

Re: God of Formation.

#Chapter 81: Shaking the Soaring Cloud Region Once Again. - Read Re: God of Formation. Chapter 81: Shaking the Soaring Cloud Region Once Again.

Chapter 81: Shaking the Soaring Cloud Region Once Again.

It had been a day since Jun Wu unveiled the Array Plates. Now, everyone in the Mystic city and beyond was talking about it.

"How did he do it?"

"If you ask me, who am I going to ask?"

"The Array Plates are too magical."

"I heard all the top clans and forces had tried to get in touch with him."

"What do you expect? In the whole Soaring Cloud Region, Jun Wu is now the most popular person."

"You're right and this is without his clan influence."

Seated inside the taverns, all the people were discussing the newly created array plates by Jun Wu.

Inside the Array Formation Association Hall, the president and elders were staring at the six array plates on the table with wide eyes.

"This is incredible..." Elder Shen muttered, her voice filled with amazement.

"What I want to know is how it was even possible?" An old elder asked, his voice still in disbelief.

"What is even more ridiculous is the price. 1 gold coin while the highest is 5 gold coins. Wouldn't this make us useless?" Another elder asked.

No one responded. Everyone could feel the invisible pressure on their shoulders.

Many had relaxed since they became array masters. As long as they took a mission from the association each month, they wouldn't have to worry about wealth.

But now, the situation was changing quickly.

It wouldn't be long before many would not need their services any longer.

"President, you need to speak with him. He must control the amount of this thing he sells or else it would affect us." A pot-bellied elder couldn't help but complain.

"Do you think he will listen to us? He's a Jun, don't forget."

"I don't think we need to worry about that. Our main priority is to find out how to create our own array. Jun Wu has shown us another way of array formation. That should be our priority." Elder Kang said after thinking deeply.

Elder Shen looked at him from the corner of her eyes and smiled.

"Elder Kang is right. Right now, the association cannot fall behind. We need our own array plate diagram and technique." Elder Shen added.

Huh!

Everyone sucked in a cold breath. They knew this was the path forward but how could it be so easy to create array plates.

Moreover, few of them had only two to three array diagrams. How could they compete with Jun Wu who seemed to have an endless stream of array diagrams?

The President thought for a moment before he decided.

"Each of you should buy an array plate to study. This is our priority right now. We will suspend any mission. We must find the secret behind the array plates."

"Yes, president."

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"Vice dean, what should we do?" A man looked at the Mystic Path vice dean.

The introduction of array plates had changed how they perceived array formation.

Now, they needed to come up with the right method to handle the changing situation.

"Have our array formation professors research it. Before they find the secret, we need to equip all our offices with Sound Barrier Formations." The Vice Dean said seriously.

As an academy, the most important thing was to reduce sound from disturbing both the teachers and students.

Apart from that, there are many secrets that must not be leaked to the students. This had always been a headache to the teachers but now...

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Frostwind City.

The news of the groundbreaking array plates had reached the city.

When many heard the news, they did not believe it. As a city on par with the Mystic City, they boasted a lot of resources and commerce.

Inside Frostwind City, there were many powerful clans living there.

The Mei clan stood on top and beneath the Frostwind Academy.

"Are you saying with these array plates we no longer need array masters to set up array formations again?" The Mei clan master asked in a deep voice.

"Yes. We only need spirit stones. Although spirit stones are rare, we can still find them in the ruins." The man responded.

"Before we get ahead of ourselves, go to Mystic City and buy the array plates and let us test them."

Even without seeing with his eyes, he wouldn't believe it. How could such magic exist in this world?

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Frostwind Academy.

Inside a secluded courtyard at the heart of the academy. A cold detached girl was reading through an ancient book.

Her expression was cold like ice. She only creased her brow every now and then.

"Senior Sister," a tiny voice shouted from outside the courtyard.

"What?!" Mei Ling demanded in a cold voice.

"Senior Sister, I know you're in. There is a strange rumor spreading in the city. Can I enter and share the rumor with you?"

Mei Ling squinted for a moment. She hated to be disturbed when she was either cultivating or reading.

However, her reading had not yielded any result for the past few days, thus, she did not mind taking a break.

"Come in."

Creak!

A young girl between the ages of fifteen and sixteen came with a bright smile. Her eyes were wide and pure as she stared at Mei Ling.

"What rumor?" Mei Ling demanded. "Remember, if you speak any nonsense, you know what will happen?"

"Hahaha. Of course, I know what will happen." She shivered thinking about her last experience.

Quickly, she revealed all the rumors that were spreading throughout Frostwind City.

"Senior, do you think it is possible?" She asked, not believing the rumors.

How could mere metal plates create an array formation?

"Why can it not be true? There are many things in this world that we do not know." Mei Ling replied.

"Now, get out." She added.

"Senior sister... can't you..."

Feeling Mei Ling's deadly cold gaze, she shivered and rushed out of the courtyard as if she had stepped on her tail.

"Bad sister." She mused when she came out.

Inside the courtyard, Mei Ling looked at the horizon and muttered.

"How did he do it?"

Many did not know she was acquainted with Jun Wu and knew about his secret.

She knew he was a monster in array formation.

But this was on another level.

She shook her head and returned her gaze to the ancient book.

"I have been searching for a week now, why can't I find a clue?"

Chapter 82: Starting the Second Phase Of His Plan.

It had been three days since the Blazing Sun Pavilion was opened. Yet, the sensation brought by the Array Plates was not reducing.

In front of the Blazing Sun Pavilion, a crowd gathered waiting for the pavilion to open. Each day, when the pavilion opened its door, people would rush in to buy the array plates.

Each day, Jun Wu could only forge a hundred to two hundred array plates. Thus, anyone who wanted to buy the array plates would have to be quick.

Xinyue was seated on expensive chairs going through their previous sales. As Jun Wu had said, he placed her in charge of the pavilion.

Under the huge pressure, she could not sleep comfortably at night. Her thought was always on the pavilion's progress.

Am I doing it right?

Will the Young Master be disappointed in me when he sees my result?

Various thoughts flashed through her mind. Thus, every day, she pushed herself to the limit while reading various books on how to manage a pavilion.

As for Jun Wu, he was back at the mansion forging and helping Elder Peng to become a Grade-1 Blacksmith.

Now that Jun Wu had a pavilion, the demand for array plates was high, providing a better chance for Elder Peng to increase his craft.

However, his peaceful life was gone. Since he revealed the array plates, many clans had visited, hoping to form a partnership with him.

At first, he attended to the first few but he noticed they were not ready to give up.

He made an announcement that he was going into seclusion.

Clang! Clang!

While Jun Wu and Elder Peng were working seriously to meet today's array plate quota, they heard Zhang Wei's voice.

"Young Master, he's here."

When Jun Wu heard this, he stopped his work and looked at Elder Peng.

"Elder Peng, can you handle it?" he asked.

"Haha. This old man can handle it. I'm closer than you think, Young Master." Elder Peng responded confidently.

Jun Wu nodded and left the forge.

Inside the main hall, a boy not older than sixteen years old sat with a pensive expression.

He lived in the slum and today, a powerful martial artist came and brought him to this massive mansion.

Inwardly, he was trembling.

Suddenly, the door to the main building was pushed open and a young handsome man entered.

Looking at the boy who was only a few years younger than him, he widened his eyes when he discovered he knew him.

Everyone knew him.

He was the rising star in Mystic City.

His talent in Array Formation was claimed to be the best in this generation. Also, he was the creator of the now famous Array Plates.

Subconsciously, he rose to his feet.

Looking at the unkempt boy, Jun Wu did not show any change in his expression.

He took his seat and stared at him intently before he spoke.

"Don't be nervous. I don't mean any harm."

The boy swallowed the lump in his throat and took his seat with trembling legs.

"What's your name?"

"Young Master, I'm Wei Jiang."

"Wei Jiang, I believe you know who I am? Right?" Jun Wu asked, looking at him with an approachable smile.

"Yes, Young Master. You're Young Master Wu of the Blazing Sun Pavilion." Wei Jiang responded without raising his head.

"That's right. I have a few questions for you. I hope you will give me an honest answer." Jun Wu asked, his voice soothing and calm.

"Young Master, please ask me anything and I will respond truthfully." Wei Jiang responded quickly, afraid to give the wrong impression.

"I know you will answer me honestly." Jun Wu's smile deepened.

"I heard you are the leader of a gang. Is that true?"

Hmm!

'Am I in trouble?' A streak of panic flashed across Wei Jiang's face.

He was the leader of some smaller kids. The situation in the slum was bad and without banding together they wouldn't survive.

Who would have thought because he was trying to help all the smaller children he would be in trouble.

He fell on his knee and pleaded. "Young Master, please forgive me. I'll go and disband the gang immediately. Please don't kill me."

Jun Wu was confused. When did he mention he was going to kill him?

"Relax. You did nothing wrong, why would I kill you?"

Hmm?

Wei Jiang was confused and raised his head to look at Jun Wu's face. Looking at his face, he found Jun Wu was not lying, he had no intention of harming him.

A sigh of relief escaped from his lips and he wiped off the bead of sweat from his forehead.

"Thank you, Young Master, for sparing my life." He added.

Jun Wu shook his head and motioned for him to take his seat.

"Wei Jiang, I want you and your gang to work for me." Jun Wu went straight to the point.

Hmm?

Wei Jiang wore a look of confusion. What could mere beggars help him with?

"You don't need to worry how you are going to help. Just know you're more useful than you know." Jun Wu's voice was calm but he could feel the seriousness in it.

He nodded and listened attentively.

"If you work for me, I will provide you with food, clothes, cultivation techniques, and you can earn enough money to buy a house like this."

"And you don't have to worry about doing evil things. So, are you ready to work for me?"

"Yes, Young Master." Wei Jiang stood up and responded firmly.

He would be a fool to reject such a heaven-sent opportunity.

"Good. You will gather as many young people in the city to join your gang in secret. Remember, secret. I don't want others to know about it. Do you understand?"

"Young Master, I understand. You can trust me on that." Wei Jiang responded confidently.

"Take this fifty silver coins to buy anything for you and your gang members."

"Ha!" Wei Jiang widened his eyes in disbelief.

This was the highest money he ever received in his life. With shaky hands, he held the money, tears hung at the corner of his eyes.

"Thank you, Young Master." He said from the depth of his heart.

"Go now. Don't forget, no one must know about this meeting. And remember, you must not use this money to buy clothes. Your beggar's rags are your uniform."

Wei Jiang nodded and left the main hall. However, when he reached the exit, he stopped and looked at Jun Wu.

"Young Master, how will I contact you if I'm done with the preparation?"

On hearing this question, a bright smile appeared on Jun Wu's face.

He had deliberately left that part out, testing Wei Jiang's cleverness.

"Don't worry, when it is time, my men will contact you."

With that, he departed.

Left alone in the main hall, Jun Wu rose to his feet and muttered.

"Finally, it has begun."

Chapter 83: The Information Gathering Beggars.

It had been three days since Wei Jian met Jun Wu and the situation inside the slum had changed.

To the untrained eyes, the slum was still the same but those living in the slum could see the minute changes.

Kids not older than 15 years moved in twos and threes, their faces filled with shock and confusion.

"Is it true?" a thin girl whispered, her voice trembling as she looked at her partner.

Her clothes, once bright, had long faded to dull rags, hanging loosely over her frail frame.

Her skin was pale, stretched thin over sharp bones, and her tangled hair clung to her face.

A sour, nauseating smell clung to her body—yet in the slums, such odors no longer turned heads.

The alleys reeked of rot, smoke, and unwashed bodies. Trash piled high like walls, and stagnant water glistened with filth under the sun.

No one cared; survival left no room for pride. Parents barely had food for their starving children, so who could afford the luxury of dignity?

"I don't know but I heard many of my friends talking about it seriously. I guess it must be true." Her partner, a boy who looked no different from her, responded.

Passing through a dirty alley and along the narrow path between the shacks, the two kids arrived before a small mud building at the end of the alley.

Standing in front of the small mud building were two burly kids with fierce expressions.

"Are you here to see the boss?" One of them asked, trying very hard to look intimidating.

"Yes." The boy responded.

"You know the rules. Go in."

The two kids looked at each other and parted the faded curtain, arriving inside the mud house.

The mud house was empty but a narrow passage led to the backyard.

Arriving at the backyard, they saw many kids like them staring at a boy standing on the podium.

Wei Jian looked at the new arrivals with a welcoming smile.

"Please join us."

The two kids nodded and joined the curious group.

Clearing his throat, Wei Jian continued his speech.

"As I was saying, I've found a heaven-sent opportunity for us. We don't have to live in poverty anymore. As long as we work hard and are faithful to the master, we won't have to worry about food again."

"Also, I know many of you dream of becoming Martial Artists. This is a chance to fulfill your dream."

"So are you going to join and work for a better future or remain in this dirty, filthy slum for the rest of your life?"

"Boss, we will follow as long as we have something to eat." A boy said in excitement.

He had eaten nothing since yesterday, and the rich young master did not even give him some leftovers.

Right now, his only thought was to eat.

Wei Jian smiled and looked at the others.

"Boss Jian, before I agree, can we know this work?" A boy not older than fourteen asked. Though lean like a skeleton, his eyes were sharp and filled with wisdom.

"The work is simple. When you're out begging, you must listen to rumors and news. If you find any important news, you must tell me immediately." Wei Jian responded with a wide smile.

When they were told of their mission, they couldn't believe their ears.

They were beggars; listening to rumors and news was second to breathing.

Ah!

All the kids were stunned.

"Boss Jian, are you telling the truth?" A girl asked with wide eyes.

"Yes. Do you think I'll lie to you?"

"No! No..."

The kids shook their heads, their eyes blazing with excitement.

Quickly, the kids joined Wei Jian's beggar gang. With such an easy job, how could they refuse?

With everyone joining his gang, Wei Jian grinned from ear to ear. He had completed the first job given to him by Jun Wu.

Now, his gang had over one hundred kids spread throughout the city.

"Now, everyone line up." He announced.

Confused, the kids did as he said.

From an old black box, Wei Jian began giving the kids two copper coins.

"What! Free money!"

The kids were stunned. In their world, there was nothing like a free gift.

"Don't be surprised, every week you will receive two to five copper coins. And if you bring important news, you can receive ten to twenty copper coins."

"Ah! Boss Jian, we will work hard and bring important news."

The kids were pumped as they couldn't wait to rush out into the street to find any important news.

As Wei Jian distributed the money, he did not forget to warn the kids.

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At Jun Wu's mansion, Elder Zhang Wei gave a full report of Wei Jian's progress.

"What a sharp kid. I guess we did not find the wrong one." He smiled.

"What about the hideout I asked you to find?" He asked.

This was important for the plan. Since he opened the pavilion, he could feel his enemies already growing impatient.

Thus, he needed to speed his actions.

"Young Master, I've already found one and I believe you will like it." Zhang Wei responded.

"Where?"

"Outside the city. There is a natural cave outside the city with many tunnels that lead to different places. One of the tunnels is under the city."

"It is under a tavern, and as long as we buy the tavern, we can easily make a path that connects to the tunnel."

Jun Wu nodded, pleased with the location of the hideout. Still, he couldn't help but ask.

"What about the tunnel outside? Can people use it to find the hideout?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"That's even better." Jun Wu smiled. "With the various tunnels, people can hide out without depending on one path."

"If things go south, there will be many paths for escape. Don't you think that is great?"

Zhang Wei creased his brow and nodded but still asked.

"Young Master, what about security?"

Jun Wu looked at him and asked. "Have you forgotten who I am? A simple protective formation will solve the problem."

When Zhang Wei heard, he smiled. How could he forget what a freak his Young Master was in array formation?

Now, he couldn't wait to see how everything would turn out.

Chapter 84: A Nice Time With Xinyue.

The sun was setting in the west, casting a golden hue over the Mystic City. Seated under the willow tree, Jun Wu and Xinyue were having a nice time.

"Young Master, those that wanted to meet will not stop bothering me." Xinyue complained.

"Hahaha. This is what being a manager is." Jun Wu laughed.

Xinyue rolled her eyes but the faint smile on her cherry lips spoke of how happy she was.

A month ago, she was nothing, living in the slum, but now she managed one of the rising pavilions in the city.

Many who once ignored her now bowed their heads and spoke with reverence.

The sneers and dismissive glances of yesterday had vanished, replaced by forced smiles and careful respect.

And all of it was because of him—this boy, no older than her, who stood calmly at her side as though the world itself bent around his presence.

She found her gaze drifting to Jun Wu's profile, and her heart stuttered, sending waves of butterflies through her chest. Her cheeks burned crimson, her breath uneven.

If this is a dream, she thought, may I never awaken.

Jun Wu glanced at her, just for a moment, and their eyes met. She looked away too quickly, yet her chest ached with a sweet, unspoken longing.

She knew something was happening to her. A feeling she could not describe and worse, she did not hate this feeling.

Staring at her with a knowing smile, Jun Wu asked.

"What is it?" His voice soft, brushing against her like wind.

"Nothing..." Xinyue replied in a low voice like a whisper.

She held the hem of her robe tightly as she listened to her fast-beating heartbeat.

Slowly, Jun Wu rose to his feet and stretched out his hand.

"Walk with me."

Looking at his firm soft palm, Xinyue sucked in a cold breath. She could not control her joy and nervousness.

'Are we going to walk hand in hand?'

'He's going to hold my hand.'

Just thinking of it made her want to faint from joy. She tried not to express her emotion but her crimson cheeks gave her away.

Slowly, she reached out her hand and held Jun Wu's hand.

The softness and firmness made her feel nothing in this world could take her away from him. For the first time, she felt a sense of security she had never felt before.

Hand in hand, the two walked calmly inside the courtyard under the setting sun.

In the distance, watching the couple, Zhang Wei and Elder Peng wore a knowing smile.

"I never expected the Young Master would be this charming." Zhang Wei said with a light chuckle.

"What do you expect? With everything the Young Master has achieved, is there any girl that could reject him?" Elder Peng responded.

"Master, I'm done." Hao Ran announced, coming out of the forge.

However, Elder Peng did not respond as his gaze was locked on the beautiful couple in the distance.

"Ah! My poor soul. Watching them makes me want to get a woman." He whispered.

Zhang Wei looked at him and rolled his eyes. 'Who doesn't know your wives and children are those hammers and iron ore.'

Watching his sister acting shyly beside Jun Wu, Hao Ran was grinning from ear to ear.

"Hahaha. Finally, my sister is taken."

"Shut up! What do you know." Elder Peng berated. "Go back to the forge and swing the hammer 100—no, 1000 times."

"Ah!" Hao Ran widened his eyes.

Why? What did I say wrong? He wanted to question his master but staring at the cold deadly eyes that said more words and your punishment would increase.

Reluctantly, he dragged his feet back to the forge while muttering some incomprehensible words.

"Elder Peng, why are you punishing the innocent kid? If you're jealous of the Young Master, I can help you find a beautiful woman."

"Get lost! What do you know."

While the two bantered, a soft knock came from the entrance gate. The two exchanged subtle glances before Zhang Wei headed toward the gate.

Outside the mansion gate, a man and a woman stood calmly, waiting for the door to be opened.

Creak!

The door was pushed open and Zhang Wei came out. Looking at the visitors, he creased his brow.

"What brings you here, President and Elder Shen?" He asked curiously.

It was almost night. Why were the two array masters at their mansion?

"Hahaha. Sorry for coming unannounced. We'd like to have a word with the Young Master." The Array Association President responded with a light smile.

"Alright, come in."

Seated alone inside the main hall, the President and Elder Shen waited quietly.

After a few seconds, Jun Wu entered the main hall.

"What do I owe the visit?" He said softly and took the main seat.

"Hahaha. Young Master, you're now the talk of the city. Everyone wants to meet you, how could this old man not use his advantage?" The Association President said with thick skin.

"You're right but I wonder what brings you here at this time of the day." Jun Wu was still curious.

They could have waited till tomorrow. Instead, they sneaked in like thieves.

Listening to him, Elder Shen and the Association President exchanged subtle glances.

"Young Master, do you know how important the array plates are to the world?" The President asked.

Jun Wu nodded, waiting for him to continue.

"You might know, there are many hidden clans in the Soaring Cloud that are slightly weaker than your Jun clan. With the importance of the array plates, I don't think they care about your Jun clan." The President said seriously.

Jun Wu listened but did not respond. He was yet to understand what all this had to do with him or the Array Formation Association.

Watching the quiet Jun Wu, the President sighed and forced himself to continue.

"Young Master, instead of bearing the hatred and greed of all the clans, why don't you share the secret with us and we could split the profit?"

Jun Wu's expression did not change; he stared intently at them.

'So, this is all they amount to. Greed.'

Chapter 85: Misunderstanding

Under Jun Wu's piercing gaze, the Array President and Elder Shen shifted uncomfortably. They had merely wanted to try their luck, hoping to glimpse the secret behind his mysterious methods.

If Jun Wu chose to share, they would be overjoyed. If he refused, they had no intention of forcing the matter.

"So, your aim is to discover my secret?" Jun Wu asked coldly, his eyes narrowing.

Elder Shen shook her head firmly. "Young Master, you misunderstand. We are not here for that. The President was only concerned for your safety. We have lived long enough to witness how dark and twisted the human heart can be. We only wish to ensure no harm comes to you."

Jun Wu sneered, his lips curling upward with disdain. "So, by 'looking out for me,' you mean you want me to hand my secret to you on a platter of gold. Is that it?"

"Young Master, you have it wrong," Elder Shen quickly corrected, her voice calm but sincere. "Our intention is to serve as a shield for you. But if you don't want our protection, we will never force you."

Jun Wu studied her. He was a monster in array formation—why would such figures lower themselves to snatch secrets?

Besides, they had both seen the array plates. Forget understanding the plates—just the forging method alone was enough of a headache.

None of the Blacksmith Association's masters could even begin to comprehend the techniques and materials that had gone into creating them.

"Elder Shen speaks the truth," the President added, his aged face serious.

"We are not here to steal from you. Our original thought was to protect you, but if you can withstand the pressure of those greedy vultures yourself, then our worries are unfounded."

Jun Wu tapped the armrest of his chair rhythmically; his sharp gaze fixed on the two elders as though trying to decipher their true intent.

Until now, he had already counted them among his enemies. Yet, hearing their words, perhaps he had been too quick to jump to conclusions.

"So you're telling me that if I hand over the secret of the array plates to you, those people will stop targeting me?"

The President thought for a moment before replying.

"That should be the case... though who can truly predict the hearts of greedy men? Still, with the prestige of the Array Formation Association backing you, many of them would be forced to give us face."

Jun Wu nodded slowly. Now he understood their position. They wished to act as a shield, drawing attention away from him while ensuring he could continue working in peace.

If he desired a stable life, free of powerful enemies, perhaps he should accept.

But Jun Wu's path was not one of peace. His road was destined to be paved with blood.

"Thank you for your consideration," he said at last. "If the pressure becomes unbearable, I will consider your proposal. However..." His gaze sharpened, cold as a blade. "If I ever discover you colluding with those people, you will forever be my eternal enemies."

The President met his eyes without flinching. "Young Master, you need not worry. I have long lost interest in worldly power. Though I am curious about the secrets of the array plates, my curiosity is only for research—to further my understanding of array formation, nothing more."

"The President is right," Elder Shen added sincerely. "Some of us only wish to pursue our path to its limit. As for status, fame, and the squabbles of the outside world—we have little care for such things."

Jun Wu studied them carefully, then nodded. His admiration for the two elders increased slightly. Perhaps, just perhaps, they were different from the others.

Almost against his own instincts, he found himself wanting to give them a hint.

"President," he asked suddenly, "why don't you strive to become a Master?"

"Hmm?"

Both Elder Shen and the President were taken aback. They exchanged glances, then the President answered with a faint smile.

"I am not a warrior. Why should I pursue higher realms when cultivation brings no direct benefit to my profession?"

"Moreover," he continued, "I consider it a waste of time. The hours spent cultivating could be better invested in studying ancient formations. That is where my passion lies."

These words came from the depths of his heart. His Peak First-Rated Martial Warrior Realm cultivation was maintained only for convenience and respect in society. If he could study arrays without cultivating at all, he would have abandoned martial practice entirely.

Jun Wu sighed and shook his head. Now he understood why so many professions failed to progress through the ages.

It wasn't only a matter of missing teachers or incomplete inheritances. Misconceptions like this had become roadblocks, chains shackling them in place.

Watching Jun Wu shake his head, Elder Shen and the President exchanged uneasy glances.

"Young Master, is there something wrong with what I said?" the President asked carefully, his brows furrowing. He did not treat Jun Wu as a child but as a peer, someone from whom he might learn.

Thus, he was unafraid to ask directly.

Elder Shen, too, leaned forward, curiosity burning in her eyes.

"Let us speak of formation first," Jun Wu said slowly, his tone calm yet profound.

"Array formation is the act of comprehending the secrets of heaven and earth through natural ley lines, symbols, and inscribed patterns. Am I correct?"

The two nodded at once. That was indeed the fundamental definition of array formation.

"Then let me ask you this—can an ordinary mortal comprehend the secrets of heaven and earth?"

"No, that's impossible!" the President replied instinctively, shaking his head.

"Exactly," Jun Wu said, his eyes gleaming. "Ordinary people cannot decipher heaven and earth. To comprehend such secrets, one must draw closer to them. And how do we draw closer?"

He paused, letting the weight of his words settle.

"Through cultivation. Only by cultivating can we step nearer to the essence of heaven and earth. Now imagine—if we cease cultivating, what happens?"

The President and Elder Shen's eyes widened in sudden realization.

This was the first time they had heard such a perspective. What they had always viewed as a hindrance—cultivation—was in truth the foundation of their progress.

If they stopped walking forward on the path of martial cultivation, how could they possibly move forward in their professions?

"Young Master..." The President stood abruptly and gave Jun Wu a deep bow, his voice trembling. "Thank you for this guidance."

Elder Shen followed, bowing deeply, her face filled with newfound respect. From just a few simple words, Jun Wu had opened a door they had never known existed.

"It is nothing," Jun Wu said with a faint smile. "I simply saw your sincerity in pursuing the path of array formation and decided to offer a little help."

The President straightened, his expression still solemn. "Young Master, then... Do you know how I might step into the realm of Master?"

Chapter 86: Jaw Dropping Secrets

"Young Master, do you know how I can become a Master?" the President asked in a solemn voice.

Jun Wu was momentarily stunned when he heard the question. For a moment, he almost doubted his ears.

How could the president of such a powerful Association not know how to break through into the Master Realm?

The shock in his heart was genuine.

He had always believed that the president, as the head of a massive Array Formation Association, with their wide network and countless connections across the region, would surely know such a fundamental truth.

Yet reality slapped him otherwise—he was wrong.

Watching the disbelief on Jun Wu's youthful face, the President could only sigh, his aged shoulders sinking slightly as though burdened with invisible weights.

Beside him, Elder Shen was equally astonished. She never imagined that their dignified association, which stood tall in the Soaring Cloud Region, lacked such a crucial piece of knowledge.

For her, this moment was an eye-opener.

Previously, she had believed their association to be one of the leading powers of the region, capable of matching the influence of powerful forces.

But now she realized how naïve her thoughts had been. The truth was far harsher than the polished reputation they flaunted.

The Soaring Cloud Region was far more complicated, its hidden depths more unfathomable than she had ever conceived.

The President cleared his throat, his expression turning grave. "You must understand, Young Master. Before the entrance to ancient ruins became common, access to them was tightly controlled by the aristocratic clans."

His tone dropped lower, almost like a history lesson etched into his memory.

"They were the first to discover secrets about martial arts, monopolizing every shred of information. Only decades later, when ruins began appearing more frequently and could no longer be hidden, did ordinary people finally gain the privilege to embark on the path of cultivation."

He let out a faint breath and continued.

"As for supporting professions like array formations, alchemy, and blacksmithing—it was even worse. For many years after the ruins appeared, these professions struggled without a complete inheritance. People were groping in the dark, piecing fragments together. Progress was painfully slow, stagnant even."

"You can imagine," he said with bitterness in his eyes, "that after so many years passed, we were still crawling forward. That was the reason all the supporting profession masters decided to create associations—unions where knowledge could be preserved, shared, and protected."

Jun Wu and Elder Shen listened attentively. Neither of them dared interrupt. This was the kind of information that one could not find in history books nor hear in tavern rumors.

The President paused, lifted the porcelain teacup before him, and took a slow sip, as if moistening his throat before unveiling heavier truths.

"Although the Association has influence," he went on, "that influence is limited. We can sway weaker clans, and perhaps some intermediate ones, but as for the truly hidden clans? Many of them only tolerate us because they owe us favors."

His eyes darkened. "And for those who owe us nothing—we are insignificant. To your Jun clan, or to the Gong clan, we are nothing but a gathering of loose warriors. Our titles mean nothing in their eyes."

He let the weight of his words settle before asking softly, "For something as vital as the secret of the Master Realm... do you truly think they would share it with us?"

Jun Wu's lips pressed into a thin line, but before he could answer, the President continued.

"Do you know how many Masters exist in the Soaring Cloud Region?" he asked.

He did not wait for a reply.

"Less than fifty," he said with a bitter chuckle. "Do you know the population of our region? Over one billion souls. Yet less than fifty Masters. As for realms beyond the Master Realm, I cannot give you an exact figure, but I assure you, it would not exceed twenty."

The words crashed down like a mountain, and then the conclusion came, heavy and irrefutable.

"All this only means one thing. The higher path is extraordinarily difficult, and it is strictly controlled by the great powers."

Silence.

The air within the hall grew heavy. Jun Wu and Elder Shen sat frozen, digesting every word. This was the kind of knowledge they could never have imagined, the kind that tore apart preconceived illusions.

Jun Wu finally exhaled softly. Now he understood the importance of the strange mural he had obtained from the Tier-2 ruins.

After a few moments, he cleared his throat and spoke slowly, "President, thank you for this enlightenment. I never considered the situation in such a broad manner. Now I understand what you mean about those foxes guarding the higher path."

The President merely smiled faintly, choosing not to answer.

"Still," Jun Wu continued, narrowing his eyes, "why do you think I know how one can become a Master?"

The President shook his head, his face sincere. "I don't know. I only asked because you are from the Jun clan. If you had not corrected our misconception about cultivation earlier, I would never have dared ask such a question."

Jun Wu nodded thoughtfully. "I don't know the entire secret either, but this much I do know..."

Both the President and Elder Shen straightened their backs instantly, their hearts thumping. This was not just knowledge—it could be one of the deepest secrets in the region.

"From Third-Rated Martial Warrior up to First-Rated Martial Warrior, all we are doing is cultivating the body. We are still mortals."

His voice was calm, but every word struck like thunder.

"To step forward, one must break free from the shackles of the mortal body."

Gasps echoed in the chamber. Both the President and Elder Shen widened their eyes in disbelief.

Jun Wu's tone did not waver. He had expected this reaction.

"To become a Master means to shatter the mortal shackles. Masters can live close to two hundred years, as long as they are not killed. Their lifespan alone is proof they are no longer ordinary. Furthermore, they are attuned to the very secrets of heaven and earth."

"A single Master," he said with conviction, "can slaughter one hundred Peak Stage First-Rated Martial Artists without breaking a sweat. They are simply not comparable. And as for supporting profession Masters..."

"They go even further. Their minds are sharper, their spirits tempered by the energy of heaven and earth itself. This is why Spirit Stones are rare, why they are so tightly controlled. Those above the mortal realm cultivate spiritual energy into their bodies, and Spirit Stones are the purest source of that energy."

His words ended like a soft breeze, but their weight was immense. "That is all I know. I hope it helps, even if just a little."

The President and Elder Shen sat in stunned silence, their thoughts racing. What they had just learned overturned their entire worldview.

After several heartbeats, the President finally stood up. He bowed deeply, his aged back bending with reverence.

"Young Master, I do not know how to thank you. Please, if you need anything in the future, do not hesitate to seek me."

Jun Wu only smiled faintly. "President, you don't have to be so serious. This is common knowledge in my clan."

Of course, that was a lie. Everything he knew about the Master Realm and beyond came from the ancient soul whose memories now resided within him. But he could not tell them that.

"Young Master, even if it is common in your clan, for us ordinary folk, this is a treasure beyond price," Elder Shen said sincerely from the side.

Jun Wu's expression grew serious. "I understand. But you must also know this secret cannot be spread recklessly."

The President placed his hand on his chest and spoke firmly. "You don't have to worry. No third person will ever hear of this from us."

He hesitated for a moment before adding slowly, "Young Master, I know your situation within your clan is... less than favorable. But perhaps—I have a solution."

Chapter 87: Movement In The Dark

In an unknown location, a middle-aged man sat on his throne and regarded the three figures standing before him.

They wore black and red robes; deep hoods shadowed their faces.

Each radiated a cold, intimidating aura that seemed to press against the chamber walls.

The man on the throne watched them with small, sharp eyes—patient, calculating, and unquickened by surprise.

"Have you discovered anything?" the middle-aged man asked in a low, frightening voice.

Those below him trembled.

One stepped forward and answered, voice steady but deferential.

"We tracked their movements and reached a conclusion. The array plates are manufactured behind the pavilion."

"And the blacksmith?" the lord demanded. "Have you found his home or any of his family?"

"No," the speaker replied, bowing without lifting his head. "We discovered five female attendants who work in the pavilion. Our men have located their residences and await your orders."

The man on the throne fell silent, as if turning possibilities over in his mind.

He tapped the armrest with slow, practiced fingers—a measured rhythm like a metronome.

"Kidnap them all," he said finally. "Extract whatever they know. Do not delay." He let the words hang a moment before adding,

"We are not the only ones hunting the secret of the array plates. Be careful not to be discovered by others."

"Remember—failure is not an option."

The three bowed deeply and withdrew.

Once the chamber emptied, the middle-aged man sat alone with the soft echo of their footsteps.

He murmured to himself, a cold whisper: "The world is changing. We must possess that secret if we are to survive."

His mind turned over maps, alliances, and debts; the plates were not merely tools, they were leverage—currency in a time when ruins sprouted like rot and the ground itself became a hazard.

...

Inside the Xie clan mansion, the clan master sat on the main seat and faced the assembled elders.

The great hall smelled faintly of incense and iron; banners hung like watchful sentinels, and the elders' faces were lined with age, worry, and a practical hunger.

"We need the secret of the array plates now more than ever," declared an elder, his voice resonant throughout the hall.

"Ruins are appearing in every corner of the region. Possessing array plates would give our people extra security—an edge we cannot afford to lack."

Heads nodded in agreement. Everyone present understood the plates' value: compact, portable, and quick to set up, they required no array master to operate once properly forged.

To possess the technique was to control safety in a world that had lately grown dangerous.

For any clan in the Soaring Cloud Region, such an advantage could mean the difference between survival and catastrophe.

Purchasing plates from the Blazing Sun Pavilion was not a realistic option. Demand had outstripped supply.

Greed would prevent them from freely buying from the pavilion. Each clan preferred to hoard the secret, to keep the balance of power skewed in their favor.

"So we must take the secret by other means," the Xie master concluded.

"I suggest we kidnap the pavilion's manager," a female elder proposed crisply. "That is our easiest link."

"Jun Wu rarely leaves his mansion," she continued. "If we capture his manager, he will be forced to hand the secret to us."

At the mention of Jun Wu's name, a hush fell over the hall. Jun Wu's reputation had spread in whispers: his array plates crafts of uncommon ability.

He preferred solitude, and his work spoke for him—so much so that others had begun to measure the balance of power by his inventions.

To confront Jun Wu directly would be risky; to take those closest to him offered a quieter, more pragmatic route.

"All right," the Xie clan master decided. "Send our men to capture them without leaving a trace."

"Let us see if he can retain his arrogance when his beloved manager is in our hands."

There was a personal edge to his command. The Xie master still burned with humiliation—an expectation of deference had been rebuked, and he tasted the keen flavor of being dismissed.

His earlier attempt to use Elder Kai had collapsed; the old man had proved useless against the new, intricately woven plates.

Not only Elder Kai, but many of the region's supposed masters found themselves confused by designs that did not follow tradition.

"Jun Wu will pay a heavy price for looking down on me," the Xie master murmured through clenched teeth.

...

At the Gong aristocratic clan, the elders sat with solemn expressions. They were recovering from a recent defeat at the hands of the Jun aristocrat clan's experts.

"How long are you going to sit in silence?" the Gong Matriarch snapped. The victory had slipped from their hands and her temper had not cooled.

"Matriach," one elder began, voice controlled but strained, "we must not allow this to continue. We underestimated Jun Wu. We have to stop him."

"Then propose a solution!" the Matriarch demanded. "Idle talk gets us nowhere."

One elder swallowed and continued in a trembling voice. "I propose we pressure him through an elder from the Frostwind Academy. If an authoritative figure confronts him, the strain might force him to reveal the secret behind the array plates."

The Matriarch's frosty gaze did not ease. "How would that be possible? Have you forgotten that Mystic City is under the jurisdiction of the Mystic Path Academy?"

"It is simple," the elder replied, gaining confidence. "We stage an array challenge under the pretense of tradition. In a public contest, he may be compelled—or tempted—to demonstrate his method."

"Do you think he's foolish enough to expose such a deep secret in a contest?" another elder countered.

"We do not rely on his foolishness," the first elder said. "We rely on opportunity. If we present something of equal value, we create temptation."

"And if he refuses?" an old female elder asked. "Do we simply let him continue growing unchecked?"

"Then we snuff out his advantages," suggested another elder. "Without access to iron ore, he cannot forge plates."

"Then, what about his clan? They also controlled a large iron mine far greater than us." An elder asked.

"His clan will not support him. Right now, they're planning to take him out before his father returns." The Matriarch announced.

Chapter 88: Jun Wu Is Going To Hold An Open Lecture.

The following days, news from the Array Association spread like wildfire throughout Mystic City.

Everywhere people gathered—in taverns, in tea houses, even on the crowded streets—the same topic dominated conversations.

"Can you believe it?" a thin old man asked, leaning across the table toward his companion as he nursed a cup of warm wine.

"Of course I can believe it," his friend replied confidently. "Everyone has seen Young Master Wu's mastery in array formation. Why should it be strange for him to host an open lecture? In fact, it's long overdue."

"Nonsense! What do you know?" A tall, burly man from the next table snorted in disdain, his voice loud enough for the entire tavern to hear.

He leaned back with his arms crossed, lips curled into a sneer. "Just because the brat was lucky enough to create the array plates, he thinks himself worthy to lecture others. How dare he, when there are masters older than his father among the Array Association!"

"You're right," another man quickly agreed, nodding vigorously. "This is arrogance, plain and simple. His pride knows no bounds."

But a younger voice from the corner countered sharply. "Arrogance or not, the truth remains the same—Jun Wu is the first and only array master who can forge array plates. And when the city's defensive formation was breached, where were your so-called old masters? Wasn't it Young Master Wu who saved us that day?"

The tavern erupted into argument.

Voices overlapped, wine cups clattered on tables, and the crowd split into two heated factions: those who believed Jun Wu's lecture was a gift to the region, and those who believed it was a slight against the old traditions and senior masters.

Inside the Yuan Clan mansion, however, the mood was far calmer. In the grand meeting hall, elders sat in neat rows, their expressions thoughtful but not hostile.

"I don't know why Young Master Jun suddenly decided to conduct an open lecture," one elder remarked with a faint smile, "but this is good news. Perhaps we might even learn a thing or two from him."

"Indeed," another elder agreed.

"His understanding of arrays is far beyond ours. I don't know who taught him, but his mastery already surpasses many of the older generation. He even demonstrates knowledge of types of formations most of us have never heard of."

Unlike the skeptics in the city, the Yuan Clan—one of the leading array clans of the Soaring Cloud Region—readily supported Jun Wu's decision.

Some of their elders had worked with him personally and knew the vast difference between his creations and those of ordinary array masters.

His plates were not the result of guesswork or tinkering; his craft flowed with a clarity and precision that made it seem as natural as breathing.

"But does anyone know why he chose to hold this lecture so suddenly?" a female elder asked, her calm question breaking the excited chatter.

The hall fell silent.

The elders exchanged glances, each hoping another could provide an answer, but no one spoke.

At last the clan matriarch's voice rang out. "We don't need to know his reasons. What matters is the opportunity. This lecture is a chance for all of us, and we must not miss it."

Her words settled the matter. The elders nodded in unison, their anticipation growing.

Meanwhile, within Mystic Path Academy, the news stirred even greater unrest.

In the courtyards, students gathered in twos and threes, whispering and speculating.

"Do you think the academy will participate in the lecture?" one asked anxiously.

"I'm not sure," another replied. "But I heard many students are strongly against it."

"Really?"

"Yes. Just earlier, I saw a group marching toward the Array Formation Hall."

"Quick, let's go see!"

When they arrived, a large crowd of students had already filled the Array Formation building, their voices loud with indignation.

"Professor, you must put a stop to this nonsense!" a female student demanded, her cheeks flushed with anger.

"How can Jun Wu hold an open lecture? What gives him the right? It's blatant disrespect toward our academy!"

"Agreed!" a handsome male student added. "You must convince the Vice Dean to cancel it immediately."

But before the professor could respond, a cold, steady voice cut through the noise.

"Why should the Vice Dean cancel the lecture?"

The crowd turned toward the speaker.

A girl stood near the back, arms folded across her chest. She was strikingly beautiful, her expression calm but icy.

Her name was Jiang Yawen, a second-year student known for her sharp tongue and sharper talent.

The crowd faltered briefly, but soon one of the indignant students jabbed a finger toward her.

"Why shouldn't he cancel it? Jun Wu's actions disrespect the academy!" she shouted, her voice trembling with emotion.

At once, others rallied to her side, their voices rising in agreement.

To them, only the academy's professors had the right to host such lectures; allowing an outsider to do so undermined their institution's prestige.

But Jiang Yawen remained unmoved, her gaze cutting through them like a blade.

"Is there any law that forbids him from holding a lecture?" she asked icily.

"He is a recognized member of the Array Association. If the Association itself has no objections, why should you?"

Her words struck like daggers. The students faltered, their outrage caught in their throats. Many opened their mouths to reply but no argument came forth.

Seeing their silence, Jiang Yawen sneered. "If you're jealous of his talent and his achievements, then I advise you to stop making noise in the academy halls. Go back to your rooms and cultivate, instead of shaming yourselves here."

Without waiting for a response, she turned and walked away with calm, unhurried steps, her figure graceful even in retreat.

The students watched her leave, stunned and speechless.

The professor, too, stood frozen for a moment.

Then, with a weary sigh, he retreated into the hall. He and his colleagues had no intention of stopping Jun Wu.

In truth, they were frantically researching the secret behind the array plates themselves, hoping for even the smallest breakthrough.

If these students understood how desperately their professors wished for enlightenment, they would grasp the vast gulf between themselves and Jun Wu.

Cancel the open lecture?

Who would dare?

Not unless they wished to become enemies of every array master in the Soaring Cloud Region.

Besides, the Vice Dean himself was quietly supporting Jun Wu from behind the scenes.

Chapter 89: Moving In The Shadow.

With each passing day, the news of Jun Wu's open lecture spread like a blazing fire across the land.

What had begun as a single announcement in Mystic City had now traveled far beyond its borders.

From great cities and towns alike, martial artists and merchants began packing their belongings, setting out on long journeys toward Mystic City.

Curiosity fueled some, anticipation drove others. Every road leading to Mystic City was becoming crowded with travelers.

And it wasn't only the common folk who were stirred.

Array Masters from across the Soaring Cloud Region were also making their way toward the city. Not all came with goodwill.

Some were dissatisfied, convinced that Jun Wu's fame was undeserved.

Others looked forward to questioning him, determined to expose what they saw as the arrogance of youth.

The more sinister among them harbored darker intentions: they dreamed of crushing his rising reputation, and by trampling him, using his downfall as a stepping stone to elevate their own fame.

What should have been a simple open lecture was quickly transforming into a sensation.

In fact, it was unprecedented.

In the history of the Soaring Cloud Region, never had there been an open lecture of this kind.

Academies, of course, held lectures for their students, but they were private, structured, and controlled.

None had dared to invite every master, novice and veteran alike; to gather in one place and exchange knowledge.

To host such an event required immense confidence.

The people whispered that even seasoned masters with decades of experience would hesitate to place themselves before so many peers.

And yet, an eighteen-year-old boy was about to set a record that none before him had dared to attempt.

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Inside Frostwind Academy, the atmosphere was heavy with discussion.

Professors and teachers gathered in small groups of twos and threes, speaking in hushed voices as they debated the upcoming lecture.

"Are you going to attend?" a female teacher asked her colleague as they walked across the courtyard.

"Of course I'm going," her companion replied without hesitation. "I've heard countless rumors about this so-called one-in-a-generation prodigy. I want to see him with my own eyes, to know whether the rumors are true or mere exaggeration."

"You're right," the woman murmured, her tone thoughtful. "I heard many professors and teachers are already preparing to depart for Mystic City today." She paused, glancing sidelong at her companion.

"Should we travel together?" Her voice dropped, barely louder than a whisper.

The man chuckled. "Sure, why not? I wouldn't mind the company."

Elsewhere, inside the Vice Dean's office, the atmosphere was far less casual.

The Vice Dean sat behind her desk, her sharp gaze fixed on the middle-aged man standing before her.

"You want to challenge him?" she asked, her tone cold and detached, bordering on indifference.

"Yes," the man replied, nodding firmly. "I've been preparing for this for some time. The open lecture provides the perfect avenue."

This man was not just anyone. He was the head of Frostwind Academy's Array Formation Hall.

Within the academy, his influence over the study of formations was unmatched.

The Vice Dean's gaze did not waver.

"Why?"

The man straightened his back. "Because knowledge must be exchanged. If he is truly acclaimed as the best, then he is the one I should challenge. Only through such confrontation can both sides grow." His voice was neutral, revealing nothing of the ambition that glimmered in his eyes.

"This is a rare opportunity for me—and for him," he continued.

"I cannot miss it. Vice Dean, please grant me permission."

"No problem," she said with a slight nod, her expression still cool and unreadable.

"Thank you. I won't disappoint you."

He bowed and left the office.

The Vice Dean watched his retreating back for a long moment.

Then, narrowing her eyes, she muttered, "Whatever you're planning, I only hope it doesn't bring harm to the academy." With that, she returned to her work.

....

Meanwhile, in Mystic City itself, preparations of a different kind were underway.

On the edge of a bustling main street stood an ordinary tavern, one few customers bothered to patronize.

But yesterday, it had quietly changed hands. The new owner's identity remained unknown.

Inside, heavy renovation was already underway.

Workers moved about briskly, hammering and carrying planks.

But the true transformation was not in the public rooms—it was happening below.

In the underground cellar, a hidden tunnel had been uncovered and fortified.

The tunnel stretched far beneath the city, winding outward until it emerged hundreds of meters away in the wilderness.

There, a large cave system opened into the earth.

Dozens of branching tunnels twisted into the dark, connecting hidden chambers.

At the heart of this cavern, construction was progressing steadily.

Workers toiled day and night, carving walls, erecting supports, and shaping the cave into living quarters and meeting rooms.

It was exhausting work, but important.

In one of the dimly lit tunnels, Jun Wu himself could be found, crouched low as he set up array formations.

He was constructing a protective formation around the base.

Ever since this place had been discovered, he had devoted himself to weaving layers of defense.

For the organization he envisioned, he knew security was paramount.

"Young Master, you should take a rest," Zhang Wei called, emerging from another passage.

Without raising his head, Jun Wu replied calmly, "I'm almost finished. What about Mao Yuan? Has he returned?"

"Yes," Zhang Wei answered. "He's back. The men have settled into their quarters. Their training begins tomorrow."

"Good." Jun Wu brushed the dust from his robes and finally straightened. His eyes gleamed with determination. "Remember, this step is crucial for everything we're building."

"How long do you think it will take them to be ready?" he asked.

Zhang Wei shook his head. "I can't say for certain. Most of them are old third-rate martial artists, with only a few at the early stage of second-rate."

Jun Wu nodded thoughtfully. "That's not a problem. This is only the beginning. As we grow, stronger experts will come to us."

Zhang Wei hesitated, then asked the question that had weighed on his mind for weeks. "But, Young Master... can you at least tell me what exactly we are building here?"

Jun Wu's lips curved into a faint smile. "That's a secret."

As always, his answer was wrapped in mystery.

Zhang Wei sighed in frustration.

He and Mao Yuan had asked countless times, but the young master never revealed his plans.

Still, loyalty bound them, and so they followed without question.

"Don't overthink it," Jun Wu said as he turned to leave the tunnel. "Come, let's return."

And just like that, he walked away, his figure fading into the darkness, leaving only the flicker of formation lines glowing faintly on the stone walls.

Chapter 90: Elder Peng Become a Grade-1 Blacksmith (Mortal Grade)

Returning to the mansion, Jun Wu was greeted with a sight that made him pause in surprise.

Elder Peng was dancing back and forth like a restless child, his wide grin stretching from ear to ear.

His steps were clumsy, yet his excitement was unmistakable.

Standing a little distance away, Mao Yun, Hao Ran, and Xinyue watched with faint smiles tugging at their lips.

Their joy was quiet, but it was genuine. They all knew how much this moment meant to the old man.

Hao Ran, watching his master spin and hop with unrestrained happiness, nearly burst into laughter.

Elder Peng looked no different from a boy being handed his very first candle during a festival.

Yet Hao Ran quickly covered his mouth, forcing the sound back into his throat.

If he caught Hao Ran laughing, he would not hesitate to order him to swing the forging hammer a thousand times without pause.

That single punishment alone would leave his arms aching and swollen for days.

Suppressing the laugh, Hao Ran folded his hands behind his back and stood stiff.

"What is going on?" Jun Wu asked at last, curiosity flickering across his face.

"Hahahaha! Young Master, you've returned!" Elder Peng exclaimed.

He rushed forward, stopping a few feet away before dramatically presenting something with both hands.

In his grasp gleamed a dagger.

Jun Wu raised his brows, accepting the weapon. At once, the courtyard fell into silence.

Everyone held their breath, waiting for his judgment.

Even without touching it, Jun Wu could already tell, this was no ordinary tool. This was a genuine **Mortal Grade Weapon**.

He turned the dagger in his hands. The weight was balanced, the edge sharp enough to gleam even in dim light.

The runes carved into its surface were neat and orderly, evidence of painstaking effort and precision.

"Congratulations," Jun Wu said at last, a smile brightening his face.

"Hahahaha! Finally!" Elder Peng's laughter cracked as tears welled at the corners of his eyes.

His shoulders trembled.

For nearly half his life, he had labored day and night, burning his body and spirit for this single goal— to forge a Mortal Grade weapon with his own hands.

And now, at last, he has succeeded.

He raised his head, meeting Jun Wu's gaze. His voice trembled as he spoke from the depths of his heart.

"Thank you, Young Master, for giving this old man the chance to fulfill his lifelong dream."

"It's nothing," Jun Wu replied gently, patting him on the shoulder. "This is just the beginning. But remember...do not neglect your cultivation. If you wish to become a true Spirit Grade Blacksmith, you must forge your path both in craft and in strength."

"Yes! Yes, of course!" Elder Peng nodded vigorously.

"Good," Jun Wu continued with a grin. "Then tell me, are you going to celebrate this great achievement, or not?"

"Ah! How could I forget?" Elder Peng smacked his forehead; his face filled with mock despair. "Of course, we must celebrate this! The heavens would mock me otherwise!"

His joy was so great that he dashed from the mansion at once, declaring that he would bring back the finest wine the city had to offer.

Today was the happiest day of his life. How could he not mark it properly?

The group watched his retreating back, laughter spilling from their lips.

True to his word, Elder Peng returned minutes later with large jars of fragrant wine balanced on his shoulders.

At the same time, Xinyue hurried into the kitchen, determined to prepare the finest dishes she could manage.

Before long, the courtyard was alive with warmth and noise. Plates of steaming food covered the tables, and jars of rich wine stood uncorked.

Everyone gathered together, feasting and drinking in celebration of Elder Peng's triumph.

The atmosphere was light and carefree, filled with laughter. Even Mao Yun and Zhang Wei who rarely drank due to the nature of their duties allowed themselves a few jars in honor of the old blacksmith.

Hao Ran, however, was less fortunate. Every time he tried to sneak a cup of wine, Xinyue's sharp eyes caught him.

She smacked his hand away, scolding him like an overbearing sister.

The others roared with laughter at the siblings' playful antics.

Jun Wu himself did not hold back; he lifted several cups of wine, letting the burn of the drink loosen his chest.

This was one of those rare occasions where they could lower their guard and simply enjoy peace.

Beside him, Xinyue's cheeks soon turned crimson, her composure faltering after only a few sips.

"What's happened to your face?" Jun Wu teased, leaning slightly toward her. "Are you alright?"

"Ah! Young Master..." Xinyue squeaked, ducking her head in embarrassment.

"Hahaha! Don't tell me this is your first time tasting wine?"

"Young Master... you're bullying me..." she whispered, her voice soft as a feather.

Her heart raced wildly, pounding so hard she feared everyone might hear it.

Sitting so close to Jun Wu, she couldn't calm herself no matter how hard she tried.

"That's the truth, Young Master!" Hao Ran interrupted loudly, eager to expose her.

"My sister is so stingy she wouldn't even buy the cheapest tea in the market. We only ever drink plain warm water at home. Tsk!"

"Hahaha! Is that so?" Jun Wu laughed heartily.

Xinyue's blush deepened, her face red as ripe tomatoes.

She wanted nothing more than for the ground to swallow her whole.

She glared daggers at her younger brother, but Hao Ran only smirked, tearing into a piece of chicken rib with relish.

'This little rascal...' she seethed silently. She swore to herself that once this night ended, she would teach him a lesson he would never forget.

The group continued laughing and teasing one another until, suddenly, a light knock echoed from the entrance gate.

The cheerful atmosphere still.

Mao Yun and Zhang Wei exchanged subtle glances before rising from their seats.

Without a word, they left the courtyard to investigate.

Jun Wu frowned slightly. Who could be visiting at this hour?

For weeks, he had done everything possible to avoid entanglement with the various clans.

Many had approached under the guise of business, but their true intentions were always the same—marriage alliances, power games, endless schemes.

He had no interest in being caught in their webs.

Moments later, Mao Yun returned. His face was grave.

"Young Master," he said solemnly, "we have visitors. They are elders from the clan."