once tried that folly again. They centralized their power and control in the central region of the kingdom and the areas they had conquered while they left the rest of the unexplored areas to remain as it were.

Those areas could be considered part of the Deer mountain kingdom in name only. The habitable areas of that region soon got flooded with foreign sects, clans, and small kingdoms that could be considered subsidiary forces of the Deer mountain kingdom since they paid tribute to them even if they didn't get anything in return.

Due to the dangers and opportunities present, the number of foreign powers in the area has not grown by much but it hasn't reduced either.

However, those that have managed to survive have grown by leaps and bounds to the point that the area has over a hundred rank 4 organizations.

Some at the Order have even suspected there may be a rank 3 organization in the area, it's just that they are maintaining a low-key so that they don't draw the attention of the Deer mountain kingdom.

Even with the loss they suffered during their excursion, the power of the Deer mountain kingdom as the true overlord of the area is still undisputed. Most of the organizations in their territory are wary of that fact. It's the nail that stands out, that gets hammered. Who knows, if word of one of the organizations having a palace realm cultivator gets out, they may get targeted by the Deer mountain kingdom as a show of force to keep the other organizations in line.

It's a well-tested and well-proven tactic employed by powerful organizations like rank 2 empires, to maintain order and their supremacy in the massive territories.

As for the Deer mountain kingdom, the whole tragedy ended up being a blessing in disguise for them more so for the royal family.

With the threat of potential domain-level spirit beasts roaming about in their territory, it made the whole of the Deer mountain kingdom, from the royal family to the noble families down to the commoners, have a united front. Who knew how many other scary existences lurked about in the other areas, they couldn't afford to be divided.

When the news of the discovery of the half-step domain-level spirit beasts lurking in Deer mountain kingdom broke out, it created a ripple effect on the other nations surrounding them who extinguished any designs they may have had on the kingdom.

Those unexplored regions served as a buffer for the Deer mountain kingdom. It is why they never interfered when other organizations settled in their territory without a heads-up or tribute. The dangerous unexplored areas were a buffer to the outside nations, while the organizations within the territory were a buffer for them in case anything dangerous broke out of those unexplored areas.

They could be considered free manpower whose presence showed which areas were safe and which were not.

The Clear sword river sect was among the organizations that made their home within the Deer mountain kingdom's territory though their true roots lay elsewhere.

Chapter 176 Clear Sword River Sect's Fate (1)

"Ellie, drop down there," Yang Qing said as he pointed towards a spot at the bottom of some mountain.

Ellie gently glided downward as she restrained her aura. She wasn't the only one exhibiting caution, as Yang Qing restricted his palace sense within a half a kilometer radius of them.

He wanted to avoid alerting other spirit beasts or triggering something if he could.

"Deer mountain kingdom is a really interesting place," Yang Qing muttered as his gaze landed on a few of the mountains spread about.

Some were covered in mist, while others seemed almost inhabited. The ones his eyes fell on, were the ones that gave him a threatening and unnerving feeling.

"If you detect anything off, immediately rush to my side, though at this distance, I should be able to detect anything off, but one can't be too careful in this place," Yang Qing said as he leaped off Ellie's back.

In front of him was a rundown gate that seemed to be hanging on by a thread. There was an illegible faded sign with the name Clear sword river sect on it.

Yang Qing sighed when he saw this as he made his way in since there wasn't even someone at the gate. He had lost count of the number of times he had sighed on the way over.

The inside was just as bad as the gate. There were overgrown weeds all over, the buildings were few and far in between and at the state they were, calling them buildings was polite. As some of them had holes in their roofs or lacked doors, there were even some which seemed like their floors had been forcibly torn off.

"I can't believe it fell this far down," Yang Qing muttered as he took in the dilapidated scene. The area would have been confused for a ghost town if it wasn't for the absence of dense yin qi and the few human presences Yang Qing detected.

"Only about 12 people are left," thought Yang Qing as he made his way to the building that seemed better off compared to the rest. Though from the numerous patchwork it had, its future wasn't all that promising and would soon join the rest.

Yang Qing had chosen this building since it was the location where the person with the highest cultivation was. That person had a fourth stage foundation establishment realm. But from the weak undulating fluctuations Yang Qing detected, he knew that person didn't have long to live.

Yang Qing sighed as he gently pushed open the cracked door. He had to use a bit of his qi to hold it in place so it didn't creek.

Inside the building at the center of the room, was an elderly man who was nothing but skin and bones donned in an old faded grey robe which Yang Qing deduced must have been black at some point.

He was seated in a lotus position on a cultivation mat that had stopped being a mat at some point and was just loose threads tied together.

The room seemed to double as a cultivation chamber and an office, as there were scrolls and parchments of paper spread about in one of the few pieces of standing furniture in the room, with a dusty painting of a person fishing in the river, hanging at the wall in his back.

The room had amber-colored lighting that mostly came from the sunshine penetrating through the gaps and the cracks around the building.

Yang Qing took everything in as he sat down with a heavy heart. The elderly man before him didn't even seem to have noticed his presence as his eyes were still closed.

Because of his atrophied state, one would even easily mistake him for a corpse if it wasn't for the faint qi fluctuations he was emitting.

A frown appeared on his weathered wrinkled face which only grew deeper and deeper by the second. Seconds later his face constricted and started coughing out blood.

Yang Qing flashed to his back and poured some of his qi into him.

The elderly man didn't even have time to react as a gentle, cool soothing qi pervaded throughout all his body.

"Senior are you trying to kill yourself?"

Yang Qing had a serious expression as he noticed the elderly man's internal state was a complete mess. Some of his meridians were jumbled up together, some had ruptured, his foundation pillars seemed to be on the verge of collapsing, and his qi flow was in an erratic state which damaged his internal organs.

It was only thanks to the vitality of a foundation establishment cultivator that he was even awake or alive for that matter, with all those injuries wreaking havoc in his body. But even his vitality seemed lacking just like his body. It was dwindling like a dried river.

This was the least of the problems that afflicted the elderly man. When Yang Qing was pouring his qi into him, he detected the elderly man seemed to have overdrafted his soul's essence since it was about the size of a weak candlelight flame that could be snuffed out at any moment.

"It seemed it didn't work this time either. The clear river sword sect will be buried with me. Forgive me master, grandmaster, ancestors, I couldn't save it in the end," the elderly man weakly spoke then immediately passed out.

"You won't be dying that easy, senior," Yang Qing softly muttered as he fished out three acupuncture needles with a greenish hue.

He concurrently stabbed them at the elderly man's glabella, heart, and navel.

Yang Qing rapidly formed seals in his hands as a green river formed in his hands which he then dropped on the acupuncture needle in the elderly man's glabella.

The acupuncture needle immediately started vibrating the moment the green river touched it. The vibration stopped after a few seconds.

A meandering green river started forming from the glabella as the river made its way downwards to the acupuncture needle at the heart. After it reached the heart, the same vibration occurred after which it proceeded downwards to the navel.

The moment the green river connected to the three places a dim pulsing green light was produced from the river and the three acupuncture needles.

"Nature's convalescence," Yang Qing softly muttered as his eyes and hair turned greener to the point that vines formed in his hair.

A green gentle glow was produced from his body which filled the room with so much vitality that vines and grass started growing from where he was seated as it rapidly spread throughout the whole room with the range increasing by the second.

By the time half a minute passed even the plants that were originally within the vicinity of the building experienced a drastic growth spurt. There were a few young trees that were about four meters tall that grew to about twenty-five meters with thick leafy branches sprouting about.

After a few minutes, the area had turned into a mini forest thoroughly alarming the remaining sect members who were shocked at a small forest suddenly appearing within their sect grounds.

On the elderly man's body, the single green river line had branched off into millions of veins that covered his entire body. With every pulse of the green light, the elderly man's state seemed to be improving.

His skin had turned rosy within a few minutes erasing the deathly pale look he had a few minutes ago. Even though his skin was still hugging his bones, his outward appearance seemed vastly better compared to a few minutes ago. Even a few strands of his hair had turned from snow white to grey.

"I'm still not joining the Medical valley but their techniques are amazing."

Yang Qing smiled as he admired the internal and external changes happening within the elderly man's body.

He waved his hand and the three acupuncture needles dislodged themselves from the elderly man's body into his hands as he stored them away.

The needles weren't the only thing that disappeared, as along with the needles, the various undergrowth within the room and building all disappeared. But the overgrown trees still remained where they were.

Yang Qing purposely left them like that because he liked the ambiance they added to the place and they had a bit of his qi in them which with time may transform them into spiritual trees.

"Huh, I'm not dead?" the elderly man muttered in confusion as he slowly opened his eyes.

Chapter 177 Clear Sword River Sect (2)

"No you're not," Yang Qing softly said as he took a seat opposite the elderly man.

The elderly man seemed to be in disbelief as he kept looking around with a dumbfounded expression as he touched his body repetitively.

He did this to make sure what he was feeling was real, and he wasn't just a ghost unable to move on due to regret and the lingering attachment he had for the sect.

Only when he had sufficiently calmed down and confirmed he was indeed alive, did he have the presence of mind to notice there was another person in the room with him.

He was also surprised to find out his body felt more vigorous. The grave injuries he had accompanied by discomfort and pain that came from those accumulated injuries, had all disappeared.

His body was pristinely new like he had been reborn again.

"While I may have healed your body, I'm afraid there's not much I can do about the lifespan you've lost by overdrawing your soul essence.

Even if your soul had been perfectly intact, my healing wouldn't have been able to add more years to your life since the base lifespan of a cultivator falls upon the laws of the world.

I'm afraid only natural treasures can help with that," said Yang Qing.

He didn't want the elderly man to misunderstand and become disillusioned that he was okay, like he had a new lease on life. While Yang Qing had healed all the damage he had ever done to his body, his base lifespan remained unchanged.

If a mortal took really good care of himself/herself, they would be able to reach 100 years and with some luck, they'd reach maybe 150 years at the maximum.

But if they wanted to live past those years and maybe reach 200 years or more, it would be an impossibility because the natural laws governing their body prevented them to be able to live that long.

As long as they don't cultivate and remain the same, even a soul formation expert would find it difficult to increase their lifespan.

The only way that mortals could live longer is if they embarked on cultivation thus breaking their mortal shackles and fundamentally evolving their being every time with every breakthrough. Or if they had the aid of some natural treasures that had the Dao of life as its main attribute. But even that, would still fundamentally change the constitution of that mortal.

The elderly man before him was nearing his end because he had lived the complete lifespan afforded to him as an early foundation establishment cultivator. Though he did squander a bit of his lifespan by draining his soul essence, he already didn't have much time left.

From what Yang Qing could tell based on his bone age, the elderly man had lived for at least 1,000 years and the drained soul essence reduced whatever time he had left to just one or two months at the most.

....

The elderly man seemed a bit shaken up by the news he heard from Yang Qing before smiling bitterly.

"Atleast when the time comes, I'll go in comfort rather than the constant pain I endured over the years.

Thank you senior for helping an old man such as myself."

The elderly man bowed as he was seated in a lotus position.

"There's no need for that, senior," Yang Qing said as he lifted him up with a gentle force.

"Senior?"

The elderly man ruminated over the words Yang Qing had said before a look of shock appeared on his face as he took in Yang Qing's young look.

He knew his injuries very well and he knew only those skilled old foggies who have poured thousands and thousands of years into medicine, would be able to completely heal his body.

There was no injury left, even his pillars which were on the verge of collapsing had all been stabilized.

This was a complete restoration and how long had it even taken?

He wasn't skilled in medicine himself but he atleast had a general idea of the skills that would be required to help him get a full recovery. At the very least it had to be someone who was a high-rank Orange-grade medical arts practitioner.

....

"Thank you for your benevolence esteemed master. Once again, I'm deeply thankful for your aid. If there's anything you need, I Wang Yi will not hesitate to offer my services," the elderly man solemnly said as he cupped his fists.

"Pardon my insolence, I still haven't introduced myself. My name is Wang Yi and I'm the sect master of the Clear sword river sect, though I fear both my post and the sect will soon disappear," he said as a painful melancholic smile appeared on his face.

"Would you like some tea, esteemed master? It may not be much but it's the only thing I have to offer," Wang Yi said as he smiled in embarrassment at the impoverished status of his sect.

Yang Qing nodded his head in acceptance as sect master Wang Yi picked up a small white porcelain kettle with two cups.

He used a small mystical art to produce water which he then proceeded to mix with the green tea leaves in the kettle.

He did everything in an experienced, gentle, and practiced motion. Within a few seconds, the brew was already ready, which he then poured for Yang Qing first then himself.

The tea was more light yellow than green like the leaves had been repetitively used and drained of every last richness they had.

Yang Qing didn't mind as he could tell Wang Yi was a seasoned pro in tea making. Even with subpar resources, a seasoned expert could do so much with them.

"Thank you for the offer, sect master Wang Yi. My name is Yang Qing and I'm from the Order, you should know why I'm here," Yang Qing said with pity flashing in his eyes as he noticed the trembling pupils in sect master Wang Yi's eyes.

"From the Order huh...?..At the rate we are going, it was bound to happen," Wang Yi absent-mindedly muttered as he took a small sip from his tea.

Yang Qing mirrored his actions as he too took a sip.

"As expected, it's still good," Yang Qing thought as he savored the tea which still managed to retain some flavor despite the weak ingredients.

....

"Master Yang Qing, can you indulge this old man for a bit?" Wang Yi weakly asked.

Yang Qing gently nodded in acquiescence.

Sect master Wang Yi exhaled as he stared at the roof with a cloudy look as his expression turned nostalgic.

"I may be the sect master now, but in its heyday, I wasn't even fit to be considered an outer sect disciple of the Clear sword river sect.

I was a member of the servants division of the sect. We handled the daily miscellaneous tasks around the sect such as cleaning, gardening, cooking, playing instruments, and the like.

We ensured the menial daily necessities of the sect were met so the cultivators within the sect could place their entire focus on cultivation.

We strived to create an environment that was suited for just that.

Even though it didn't seem like a glamorous job to others but to us, it was a privilege and a great undertaking that we did with great pride.

My memories as a servant in the sect master's pavilion are what has helped me get through the past few years.

While my being the sect master is nothing but a constant nightmare, the proof that the Clear sword river sect I knew, has all but disappeared if all it has is a servant to hold the forte as its sect master.

It's a cruel joke that I've had to endure for over a century.

Death would be a release from this torment but I'm also afraid to face my predecessors in the next life.

I'm ashamed to tell them that I was unable to preserve the embers of the sect and Clear sword river is no more...."

Wang Yi's voice cracked as he said the last part. His look turned listless and lifeless.

There wasn't much Yang Qing could say at the moment since he was the proverbial nail into the Clear sword river sect's coffin.

"The world is truly a mercurial place for a former rank 3 sect to fall this far," thought Yang Qing as his thoughts drifted to the circumstances that befell the Clear sword river sect.

A thousand years ago it was a rank 3 sect which although didn't completely stand out in its era, was still a decent cultivation sect that would garner respect wherever it went.

It had an unfathomable sword cultivation art whose versatility drew the envy and respect of many. With that as a foundation, it was able to grow in strength and stature as it drew in countless geniuses.

If nothing unexpected happened, its rise into the top ranks of rank 3 organizations, was all but guaranteed.

However the unexpected did happen, in the form of their legacy disciple who invited a calamity that reduced the sect into the shell of its former self, it was today.

They lost everything; their sect grounds, their power, fame, and disciples till they regressed to the point they were about to become an unranked sect with only 12 members. Of which, Yang Qing wasn't even sure that some of them were members of the sect.

This was a sect that once had a territory that rivaled the Deer mountain kingdom in size, and unlike them, they had a firm grip on their territory.

Chapter 178 Clear Sword River Sect (3)

They couldn't afford fresh tea leaves at the moment but at their prime, they even had a subordinate Rank 3 kingdom under them despite being rank 3 themselves.

Within their territory, they could sneeze and it could cause a ripple effect the size of a tsunami to all organizations that were within their territory.

Despite their massive power, they had a relatively good reputation within their sect in comparison to others. Yes, they monopolized some of the resources, but they left enough to even promote a rank 4 kingdom into a rank 3 kingdom, while rank 4 organizations were a dime a dozen within their territory.

However, all the goodwill and reputation they had built was destroyed about 200 years ago till they slowly deteriorated into what they were today.

The sect master back then was perfect in all regards. He was a talented swordsman, charismatic and shrewd in managing the sect and its territories.

In all regards he was perfect except for one thing, he doted on his grandson too much which made him blind to his faults.

He only had one son, who rivaled him in terms of talent and character. However that son and his wife died during a war the sect had with a rank 3 underground organization, leaving behind a son.

The sect master out of grief, guilt, and a sense of responsibility, pampered his grandson a lot.

He started off by giving him an astronomical amount of precious cultivation resources, even ones promised to others, giving him a priority in certain areas despite the grandson not earning that spot.

Not many people within the sect had any complaints about it since they knew the sect master was trying to make up to the kid for getting both his parents killed. Other than that, the child was also gifted in cultivation which made it palatable to the rest of the sect, even when he was shown favoritism in a lot of things. Atleast the resources were not being wasted.

Even when he was made a legacy disciple despite not reaching the minimum standard, the higher-ups within the sect overlooked it, since it would only be a matter of time till he was deserving of the title.

However, the attitude of the sect members started changing from accommodation to dissatisfaction when the grandson's habits turned hedonistic and despotic.

Wielding the power that came with his title as a legacy disciple and the sect master's grandson, he started behaving wantonly within the sect.

He continuously suppressed any disciple that showed enough talent to threaten his position. Some were forced into his lackeys, while those that refused, got assigned difficult missions by the sect's mission halls at his behest and if that wasn't enough, he would even use his connections to have their resources reduced or hinder their cultivation time.

When the matter was brought to the sect master, he only offered a soft reprimand, nothing more. After a few weeks of good behavior, the grandson went at it again but this time he was more calculating and insidious about it.

Even if most within the sect knew it was his handiwork, there was not much that could be done if he was not tied directly to those deeds.

But soon, when his cultivation grew to the peak of core formation realm, he didn't bother to hide his vile nature. He became more vicious and open in his actions.

He injured his fellow disciples to the extent that he even crippled some, next he started relentlessly targeting the female disciples of his sect with lewd intentions. Those female disciples ended up with fates worse than death, to the point some risked desertion from the sect while others committed suicide.

Even with the escalation of his habits, the sect master still turned a blind eye to this to the extent that he personally punished some of the elders who admonished his grandson as a scourge of the sect.

Things went downhill from there as the sect master lost the trust of his disciples and even some of the elders. The Clear sword river sect welcomed a decline in their talent pool as the disciples started running away whilst on missions. It got so drastic that they lost a third of them within a few years.

Sect missions got halted because of it and when that became untenable as a solution, the sect master inscribed restrictions on the souls of the disciples to ensure that they came back. Otherwise, they risked a backlash that would heavily injure their souls.

But even with such a restriction, there were still those who risked running away despite knowing the danger. Some talented ones decided to defect to other sects and organizations of the same caliber as the Clear sword river sect and had them remove the restriction.

As for those with no such luck or talent, they decided to embrace death rather than return back.

Soon, with how many disciples were defecting and running away, news spread fast within their territory about how things were within the sect. This added another dent into their talent pool since no talented genius wanted to risk joining a sect where they'd be suppressed for showing their talents. Even worse they would risk being crippled as the sect master turned a blind eye to it. Most of those with talent and no background chose to go to other sects, which even though may not have matched the Clear sword river sect in stature, at least guaranteed their safety.

Things just got grimmer and grimmer as years passed by, with the grandson not correcting his habits and the sect master turning a blind eye to most things. Though he did try to employ some measures, such as increasing the allotted resources given to the disciples to try and placate them. But that was just a drop in the bucket that did little to alleviate their distress.

A few years later, the grandson interrupted the breakthrough of a nephew of a grand elder of the sect. That nephew had been attempting to break through to the palace realm when the sect master's grandson intervened using an insidious technique that caused the breakthrough to fail. That grand elder's nephew ended up with serious injuries that almost took his life.

It was only due to the timely intervention of that grand elder that he was able to live. The grand elder was a palace realm cultivator and he had been in seclusion for quite some time which was why he had not been there to watch over his nephew as he broke through, which was common practice.

Once he had stabilized the situation, he attacked the sect master's grandson only for the sect master to intervene personally as he offered to make amends for his grandson. However, the grand elder was livid at the time and attacked the sect master.

Chapter 179 Clear Sword River Sect (4)

What started off as just venting, transformed into a life-and-death battle that almost destroyed half the sect grounds. The grand elder got defeated in the end, however, the sect master chose to spare his life.

That same night, that grand elder left along with almost half of the elders along with their personal disciples. Depleting the sect's foundation further. The sect master didn't stop them since the grand elder had insisted he'd rather die than remain and those who went with him, shared the same sentiments.

Even with all that had happened, the sect master still didn't punish his grandson but instead decided to make him an envoy of the sect. That position guaranteed he would be spending most of his time outside of the sect which would be a welcomed relief to the rest of the sect members who remained.

Everything went as expected, and some form of peace returned to the sect without the grandson around. However, the same couldn't be said for those outside the sect.

The sect master's grandson became a monstrous nightmare within the territory of the Clear sword river sect as he flexed the authority that came with being the grandson of the sect master of the Clear sword river sect, the true overlord of the region.

Lives were lost and ruined as he pillaged through the territory like a ravenous wolf. It was during one of his escapades that some beauty grabbed his attention. When he saw her, he acted just like he always did. He tried using charm and when that didn't work he immediately switched to force.

However, unlucky for him, the lady he had his designs on, was a palace realm expert who made quick work of him that he ended up with a crippled cultivation base and it was even unluckier that she had a dao companion with her who was an early stage domain expert.

So when the sect master's grandson threatened them using his sect and grandfather's name, even after being crippled, the lady's dao companion was all too glad to entertain him as he went with him back to the sect.

When they arrived at the sect, the dao companion destroyed the sect's guardian array to make his presence known and to draw out the people from the sect most importantly the sect master.

The plan worked splendidly as the sect master and all the elders reacted to the attack only to find the grandson being strung like a chicken at the hands of an unknown domain expert.

The sect master on finding out what had happened from the domain expert, begged on his knees as he offered his life along with all the sect's treasures in exchange for his sect being spared except for his grandson. He knew at that point, death was all but certain for his grandson.

All he could do was hope his death could save the sect he had neglected for so long till it reached this point.

Lucky for him, the domain expert agreed and the matter got settled with his death, which the grandson couldn't believe even to his death. The sect's coffers got emptied and the domain expert left.

Things fell rapidly into decline after that with the sect falling apart. They already had too many enemies thanks to the sect master's grandson. If people got wind that they had lost their sect master and their guardian array along with their resources, it wouldn't be long before they were besieged and forced to pay for the crimes of the sect master's grandson.

The remaining members split into different groups. There were those who decided to abandon the Clear river sword sect altogether and start fresh someplace else and those who wanted to revive the Clear sword river sect. There were more people in the latter group than the former mostly because they assumed it would be easy to do so with the prestige of the Clear sword river sect and they thought the grand elder and the other elders who had left would come back when they heard the sect master and the grandson were no longer around.

Wang Yi was part of this group. However, they had grossly underestimated how hated the sect master's grandson, was. He had created countless blood feuds and had ruined whatever reputation the Clear sword river sect had.

The Clear sword river sect got besieged by thousands of enemies once word got out that the sect master had perished. Despite their loss in manpower during his reign, the sect master was a seventh-stage palace realm expert, his presence alone was a sufficient deterrent throughout their whole territory.

But after his death, of those who remained, only one was in the palace realm and he was at the first stage. The attackers had a few early-stage palace realm experts. Some came from the rank 3 kingdom in their territory who had joined in hopes of filling the void with the destruction of the Clear sword river sect, while others were part of organizations that held deep enmity with the sect for quite some time but had not been able to act on it due to the foundations the sect had.

After a few years of being constantly attacked, the remaining palace realm member died. The restorationists had thought that at some point the grand elder and the other elders who left would step in, but they never did.

With the death of the last palace realm cultivator, things kept going downhill after that with the survivors dropping like flies as they escaped, till their escape landed them in Deer mountain kingdom. But by that point, only less than a hundred people were left and those that survived were the weakest of the bunch. The ones deemed unworthy of the attention of their pursuers.

The sect managed to etch out a tiny road of survival because of that. However, with no one strong or talented enough to hold the forte in the past 200 years, it fell down to the point it was just the Clear sword river sect, in name only.

With the death of Wang Yi, Yang Qing had doubts if it would even survive a year before everyone left and by then even the name will disappear. It will be nothing more than a cautionary tale to those who knew it even existed.

Yang Qing kept opening and closing his mouth as he deliberated what to say. Wang Yi was still in a lost daze and Yang Qing was hesitant because once he uttered his next words, it was the same as closing the book on the Clear sword river sect.

"It's okay, master Yang Qing, I'm not too long for this world anyway," Wang Yi said as he gently smiled at Yang Qing.

"I'm thankful for your kindness," He added as he pulled out a scroll from a small black wooden box that had dragon cloud engravings on it.

"Will this be needed?" He asked as he handed over the scroll to Yang Qing, albeit reluctantly.

"Yes it will, thanks," said Yang Qing as he politely nodded unfurling the scroll. In it was the certificate issued to the sect by the Order.

Chapter 180 Farewell To The Clear River Sword Sect (1)

Yang Qing took out his gold eagle medallion and formed a few seals with one hand, as he parsed the medallion over the certificate.

A gentle golden glow appeared on the gold eagle medallion which Yang Qing used to shine over the certificate.

Glyph patterns started appearing everywhere the gold light fell on.

Yang Qing was using the medallion along with a special mystical art meant to confirm the certificate was authentic.

All Order issued medallions came from the same source making it a suitable conduit artifact to use when confirming another judge's work, like the issued certificate before him.

Once Yang Qing had confirmed it was authentic, he rolled the scroll and stored it in the medallion.

The closer he came to the demotion the heavier his tongue felt.

For some odd reason, to him, it seemed like Wang Yi was much calmer than he was. One would even assume Yang Qing was the sect master of the Clear sword river sect while Wang Yi was the official sent to handle the demotion.

Yang Qing chalked up Wang Yi's current calm state he was in, was due to the short lifespan he had left and the unsalvageable situation he was in.

There was a special kind of release when you were at the end of your tether and there was nothing more you could do.

....

"Do you want to confirm how long you have to live?" Yang Qing cautiously asked.

"Its part of the procedures?" asked Wang Yi

"Yes, it is. Usually, when we are doing a demotion we confirm the remaining lifespan of the member maintaining the organization's rank to create a grace period timeline.

That grace period timeline is decided by your remaining lifespan. As long as circumstances change within that period, like gaining another foundation establishment member, the demotion can be rescinded and you won't have to reapply for a promotion or pay the costs that come with it.

You can visit any branch to have the demotion rescinded once they confirm everything is authentic. Then they'll update the status at the headquarters," Yang Qing patiently explained.

When an unranked organization got promoted, they usually paid a fee of 10 low-grade spirit stones. That fee increased the further up the promotion was. For example, moving from rank 5 to rank 4 the charge would be 10 middle-grade stones, and from rank 4 to rank 3 would be 5 high-grade spirit stones.

A grace period was introduced to help cushion the blow to those struggling to maintain their ranks.

Most organizations in a similar situation to the Clear sword river sect, would pour every resource they had into ensuring they didn't get demoted. Those, who by some miracle end up pulling it off before their grace period is up, end up with nothing to their name at that point since they have used every stone and resource they have to survive and prevent the demotion.

Asking them to pay 10 low-grade spirit stones for another evaluation, is like asking a mortal farmer to produce milk from a stone. They'd have to stay as an unranked organization until they got enough spirit

stones to pay for the evaluation cost, then they'd have to wait patiently until they get slotted. If their luck is horrible, it would be a year.

With how unpredictable the cultivation world was, a lot could happen within that year, such as the death of the member they cultivated to ensure they remained a rank 5 organization.

That reality wasn't an impossibility since Yang Qing had seen it happen a few times, whereby a sect files for a promotion, only for the member supposed to be evaluated dies before the evaluation is done, nullifying the evaluation process.

...

"Master Yang Qing you must have noticed the state of the sect, right?" Wang Yi said with a bitter smile.

He left a few things unsaid but Yang Qing knew where he was getting at.

Excluding him, there were 11 more people within the sect. Of these 11 people, only three were in the qi refinement stage and none of them was past the 3rd level.

The majority of the remaining eight were in the body refining realm and it was the weakest rank at that, the iron stage.

Bar anything unexpected, it was almost impossible for any of them to reach the foundation establishment realm in three months, which was the lifespan Yang Qing roughly estimated, Wang Yi had.

When Yang Qing's thoughts reached this point, he didn't know what to say. He couldn't in good conscience tell him that something could happen in the few remaining months he had left.

While there were tales of fortuitous encounters happening that made one leap to the skies in one step, those tales were few and far in between and most of them happened in perilous places like abandoned mysterious realms and grottos or the millions fold treasure ocean.

They didn't just fall from the sky or fell into someone's lap while he or she was sleeping and it wasn't just anybody who got them. Those who did, despite their backgrounds, all had an absurd amount of karmic luck enough to rival that of a rank 3 empire that has had good ruling for thousands of years.

Luck, just like time and space, was an ultimate Dao rule. However, unlike the latter two, luck couldn't be cultivated or gain insight into. You could only be born with it and it had no rhyme or reason as to who would be chosen. You could be the prince of some big empire or a child born in a slave mine.

Despite their starting point, none of them grows up to be a simple character.

While it didn't grant invincibility due to the unpredictability of luck and how at times it went hand in hand with calamity. Those who survived its trials grew up to be big shots whose names shook the Southern continent.

Yang Qing had read of one such person, who was still alive today. He was the founder of the Bright pearl sect.

His parents were slaves to some dark alchemy organization. They were used as live cauldrons which was an insidious art where potions were brewed inside the bodies of said persons.

Those with special physiques were prime targets for this technique as the potions produced with them as cauldrons, would have special attributes because of their physique.

That founder's parents had a wood physique, and though it was nothing special, it had the effect of increasing success in potion brewing. Their physiques could temper volatile ingredients.

As luck would have it, their dear son, the founder of the Bright pearl sect, was born with a wood physique like theirs, except his' was even stronger, which granted him a body that was just perfect for the human alchemy cauldron art since his body could endure the damage the art caused and regenerate.

He was the perfect human cauldron and catalyst.