

F Disciples 621

Chapter 621: Empty Library

The library was quiet except for the barely perceptible breaths of two people. The occasional sound of a turning page seemed to echo across the tall ceiling supported by wooden pillars that were akin to tree trunks. Amidst the shelves and tables, there was hardly a soul to disturb the peace.

Zhou Ziyun bit her lip as she concentrated on the bamboo scroll in front of her. The text was barely recognizable compared to the current calligraphy style and she had to expend a lot of effort on reading every character. The sentences and grammar were strange and required a long time to comprehend. A slender index finger followed her eyes, barely moving to indicate her progress.

"The Great Tang Empire was founded in the Shu Year of 1590 by a peasant with the gift of heavenly strength. It was rumored that his raw strength could surpass a whole realm and that he could easily master all body strengthening Daos..."

"The Black Flag Company that ruled the three middle oceans for a hundred generations was founded in the Ma Year of 344 by a person who was gifted three drops of divine blood from an emerald qilin..."

Zhou Ziyun slowly learned about these famous gifts and bloodlines known to the Immortal Association. Each one lacked enough detail to almost make her slam her fist on the table with frustration. But she also knew that the true story behind these entries might be long enough to fill an entire shelf with heavy tomes.

There were so many different gifts and bloodlines. The possibilities seemed to be endless. Although the scroll only contained a limited number of examples, she committed each one of them to memory and also considered if any of them sounded similar to hers or her fellow sisters' powers. So far, there didn't seem to be any close match.

The closest was Bei Yingluo's realm-hopping ability and that of the Great Tang Empire. However, the ability of the royal family of the Great Tang Empire only increased physical strength and not spiritual force or mental ability. Bei Yingluo's power, when activated during moments of desperation or rage definitely had a spiritual element.

Another close call was Lin Qingcheng's strange power of orgasms and how it could have been related to the bloodline of the succubus demon. There were many records of various human clans that had fallen

to this demon of sex and seduction. After receiving that bloodline, these humans were able to cultivate through a variety of sexual methods that were far more potent than ordinary dual cultivation arts.

However, the powers of a succubus didn't fit Lin Qingcheng whose power was more pure and even more mysterious. She did not draw her power from her partners like those with the succubus bloodline. She simply drew her power from nothing which was why she could still cultivate by masturbation even if it was a little slower.

No, she still remained a mystery and perhaps that was a good thing.

Zhou Ziyun let out a sigh and noticed a pair of eyes staring intently at her. She tilted her head and glanced at Chen Wentian who seemed to have given up on reading. Instead, his attention was solely on her and his expression was one of mischief.

She rolled her eyes and returned to her scroll. She sometimes had to remind herself that this version of her master was not the real body but a representation made of shadow energy. His power was so strange. He had explained it to her the best he could that it wasn't a gift or a bloodline. He wasn't born with it but found it later in life, a heaven-defying dao that had no creator, at least none that could be understood by ordinary people, even those in the immortal realms.

This Chen Wentian before her was exactly like his true self in every way. At first, she had been afraid. But she had long since gotten used to it. She felt no discomfort with this version of him around her anymore. Instead, it simply gave her a sense of security.

"Master, there are still more to read." She said softly.

He ignored her reminder and continued to study her. They were probably alone at the moment on the top floor of the library. Few people came up here. In the last hour, there had only been a handful.

"You're doing such a great job, I'll let you read more." He teased.

She shook her head helplessly.

He reached over and guided a strand of long brown hair behind her ear so he could get a better look at her face. "Why are you so beautiful today?"

"Master, please. I'm reading." She tried to add some annoyance to her voice but wasn't quite successful.

"By all means, don't let me distract you."

Zhou Ziyun sensed his smile widen at this but didn't bother to respond. Grumbling to herself, she tried to focus on the tiny complicated writing in front of her.

At some point or another, she felt a soft force on her hips opposite him. She glanced at him sharply but both of his hands were visible. One was flat on the table while his head was resting on the other.

"Something wrong?" He asked and smirked.

She felt a flush of heat in her stomach but suppressed it. Normally, she would give in to his advances but they were in public. Even though this was a mostly empty library, there were still people that came and went, cultivators with keen spiritual senses. An immortal could even show up and the chances of that were not low. She really wasn't into exhibitionism.

She was just about to get back to the scroll when she felt the pressure on her waist slowly slide upward. Her heart fluttered as it came to a rest right below her left breast. Then, she felt the warmth of what was unmistakably an invisible hand cup her breast.

She gasped sharply in reaction and then glared at him.

He made a gesture with his hands professing innocence. But she knew it was him.

Zhou Ziyun tried to read but soon the invisible hand had started to grope her more insistently, kneading her breasts over her clothes as if he was trying to measure her size for the hundredth time. Her body reacted naturally. Warmth and moisture pooled toward her lower stomach. Her breathing became faster and her skin became flushed. If they were back in the sect or somewhere private, she would let

him do whatever he wanted. But they were here, where anyone could see them and sense what was happening.

That thought sent a thrilling tingle down her spine. It distracted her just enough so that she wasn't prepared for a sudden touch against her bare skin.

A/N I wrote three special stories to celebrate IOAFD reaching one million words. They are a retelling of the side stories after the very first arc, with three brand-new smut scenes. They are free to read for a limited time!

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Chapter 622: Almost Empty

The library was still quiet all around them. Chen Wentian's spiritual sense was active but except for maintaining a perimeter around them, he was mostly focused on his beautiful disciple next to him. When he first met her, he probably would not have called her beautiful, perhaps just really pretty. But as the months and years flew by, he found himself more attracted to her than ever before. She was growing more and more beautiful in his eyes and he couldn't explain it.

Especially right now. She looked utterly delectable. The way she focused so hard on those books, the way her lips moved when she was pondering a problem, she was driving him crazy.

He counted three other people in the library. They were all focused on their own studies and nobody was around them. It was the perfect opportunity and he could help but think of naughty things.

His mind wandered, imagining Zhou Ziyun as the stereotypical serious student, a scholar who was focused more on the written word than socializing with others. Perhaps this diligent student also worked in this library, helping take care of the place she cherished the most. And of course, such a woman was ripe for the picking, just waiting for a dashing rogue to sweep her off her feet.

Chen Wentian gathered some spiritual power in his fingers and sent it toward her. Shadow energy landed on her clothes and hid within the folds. He moved this clump of his spiritual will slowly towards her hips so that wouldn't notice anything.

"Master, there are still more to read." She complained, her eyes flicking towards the old tome in front of him which had already been forgotten.

He smiled and simply continued to study her face. He wanted to trace a hot trail of kisses along her jaw and slender neck and suck the triangular patch of bare skin above her breasts. Her outfit was mostly conservative except for this plunge of the neckline. It suited her very well. It gave her a great sense of class but also sensualness without being vulgar. She was every bit the high-class noblewoman that he would have had no chance with in his youth.

"You're doing such a great job, I'll let you read more." He teased.

She went back to her studies and he continued to study her.

With his real hand, he guided a strand of sleek brown hair that had fallen out of place back behind her ear.

"Why are you so beautiful today?" He asked honestly.

"Master, please. I'm reading."

She sounded so sexy in her bossy voice. He loved it.

"By all means, don't let me distract you." He said idly.

Chen Wentian decided to play with her. He couldn't resist. His phantasmal hand made of shadow finally rested against her hips and he gave her a gentle squeeze to announce his presence.

Her sudden reaction of annoyance sent a thrill through him.

"Something wrong?" He teased, unable to hold back a smile.

She refused to speak to him but he could see a tinge of pink spread up her neck, making her cheeks blush with warmth. It was a good sign so he continued. His shadow hand moved up over her clothes until he finally cupped her left breast.

She glared at him but he feigned innocence, even as he gently squeezed her tender flesh. She was the perfect size for his palm. She felt sublime and so soft, like a freshly steamed bun.

He felt her shiver under his touch and this emboldened him even more. He gave her a harder squeeze, his fingers sank down deeper. Her nipple hardened against his palm and he gently rubbed it over several layers of clothes.

After several rounds with one breast, Chen Wentian moved to the other one just to make sure it wasn't left out. Even as she tried to continue reading, he groped her with more and more intensity with each passing breath.

He was the naughty schoolboy trying to corrupt the good student. Two of them in a quiet, almost empty library, he played out this fantasy in his mind, one which he never had an opportunity to experience in his youth. He was making up for lost time and he now had the tools to properly torment her without anyone knowing.

Chen Wentian's shadow energy completely slipped under Zhou Ziyun's clothes. He dug through multiple layers of silk and fine fabrics until he finally reached bare skin. Now that he could really feel her, he gave a really good squeeze, catching her erect nipple between his fingers in a well-practiced fashion.

She let out a soft moan. Only one before she caught herself. She continued to stare stubbornly at the scroll filled with tiny characters like ants but he knew she was feeling it. Her skin flushed with a wave of heat and her heart beat under his palm.

Someone six or seven aisles away from them suddenly stood up. Chen Wentian and Zhou Ziyun both tensed but that person headed in the opposite direction. She let out a sigh of relief while he used this opportunity to lean in close.

"Something interesting on the page?" He asked, pretending to look over her shoulder.

His warm breath tickled her ear. He wanted to drive her crazy like she was doing to him. The library was almost empty but there were still people around. The thrill of the situation was amazing. His erection strained for air inside his pants. He wondered if she felt the same.

While his physical hands still rested on the table, his shadow hand ventured southward. Sliding across smooth skin, he brushed over her belly button and her lower stomach until he reached a patch of hair. It was neatly trimmed and velvety, just the way she liked to keep it. He could already imagine it in his mind, a triangular path of brown hair that guarded her sex.

Her thighs spread apart ever so slightly as he arrived. She wanted it. This beautiful student, this elegant lady, wanted him to finger her in public. What an amazing thought.

Chen Wentian obliged. His middle finger slid down her crevice, teasing her sensitive nub along the way until he finally found her opening. She was already drenched and soaked his finger completely as he dipped into a sultry honeypot.

He made it all the way in until he couldn't go any deeper. She was so slippery but yet she still gripped him tightly, not wanting to let him go. He curled his finger and rubbed the tender folds along the roof of her pussy. She quivered around him, creating another gush of arousal.

Zhou Ziyun let out another soft moan, closing her eyes in the process. She looked so sexy at that moment. He wondered what she was thinking about, was it their current location or was it a ghostly finger thrusting in and out of her pussy or was it a combination of the two?

Her hands which had been gripping the scroll a few seconds ago were now clenched into fists. Her eyes opened again but they were unfocused. Her lips were slightly opened and her breathing was labored.

He watched intently. Every one of her reactions was amazing.

Chapter 623: Planning More Experiments

Time seemed to slow as Chen Wentian and Zhou Ziyun entered their own bubble. Beams of sunlight from the windows slowly moved across bookshelves and aisles. Their backs were warmed by the yellow glow but it failed to distract the two.

He didn't know when he added a second finger. His fingers rubbed the sensitive folds inside her with force and enthusiasm. His fingertips pressured some of her most sensitive spots over and over in a beckoning motion, inviting her to come again.

By now, Zhou Ziyun was leaning heavily on the table with her elbows. Her hands were still clenched into fists but a few strands of hair had fallen out of place and were hiding her eyes. He could still see her lips, pursed tightly as if struggling mightily with a difficult problem.

He knew she was close. He recognized her expression. His smile widening, he repositioned his hand and moved a thumb to her clit. While maintaining a shallow thrust with two fingers, he rubbed slow circles around her most delicate nub.

She let out another moan as she shuddered uncontrollably. It wasn't an orgasm just yet but it was almost as good. Her shoulders sagged and her head tilted to one side. Her breathing became heavy. He could almost taste the pleasure she must be feeling.

He brushed aside the tender folds around her clit and teased her mercilessly. He increased his pace even as her breaths became ragged. Round and round, he circled her button of pleasure and sent her to heaven as only he could.

When she finally came, he didn't sense it so much as felt it on his fingers. Her pussy clenched tight, almost preventing him from pulling out. Along with quivers and undulations, there was a great gush of moisture as she unleashed her pent-up arousal.

Being a good master and lover, Chen Wentian helped clean up the mess he had a hand in causing. He left barely any trace of his misdeeds, only a slightly wet patch in her undergarments.

Zhou Ziyun recovered around the same time and shot him a look filled with meaning, "Master, I will repay the favor when I get back."

Chen Wentian understood and smiled. Being a substitute body, he knew that some disciples were more cautious of him in this form than others. Zhou Ziyun had always been ambivalent so he only went as far as using his fingers. It seemed that she preferred to keep it that way.

Thinking about this, he was reminded of Bei Yingluo. She was the only other disciple he had done this with. He had helped her break through to the Mind Focusing Realm and also fingered her in the process. But even with her, he had never gone any further. It was like an invisible barrier that neither he nor his disciples wanted to cross.

"Master," Zhou Ziyun's voice was clear and flat, already back to business as if nothing had happened, "I've read so many books and records about gifts and bloodlines but this is all still a brand-new subject for me. Can you tell me what you think about it and if you have any suspicions?"

Chen Wentian chuckled and shook his head, "I have given this some thought but I don't know much else. For you and Yingluo, it will simply take more time and research. But as for Chengcheng, I have noticed something."

He then went on to describe the strangeness of her spiritual sea and the existence of several stars above her spiritual sea that seemed to be linked to others. The link was a mystery that he didn't quite understand but she seemed to be able to form one if she was able to achieve an orgasm at the same time as someone else within close proximity.

His link to her was the only one for a long time. She could sometimes see temporary stars in her spiritual sea when others had orgasms near her but his star was the only one that persisted afterward. At least, that was until a few days ago when she reported that she now also had a permanent link with Su Yue after the two of them had masturbated next to each other and had come at the exact same time.

"Really..." Zhou Ziyun said, "A link through simultaneous orgasms? Synchronization? How is that even possible?"

"I don't know. Chengcheng is just weird like that." He said with shrug.

"It's a serious matter!" She rebuked, "What effects does this link have on her, on you?"

"As far as I know, it has no effect on me. She did mention that she would feel more aroused than normal out of blue. When we compared the times, they lined up with when I was having sex with someone else."

"You should have told me earlier." She said and quickly scribbled some notes, "This is a tremendous development. We definitely need to set up an experiment as soon as we get back."

"Oh, are you going to be participating in said experiment?" He asked eagerly.

She studied him expressionlessly, "I'll let you know."

"Come on!"

"You'll just have to wait and see." She said and pretended to stick her nose in the ancient books once more.

Chen Wentian had no words to retort for her impertinence. He briefly considered punishing her with his fingers but thought better of it. If he did that again, he might not be able to control his own urges. Instead, he focused on more serious topics and also perused a few old parchments.

"Say, speaking of experiments..." He said as he entertained a vague idea, "What kind of experiment would be best for Yingluo to test out her powers? I haven't been able to think of anything useful..."

"Sister Bei? Tell me more..."

The two of the discussed the matter in detail. Chen Wentian had let Bei Yingluo participate in many local missions. Those included clearing out demon infestations and subjugating areas ruled by various beast

species. In all of these, she had managed to activate her hidden power only once. Now, he was running out of missions for her to do and he felt that they were a waste of time anyway. freewebno(v)el

Zhou Ziyun felt that his approach was too conservative. She felt that they needed to increase the difficulty in order to find the correct triggers for her powers. Nothing else could be done to develop her cultivation path until they established this baseline.

Ultimately, she suggested two options. One was to drastically increase the difficulty of missions and have her fight opponents that were one realm above her. The other was to invest in some kind of dream array where she could be put through unreasonable scenarios that were impossible in real life. This way, they could determine the full extent of her triggers.

He liked both ideas and decided to look into them as soon as possible.

Chapter 624: Forest District

Chen Wentian and Zhou Ziyun spent the next few days in one library or another. The first library they went to belonged to the Immortal Association and was the largest but it didn't mean it was all-encompassing.

Following the Central Association Library in the Sky District, the pair of master and disciple visited the Grand Public Library which was located within the Trade District. This library's contents were of obviously lower quality but it had some unique perks. For one, it had the widest collection on mortal cultivation and the history of the subcontinent. Although the chance of finding some hidden secret about gifts and bloodlines was rare, it at least allowed Zhou Ziyun to broaden her horizons.

After that, they went to the Old District. This was the poorest district out of the whole metropolis but it was also the most populated by far. As a result, the various libraries here had the most mundane information possible but these were not the target. Instead, they visited a variety of small bookshops and private collections. They were trying their luck at finding a hidden gem. There were so many people, so many creative ways to cultivate that there were always outliers and strange feats.

Three days passed in a blink and it was finally the day of the Great Dao Preaching Convention. Chen Wentian and Zhou Ziyun did not manage to uncover any new information or leads about gifts or bloodlines. Even so, Zhou Ziyun gained a lot of new information and was quite pleased with the progress she had made with her cultivation. Although she was still at the 8th Level of the Spirit Initiate Realm, she had made a definitive step toward the ninth level.

"We're here." Chen Wentian called out as he slowed his flight.

The Great Dao Preaching Convention would take place over three days and be held in a different district each day. The convention's main goal was an act of community service but it was also set up as a competition between those who participated in preaching the way of cultivation to the masses. Every audience member that bought a ticket and went to any of the three sessions could cast a vote for the best preacher. In the end, the person with the votes would become the Dao Genius of the current generation, an honor that would resound across the subcontinent.

"Dao Genius Zhou Ziyun, it has a nice ring to it." He teased.

"Master, stop joking around." Zhou Ziyun nudged his side in retaliation. "I have no need for titles or the admiration of strangers. I only want to be stronger so I can support master and the sect."

He laughed, "You always know the right thing to say."

They descended towards a huge tree that was as tall as a ten-story building. There was a gap within the foliage where a few flying boats were going in and out. Surrounding the tree was a vast forest of equally massive growths. From a distance, it was a sea of green. Close up, one could see countless buildings and houses building into the trunks and branches, forming a massive city that was intertwined with nature.

This was the Forest District that lay in the northern region of the Eastern Sanmu Metropolis. It was one of the most unique districts and one that proved the specialness of this land.

Chen Wentian and Zhou Ziyun landed on a wooden platform that was as wide as a town square. The planks of wood that made up the floor were incredibly tough and gave off a metal gleam. The entire structure sat atop a mass of living branches that gave off a similar gleam. They had all been shaped to support this platform. It was difficult to tell how many years or decades it had taken to create this natural and man-made construct.

"Welcome to the Forest District, Immortal Blue Dragon Chen Wentian!" A small group of people wearing familiar blue robes approached them.

They were from the Eastern Light Clan. Around them, other groups wearing the uniform of the four king sects were greeting other arrivals.

Chen Wentian tilted his head slightly in a casual greeting.

The old woman in the middle bowed and said in a formal tone, "Lord Chen, as you are aware, the first day of the Grand Dao Preaching Convention will have a morning session, an afternoon session, and an evening session. The Forest District is a great producer of metals and has a strong relationship with weapon arts. Thus, the morning session will be a discussion of all kinds of cultivation arts that utilize weapons, especially ones made of metals. But these weapons don't just appear out of thin air so the afternoon session will focus on forging arts, metallurgy, and other crafting arts that utilize metals such as creating defensive arrays or even flying boats. Lastly, the Forest District owes its prosperity to the forest around us and thus we must always be aware of our connection to nature. The final evening session will focus on Daos that connect one to the power of nature and life."

The lady finally took a breath and quickly followed by saying, "Lord Chen, will your disciple be participating in any of the sessions?"

Chen Wentian glanced at Zhou Ziyun briefly before smiling benignly at the hosts, "My disciple, Zhou Ziyun, will be participating in all three."

All of them were surprised by the answer. Some were able to hide it better than others but they couldn't fool an immortal's senses.

"Something wrong?" He asked.

The woman coughed and spoke respectfully, "Lord Chen, perhaps that may not be wise. Each session will have multiple participants at the same time. The crowd will naturally gravitate towards those that can showcase the most knowledge and understanding of the Dao subject. In each session, only a handful of participants may be able to earn the public's recognition and their votes while others will be ignored. Therefore, it is usually best if participants stick to a few subjects they are the best at."

He waved her off, "No need to worry. My disciple is just here to have a good time and learn new things. Naturally, we need to attend every session."

The hosts from the Eastern Light Clan looked at each other with looks of trepidation and ridicule. Chen Wentian paid them no more attention and left without another word.

Zhou Ziyun also showed no signs of worry. His words encapsulated her purpose. She had no specialization so the only thing she could do was learn as much as possible from every source. Although she did not voice it, she had great hopes in this event, that it might finally cast a clearer light on what her cultivation path should be.

Chapter 625: Participants Convene (I)

Chen Wentian and Zhou Ziyun followed the posted signs toward the convention area. They crossed several sky bridges that connected one tree to another. Finally, they arrived at a large meadow surrounded by a circle of trees. Instead of houses, the branches were filled with seats and viewing platforms and they were already crowded with people. This natural arena could easily hold at least a hundred thousand with a clear view of the meadow in the middle.

"You're up." Chen Wentian said and patted Zhou Ziyun's back.

She nodded with a calm expression.

The two separated. Chen Wentian flew off towards the private seats for immortal guests while Zhou Ziyun strode forward into the meadow.

The first thing that hit her senses was the crowd noise. There were over a hundred thousand souls gathered for this convention. She had never gone before such a number before. Although she was not one to suffer stage fright, she still had to fight back a jolt of nervousness in her stomach.

The next thing she noticed was the other participants convening towards the middle. A few were following the path through the waist-high grass while around a dozen were already gathered in the central clearing. They all exuded a level of confidence and competence that was rare to find. It was as if each person dared to participate in this Great Dao Preaching Convention was a genius above all geniuses.

She was somewhat thankful that her cultivation was not too bad compared to her peers. Many were around her level while a few were even lower than hers. Their ages were also quite young in comparison

to ordinary cultivators at the upper levels of the Spirit Initiate Realm. If she had to guess, most were only in their late twenties.

Zhou Ziyun reached the clearing in the middle. Some participants were sitting on tree trunks that lined the edge while others were standing around conversing with each other. Her arrival did not attract much attention aside from a few sideways glances.

She did not mind it and chose an isolated tree trunk to sit down on. With a straight back and an elegant posture, she calmly surveyed the surroundings with more detail. Her ears perked up as she tried to catch tidbits of conversations around her.

"... Who do you think will the title of Dao Genius this time?"

"... Who else? Of course, it will be Brilliant Blue Ming Yuqi!"

This was followed by some laughter and indistinguishable words.

She turned her head slightly and focused on another group.

"Did you see... Deng Lun, the Gentle Scholar, he is so dreamy..."

"Don't be so ridiculous..."

"... I know, right? Prince Huang is much more handsome..."

Zhou Ziyun rolled her eyes and moved on from them.

As she listened, the topic of conversation seemed to all tread on the same path, that of the four geniuses from each of the four king sects. They were Prince Huang, Huang Yaoying from the Huang Family; Deng Lun, the Gentle Scholar, from the Lotus Tower; Little Devil Tang Liang from the House of Armament, and Brilliant Blue Ming Yuqi from the Eastern Light Clan.

These four seemed to be the best candidates to win the title of Dao Genius. The other participants were from a variety of branch sects and local sects that were affiliated with the four king sects in one way or another. Although they were not had, none of them seemed to hold any confidence in winning or even competing against those four. In fact, most were here merely in hopes of getting to know those four and perhaps establishing some kind of relationship.

Suddenly, there was a loud roar from the surrounding trees that were packed to the limit. The ground shook and the air filled with raucous energy. The cause became apparent as a tall young man walked into the clearing. He was adorned with rich golden robes that shined as he walked. His inky black hair was sleek and long. Atop his head was a golden jewel-encrusted ornament that exuded supreme nobility. His silhouette was perfect, with broad shoulders and ideal features.

"Prince Huang!"

"It's Prince Huang!"

"Waaaaa!"

The shouting became incoherent as if everyone had suddenly seen a god descend from the sky. And there was good reason for it.

Zhou Ziyun found it difficult to describe the person except for extremely suave and extremely handsome. She had seen many talented young masters and gifted princes after becoming Chen Wentian's disciple. But she had to admit that this Huang Yaoying far surpassed them all in terms of looks. In the same way that Long Yifei could be considered the most beautiful woman of the subcontinent, perhaps this person could be her counterpart for the male sex.

Such a man was a danger to women everywhere, young and old. He was a man who understood his power over women and used it to his full advantage. Those making the most noise among the crowd were obviously his female fans. They were almost rabid, emitting ear-splitting cries akin to beasts in heat than humans with conscious thought.

Zhou Ziyun savored this supreme handsomeness for a little longer before looking away. Her heart was calm and she did not feel attracted to him. After all, she was a taken woman, she had already promised

her whole life to her master. She was simply admiring that man's looks, like admiring a particularly splendid wild creature or a beautiful natural scenery.

Huang Yaoying, unaware someone was comparing him to a wild beast, strode along with an idle smile as if he owned the whole arena. He glanced left, then right, and finally found someone he recognized and walked towards them.

"Brother Deng Lun, congratulations on your recent breakthrough. I hope you received my gift."

Huang Yaoying's voice was not too deep but filled with strength and confidence. It made half of the audience swoon.

The target of his words was actually Deng Lun, the Gentle Scholar. Zhou Ziyun had heard of his name but did not realize that he was already here, sitting in an inconspicuous spot and taking notes in a small book.

Deng Lun closed his book and stood up. He had a slender build and was slightly shorter than Huang Yaoying. He was not as good-looking but still excellent and carried himself with a steady air. He stood his ground and there wasn't a hint of intimidation.

"Brother Huang Yaoying, your gift, I received it." He then lowered his voice and said something only Huang Yaoying could hear.

Huang Yaoying burst out laughing, a joyful and heroic laugh that made some of the female participants around him weak at the knees, "Just a jest! Just a jest. I always have Brother Deng Lun's best interests in mind. After all, unlike the rest of us, you are in a difficult situation. You have to strive to keep that woman satisfied and she is notorious for having peculiar tastes."

If Deng Lun was offended by those words, he did not show it. He kept his composure and his aura as a scholar, steadily holding a book at his side while twirling an ink brush in his other hand.

"Actually," Huang Yaoying continued, lowering his own voice slightly, "I heard that your master is still pining after that Immortal Blue Dragon, surnamed Chen something? Is this true?"

"The lord's name is Chen Wentian. He is actually here today in the stands so you should be more respectful." Deng Lun chided.

"Oh! That's right!" Huang Yaoying smiled widely and looked around, "One of his disciples is here, right? Why don't we ask them if the rumors are true or not."

Deng Lun ignored the joke but pointed with his ink brush, "Yes, her name is Zhou Ziyun. She's sitting over there."

With that, all the participants, and indeed the whole arena, seemed to suddenly turn as one and look in Zhou Ziyun's direction.

Chapter 626: Participants Convene (II)

The two young men headed toward Zhou Ziyun's direction. Many eyeballs followed their movement, many almost salivating at the combination of Huang Yaoying and Deng Lun. One was the epitome of manliness while the other exuded a calm and scholarly temperament. They were a perfect match and together, could satisfy the appetites of all women in the world.

Zhou Ziyun's expression narrowed as they stopped a few paces from her. The other participants had all stopped talking and were staring at the trio. The forested arena also seemed to have gone silent all of the sudden. She could feel their invisible pressure intensify, as many tens of thousands of women were fiercely glaring at her.

Her lips tightened into a slight frown. She was not usually the type to act narrow-minded or petty in front of strangers. That was more of Lin Qingcheng's style. However, it didn't mean that she was a pushover. As Chen Wentian's second disciple and the one largely in charge of the day-to-day operations of the sect, she was the boss, a true boss.

"Gentlemen, are you lost?" She asked.

Huang Yaoying's smile faltered ever so slightly before recovering, "You are Zhou Ziyun of Ten Thousand Flower Valley? Well met. Well met! I didn't think I would meet a disciple of the famous Immortal Blue Dragon at this Great Dao Preaching Event. A pleasant surprise, surely."

"Oh? I didn't know you are a fan of my master." She replied.

Huang Yaoying let out a burst of laughter, "Miss Zhou's joke is sharp and vigorous. Hahaha! I am not but actually; my brother Deng here is a tremendous fan of your master!"

Saying that, he slapped a palm on Deng Lun's shoulder and laughed some more.

Deng Lun didn't react strongly and merely brushed the hand off of his shoulder. He cast a light smile toward Zhou Ziyun and said, "Please don't misunderstand, Miss Zhou. I am not a fan of your master but I am a little fascinated by you."

"Me?" Zhou Ziyun said in surprise.

She looked this frail-looking scholar up and down again. He had on a simple outfit of a slightly peach color. It matched his demeanor; clean, reliable, and conservative. Although he couldn't be considered strikingly handsome, his features were pleasant to look at. There were also hints of mysterious qualities waiting to be discovered if only one was patient enough to get to know him.

She rubbed her chin absentmindedly. If she had to go by first impressions, she didn't really like Huang Yaoying but this Deng Lun was more suitable to her tastes. There was more to a person than their outward appearance and aura but if she had to choose, like she was choosing between two similar items at a vegetable market, she would definitely choose this scholar over the other one.

Deng Lun, unaware he was being compared to vegetables, inclined his head as a show of respect and said, "Miss Zhou Ziyun, the second disciple of Immortal Blue Dragon Chen Wentian. Not yet twenty-two years old and you have already reached the 8th Level of the Spirit Initiate Realm. By any measure, whether it is here in the Eastern Sanmu Metropolis or another land of great cultivation like the Martial Brilliance Continent, you would be considered a genius."

"Not yet twenty-two?" Huang Yaoying blurted out in surprise.

Those nearby that heard Deng Lun's words reacted with equal levels of surprise. It had to be said that the average age for cultivators at the upper levels of the Spirit Initiate Realm to be considered talented was the mid to upper twenties. For someone to be only twenty-one, it was difficult to believe. Even

Huang Yaoying, considered a top-level genius in the city, was already twenty-five even though his cultivation was equal to Zhou Ziyun.

Deng Lun ignored everything around him and continued, "That's not all. If it was merely your age, I would have only found you somewhat fascinating. Instead, the truth is even more astonishing. If the records are not wrong, you were still at the 5th Level of the Mind Focusing Realm during the Immortal Sect Competition that was held two years ago?"

"I suppose so?" Zhou Ziyun replied.

Deng Lun's eyes gleamed with an unknown emotion as he said, "And during the competition, there was an event that tested comprehension ability. In that event, you managed two breakthroughs in the span of one hour, completely shattering what people thought was possible, reaching the 7th Level of the Mind Focusing Realm at the age of only nineteen! Such a feat, I have never heard of it before or ever again!"

"What?"

"How is that possible?"

"Unreal!"

A few people jumped from their seats. Others were starting with open mouths. These fellow participants were not stupid and could comprehend why Deng Lun was so interested in this person. This Zhou Ziyun, this unassuming young lady was a true dark horse, someone who could potentially stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the four geniuses of the metropolis.

What did it mean to break through two levels during a test of one's comprehension?

Not everyone could come to the exact same conclusion but the gist was the same. This person was unnatural, definitely someone to watch out for!

Zhou Ziyun furrowed her brow and stared at Deng Lun. She thought about it and then asked, "Sir Deng, do you have a problem with me?"

This was a judgment she had come up with rather quickly. She felt that this person named Deng Lun acted calm and benign on the surface but hid many emotions beneath the surface. His gaze was deep and mysterious. She could only conclude that he was far more complicated than someone like Huang Yaoying who seemed to wear his emotions on the outside.

She tried to guess what kind of person he truly was. Her best guess was that it had something to do with his sect, the Lotus Tower.

It was known that all core members of the sect were men, handsome and talented men that were rarely found across the land. And if the rumors were true, all these men were members of Gong Liyun's harem. The sect operated less like a sect and more like a personal playground for a horny old granny.

She suppressed a smirk from imagining Deng Lun having to perform sexual acts on a wrinkled old monster like Gong Liyun. No wonder he was in such a bad mood. Anyone would be. It was only natural. Just the thought of it made her want to throw up. For a young man in his prime, regardless of what awesome benefits he received in return, it was still a tough life.

Even so, she still wasn't sure if he was a good person or a bad person so she decided on a wait-and-see approach.

"Do you... perhaps dislike me for some reason?" She probed.

Deng Lun's mouth twitched but he remained silent. It seemed that he was also contemplating various matters. And before he could respond, another voice joined the fray, ringing bright and vibrant through crowd noise.

"Sister Zhou, are these smelly men bothering you? I'll help you get rid of them!"

Chapter 627: A Spark

The woman that spoke up was short, really short. She might have only reached Zhou Ziyun's chin with shoes on. She looked like a child who was lost and had wandered into the field.

"Who..." Zhou Ziyun started to say but the crowd answered for her.

"It's her!"

"Little Devil Tang Liang!"

"Wow!"

"The rumors were true!"

It was indeed her, Little Devil Tang Liang, one of the four geniuses known across the city.

The story supposedly went like this. This Tang Liang was born with a birth defect that gave her a small stature. She had a direct lineage to the house master, Immortal Grand Spear Tian Yong, so she was still able to live a privileged life. But due to her physical limitations, her cultivation progress always fell behind her peers. If others gained two levels of cultivation, she would be lucky to gain one. Training sessions that were considered easy for others would leave her exhausted.

However, this Tang Liang was incredibly smart and was rumored to have a flawless memory. She could read ten thousand words in one go and recall everything without error. She could reproduce a painting just by seeing it once. She could comprehend martial arts moves in one afternoon that would take others weeks or even months.

It was through her mind and not her body that she managed to reach the 7th Level of the Spirit Initiate Realm at the age of twenty-five, putting her at the same level as the likes of Huang Yaoying and Deng Lun.

The pixie-like Tang Liang rushed over and pulled one of Zhou Ziyun's sleeves, "Sister Zhou, come, don't listen to those smelly kids."

Zhou Ziyun was taken aback and let herself be pulled along. This person reminded her of a mix between the twins, Su Xue and Su Yue, and Jasmine. Jasmine was even smaller than her and had a bigger attitude. It wasn't difficult to see why she got the nickname of Little Devil.

"Who are you calling smelly kids?" Huang Yaoying snapped back, "Little devil, don't talk big when you haven't even grown hair down there!"

"Rabbit bastard, you dare? I do have hair down there, I just shave! Do you want to check?"

Zhou Ziyun snorted with laughter. This little big sister talked like a gangster. It was difficult to imagine that such a person had one of the sharpest minds in the city.

"Miss Tang? Thank you for that but I don't think we have met before for you to refer to me as sister?" Zhou Ziyun asked.

Tang Liang waved her small hands nonchalantly, "My elder sister got to know several disciples from your sect, Sister Xu Lanyi and Sister Lin Qingcheng, during the Golden Feather Hunt. She was in charge of some events in the Old District, Executor Tang Xiang. Do you remember that name?"

"Ah, so it is Executor Tang Xiang's young sister, Sister Tang Liang. I hope you can offer my thanks to your Executor Tang for her assistance during that time and her hospitality." Zhou Ziyun said respectfully.

Out of the four king sects, the one that chose to be friendly with Ten Thousand Flower Valley was the House of Armament. They had made that intention clear during the Golden Feather Hunt. Whether there were any ulterior motives didn't matter right now since having better relations was better than having none.

"Sister Zhou is too polite. I have heard of all of Sister Zhou's feats. I am sure you will amaze everyone during the Dao preaching." Tang Liang said.

Zhou Ziyun shook her head, "I am still young and unlearned. There are so many things I do not know of. My achievements in various Daos are too shallow. How can I compete with Sister Tang Liang?"

"Hehe, don't worry, things aren't that complicated. Here, let me explain..."

The two sat down in a corner and Tang Liang described the preaching convention's format in more detail. She was a resident of the city so she had seen several in years past. Each time, there were multiple sessions based on a specific area of cultivation. And for each session, there were two distinct events.

The first one tested one's comprehension by allowing them to examine the secret art of a mortal sect. One lucky mortal sect would be chosen to offer up their complete secret art to be studied by the geniuses for a period of time. Then, everyone had an opportunity to point out flaws or offer suggestions in that secret art. Disciples of the mortal sect would be present to test out these theories, thus providing proof to conjecture.

The idea was that by testing a mortal Dao, it would not reveal any worthwhile secrets held by immortal sects. But with enough improvement, a mortal Dao could still transform into an immortal Dao. The world was endless and there were infinite ways to cultivate. One had to rely on their comprehension as well as creativity to progress toward the heavens.

The second event was for individual cultivators. Loose cultivators or ones from lowly mortal sects, they could get a chance to go onto the stage to present their abilities. The participants would be given an opportunity to offer pointers and give advice. This was less about the theoretical aspects of the Dao as with a secret art and more about practical application.

Each person was different, as different as flakes of snow and grains of sand. Each person's path toward the Great Dao was different from the next. This second event tested each participant's ability to be flexible and ability to apply their vast knowledge in the real world.

Zhou Ziyun nodded along as Tang Liang continued with stories from past conventions. She was already fully impressed and excited. What a Great Dao Preaching Convention! It was really wonderful. It was lucky that she could attend. She would have kicked herself if she had missed it. Everything here, including these events, exactly matched her interests.

She felt that cultivation held endless possibilities. Coming from a small place like River East City, she didn't have grand dreams of the Great Dao. She simply wanted to let her clan live prosperously. She simply wanted to support her master and not let him down or lose his favor. Although she competed with Lin Qingcheng in gaining levels quickly, there had been no real aim to her efforts. She simply didn't want to be left behind.

Everything had been for others; for her clan, for her master, for her sisters.

But now, before a hundred thousand souls at this Great Dao Preaching Convention, she felt the first spark of desire to reach the heavens for herself, to satisfy her thirst for knowledge.

Chapter 628: Falling Leaf Sword Dao

While Zhou Ziyun chatted with Little Devil Tang Liang, the rest of the participants of this morning's session of the Great Dao Preaching Convention arrived before the starting time. There were forty-two of them in total, all striving to provide their knowledge of cultivation and understanding of Dao. They were all youthful, in their twenties, and eager to display their talent.

The last of the four geniuses had made it as well. Brilliant Blue Ming Yuqi, she matched every bit of her reputation and even more. She was exceedingly beautiful and elegant, a queen among princesses. There was an aura about her, even though she was sitting down. It was as if she was blessed with a heavenly halo at birth.

Zhou Ziyun instantly disliked her. She wasn't usually the jealous type but she felt a sense of inferiority because the two of them had similar stature and figure. They carried themselves in the same way and gave others a familiar feeling. If one squinted from a distance, they could be confused as twins. But up close, the superior one was immediately obvious because Ming Yuqi had the face of a beauty capable of toppling whole provinces, perhaps even a subcontinent.

She was this generation's Long Yifei. Perhaps fewer people knew about her because she was still young and had not left her sect or the metropolis to make a name for herself. But at the age of twenty-four and already at the 8th Level of the Spirit Initiate Realm, she was well on her way.

After the commotion of Ming Yuqi's arrival, the competition formally began. An announcer utilizing a powerful voice modification art started hyping up the crowd for this morning's events. At the same time, each participant was given a booklet that contained the first test.

Zhou Ziyun opened to the first page. Everyone else did so as well in silence. Participants were not allowed to talk or help each other.

The booklet contained a sword art called the Falling Leaf Sword Dao. There was little chance of any of the participants having encountered it before. The art came from a province that was chosen at random.

And within that province, one was chosen at random from the countless mortal sects that populated the vast land.

Zhou Ziyun flipped through the booklet and tried to understand its contents. There were fifty or so pages of diagrams that depicted how one should carry out the ten sword stances and various offensive and defensive routines. There were also another fifty pages of meditative chants for one to cultivate their sword Dao.

In terms of depth, it was about average. In terms of strength, it was also about average. It was about as generic of a sword art as one could find. It was comparable to the Six Meridians Demon Blight sword style that she had concocted a while ago. If one said improving such a sword art like Fallen Leaf Sword Dao was difficult, then it would be a lie. However, if one said it was easy, then it would also be a lie. All in all, it was the perfect test for young cultivators and budding geniuses.

Zhou Ziyun glanced up and around at her competition. A few had relaxed expressions like her. Huang Yaoying and Ming Yuqi had already closed their booklets, fully confident in their abilities. Deng Lun was still studying seriously while the impish Tang Liang was drawing funny faces on the ground with her shoes, not taking this seriously at all.

The study period of half an hour ended. The crowd was still buzzing from the expert storytelling ability of the host. As the gong sounded, the participants all looked up as the arena roared in approval.

They all watched as ten sword cultivators arrived in the center of the meadow. They wore the same outfits and carried slender, long swords. They came from the Falling Leaf Sect, the one that created the sword style being examined.

The ten, a mix of men and women of a variety of ages formed a straight line and faced the participants. Their cultivations were also a mix that varied from the high Mind Focusing Realm levels to the lower Spirit Initiate Realm levels.

The oldest among them took a half step forward and spoke, "The Falling Leaf Sect thanks the Immortal Association and the Eastern Sanmu Metropolis for hosting this Great Dao Preaching Convention. We feel a thousand fortunes at the opportunity to present our sect's prime sword art. I hope we will not let these young geniuses down with our crude swordplay."

The bearded man then nodded to his compatriots and rejoined the line. All ten then drew their swords at the same time and formed the first stance.

"Hei!" With a unified shout, they began the demonstration.

Like a choreographed dance, polished steel blades flicked and twirled as they fought invisible enemies. After the first offensive routine, they immediately transitioned into a defensive one before moving on to the next stance.

These people were the elders and senior disciples of the sect. They had practiced the Falling Leaf Sword Dao to perfect, or what they thought it was. All ten had nearly identical movements. Only those at the Mind Focusing Realm lacked the sword energy of the rest but they still exuded ample sword intent.

Zhou Ziyun watched the display with great interest. Her eyes darted from one person to the next, catching every detail. She called upon her understanding of sword Dao, recalling spars she had with Wu Qianyu in the past and even Peng Lingxi recently. She melded her experiences and those of her sisters with what she was seeing before her.

She then added the text and diagrams of the Falling Leaf Sword Dao to the mix, creating a mighty swirl of knowledge in her mind. Mental energy surged through her. Time seemed to slow as images of countless swords appeared in her inner eye. Somehow, she fell into a state akin to a trance.

Eventually, the demonstration came to an end. The ten sword cultivators recovered their breath and bowed respectfully. After a few polite words, the announcer's voice came back with booming might.

"What a wonderful display of the sword. Now, ladies and gentlemen, cultivators of the metropolis and guests from the provinces, let's listen to these talented youths preach the Great Dao!" There was another round of cheering and applause before the host continued, "Now, who will be brave enough to be first? Will it be Prince Huang Yaoying or Brilliant Blue Ming Yuqi, two of the brightest the metropolis has to offer and future candidates to lead their sects? Or will it be Deng Lun, the Gentle Scholar, and Little Devil Tang Liang that will awe us with their impeccable minds? Let us find out now!"

Chapter 629: Preaching the Sword (I)

All attention fell upon the forty-two participants. They were all seated and no one jumped up immediately to take the lead. Some were contemplating while others were glancing at their

competition. A few seemed eager to answer but held themselves back with great difficulty. This was the first event of the first session and nobody wanted to make a fool out of themselves.

As for the four so-called geniuses, none of them showed any eagerness to be first. Huang Yaoying sat there with his arms crossed, a casual smile gracing his handsome face. He seemed unworried as if he was relaxing in a backyard garden instead of being in front of such a huge audience. Ming Yuqi wasn't so brazen in comparison. Instead, she sat serenely with her eyes closed in meditation as if she was bored.

The pair of Tang Liang and Deng Lun also struck an interesting contrast. The scholar was diligently reading from a scroll that was probably wholly unrelated to the current event while the devilish girl was busy whittling a small chunk of red-hued wood as if it was the most fascinating thing in the world. Both of them acted as if would rather be anywhere else.

Zhou Ziyun took all of this in with some level of amusement. She didn't think these geniuses would be so pretentious. But with a background of a wealthy and noble family, even if it was one that belonged to an insignificant trade city, she understood the importance of public spectacle, of putting on a good show. And for that, the geniuses had to let the dumber people go first. Only then would they be able to display the absolute gap that existed between them.

After a short pause, someone stepped up to the challenge and stood up.

That person was a short-statured young man with above-average features. He cupped his fists in a martial salute and spoke clearly, "Since nobody else wants to be the first one, then I will do it. Friends from the Falling Leaf Sect. This one is named Fu Huxin, disciple of the Red Forest Alliance which calls this Forest District our home. I will point out some flaws I see in your Falling Leaf Sword Dao and I hope you will not be offended."

The ten guests returned the greeting and indicated that they would be fine with anything that was thrown at them.

"Very good." Fu Huxin nodded and said, "Your Falling Leaf Sword Dao is a decent sword style in general. It has a large number of sword routines and forms applicable to many different situations. Cultivating this sword style creates a good foundation for those seeking the Dao of the sword."

He paused as his expression grew serious, "However, the limit of your sword is clear. It is too slow. In a battle between swords, regardless of technique or strength, the one who wins is often who is the fastest. An offensive sword can be broken with speed. A defensive sword can also be broken with speed. Even before seeing your performance, just by looking at your secret manual, I could tell that the moves within them had no emphasis on speed... My suggestion is this. Practice all of your moves at double the pace and see what happens. I predict that you won't be disappointed."

Fu Huxin finished and sat down. His preaching of the Dao of the sword was met with skeptical looks from the ten guests. It was one thing to increase one's speed a little. But double was asking too much of many cultivators.

The oldest of the bunch stepped forward once again and raised his sword, "Thank you, young prince. I will try it according to your idea."

He twirled his weapon and went into a combat stance. With a surge of spiritual energy, he launched into his well-practiced routine but at twice the ferocity. His sword became a faint blur as his body spun about the meadow. Occasional flashes of sword intent shot out from rapid attacks with much greater strength than before.

Zhou Ziyun watched with transformation with some trepidation. Speed was indeed the king. There was no falsehood in Fu Huxin's words. Speed was an integral part of the way of the sword. The only problem was stamina as increasing one's speed by one-fold would require a multiple-fold increase in exertion. However, the increase in power did not reach one-fold and was perhaps around half. She felt that speed wasn't the most optional way to improve this mortal sword art.

True to her analysis, the old man didn't last very long. He came to a stop, gasping for air. Sweat covered his face and his entire body was slightly wobbly. Speed was good but it wasn't good if the body could not keep up. freewebno(v)el

At this point, another participant stood up and strode to the center of the meadow. It was another young man with a much more confident expression. He began by immediately refuting Fu Huxin's advice previously, outlining the exact points Zhou Ziyun was thinking about with regards to speed, how it exerted too much energy for not enough return, how the Falling Leaf Sword Style could not be improved by much just with speed.

Instead of speed, this second person preached that the sword style lacked a powerful attack, a finishing blow that could be used against strong opponents. All the moves of the sword style were average in

strength had lacking killing power. After all, the way of the sword was one of killing, slaying enemies with one's sword, and forging a bloody path through the world.

Those words reminded Zhou Ziyun of the might of Dugu's Tenth Sword. That sword art had only a few moves but each one was supreme in effect and killing power. But that was something created by a sword saint, an untouchable genius of the immortal world.

One could talk about sword intent and killing power in front of such immortal sword Daos but in front of an ordinary, mortal sword style, such things were a little too much.

The old man from the Falling Leaf Sect thought the same. He accepted the preaching but couldn't do anything about it. He was just a normal cultivator in the mortal realms. He had no idea how to increase the killing power in his sword nor did he have any idea how to create an all-powerful attack out of nothing. Before today, as far as he knew, his Falling Leaf Sword Dao was his entire world.

The person that had stood up arrogantly sat back down with a red face. This preaching convention wasn't so simple that anyone could blabber nonsense and impress the crowd. Without proper analysis, many ideas would fall into the same trap as the first two. It wasn't enough to simply know about the theories behind the sword, they had to correctly apply it towards a specific sword style, not spout generic bullshit.

After this, a third person came forward and then a fourth.

All the while, Zhou Ziyun's mind was constantly working, analyzing, and deducing. She felt that she had a unique idea that could be viable but she wasn't sure. It had come to her all of the sudden like an epiphany. If she was with her master and her sisters, she would have blurted it out immediately. But in front of so many people and four touch competitors, she held back and decided to not say anything.

Chapter 630: Preaching the Sword (II)

Another young cultivator rose up to offer their knowledge. They were even less impressive than the first two and retreated with heads lowered. Preaching the Dao was not a simple matter. It was clear that even among the best of the best that the metropolis had to offer, it was a difficult challenge for those so young.

This was it meant to be a genius.

Everyone expected an old cultivation master with many decades of experience to be able to preach the Dao. Everyone expected an immortal who had traveled the world and seen unbelievable things to be able to guide others along the correct path. It was another thing entirely for young men and women who had not even reached the peak of the Spirit Initiate Realm. By average measures, everyone gathered in the meadow this morning was already talents that even immortal sects would fight over.

As the sixth participant sat back down with a disappointed expression, the preaching event fell into a lull. Nobody else wanted to immediately take the reins. Those not confident in their answers didn't want to go up and embarrass themselves. Others didn't stand because their ideas had already been presented by others.

Zhou Ziyun looked around and felt a small urge to go for it. Her answer was rather strange but she felt confident about it. The idea had suddenly come to her. She had thought about left to right and front to back. She felt that her deduction was the most accurate.

Her conjecture about the Falling Leaf Sword Dao was that it was weak because it had two glaring flaws. The first was that it was an incomplete sword art. In its current state, it had ten forms and eight movements in each form for a total of eighty-eight movements. It was a lot but it was still missing movements.

The movements were mostly cohesive but occasionally, there would be jarring pauses or irregular movements as if the pieces didn't quite fit together. It wasn't easy to spot these as pauses would only be for a split second or a slight imbalance in their movement which was corrected within a breath. Solving for the gaps, the natural conclusion was that there was something missing. This was what she had comprehended from the demonstration and from her own knowledge of the sword.

The second flaw was that the sword style had two creators and the two did not mesh together seamlessly. Around three-fourths of the movements were created by a far stronger person and were filled with precision, vigor, and power. The rest were made up by a second person trying to imitate the first, resulting in a sword style that felt disjointed and messy, a sword that had great style and showmanship but lacked some fundamentals such as speed, killing power, and most importantly, sword intent.

Zhou Ziyun sighed and leaned back in her seat. Although she was convinced of the result of her comprehension, she couldn't be totally sure. She was already satisfied to be able to thoroughly analyze this sword art. She didn't feel the need to stick her out on the chopping block.

Her master and their sect were already embroiled in several high-profile events. Their reputation could be considered infamous across the subcontinent. And especially in the metropolis, public opinion wasn't great. He was known as someone who stole disciples from other immortal sects and as someone who fled in the face of demons. He relied on a bunch of women from the Virtuous Order of Chunzhen and couldn't do anything for himself.

All of these were false but also secrets that could not be easily revealed. Thus, she decided that she wouldn't cause trouble this time around.

As Zhou Ziyun looked back up, a person finally stood up. There were a few gasps from fellow participants and a surging roar from the massive crowd. It was the Little Devil Tang Liang.

"Hmph, you guys are so useless. How much face have you lost for the metropolis already? I still have to live here, you know?" Her voice was sharp and her words were piercing. She glared at everyone before snorting again, "Rest of you can stay seated. I will take care of our guests and there won't be any need for any more garbage ideas."

Such arrogance, such bristling attitude, her reputation as the Little Devil was truly worth it.

But there were no complaints from her competitors or the crowd. They all waited for her to continue.

"Good! Listen closely, the problem with the Falling Leaf Sword Dao is very simple. The solution is also very simple. You won't believe it if I told you." Tang Liang paused and faced the senior of the Falling Leaf Sect. Her eyes gleamed like a predator and she smiled without smiling, "Your Falling Leaf Sword Dao cannot even be considered a proper sword art. It is bastardized version of another sword art and not a complete one at that. The idiot who stole the original sword art didn't even manage to grab the complete texts. And on top of it all, they added their own erroneous movements haphazardly until it became a worthless mortal sword art."

"Impossible! No! No!" The old man from the Falling Leaf Sect shouted, "Our sect founder created the Falling Leaf Sword Dao by himself and established our sect three hundred years ago! What you say is impossible!"

His outburst seemed genuine and nobody blamed him. Each cultivator would defend their sect and their master like this. If their honor and history were questioned, for some, it was akin to declaring war.

Tang Liang laughed harshly, "Those that doubt me can check the Central Association Library in the Sky District. I remember it from that one time I visited it about five years ago. You can look on the third floor, in the Blue Forest Room, aisle twenty-one, fifth column, and on the third shelf from the top. There will be a large book titled Records of the Grand Sword Historian. Its cover has a dark grey color like iron. Within, on page one hundred and eighty, it describes a sword style that originated from Immortal Autumn Leaf Liu Ye, a loose cultivator who was a senior member of the Eastern Sword Alliance sometime around three hundred and fifty years ago. It was called the Falling Leaf Sword Style."

She pointed a finger accusingly at the old man, "Your old founder must have encountered Immortal Liu at some point and gotten some pointers. Feeling that this was not enough, they stole most of the Falling Leaf Sword Style but they didn't even bother changing the name, only changing one word so that it became the Falling Leaf Sword Dao."

"That can't be true... that can't be..."

Tang Liang raised her hand as a shiny sword appeared, "You don't have to believe my words, you just have to keep your doggy eyes wide open and watch closely! This is the true Falling Leaf Sword Style!"