

Daily life 71

Chapter 71 A Sect, A Core Disciple And A Merchant Organization

Yang Qing started perusing the details of the case as Mao Yunru was loudly grinding her teeth in the background as she occasionally sent him death glares which he deftly pretended he didn't see.

"Mmh let's see the Mountain spring pavilion which is a rank 4 merchant organization has filed a complaint against the Yellow lotus sect which is a rank 4 sect. The complaint is failure to make repayments on the agreed-upon repayment schedule. The loan was to be repaid back in 8 years however they only serviced it for three but for the past year or so they haven't made a single repayment.

The remaining debt they owe to the Mountain spring pavilion is 6,450,208 middle-grade spirit stones that is to be repaid back within 5 years with a 10% interest making the total amount being repaid back at the end of the 5 years 8,222,871 middle-grade spirit stones.

These merchants sure know how to make money. But the monthly repayment amount of 137,000 shouldn't be hard for a rank 4 sect to meet with the many business and lands they have and their other resources. It shouldn't be too hard to scrape that amount together since maintaining a sect of this caliber should have monthly costs that are at least 100 times that.

Is there something going on with the sect?" Yang Qing paused as he silently wondered before he resumed reading the details again after he decided it was better to hear from the parties themselves rather than spend all his energy imagining different scenarios that may end up being off base.

"Mmmh from Su Jinjing's findings it seems that the Yellow lotus sect has debts with other merchant organizations but it seems they are honestly servicing those debts with none in default.

This must be why the Mountain spring pavilion decided to escalate the matter to the Order. With their network of information, it shouldn't have been too hard for them to discover they were the only ones not getting their dues.

It seems when they confronted the Yellow lotus sect to repay those outstanding dues instead of the sect owning up they did something the Mountain spring pavilion didn't expect which was use one of their core disciples as collateral for the debt claiming he was the cause of the debt. They even disclosed the attributes of the disciple to the Mountain spring pavilion.

This is rather odd of them," Yang Qing couldn't help but raise his eyebrow in confusion. The sect being unable to repay its debt was already a red flag but using a core disciple as collateral was even stranger.

Core disciples were prized figures in any given sect. Anyone who was given that title had a talent that stood out amongst countless other disciples. They were the future leadership of the sect and as such, they would receive appropriate grooming and nurturing. Considering how valued and how much effort and time was spent on core disciples it would be unreasonable for any sect to risk losing them, especially in an absurd manner such as collateral for a debt.

Yang Qing was dazed for a moment as he decided to continue on hoping to find a reason for the odd choice in the report.

"It seems the Mountain spring pavilion was just as dumbfounded when they were asked to take the core disciple away as a repayment for their loan leading them to question the Yellow lotus sect's motives.

The Yellow lotus response was simple HUUUUUH? What's going on?

The core disciple was given up by the sect as collateral because he was the reason they took the debt in the first place to help him in his cultivation. But he has been a bottomless pit that swallowed up resources without showing any improvement. The sect in frustration decided to use him as repayment for the loan they took.

Since the loan was taken precisely for his sake to nurture and groom him the sect felt it was his responsibility to repay it back so they offered him up to the Mountain springs pavilion to do with him as they will and the matter of the debt was to be considered closed.

The Mountain springs pavilion took this as an affront to their face and considered it a shameless ploy by the Yellow lotus sect to welch on their debt however the pavilion didn't have the power to force the issue since they are just a new rank 4 organization with 5 core formation experts with 3 of them being the leaders of the organization so they could only involve the Order in this.

Their choice in doing so was understandable since I can see the Yellow lotus sect has been in existence for the past 20,000 years and it's been recorded that they have close to 20 core formation experts which has made them a local hegemon in blue carp county.

Mmmh by these standards they should be considered a high-tier sect among rank 4 organizations. Being around for 20,000 years means they have deeper foundation and resource channels too. Repaying that debt shouldn't have been an issue for them," the more Yang Qing read the increasingly confused he became and the more questions cropped up.

"Maybe the last party in this case may shed a bit of light on the situation.

Zhao Qi is the core disciple being used as collateral and the unwitting center of all this. Once the Mountain spring pavilion filed the suit against the Yellow lotus sect they in turn dragged Zhao Qi as part of the case too.

I can see he joined the sect when he was 6 years old. He was average in his performance during the sect entrance examinations. His results weren't too low but there was nothing worthy of note in his performance either.

When he joined the sect this didn't change either, he kept a low profile, was diligent in his sect-assigned tasks and cultivation but never proactively tried to stand out such as by featuring in the sect competitions. He spent two years like this and about the only thing that stood out was how strong he was in the basics and the entry cultivation art given to new disciples for use during their body refinement and qi refinement realm.

It was during those two years that one of the outer sect elders discovered that Zhao Qi had cultivated to the gold body stage in the body refining realm. This news sent waves throughout the sect and he was directly promoted to a core disciple from an outer sect disciple skipping the inner sect disciple route.

He took one of the core elders by the name of Wei Peng as his master. His talent shone brilliantly in terms of cultivation and was seen to be gifted in using the various cultivation arts, especially his skill with the sword. At 16 he had already reached the peak of the qi refinement realm and two years later after refining and solidifying his cultivation base he broke through to the foundation realm with his first pillar being a blue-grade pillar. This drew the attention of even the sect master and some of the retired elders who had gone into seclusion to try and break through to the palace realm.

With the level of talent, he showed the sect decided to pour most of their resources to nurture him in the hopes that he would reach the palace realm. This is interesting. It seems the Yellow lotus sect once had 3 palace realm experts however they died while exploring a mysterious realm 400 years ago. Once

news of the death of those experts spread wolves started surrounding the sect, especially rival sects. Since then the sect has been in desperate straits to try and groom a palace realm expert to ease the dangers they were facing.

Once Zhao Qi exhibited his talent in the form of the gold body and the blue-grade pillar, the sects saw the hopes of having a palace stage expert in him. He was given special attention and resources to the extent of despite being in the first level of the foundation realm he was given top grade sky rank herbs and potions, the arrays in his abode were upgraded to the level that it would satisfy even a core formation expert's needs. He was given specialized training by most of the core elders including the sect master too. Mmh but despite all the resources and training poured into him, in the past 7 years he hasn't made a single leap in his cultivation base and is still stuck in the 1st level of the foundation realm.

The sect thought there was a problem only to find out it was all Zhao Qi's doing. Zhao Qi said he had been deliberately holding back so he could make sure his foundations were firmer and more robust. The sect couldn't believe what kind solidified cultivation base required over six million worth of treasure claiming even a normal pig that was given the same attention and resources he was would be in the peak of the foundation realm already. They couldn't help but worry how much resources they would keep pouring before Zhao Qi decided it was enough seeing how they had already gone beyond what was expected as the normal allocation of a core disciple. The amount they spent on him matched what the core elders got.

Zhao Qi remained stubborn not improving and only working on solidifying his cultivation base till the sect decided to cut off his support despite the pleas from his master. When the Mountain spring pavilion came to collect their debt they threw Zhao Qi to them to repay his own debt out of anger and frustration. Some elders had even sacrificed some of their monthly quotas of resources so Zhao Qi could get them. They felt betrayed by his actions and it was only out of the consideration of how much resources they had expended on him that they didn't outright abolish his cultivation.

What an interesting kid," Yang Qing said as he pushed the white jade talisman to the side with a curious glint flashing in his eyes as he smiled.

Chapter 72 72: The Last Case And Last Inquisitor

"Mao Mao, what time is it?" Yang Qing asked as he put away the jade talisman after he had finished reading the last case report.

"Almost 4 p.m.," Mao Yunru begrudgingly answered still sour over Yang Qing's claims.

"WHAAT!! I missed lunch?" Yang Qing rose from his desk in fright with eyes wide open spittle flying everywhere.

"Didn't you just have lunch before the end of the first case?"

"Mao Mao there's still a lot to teach you. Didn't those information brokers sell you any info on the 3 lunches one should have in a day? The breakfast lunch, the lunch lunch, and the evening lunch. I haven't had my lunch lunch of the day and it's the most important one. Now I'll have to combine the evening lunch and the lunch lunch which will ruin the whole eating dynamic.

This blackhearted organization. I can't sleep in peace now I can't even have my lunches in peace," Yang Qing sat back as he grumbled while pouting. He would have left already if this wasn't the last case and he didn't fear the exorbitant fine he would get for leaving during work hours.

Mao Yunru was seething at the side from Yang Qing's callous remark about her extracurricular.

"Will he keep bringing it up every day now every chance he gets? Luckily there are only a few days left before he leaves," she thought as she wished the days could fly by fast.

The doors of the courtroom opened as the two were lost in their thoughts. In the lead was Yi Jie and behind was a middle-aged man with broad shoulders and a medium-toned build and almost 3 meters tall. He wore a black robe and coat and the emblem of the yellow lotus embedded on his coat. He had a stern look with a narrow long flowing smooth black beard that reached his chest and hair that was tied in a topknot.

From the Yellow lotus emblem, Yang Qing could infer that this was Han Qingling the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect. From the faint fluctuations he was releasing though he tried well to conceal them Yang Qing could tell he was a quasi-palace stage expert but it didn't seem like he broke through that long ago.

"Mmmh I heard he was one of the disciples of one of the dead palace stage experts of the sect. His talent was touted as one of the best 100 years ago and it even eclipsed all his peers at the sect. He was expected to have the highest chance of breaking through to the palace stage.

But with the death of the other palace stage experts and him being hoisted to the seat of the sect master his pace slowed down," Yang Qing couldn't help but pity the sect master before him.

"The Order really has a deep information network. They even have information on the grade of his core. I wonder if I'll get my own information team when I get to the palace courts. I could have them comprise a list of the best foods and restaurants per province no , no per district no more restaurants will get lost. I should make the area as small as possible. Maybe per city or town would do.." Yang Qing got embroiled in his own epicurism fantasy as the rest of the parties made their way in.

Behind Han Qingling the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect was a young man. He had a dark grey robe with the yellow lotus emblem on it just like Han Qingling. He was of average height and build with short black curly hair. His looks were average further adding to his average guy persona. He would be easily overlooked in a crowd just like a person's shadow.

He walked with his head facing downward as pain and disappointment showed on his face. Yang Qing woke up from his food dream in time to notice the complex emotions running through the young man.

"That must be Zhao Qi the core disciple of the yellow lotus sect," Yang Qing thought as he sighed. The bureaucracy of sects and how cutthroat it was, were among the reasons he never dared join a sect.

Yes, the Order worked him to the bone but it was much freer and more transparent especially when it came to accessing cultivation resources. Few talents are ever buried in the Order unlike in sects or clans where they can be suppressed if they don't have a backing.

"He really is just at the first stage of the foundation realm but his qi seems much more refined than even someone at the 5th stage. Wait, was that an attribute I detected in his qi?" Yang Qing frowned as he detected something different in Zhao Qi's qi but it disappeared in an instant. He scanned him again with his divine sense but the results came normal.

"Could I have been mistaken?" Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder.

Sometimes cultivators would have elemental attributes in their qi. It was usually as a result of the cultivation art they are cultivating sometimes in which blue grade and above were the only arts capable of effecting such a change or the qi was influenced by the cultivator's physique. For example Haishi the

mirage dragon fly had the water attribute in her qi, Tan Delun the son of the owner of the falling meteor blacksmith shop had a special physique that made his qi seem like it was boiling magma.

Those born with special physiques don't need to train in the body refining stage as those physiques afford them the same advantage as what training their body would give, up to a point. Few physiques could match the physique of someone who trained to the flawless jade or the diamond body in the body refining stage. Mao Yunru was one of the few who had a natural borne physique that matched a flawless jade body and these kinds of physiques were far and few in between. Some could be passed down from descendant to descendant but others, the rare ones were usually a stroke of fortune tied to one's luck. Background, resources had nothing to do with it. Normal non-cultivating parents could give birth to a child who had a rare physique that matched a diamond or flawless jade body.

Yang Qing's gaze lingered on Zhao Qi a little bit longer before he moved his gaze to the person behind him.

Behind Zhao Qi was a thin tall man in a dark deep blue robe with a few rings on his hand. His hair was neatly straightened and flowing back smoothly with a well-groomed whisker-like moustache.

From the robe that looked to be made of high-quality material that cost a few thousand middle-grade spirit stones, it took no effort to know that he was from the Mountain spring pavilion.

"So he is Liu Yun, one of the three heads of the Mountain springs pavilion and the most active of the three with the other two being recluses who only show themselves for the most important of deals.

Peak of the core formation realm? And a stable foundation at that too. I can see why even as an upstart the Mountain springs pavilion has been experiencing tremendous growth. Though they fall a little short of the yellow lotus sect not unless one or both of the remaining heads are at the quasi-palace stage too," Yang Qing thought as he compared Han Qinling the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect, and the merchant leader Liu Yun. Both had a bearing of leaders who have weathered a few storms and come out on top.

The last of the group who was closing the courtroom doors was a slender young lady who had a half-blue half red robe and coat that were both short-sleeved. In one of her hands, she held a short pitch black spear that looked simple with even the edges looking blunt. She had an ordinary look with black short crinkly hair. However, her eyes stood out as they were round big, and deep almost like an unfathomable deep ocean drawing everything in the more you stared.

After she closed the door, she turned holding the spear with both hands like she was swaddling a baby.

"You be good while I work okay? I'll tell you good stories later," She said giving the spear a tender smile.

Yang Qing smiled bitterly when he saw this as Mao Yunru threw him a smug you see look.

The young lady was Su Jinjing the inquisitor of the case and the last inquisitor in Yang Qing's team. She also went by another moniker like Yang Qing's the lazy glutton which he has been desperately trying to find the originator of it. She was known as the spirit smotherer.

Chapter 73 73: Iron Thorn Kingdom

The whole group was soon in the middle of the courtroom with Yi Jie heading to his usual position by Yang Qing's side.

Han Qingling the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect was standing on the right side, Zhao Qi whose head was still lowered stood in the middle, Liu Yun one of the heads of the Mountain springs pavilion stood on the left, and lastly Su Jinjing who went ahead of them closer to Yang Qing's podium.

She stared longingly and gently at her spear before she shook her head as he eyes firmed up as if she had resolved herself and let the spear hang downwards as she averted her eyes.

"Su Jinjing the inquisitor of this case hereby present Han Qingling the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect, Zhao Qi the core disciple of the same, and Liu Yun one of the heads of the Mountain springs pavilion.

The Mountain springs pavilion the accuser in this case has filed a complaint against the Yellow lotus sect for defaulting on its loan repayment. The sect owes 6,45,208 middle-grade spirit stones. Over the past year, they haven't made a single repayment despite agreeing on a monthly repayment schedule.

The Yellow lotus sect on receiving the suit has in turn filed one against their core disciple Zhao Qi who they named as the cause for the debt and the difficulty in repayment.

The guidelines of the courtroom have been explained to all parties present and they have all agreed to adhere to them and suffer the consequences should they break them.

That's it."

Su Jinjing had a soothing voice that seemed to have a mild calming effect to all around the courtroom. However, those effects were minimal on Yang Qing, Yi Jie, Mao Yunru, and the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect. It was more pronounced on Zhao Qi the weakest member present as he was able to look up finally and the dejection in his eyes was slowly disappearing.

"Thanks, Su Jiinjing," Yang Qing said as he offered her a thankful smile. He knew Su Jinjing had used her calming effect in her voice on purpose. Despite her weirdness with mothering a spear, she had a gentle personality by default. She had infused her spirit into her voice to try and help Zhao Qi but since she didn't want it to seem like favoritism she used it in the whole courtroom.

When she joined the team both Yang Qing and Yi Jie were worried because of her gentle personality she wouldn't be able to do her duties as an inquisitor which had a hint of ruthlessness to it. It was only later when seeing her in action that they realized their worries were unfounded. She may be gentle but she loved her spear a little too much and as such whenever she got a chance to use it or help it be its true self as she likes to say, she was more than overzealous with it.

Of all the inquisitors in Yang Qing's team, she had the highest record of fatalities and injuries caused when in the conduct of her duties. Even Zheng Hu the battle fanatic fell a little short compared to her. But due to her high spirit strength, she is sensitive to malice so she never attacked anybody who didn't deserve it and was never the first person to throw the punch but she sure had the last throw.

Due to her sensitivity, she also had the highest impromptu cases record. Most cases in the Order are from people submitting their complaints which are then distributed to the various courts that are then distributed to the inquisitors. The inquisitors can use the intelligence organizations attached to the Order to dig deeper into the background of the parties they are investigating however they also need to do their part in person. During such investigations,, they can stumble onto other cases that violate the Order's articles and regulations and are obligated to bring those parties in. Such cases were called Impromptu cases.

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Su Jinjing bowed in return as she offered back a polite smile of her own as she made her way back to the end of the courtroom closer to the courtroom doors.

"As my colleague has told you the moment you stepped through the courtroom doors you are now subject to the rules and regulations of this courtroom and its judgment. However, you still have time to refuse and decide to resolve the case among yourselves. The decision the court makes is final and can't be overturned. Whatever is decided, all parties will have to follow it.

Are you all sure you want to go through with this or would you rather solve it amongst yourselves?" asked Yang Qing.

"We already tried to resolve it ourselves but we couldn't make any headway. Whatever the courtroom decides I on behalf of the Yellow lotus sect will abide by the ruling," Han Qingling curtly said.

"I'm okay with it," Zhao Qi softly answered with a weak smile

"On behalf of the Mountain springs pavilion, we will adhere to the court's judgment. We trust in its integrity and impartiality," Liu Yun gently said as he offered a small bow.

"Okay then. My name is Yang Qing the judge who will be in charge of this case henceforth. I will hear the version of events from all parties present and once I am satisfied I have all the pertinent information to have a sound judgment only then will I offer my ruling. During the case, I may involve specialists in the matter at hand but they are involved on as needed basis.

I hope we will come to a resolution that all members present can accept and live with," said Yang Qing as he eyed every member present.

"Owner Liu Yun I think we will start with you then sect master Han Qingling you will be next then we will finish with disciple Zhao Qi. Make sure to be upfront and not hold back the details. That is all. Owner Liu Yun would you please," Yang Qing said as he motioned for Liu Yun to start.

"Thank you for the opportunity, Judge Yang Qing. As you all know my name is Liu Yun I am one of the founders of the Mountain spring pavilion along with Wen Song and Wu Aiguo. They couldn't make it as Wen Song is in secluded cultivation and Wu Aiguo is not on the continent at the moment and it's hard to

get a hold of him through the communication talisman. But any decisions I make they will agree to it too. We have been sworn brothers for the past 300 years. We were orphans who lived in the harsher parts of the Green bud kingdom formerly known as the Iron thorn kingdom."

Yang Qing and the rest once they heard he was a citizen of the Green bud kingdom couldn't help but have perceptible changes in their expression. The current Green bud kingdom a rank 4 kingdom was once known as the Iron thorn kingdom. The kingdom's name changed 40 years ago when the royal family was overthrown and killed.

The Iron thorn kingdom got its name from the way the royal family liked to impale its victims on gates all over the kingdom that were made of tiny spikes made of abyssal iron. The victims would experience a slow excruciating death as the iron sucked their life force and put them in extreme torment. Whether noble or commoner they all faced the same treatment as long as they drew the ire of the royal family.

The ruthlessness of the royal family was so extreme that a metallic smell permeated all over the kingdom. It was a mixture of abyssal iron and blood. They could act wantonly because they had a palace realm ancestor and no one in the kingdom even among the noble families had someone of that caliber. The best they had were peak core formation experts and they were few far and few in between as the royal family kept a tight leash on the resources all over the kingdom. They used those same resources to develop their own forces further strengthening themselves.

The kingdom was also located in one of the areas that had a nonexistent Order presence. Due to their low manpower, there were many areas around the southern continent that escaped the Order's eyes while some areas were too dangerous to even create their branches there such as the Green fog region.

All these factors thus emboldened the royal family of the Iron thorn kingdom to act with unbridled cruelty and they also had the presence of mind to seal the whole kingdom so no one went out thus putting a blockade on the information flow out of the kingdom. But all this changed close to 40 years ago. Their latest act at the time which was recorded as the cruelest they have ever been was when they massacred a whole city because they suspected a coup was brewing from it. This was the trigger that united the kingdom and also pushed it over the edge. Every citizen whether noble or commoner had one common goal, to either escape or destroy the current family.

A mass exodus was impossible and destroying the royal family was even harder not with their palace stage ancestor lying around and the numerous other experts the royal family had created from squeezing and monopolizing almost every drop of cultivation resource.

However, in this desperation, they got help from an unlikely source, an underground organization known as the silent moon. It barely makes moves but when it does it sends waves around the continent.

The organization is veiled in secrecy and the only times they are heard off is in the aftermath of their actions which don't happen as often.

It's not known how but the major nobles all got messages with the emblem of a moon veiled in a hazy shadow attached to it asking the same question,

"What are you willing to pay for your freedom?"

They were at first weary but the weariness with time grew into a glimmer of hope. A what if... Which led them to the same answer. EVERYTHING they had. Once they came to that answer they all got another reply.

"Then give us every form of wealth you have silver, copper, gold, spirit stones, spiritual metals, and herbs anything you've attached value to except the living give it and the royal family will be no more,"

It took close to 4 years to gather the wealth of not only the nobles but even the commoners. It took that long because they had to be careful about it, in case the royal family got wind of it and a repeat city-wide massacre happened.

Anything of value was gathered, from precious cultivation resources and arts to heirlooms down to even a wooden sword someone used as a kid and couldn't let go off. Anything they thought to be a treasure was given. The whole kingdom came together and paid for the hit. It's not known how but the silent moon knew when everything was gathered and the very next day the royal castle was destroyed and all in it. As for the palace stage ancestor, he had his cultivation crippled and hung on the same abyssal iron gates they hung their victims along with the king and other infamous princes known for their cruelty. All this barely took a day.

When the citizens saw the royal capital in flames they couldn't believe it and when they saw the royal family hanging on the gates they all broke and wept. Young, old, commoner, noble they all had the same emotions as they looked the source of their nightmare up in flames and suffering the same torment they did or dreaded.

It was only after all these happened and the borders were finally open that the rest of the continent finally knew what happened here. The Order sent inquisitors and was baffled at the records of cruelty they heard which was more intense than what was floating around.

It was from this experience that they pushed for inquisitors not only to be diligent in their current cases but even in impromptu ones. Because there were sure to be many other Iron thorn kingdoms out there.

Chapter 74 74: Mountain Spring Pavilion's Side

Everyone in the courtroom had complex emotions running through them, even the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect who had on a stoic expression had his eyes flicker imperceptibly.

Despite a cultivation world being brutal at the end of the day, they were still human and they couldn't help but sympathize with the torment endured by the citizens of the now Green bud kingdom, years on end to the point they were willing to give up everything for a chance at reprieve.

"We three brothers decided to start the Mountain springs pavilion 40 years ago. With our borders finally opened we wanted to see and experience the outside world which despite being core formation experts over 100 years old we were never able to," Liu Yun continued on as if all this had nothing to do with him and he was just an impartial narrator saying another person's side of things. However, he wasn't completely calm as he wanted to portray as Yang Qing detected sorrow in his voice and his hands were twitching as if holding himself back from clenching them into a fist.

"We couldn't travel without money and from our firsthand experience we realized capital is an important resource to have that can get you almost anything..." Liu Yun said with conviction in his tone.

It was understandable since their freedom from the Iron thorn royal family was paid for with resources or anything they held of value. This belief that with enough resources you can buy anything wasn't held by Liu Yun alone but was a seed that had been planted in almost every citizen of the Green bud kingdom.

Because everyone pulled their resources together, every single person felt their resource had a part in buying back their freedom despite their quality and quantity being different from each other. It was for this reason that the Green bud kingdom was developing into a mercantile kingdom.

Every year there would be dozens of merchant organizations formed by the citizens of the Green bud kingdom.

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"We, therefore, pulled everything we had together and started the Mountain springs pavilion. It wasn't much but we also received additional support from some of the citizens of our country once they heard we wanted to venture out as merchants.

Because of being locked up in the kingdom for so long there were those who were afraid of leaving the kingdom despite yearning for it. They couldn't overcome that mental barrier just yet from years of being threatened with death or worse should they attempt to leave. So they supported us as a way to cheer for us and also experience the outside vicariously through us.

The iron thorn kingdom may have brought nothing but torment and pain, a literal never-ending nightmare but it also gave us something else. It destroyed all forms of social constructs and the ensuing barriers that come along with it. No difference between noble or commoner, rich or poor, cultivator or non-cultivator. We all developed one identity. The people who suffered unbelievable torment together and came out the other side together.

Our sense of togetherness might be the only good thing that royal family ever gave us..." Liu Yun's gaze seemed to blur as he smiled a smile that wasn't a complete smile but a smile filled with gratitude but also pain.

"Sorry, it seems I wandered off-topic there.." Liu Yun regained his clarity as he bowed in apology.

"It's okay Owner Liu Yun. I did say to offer as much detail as you can. You have nothing to apologize for. The courtroom offers not only unbiased judgment but it also offers solace to those who want to unburden themselves," Yang Qing said as he used a gentle force to stop Liu Yun from bowing.

Liu Yun was surprised to find he couldn't bend an inch despite trying. It was like there was a soft cushion that was as sturdy as an immovable mountain in front of him. It gently absorbed all his force without moving an inch.

"The Order is really a place full of monsters. If only..." Liu Yun quickly shook his head free of the negative thoughts that were almost brewing.

"What's done is done. We all agreed to start out new lives unshackled by our past. Enough has been taken from us, huh big brother," Liu Yun before he regained clarity and decided to focus on the matter at hand. He had to ensure they got what was owed. That sum may not mean much to the Yellow lotus sect or other rank 4 merchant organizations but to them, it was life and death.

"We struggled at first when we started since we didn't know how things worked. We got tricked a few times and almost gave up but we soon got the hang of things and we grew slowly by slowly in good repute and the quality of our goods and services.

Every deal matters to us whether big or small because of our background we personally saw how anything no matter how insignificant it may seem has value enough to buy back your freedom.

It was in that spirit that we were so ecstatic when we managed to strike a deal with the Yellow lotus sect a sect whose reputation as one of the strongest rank 4 sects is known far and wide.

Getting a deal with them was a validation that we had finally taken a big step as merchants," Liu Yun paused as gave a complicated look toward the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect before he continued. He experienced both the greatest moment and worst moment as a merchant thanks to them.

"It took months of negotiations, going back and forth before we managed to reach an agreement.

We agreed to give the Yellow lotus sect a loan of 9,000,000 middle-grade spirit stones which was to be repaid back in 8 years with a 10% annual interest charge.

The repayment schedule was to be done monthly with the repayment amount being 137,000 middle-grade spirit stones.

We didn't ask for any collateral since we trusted the reputation of the Yellow lotus sect and it wasn't like they would flee.

Everything started off well with the sect maintaining its schedule, there were even times it made the payments a month prior. With this, 3 years passed by smoothly with no issues but all that changed in the 4th year.

We don't know why but they stopped making their repayments. The first month came and there was no repayment. At first, we thought something unavoidable must have happened for them to miss their payment. So we decided to be patient and not press them on the matter. Then came the second month still no payment. It was then that we got a bit worried and had to send one of our representatives who had been handling their repayment account to go find out what was happening since neither I nor my senior brothers were close by.

They denied her entry despite visiting them for almost 2 months, not telling her why. Since I was the only leader closest at the time, I decided to handle the matter myself.

On reaching the sect, yes they opened their doors but they kept me secluded in one of their guest courtyards for 2 weeks before they even sent someone to talk to me.

At the end of the 2 weeks, one of their core elders came by with Zhao Qi in hand saying that their disciple will pay the whole debt. If I have anything to discuss, I should do it with Zhao Qi and the Yellow lotus sect has nothing to do with it. They considered their debt with us closed.

I thought they were joking but when a day ended with no one coming back I had to reevaluate the situation which only drew more questions than answers. The only thing I could think of at the time was the sect was in a difficult position that they had to use one of their disciples as payment.

I decided to leave and use our established channels to see if there was anything happening in the Yellow lotus sect that I wasn't aware of. I left Zhao Qi at the sect and went my way.

A few weeks later was when I discovered through my channels that the Yellow lotus sect was faithfully servicing the loans it had with other organizations except ours.

Disappointment, anger, and all sorts of negative emotions that I had long tried to forget all bubbled up in that instant.

Why the Mountain springs pavilion? Is it because we have the shallowest foundations among the organizations they deal with so it's easier to welch on our deal than the rest? Or was it a scheme of theirs from the start to get free spirit stones from some bumpkin merchants?

Dozens of questions funneled through my mind but at the end of the day none of the answers to those question matter," Liu Yun said as his expression turned cold.

"What does matter though is the Yellow sect repaying its debt in full and not use a foundation level disciple as some form of repayment. All I want is the spirit stones they owe and we will be done.

I understand the Mountain springs pavilion doesn't have the power to force them and I've seen enough bloodshed to last a lifetime to try my hand at it again, especially for something as foolhardy as spirit stones but I still can't find it in me to forgive that debt not after how the sect has treated us.

I hope the Order can help us get paid what we are owed I'll even waive any interest charges they just need to pay me back the 6,450,208 middle-grade spirit stones they owe. Since they have shown themselves to be untrustworthy, I hope it will be done in a single lump sum payment. Thank you for the time." Liu Yun said as he gave another polite bow and stepped back.

Chapter 75 75:Private Testimony

"Thank you Owner Liu Yun for an apt description of your side of things. We will now move to you, sect master Han Qingling," Yang Qing promptly said.

After hearing Liu Yun's side of things the whole thing felt too off for him. The Yellow lotus sect was a sect with a rich history and deep foundations that has existed for over 10,000 years.

It seemed implausible for such a sect to risk its reputation for a few million middle-grade spirit stones.

There were a few things that didn't quite add up to him.

Why did the sect decide to take a loan with the Mountain spring pavilion in the first place? The interest rate the pavilion offered was cheap but he had a feeling with the long-standing reputation of the sect they were sure to get even lower interest rates from organizations they have been dealing with for a long time.

Then there was how they treated the Mountain spring pavilion after. For a sect with so many enemies already at their doors, it seemed rather reckless on their end, especially in a situation where they need every help they can get and fewer enemies.

A sect that managed to survive for over 10,000 years and continue to exist even after its strongest pillars had perished surely wasn't run by the foolish or the reckless.

This was why Yang Qing always felt something was off with the Yellow lotus sect even discounting the little issue with Zhao Qi exhibiting elemental qi.

"Thank you judge Yang Qing for you and the Order affording my sect this opportunity," Han Qingling calmly said with no ripples in his tone or emotions as he gave a cultivator's salute with the right fist placed on the left palm that was facing vertically.

"I know it's rather presumptuous of me but can I ask the court for some privacy to tell my side of things? I would prefer it Zhao Qi didn't hear what I'm about to say or the Mountain spring pavilion."

The sect master had used a soundless incantation aided by his pseudo-monarch sense to send his message to Yang Qing.

He was already half-step into the palace stage, so when Yang Qing used a bit of his qi to prevent Liu Yun from bowing to him, the sect master caught a glimpse of Yang Qing's actual realm.

This sent enormous waves in his heart as he could tell by Yang Qing's vitality aura he had just cultivated for 20-some-odd years and he was already in the palace stage. Whilst he has been cultivating for almost 200 years and the best he could show for it was being a half-step palace realm expert. Though in his defense the mountain of troubles the sect has been facing made him find less and less time to cultivate.

Scale wise 50 half-step palace stage experts would at most force a pyrrhic draw with someone whose feet were firmly placed in the palace realm. It was the reason all this time the Yellow lotus sect had been in a bind. They lost their palace stage experts while their enemies had one palace stage expert at the helm. Despite how many half-step palace stage experts the Yellow lotus sect has, it wouldn't help much against their foes who have at least one palace stage expert.

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Yang Qing was surprised by the sect master Han Qingling's request. He couldn't help but raise his eyebrow a bit in question.

Yi Jie who was beside had a bewildered look too. He may have not heard the contents of the message but he detected the ripples of Han Qingling's pseudo sense being a half-step palace stage expert himself.

Before he could ask Yang Qing what was going on, he was already beaten to it.

"The sect master of the Yellow lotus sect is requesting that he give his testimony in private away from the ears of their disciple and the leader of the Mountain spring pavilion," Yang Qing told both Yi Jie, Mao Yunru, and Su Jinjing using his monarch sense.

Both Mao Yunru and Su Jinjing were at the late stages of core formation so they couldn't respond back as they didn't have monarch sense of their own to transmit their voice though with Su Jinjing's powerful soul strength she could send her intent.

"I think we should oblige him. The case seemed a bit off and it isn't the first time a defendant has wanted to give their testimony in secret," said Yi Jie.

"I was thinking of agreeing to it too. Though..well we will cross that bridge when we get to it," Yang Qing said seemingly thinking of something as he closely eyed Zhao Qi before dismissing that thought.

He canceled his monarch sense connection with the rest as he focused back on Han Qingling giving his response.

"The court agrees to your request," Yang Qing said as he picked up the golden eagle medallion on his podium.

He injected his qi into it which produced a small burst of white light that struck the ceiling of the courtroom. A pure white membrane started rippling from the ceiling as it flowed downwards like a waterfall before it formed a cordon around Zhao Qi and Liu Yun who were visibly shocked at being surrounded by a white membrane out of the blue.

The white membrane solidified into a cuboid shape that surrounded each of them in their own compartments. There was a gold eagle symbol on each of the compartments that seemed almost lifelike as it flew within the membrane spewing strange script scribbles from its mouth.

Liu Yun was visibly shaken as he tried to spread his spiritual sense past the compartment only for it to disappear completely. It was like his sense had hit an empty void with no end. He tried touching the compartment and felt a soft, smooth sensation as it rippled faintly from his touch.

"What's going on?" He couldn't help but fearfully worry. Years of being tormented had left him almost instinctively assuming the worst-case scenario.

Zhao Qi was the complete opposite as he stood in the middle of his compartment rotating from left to right eyeing the membrane with curiosity in his eyes and nothing else.

"I wasn't wrong after all, there was something there. But even with the assistance of the medallion's power, the detection is still faint. I should tell old monster Lei Weiyuan about it," Yang Qing thought as an interesting glint flashed through his eyes.

"Neither your disciple nor Owner Liu Yun can hear you now. Even a domain-level expert wouldn't be able to eavesdrop on the conversation," Yang Qing said to assure the sect master. Though what he said was half true as a seasoned domain expert like the ones in the Order would be able to bypass the membrane which could at most work against a domain expert who has just broken through at that moment without time to familiarize themselves with their abilities.

"Thank you very much for acquiescing to my selfish request," Han Qingling humbly said with his expression easing up a little bit.

"First I'd like to say, the Yellow lotus sect has every intention of paying back every single spirit stone we owe to the Mountain spring pavilion and even double that for the trouble we have caused them," Han Qingling said as he gave a sorry look toward the direction of the compartment Zhao Qi and Liu Yun were in. Though it was not known who exactly was the true recipient of that apology.

"So there is something going on with the Yellow lotus sect," Yang Qing thought to himself.

Mao Yunru's eyes were glittering as she even moved her seat a couple of times to find the best listening position.

"Can't she maintain her bearing as a judge at least," Yang Qing thought as he threw a mocking look at Mao Yunru who was completely oblivious to it as all her attention was zeroed in on the sect master. Seemingly like suddenly remembering something, she took out four white jade talismans and positioned them carefully on her desk as she chose the best angle for each of them.

"Four? Don't we need just two recordings for the court proceedings? who are the extra ones for? it's not like you can take them out of the courtroom," Yang Qing thought before he decided to ignore Mao Yunru's antics and focus on the matter at hand.

"We didn't mean to drag Zhao Qi and the Mountain spring pavilion but it was something that we felt we had to do."

Chapter 76 76: The Yellow Lotus Sect's Confidence

"As you all very well know our sect once had 3 palace stage experts however they disappeared about 400 years ago when they were exploring a mysterious realm.

We haven't been able to confirm whether they are dead or alive but it's more likely that the former happened because we haven't heard even a single rumor about them for the past 400 years.

We tried tracking down the realm they had gone to in search of better opportunities for the sect but we couldn't find it despite them leaving the exact coordinates of its whereabouts.

Based on our experience, a mysterious realm disappearing could be a result of a few things: Either the entrance got closed off once certain requirements were met such as the number of cultivators in the realm reaching a certain threshold or the entrance swaps spatial nodes so it could have appeared someplace different or the last ominous option which we've been hoping didn't happen which is the mysterious realm had a problem that led it to disappear into the void," said Han Qingling as his voice shook a little.

As a sect, they tried to keep their hope alive that the previous sect master and the two grand elders that went along with him were still alive. They were still hopeful when the first century passed by. Due to the long life spans of cultivators a single century was just the blink of an eye since just breaking through to the foundation stage gives a cultivator 1,000 years waiting a 100 was nothing.

But when 200 years passed by, the sect as a whole couldn't help but worry considering in those 200 years they heard nothing despite mobilizing all their resources and channels to try and locate that mysterious realm or detect any news of their sect master and the grand elders.

After hearing nothing for all this time a massive seed of doubt, worry and dread was planted in their hearts.

What if the mysterious realm lost its anchor and got lost in the void? This was the explanation that made the most sense but it was also the one they found the most difficult to accept.

Yang Qing and the rest could understand sect master Han Qingling's worry.

When it came to mysterious realms there were two types of mysterious realms; Natural mysterious realms and man-made mysterious realms.

Mysterious realms were considered pocket spaces around the world. Natural mysterious realms were usually formed by treasures or spiritual plants with space-bending properties. These kinds of realms though they had a degree of danger to them in some regards they were considered safer compared to their counterparts, the man-made mysterious realms. This was because of spatial stability.

Natural mysterious realms were more stable than manmade mysterious realms because they conformed with the laws of the world rather than tearing through it. At their foundation, they had the support of the world itself. This is why treasures and spiritual plants with space-bending properties were highly coveted and would cause battles of epic proportions when spotted.

But when it came to manmade mysterious realms, it was much more complicated. Not just anyone could build one because they wanted to. They had to have a profound understanding of the dao of space so they could detect places where the space had overlapped. It also had to be fragile enough that they could pull it apart. Only cultivators who were at the soul formation could attempt such a thing and they had to be proficient in the dao of space too as not all soul formation cultivators could do it efficiently.

Once the overlapping space is separated they would then use artifacts and arrays and a mountain of energy-giving treasures to anchor the area between those overlapping spaces to the world. Without an

anchor, the area would suffer spatial breaks which would lead to its decimation as it disappears into the void as the world seals the space in an attempt to mend itself.

This was the real danger of manmade mysterious realms. If there is a problem with the anchor the whole realm becomes destroyed due to the unstable spatial barrier as it cracks apart and disappears into the void. Once in the void, anybody in the domain realm and below dies with the domain experts holding out just slightly longer. Those at the soul formation stage may survive as long as they find a weak spatial node to reenter the world from but even then they end up with heavy injuries caused by the spatial storms and void current that take a long time to heal.

Han Qingling and the other sect members were justifiable in their worry because if there was an anchor break then the previous sect master and the two grand elders were surely dead.

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Han Qingling paused to get his emotions in check before he could continue. Over the past century since he inherited the seat as sect master he hasn't had a single moment of respite, especially with the wolves encircling them adding to the turmoil of the potential loss of their strongest pillars.

"Our incessant search for the previous sect master and the grand elders alerted others to our situation. We knew it was a risk with the amount of fanfare we caused searching for them but it was a risk we had to take especially in a situation where every second counts.

But as time passed by with no information about our palace stage experts the curious looks we got from those sniffing around soon turned into greedy, covetous, and vengeful looks.

In our rise, we had no shortage of enemies. Friends believe in your potential and enemies push you to live up to it. We lived up to our potential alright but now the thing that drove us to prominence is now threatening our destruction.

The enemies we knew started baring their fangs then those we didn't even know joined in and finally the friends we thought we had, joined the other side.

The past 200 years have truly been the longest years of my life," Han Qingling said as he gave a tired self-deprecating smile.

"After 200 years passed by, these unlikely motley association of greedy wolves started probing us by attacking our small-scale businesses then they moved to the mildly important ones and some mines once they saw no retaliation from us. Their appetites and range of activity have only grown since then.

Currently, we are only left with half of what we once had. The only reason that half hasn't been targeted is that those are our core businesses and are located within a distance from the sect that we can safely reinforce and their base protections are sufficient enough to hold out against attacks from late-stage core formation experts.

As for the businesses that we lost, we couldn't risk protecting them as we had to concentrate all our manpower against these many foes and the most important reason is, four of those sects attacking us each have a palace stage expert.

They haven't yet made a move but their presence is enough to deter us from sending our sect members that far out. We even had to close all our branches because of them and to cut on cost," Han Qingling paused once more as he stared in Zhao Qi's direction with regret and self-blame flashing in his eyes.

"Losing half our resources and businesses hurt our foundations even if we still retained our core businesses. It was for that reason we had to take a lot of loans to maintain the running of the sect and also use the channels of those merchant organizations to find information on our enemies.

It was through those channels that we learned a bit of information that made us reevaluate our plans and priorities.

The only reason the four palace stage experts haven't attacked us is that they have a formation art that requires five palace stage experts to work. With that formation, they would be confident in their chances of breaking our sect protection array.

They have to be pretty confident about its might since our array was set by one of the palace stage grand elder who is....

was a blue-grade formation master," Han Qingling painfully sighed once he said this. He couldn't admit this in front of the rest of the elders but he too was one of those who believed the previous sect master and the two grand elders were already dead.

"The array can last a whole month from a barrage of attacks from a palace realm expert in the middle stages and that is without feeding it spirit stones for recharging.

I'm confident in our elder's work but as a sect master I have to consider the possibilities and the might of five palace stage experts condensed in a formation isn't something I can overlook.

And two years ago they found the missing piece. A rogue cultivator in the early stages of the palace realm joined their cause.

They may strike any minute now. I have confidence in the sect protection array holding out but just in case it doesn't we need an alternative which brings me to Zhao Qi's situation.

Over the past few years, we have been secretly sending out some of our most gifted disciples to different locations so they may not be targeted. Even among them, Zhao Qi's talent is definitely the best and he has the right attitude to go along with it," Han Qingling said as he gave a look of pride and admiration in Zhao Qi's compartment.

"If circumstances were different we'd happily nurture him even if he decided to build his foundation for 500 years but time is running out and the best we can do for him now is give him a way out just like the other disciples so we can preserve the embers of the Yellow lotus sect.

Thus we decided to run his name through the mud, discredit him and show the outside forces we want nothing to do with him. Of the many merchant organizations we deal with most have already been infiltrated feeding information to our enemies.

The Mountain spring pavilion approaching us was an opportunity we couldn't let go of. They were fairly new, had a decent reputation as far as I could tell, our enemies hadn't sunk their teeth into them yet and the most important reason was Liu Yun's character.

The only good thing that came from me being the sect master in these past 200 years of dealing with schemes and duplicity is it helped me improve my ability to read someone. Though I'd trade that for a single peaceful place and day just to cultivate. I'm not sure what the elders were thinking throwing this hot seat to me. I've always preferred being in seclusion to dealing with people.

I'm the least suited to hold this post.

Sorry about that I deviated from the topic," Han Qingling laughed in embarrassment at speaking his true thoughts out. Yang Qing smiled at this while Mao Yunru.....

Well, Mao Yunru had pulled out 6 more white jade talismans in the duration of the Yellow sect master's narration bringing the count of the white jade recording talismans on her desk to 10.

Han Qingling was too engrossed in his testimony to notice while Yang Qing and Yi Jie knew well enough than to comment. As for Su Jinjing, she was holding back her tears as she stared at the sect master while she whispered to her spear.

"Anyway after interacting with Liu Yun, I could tell he had a forthright character. This guess was further reaffirmed by how he acted even when we missed out on the monthly payment or treated him after. It's an unlikely trait to have as a merchant but as someone I wanted to entrust Zhao Qi with, it was the best character to have. Were Zhao Qi to end up with the Mountain spring pavilion I know he'd look out for him and Zhao Qi would have a safe space to grow.

We intended to pay their debt back through secret channels in a year and also a note for them to let Zhao Qi stay in their care but he had already filed the complaint with the Order before we could do so.

With the suit filed we decided to continue along with the reuse to add further credence that we want nothing to do with Zhao Qi.

I can only imagine how much anguish this did to Zhao Qi and I didn't wish to do this to him or the Mountain spring pavilion but it's the only way we can guarantee his safety and reduce the pavilion's risk of harboring him.

As for us, should the sect protecting array break we have every intention OF BURYING EVERYONE who budes in with us. It's the least us old foggies can do for the little sprouts," said Han Qingling as his eyes flashed with murderous intent and pride as a sect master.

Chapter 77 77: Judge's Chambers

Yang Qing and the rest were astounded by the Yellow lotus sect's plan especially the outward ruse with Zhao Qi and the Mountain spring pavilion. Though the shock was mild as both Yang Qing and Yi Jie had felt something off with the Yellow lotus sect from the start.

Mao Yunru at the side had her eyes filled with a cluster of stars as she carefully stored away the excess white jade talisman like some precious treasure as she silently muttered under her breathe,

"You, I'll watch you after supper, then you, will be before bed, you will be in the morning before I get to work, as for you...."

She went on designating set timelines for each of the white jade talismans.

Yang Qing shook his head as he wondered if she planned to live in the Order as she wouldn't be allowed to step out of the building with any of the talismans with the recorded proceedings. It was a severe and punishable offense by the Order, one that they did not take lightly.

The only plausible way Mao Yunru could use the white jade recording talismans in the times she set was if she decided to live in the courtroom building full-time.

It could be doable as every judge is given their own chambers in the building which only get better the higher up in rank they are. Though it was called a chamber it was more like an abode.

Every judge's chambers usually had an office where extra recordings of all the cases the judge has dealt with would be kept, a roster of his duties, and other pertinent documents relevant to their job such as progress reports on certain sentences. There would also be a cultivation room that was fitted with isolation arrays, amplification arrays for spirit qi density, and among other treasures that would help them get into meditation easily and boost their cultivation speeds.

Being a cultivation judge was a taxing job that would leave one with barely any time to cultivate. The Order had gone all out to ensure each of the judge's cultivation rooms was fitted with resources that

would create the most optimum environment for their judges to cultivate. They spared no expenses as even the lowest judge from the lower core court had their chambers fitted with a treasure that was at the monarch rank at the very least and the spirit density of that room matched blessed grounds of rank 3 sects that were headed by a palace stage expert.

It was because of this environment that there were some judges who preferred cultivating in their chambers as opposed to their living quarters.

In addition to the office and the cultivation room, there was also the training room that was the size of a small arena but sturdier than one as it could handle a full blow from a domain realm expert. All training rooms from the lower core courts up to the palace courts were all made of the same materials. It was only when one reached the domain courts and above that the materials and standard of the training rooms would change.

There was also an alchemy room, blacksmithing room, talisman refining room, and other professional-based rooms that were in line with the talents of the occupant of that room. They were all equipped with the relevant accompanying arrays and equipment. However, sourcing of ingredients such as for alchemy for example would all be on the judge's dime which had gutted Yang Qing when he heard it.

He had tried to secretly rally other judges together and even sent some secret complaints to the Order to stop being stingy and that their actions were tantamount to slowing down the strides the Order could make through their young talents. He wrote a rather impassioned speech.

A large gathering joined his cause which got too large for him to control or do things covertly. It's not known how and by whom, but despite his camouflage arts, cloaking techniques, and every other covert arts he could use to not be found out as the instigator, he was found out by the higher-ups. They agreed to sell the resources such as herbs, spiritual metals, and the like at an extremely discounted rate that was too low to even be reasonably called a discount. But in exchange, they had to have tangible evidence that they were putting it to good use and not just wasting it away like rich young masters. As for Yang Qing as the instigator of all this, he got his just rewards.

The spirit stones that were provided for free to provide the arrays the energy they needed to run were no longer provided. He had to source his own. His chambers were reduced in size to half of what it was. The middle-grade monarch rank treasure that was provided was downgraded to a low-grade one though it would have been further downgraded to a high-grade sky rank treasure if not for his shameless begging that left one of the administrators with snort in their robes.

He is one of the few judges who almost never steps into his chambers. Every time he goes in he always struggles not to cough up blood due to the upkeep costs of the place. He has never joined any movement since then, he even sneakily tells on his colleagues in the hopes of getting in the good graces of the higher-ups.

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Yang Qing sympathized with the predicament the sect master and the Yellow lotus sect found themselves in but the Order's hands were tied in this.

The Order's primary focus has always been on the protection of the lives of ordinary people as for disputes between cultivators they could only step in after the fact or if both parties decide to involve the Order in its dispute.

In the Yellow lotus sect's case, there wasn't much the Order could do at the moment except wait until the battle happened and its scale that's when depending on how everything played out they would decide whether to enact justice or not but by that time the Yellow lotus sect would have already been destroyed.

This was a cultivator's world, yes the Order tried as much as it could to maintain some balance but the rules that governed a cultivator's society still applied. Fights between cultivators were inevitable.

The Yellow lotus sect might be the ones on the chopping block now but in their rise, they had destroyed their fair share of sects and clans along the way. Their enemies may have been suppressed to the limit by the palace stage experts of the Yellow lotus sect when they were around. Being forced to pay tributes, and having their business swallowed up. Things like these were a common occurrence.

With the long lives cultivators had that meant grudges and feuds lasted just as long. There were intertwining webs that one couldn't trace who is in the right or wrong. This is why the Order in situations such as these where the opposing parties were almost similar in strength adopted a wait-and-see approach. They were not every person's shield because if they were lots of sects, clans and other organizations out there would use the Order for their own means.

However, there were also extenuating circumstances in which the Order would have to intervene. For example, if a higher-ranked sect was attempting to destroy a lower-ranked sect e.g a rank 3 sect

targeting a rank 5 sect. The Order would step in and review the cause of the feud and if they find the rank 5 sect to be the innocent party they would enact justice on their behalf. Another would be if a sect voluntarily surrenders but still gets massacred root and stem the Order would have no choice but to step in.

Had the Yellow lotus sect decided on that route then the Order would have ensured a safe route for them in their surrender. But from the sect master's statement, Yang Qing could see the whole sect had every intention of fighting it out with their enemies to the last person. In such a situation as long as their fight doesn't end up destroying dragging unaffiliated members in and other innocents, they wouldn't interfere up to a point and that point is usually up to the Order.

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"So sect master Han Qingling what do you want from the Order? In as much as you are in a huge predicament, the Order can't actively participate in the ruse though.

The Mountain spring pavilion has to get its dues and from the moment you filed a suit against Zhao Qi and treated him as a separate entity from the Yellow lotus sect we saw him as such and thus he deserves his justice too, as Zhao Qi the cultivator.

Since it has already reached this point why not trust them both with the truth and give them the option to choose for themselves what their best recourse is? You already planned to tell Liu Yun a year later so telling him earlier shouldn't make a difference plus as someone who may potentially be targeted despite your careful plans, I think he ought to know beforehand so he knows what to expect.

But I'll let you think on it sect master Han Qingling in the meantime I still need to hear things from Zhao Qi's side then we can all decide the best way to move forward," Yang Qing said as he flashed from his seat and reappeared in front of Zhao Qi's compartment.

Han Qingling stood silently at the side as he ruminated over Yang Qing's words before he let out a heavy sigh seemingly having come to a decision.

Chapter 78 78: Deng Chao

The compartment that Zhao Qi was in rippled like the surface of the water when Yang Qing placed his hand on it as it cleanly opened up a pathway for him to pass through.

Zhao Qi who was busy admiring the subtleties of the compartment was surprised when it suddenly opened but calmed down once he saw it was Yang Qing.

"Sorry to keep you waiting cultivator Zhao Qi, there was something your sect master had to say and he couldn't say it in front of others. What about you?" Yang Qing asked as he gave a polite smile.

"What about me what?" Zhao Qi asked with a puzzled expression.

"Do you have anything you want to say that you wouldn't want to say in front of others? The Order ensures anonymity except in situations where it impedes the judgment of the case. So Zhao Qi do you have anything you want to share that you wouldn't feel comfortable saying in front of your sect master?" asked Yang Qing.

Zhao Qi had a nigh imperceptible freeze in his pupils before they went back to normal as he let out a chuckle marred by pity, sadness, and a little anger.

"I don't have much to tell though. I'm just a normal cultivator who got betrayed by a sect he thought was his home just because he wanted to ensure his cultivation journey ahead was a long smooth one.

Bit ironic isn't it that the real reason I even insisted on sturdying up my foundations was so I could help shoulder the burden of the sect.

The sect master, the other elders and the senior core disciples may try to hide it but we can tell the sect isn't in a good place with disciples being forbidden to leave the sect grounds, the constant joint combat training that have gotten too intense to just be a normal training.

It isn't hard to guess that something is afoot and the only way someone like me can make a difference is by atleast making sure I'm not a burden and a sturdy foundation is the best and quickest way of ensuring that.

I was acting in my and the sect's best interest but alas here I am. A core disciple whose on sect threw to the merchants as a piece of collateral to pay off a debt that the sect can clear at any time.

I wouldn't have minded if they told me to work for it but the manner in which they did it...." Zhao Qi clenched his fists in anger as he quickly shook his head and a sense of defeated calmness filled his body.

Yang Qing stood silently as he waited for Zhao Qi to collect himself. Seeing Zhao Qi's current mental state was one of the reasons he suggested to the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect, Han Qingling to disclose the truth of the matter to both Zhao Qi and Liu Yun.

The severe blow Zhao Qi experienced during the whole farce was not light in any way. From being a prized disciple to being treated as a scourge and worst of all his decision, the root of all this was done because he had been trying to find a way he could contribute to the sect.

Such a severe mental blow would leave an impact. In the worst case it may turn into a mental demon that may harm Zhao Qi's cultivation journey no matter how firm his foundations were. If it really did happen then the Yellow lotus sect would be guilty of destroying one of their talented disciples with their own hands despite the well meaning intentions.

But if Zhao Qi did manage to overcome the hurdle his mental fortitude would grow and be sturdier thus making his journey ahead even smoother.

However, no matter how good or bad it would potentially turn out should things stand as they were, that betrayal would forever guide his decision-making even if he managed to overcome it.

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"Is there anything else you want to add on or should I take what you said as your final and only statement?" Yang Qing asked.

"You can take that as my only statement. Coming here I didn't expect to have any say on how this matter plays out. I'm just a foundation establishment pawn caught between two organizations out of my league.

I do feel sorry for the owner of the Mountain spring pavilion though. He treated me kindly when we first met despite him being ambushed by the elder saying I was the repayment for the debt.

Maybe being accepted by the Mountain spring pavilion in exchange for the debt being considered repaid in full wouldn't be such a bad thing. It can't be worse than where I am at with the sect," Zhao Qi said as he sighed to himself.

"Things may not be bleak as you think Zhao Qi," Yang Qing gently said. Zhao Qi only offered a polite smile in return thinking Yang Qing only said that to comfort him.

"Seems like he is here," Yang Qing muttered to himself as his eyes twinkled.

Zhao Qi who was wallowing in self-pity suddenly shook almost as if he had heard something terrifying as his gaze shifted behind Yang Qing where another figure walked in.

The figure had on a black robe, was short and slender with silver hair tied in a half bun and matching sharp piercing silver eyes. He had a stern and calm-looking face. He calmly walked in with his hands behind his back and his eyes pinned on Zhao Qi whose skin had grown visibly paler since his appearance.

"Oh....I mean Supervisor Lei Weiyuan you're here," Yang Qing cupped his fists in greeting as a tiny bead of sweat trickled down from his head.

Lei Weiyuan ignored pretending he didn't notice what Yang Qing almost called him as he stopped a few feet away from Zhao Qi.

"So are you going to come out fellow daoist or should I force you out? I would much prefer the former because from your connection to the boy it does not seem like you bare him any ill intent," Lei Weiyuan calmly said.

"How..?" Zhao Qi stammered on hearing Lei Weiyuan's statement. He walked backward in fear before he tripped and fell.

"Seems like I was too naïve in thinking I could hide and go unnoticed beneath the gaze of the Order. Who would have expected that I would be in front of a palace stage kid with such monstrous foundations? I don't think our legacy disciples reached that extent.

The continent doesn't know the sleeping dragon they created when they decided to establish the Order.

I'm coming out," A tired ancient-sounding voice sounded within the compartment before a grey fog was produced from Zhao Qi's body that congealed together to form a grey translucent image of a medium-height and slender built old man.

His features got clearer and more defined with each second. With the last fog produced the old man's figure finally stabilized into a ghostly white figure except he looked more lifelike so much so that it looked like if one tried to touch him they would be able to.

The old man had a free-flowing hair that reached his back and a long smooth beard that reached his chest and was tied into a small braid at the bottom. His hands and eyes were crystal colored as they reflected light every now and then.

His gaze turned in Zhao Qi's direction who had a look of guilt as he stared at the old man.

"Grandpa Chao because of me..."

"Don't worry too much about it child. What's done is done. The situation couldn't be avoided. When I agreed you come I came knowing full well that there was a chance that I would be discovered. Coming and dealing with the matter here was better than the alternative," the elder gently said as he looked at Zhao Qi with the gaze one would give their grandchild.

The old man sighed as he turned to face Lei Weiyuan and Yang Qing. His gaze paused on Yang Qing briefly before it settled on Lei Weiyuan.

"Seeing judge Yang Qing here and the rest of his colleagues I can't help but feel the Order has already approached the ranks of a Holy land.

That young lady Su Jinjing despite being at the core formation stage kept looking at Zhao Qi funny almost as if she felt something was off.

The young will soon surpass the old. If only..." his thoughts trailed off as a melancholic look showed on his face.

"That they will though there are some who need constant and firm pushes to get them there more than others," Lei Weiyuan said as he threw a meaningful glance at Yang Qing who flinched instantly upon noticing the look Lei Weiyuan was giving him.

The old man lightly smiled on seeing their interaction.

"Might I ask for the fellow daoist's name? My name is Lei Weiyuan and I'm a supervisor in the courts of the Order." Lei Weiyuan asked. Though from the crystal-like hands and eyes he had an idea behind the old man's identity.

"My name is Deng Chao though it's been centuries since anyone called me by that name," Deng Chao said with a tired sigh.

Chapter 79 79: Crystal Palm Jade Sect (1)

"Figured as much," Lei Weiyuan thought to himself once he heard the old man's introduction.

He already had his suspicions from the crystal clear eyes and palms and hearing the name all but confirmed his suspicions.

"Based on your reactions I take it you've heard of me," Deng Chao said once he noticed Lei Weiyuan's reaction.

"Those keen enough have atleast heard of your name in the past 2,000 years especially those of our level and even if they didn't, they have atleast heard of the Crystal palm jade sect," Lei Weiyuan said.

Deng Chao had a pained look on his face once he heard the name Crystal palm jade sect. It seemed to elicit memories in him that he would rather forget.

Yang Qing who at first didn't know who Deng Chao was even after hearing his name, showed a reaction when Lei Weiyuan said the name, Crystal palm jade sect.

As part of their curriculum, the Order didn't only teach combat, cultivation arts, and other secondary profession skills but they also placed emphasis on their students learning the history of the continent that they would be serving in addition to the institute's own history.

Learning history was a measure of ensuring their students and all who worked for the Order knew why they did what they did, to create a sense of solemnity and respect for what they do. But it also served as a measure to open their eyes to how things could change in an instant to help them in keeping their guards up and increasing their sense of vigilance and discernment in all their duties because that keenness might be the difference whether a murderous calamity is avoided or not.

As an added measure to ensure that their students did actually give the history classes the attention it deserved, the Order started giving out high merit points to those well-versed in those classes. Merit points were a highly sort after and privileged resource at the Order. It was a form of currency used within the Order that could be used to purchase anything, especially in cases you had no spare spirit stones lying around. Infact in some regard, it was even deemed more valuable than spirit stones as a form of currency.

There were things even if you had sufficient spirit stones you couldn't buy whereas when it came to merit points as long as it was within the Order you could buy almost anything with it including even more leave days which was what pushed Yang Qing to be a history nerd. He even went to the extent of learning different languages, obscure techniques of preserving worn-out scrolls, and deciphering broken texts all for the precious leave days he would score.

The higher-ups soon noticed an obvious loophole in this as Yang Qing the greedy hound and exploiter that he was learned so much history that he ended up having merit points that granted him half a year worth of leave days which he shamelessly used much to the hatred and envy of his colleagues on hearing how much of a wastrel he was.

When others would redeem such a huge amount of merit points on expensive cultivation resources such as herbs, weapons, pills, or cultivation arts that were of a higher grade or gain privileged access to special locations like restricted sections of libraries, access to special locations that offer boosts in enlightenment and cultivation, get their courtyards retrofitted with much higher grade arrays. Yang Qing in his infinite wisdom and young master persona wasted it all on a chance to lazy around and eat. There was even a judge who suffered qi deviation once he heard the news of how Yang Qing spent his merit points.

The Order on recognizing another flaw once again because of Yang Qing's exploitative nature decided to cap the amount of merit points one can spend on leave days per year despite the vehement and deeply passionate protests Yang Qing offered.

...

It didn't take too long for Yang Qing to recall the history of the Crystal palm jade sect especially since up until 400 years ago it was one of the top rank 2 sects in the whole southern continent.

From what Yang Qing had read, the sect was founded by four people about three thousand years ago.

They were four martial siblings with tremendous talent with three being masters in their own area. One was so skilled with the sword that he achieved sword intent in 14 years, the other was skilled with formation arrays that he killed a core formation expert while being at the beginning stages of the foundation establishment stage, and the third one was skilled in alchemy and medicine which was the reason they managed to survive for so long despite constantly engaging in battle for resources, especially in their earlier growing years.

As for the fourth, not much was known about him except he barely participated in the skirmishes especially when the sect started up he was always the one left manning the base. Many assumed the three brothers arranged it that way since he was the weakest of them and it was safer to have him at the sect rather than the constant battles and dangers they engaged in to try and fight for resources and expand their sect's influence.

It took only a thousand years for the Crystal palm jade sect to move from being a no-name rankless sect to a rank 2 sect when one of the brothers broke through to the domain realm. Three hundred years later another brother broke through and a hundred years after that another one broke through. Three of the brothers broke through while news of the fourth one was never known since he never made any monumental moves. There was a time the sect was attacked while the 3 brothers were away but the attackers were swiftly dealt with. It didn't create much of a storm as the outside world assumed it was due to sect treasures and powerful arrays that the assailants were swiftly dealt with, after all, one of the leaders of the sect was a renowned array prodigy and there were no witnesses left alive to say any different from the group that attacked the sect.

For the next 1,600 years, the name Crystal palm jade sect shook the continent as it had a meteoric rise with unstoppable momentum to be one of the most powerful sects below the rank 1 sects and organizations. In those 1,600 years, they also managed to add three more domain realm experts to their

ranks. With the reputation they had built up they managed to attract numerous talents. Two of those domain experts came from their sect disciples while the third was a guest elder who joined in as a domain expert.

Only one in a million cultivators would potentially be able to step into the domain realm. This was the rank that served as the watershed that separated the above-average from the true genius. Of course, there were those with massive luck who manage to breakthrough due to some fortune then there are those who saunter through on their own two feet.

The domain realm, the door that shuts countless of those who thought themselves the sons and daughters of destiny out and lets in a few.

But once someone breaks through that realm in addition to an explosive increase in lifespan is the sheer firepower a domain expert can exert. There was a saying around the southern continent that if you had a single domain expert and no other cultivator in your kingdom, that kingdom is guaranteed at least 10,000 years of peace and prosperity.

That was how much of a deterrent and an asset having a domain expert was. They were highly valued even in rank 1 sects and holy lands and here there was a new upstart in the name of Crystal palm jade sect had 8 of them in 3,000 years.

Many had thought with the way things were going for them they would continue to rise up to a rank 1 sect. They had an astonishing number of domain experts, three talented leaders, and the best of all was their technique. It was one of the fundamental reasons they were able to draw in many talents and also grow so fast. The crystal jade palm art. Yang Qing didn't know much about it except those who had mastered the technique were able to shatter mountains and sink their hands in the most deadly of poisons and elements such as fire and frost with nothing happening to them. It was a lethal technique that offered absolute destruction and defense.

With this technique and talented people to bring the most out of it, they were able to easily sweep past their foes. Yang Qing whose hobby involved truancy, eating, and more truancy also loved collecting cultivation arts of all ranks. The more powerful ones were to see if he could draw inspiration from them and the lower-ranked ones were to see if he could add to them and improve their grades.

When reading about the Crystal palm jade sect, their cultivation art drew him in and he couldn't help but want to add it to his collection. Based on his guesses if the description of the art was right, it was at the very least, an upper-rank blue-grade art.

He couldn't help but have his hopes reignited when he saw Deng Chao in front of him. Though he still couldn't guess his identity.

"I wonder who he is among the eight domain experts that they had? I've never heard of Deng Chao and I know he isn't one of the leaders because they were all..." Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh once his thoughts reached that point as he looked at Deng Chao who still had a melancholic look cloaked in sorrow.

400 years the rising star that was the Crystal palm jade sect was snuffed out. It is not known how but rumors started floating around that one of their leaders had found a quasi-saint treasure in the Millions treasure ocean. This drew countless eyes from everyone including even some newly promoted rank 1 sects, clans, and empires. The more time passed by the more the rumor gained traction and spread.

The potted rumor soon boiled over and exploded when 10 rank 2 sects and some organizations besieged the Crystal palm jade sect. A thunderous war that shook the entire continent soon took place with domain experts at the lead. At the time the Order was pretty new. The war had taken place 400 years ago whereas the Order had just been established 100 years prior. A battle of that level was beyond what the Order with its then pitiful manpower could handle at the time.

The war lasted 3 years but the fangs of the Crystal palm jade sect were revealed for all to see in that war. They decimated 7 of the rank 2 sects who besieged them and they even secretly diverted some of their manpower to decimate the sect grounds of those 7 sects. They were well on their way to forcing a stalemate with the remaining forces when a third party suspected to have come from some rank 1 organization and suspected to be the mastermind behind bringing so many rank 2 sects together, intervened.

The crystal palm jade sect got decimated with as few survivors as possible with the leaders confirmed to be dead but not before they took a large bite from the third party forces who despite joining the party late suffered such huge losses that one would have thought they were there from the start. They became the primary recipients of the damage of what a cornered beast can do in its last moments.

As for the supposed quasi-saint treasure, it couldn't be confirmed that it even existed as all the parties present left with nothing. Well, not exactly nothing. Of the remaining three rank 2 sects two of them got attacked by their rivals once news got around of them suffering grievous injuries from the battle and the last sect subordinated itself to a rank 1 empire thus ensuring its safety as for the third party, they lost two domain experts, over a dozen palace stage experts and nothing else to show for it.

The history of the Crystal palm jade sect became a firm reminder to Yang Qing to always be vigilant as the continent was rife with greedy wolves and billions of threads of conspiracies. Especially with the recent attacks on people from the Order he couldn't help but suspect that there was something larger at play here other than discontent against the Order doing its duties.

Chapter 80 80: Crystal Palm Jade Sect (2)

Lei Wei yuan saw the puzzled look Yang Qing had on still trying to guess Deng Chao's place in the Crystal palm jade sect.

"I'm sorry fellow daoist I may have to indulge my junior here about your background since he is still the one in charge of this case and as such he will need as much information as possible. I'm only here in a supportive capacity.

All judgments later will be made according to his will. Though he may not look like much, especially with his lackluster and lazy look he has a good head on his shoulder and excellent judgment," Lei Wei yuan said as he cupped his fist at Deng Chao.

Yang Qing had mixed feelings at the moment. On one hand, he was surprised at Lei Wei yuan's compliment and on the other, he felt aggrieved for being bad-mouthed in front of company.

"Can't old geezer Lei throw a complete compliment? What's the use of preparing a pleasant-smelling dish and then adding bitter poison to it? Stingy geezer," Yang Qing silently thought.

"It's okay I don't mind. I'm in someone else's house and as such should abide by their rules besides if it will help little Zhao here I'm okay with it," Deng Chao said as he gently smiled at Zhao Qi who was still sniffing and red-eyed at the side.

Lei Wei yuan cupped his fists once again in thanks with Yang Qing also giving the same daoist salute.

"There's a reason you haven't heard of him and even if you tried to guess you would still fall short because he is not one of the eight domain experts recorded by the Crystal palm jade sect or known by the world for that matter. And if it wasn't for that incident 400 years ago we would have never known either," Lei Wei yuan said as he sighed.

He was using his domain to communicate with Yang Qing as he felt it would be crass of him to outwardly speak of Deng Chao's matter for him to hear when the story didn't have a particularly good ending.

For all intense and purposes, Lei Weiyuan was even surprised that Deng Chao had managed to survive that onslaught. Many had thought him dead though from his current state it could be seen he wasn't far away from it.

Lei Weiyuan's statement created more questions than answers as Yang Qing threw another glance at Deng Chao.

"Then who is he?" Yang Qing asked following the same direction as Lei Weiyuan he too used his monarch sense to send his thoughts.

"It's not that hard to guess if you really think about it. It's just that the Crystal palm jade sect grew so fast creating so much fanfare in its trail of glory with the three leaders' names and their sect's crystal palm technique being the prime highlights. Everything else seemed to pale at their brilliance.

The Crystal palm jade sect has always had four leaders from the very beginning and in those 3,000 years that has never changed despite more domain experts being added to the mix.

The three leaders took the continent by storm but little is known about the fourth one. The outside world wrote him off as someone riding the coattails of his brother which made them overlook something the same way you may have overlooked it."

Lei Weiyuan paused as he waited for Yang Qing to ruminate and digest his words. To him and the rest of the higher-ups they knew Yang Qing was cunning, liked to do as little as possible, exploitative, especially in finding loopholes, and a little too greedy but through his antics, they also discovered he was an ironical creature.

He was extremely lazy when it came to work but he was also extremely devoted to the things he loved or interested him whether it was researching lost cultivation arts and restoring them, the thorough vigilance he put to his cases to ensure he doesn't end up redoing them or the lengths he goes to try and score free things from the Order while doing as little as possible. It was one of the scant admirable qualities he had.

It was also thanks to his greedy exploits that the Order has been improving its operational guidelines and bylaws further smoothening its organizational structure from the weaknesses Yang Qing tried to take advantage of.

There was even a committee formed to review those structures and figure out if there were more areas Yang Qing would exploit and plug them before he took a large chunk of bite from it with the Order footing the bill.

The greatest exploiter was also the largest contributor to the operational improvements within the Order. Though if Yang Qing ever discovered that who knows what he might do...

His open mind was what Lei Weiyuan admired about him most in fact it was probably the only thing considering his lifelong misdeeds.

That was why he would use every opportunity to help him cultivate it more and more.

Lei Weiyuan's words flashed like an electric current in his mind that seemed to be drawing things together. It was the key he had been missing.

"The crystal palm jade sect, the crystal palm jade sect, the crystal palm jade art..it's that," Yang Qing said as his eyes shone with enlightenment.

"One of the brothers was gifted in sword cultivation, the other in formation arrays, and the other one in medicine and alchemy however what the sect was known for was the crystal palm jade art.

The art based on my initial estimates was at the very least an upper rank blue-grade art though if I'm being perfectly honest it seems more likely to be a gold-grade art.

When an art reaches the blue grade and above it's hard to buy them just with spirit stones and from what I could tell the sect has always been known as the Crystal palm jade sect from the very start but none of the three brothers used that technique as their primary fighting style though I did read the brother skilled in medicine and alchemy did use it in harvesting and preparing ingredients but that's about it.

Then it's highly possible that the fourth brother was the one who used this technique but then why?"

"If the fourth brother was the one skilled in the crystal jade technique how come he was unheard of despite possessing such a terrifying art? Well at times the simplest answer is usually the right answer.

It's because all who ever fought him died on the spot so there was no one to tell the tale," Lei Weiyuan calmly said as Yang Qing's pupil froze as he eyed Deng Chao solemnly.

"Then that means..."

"Yes, in the 3,000 years not a single person who fought him ever survived. There's a reason I said most people overlooked something, yes your guess about the name of the sect was right but there was also another thing.

Let's say you are starting a sect Yang Qing, other than your lives what should be the most important thing?" Lei Weiyuan patiently asked.

"Sect grounds," Yang Qing said without a second thought.

"Yes, the sect grounds are the root and the foundation within which a sect grows from including the people in it.

Then given how important those grounds are, do you think one would leave their weakest member to man it while the strongest members were out, especially in the budding stages? Given at that time you probably don't have any high-grade treasures to power a formation array whose grade you probably can't buy or create yet since it's the early stages of your sect starting up and you're all weak. So the best defense to ensure your grounds stay standing is to leave your strongest member behind guarding it while the rest search for resources.

The stronger the person guarding it is, the freer the rest searching for resources will be. From the stories about the sect, you can tell how rampant the three brothers were in their actions. It's because they had confidence in who they had left to guard their home that they could act freely without a care in the world. In my opinion, the biggest reason the Crystal palm jade sect grew into what it became is because

of him," Lei Weiyuan said as he gazed at Deng Chao with a look of respect. He embodied what the Order has been trying to do and that is providing a safe nest for the young to grow to their fullest potential.

"I'm sorry Supervisor Lei Weiyuan it seems I still have a long way to go in my discernment," Yang Qing solemnly said with embarrassment as he remembered just a few hours ago he was guiding Mao Yunru in keeping an open mind and even bragged how he was the world's canvas. His face couldn't help but turn a shade redder at the thought.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. The only reason I could figure this out was that I had an ending to extrapolate from. The ending that wasn't written in the books.

A senior from the Order was there when the fight was at its highest and stayed almost to the very end. It was from what he saw that we were able to finally know about the true hidden trump card of the crystal palm jade sect, the true leader of the sect, and the creator of the crystal jade palm art, Deng Chao. The calm unassuming wind that turned into a massive derecho that no one saw coming," Lei Weiyuan solemnly said.