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Chapter 81: The Palm That Shattered The Sky

Yang Qing's countenance transformed into one of curiosity at Lei Weiyuan's statement. He couldn't help but throw a deep glance in Deng Chao's direction.

"What's missing from the records, Supervisor Lei Weiyuan?" Yang Qing couldn't help but ask.

"The fundamental reason why the battle lasted 3 years in the first place. The ten rank 2 sects that attacked the Crystal palm jade sect each brought atleast two domain-level experts making the total number of domain experts fielded on the battlefield, twenty.

The Crystal palm jade sect only had eight domain experts even if the three founders were fairly gifted and the might of the Crystal palm jade art had significant prowess, it was still a tall order for eight domain experts to successfully hold off twenty domain experts and still have the time to attack their bases whilst the fight was still going on.

All this was only possible because of Deng Chao. When the attacks started the Crystal palm jade sect was continuously pushed back to the point that their sect guarding array got breached. The senior surmised that at that time Deng Chao was still in closed-door seclusion since he didn't show himself when the attacks started. Considering the massive losses they had suffered in those early periods it couldn't have been intentional.

With the sect guarding array broken and the pressure the sect was put in, most assumed the end of the Crystal palm jade sect was all but nigh but the change occurred when the barrier broke. A dazzling white light pushed back the attackers and before anyone could register what had happened two of the weakest domain experts got slaughtered on the spot. It was only when that light disappeared that everybody there saw a solitary figure floating in the air.

Those present couldn't make heads or tails on who the figure was, our senior included. It was only when the three founders addressed him as junior brother and the rest of the sect called him founder that they knew he was the fourth leader of the sect who was assumed to be the weakling of the bunch.

All came to know how massively incorrect that assumption was. The battle that was one-sided soon got transformed into a free-for-all the moment he made his presence known.

Deng Chao shuttled around the battlefield like a specter of light with death, havoc, and destruction following him. With a wave of his palm, hundreds of palace stage experts died.

In a few minutes he had effectively destroyed the momentum and morale the opponents had built over a week and it didn't stop there as he was soon besieged by five domain experts trying to steal the initiative back. After battling back and forth for a week another domain expert fell and every week after that till one month ended with four more domain experts dying. This brought the total tally of domain experts who had died by his hand to six.

When cultivators reach our level it's usually hard to kill each other not unless the disparity in cultivation is very huge or there's a huge gap in our attainments of the dao. It's not easy for two domain experts that have the same cultivation realm to kill each other that easily as it is hard to stop the other party if they want to run away.

This was why Deng Chao killing six domain experts in a single month overturned the whole battlefield. The ten rank 2 sects were not as confident as they were before and the Crystal palm jade sect had been reignited by Deng Chao's display so they fought even more ferociously pushing their attackers back. The remaining domain experts tried to surround Deng Chao which eased the pressure on the rest of the sect members who devised the plan of taking advantage of the situation to sneak out one domain expert and a few palace stage experts to destroy the sect grounds of their attackers who were being held up by Deng Chao and the rest of the remaining domain realm experts.

The guest elder was the one put in charge of destroying those sect's bases as the rest remained. Deng Chao held up five domain experts alone while the remaining nine domain experts were split between the three founders and the two domain experts they had left. For Deng Chao, despite facing five domain experts was like a fish in water as he smoothly alternated between offense and defense taking as little damage as possible and ensuring every attack he made left an impact on the opponent. The grandness of the crystal palm jade art was revealed in that battle. The senior couldn't help but admire the brilliance of the art, especially in his hands. No one on the battlefield could bring out the art with as much grandness as he did, it seemed to have been made specifically for him as opposed to the rest. With it, Deng Chao shattered ascendant-grade weapons bare-handed. He was like a walking weapon despite being unarmed. I wish I could have seen it," Lei Weiyuan said with some pity and desire in his tone. Yang Qing ruminated on the words built for him as there was something that he suddenly noticed about Deng Chao. Despite being a phantasm his hands had a white jade crystal look to them and his eyes. But it was the hands that drew him in because they reminded him of someone.

"Could it be?...." Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder as his gaze lingered on the hands before focusing back to Lei Weiyuan's narration.

"Finally after a long drawn-out battle, two more domain experts fell by his hands with the remaining three being seriously wounded as for the rest of the opponents three more had been lost with one of the domain experts from the Crystal palm jade sect being grievously wounded. However, the four leaders were still alive and going.

News of the destruction of the bases finally reached the ears of their opponents which further destroyed the morale that was hanging on by a thread. The rest is as you read. A battle that was expected to last just a month ended up lasting three years and by that time only three sects remained . They were the three most powerful ones who had sent domain experts in the late stages of the domain realm but even they were not doing too well. Had things remained the same in another year or two they would have joined their dead compatriots. But alas things usually never go as we expect them to sometimes," Leo Weiyuan sighed. He suspected this was a part of the reason behind Deng Chao's pained look.

It was one thing if they were totally outclassed and their defeat was all but certain but they were well on their way to securing a firm win just inches when everything changed.

Without keeping Yang Qing waiting for long Lei Weiyuan went on.

"A third party appeared just when things looked to be heading in the Crystal jade palm sect's favor. It was a small team of five led by a half-step soul formation stage expert with the other members either being at the peak or later stages of the domain realm.

The senior of the Order on noticing them, especially the half-step expert decided to leave the area just in case they decided to silence witnesses. He didn't want to get tangled up. But before his escape, he did manage to see one of the three leaders, the medicine expert get butchered by the half-step soul formation expert. Roaring, maddening yells, and explosions soon followed as the battle seemed to have increased a hundred more notches. Just when he was about 300 miles away a palm the size of a county descended on the area from the skies above. It was crystal clear like glass with nebula vortexes on the tips of the fingers. The vortex sucked everything in from spiritual qi to air down to the light in the area. There was a thunderous sound as the palm clashed against a mountain size silhouette of a fire crane. The senior crashed his teleportation talisman before he was razed in the aftermath of the attack despite being over 300 miles away.

Everything within a thousand miles was decimated to dust with a crater left in its place. Not even a single brick of the Crystal palm jade sect was left. The whole area to date has become inhabitable

because of the chaotic qi and unstable space in the area. No one below the core formation realm can survive in that area and even those in the core formation realm can only do so in the outskirts.

Based on the senior's judgment the scale of the attack had already touched the threshold of a soul formation expert.

The scale of destruction was so severe that there were no bodies to be found along with any building or vegetation within the 1000 miles. The leaders of the Crystal palm jade sect were assumed to be dead because of it along with their attackers. It was only later that it was discovered that two of the attackers had made it out alive albeit with grievous injuries. They were both sect masters of rank 2 sects.

One of them got killed a few weeks later by a rival sect when news got out of his injury and the severe losses they suffered in their clash against the Crystal palm jade sect. His sect got swallowed soon after. The last known survivor immediately announced that they had become a subordinate of the rank 1 empire the Crimson sky empire which served as a protection for them against their enemies. As for the third party, it's safe to assume they made it out alive considering the two rank 2 heads had survived too. Since their movements couldn't be traced after the explosion, it's pure conjecture at this point,"

"Did you ever find out their identities?" asked Yang Qing

"Sadly no. We have some guesses but they are only just that, guesses. We can't act on them without something solid. Though the senior who saw the battle has been continuously investigating it for the past 300 years. It's only a matter of time before we can unmask their identity," Lei Weiyuan said.

"About that senior?" Yang Qing asked a bit curious about his identity. All of the information he had learned today was not in the books. So either the information about some parts of the battle more specifically Deng Chao's interference had been expunged by some party who didn't want it to leak out for some reason or the battle was so intense that it discouraged people from even trying to get near it. Either guess proved that the senior mentioned by Lei Weiyuan was not a simple character as he was able to spectate the battle from start to almost end.

"He is a superior domain court judge other than that I can't tell you more. Though you may end up meeting him considering you have one of the main figures of his investigation in your courtroom. Focus on the matter at hand first," Lei Weiyuan said.

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Yang Qing couldn't help but suck in cold air once he heard that the senior Lei Weiyuan was talking about is a judge in the superior domain court.

This was the court of the big shots. Just like the core formation courts, it has three different types of courts too i.e. the outer domain court, the inner domain court, and lastly the superior domain court.

Those who could be judges in the superior domain court at the bare minimum had to be at the peak of the domain stage in addition there was another special attribute they had to have. That attribute was what made them stand out even against other peak domain experts. An attribute that can only be gotten by someone who formed a purple core in the core formation.

It wasn't always a guarantee that those who had a purple core would awaken that attribute when the time came but more often than not it went that way as having a purple core was a prerequisite though there have been instances that even those with gold cores did manage to do it but even then their results were usually a stroke of fortune that couldn't be replicated as opposed to the purple core that is almost guaranteed to form it as long as one has sufficient time and resources.

This was what made those at the superior domain court the absolute best of the best who could even manage to escape from an early-stage soul formation expert alive. Defeating a soul formation expert whilst still in the domain stage even at the peak was an impossible feat not unless 10 half-step soul formation experts with deep sturdy foundations banded together but even then it would be a draw at best or mutual destruction at worst. Those in the soul formation realm even at the early stages had unfathomable means and outrageous strength that they could slaughter someone 5,000 miles away from them no matter what amount of protection they hid under.

If a soul formation expert wanted you dead, the best you can do is put on a clean robe, leave your affairs in order, clean your neck, and await the inevitable. So it was a huge feat for someone in the domain realm to be able to guarantee their survivability against an opponent at the soul formation. It was for this reason that the judges of the superior domain court mostly handled cases that concerned rank 1 organizations that had a soul formation expert at the helm. In addition, they were responsible for conducting the test for those seeking to join the outer and inner domain courts.

Yang Qing understood now why Lei Weiyuan had his reservation about revealing the senior's identity. He might have very well been his superior as they vetted court supervisors too and gave their recommendations to the chief administrator and spirit council.

"Okay supervisor Lei Weiyuan," Yang Qing said as he cupped his fists in understanding.

Yang Qing seemingly remembering something decided to fill Lei Weiyuan in on the Yellow lotus sect's ruse to try and save their disciple's life and the farce they created.

"What do you intend to do?" Lei Weiyuan calmly asked.

"For the best resolution, I feel everyone should come clean and lay their cards on the table starting with the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect. Of course, if senior Deng Chao doesn't wish to reveal himself to the Yellow lotus sect I will respect his wishes since we can come to a favorable conclusion without his involvement. But sect master Han Qingling has to come clean to their disciple Zhao Qi and also owner Liu Yun of the Mountain spring pavilion. Without them knowing it would be hard to come to a decent ending," Yang Qing patiently explained.

"Will he agree to it?"

"From what I can tell about the man he seems like a decent and intelligent person. I doubt he doesn't have the same worries as I do concerning Zhao Qi. The mental blow he suffered from this whole thing if left unresolved may end up as an inner demon that may cripple his future achievements permanently or the considerable risk he would be putting the Mountain spring pavilion without giving them the full picture of things," said Yang Qing.

"Your worry isn't unfounded as I can tell the boy is riddled with inner turmoil. Though it's best we confirm with the person who has been with him through all this...

Excuse me fellow daoist pardon me for asking but how is young Zhao Qi fairing in all this?" Lei Weiyuan asked as he finally turned to Deng Chao.

He waved his palm and cordoned their voices from reaching Zhao Qi. He opted for them to use their voices instead of their spiritual senses for Yang Qing's sake. Using your spiritual sense to communicate ran a risk of having your mental sea being invaded especially if the person you are talking to is stronger than you.

Yang Qing was just a fledgling in the first stage of the palace realm whereas Deng Chao was a seasoned expert who despite being some sort of residual spirit right now and extremely weak from what he once

was, he is still a bonafide peak domain stage expert and from what Lei Weiyuan could tell he may very well be half step soul formation expert considering how his spirit form seemed so tangible.

Deng Chao realized Lei Weiyuan's precautionary means but he didn't say anything and went along with it.

"Were it a different person they would have been okay with time but because it's him I can't help but worry.

I met little Zhao Qi when he was just a few weeks old in an abandoned shack in the middle of the grey haze mountains a few hundred miles from where the Yellow lotus sect is located," Deng Chao paused as his brow constricted in grief.

"After clashing with the unknown half-step soul formation expert and his party my body got destroyed in the aftermath along...with my brothers. I thought I would die along with them which would have been a welcomed ending for me but sadly I survived. Though it would be more apt to say I was rescued and the rescuer was the real cause behind my sect being decimated, the milky way crescent moon pearl, a saint-grade treasure. Though I would trade it in a heartbeat for the lives of my brothers and sect mates."

One could hear the deep anguish and even a faint loathing in his tone. Did he hate the people who attacked his sect or the treasure that caused all this? It was a doubt if even Deng Chao himself knew.

"So the treasure really existed and from the looks of it the unknown experts left empty-handed," Lei Weiyuan silently thought.

"I had found the treasures almost two decades before the sect was attacked. I got it from the Millionsfold treasure ocean after a bitter struggle. I made sure to clean my tracks so it could not be traced back to the sect that we had a saint-grade treasure but it still got out somehow and I don't know how....

In those 20 years, I successfully managed to form a faint connection with the spirit of the milky way crescent moon pearl. It was because of this that I was able to access a tiny part of its power which I used to strike against the half-step soul formation expert despite being in the peak stage of the domain realm. Thanks to it my abilities approached the soul formation realm and I managed to take the half step too in the midst of the battle. But it was all for naught as the expert had a trump card too, the personal

weapon of a soul formation expert. Despite not being the owner he triggered a part of its abilities which managed to balance out my attack and destroy the sect and everyone in it. The milky way crescent moon pearl on detecting my life was in peril forcibly incubated my pseudo spirit and flashed away.

It ended up in the shack Zhao Qi was abandoned in. At the time my pseudo spirit was injured and it took the pearl almost 380 years for it to successfully heal my spirit. During that whole time, I was in a foggy state, in and out of consciousness with fragmented memories that were only stitched together when my spirit was fully healed.

By the time I was fully lucid, I noticed a weak baby tightly holding the milky way pearl in its hands as it suckled on it.

It was fate that brought us together. A baby abandoned in the middle of nowhere and a half-dead old man with no one. Though I was in a weakened state and had lost most of my abilities, with my strengthened spirit I was able to take care of him and when he reached 6 years I asked him to join the Yellow lotus sect so he can be around children his own age and I wanted him to find lifelong friends as I did with my brothers. He was too young to be some old geezer living alone in the mountains with an old ghost for company," Deng Chao lightly chuckled as he remembered vividly painting that picture for Zhao Qi with mystic arts which scared him so much that he agreed to join the Yellow lotus sect the very next day despite being vehemently against it.

"I was happy when he agreed to join which was a welcomed tonic for my endless regrets.

He tried to hide it but I could tell he was excited and mildly afraid at the chance of meeting other people since the mountain we stayed in barely had any intruders due to the presence of spirit beasts at the core formation stage and the cold and foggy atmosphere.

I was proud of him for taking that step despite living with fears of abandonment all his life. Being in my state and him being an intuitive child it didn't take long for him to figure out he was abandoned in the shack. Since he made the discovery I would occasionally spot him having a melancholic look he got sometimes where he wondered why he was abandoned to die alone on some mountain. This made letting people in a terrifying thing to him but he did it after some time when he joined the sect.

He successfully joined the sect and I secretly guided him in the Yellow lotus sect's cultivation arts. I would have loved to teach him my sect's art but he ran the risk of being found out by my enemies if he ever used it so I only used part of it to help him in laying his body foundations to the gold state and improve his qi. From the qi stage going onwards, I decided to stick to the Yellow lotus sect's arts. They

may not match the crystal jade palm art but with some improvements, they were a decent art to learn since they were already in the lower blue grade.

With my guidance, Zhao Qi started to soar in the sect.

I felt pity for Zhao Qi though since he clearly has a great talent for cultivation and at the bare minimum, I'm sure he would reach the palace stage. With stronger arts those odds get better but alas I still don't know who targeted us so I couldn't risk it despite how beneficial it would be for him.

The positives that came from this though were Zhao Qi finally made friends, and he got a master who looked out for him. He was slowly opening up to the sect and letting it be an important part of his life. It was like he finally started living.

So the sect treating him like this after he opened up himself to them came as a massive hit. The thing he dreaded most happened again, abandonment. I wanted to raze the sect to the ground but I'm too weak to do anything now and not all the people were bad as the friends he made still remained close to him despite the drama that surrounded him.

So after deciding with him, we decided it was better to cut ties with the sect and when the opportunity presented itself with this case I told him to take it.

To answer your question, No Zhao Qi isn't okay and I don't know if he will be considering I lost my brothers, and sect mates over 400 years ago, and I'm still lost, I can only imagine what it is like for him," Deng Chao said as his gaze lingered worriedly on Zhao Qi who seemed to have calmed down a bit but still had a despondent look to him.

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"It seems sect master Han Qingling will have to let the cat out of the bag. Considering my earlier worries and senior Deng Chao's revelation, this is a risk that we just can't take," Yang Qing thought and from the look Lei Weiyuan gave him, he too was in favor of laying everything out.

At the end of the day, every single person who stepped into the Order was entitled to a fair conclusion, and hiding the truth from Zhao Qi would be more detrimental than good to him even though it seemed more beneficial in the Yellow lotus sect's side.

"Excuse me senior Deng Chao there is something I need to ask of the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect," Yang Qing said as he cupped his fist and disappeared on the spot leaving Deng Chao with a puzzled look.

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Sect master Han Qingling had a troubled look on his face which deepened when he saw Yang Qing appear in front of him.

"I'm sorry sect master Han Qingling we will have to reveal everything you just told us to Zhao Qi though I would very much prefer it to come from you rather than me," Yang Qing gently said as he put on a solemn expression.

"Is it that bad?" sect master Han Qingling asked worriedly. He, just like Yang Qing had the same misgivings about Zhao Qi's mental state as even Zhao Qi's master had on more than one occasion raised his concerns. But what could they do? The die had already been cast, the Yellow lotus sect will be attacked, and everything was already in place the only things left in the air were when they would be attacked and how long it would take for the sect to fall.

They all had no illusions that they would make it out of this alive. The best they could do is to ensure they save as many seedlings as they could which drove them to hard measures like the one they used on Zhao Qi. Yes, there was a chance that he would develop an inner demon from that experience that would destroy his chance going forward but the elders all assumed because of the talent he showed as long as he was given enough time he would overcome it. But if he stayed in the sect then there was only one ending for him, death.

"It's much graver than you think. Based on what I've just learned if things progress as they are and he faces the tribulation for breaking through to the core formation realm he will most likely die and that is if he even reaches that far. If we leave things be as they are it's no different than sentencing Zhao Qi to death albeit his will be a slow and gruesome one.

If you care about him just trust him with the truth and let him decide the path that suits him. Same with owner Liu Yun of the Mountain spring pavilion.

Who knows maybe another path may open up for you and your sect," Yang Qing meaningfully said.

He knew if they managed to gain the support of Deng Chao they may just etch out a path of survival. Even though he was currently in a state where he couldn't even use 1% of his abilities he was still a half-step soul formation expert with over a millennium of experience and the founder of one of the top rank 2 sects in the whole continent. He was sure to have means that could help them in their current predicament.

But whether Deng Chao would agree to help them was another matter entirely.

"Fine, I'll tell them both," Han Qingling said as he sighed.

Yang Qing nodded in thanks as he flashed back to Zhao Qi's compartment.

"Senior Deng Chao, Cultivator Zhao Qi, there is something that the sect master of the Yellow lotus sect didn't reveal to you Zhao Qi hence why I separated you all but he has agreed to reveal to both you and the owner of the Mountain spring pavilion, Liu Yun.

I advise you hear him out.

Senior Deng Chao you can choose to reveal yourself to him or not, we will ensure to keep your anonymity should you choose the latter," Yang Qing said.

Zhao Qi was confused when he heard there was something the sect master wanted to tell him. However, that confusion turned to anger and then despair.

"What more could he want to say? Does he want me to pay for the transport costs coming here too, or my whole upkeep since coming into the sect? Whatever it is I would prefer not to hear it. Haven't they tormented me enough already? I'd rather stay here silently and await the decision the court will make concerning my fate. As long as I have grandpa Chao I'll be okay," Zhao Qi gloomily said as he got up and stood next to Deng Chao.

Yang Qing could only throw a pleading look toward Deng Chao who couldn't help but be puzzled as he turned to Lei Weiyuan who nodded his head to him.

"Little Zhao let's listen to him. Whatever else, do it for your sake so that whatever comes next you can move on with a clear heart. I'll be right there with you, if he says something that harms you I'll be the first to pull his beard and knit it into a cultivation mat for you," Deng Chao said as he tried to ease Zhao Qi's mood.

"Fine we will do it as you say, Grandpa," Zhao Qi begrudgingly answered but not before muttering something silently under his breath.

"I hope he doesn't say something bad, grandpa Chao's knitting skills are the worst. How does he turn even the softest of fur into a hard, spikey, and scaly mat?" Zhao Qi's back shivered as turned to see Deng Chao fiercely glare at him for his remark.

Yang Qing cupped his fists in thanks before he went over to Liu Yun's compartment and told him the same thing he said to Zhao Qi on the sect master's intent after which he removed the compartments and the courtroom resumed its normal appearance.

Mao Yunru, Yi Jie, and Su Jinjing were puzzled when they saw Deng Chao next to Lei Weiyuan and Zhao Qi. They were already puzzled when he appeared in the courtroom and headed directly into Zhao Qi's compartment where Yang Qing was at the time.

They had assumed it was just a random spot check to ensure Yang Qing wasn't up to mischief but seeing Deng Chao they had to reevaluate their earlier assumption.

Sect master Han Qingling and Liu Yun were also puzzled and confused at seeing two people there who were not in the courtroom with them.

Sect master Han Qingling's gaze narrowed on Deng Chao and then moved to Zhao Qi who seemed like he was hiding behind his back like a child would behind their parent when they saw a stranger.

"So that's how it is."

He was in the midst of reaffirming his thoughts when he felt an overwhelming pressure slam into his soul. Just when he thought he would pass out from the overwhelming pressure his soul was put under, he felt it disappear as though it was never there.

"I hope you give my grandson a satisfactory explanation for how you treated him. Mmph," Deng Chao said as he coldly stared at Sect master Han Qingling.

The sect master could barely breathe under that gaze that made him seem as insignificant as spit on the ground.

"Fellow daoist you shouldn't be too hard on your juniors," Lei Weiyuan spoke at the side which helped alleviate the torment Sect master Han Qingling was under which left his whole back soaked in sweat.

"I'm sorry I lost myself there," Deng Chao said as he bowed in apology to Lei Weiyuan and Yang Qing who was already at his podium.

Yang Qing could only nod in acceptance what else could he do? Reprimand him? That was out of the question in fact he admired Deng Chao's resolve because from his brief display it was evident he is able to kill someone of Han Qingling's caliber without anyone noticing by striking their soul.

But in all that time even with Zhao Qi's name being dragged through the mud he never did anything to them.

"Sect master please forgive him, this is Deng Chao. He is Zhao Qi's grandfather and only guardian. Next to him is supervisor Lei Weiyuan, my boss. He will be part of the procession as an observer and adviser too.

We are ready when you are for you to finally reveal everything to Zhao Qi and Owner Liu Yun," Yang Qing patiently explained. He didn't reveal Deng Chao's background as he figured the man in question would prefer it that way as it was in doubt whether he even told Zhao Qi about it.

Sect master Han Qingling couldn't help but wearily look at Lei Weiyuan despite not sensing any cultivation from him. Him being a boss of a palace realm cultivator meant his cultivation was at least

higher and not lower. Also how he referred to Deng Chao as a fellow daoist he surmised they were on the same level.

He quickly tried to reign in his fear which he failed but he still decided to push through with it even with his hands shaking and stomach churning.

"Thanks, judge Yang Qing. Zhao Qi as your sect master I have failed you and for that, I am truly sorry. I don't expect you to forgive me even after hearing what I'm about to say because it doesn't change the fact that we put on you much more than you should have had to bear or deserve. And for that I am sorry.

Owner Liu Yun I would like to offer my apology to you too. You showed kindness and understanding to us despite not even knowing each other for long and all we gave you in return was betrayal, a web of lies, and possibly even inserted you in a situation that would have harmed not only you but even your organization.

Now that I'm saying it out loud I realize how careless and selfish we were in our plans despite our well-meaning intentions.

I am truly sorry to the both of you," Han Qingling solemnly said as he bowed at a ninety-degree angle toward both Zhao Qi and Liu Yun, whom were both shocked at his action.

Who was Han Qingling? He was a lofty figure and cultivator who was above many and had a cultivation realm way above theirs. A talent the Yellow lotus sect has not seen in years.

Zhao Qi may have been touted as a talent, especially with his blue-grade pillars but there was one person whose glamor he couldn't outshine and that was Han Qingling. There was a reason he was pushed to the sect master position of a behemoth like the Yellow lotus sect despite being young and there being more senior cultivators who were more powerful than he was at the time. There were even three that were half-step palace realm cultivators but he was unanimously made sect master despite it. The reason for this was he is the rarest talent the Yellow lotus sect has ever had since its inception 20,000 years ago and that was even taking the three palace stage experts into account.

He is the only one to ever form a gold core in the sect something so rare that there may be no more than five in some of the rank 2 sects.

When Zhao Qi met him for the first time during his promotion as a core disciple he remembered how Deng Chao was surprised that someone like him was in some rank 4 sect. His talent was enough for him to stand out even in rank 1 sects. Zhao Qi was utterly shocked when he heard it and here he was, that terrifying talent bowing to him.

He was shocked and conflicted on what to make of it.

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After his bow of apology sect master Han Qingling rose up and started recounting the version of events to Zhao Qi and Liu Yun. They both had complicated looks on their faces as they went through an array of emotions most of all Zhao Qi.

By the end, there was a looming silence when sect master Han Qingling had finished rehashing the sect's plan and the sham they created to ensure Zhao Qi's safety when the demise of the sect eventually happened.

"Isn't this a little too convenient? One minute I'm the parasite of the sect and the next I'm a precious seedling that the sect went to great lengths to protect. If you were in my shoes sect master would you believe what you just told me? That the things you put me through were all for my benefit?"

The whole tale seemed all too unbelievable for Zhao Qi. He found it hard to believe sect master Han Qingling's statement.

Though it was more appropriate to say he did not want to believe it as a way to protect himself. He had already been burned once by the sect after he let his guard down with them and actually really considered the sect and its members his home.

He moved from being the most prized disciple to the scourge of the sect too fast. Yes, some people like his master and some of his sect mates treated him with the same sincerity as before despite the scandal surrounding him but even then they were the scant few compared to the majority of the sect who saw him as an eyesore. The only reason he even managed to maintain his sanity was because of Deng Chao and the few who stuck by him.

But now he was supposed to believe the sect master that the sect never really betrayed him? It was easier for him to paint the sect as the villain despite some part of him believing the sect master's story and even finding a tiny comfort in it.

Deng Chao couldn't help but sigh at this. He had expected as much. Zhao Qi's greatest wound was pulled open. It was a given he would be weary, distrustful, and defensive like an injured cub.

"It's the truth Zhao Qi. Do you remember Shi Jia, Cheng Fu, Lu Ming, Liao Gen, and Lai Gang?" sect master Han Qingling gently asked.

"I do but what do they have to do with this?" Zhao Qi still with some venom in his tone asked. He knew those names all too well because just like him they were once core disciples whose talents stood out amongst their peers.

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Shi Jia at just twenty was already an orange-grade alchemist who could make pills and potions that could be used by those in the core formation stage. Zhao Qi was still an outer sect disciple in his sixth year at the time when he heard of her tales.

Cheng Fu other than the sect master was the youngest person to become a core elder when he broke through to the seventh stage of the core formation realm at just 34 years old.

Lu Ming had the cerulean butterfly physique that made her have an abnormally large dantian that was three times the size of those at the same level. She was also counted among the youngest to reach the peak of qi refinement at 14.

Liao Gen got recognized by one of the swords belonging to the founder of the Yellow lotus sect who was gifted in the way of the sword. He had four swords each with its own spirit and in 15,000 years since his death, only 6 people have ever been accepted by them with Liao Gen being the seventh.

As for the last one, Lai Gang, he had reached the fifth level of the core cultivation art of the Yellow lotus sect, the 36 winding leaves of the yellow lotus. It was an upper blue-grade cultivation art. One would form a leaf at each mastery which would then result in a lotus leaf marking on the cultivator's glabella.

One had to cultivate four leaves to move to the next level. Lai Gang at 29 years had already cultivated 23 leaves which put him at the peak of the fifth level in the art.

The founder of the sect had found the art by some stroke of luck in some mysterious realm. That art was the true foundation that helped the sect grow into what it is today.

The highest recorded level reached is 28 leaves and it was done by Han Qingling's predecessor, the previous sect master. Han Qingling is recorded to be close since he has 27 leaves and it is touted he would have likely reached 28 leaves if the sect wasn't facing a crisis leaving him without ample time to cultivate.

Every jump in level is a qualitative leap in both power and difficulty which only intensifies the further up one goes to the point where the difference between 27 leaves and 28 leaves is equivalent to the difference between someone with no leaves and one who has 16.

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To Zhao Qi even if he didn't know their relevance to the case he noted they had a few things in common. For one they were all geniuses and the other was they were all no longer in the sect.

Shi Jia took on a long-term mission to work as an assistant to some big-shot alchemist from a rank 3 organization. Said alchemist was a blue-grade alchemist. She hadn't been back to the sect in over a decade.

Cheng Fu was reported missing during an escort mission five years ago with no news being heard since. Lu Ming was the strangest as she somehow got taken in as a disciple by one of the elders of the Dreamcloud lake sect, an all-female cultivation sect with two palace stage experts. Even though Lu Ming never had a master in the sect it was still thought to be weird when she joined another sect without any pushback from the Yellow lotus sect.

As for Liao Gen rumor in the sect was that he was in the Death sword valley. A treacherous place where even early domain experts have lost their lives. However, despite its infamy, it is considered a treasure ground for sword cultivators. The wind there is made of sword qi and rumor has it that at the center of the valley lies an inheritance belonging to a sword cultivator in the sword formation stage. No one has been able to ascertain the veracity of that rumor as of yet but what is known is that sword cultivators

who go to temper themselves there achieve significant breakthroughs the deeper they delve into the valley.

For 13 years Liao Gen hasn't come to the sect and his fate is unknown.

As for the last one Lai Gang, nothing was heard of him in the last sixteen years. It was like he never existed. The only thing that can be traced about him is the record. Zhao Qi doesn't even know what he looks like since he has never laid his eyes on the person and only heard of his tales.

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Zhao Qi didn't have to wait too long to get his confusion answered.

"Of the names I've mentioned, Shi Jia and Lu Ming were purposefully sent away from the sect. We used the connections the previous sect master and the two supreme elders had built to send them to those organizations to ensure their safety. Luckily they have enough talent that it wasn't hard to convince those organizations to take them in.

Liao Gen rejected our plans and decided to temper himself in the Death sword valley in search of an opportunity to break through to the palace stage. It was deemed safe to escort him there since the area is declared a no-fight zone and anyone who breaks it gets executed on the spot inclusive of even domain experts. As for Cheng Fu.," sect master Han Qingling paused with a pained look on his face.

"He got killed when we had arranged a safe place for him to go to. I don't know how but our foes got wind of it and had him killed. We didn't inform anyone else from the sect other than the core elders for fear of creating mass hysteria.

As for the last one, Lai Gang, he never existed in the first place. We created him as a cover for those we intended to protect. We fabricated everything. Half of the sect's spirit stones were spent to ensure that little web of lies spread to every corner and that the story was as believable as possible both within and outside of the sect. Lai Gang had to come to life for our seed protection plan to have a chance. We successfully created someone with enough repute to attract the attention of our enemies but not absurd enough that they would suspect it. It was because of Lai Gang that we were able to safely bring out Lu Ming and a few other disciples," said sect master Han Qingling.

Zhao Qi's jaw hung wide open from what he had just heard as the rest wore dumbfounded expressions. They were all surprised at the lengths the Yellow lotus sect was willing to go to. The one intensely hit by this revelation was Deng Chao whose eyes seemed to quiver as a complicated look flashed in his eyes as he silently muttered.

"If we were like them maybe...."

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"Zhao Qi there is little we can do about where we find ourselves in but what we can do is ensure the legacy and the future of the Yellow lotus sect doesn't end with us. It is my duty as the sect master to ensure it doesn't happen," Sect master Han Qingling said with a comforting smile.

"Then why don't we surrender? The Order can ensure our survival if we do. We will lose the sect but we can always rebuild," Zhao Qi said as his voice quivered and broke from the shock.

"We are old and have made all our memories around the sect over the centuries, some of us have even been born there. It's hard for our hearts to accept losing it even if our heads say it's the strategic thing to do. We are tied down to what we will leave behind. We do not want our legacy to be those who gave in without a single fight but we want it to be that we made sure the Yellow lotus sect's flame burned bright up to the very end. And in that brightness, we managed to pave the way for future seedlings who will one day grow and prop the Yellow lotus sect to greater heights than even we could.

If it's your lot then I'm sure you will be able to do it though it won't be easy but I'm sure in the end you will make it. I created a way you can find each other after we.....well make sure to look out for one another as you will all need each other in the times ahead.

I will also have to shamelessly ask for senior's help to look out for some of our disciples should they ever need assistance when we are not there," Sect master Han Qingling said once more with much solemnity in his tone as he bowed deeply.

Chapter 85 85: Four Way Agreement (3)

It took a while before Deng Chao could collect himself to give a proper response to Sect master Han Qingling's request. The Yellow lotus sect's circumstances hit a little too close to home for him.

The crystal palm jade sect may have been destroyed 400 years ago but to him, it was still fresh just like something that happened yesterday. His weakened soul left him unconscious for over 380 years with fragmented memories that left him not knowing who he even was. He only started gaining clarity some twenty-odd years ago and with it the wounds from his sect's destruction. To others, all this happened 400 years ago but to him, it happened 20 years with details getting more vivid with every passing year that for some time he had to lock some of those memories away for his sanity.

"Could I have been born as an unlucky star where I invite calamities everywhere I go? One time can be called an accident, the second time an unlucky coincidence but now a third...?" Deng Chao silently muttered as he had a complicated look.

"I was too weak when my clan got destroyed and was unlucky or lucky that I wasn't in the clan grounds at the time. The second time I thought I was powerful but even then I still felt a little too short maybe this time even in this state I may be able to do something I couldn't do the previous two times," Deng Chao said as his despondent look was replaced by the look of someone determined.

"I'll help you sect master Han Qingling but not with the protection of your disciples but before that..." Deng Chao paused as he turned to face Zhao Qi who was still thrown from all the revelation.

"Little Zhao you have always done everything I've told you but for this, I will hand over the total reign to you for you to decide what our next move will be. Whatever you decide I will support you with all of my abilities. So little Zhao, what do you want to do?" Deng Chao asked the dumbfounded Zhao Qi with a genial smile.

"Grandpa but...." Zhao Qi was a little tongue-tied and confused. All his life all the major decisions had been under Deng Chao's suggestion. The only time he ever made a huge decision for himself was when he was choosing his master, Wei Peng and even then he only did so because Deng Chao adamantly refused to give his opinion on the matter.

"Zhao Qi it's okay to be obedient but don't use it as a crutch for your free will. Cultivators need independent thinking. Disciples are given guidance by their masters on their cultivation journey but at the end of the day, it is they who decide which road suits them best.

It's my fault that I always made the decisions for you never giving you a chance to think and decide on your own. I let my own fears guide my actions which also influenced you and your fears.

It's okay little Zhao, whatever you decide I WILL ALWAYS be there with you to the very end. You have the strength and courage to do it so don't sell yourself short. You survived in a place filled with strangers and even learned to make friends despite being deathly afraid but you still did it.

So don't hold back on fear of what I might think. It's my joy to see you step out," Deng Chao said with a smile as he ruffled Zhao Qi's hair who seemed to be fighting back his tears as he uttered what he wanted to say but was too afraid to admit to himself and Deng Chao.

"I want to protect the sect grandpa," Zhao Qi solemnly said as his voice boomed in the courtroom.

He wasn't sure if what sect master Han Qingling had said was the complete truth but he knew if he left at this moment he would be no worse than the parents he never knew who abandoned him in an old shack to die.

"Good," Deng Chao firmly said as he smiled in pride and appreciation. Yang Qing and the rest couldn't help but admire Zhao Qi's character. Making that choice with everything that he had gone through couldn't have been easy.

Sect master Han Qingling's eyes were wide open as he was surprised by Zhao Qi's choice which further deepened his guilt.

"I appreciate your resolve Zhao Qi, but you don't have to die with us. You have barely even started living your life. It would be a waste to risk it now. You should strive on ahead and pursue the endless dao and see where it will take you and when you reach heights where you can confidently keep the things you love safe I hope you can revive the sect and make it into a sect that doesn't need to destroy their disciple's reputation to keep them safe," Sect Han Qingling said in a self-deprecating smile.

"I'm sorry sect master but I've decided to stay in the sect to the bitter end no matter what that end may be. I should be dead but someone who didn't even know me decided to take a chance and raised me. If the sect is in a certain doom as you say, then all the more reason for me to stay. I have to help just as I was helped when I needed it. Besides my grandfather is powerful. All the achievements I have today are because of him. I'm not as talented as you sect master and it was only thanks to my grandfather's careful guidance that I even made it this far," said Zhao Qi as he smiled in pride as he spoke of Deng Chao's brilliance.

"There you have it, Zhao Qi and I will be staying. Besides your situation isn't as unsalvageable as you think. As long as you don't face a bunch of peak-stage domain experts I have ways to ensure your survival. I can't exert my full abilities yet but I have arts that you can use to preserve your sect atleast for ten years as long as you have the resources.

I can tell you only need half that time or even less to breakthrough into the palace realm and once you are at that stage I doubt your opponents have someone that can face a palace stage expert who had a gold core in their core formation stage," Deng Chao said as an interested glint flashed through his eyes.

He couldn't help but admire Han Qingling's talent. His martial brothers were called geniuses but even he thought they still fell a little short of Sect master Han Qingling for a few reasons one of them being despite the sect master growing up in a rank 4 sect with a cultivation art that was a grade lower than theirs he still managed to have a gold core with foundations so firm that rivaled even his. He couldn't help but wonder if his circumstances were better and was instead found by a rank 1 sect or even holy lands if he would have ended up with the fabled purple core.

"Maybe I'll offer some pointers to this little kid so little Zhao can cultivate safely with a tall tree to shelter him before I am able to reform my body again," Deng Chao silently thought to himself.

"This.." Sect master Han Qingling didn't know what to say. He couldn't help but reevaluate Deng Chao even further, who seemed more and more unfathomable by the second.

"Just who is Zhao Qi's grandfather? He must not be a simple character seeing the casualness he has when speaking of peak domain experts. Could he be...?" He shook his head free of the frightening thought that had just built up as he had impending matters to address the most important one ensuring the survival of his sect.

He had just been given a straw and he would be a fool not to clutch at it with both hands.

"On behalf of the sect, I humbly offer our deepest gratitude for your assistance which I will have to shamelessly accept. If you or Zhao Qi need anything, if it's within the sect's means we will be more than happy to accommodate any and all requests," Sect master Han Qingling said as he bowed in gratitude.

"Well it's good that you have offered as a matter of fact there are a few things I need,"

"Grandpa.." Zhao Qi hurriedly interjected as he eyed Deng Chao.

"Little Zhao this is for their benefit as well as mine. I'm not a member of the sect so me helping them and you helping them is different. If I helped without asking anything in return there will always be a strain like I own them which will extend to you and your relationship with the sect. But by asking for payment, the sect will feel like an equal partner in this on some level," Deng Chao patiently explained.

Zhao Qi nodded perfunctorily though he didn't look like he understood much of what Deng Chao was saying.

Deng Chao could only smile as he shook his head at this. Zhao Qi had little interaction with people and even in the sect, he had few friends as most of his time was spent cultivating so these subtle social intricacies that those at the top engaged in were a foreign line of thought to him.

"We would be happy to fulfill any requests you have senior," Sect master Han Qingling said as he smiled in gratitude at Deng Chao's thoughtfulness in giving the sect some leg to stand on.

"First you can't reveal my existence to others within the sect without my approval. I would have preferred to remain completely anonymous but considering my next two requests a few of the high-ranking elders will have to know of my existence for the smooth fulfillment of those requests.

The elders who know my identity will all have to have a soul restriction seal placed on them to prevent any slip-up. This is as much a safety guarantee for me as it is for your sect considering my background. As for my background, I will reveal it only to you and no one else not even the elders with the soul restriction spell on them. As the sect master, it's only fair you know just in case.

As for the next two requests. One is for me and the other is for Zhao Qi.

My request will have to wait until you are atleast in the middle stages of the palace realm before you can fulfill it and the sect will also need to be in one piece and fully operational. There are resources I need which at your current and the sect's level will be hard for you to procure. At the bare minimum, you need to at least be in the middle stages of the palace realm to get the least of the resources I need. The only reason the requirement is even this low is because you have a gold core otherwise getting those resources would have required someone at the late stages of the palace realm.

As for Zhao Qi's request, it's not that difficult. Other than ensuring his name is cleared, I'll need the sect to let him learn your core art, The 36 leaves of the yellow lotus. I know it's restricted only to legacy disciples and they need to be at the late stages of the foundation stage to start learning but I want you to make an exception. I know he said it's because of me that he made his achievements but he sells himself short. He has the talent for cultivation and an art like that would really help him soar to greater heights the earlier he starts on it.

In exchange, I'm even willing to offer my guidance and insights to some of the elders whom you will deem trustworthy to know of my existence.

That is all. As long as you agree to these three requests I will be willing to lend a hand," said Deng Chao.

"Agreed," Sect master Han Qingling didn't take even a second to think it over. To him, those requests were more than generous. If Deng Chao had even asked for him to abdicate his seat to Zhao Qi he would have agreed. Though partly his agreement would have been to help the sect and the other was he REALLY DISLIKED being the sect master.

Chapter 86 86: Four Way Agreement (4)

Liu Yun who had been silent all this while, ruminating on what he had heard seemed to have arrived at a huge decision as the wrinkles on his forehead straightened and the pensive look on his face calmed.

"I would also like to make a deal with the Yellow lotus sect, sect master Han Qingling," said Liu Yun.

This drew curious gazes all around the courtroom as all had assumed once the Yellow lotus sect agreed to make their payment his grievance would have already been resolved and his part in the case, done.

"Please speak your mind pavilion owner Liu Yun," Sect master Han Qingling said as he cupped his fist. He had a favorable impression of Liu Yun considering how he maintained his conduct despite the unbecoming treatment the Yellow lotus sect showed him throughout the ruse.

"The Mountain spring pavilion is also willing to lend a hand to your sect but we need something in particular in return," Liu Yun solemnly said.

His bearing was much more serious than when he was asking for his payment back. Yang Qing couldn't help but be curious about what would be so important to Liu Yun that he would be ready to risk his life along with the Mountain spring pavilion and get into a battle that they needn't get involved in.

"Why?" Sect master Han Qingling couldn't help but ask.

"There is a reason why despite the Mountain spring pavilion having 3 leaders I'm the only one people have ever met. The reason for this is that our eldest brother got injured before the Iron thorn kingdom got liberated and transformed into the now Green Bud kingdom.

We were part of a revolutionary organization that was filled with nobles and commoners alike and our eldest brother was one of its commanders. We got betrayed and during one of the royal family purging raids, they ambushed one of our secret hideouts.

Our eldest brother sacrificed himself to hold them off and even managed to luckily escape but he suffered grievous injuries in the process. He got infected by an insidious technique used by the royal family which caused his internal organs, qi, and his body to gradually rust.

It was because of his injuries that we decided to form the Mountain spring pavilion to try and find the means and resources to cure him as it was impossible to do so in the kingdom since there are many just like us who have someone suffering from that same technique.

The royal family may be gone but their fangs still torment us even now." Liu Yun paused as he clenched his fists in anger.

"After countless sacrifices and effort, we finally found a way to cure him but even with our resources, it's impossible to afford it. What we need to cure our eldest brother Wen Song is the lightning aurora sunflower, a lower-grade monarch rank herb.

Despite our many efforts, it has been hard to locate it let alone afford it and our channels are not that widespread seeing how young our foundations are. It's, for this reason, my second senior brother Wu Aiguo risks his life in the Millions treasure ocean to try his luck and find something that we can barter with or maybe get lucky enough to spot the herb there.

If the Yellow lotus sect can help us locate that herb we are willing to sacrifice everything to help you. In fact, the odds may get better for you as just before my senior brother was injured he was already a half-step palace realm cultivator just a few steps away from completely breaking through to the palace stage. As long as his injuries are dealt with, he has the confidence of breaking through to the palace realm," Liu Yun said.

His senior brother had a few years at most before his whole body got corrupted with the technique. At that point even if they found the lightning aurora sunflower the damage would be too severe and it would leave hidden dangers that may result in the complete loss of his cultivation. The sooner they cured him of the ailment the better and taking a gamble on the Yellow lotus sect was well worth the risk.

The Yellow lotus sect had existed for 20,000 years so its foundations were not shallow and the evidence of that was there, seeing how the sect still remained standing despite losing their palace stage cultivators for a few centuries. Their foundation was something that even their enemies couldn't overlook which had been why they had remained cautious even now, not attacking their headquarters despite having palace stage experts.

Liu Yun was willing to bank on the sect's resources no matter how depleted it seemed. In his eyes, the Yellow lotus sect would have much better odds than them in their search. A starving camel was still bigger than a horse.

Despite making the suggestion he knew his position was more desperate compared to the Yellow lotus sect. Without Deng Chao's involvement, he knew his odds of striking a deal with the Yellow lotus sect were high but now he wasn't so sure. With Deng Chao's involvement the sect's preservation timeline could be extended by at least ten years and that timeframe gave Han Qingling the time he would need to break through to the palace realm.

The revelation about Han Qingling having a gold core had startled him beyond measure. He may have not had much interaction with the outside world for long but he had picked up a few things here and there in addition to the knowledge he already had from before their kingdom's rebirth. His senior brother had a quasi-blue core, not even a true one but with it, he displayed enough power to escape the encirclement of twenty late core stage experts alive. What about a gold core expert? He shuddered to even think about the damage a gold core expert could exert.

His biggest worry at the moment was their help wouldn't be needed as with Han Qingling and Deng Chao's cooperation they would be able to easily resolve the current predicament. He only hoped Han

Qingling had a prudent personality to want to increase his odds by adding another potential palace stage expert to his team and two peak core formation experts.

"You showed understanding and kindness despite how we treated you which made me admire and trust your character enough that I was willing to entrust our core disciple to you.

We don't have the lightning aurora sunflower in our treasury but one of our elders has an acquaintance from a rank 3 alchemy organization. With her help, it won't be hard to gain information about the herb and purchase it.

We have a deal Owner Liu Yun, I will have to impose on you and the Mountain spring pavilion when the time comes," Sect master Han Qingling said as he smiled.

He had been thinking of a way to make it up to Liu Yun all this time as just using spirit stones as an apology didn't seem like enough reparations for what he put them through. In addition, he also hoped to build a connection with them. It was rare to find people of virtue like Liu Yun, those you could trust that even in times of trouble wouldn't betray you.

The current predicament had taught him one thing, a sect can't stand alone no matter how powerful it may seem. It needs allies everywhere to increase its odds of survival or it needs to have insurmountable strength the kind that will extinguish any villainous thought from its enemies. But alliances can only be formed with those whom you can trust and in this duplicitous world where self-interests came above everything else it was a hard thing to find.

Meeting people like Liu Yun was rare. So when the moment presented itself he jumped at the opportunity to form a connection with Liu Yun and the Mountain spring pavilion. Gaining the assistance of a half-step palace expert just a hair's breadth away from breaking through was just an added bonus.

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Liu Yun was surprised at how fast Sect master Han Qingling had agreed to his suggestion that it left him out of sorts. He was partly relieved, partly worried that this was a sham. He couldn't be blamed for being worried considering the Yellow sect's prior actions.

"Well then, it seems everyone here has come to an agreement without even the court doing anything," Yang Qing said with a cheerful smile. He didn't expect things to resolve themselves this easily.

"If you want, the court can stand as a witness to your agreement and do the binding seals for you if you all agree. Though even if you don't it's okay," said Yang Qing.

Deng Chao looked to Zhao Qi who nodded back in agreement.

"I am willing to accept the court as a witness to the agreement," Sect master Han Qingling solemnly said as he gently bowed to Yang Qing.

"I agree too," said Liu Yun as he too bowed.

"Zhao Qi and I agree too," Deng Chao said as he cupped his fists while Zhao Qi bowed.

"Alright then, Supervisor Lei Weiyuan if you would please," Yang Qing said as he cupped his fist in request to Lei Weiyuan.

Ordinarily, he would have been the one to create the contract but the presence of Deng Chao complicated matters. At his level, his contract would not have any effect on someone in the domain realm even with the assistance of the court's treasures. He could only entrust the formation of that contract to someone in the domain realm.

"I'm sorry to intrude la.. I mean little genius Yang Qing. I humbly request the court to let me do it if you don't mind Lei Weiyuan," a slow friendly calming voice echoed in everybody's ears around the courtroom as Lei Weiyuan smiled while cupping his fists in greeting.

"I had a feeling you would show up senior Meng Chao."

Chapter 87 87: Meng Chao

It didn't take long for everyone to see the originator of that voice. A blue spark flashed as a young man seemingly in his twenties appeared in the middle of the courtroom.

He had a handsome fair face, deep sky-blue eyes that seemed to hold the galaxy in them, a slender build, and flowing blue hair that was partly tied into a bun with a starry blue vine. His robe had a rhombus shape with the numeral IV inscribed in it and the words superior written above the rhombus shape.

On seeing the figure; Yang Qing, Mao Yunru, Yi Jie, and Su Jinjing all rose up as they cupped their fists in greeting as they said in unison,

"WE OFFER GREETINGS TO THE SUPERIOR DOMAIN JUDGE MENG CHAO,"

Their voices reverberated around the courtroom as an air of solemnness and deep awe spread about. The demeanor of Yang Qing and the rest startled sect master Han Qingling, Liu Yun, and Zhao Qi who couldn't help but wonder who the young newcomer was and why he elicited such a reaction from all the members of the Order present.

Deng Chao narrowed his eyes as he pensively gazed at the young man.

"A half-step soul formation expert and despite him reigning his fluctuations I can tell he is a couple of levels stronger than the one I faced," Deng Chao solemnly thought.

"Dispense with the formalities. Right now I'm just an interloper intruding on your case," Meng Chao lightly said as he offered a polite smile.

"It is not an intrusion we are the lucky ones to have you grace us with your presence," Yang Qing hurriedly and devoutly said.

The bootlicker Yang Qing had already come out to play. This was a superior domain court judge in front of him. As far as his clearance level allowed him to know, the superior domain court was the highest court level in the whole Order. Even though he definitely knew they had soul formation experts he wasn't sure there was a court that tried soul formation cases.

Soul formation experts were few and far in between and those that managed to reach that level were all sons and daughters of destiny. It was very difficult for soul formation experts to kill each other not unless one of them was in the early stages and the other in the late stages but even then the means a

soul formation expert had to ensure their survival was too numerous to count. It was easier to kill one hundred domain realm experts than it was to kill a single soul formation expert.

It was, for this reason, Yang Qing never thought there was a court that judged soul formation experts when it would prove difficult to find one let alone entrap one.

However, there was a matter 90 years ago that led to the demotion of a rank 1 sect when said sect lost its only soul formation expert and over half its domain experts. The reason for that demotion was tied to the Order however that topic has always been a taboo topic to talk about in the Order. Yang Qing once tried to find some details from Lei Weiyan only to be sternly warned against asking about things he shouldn't.

It was therefore commonly accepted within the Order that the superior domain court was the highest-ranked court and its members were the most powerful force the courts had to offer. They were all peak domain experts who stood out even among fellow peak domain experts. Most of the recorded soul formation experts in the Order since its inception to the present had come from the superior domain court with a few coming from the inner domain court or other branches of the Order such as the institute.

The principal of the institute was rumored to be a soul formation expert though Yang Qing has never seen him however there was credence to the rumor as the vice principal and a few deans were peak domain realm experts.

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"Haha, Lei Weiyan he is just like you said," Meng Chao said with an amused look on his face.

"I'm sorry Yang Qing I don't handle the working schedules and leave days, especially in the palace courts. If I overstep my bounds I would get in trouble with my superiors too," Meng Chao said with an apologetic look though there was a scheming glint that flashed through his eyes.

Yang Qing was already beet red in shame that his little bootlicking scheme had already been seen through even before he could fully display it.

"This old fox Lei Weiyuan does he never rest? Just how many countermeasures has he put in place? Won't I ever get time off? All I want is to give soft life Yang Qing a chance at life," Yang Qing thought to himself as he threw an aggrieved look toward Lei Weiyuan who smirked coldly in return.

"You're a thousand years too young Yang Qing. The Order will make sure to squeeze every last drop of qi you have after which we will feed you herbs to rejuvenate it and squeeze it out once more over and over. Blood, sweat, and tears Yang Qing the Order welcomes you with open arms," Lei Weiyuan thought as he offered Yang Qing a gentle smile that hugely terrified Yang Qing.

"Though."

Meng Chao's voice quickly pulled Yang Qing back from that terrible bout of dread that was assailing him.

"If you were to make it to the domain courts I would be able to put a good word in for you with one of the administrators. I have much more latitude within the domain courts than in other areas. I'm confident I can help you out with whatever it is you were angling for," said Meng Chao as he exchanged a high imperceptible crafty look with Lei Weiyuan.

"Really?" Yang Qing who was beside himself with fear from Lei Weiyuan's smile was now beside himself with blissful joy as if he had received the greatest news ever.

"I give you my word. Though just so you know becoming a domain court judge we don't just evaluate strength but the cases you have worked on and your rulings but I'm sure you will make it, after all, Lei Weiyuan speaks highly of you and your work," Meng Chao replied.

Yang Qing who was about to foam in his mouth from excitement had cold water poured on him as he felt that something felt off with the whole thing.

"This seems a little bit too familiar. Wasn't this the same promise I was given by one of the palace court administrators which is the whole reason I worked like crazy and strived to break through to the palace stage? Not sleeping well for five years all for the dream of taking it easy once I reach the palace courts? Only to get punished for taking a well-deserved breather. I worked like a dog for five years and the Order punished me for taking an authorized three-month break. The nerve of them.

Will I really be alright in the palace courts?" Yang Qing couldn't help but worry as he was only six days away from finding out.

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"Now then Yang Qing I guess you're okay with me establishing the contract?" Meng Chao suddenly said as his look turned solemn when he faced the concerned parties present more so when his look turned to Deng Chao.

"It's okay senior Meng Chao," Yang Qing said as he handed an old gold-brown parchment to him that had the details of the agreement made between the four parties. All that was left was the binding seal which Meng Chao would do.

"Such a shame. But who knows, that mighty palm may once again shake this continent again," Meng Chao sighed as he saw Deng Chao.

"I couldn't step in then but I may be able to help you find the answers you seek," thought Meng Chao.

Back then he was just at the seventh stage of the domain realm. He was confident of ensuring his safety but not enough to intervene and the Order at that time wasn't at a sufficient level where it could throw its weight on affairs that touched several rank 2 organizations and even had the fingerprints of a rank 1 organization behind the shadows.

But the current Order was very different from the fledgling sap it was back then. It now had firm roots that could be spread everywhere and Meng Chao had been using them to find out who were the masterminds behind the destruction of the Crystal palm jade sect 400 years ago. He wasn't doing it out of a sense of justice but out of a sense of respect he had for Deng Chao as a cultivator. A man who had the power to shake the world but chose to remain in obscurity providing a safe shelter for his sect and when the time came for him to act he did with so much brilliance that it blinded the sun. Meng Chao couldn't help but admire his resolve and character. This admiration was what made him decide to investigate the culprit behind their destruction.

After years of twists and turns, he made surprising discoveries and was just a step away from unveiling the culprit.

"If it is as I suspect, I wonder if you will be able to handle the real reason behind your sect's destruction. Not knowing may actually be a blessing for you senior," Meng Chao thought as he masked his worry with a polite smile and a nod that he gave to Zhao Qi, Han Qingling, Liu Yun, and Deng Chao.

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"Let's begin," Meng Chao said as he gently threw the old parchment in the air which floated as ancient symbols and runes flashed from it.

"I Meng Chao on behalf of the Order stands as a witness and binder to the agreement contract made between Sect master Han Qingling of the Yellow lotus sect, Liu Yun of the Mount spring pavilion, Zhao Qi, and Deng Chan.

Bind!!," He slowly uttered.

Though the tone was soft it sounded like an enormous thunderclap had hit the courtroom as an octagram circle formed beneath his feet filling the whole courtroom.

The scenery within the courtroom seemed to have switched to the skies as a deep blue background enveloped the place with celestial symbols such as the moon, sun, and stars flashed around the circle. The parchment floated to the center as the ancient symbols turned into golden chains that tied themselves to the wrist of each of the members mentioned.

Their names all appeared simultaneously on the parchment once the chains had firmly bound one of their wrists. The golden chain then turned into mottles of light and disappeared once the final letter was written on the parchment as the courtroom resumed its normal appearance.

Han Qingling, Liu Yun, Zhao Qi, and Deng Chao could feel they were all interlinked together with some binding force in the deepest recess of their self that would only reveal itself when the agreement was completed or violated.

"This," Deng Chao's pupil froze as he felt the indescribable power invoked from the binding seal. It had managed to bypass his saint treasure which would form an automatic defense against anything threatening him. It had activated but it seemed to have been forcibly suppressed and put to sleep. That

was a saint-grade treasure even if it wasn't completely activated it was still a bonafide saint treasure but in front of Meng Chao, it may have well been a toy.

From what Deng Chao knew, only a saint-grade treasure could suppress another saint-grade treasure but he didn't detect any treasure of that level in the vicinity. The parchment was a monarch-rank treasure at best. The only other explanations Deng Chao could think of were Meng Chao was a soul formation expert or he had executed a purple-grade art in which he had a high level of mastery in.

Either of these choices was something that sent terrifying waves in his heart.

"Why did someone of his caliber come here? Even if I'm a half-step soul formation expert but that is in name only. In my current state without the milky way crescent moon pearl's protection even a palace stage expert could harm me let alone a half-step soul formation expert who I have no confidence of defeating even in my prime."

Chapter 88 88: Clocking Off

As Deng Chao was busy ruminating over why someone of Meng Chao's stature had made a personal appearance on the case, the contract parchment in the middle of the courtroom split into five copies. The five copies turned into dazzling golden lights as they flew toward sect master Han Qingling, Owner Liu Yun, Zhao Qi, Meng Chao, and finally Deng Chao who was pulled from his daze when he saw a golden light fly at him.

"I think my work here is done. Thank you Yang Qing for giving me a chance to intrude on your case. I'll leave the rest to you," Meng Chao nodded to Yang Qing who nodded back in acknowledgment.

"Lei Weiyuan you're coming to Zhu Lao's welcoming party, right? His wife has finally decided to let him out after the little stunt he pulled 50 years ago. The party will be tomorrow night at Su Yin's place," Meng Chao said as he shook his head while chuckling.

"Glad to hear his seclusion is over. His department in the institute has been out of sorts without their dean to hold down the fort. Hehehe sure I'll be there," Lei Weiyuan said as he smiled.

"Zhu Lao, isn't he?" Yang Qing paused as he immediately recollected who that was. How could he not when that was the name of the longtime absentee dean of the faculty of cultivation art history and dissection.

Other than him being the only dean Yang Qing had never seen in his time at the institute the real reason he remembered him was that one of the core cultivation arts currently being practiced by the Order was created by him. It was a movement art in the middle ranks of gold-grade cultivation arts, the shadow void steps.

The shadow void steps made one as light as a feather and as fast as the wind. With high levels of mastery, one would even move within the shadow of objects around making it as versatile as teleportation. It even went to the extent that one could bypass protection arrays of a particular level as long as the cultivator had high proficiency in the art. It was one of the best stealth and multipurpose utility art the Order had, so its creator Zhu Lao was widely known despite never being seen by the younger members, especially the story surrounding the art's creation.

Rumor was he had created the art so he could sneak out of his home undetected to go have a chat and drink with friends in the wee hours of the night and sneak right back in. He was successful at first but later his wife with abnormal instincts felt something was off, especially with the random dao research excuse he used on her for a few months when he came home late. Acting on her suspicions she added a few alert formation arrays without Zhu Lao's knowledge.

Zhu Lao who had grown careless from his pumped-up pride at pulling one over his wife ended up triggering one of those formation arrays on his way out. After he was caught red-handed sneaking out, the information circulated around the Order was he was going into closed-door cultivation to deepen his understanding of the dao. 50 years have passed since the announcement.

Yang Qing had always wanted to meet the person who created the Shadow void steps considering how intricate that cultivation art was among movement arts. If he received pointers from such a person he felt the improvements he would make would be astronomical considering Zhu Lao had created the shadow void steps by improving on a red-grade art, the silent moon steps. He had elevated the cultivation art by three grades which was a feat in and of itself.

Though there was another person who Yang Qing would have even traded his leave days just for a chance to say hi, a monster who invented four purple-grade arts something even those from the holy lands couldn't achieve. But sadly just like Zhu Lao who was hard to get in touch with because of his 'closed-door cultivation' it was similarly hard to find the four-time purple-grade cultivation creator.

The only reason Yang Qing and most people knew about him was that his name was among the top ten names written in the all-time merit wall.

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"Senior Meng Chao do you think I could.." Yang Qing hurriedly asked as his eyes gleamed with expectation. Though currently his request wasn't purely borne out of a young cultivator's interest in seeking pointers from their seniors. His gluttonous nature just like always had already guided his steps.

"What could be better than a feast hosted by a domain expert? The quality," Yang Qing thought to himself

"Yang Qing don't you think you should try to atleast hide your true thoughts a little bit better?" Meng Chao said as he pointed at the side of Yang Qing's mouth that had a tiny drool sneaking out from it.

Yang Qing hurriedly wiped it with his sleeves.

"Sorry about that senior Meng Chao. It seems like I've made a fool of myself in front of you. My hunger for the dao sometimes gets the better of me and I lose control of myself. I have much to learn especially from my very talented seniors," Yang Qing shamelessly said putting on the most solemn serious dao focused look he could muster.

"This guy is truly shameless beyond measure. If shamelessness was a dao I'm afraid he would already be an unparalleled expert by now," Yi Jie thought as the swollen throbbing vein in his forehead threatened to burst open from the passive shame he was suffering from. He always bore the brunt of Yang Qing's shamelessness since he was his chief inquisitor.

Even Meng Chao was a little taken aback by Yang Qing's reaction.

"Fine you can come too, your team included and those judge friends of yours you eat with," Meng Chao said in exasperation. He couldn't wait to escape before Yang Qing did something that made him ruin his expert-like demeanor.

"Lei Weiyuan is truly a pro at this. He hasn't flinched even a little," Meng Chao thought as he looked at him in admiration

"Well then, if there is nothing else I will be taking my leave," Meng Chao hurriedly said as he turned around to make his getaway. But as he passed by Deng Chao he paused for a second as if debating about something.

"I was there during the final moments of your sect. I'm sorry that I couldn't do much for you or your sect at the time but in the next year or so should you want to find out the truth about the identity of the mastermind behind your sect's destruction and the origin of the last intruders, you can seek me out," Meng Chao said as he passed a small black token with a golden eagle symbol on one side and the name Meng on the other.

Deng Chao reflexively took the token though he was in a stupor as he did it. By the time he regained his senses and was about to ask a question, Meng Chao had already disappeared from his sight the same way he had appeared.

"If he was there then why didn't he step in? With his abilities surely he would have been able to prevent the total annihilation of my sect or even kept the intruders who came at the last moment, at bay," Deng Chao softly said. However, everyone could feel the anger and despondence in his tone despite the softness of his tone.

"He was at the peak of the seventh stage of the domain realm at the time and the Order was barely a few months old and thus didn't have the proper structure to involve itself and solve something of that level efficiently.

I'm not saying this to make an excuse for senior Meng Chao or the Order but I'm just stating the facts as they were.

If the situation were reversed and you were in Meng Chao's shoes, a seventh-stage domain realm, would you recklessly intervene in a clash that had more than ten late-stage domain experts?" Lei Weiyuan asked.

Deng Chao's eyes flashed with pain as he swallowed his next words. He knew he was just being unreasonable by assigning blame but sometimes blaming another person seemed a lot easier than facing the grim harsh reality.

"He couldn't do anything for you then but over the past 400 years, he has been searching and investigating every clue he could find concerning those who masterminded the destruction of your sect. He has spent countless hours and resources doing it all because he felt he owed it to a cultivator whose character he admired.

I hope you find the answers you need fellow daoist.

Yang Qing I'll be taking my leave too," Lei Weiyuan said as he flashed and disappeared from the spot.

The mood remained somber for almost five minutes without anyone moving or saying anything.

It was only when Deng Chao regained some semblance of clarity that the silence was broken.

"Judge Yang Qing, can you give my thanks to fellow daoist Meng Chao when you next meet him? Tell him I will never forget the favor he has done for me and my sect," Deng Chao softly said with some calmness to his tone.

"I will. By the way, can I ask you something? It's okay not to answer if you find the question too personal," Yang Qing said.

Ever since he saw Deng Chao there was something that he couldn't shake and has been nagging at him. Once he saw Deng Chao was in a calmer mood he decided to take a gamble and ask.

"If I can answer I will," Deng Chao replied with a polite smile.

"Is Deng Chao your real name?" Yang Qing hesitantly asked.

"Why ask that?" Deng Chao asked as he narrowed his gaze and his face turned serious.

"If I said just acting on a hunch would that be enough?"

Deng Chao went silent for a second a bit hesitant before he sighed as his shoulders relaxed.

"Well, it doesn't matter revealing it now anyway seeing how they're all dead.

My real name isn't Deng Chao but Li Ren. Other than that I'm afraid I can't tell you more as it is a past I'd rather not dredge up. I already have too much grief to last several lifetimes," Deng Chao said as he bitterly smiled.

"Thank you senior Deng Chao for fulfilling my selfish request," Yang Qing said as he got up and deeply bowed toward him.

"Maybe later you will tell me the real reason you asked me that," Deng Chao said as he smiled.

"I will," Yang Qing solemnly said. If he confirmed his suspicions to be true he had thought of looping both parties in but that would have to wait until he met with the other half of the potential equation when he clocked off.

"Clocking off," As if realizing something, Yang Qing had a joyous smile on his face as he hurriedly grabbed his gavel.

"I, Yang Qing, judge of the superior core court of the Order and the judge in charge of this case hereby declare the case of Sect master Han Qingling of the Yellow lotus sect vs Zhao Qi vs Mountain spring pavilion, CLOSED!" Yang Qing joyously said as he thunderously brought the gavel down that it even made the podium vibrate much to the dismay of the rest.

Chapter 89 89: Party Arrangements

"Jinjing, stay behind a bit," Yang Qing suddenly said as he got up from his podium.

"Thank you very much for your assistance judge Yang Qing," Sect master Han Qingling said as he cupped his fists.

"Thank you very much too," Liu Yun added as he cupped his fist in thanks too.

"Till we meet again young friend Yang Qing," Deng Chao said with a smile as he offered a daoist salute. Despite him being a half-step soul formation expert he didn't find it beneath him to offer a daoist salute to an early-stage palace stage expert.

How many 20-year-old palace stage experts were there around the world? And he could detect Yang Qing wasn't like the rest. Even Yi Jie, Mao Yunru, and Su Jinjing had made him raise his brows.

"The Order really isn't simple. How many such talents do they have? With terrifying seniors like daoist Meng Chao and daoist Lei Weiyuan looking after them, they can grow to their fullest potential under their guidance and protection.

If what I'm seeing is any indication, then the Order has long since reached the ranks of the Radiant sword sect and the Flowing valley sect. I wonder if the president of the Order has reached that terrifying realm?" Deng Chao thought as he disappeared into the crescent moon-shaped trinket around Zhao Qi's neck.

"I wish you all good fortunes in the times to come," Yang Qing said to sect master Han Qingling, Liu Yun, and Zhao Qi. They were all in the same battle wagon now with the troubles facing the Yellow lotus sect being imminent.

Their chances were much better now with the involvement of Deng Chao, a seasoned expert who headed a rank 2 sect and is a seasoned domain-level expert. His plethora of experience with different cultivation arts could come in handy but the unexpected could happen and things could go wrong. In Deng Chao's current state other than offering insight there wasn't much he could do physically. The rest would have to fall on the shoulders of sect master Han Qingling, his sect, and now Liu Yun and the Mountain spring pavilion.

Though based on Yang Qing's read of Liu Yun, he had a feeling only Liu Yun and his two brothers would participate sparing the rest of his staff from involving themselves in the Yellow lotus sect conflict.

Sect master Han Qingling and the rest nodded back in thanks as they made their way out of the courtroom. They had several additional things they needed to iron out together.

Yang Qing sat back down comfortably in his seat as he slumped backward raising his feet up on his podium.

"I wanted to inform you all I will be throwing a small welcome party for our new members at my place. They're spirit beasts, one is called Bolin and is a rainbow mist toad, and the other Haishi a mirage dragonfly," Yang Qing said as he made a brief introduction for Su Jinjing's sake.

"The party will be one hour from now. Yi Jie you're in charge of informing the rest. I think they should be in the common room or their chambers here at the Order. As for Feng Xin, I'll inform him personally. He should be at the Thousand flavors restaurant," Yang Qing said as a pensive look flashed in his eyes briefly.

"Hopefully he hasn't left yet by the time I show up," thought Yang Qing.

"Can I bring friends? I'd like to bring some members of my team," Mao Yunru suddenly asked. Though from her tone it seemed more like a dictation of facts rather than a request.

"Sure, sure," Yang Qing offhandedly replied as he waved his hands.

"By the way Yi Jie you'll be in charge of providing the wine like always. They will be your subordinates so bring something good," Yang Qing said as his eyes shone with unconcealed greed.

"You're paying. As the boss, it's only proper. And no putting it on your tab. You already owe me for the past 15 transactions and if you don't pay it at the end of the week as promised I'll just have to file a complaint against you Mr. I will soon be rolling in it, Yang Qing," Yi Jie said without missing a beat. He had to quickly block off every root of entry before the parasitic Yang Qing sunk his leeching fangs in.

"Yi Jie..You? I'm I that sort of person?" Yang Qing vehemently retorted with spittle flying everywhere with eyes red, fingers shaking. All the clear marks of righteous indignation.

"Of course, you are that person," Yi Jie coolly answered back.

"I'm leaving," Mao Yunru quickly said as she left, carefully carrying the excess jade talismans in both her hands.

"Another one for the collections. This will help me save up a bit for this month," Mao Yunru thought cheerfully as she made her way to her chambers via a teleportation circle at the center of the courtroom.

"Me too. It's time for your bath and I have to put you to bed early because mummy has to go out later," Su Jinjing coaxingly said to her spear as she made her way out of the courtroom door.

Yang Qing and Yi Jie didn't seem to have noticed anything as they were still bickering with each other by bringing up past events to one-up the other. Yang Qing was slowly losing that fight as evidenced by his decreasing word flow that soon turned to gestures and signs.

They soon decided to take a pause in their debate as Yi Jie went to the teleportation circle, headed to the inquisitor common room and chambers in search of Luo Meili and Zheng Hu.

Just like judges, the inquisitors had their chambers too and a common room right next to the judge's chambers they were attached to. However, even if they had their own chambers they had a shared common room where they held their meetings and also trainings. Though it was mostly used for the latter because the combat hall in the training room was retrofitted with all kinds of powerful arrays to help them hone their combat sense.

Yang Qing made his way out of the courtroom doors as his robes started transforming when he was midway out the door. His resplendent blue robes and coat transformed into a simple green coat with the symbol of a circle that was half-moon and half-sun appearing on the back of the coat. Inside he had a matching green robed shirt and matching shorts that reached his knees and straw sandals. Though the sandals were of different colors. The one on the left was pure white and the one on the right was pure yellow. Though contrasting they seemed perfectly in unison.

Yang Qing looked like a farmer out in the summer. He leisurely walked out whistling with cheer in his steps. Some of the cultivators whose cases hadn't been heard yet by the other judges couldn't help but stare strangely at the stranger walking casually in the Order's hallway without a care in the world.

Yang Qing offered a silent prayer at the courtroom doors that were still in session. The Order didn't have a set working schedule. The rule that they had was all the cases scheduled on the docket for the day had to all be heard that day. The Judge could only clock off when he had fulfilled this criterion.

This rule was the cause of Yang Qing's nightmares when he was just starting out as an outer core court judge. Outer core court judges had over a hundred cases per day in their docket. This was because they heard cases from cultivators in the body refining stage up to the foundation stage. The numbers were endless. Worse was they had to hear all a hundred cases in a single day. If you didn't finish the assigned quota they would be added to the next day's pile and the cycle continues mercilessly. Yang Qing at the time thought nothing of it until when it came time to take his leave he was denied until he cleared his backlog of cases.

It was from this never-ending torment that Yang Qing decided to work himself like a dog to rise up the ranks. Even though the superior core court had more complex cases, the number of cases they heard per day was few and from what Yang Qing heard that trend continues the further up one moves. He couldn't wait.

Once Yang Qing had finished giving his condolences to the judges still hard at work, he leisurely went down the hall and passed through the blue-colored mimicry chaos sky metal that transported him to the ground hall as he made his way out of the building down the alley to the Thousand flavors restaurant.

It was already dusk out with the sun almost setting but the restaurants were still packed to the brim.

"Most likely some poor saps who missed lunch because of the pile of cases in their dockets," Yang Qing thought to himself as he swaggered into the restaurant while taking in a greedy gulp of air.

"Judge Yang Qing," Cao Ying who had spotted him when he entered, quickly came over.

"Cao Ying hey, what time do you clock off?" Yang Qing asked with a smile.

"In about thirty minutes though I think I'll stick around longer as I wait for my friends,"

"Well, you can come by my place if you have nothing to do. I'm throwing a small party for new team members in an hour's time. You should come," Yang Qing said as he patted Cao Ying's shoulders.

"Really I can? Uum can I.." Cao Ying paused as he hesitated on how to ask what he wanted to ask.

"You can bring your friends," Yang Qing easily said.

"Thanks," Cao Ying loudly said before he hurriedly closed his mouth in embarrassment at his outburst.

"Will you be having the usual?" Cao Ying said.

"No, I don't think so. I'll just grab takeaways. I'll have 10 plates of red braised pork, a similar number in sweet and sour spare ribs, sweet and sour pork fillet, vermicelli with spicy minced beef, and 10 large bowls of eight treasures porridge.

Mmmh what else..Haishi might be a vegetarian. Add a few plates of pine nuts with sweet corn, pan-seared green chili pepper, sweet sour cucumber, and seaweed, and egg soup.

To finish it off I think a hundred pan-fried dumplings, a hundred pork buns and hundred spring rolls will do and oh also the 1,000-year-old silent lake elderberry wine," Yang Qing said in quick succession as Cao Ying dutifully remembered everything. A cultivator's memory grew sharper the higher the realms they moved. It was why the Order never felt odd about slamming the core realm judges with a hundred cases since with their memory they could remember an event that happened decades ago with much clarity as though it happened at that moment. Down to even the food, the weather, the number of people they greeted that day.

So remembering an Order was an easy task for Cao Ying with his foundation establishment cultivation. It was a given considering how much cultivators ate especially special characters like Yang Qing and his partner in crime Feng Xin who was currently discussing something with the manager of the Thousand flavor restaurant at one of the tables.

Yang Qing made his way toward them as he gave Cao Ying a storage ring and the card with his spirit stones for the bill.

Chapter 90 90: Glowing Respite Valley

Yang Qing noticed that the discussion Feng Xin was having with the manager seemed to be going well as he was all smiles as he passionately patted the manager's shoulders repetitively.

"It seems he managed to trade something to get himself off the blacklist again," Yang Qing thought as he made his way over.

The manager was a middle-aged man of tall height and medium build with black hair tied in a top knot and red-fitting robes that had silver linings at the edge. Everything about him screamed excellence and immaculate. He rose up with a welcoming smile once he saw Yang Qing headed in their direction.

"Judge Yang Qing it's always a pleasure to have you grace us with your presence at our little establishment," the manager said as he cupped his fists. Every movement he made was matched with grace and elegance.

Yang Qing had long assumed before the manager worked here he was most likely under the retinue of some high noble or clan at some point in his life based on his mannerisms that could only have been acquired through rigorous practice. He didn't think his guess was that far off since the owner of the Thousand flavors restaurant was a former prime minister of a kingdom that later became a subordinate of a rank 2 empire.

Among the Thousand flavor restaurant employees, none has stayed longer than the manager who has been here since the very beginning. Other than that outside of the owner who rarely shows himself, the manager is also the strongest expert at the middle stages of the palace realm.

"I'm already off the clock Manager Wang Shan as you can see. So now it's just Yang Qing," Yang Qing said as he cupped his fist in greeting.

"Feng Xin good that you are here. I will be throwing a welcome party for Haishi and Bolin in an hour so make sure to bring them over. I think their registration and part of the verification process should have been done by now," Yang Qing said as he sat down on one of the seats by Feng Xin's side with Manager Wang Shen on the other side.

Feng Xin's eyes glowed once he heard of the party accompanied by a small rumbling of his stomach.

"I will bring them by. What did you get?" He hurriedly asked getting to the most important part.

Yang Qing dutifully told him what he had ordered. Feng Xin's eyes were at first glowing as he nodded his head with an approving grin but at the end when Yang Qing finished his look turned to one of worry.

"Yang Qing there's no way that would be enough considering all the other warm bodies you have added to the list," Feng Xin worriedly said.

"I know it isn't enough but you know my financial situation well. This is the best I can afford within my budget. I haven't been paid in three months all thanks to Lei Weiyuan's diligent efforts," Yang Qing angrily said as he gnashed his teeth.

Manager Wang Shan could only shake his head at this. The quantity Yang Qing bought was suitable to feed a village of 500 people and leftovers remaining considering the ingredients used were all at the peak of the foundation establishment. But these two were acting like the quantity was barely enough to fill the gap between their teeth.

Feng Xin seemingly on the fence about something finally relented.

"You remember the matter I told you I will need your help with. I have a mountain-size babirusa with me. We can use part of the meat for the party. A leg should be enough. Remember you will owe me one for this," Feng Xin reluctantly said.

"Owe you one? You still owe me a lot and that is even without counting the primordial lotus dew favor. The nerve of you, Feng Xin. We should split the babirusa half just to make up for it," Yang Qing snottily said.

"YANG DON'T GET GREEDY or I'll take back even the leg. Just so you know the babirusa is a variant so it has excellent flavors," Feng Xin said.

"By the way, I think we will need to carve it up away from Haishi's eyes. It may have been her friend or something though I'm not too sure," Feng Xin added. He had noticed the faint ripples in Haishi's emotions when he beheaded the green-flowered babirusa.

"Okay. My backyard is big, I'll activate some of the illusion arrays in there. I hope Yi Jie brings the wine. His wines would pair well with the babirusa," Yang Qing said as he voraciously licked his lips.

"I know," Feng Xin said as he mimicked his actions too.

"By the way manager Wang is Jiang Fu around or has he left already?" Yang Qing asked as his persona changed into a serious one. Finding Jiang Fu was one of his goals for coming to the restaurant.

"He already left a few hours ago. It will be quite a while before we see him again as you're well aware he has gone into seclusion to breakthrough to the palace realm. His absence will be felt considering his oolong tea is one of our best sellers. Luckily Qi Shan is making strides in her cooking so we will be able to maintain our numbers before master Jiang Fu comes back," Manager Wang Shan said.

On one side he was happy and ecstatic since Jiang Fu's oolong tea would have improved by leaps when he comes back. They could even have to consider altering the price because of it but on the other hand, because of his seclusion, they faced a potential drop in the revenue stream till he got back. Despite the tea being produced in small quantities due to resource and technique constraints, it was one of the biggest earners of the restaurant.

"He has already left huh. I guess I will have to wait a couple of months or years before I see him. Hopefully, Deng Chao will be around then," Yang Qing said as he sighed.

"What's up?" Feng Xin asked once he noticed Yang Qing's weird reaction.

"I had a case today in which there is a chance he may have ties to one of the parties in that case. Though I'm not completely sure as it's just a wild hunch at the moment. I was hoping to meet with Jiang Fu to see if there's some truth to my guess. But now with him in seclusion that will have to wait and I'm not sure if the other party will be around then. We will just have to wait and see," Yang Qing said as he got up to leave to await his order by the counter as he left Feng Xin and Manager Wang Shang to their prior discussion.

"I'll leave you two to your discussions. Manager Wang, have a nice evening, Feng Xin later," Yang Qing said as he waved.

"Salutations Yang Qing and good festivities," Manager Wang replied in return with Feng Xin nodding toward Yang Qing in acknowledgment.

They swiftly went back to their discussion as Yang Qing made his way to the counter where he greedily breathed in the pleasant smell of dishes and spices that was wafting from the kitchen.

He didn't wait long as after ten minutes Cao Ying had already come back with his storage ring and card. Yang Qing picked the ring gladly but later frowned once he saw the decreased spirit stones in his card.

"10 middle-grade spirit stones. This is just barely enough for me to survive on for the whole week and that is only if I have a single cheap meal a day for the whole week. Kang Huilang better bring the amount he owes me tonight otherwise I'll have cold leek soup for a week," Yang Qing silently grumbled as he removed one spring roll from the storage ring to help lift his spirits.

The spring rolls seemed to have done its job as he was once again chipper, financial woes thrown into the backburner as he went to the stables where his carriage and the core formation dragon horses were kept.

He spotted Yi Jie already there harnessing the black horses to the carriage. These beasts who were normally arrogant to the stable caretakers acted like docile little lambs under Yi Jie's hands.

"Luo Meili and Zheng Hu will come once they finish up with their matters at the Order," Yi Jie said once he spotted Yang Qing coming over. He had changed his attire too. His robes had changed from the half-red half blue inquisitor robe to a light silver coat and robe. The silver robe accompanied by his calm demeanor and loosely tied bun made Yi Jie look like a detached seasoned expert.

"Okay. I have already bought the food as for the wine..." Yang Qing said meaningfully.

"You will have to settle for what I have on hand. If you want anything better then cancel our bet. As long as I stop being your carriage driver for the month I'll bring out my fine snow plum wine as opposed to the hundred-leaf cane wine," Yi Jie said as he tried his best to make the best pitch.

He lost a bet to Yang Qing about a month ago which landed him in his current state where he had to be a coachman for Yang Qing for the month. He was left with a few days but he couldn't wait to escape the endless torture of having to wake Yang Qing up both at his home and also when they arrived at work. Sacrificing his wine collection for an early release from Yang Qing was well worth it.

"Nice try Yi Jie. I admire your attempt but I happen to love sleep just a tiny bit more. I bet the hundred-leaf cane wine will taste just as good. Now then to your duties fine sir. Who knew you'd make a fine coachman? It's regrettable that only a few days are left. I wish the bet was longer," Yang Qing said with

regret showing in his eyes as he looked at Yi Jie before disappearing into the carriage when he saw Yi Jie's vengeful look.

The carriage gently trotted away as it made its way out of the court grounds down through a special gate designated for the Order employees. The gate had a smaller line compared to the main gate used by the defendants and those with complaints. Since cultivators didn't need sleep the courts worked 24/7 and the traffic in and out of the grounds never stopped.

There were different reactions from the cultivators once they saw the dragon horses and the black carriage with the golden eagle symbol. Most were filled with awe since they knew inside the carriage was some Order bigshot especially with the fearsome late-stage core formation dragon horses driving the carriage. Yi Jie with his frosty expert-like demeanor added further charm to it.

The inviting night outside the gate swallowed the carriage whole. When next the carriage appeared it was half an hour later outside a massive gate that had two stone statues of an eagle with golden eyes by its side. Though the eagles were statues they seemed very lifelike.

There was a sign on the gate with the name Glowing respite valley written on it. The writing had a calming effect on anything within 500 meters of it.