

Unfathomable 131

Chapter 131

Zhang Liu and his companions got taken aback by the way the youth was speaking. He was clearly being condescending towards their Clan name.

‘Small Clan? Guess if you compare it to the Huo Clan then that’s true.’

Zhang Liu thought to himself while trying not to get offended, but he had to fight against his natural disposition of wanting to jump in and give the Huo Clan member a good smack. His friends that he was with were slightly less composed than him, picking up on the tone he was speaking in, knowing well that by calling them a small clan he was saying that they were weak.

“What did you say?”

“Are you looking for a fight?”

None of these people fought together in the secret ground, so they only heard tales about the other clan from others. So there was no real sense of comradery there.

“Hah, talk is cheap, if you want something just face me!”

The man moved his right hand outwards pointing it towards the blue robe wearing group of young cultivators and beckoned them over by moving his palm towards himself. The Zhang Clan members were furious, veins started bulging on their foreheads as they just wanted to jump in and fight.

“Oh what is this, the contestant is challenging someone from the audience? Are they brave enough to take him up on the offer? Or will they cower in shame!”

The veins on their foreheads started bulging, even more, the moment the loud announcer’s voice boomed through the whole arena. Now it would be quite difficult to back off, they would suffer public humiliation, loss to their own face and would bring shame to the clan.

“Brothers, let me handle this! I’ll show him how the Zhang Clan warriors fight!”

One of the members from the group stepped out, the youth had sharp sword-shaped eyebrows and looked to be in his twenties. This was a talented youth from the group, even though he wasn’t the strongest he wasn’t the weakest either. He looked at Huo Kong that was just standing there beckoning them over, looking like he was without any care in the world.

Zhang Liu was the de facto leader of the group, being the strongest and also having the best backing out of the group. Liu remembered the words of the elders of not causing trouble, but he also recalled the bit about not backing down from a fight and not causing any loss to face if it was a manageable opponent.

“Do you feel confident, brother?”

The sharp eyebrow youth smacked his chest which produced quite the loud thumping sound. He then moved over to one of the arena officials to show him his mark and that he was eligible for the fight.

“Oh, think we have a new challenger!”

“Will this young man be able to douse the burning inferno, or will he also get burned by the blaze!”

The announcer was overdoing it a bit with the dramatic introductions and comments, but he was there to pump up the people in the audience. This looked to be working as people cheered, a path was made for the blue robe wearing youth from the Zhang Clan, people shouting out as they got their bets ready.

“Give us a good show, eyebrows!”

“Burn him alive!”

“You can do it, blue robe bushy-eyebrow brother!”

The young man tipped over to the side as he heard people commenting on his eyebrows. This was his most prominent trait though, besides them giving him a sharp look they had quite the volume to them as well.

“Shut up, who you calling bushy-eyebrows!”

He shook his fist at the audience that just laughed at him in response. He then jumped into the arena to face the red-haired youth, his aura getting releases, blue spiritual energy covering his robe. Huo Kong just shrugged and held his fists out in a what looked to be a traditional boxing stance with both his fists up in the air with his forearms blocking the view of his face.

The announcer shouted out which prompted the match to start, the two fighters eyeballed each other from a distance probably trying to get a feel of their opponent.

“Oh, didn’t know the Zhang Clan studied the Dao of waiting, such a powerful technique~”

Huo Kong chuckled while taunting his opponent, who in response got red in the face and started showing his inexperience. He shouted out and charged forward, his foundation pillars vibrated and pushed their Qi into his legs. It looked as if a puddle of water formed under him and instead of running forward it looked as if he was sliding on the water that was getting produced on the arena floor. He glided forward like a figure skater just moving his legs slightly while gaining momentum.

The red-haired opponent gathered his Qi into his hands which produced a red glow, some strange patterns started appearing on his forearms that looked like they were made from fire. Huo Kong was going for a similar approach as with his previous opponent, first, rile him up and make him do the first attack, then he would block it and inject his fire type Qi into their body while defending. This was quite the simple battle plan, but worked quite well against easily irritable opponents with a chip on their shoulder.

The moment came soon, the Zhang Clan youth circled around Huo Kong while using his peculiar water gliding movement technique. He was gaining momentum, for his next attack. Soon he took his chance and jumped doing a nicely timed flying kick at his opponent’s head and aiming at it from the back. His foot was shrouded in a watery energy that molded itself into a sharp blade, the youth charged forward while shouting.

“Take this Tidal Wave Scythe!”

Suddenly the scythe bubbled and increased in size, the foot was coming in an arch from the side and if Hou Kong didn't dodge his head would be flying into the air and probably killing the haughty youth in one strike.

"Hoho? Not half bad... but!"

Before the kick could slice the red-haired youth's neck he moved back, not to the side but behind. He leaned back while not bending his knees making look as if he was defying gravity and doing a peculiar popular dance move back from earth. The water scythe swung past him while producing quite the strong aftershock, which got dispersed by the shielding formation that the arena was set up with. This was a standard shielding formation that had to be installed to protect the audience members from any stray Qi attacks, that might come their way.

The kick swung past Huo Kong that was now open for a counter, he had quite the good opportunity to deliver a blow. He moved both his hands back as if he was going to do a handstand. While using his momentum from the previous back-dodge he tried landing a kick that was clad in fire energy at his enemy that just missed with the big swing that he did with his foot.

Luckily momentum wasn't only something the Huo clan youth was knowledgeable about, the bushy-eyebrow brother managed to spin around in time to receive the fire kick with his hands dispursing the attack somehow. He didn't go unscathed though, he noticed that the enemy was trying to inject his fire Qi into him to disturb his cultivation. He quickly activated his pillars that worked tirelessly to eject the invading spiritual energy.

"Eh?"

Huo Kong was surprised, he expected to get a clean hit in but only managed to send the other youth flying backward. He knew that his attack was somehow effective as the opponent with the sword eyebrows started sweating from the Qi expenditure.

"So you weren't a total pushover... but this doesn't change anything!"

The raid haired youth went on the offensive, his muscles bulged slightly as some kind of strange runic looking patterns appeared over his body. You could hear an explosion as he flew forward, this was his movement technique that produced small controlled explosions under his feet to produce short bursts of speed.

After the first exchange, the crowd cheered out in unison. the Zhang Clan member that were at the side were hoping that their brother would show this rude cultivator that they shouldn't be trifled with. But gasped out after seeing his water scythe miss the mark and him getting blown back several meters from the counter.

"Oh, that was a nice try but the blazing youth doesn't look impressed!"

The two continued clashing with each other, it looked like they were equally matched at the start but soon enough you could see the water cultivator getting pushed back. His robe started catching fire, his water Qi having trouble in dousing the spirit flames that were far more difficult to deal with than regular flames.

Still Huo Kong was surprised, he had a reason for calling out these Zhang Clan cultivators and it was a personal one. He hoped to show a one-sided massacre against this man in front of him, but his opponent was showing quite a high amount of skill. He was still confident in his victory, but he wanted to show the large gap in their techniques and aptitude. Instead the no-name sword-shaped eyebrow opponent showed everyone that he could keep up with him.

“Don’t get cocky, this ends now!”

Suddenly the fire cultivator’s power spiked, did he activate some kind of special skill or was he hiding some reserves, no one was sure. The abrupt change of pace surprised the Zhang Clan youth, that received a heavy hit to his stomach. He was unable to see the trajectory of the fist coming for him and was blown back by the strike by several meters.

The red-haired man cocked his fist back, red energy gathered and it looked as many tiny fireflies were quickly getting absorbed into the palm of his hand. The Zhang Clan youth knew that he was about to get hit by something big, so he used a defensive technique that produced a water shield. The previous strike took the wind out of his lungs, so this was the most he could do.

“Take this, Inferno Dragon Strike!”

The moment the fist got thrown forward a surge of fire Qi flew towards the defending cultivator, the fire started taking shape and turned into a dragon. The dragon head gave out a roar that sounded more like an explosion. On the other side, the Zhang Clan member had both his hands stretched out and he was getting surrounded by a thick bubble of water.

BOOM

Another explosion occurred, steam and wind getting kicked up while the vision of the audience members got blocked.

“Oh no, is this it? Can the watery youth defend against this strike?”

Everyone scooted closer to the arena trying to see if the fight was over, or if there would be some kind of comeback. After the smoke cleared, they could see the red-haired youth looking at something. At the spot, he was looking at stood the Zhang Clan youth, his bare chest was showing and his hair was in a mess. He was still standing and breathing though, looking as if he managed to power through this attack.

“Huff...huff... huff...”

He was panting hard, one of his eyes closed as he burned through quite a lot of his spiritual energy to defend against this attack. His opponent was clearly annoyed that he couldn’t end the fight right there, he even had to push a lot of his spiritual energy into that attack but the annoying opponent was still standing there.

“Oh, he is still standing! What a twist!”

The people cheered out, shouting out the nickname of eyebrows-brother in unison. The youth in question was far too tired to grimace about his stupid nickname.

‘That’s enough, don’t risk injury brother, leave him to me.’

The Zhang Clan youth twitched and then looked to the audience and there his clan members were standing. Zhang Liu sent his voice out next to his brother so that he would hear his message. He was feeling a bit apprehensive but he felt that he wouldn't come out unscathed if he battled this youth further.

Huo Kong looked at his opponent that stood up straight and clasped his hands.

"This is my defeat."

He didn't really wait for his opponent to reply and just turned around to leave, the audience getting a bit rowdy at the surrender but they knew that this water cultivator's spiritual reserves were all used up and he couldn't really continue the fight.

"Hmph!"

Huo Kong spit to the side and looked at the youth leave, then watched as another member from that group stepped forward. The youth was different in the way as his hair was mostly snow-white, with a patch of obsidian in the front.

"Guess it's not so easy to bully our Zhang Clan, now is it?"

"I'll be your next opponent!"

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Huo Kong looked at his next opponent, the youth was staring at him, just standing there. He had to agree that he had miscalculated slightly and that these cultivators weren't pushovers. Still, he didn't feel like he would lose even if each one fought him one after another.

"Oh, the friend of the previous contender wants to avenge him! Let's give him a round of applause!"

Zhang Liu's eyebrows twitched as everyone looked in his direction, he could feel people's eyes on him. This wasn't anything new as he was used to getting watched by his own clan members, still, he didn't like the feeling of getting gawked at.

"What a handsome young man..."

"Think he has a partner? He looks to be quite young too... probably some young master..."

"What beautiful snow-white hair!"

You could hear the women talking, Zhang Liu was quite the handsome young lad. Alas he wasn't concerned with things like that, finding cultivation far more important than a relationship. He tried to ignore the swarm of drooling groupies that he had just earned and looked at Huo Kong.

"Why don't you recover some of your stamina before we fight, you will need it..."

Zhang Liu spoke out while looking at the red-haired youth, who in response scoffed at him.

"What? Do you think I need to recover to fight someone like you? You're being overconfident for a little Zhang Clan whelp!"

Liu wasn't trying to be patronizing, he just wanted a fair fight and was trying to even the odds. On the other hand, Huo Kong thought that he would lose face if he were to take a recovery pill. He only fought a meager opponent and thought that he didn't require any outside help.

"I'll show you your place!"

Zhang Liu's face twitched, finally getting slightly angry. He didn't know why this man was so condescending towards his Zhang Clan, but he would show his opponent that they shouldn't be trifled with.

"Fine... show me my place then..."

He squinted and jumped into the ring while leaving an afterimage behind, the display of speed making Huo Kong back off slightly, startled by the display.

'He's fast...'

He instantly realized that this new opponent was far stronger than the ones he faced in the previous bouts. He wasn't discouraged though, he just gathered his energies. His whole body glowed in a bright red hue as the same runes appeared all over it.

"Oh what's this, the opponent seems to be very fast! Oh, is that lightning? Does the challenger cultivate in the Dao of the storms?"

This was an honest mistake, the Dao of the storms was an actual cultivation method in this world. It was a lesser Dao, lightning was just a side product of it though and not the main component.

Zhang Liu was already in the foundation establishment realm and in its middle stage. While being in the Qi condensation realm he couldn't really utilize the more complex techniques that Zhang Dong was using. Now though, he had quite the repertoire of them, they mostly being the same ones that his Master used. They were just versions that required less spiritual energy to use and were weaker in response to that.

Huo Kong didn't wait for his opponent to make the first move like he did with the previous ones. Instead he jumped in, his fists ready to deliver cultivation shattering blows. At least that's what he was attempting to do, but found himself dodging to the side as some sort of spear of concentrated spiritual energy flew towards him. The attack exploded against the arena floor and delivered a residual static shock to the fire cultivator.

This was a weaker version of Zhang Dong's Lightning Javelin, the skills specs got lowered to accommodate a lower cultivation realm. It packed less of a punch but was still a good earth graded technique. Huo Kong didn't have much time to rest as he felt a shiver run down his spine, he quickly did a 180-degree turn and put up a cross shape guard with his forearms. He made sure to push his fire Qi into this block, soon he received a palm strike that sent him flying backward for about ten meters.

Zhang Liu's hand was crackling with blue lightning energy, his opponent managed to push the invading energies away while a drop of sweat run down his forehead.

"Nice block, wonder if you can block the next one as well..."

The crowd exploded in cheers, the combat prowess of this new challenger was over the charts. They thought that no one could beat this fire youth, but this white-haired one was managing to push him back.

“Oh no, the Challenger’s strikes are fast and swift like thunder, is this the end for the master of inferno?”

The commentator started coming up with more silly names while the audience shouted out and cheered on some more.

Zhang Liu wasn’t underestimating his opponent, after the first clash he felt the massive amount of spiritual energy that his opponent possessed. It was still this high even after he went through six bouts without much rest, if he made a mistake and got too confident the momentum could quickly shift. That’s why he was planning to go all-in and end it fast.

He moved his palm forward and tilted it slightly to the side while pointing it against his opponent. His feet were giving off sparks as he was ready to activate his movement technique. Huo Kong was looking at this display in distress as he knew that this opponent would be a tough cookie to crack.

In response to his opponent’s fighting stance and forward movement, Huo Kong put his fists up. His body started glowing red and his muscles bulged, steam coming out of his pores which made him look quite peculiar. His hair started catching on fire and his eyes glowed red, he was apparently charging up some secret skill or ability to try and win this next exchange as he noticed that his opponent was going for the kill.

The two jumped forward, the ground under them cracking slightly as they took off. Both fighters were going for an equal exchange, power against power as they charged towards one another. Before they could do that though, something interrupted them.

“That’s enough!”

Both of them felt immense pressure pushing them down to the ground and it also immediately canceled out their own spiritual energy. The two stopped in place a couple of meters from each other and looked to the side, to where the voice came from. There they saw an elder looking gentleman that had a characteristic mutton chop beard and was wearing a standard Huo Clan elder’s robe.

“E-elder Qiao, t-this is...”

“Quiet! By your father’s orders you were not to start trouble... and here you are offending the juniors from the Zhang Clan that we are allied with!”

The man jumped into the ring and moved while talking, he looked at Zhang Liu and recognized his fighting style to be quite similar to the one Zhang Dong had.

“Oh, what is this? Someone from the senior generation got involved? I must remind you that if you interrupt the fight all the winnings that the young lord battled for will be taken back by the arena staff. Also, there will be a fine for breaking the rules!”

Elder Qiao snorted at the announcer and moved closer to the red-haired youth, giving him a good smack on the head. He didn’t care about those things, this brat would be paying out of his pocket

anyway. He turned to the white-haired youth that looked quite confused, but he somehow remembered this man from the time at the secret ground.

“Ah... junior greets senior.”

He did a polite bow towards him, making Huo Qiao nod in response as he didn't feel like he had to explain himself to someone of the junior generation.

“Let's go... your father will decide on your punishment.”

“F-father?... wait, why don't we discuss this over some spirit wine...”

The youth rubbed his head while looking distressed, he sounded quite meek now. His bravado was thrown out of the window the moment his father's name was mentioned.

“I just wanted to show the clan's superiority...f-father always talks about the Zhang Patriarch so favorably...”

He trailed off with the last part of his sentence before getting dragged away, Zhang Liu and his companions just looked at the strange display while scratching their heads.

“Due to the unforeseen interruption we will be holding a small break, this bout will be seen as a draw and all the bets will be annulled.”

They woke up from their stupor after the announcer's voice was heard. Zhang Liu then left the ring not really wanting to continue with the fighting as he didn't want to make a bigger scene than it already was. Though as he was trying to leave the arena he was surrounded by some ladies. They were all cute young girls that saw his fight and he made a big impact on them.

“Hey big brother you were so cool, why don't you invite us to some tea~”

“No, why don't we go visit some stalls at the market instead!”

“Where are you from, are you from some powerful clan, big brother?”

The girls assaulted him with various questions, they even moved closer and started yanking on his sleeves. They knew that this man was quite strong for his age, probably some kind of rich master as he even had a whole squad of similar-looking cultivators to guard him. The other boys grimaced as this Zhang Liu was stealing all the thunder, they also wanted a piece of that action.

While Zhang Liu was feeling distressed a certain person approached from the back.

‘This is the perfect chance!’

The person in question was the girl that Liu bumped into a couple of hours ago. She had followed their group all the way here while hatching her devious plan. This was the best opportunity to pounce on her prey, her pink twintails bounced about in the sea of people as she got closer and closer.

Liu moved his hands upwards as he backed away, the girls looked like predators that saw a tasty snack. They were already seeing themselves rolling in spirit stones if they married a young master of this caliber. He looked to be strong, noble and good looking and by how expensive his robes looked, loaded

as well. He was also quite young, below the age of twenty. They all were crafty vixens and knew that at this age it was easy to lure the boys in.

Suddenly Liu felt someone grasp his hand, it was quite the soft and small hand but there was quite the amount of power behind it. He soon felt himself getting yanked behind, the pulling power the person used was quite astonishing. He found himself getting captured by someone with light pink hair, the female was quite small not much over 150 cm. You wouldn't think that a small frame like that could produce so much power, but he found himself flying as he got tugged backward like a ragdoll.

"Follow me if you want to live!"

He wasn't sure what the small girl was talking about, but he wasn't in the position of replying as he got pulled out of the arena. He soon started running with the strange twin-tail girl, he recalled that he bumped into her previously, maybe she lost something during the exchange and wanted to talk to him about it?

The girls that they left behind shouted out something, so did the Zhang Clan members that were together with Zhang Liu but they soon got lost in the crowd of people. The small girl was surprisingly agile, managing to find the best route through the sea of people. So the two youths found themselves outside, Zhang Liu looked down at the woman.

The youth had a growth spurt in the past two years and was now of a similar height as his master and was quite well built as well. This made the short girl look even smaller. Though from what he could see, even though she was quite short she was plump in places that mattered. He wasn't sure what the girl wanted, but she had a strange smirk on her face.

"Um... can I help you with something?"

"Why yes, you can guide this big sister through the city but first... wait here for a second..."

She suddenly run away leaving the bewildered youth with a question mark above his head. He looked around and wondered if he should just leave, but after a minute the pink-haired girl was back.

"S-sorry did you wait long for me~?"

"Um... but you just..."

"No, you just arrived? Well, no use standing then, let's go!"

She grabbed his hand once more and dashed into the city, going for the more area where all the shops with clothes were. Zhang Liu just sighing inwardly as he remembered that his master told him that the Feng clan women were quite peculiar. He had since realized that this girl was one of them, so he didn't want to be rude towards an allied clan. So continued his first day at the new city, the rest would be filled with shopping and eating sweets.

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Zhang Liu wasn't sure what was going on, he got yanked around by the small yet busty girl through the city. They visited various places and he found himself holding a pile of robes while the pink-haired young lass was trying them on. He had a hard time seeing anything past them, by the number of clothes he was holding the shop clerks was even giving him looks of concern.

He wanted to tour the city, but this wasn't the way he imagined it. Every time he tried to speak up the girl butted in and pulled him to another location as if she was in some kind of rush. They visited places like restaurants, tea shops even went over to the area close to the big lake, the view was quite nice but he couldn't even take it in before he was yanked by the ball of energy that was this young lady.

'I don't even know her name...'

In time the young man could see that the sun was setting, this was the time that he was supposed to go back to his hotel. He even received some messages on his communication jade, asking about if he was okay as he just vanished from the arena.

"I think I should go back..."

He looked at the strange girl, that was holding various shopping bags, he himself was carrying quite the mountain of them. He did have a spatial ring of his own, but its size was limited. His mother forced him to cram it full of clothes and food, he had barely any space left for his weapons and pills in there.

When the youth spoke out, the girl looked back at the young male that she was with a big smile on her face.

"Back? we still need to walk around the beach... and go to a hot spring... then you would peek..., tee-hee."

She chuckled to herself as if she had some kind of dubious plan thought out. Though her companion was slowly getting fed up with it, luckily he wouldn't need to put up with the girl's antics for long as a certain old looking grandma that he was familiar with decided to show up.

"There you are, I've been looking all over the city for you!"

The person was an old elderly looking lady that looked like a baked potato that was out in the sun for too long, this was Feng Maling a member of the elder generation of the Feng Clan.

"W-what, h-how did you find me, granny!?"

The pink-haired girl's face sunk, she looked like she was afraid of this old lady that was slowly moving towards her with a cane in her hand. The moment she got closer she delivered a smack with that same cane of hers to the short girl's head, making her drop some of the shopping bags she was holding.

"Stop causing trouble for the clan and the Matriarch, we will be returning this instant!"

Zhang Liu looked from the side, as the old lady grabbed the short yet busty girl by the collar of her robe and started dragging her out. While the two were passing by the bewildered youth, the old woman stopped and looked at him.

"Those robes...Zhang Clan?... if I remember correctly..."

Zhang Liu shook out of his stupor and cupped his fists, giving the old woman a friendly bow, thus dropping all of the clothes and bought goods to the floor. The elder lady rubbed her chin a bit while the pink-haired oddball was squirming on the ground.

"Ah! You're the Zhang Patriarch's disciple, is he in the city perhaps?"

Zhang Liu smiled a bit as he was recognized and when his Master was mentioned, but then sighed out inwardly after the question was asked.

“Regrettably my Master had something important to attend to, so he won’t be coming to the festival this year. In his stead my Gran... Grand Elder Jin will be attending...”

The old lady’s eyebrows twitched quite a bit when she heard the name Zhang Jin, but she didn’t comment on it. She just nodded and said her goodbyes.

“Is that so... the Matriarch will be disappointed if she hears that... Don’t worry I’ll take this troublemaker with me, send my regards to your Patriarch and.... never mind...”

She broke off the sentence and pulled the girl with the twin-tails along the floor, the girl was adamant about leaving.

“No granny, I’m just following the ancient text of the ancestors... I’m just following the ancestor’s wishes!”

The granny’s face showed a grimace while she kept yanking on her robe.

“Did you forget what the Matriarch decided on Nuana? You aren’t supposed to follow the texts literally, now come you need to get punished!”

“What? I didn’t do anything wrong, big sis is the one that’s wrong!”

The squirming shorty replied while not being able to resist the core formation elder’s might.

“That’s Matriarch to you, now come along!”

The two finally vanished into another street leaving Zhang Liu with a bunch of female clothing in his possession. He rubbed his neck slightly and then used the communication jade to call for some people to help him carry all of these possessions.

“What was that?”

He spoke out loud while waiting for a clan member with an empty spatial ring to arrive, he was meaning to return these trinkets that the girl bought when he saw her next time.

Back at Spirit Spring City.

Zhang Dong was looking at his system screen, there he saw the system timer that showed him what time it was. It was only five more minutes until midnight, he was sitting in a lotus position far away from the buildings that were in this small pocket dimension. He was looking at the clock, the seconds ticking down as it was time for the points to arrive.

“Finally... I managed to craft some new pills while waiting for this day to be over...”

He spoke out while sitting down, he was ready to push through to the Nascent Soul realm. Though, by pushing through, he meant pushing the ‘yes’ button on the upgrade cultivation tree and just letting the magic happen.

'Ah, it sure is nice having a system like this, supposedly it's very difficult to reach the nascent soul level. If you follow the instructions badly or aren't fully at 100% with your cultivation your core might just explode without creating a soul instead.'

The plan was easy, upgrade to the nascent soul then create an item in the heaven grade so that he could absorb it and get his body refining technique to the next level as well. He didn't feel like there should be any problems with it in any way, the place he was in would block his aura from seeping out. No one should notice when he reaches the new realm of power, leaving him secured from his enemies.

'That Dao Festival thing should be over by the time I'm finished here. I told grandpa to invite the other clans for a visit when it ends. I'll tell them my plan, it should work...'

He glanced at his clan building part of the system, the points were there but it had some other uses besides just gathering passive points for his system. This other use was something he was banking on and that would allow him to beat the wall that was the Dark Palm sect.

'I just need some time and soon we'll have Nascent Soul cultivators in the truckloads!'

He grinned, wondering how those overbearing sects would react to a sudden reveal of multiple nascent soul elders.

'They'd probably pee their robes...'

How would he achieve this? The system somehow decided on the area's that he was the 'owner' of. He could put buildings and raise its level for more points, that was just one of the functions. The other one concerned his clan that was in the faction tab.

If he brought up his faction, he could see the whole structure with a little icon of him right at the top. The whole thing looked a bit like a pyramid with him at the top, then the clan members going into the lower parts. He could even click parts of this pyramid to get more in-depth. If a faction member had enough trust in him, he could read their stats without needing to use his analyzing skill or touching them.

This was quite handy, as he was able to tell if someone was shady by just the amount of trust they had in him. Still, they could just not like him without any ulterior motives. The other good part was, that similar to his disciples he could spend his system points on his faction members.

He could actually directly increase their cultivation level with a click of a button. This was the option that was most important, pushing through to the nascent soul level was immensely taxing on the practitioner. The cultivation techniques in this world were also of low quality bringing a lot of random chance into the mix. Matt had figured out, that anything below the immortal grade brought huge risks. Even heaven grade skills weren't all that good and brought risks with them.

'Well, my cultivation method is in the immortal grade so it should be safe even without the systems help, and after I level it up I'll be able to combine it with some other cultivation manuals.'

He was hoping on boosting the other cultivation manuals like the ones the Zhang Clan practitioners used with his new Nascent Soul one. If the combination worked, he could be able to get a cultivation manual at the immortal grade as his own was already in the higher grading of the immortal grade.

'Hm, wonder if it's compatible though... lightning and water? Maybe some kind of Storm Nascent Soul... or would that be more in the wind Dao area...'

'Mixing lower and higher grades mostly produces something just slightly better than the technique that was worse though...'

'I could also try coming up with something myself...'

This was also something the system rewarded him for, he could try to create his own techniques. If it was something that wasn't in his library, the system would give him some crafting points. He had created some variations in his skills like that, mostly weaker ones. He was knowledgeable enough, about his own cultivation method that he could come up with those. The foundation establishment techniques his disciples were using were created by him, without the use of the system.

'It's harder to do it myself, but if I do it my progress in the skill is much faster... but also could be incomplete...'

There were no guidelines that let him move through the proficiency in the technique he created himself. He'd need to test it out by himself and see how good it was before the system gave him a rating.

'But anyway, I should focus on the task at hand, midnight is here!'

He heard a little ding sound, the system could be set up as an alarm clock. His points moved past ten million and he was ready to finally go beyond the threshold. He was stuck at the Great Circle for two years, he wasn't able to get a nascent soul item to push his body refining a stage further either, but now he was going to do both at once and no one could stop him!

He quickly started sliding his finger on his system window, going to his skill tree and clicking on his Divine Golden Lightning Core cultivation method.

Divine Golden Lightning – Updrage to Divine Golden Lightning Soul Yes/No?

His finger hovered above the 'Yes' button as he gulped, he looked around the area he made it sure to be on the edge of the floating island in space as he didn't know if this level up would be an explosive one.

'Here we go!'

He pushed it and saw as his points dropped down to a couple of thousand. He could feel the knowledge of his new skill flowing into his mind, the ways of creating a perfect Divine Golden Lightning Soul lay bare to him. He tossed his head back, his eyes shining with a gold hue as lightning power gathered all around him.

"Here it comes!"

He clenched his fists, energy surging all around him as... nothing happened... absolutely nothing. Matt blinked a bit stupified, he had clearly got the information for the Nascent Soul cultivation method. It got injected into his brain, like it always did when he got new techniques or knowledge. The problem was that the system didn't push him through the threshold.

"Wait... do I need to do it on my own? Or maybe spend more system points...ffffffffffffffffuuuuuuu...."

Chapter 134

Matt scratched his head and looked out into the void of the small pocket dimension he was staying at. He thought back to the times that he upgraded his cultivation method.

‘Each time I did it the change was instantaneous... I could feel my lightning getting reforged along with my body as if I studied the improved version of the skill my entire life... but nothing happened now...’

He crossed his hands while still sitting in the lotus position, his eyes moving up as he thought about what could be the problem.

‘Maybe it’s because it’s a jump in a larger realm and not a small realm?... also could be because of the system change...’

He looked into his system library and could see the technique written down in it, he already absorbed the knowledge from it after pushing the upgrade button. Matt then brought up his status screen, nothing had changed or at least he couldn’t see anything out of the ordinary. That was until he clicked his ‘Cultivation Base Qi’ section of his status.

Cultivation Base Qi : Core Formation [Great Circle 100%] (Divine Golden Lightning Core)Upgrade available: 5 000 000

His eyes went bloodshot as he looked at the number of points he had to spend to level up. He needed close to two years to get ten million and now this stupid system wanted even more. Now, even though he had built up a base of power and he was getting a good amount of them through his clan building, he would probably have to wait at least half a year.

‘Think I’ll have to do it the hard way...no way I’m waiting for that long...I should be able to do it manually...’

He gave off a sigh, this would be somewhat difficult. The technique to push through was quite intricate and didn’t allow for mistakes.

‘I have to guide the divine energies through my meridians and my dantian like this... then slowly nourish my core till it expands... if I do it too fast it could break crippling me in the process. That is if I’m lucky, a broken core could end up fatal for the practitioner if they don’t manage to create even a slither of a nascent soul.’

‘If I nourish it too slowly, I could fail and also get crippled though I’d only get stuck a bit past half a step into the nascent soul... but the texts say, that this type of cultivation is unstable and would lower my lifespan dramatically. I’d be stuck in that realm for the rest of my life too...’

He groaned out loud, both of the options were quite bad though the second one was a bit better, he would still be quite strong just stuck with his life depleting.

‘If I nourish my core with the divine lightning it should expand and then slowly pulsate and break apart revealing a soul underneath. After that, I should reach the nascent soul stage and have my life span and strength multiply dramatically. ’

‘At least the manual is quite throughout, it also mentions the fact that a practitioner should only try this if they reach the true Apex of the great circle, which would be the half-step realm I am in right now.’

He recalled what he knew and what he read from all the other cultivation manuals. He had enough to compare too, his own technique got upgraded to the perfect grade of the immortal grade.

‘The technique is quite throughout in its explanation there is not much left to chance like with the heaven grade manuals that I got from that library...’

Thanks to how good his cultivation manual was, he didn’t really need any outside help to burst through this level. The lesser ones sometimes forced the practitioners to take pills or some magical treasures that could circumvent some inefficiencies.

For instance, one of the fire-based nascent soul manuals that his friend from the Huo clan took. Required him to procure a rare fire lotus, without it his chances of breaking through were slim and he would probably get crippled in the process.

From what he could deduct, only cultivation guidebooks in the immortal grade didn’t require outside sources for breaking through. Though you could still aid the process which would lessen the chance of failure even more. There always was a chance of something going wrong, so best to prepare for all necessities.

‘I have to think this through, I’m a goner if I make a mistake...though the success rate of this cultivation technique seems to be quite high. I already have the best kind of foundation thanks to the divine core upgrade, my foundation pillars have also changed to perfect divine ones’

Matt decided to write his manual out, he wanted to read it a couple of times and prepare for everything. He wouldn’t just wing it, what if he made a blunder and ended up a cripple or dead? The chance of success was high, he was still afraid of failure but he didn’t see a problem in giving it a try.

‘This will take a while though... maybe I can make some kind of pill to help me out...also there were some formations I could set up to aid me...’

The Dao of crafting was on his side, he already got the forging and treasure creation part to be at the topmost of core formation, even edging it into half a step into the nascent soul. There were various things he could create that would help him keep his spiritual energy from going berserk.

The night passed while Matt made his battle plan and prepared for his ascension into the Nascent Soul. The day of the Dao tournament preliminary round finally arrived and everyone was ready to take their test. The first one would calculate their all-around power, this was done by a large bell treasure. How it worked was, the practitioner would deliver a palm strike with all their might. Depending on the number of chimes the bell struck, their power would be measured.

If you wanted to pass this test, the large bell had to sound at least three times. This was something a practitioner in the foundation early-stage should be able to produce. Though if they had a flawed foundation they would find this test challenging. Four to five chimes would indicate a middle stage degree of strength, six to seven a late one and eight to nine would put you in the great circle. If you managed more than that while being in the foundation stage, it would indicate that you had quite the talent.

The contestants gathered around multiple of those large magical bell treasures, the number of people taking part in this test was staggering and it would probably take the whole day for everyone to get tested, maybe even longer.

There were only five of those bells, each contestant had to stand in a line and wait their turn. People were segregated by their clans and how they registered earlier. Some clans or sects with more pull could pay a bit extra to get a better spot. Some even could outright circumvent the whole testing process, if they had enough prestige or influence.

Zhang Clan was somewhere in the middle, not being considered a really strong clan or a weak one either, just an average, maybe slightly above average one. That was mostly thanks to the personal strength of their Patriarch, which defeated a group of core formation cultivators while defending Spirit Spring City. Also, when he defeated the Demon Hunter about a month ago. Though most people were skeptical about the state of the other clan members, thinking them to be mediocre at best.

‘Ding...ding... ding...’

“Three chimes... Passed!”

‘Ding....ding....’

“Only two, Failed!”

There wasn’t really a limit to how many people a sect or clan could bring here, you could even participate as a solo cultivator. If you could fork up enough spirit stones, the organizers were more than happy to let you give it a shot. They didn’t care if you were even illegible for it, they didn’t care if you made yourself look like a fool by not being able to sound a bell even once.

But this was still a place where you could show of your aptitude. So, a lot of people were willing to have a go at it. Qualifying past the preliminary round was already seen as a boon. Some clans or sects would take a renegade cultivator into their mids if they managed to get past the tests. Due to this, the number of people increased several folds. Some were participating and some were scouting for prospects.

The participants didn’t get an exact time for their test, so they needed to wait in line for hours. Luckily for the Zhang Clan, they were somewhere in the middle prestige wise, so they wouldn’t need to wait till the end of the day to take their test.

“Hey, isn’t it that person from the Huo Clan...”

One of the Zhang Clan members spoke up, he noticed Huo Kong stepping up to the bell. The fire clan being one of the more established ones, they had the luxury of taking the test a lot sooner than most of the other families and sects. The red-haired youth had a solemn expression on his face, he looked a lot less chipper than how he lucked when he was beating up people in the arena.

He walked up to the bell and looked at it, then just moved his hand backward while standing up straight. He infused his palm with some spiritual energy and propelled it forward, striking the measuring treasure dead center.

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding...ding...”

He received six chimes without trying all that much, the last one being a bit faint. The people in the area gasped out, as this indicated a strength level in the late stage. This was of course if you calculated it by average cultivator standards.

“So he was this strong...”

“But it didn’t look like he was even trying... maybe he could get seven of those...”

The Zhang Clan people looked from the side, already knowing that this youth was holding back. There wasn’t really a reason to go all out against these measuring treasures, unless you were barely eligible for the tournament. It was always better to keep your secrets hidden, then use your best moves when facing a strong opponent.

The testing continued, the Huo clan youths showed a good amount of strength but no one else was able to produce six chimes. The rest was able to make it sound between four and five times, which was still quite good for their age.

The day continued and more sects and clan’s kept ringing the bell. The clans that had enough renown were able to make their members pass without any problems. There were some youths that only managed to sound it out twice though, but they quickly left the stage in shame.

Zhang Liu was slowly getting bored of waiting, but soon he noticed another familiar person going up to the stage. The person being the girl that he met in the city and he still had her clothes tucked in a spare spatial ring. It was time for the Feng Clan to make their appearance, it was a female-only one so it made quite the waves. But not in a positive sense, as most men in this world weren’t really into the dark skin that the women of that clan had.

You’d mostly see women getting called fairies and approached by horny youths, this time around though, the dark-skinned girls were giving the boys some strange looks. The men gulped while looking at the faces buried under copious amounts of makeup.

“What are you looking at, want this big sister to keep you company?”

“Hey, those guys are kind of cute, we should talk to them after the test...”

“Hey, aren’t they from the Zhang Clan, that one with the bushy eyebrows is so my type...”

The puckered up their lips while looking at some men from the crowd that they deemed attractive. The men in question having mixed feelings about the whole thing.

Chapter 135

The Feng Clan, Zhang Clan, and Huo Clan were all in good relations. The gyaru gang saw the male members from the other two clans as potential Daoist partners. While the girls were chatting among themselves, their elders were slowly getting impatient. They didn’t come here to find potential partners, but to showcase their clan’s power and superiority.

The girls soon got to it, while their elder encouraged them by giving them a smack on the head. The current elder that was responsible for the Feng ladies, wasn’t anyone that the Zhang Clan members knew. The Matriarch or the granny elder that everyone was familiar with wasn’t here either. Soon the

bells started ringing and the girls began passing with flying colors. The clan was mindful enough to not bring anyone with them that wouldn't be able to pass the first strength test.

Zhang Liu looked with interest at the girl that he had a short encounter with, moved up to the stage. He didn't think that she would be participating in the test, but there she was. She walked over slowly, making everyone take in her rather cute facial features. The bouncing of her chest only added to the neck-craning that most of the youths were doing now.

Feng Nuana arrived at the large bell, which made her look even smaller. She looked quite fierce, like an angry puppy. Her eyebrows furrowed and her palm moving closer to her own body as she took a wind up. A gust of wind was produced the moment she smacked the large bell with her small hand, producing quite the amount of dinging sounds. The added wind pressure made her skirt dance around, the boys from the side just gawking.

"Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding...ding...ding..."

The treasure stopped at seven strikes, which caught the attention of many participants as this was the highest number in their age range. This was already a power level of someone at the peak of the late stage of foundation establishment. This girl was twenty-one at most, so this was quite the feat.

"Big sister Nuana is the best!"

"She is the pride of our Feng Clan!"

"Yay sister Nuana!"

The girls cheered out loud while the other clans and sects looked at the tiny girl performing the feat of strength. The girl in question crossed her hands over her quite voluptuous chest and stuck it out proudly. She moved her head up high and took in the praise that the other clan members were giving her, looking quite satisfied. Before coming down from the stage her eyes met with Zhang Liu's and she gave him a little wink.

'Are all those Feng women like this?'

Zhang Liu looked around the area to the other girls, but he grimaced some more due to the overuse of makeup that made the girls kind of unappealing. The short one at least looked decent enough and her skin wasn't as dark as the rest of the others.

'Master said that jade-like skin wasn't all that great... but I'm not sure about that...'

The female cultivators all made the cut, for now, all of the cultivators from the Huo clan and the Feng clan had made it through the first test. But they were in the minority as shortly after they left the stage, the other participants started failing.

"Get ready, you will be taking the test, don't embarrass the clan!"

The Zhang Clan youths stood at attention as they were the next in line. The clans that followed after the Feng Clan weren't doing all that great. Their members were mostly at the four or three bell range, some of them couldn't even get past two. This was probably due to the lower quality of their cultivation techniques.

“Show them why we from the Zhang Clan are on the rise, young warriors!”

The elder gave the youths some inspiring words. They were still getting underestimated by the other big families in the area, but this would soon change. One of the youths moved on to the stage, but no one was really paying that much attention as people were interested in the more powerful clans that took the test at the beginning. Though even from them, there wasn't a young master that broke past six chimes and Feng Nuana was still holding the top spot.

“I'll go up, first brothers and sisters.”

The youth with the sword-shaped eyebrows decided to make his move, he would show that even he a regular member of the clan was quite gifted when compared to the other families. He looked at the person that was standing next to the measuring treasure, it was a man that was wearing quite the long robe and a long hat. The man was old and had a scroll in his hand, on that scroll he had all the names of the Zhang Clan members that would be participating in the test.

“You may proceed.”

He noted the name of this clan member while yawning slightly. It was the middle of the day and these workers didn't really have any time off, and there was still a massive line of people after this still waiting. He didn't really care about this average clan, half of these people would probably not make the cut or just barely make it in at three chimes.

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding....”

He looked at the bell that started ringing, there were clearly five times that it rung and that would put this youth in the talented bracket. This was quite surprising for an average clan like this. The man with the scroll noted the number of bell sounds next to the youth's name, thinking that they probably had their most notable junior member start it off.

“Five, not bad... next...”

The young man with the sword eyebrows moved down the stage and another one with a similar blue robe moved up. His palm started glowing in blue color before it descended on the measuring apparatus.

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding....”

“Oh... five again...”

The elder official wrote down the name and test results again and watched as the blue-robed youth moved down the testing area. The youth looked dejected, making it seem like he was expecting a better score. Five was already quite high in the man's opinion, so why as this youth like that?

The man figured out why the young male looked sad, as following him his other clan members took the stage.

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding....”

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...”

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding....”

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...”

The youths continued having stellar results apparently they were all above a regular foundation establishment cultivator in the early stage.

“Is the measuring device broken?”

The man was starting to worry, did something happen to the treasure. How could a plain clan like this have youths this strong and below the age of twenty-one? His eyes popped out even more after a certain young lady moved up onto the stage. She was quite the beauty with long white hair a patch of black to the side. A lot of people from the side craned their necks, while whispering to each other.

“Who is that... such beauty!”

“What clan is that... I must get that fairy’s name!”

This was Zhang Xue moving up to the stage, her palm already crackling with deep blue lightning energies. It descended on the measuring treasure, a sound of thunder echoing through the whole testing stage.

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding....ding”

“Six?... at such an age?...”

The elder that was writing down the results on the scroll gawked, he had the names and the ages of the participants written down here. The age of this young lass was only seventeen and she was already stronger than all of the twenty-year-olds that came before her.

“Only six... I thought I could get seven...”

The cute girl looked a bit glum, she wanted to at least tie for the first place with the girl from the Feng Clan. Still at the age that she was, she was the undisputed champion.

“Good going junior sister.”

She went down from the stage while Zhang Tai moved up, he smirked a bit after seeing the reaction of the people around them. It was time to show them that this Zhang Clan was here do make waves. He gathered up his energies and focused, his palm started shining with water-based Qi. This Qi was far purer than the one his brothers utilized, it soon descended on the bell in question and the chiming began.

“Ding...ding...ding...ding...ding....ding...ding...d....”

The last one didn’t manage to go through, leaving his result at seven and tying it with the Feng Clan girl. Though, people would put him above her at seven and a half as it almost sounded the last one out.

“Hah, that should do it!”

The other clans and sects started to slowly gather around the area that the Zhang Clan was getting tested. The amount of foundation establishment youths that managed to have at least four chimes was staggering and this last one almost produced eight.

Zhang Tai moved down the stage and smirked while looking at Zhang Liu, signaling him with his gaze that he was challenging him. Liu just looked back at him with a smirk of his own. The two were close to each other in strength, but that was only due to Liu not using Zhang Dong's techniques that gave him stat boosts.

He had learned a lesser version of the technique that Zhang Dong used when he was battling the nascent soul Pride demon. This wasn't the avatar form and the condensation technique stack onto each other though. Matt had combined the two to produce a much more efficient one for himself, that didn't turn him into a ripe tomato after draining him of his stamina. His disciple was handed a lesser but still, it let him increase both his strength and speed by an equal amount.

Matt had to give it a grandiose name, so after much consideration, he ended up with 'Embodiment of the Thunder God'. He added the lesser term to the one his disciple was using as it was weaker and he planned to add a 'Superior' or 'True' prefix if he managed to upgrade it past the core formation level. The safe way of using this skill with no drawbacks was to only have it increase your stats by a half. But you could also double or triple your fighting prowess with harsher drawbacks.

Zhang Liu wanted to use this technique, focusing it only on his palm along with his regular striking form. He gathered up his energies, the lightning started crackling while everyone watched from the sides. His hand started getting coated by a blue aura, electricity crackling around it and it looked as if his hand had turned into lightning energy itself. The youth had similar looking hair to the young woman that was there just a minute ago. The people concluded that the two were probably siblings as this youth was also on the more handsome side.

Before Zhang Liu's palm could descend on the bell that would make it produce eight or more chimes he heard something. This was the sound of his grandfather's voice, getting sent next to his ear.

"Listen Liu, lower your cultivation..."

The youth clicked his tongue at the order, but he wasn't willing to go against his grandfather's word. His palm smacked against the measuring treasure in a similar fashion as his sister did.

"Ding...ding...ding...ding....ding...ding"

He reached quite a high number of seven hits still, it was a bit less than what Zhang Tai had managed. It was quite the result though, putting him and Tai along with Feng Nuana at the top of the charts.

"Hah, I win this time little Liu..."

Zhang Liu scoffed at Tai that was smirking at him, he would have gotten at least eight chimes if his grandpa didn't force him to lower his score. He wasn't sure what it was all about, from his standpoint standing out was a good thing as it would bring glory to the clan and his master. It would show that they are the best and the strongest around.

While the testing continued into the night, a certain youth with a small gem returned to the large pagoda hotel. He cupped his hands in front of another man. This man was Yang Kai and he had an even larger jewel stuck in his forehead.

"Disciple greets Master!"

“En. So, how were they?”

The man was seated in a lotus position and was doing some cultivation exercises. He wasn't even facing his disciple while he was talking to him.

“Just as Master expected, they were quite weak. The best one only reached seven, this disciple managed to attain ten the last time he was tested.”

“Mmm...”

The man didn't reply while his disciple just bowed again and left, knowing well that this was the signal for him to leave. He felt a bit apprehensive of taking part in this stupid festival, but his Master's orders were paramount. He didn't have to go through the preliminary round at least, thanks to this being a Dark Palm sect hosted event.

‘Guess those country bumpkins must have made Master angry, but those two fairies looked enchanting. Wonder if Master will let me have them if I perform well...’

Chapter 136

The First test came to an end and the day came to a close. The first test was mostly there to get rid of contestants at the lower spectrum. There was no place for people that weren't at a base foundation establishment level. The second trial would test the practitioner's bravery and resilience. The youths would gather in a room with a special treasure. This treasure would give out a menacing killing intent that would be akin to a demonic beast at the middle stage of foundation establishment. The task was quite rudimentary, the contenders would have to receive the killing intent and move forward. If they could move past the placed treasure they would make it into the next round of testing.

This sounded quite easy, even easier than the first test that you had to actually present some bodily strength. In reality, killing intent from demonic beasts was quite invasive. It would cause a person to freeze up and pass out, the demonic aura invading your body and soul. Most early foundation establishment cultivators would find it troublesome. Thus this test was mostly in place to weed out people with a shaky foundation. Badly flawed pillars didn't give a warrior enough protection against this type of mental attack. But there were specialized techniques that blocked killing intent from affecting the practitioner's mind.

“How many of them passed again?”

“All of them passed...”

The person that was responsible for test the earlier day asked about the results of that Zhang Clan. They had made a good impression in the first one, so he was curious about their results which were quite shocking.

“How can they all have passed... resisting such a high amount of demonic killing intent isn't even easy for more battle-hardened warriors!”

There was one standard way that people got used to killing intent. It was quite easy, you just had to face off against many demonic beasts or cultivators, or take part in battles. You would steadily get used to fighting and build up a strong mind that would block things like killing intent from even stronger beings

than you. But these were young kids from a middle-sized clan, did they lock them away in some demonic beast infested woods or something, was what this person was thinking.

“Can you tell me how it happened, exactly?”

“Sure brother... it was quite astonishing”

The person responsible for the second test explained everything from his point of view. The rooms that were used for the tests were quite large and could house up to a hundred cultivators at a time. This was mostly due to the treasure that produced the killing intent having a wide range.

The Zhang Clan participants gathered all together. They weren't the only people in the testing chamber though, with them were two other clans that each had twenty-five people. The Zhang Clan had close to fifty participants. The treasure that was giving off the ominous aura was placed at the other side of the chamber, with the cultivators opposite it in a straight line.

The treasure in question looked like a small statue of a demonic beast, inside of it was a demon beast core and it was fashioned in a way to release the killing intent. The man that was responsible for the test didn't think much about the whole thing. The only thing out of the ordinary was the number of people from the Zhang Clan, that were still participating. Normally it would be about half of that, just like the other clans that had twenty-five people with them.

The item was activated and the test started. The juniors were supposed to each the other end of the room where the treasure stood and just walk out of the door behind it. This would indicate that they passed, the whole test also had a time limit of thirty minutes. The man recalled seeing the participants from the other clans. Their faces sunk and they started looking quite pale after getting hit by the demonic aura. They sluggishly moved forward, one step at a time, some of them were even barely dragging their feet forward while resisting the killing intent.

“But those Zhang people were strange... they looked fine but they weren't moving forward... I thought that they had passed out while standing at first. To my surprise, they started walking nonchalantly... they looked fine... like the demonic aura wasn't affecting them at all...”

This was all thanks to Tranquil Mind, which was an already widespread technique around the whole clan. It had zero drawbacks and allowed everyone to think calmly under pressure. It also mitigated killing intent that wasn't over a certain degree, making this test a cakewalk for everyone involved.

“Some of them struggled at the end... but they all made it out within the first ten minutes, the best person from the other clans only managed to leave after a full fifteen minutes!”

The man that asked about the information rubbed his chin, trying to digest the information.

“This Zhang Clan is strange... think we should keep an eye on them. Even people from our Dark Palm sect would have trouble with this test...”

The man was slowly getting curious about this small clan, this wasn't anything serious from his standpoint just yet though. There were more tests after this one, it was still up to debate if more of those Zhang Clan juniors made the cut. The next one would actually test their battle prowess and was also the one that weeded out most of the junior practitioners from the tournament.

The next test was named 'The corridor of puppets' and the name kind of said it all. The participant would walk into the corridor that was quite lengthy and wide. In the said corridor, he or she would find multiple puppets that were similar in power to cultivators in the early and middle stages of foundation establishment. He or she was then supposed to get through this wide passage while being attacked by the angry automatons.

The dolls were quite merciless in their defense, they would quickly surround you delivering punches and kicks. It was quite brutal so the festival organizers had a team of medics on standby. There were numerous of those automatons around which made slipping past them hard. This wasn't all though, there were various traps placed around the area as well. They were mostly there to hinder anyone from just running past the automatons, this wasn't supposed to be just a test of evasion and speed. The participants had to dodge, block and even attack to somehow manage through.

"This should eliminate at least half of those Zhang Clan brats... maybe even more..."

The man smirked, the day of the test had arrived and it was now close to the end. He went inside the building that his companions were grading everyone. He quickly spotted someone that he was familiar with, this man would fill him in on the results of that clan that he was interested in.

"Brother, could I have a moment of your time!"

He went over, giving a standard greeting and then explained everything to the man.

"Hm... the Zhang Clan?... wait... you mean 'that' Zhang Clan?"

The man's tone changed when he was talking about that family in question, the curious man was even more intrigued

"Oh, did something happen? Don't keep me waiting brother, now you got me interested!"

The man responsible for the third test of the aforementioned 'Corridor of Puppets' recounted the events that transpired. The other junior participants were more or less doing the same, the higher-rated clan's had more passing while the lower-rated ones barely managed. Then this Zhang Clan came along, they had the most participants still in the run. Most of the others had from ten to twenty members still in it at most.

This was quite normal as even though each clan helped their junior members out, they mostly focused their resources on a small number of elites. These elite junior members would end up victorious while the lesser ones would stay behind. The Zhang Clan was different in the way, that all of their participants were well rounded. They had their top members with Zhang Tai, Xue and Liu but the rest weren't slouches either. If you compared them to the rest, they were in the elite category and they were many of them.

So, the test started with a bang. A white-haired youth just bulldozed through the corridor without letting any of the puppets even touch him once. He evaded all of the traps and probably set a new record if there was one being kept. Afterward, they continued, no one could match the youth that was first but they still did their best. The later members didn't come out unscathed, leaving with bruises and disheveled hair but all of them managed to power through this test as well. The weaker members had it

rough, some of them had to be carried off for healing. Still, all of them made it through, making them have the largest group of people left for the last trial.

This was the second to last testing ground, after this one would come an area that was a mix of all the previous tests. The number of people that the Zhang Clan had put them at quite the advantage though. The last trial was a close of space, a secret ground of sorts. It was a giant maze area where everyone would be put in. It encompassed the entire city and was built right under it.

Every participant would receive a small token. This token represented his life, the purpose of this test was for the junior members to battle it out, with their tokens on the line. You needed at least three of those tokens to pass, if you managed to procure enough you would get marked. The tokens would start giving off a sort of marker aura, that would alert everyone to your location.

The people with enough tokens could then move on to the exit while trying to evade the other participants that would block their way. So even if you lost your token you could still recover everything from another person. Like with the other trials this also had a time limit. You could win by getting three tokens and waiting it out to the end. A reasonable tactic was to wait close to an exit and just steal the tokens from the person that was trying to get out.

“With so many of those Zhang Clan juniors, they have a clear advantage...”

The last test was a battle royale, but people could form groups. Due to the number of practitioners that made it through the previous tests, this clan had a strong advantage over the rest.

“Still, the other clans and sects can also form a bigger group to go against them.”

This would probably be the thing that would happen. The names of participants and to what faction they belonged to would be hung out in front of the trial ground. It would open a few days later, leaving enough time for other clans to make some deals. This was also something that was advised and approved by the people that were hosting this tournament. Being able to form alliances was also a measure of strength so it was all fine.

The curious man decided to see how it turned out, but in secret, he went to place a bet on the clan that in his opinion had quite the potential. The number of people that were left after the preliminary rounds at the end, mostly came up to about a hundred. There were close to five hundred participants left, so you'd think that about 160 of them could make it through.

That was a naive way of thinking though. Even though you only needed three tokens, most of the participants would take more than the minimum amount required. There were even times where the contestant count dropped below fifty, when some strong clans with a couple of geniuses made a pact. The next trial would be beginning soon, the ones that made it out, in the end, would be hailed as the big winners and the future elite. The rest only to be forgotten and used as stepping stones for the new wave of young masters.

Chapter 137

The day before the last test a group of cultivators was sitting together. There were various faces, young and old but they came here for one reason, to make a deal. One man, in particular, stepped out to the

center stage. He looked like any ordinary old cultivator uncle with a beard and dressed in your standard cultivator robe.

"I am glad that you have chosen to participate, brothers and sisters."

The man spoke in a relaxed tone while looking at the people in the room, one of them quickly replying to his statement.

"Not like we have much choice in this, those three other clans will be a problem..."

"En, you speak the truth, not sure where that Zhang Clan came from, but even the Feng and Huo clan are supporting them..."

"Yes, they clearly want to steal all the top spots for themselves!"

The other people in the room chimed in, this was a hastily organized meeting with a couple of the more influential clans that were still in the competition.

"Together we have about two hundred juniors, this should be enough of a fighting force to take care of them!"

There were about twenty clans here, together they had a bit over two hundred junior members that were still participating in the preliminary round.

"If we join hands we can defeat the others, easily."

"Yes, the only problem is that there might not be enough tokens for everyone, how do we go about this problem?"

Everyone nodded, there were close to five hundred people taking the whole test. The person participating had to have three tokens to pass the stage, but there were only five hundred of those tokens to pass around. They needed close to six hundred for all of their people, so someone would need to stay behind.

"Well, my friends how about we do it like this. Everyone picks out one or two juniors from their group, that you think aren't up to par... and they will just give up the tokens, to their more superior brothers and sisters. How does that sound?"

The people started murmuring, which sounded like a good strategy that wouldn't cause much internal strife.

"The other option would be to get rid of the other clans and then have the juniors compete against each other normally..."

The group started rubbing their chins and whispering among each other. The second option sounded worse but would be seen as a lesser evil against their junior members. Their young members would probably hold grudges against their elders, if they were told to just drop out of the competition. But if they went with the second option, the number of contestants would drop even further. Also, injuries could happen rendering more of their juniors out of commission.

The people inside the room debated the pros and cons of both options. In the end, it was decided that the first one allowed for the maximal number of members. The clans would rather try their luck in the main tournament, with more juniors participating than gamble in this last test. Already being able to take center stage with all the other sects and clans watching, was a grand achievement of its own.

While those clans were having their meeting, three other families were doing the same thing. They didn't hide though and were right in the pagoda hotel. Zhang Jin was on one side with a couple of senior members from his clan, sitting down with a teacup in his hand. Opposite of him sat a Huo Clan elder with mutton chops for a beard, his name was Huo Qiao. The third member was a granny that looked like she spent her whole life farming in the sun, her name was Feng Maling.

They had gathered here for the same reason as the other clans that were plotting against them. The three seniors were crafty old foxes and had foreseen the other families going against them.

"I guess we have no other choice, I wished that we could have had a regular competition for our juniors without us old seniors getting involved."

Zhang Jin spoke out while setting the empty cup of tea on the table.

"Well, you have to see them from their perspective brother Jin."

Huo Qiao replied while leaning back in his chair.

"Yes, your Zhang Clan has gathered quite the number of promising youths... maybe you can talk your Patriarch into giving our juniors some pointers. Think you owe me a bit of face since the last time we met..."

The granny spoke out while squinting her eyes at Zhang Jin, the two had some history the old man having claimed this old lady as one of his targets back in the day.

"Oh...ho...ho... senior brings up old tales from my younger days, I was just young and curious..."

The man coughed into his hand while looking to the side, he didn't think that his old love interest would be in this city. The woman didn't age well compared to him, he was a bit younger as well. Back in the day, she was quite the beautiful older sister, he met her on one of his travels. Zhang Jin had quite the silver tongue and managed to court favor with the woman. He also left without saying a word after having his fun. Thanks to his high standing and the two clans not really wanting any trouble with each other the whole thing was forgotten, but the old woman still held a grudge.

"Yes... but I heard you didn't learn much after that, how many poor women have you devoured. Well, I guess Patriarch wouldn't be here if you weren't like this..."

She already knew that Zhang Dong was someone from a side family, that came to be due to Zhang Jin's fooling around. The old lady wasn't letting up, Huo Qiao was to the side just scratching his neck not sure what to do with these two. He was slowly getting worried that the old woman would jump at the Zhang Clan senior and claw his eyes out or something. He coughed into his palm and tried to get their attention as he spoke up.

"Ahh... let's focus on the junior members and on the competition, it's not the time for these personal squabbles, you two..."

The two looked to the man, he had the highest cultivation base here, and even though Zhang Jin had improved with the help of Zhang Dong. He was still nowhere near this senior in terms of power and strength.

“Ah yes... the competition, think we can all agree on a truce and to have our juniors work together.”

Zhang Jin was quick to jump back to the conversation about the Dao Festival, not really wanting to talk about his love life.

“Well, that’s obvious we can’t let those idiots take the spots from our juniors, not sure what they are thinking. Guess they don’t know how strong our clans have gotten since that time...”

The granny grumbled and also chimed in, during these two years the three clans had leveled up. This was all thanks to the share of cultivation resources.

“Mhm, who could have known that your Patriarch has such a useful skill! That would explain his behavior back in the library.”

Huo Qiao thought back to that time two years ago and how Zhang Dong was rushing all over the place poking and touching books. He thought that he was just looking for something, but he was actually remembering them with some kind of bizarre technique. They found out later after he had sent some of the techniques from the library for their personal use.

There were various manuals handed over to them, for which the whole Huo clan was grateful. Their Patriarch was flabbergast and immediately formed an alliance with the Zhang Clan. The techniques that they received were by far the best ones that they had ever seen. They also went along with the Dao of the flames that they practiced. The same thing happened to the Feng Clan, though their Matriarch didn’t really need them to form a similar alliance with the Zhang Clan. She already held Zhang Dong in high regard and would have done it if he just asked.

“Though your Patriarch has a peculiar naming sense.”

Huo Qiao laughed.

“Oh, think the ‘Triforce alliance’ has a nice ring to it...”

Zhang Jin replied while also chuckling slightly. The scroll that they all signed that day also had a three triangle pattern. This was, of course, a symbol from a popular game that Matt had played back in the day.

“Well, I see that we all agree. I’ll have some of my clan members pass the plan to the junior members, you should do the same.”

Zhang Jin said while leaning forward slightly, but as he was about to stand up from his seat to excuse himself a person walked in from the side room. This person was quite the beautiful lady with light pink hair, the hair was styled in a ponytail. Some of that hair was still bouncing up from the front and slightly covering the woman’s eyes.

“Grandpa Jin, grandpa Jin... why didn’t Zhang Dong come... I wanted to show him how much I have progressed...”

This was Feng Liena, the woman hadn't aged a day and was still of a nice caramel complexion.

"Yeah, I wanted to spar with Brother too..."

A large muscular red-haired man walked out as well. This was Huo Qiang, Zhang Dong's self-proclaimed brother. He treated Zhang Dong as a senior brother, but he was actually older by about ten years.

The two looked dejected while looking at Zhang Jin, the old man not sure what to say as it was due to him that his grandson wasn't here. He was still adamant about letting him know about the whole Dao Festival, not wanting to bring him into the area where he could offend some Dark Palm sect members.

"Ah, Dong'er was in secluded cultivation so I didn't want to bother him with the small stuff... it's better if this old man takes care of the junior members from time to time, ho ho ho."

He laughed out loud while standing up and giving the two that walked in a bow with cupped fists.

"I'll be sure to mention you two when I see my grandson, he had been quite busy since we started reclaiming our old territory."

"If you say so..."

Feng Liena replied while trying not to pout. The woman was quite interested in this Zhang clan Patriarch that had offered her own family various cultivation manuals. But this wasn't all, she was quite fond of his rather unorthodox ways. He was quite the peculiar man that didn't really act as others acted. He was in a rather high position, but he seemed quite innocent on the inside.

'Haven't really seen him much since those two years, he is always away or cultivating...hope he isn't evading me on purpose...'

The woman's head dropped down. Matt didn't really visit any of his new friends all that much, still having his introvert ways of not trying to intrude on people without having to. If left alone without any responsibilities he would probably lock himself in his crafting abode. He didn't really have the urge to meet people, the responsibilities of being a Patriarch mostly being the ones that made him go out.

"Ahh... didn't he send you a new battle fan recently though?"

Feng Maling interrupted as she saw where her young Matriarch's thoughts were wondering. The new pinnacle earth weapon arrived just a couple of months ago.

"Ahh! Yes!"

Liena pulled out a fan, it was quite beautiful and looked like the tail of a peacock. It shined brightly and looked like it was made from green jade. This was a lot stronger than any weapon that she possessed, Matt managed to produce it with an advanced grade of A+. Making it something that was at the top of perfect graded earth weapons.

Feng Liena waved it around proudly while her grandma and Zhang Jin smiled, seeing that the lady was cheering up once more. But the happy mood didn't last long as Huo Qiang spoke up.

"Oh, he made one for you too? Look at these babies!"

The man pulled out a set of red gauntlets that looked as if they were made from red rubies. He struck a battle pose showing them off while Huo Qiao tried not to facepalm from the side.

‘How can a man with so many wives have so little tact...’

The three elders in the room squinted at the red-haired man while Feng Liena’s expression sunk once again.

Chapter 138

The elder members from the three clans dispersed after a small commotion. The Matriarch of the Feng clan almost got into a scuffle with the Huo clan young lord. Luckily the others managed to quell her anger, the man in question not really sure why the lady was mad at him. He even offered her the spot as his 100th wife again. Telling her that if things with Zhang Dong didn’t work out, she could join his harem. This, of course, didn’t go well ending in the Feng Matriarch trying to deliver a strike to the Huo lords nether regions.

While this was happening, down in the pagoda hotel the Zhang Clan juniors were getting ready for the last trial. After the ‘misunderstanding ‘ was cleared up, their Grand Elder Zhang Jin went over to tell them about the plan and the alliance.

“So it’s like this, young ones...”

Zhang Jin laid it bare, telling everyone to work with the Feng Clan and the Huo Clan if they came across them. He didn’t beat around the bush too much as he didn’t have the spare time. Still having important business to take care of later on.

“Remember, when the final trial opens you will be randomly spread out throughout the testing grounds. If you are lucky you will have your brothers and sisters with you, but if not. You might find yourself against multiple opponents.”

“The Feng and Huo Clans have agreed to aid us, the other families will band against us so if you see anyone from our allies, aid them.”

The trial area had a teleportation formation implemented in it. It would put the juniors at random locations in a maze-like area. There were many traps and even some of those dolls were waiting to give the contestants a trashing. This wasn’t all though, in the area were hidden treasures like spiritual herbs. This was placed inside the area to give the participants some incentive to fight, the resources were limited and you could keep everything that you managed to find.

The short briefing ended and the juniors bowed, they weren’t against working together with other clans. They weren’t so sure if they could trust the other clans that well. They didn’t know the other party well enough for that. The Feng women were strange and hard to approach, the Huo cultivators overbearing and haughty. Still, this was the order of the grand elder, so the juniors would try to follow it as well as they could.

“Liu’er, Xue’er join your grandpa for a talk...”

Before Zhang Jin left the juniors, he made sure to get his grandson and granddaughter for a little talk. The two just looked at each other and nodded, not really thinking much off it. They all gathered in a separate

room that was prepared for the highest-ranking member from their clan. It looked quite nice, but compared to the penthouse one it looked quite shabby.

“Sit down, have some tea.”

They got offered some snacks and tea, their grandpa just trying to create a nice enough atmosphere. What he would say would probably not fly well with these two youngsters that had progressed at an amazing pace. But he had to at least try to convince them to see things his way, if not he would have to go with plan B.

“Liu...Xue... it would be wise if you dropped out of the competition after the next trial...”

Zhang Liu coughed out as he was sipping on the tea, his sister had a similar reaction as she choked on a cookie that she was nibbling on. The two were quite shocked not understanding the meaning of their grandpa’s words, why would he want them to drop out now.

“Grandpa Jin, what is the meaning of this? How can we show the other clan’s our superiority if we don’t participate?”

Zhang Liu slammed his palms down on the table in protest, the table rattling due to the force. His sister covered her mouth with the sleeve of her robe as she didn’t want to show the crumbs on her mouth while also replying.

“Yes dear grandpa, I would like to hear an explanation too...how could we, as the Patriarch’s disciples do such a thing?”

The old man looked at the two youths, the two looked a lot different now than they did two years ago. They looked a lot more mature, those white locks only added to their mystical appearance. He didn’t think it would be possible for anyone below the age of twenty to be at their power level. That Master of theirs really did bring in all the best techniques to the table and in that lay the problem.

“Now calm down you two, let your grandpa explain... the thing is...”

“You might bring unwanted attention to your Master and the clan if you continue like this...”

The two twitched slightly as they heard their Master getting mentioned, Zhang Liu sat back down after he stood up to smack the table and continued to listen.

“You might think that spreading the glory of the clan is a good thing, but in reality, it might bring it to ruin if we aren’t careful...”

“Your master is a powerful man, but he isn’t strong enough to shoulder this burden... not yet at least.”

“I have seen his cultivation manual... I’ve seen yours and it’s far more immeasurable than you might think. If the powerful sects realize what we are holding and it’s true worth, we might face annihilation...”

The two youths gasped in shock, not really sure if their grandpa was serious or if he was being a bit too melodramatic. Would the sects really attack if they found their Master’s cultivation method to be of a high quality?

“So that’s why grandfather stopped me back then...”

Liu said while moving his head down and thinking.

“You could have easily attained first place, but you would have attracted a lot of unwanted attention.”

“Still... I don’t agree! It would be shameful to not fight at our best!”

Liu retorted, not wanting to throw a fight as his pride didn’t allow him. Xue was also of the same mind, thinking their grandfather was over exaggerating. Though she also understood where her family member was coming from, but if they hid some of that strength things should work out.

“Well, I’m not telling you two to lie down and take it, at least try not to use the more powerful techniques like the Embodiment of the Thunder God. But your grandpa would be glad if you thought about what is good for the clan... Luckily the inside of the trial is sealed off so no one will be able to see you fight. But after the main tournament starts all eyes will be on you.”

What continued was an attempt of the old man on getting the two youths to see it from his standpoint. Bringing honor to your clan or yourself was fine and all, but it wasn’t worth your life. The two weren’t all that convinced, from their experience things seemed to work out in the end but they would take their grandpa’s words into consideration.

“So, you’re not convinced... well at least try to not stand out, your opponents shouldn’t be strong enough for you to go all out...”

The man gave off a large sigh, he could force the two to drop out but he also wanted them to make their own mistakes. The probability of something going wrong wasn’t all that high, there were only a couple of people that could contend with his young grandson at an equal level. One of them was even from their own clan, the other was the Huo clan young master. It should be fine if Zhang Liu doesn’t use the more overpowering techniques that gave off that strong lightning Dao.

He also tried making Zhang Xue wear a veil or something to cover her face, his men were telling him that the girl was garnering quite the following due to her looks.

‘I will probably be receiving a lot of marriage requests if this continued, but now like that’s a bad thing...’

Forming bonds with other clans was something positive, but from this elder’s standpoint not a lot of clans could actually bring much to the table. Their Patriarch was already a cultivation technique encyclopedia, the only thing they really lacked were more materialistic resources, like spirit stones or spirit herbs.

‘It would be nice if she fancied someone rich, but she doesn’t look that interested in the young men around her...’

“Well, you two should think it through... don’t worry if something happens, your grandpa will save you!”

The two youths looked at each other and chuckled a bit, Zhang Xue being the one to reply this time around.

“Ara? I only thought that grandpa saved fair maidens from other clans~”

Zhang Jin got taken aback by the retort, his womanizing ways having reached even his two grandchildren.

“Don’t make fun of your grandpa, you two rascals!”

The three family members chatted for a bit more before parting ways, the two youths returned to their quarters while contemplating about their grandfather’s words. They knew where he was coming from, but even then they didn’t feel like they should give up and throw the fights. Why did they have to stain their honor by acting in this way, this would bring a loss to their Master’s face if they lost a battle that they could have easily won.

Zhang Jin was left in the room alone, contemplating on what he should do.

‘Should I force them to forfeit... no, that could impend their progress later on and leave some demons in their hearts. They cherish their master too much and won’t allow a loss to his face by quitting...’

The old man looked into his spatial ring and pulled out a magical treasure, that looked like some kind of shield-shaped talisman.

‘Might have to use this if trouble arises, hope that there won’t be a need for it though. The probability of things going badly is low.’

The man huffed and looked out into the scenery, the window from his room letting him see the well-lit city in the night. His face going more solemn as a certain person entered his room.

“Are you ready?”

The man asked while Zhang Jin nodded, his eyes sharp as he rose from his seat to head out.

“Who do you think I am youngster? I was born ready!”

He replied with vigor while the other person rubbed his palms together.

“Good... let us venture forth into the unknown!”

The two men looked at each other, their expressions resolute as they headed out of the room and then out of the pagoda hotel.

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“Now this is what I call, a secret ground!”

Zhang Jin proclaimed while holding a small bottle of alcohol in his hand and taking a sip out of it.

“See, I told you that I know where the good stuff is, Senior Jin!”

Next to him was Huo Qiang, his muscular arm wrapped around a thin waist of a serving girl that looked like she was enjoying herself.

“He he he, senior brother where are you touching me~”

The young woman replied in a coquettish tone, not really moving from the spot she was sitting on as she let the young master from the Huo clan have his way.

The two hornballs had decided to check out what the red light district had to offer in this jade city. The two were prominent members of their clans so they had a lot of gold and spirit stones saved up for occasions like this.

“Let the young generation have their fun at the tournament, while we of the older generation face these ferocious foes!”

Said Zhang Jin while plopping his head between a rather busty girl’s bosom, his face was all red from drinking too much alcohol already.

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On the next day, everyone from the three clans that were in the triform alliance gathered together. The elders wanted the younger members to at least be able to recognize their allies before they headed to that closed off trial. The tension was in the air and everyone was ready to do battle, the juniors were taking everything very seriously. Unbeknownst to them, the Zhang grand elder and future Patriarch of the Huo clan were deep asleep. Having fought a ferocious battle throughout the night, tired and bruised.

Chapter 139

While Zhang Jin was trying to soothe his hangover, the youths and some other clan elders were gathering at the last trial area. There would be close to five hundred participants. The entrance to the last trial was in a large building, the large doors had a phoenix and a dragon pattern on it, the two beasts seemed to be entangled in battle. The large door was still closed as it was an hour before the competition, the people would use this time to make their battle plan.

The three families that would be working together gathered at one spot. Everyone had characteristic robes, the Zhang clan members had blue ones, the Huo clan had red ones and the Feng clan girls were mostly in green. Though the women that looked as if they stayed in the sun for too long, were hard to miss. So the other two clans wouldn’t really have a problem with discerning them from the other practitioners that were participating.

First came the supporting elders that exchanged greetings, the group of Juniors was facing each other in a triangle, curious gazes coming from all directions. The Feng girls started whispering with each other while sneaking in glances at the boys from the two other clans. In response the youths gulped, the young ladies had strange expressions on their faces as if they wanted to gobble them all up. First to speak out was a Huo clan elder, that people weren’t particularly familiar with.

“Listen up, remember each other’s faces, if you find your brothers and sisters in distress help them out.”

“The other sects and clans will be working against our group, so don’t forget to work together and after passing the trial you will be able to test yourselves against each other!”

The elder was an experienced person and knew how youths like these thought. Their competitive spirit would surely soar in a situation like this. He wanted these kids to at least work together in this trial, letting their ambitions dormant for the time being. Some of them might already be antagonistic against each other. Closed off trials like this brought out the beast in some of the cultivators, as it was the perfect chance to let old grudges unfold.

“Don’t be arrogant enough to think that you are strong enough to succeed on your own... just look...”

The man pointed to the other participants in the area. There was one thing that stuck out, just like them they were gathering in groups. Some bigger than the other, one being at least twice the size than their own. This looked like the main enemy camp, the youths there were already giving them the stink eye.

“I guess they are taking us very seriously...”

Zhang Liu chimed in while standing next to his sister, his senior brother that fancied his sister was also there probably being there due to that.

“Well, we probably gave them quite the scare during the other tests.”

Zhang Xue chuckled while smiling at her brother, the Zhang family members not that worried as they took this in a positive way. From their perspective, the other clans and smaller sects saw them as a powerful enemy. Was there anything better than being seen as a power to be feared in this world?

“Do we really need the help from these other clans, think our Zhang Clan can manage on its own!”

Zhang Tai voiced his opinion from the side while looking at the cultivators from the other clans. Not really convinced that he or his clan members that were quite strong needed to team up with other people.

“The more allies we have the better senior Brother Tai. Also, these two families have close ties to our Patriarch, so it would be rude to deny them help.”

Zhang Xue replied while moving, the moment Tai heard the Patriarch get mentioned he quieted down. He recalled that their Patriarch had some dealings with the Feng Matriarch and the man that was next in line for the Patriarch position in the Huo clan. It would be disastrous if the juniors went against plans that their elders had, for various reasons.

“Is that so...”

Tai said while looking at Zhang Xue that was slowly walking towards the Feng Clan side. None of the three factions had yet mingled with each other, even after their elders stopped talking.

“Greetings from the Zhang Clan fellow sisters.”

Zhang Xue smiled at the dark-skinned ladies. The girls looked at each other and moved forward, the girl that approached them looked to be quite the beauty. Some of the gyarus moved forward, they looked friendly enough. Before they could reply though, a tiny blur rapidly squeezed from within the group and arrived right opposite Zhang Xue.

“Who do we have here?”

The person that came out made the other Feng women move to the side, it being their elder sister. Zhang Liu blinked rapidly as he recognized the short girl that took him for a tour of the city. Though he was mostly used as a serving boy that carried her clothes for the whole day.

“Ah, greetings little sister, Zhang Xue sends her greetings!”

Xue tried to be civil in her reply, but she was getting strange vibes from this small girl.

“Little sister?... who you calling little, you pipsqueak!”

The small girl puffed out her cheeks and stood up straight, her voluptuous chest pointing forward as if she was presenting it against Xue’s. The two girls started staring at each other, one was hostile while the other was bewildered not knowing where the animosity was coming from.

“E-excuse me, senior sister?”

The small girl crossed her hands over one another and nodded, she looked satisfied after getting called a senior sister.

“That’s better!”

While this was transpiring the other youths started with curiosity, Zhang Liu moved over to his sister as he tried to pull her away, knowing well that this pink-haired midget was a strange one.

“Xue... I think we should...”

Before he could finish the sentence the small girl pointed her finger at him while shouting out. She then rapidly pointed it at Xue and then back to Liu again.

“You two, what’s your relationship!

The siblings looked at each other before eyeing the strange girl again.

“Liu is my older brother...”

Zhang Xue replies, getting the strange suspicion that this small girl was interested in her brother. The girl in question dropped her pointing finger, it looked like she was thinking about something. But just as soon as the finger was dropped, it was put up once again and pointed at the Zhang clan young lady.

“E-enemy!”

The small girl proclaimed, her eyes moving into tiny slits as she glared at Zhang Xue that took one step back.

“E-excuse me?”

“Younger sisters are always the enemy!”

Feng Nuana glared more as her eyes went up and then down. The smaller girl analyzed the looks of this so-called new enemy, not liking that striking appearance at all.

“Such a ferocious foe... but mark my words, I’ll never surrender! You will be a fitting rival for this senior sister!”

While the small girl was shouting out, the other junior members from the group moved closer. The other Feng clan ladies moved in and bowed in an apologetic fashion as they tried to diffuse the situation.

“Oh ho ho, senior sister is really energetic... don’t mind her...”

“Yes yes, she is just glad that so many handsome brothers and beautiful sisters had gathered together...”

“Yes, you there little brother, do you want to have a chat with this big sister?”

One of the Feng ladies took the chance to move next to one of the Zhang clan men that were to the side and just looking. The man looked at the dark-skinned 'big sis', her looks were quite exotic but she had a certain charm to her. Soon, the young women from the wind tribe were mingling with the other clans, even pulling the Huo clan into the mix.

Zhang Xue moved back feeling like it would be better to not get associated with the angry-looking little girl. Her brother moved in front to shield her, Feng Nuana seeming in a better mood after her so-called enemy started backing away.

"Did something happen between you and my sister..."

Liu asked wondering what this was all about, the girl in question just smirked and moved closer. She looked up to him with a smile on her face and before the youth could react, she wrapped her hands around his. The youth jumped slightly as he felt something soft pressing into his arm.

"Hey, what are you doing? Let go!"

"No!"

He was quickly shut down while the small girl rubbed her bosom into his arm, the inexperienced youth going red in the face instantly after getting assaulted by the Feng girl. The girl in question smirked and made sure to eye Zhang Xue that was backing away, her nose moving upwards as if she was looking at a bug.

'What's that strange girl doing with big brother... does she really fancy him?'

She thought to herself while backing away, but when she did that she bumped into some.

"Hey, who dares!"

She bumped into this person's back without realizing as she was preoccupied. The voice was quite manly and the back that she bumped into was quite wide, so the person behind her had to have a large physique. After turning around her eyes met with a set of red hues that looked like small embers. The youth's face contorted, his frown turned into a gaping mouth as he started.

"Ah, excuse me, I wasn't paying attention."

The girl made a little bow in front of the youth, not wanting to seem rude. She was afraid that this could turn to something more as the man in front of her sounded quite annoyed. But instead of that, the man continued to stare for a second or two before snapping back a hand moving to his head as he scratched it.

"Ahhh... don't mind... everyone makes mistakes..."

The man tossed his head back and started laughing out loud, Xue remembered him from the first test as he had scored the same number of chimes as she did.

This was, of course, Huo Kong that was panicking on the inside. This was the first time he had seen such a beautiful girl in his life, none of the women in his clan or the fiances that his clan tried pushing on him compared to this young maiden.

"N-nice weather we are having today? Haha..."

'What do I do!'

He thought while panicking, he was a person focused on personal might and had no knowledge or experience in talking to girls. Luckily the response that he got was a cute sounding laugh, followed by the girl's lovely voice.

"Yes, it's quite nice. Brother is from the Huo clan?"

Huo Kong nodded quickly replying to the question.

"Yes! I am Huo Kong the fiercest from our clan!"

"Ara? The fiercest? Quite the title you got there."

The girl laughed some more, thinking that this older brother was quite funny. This was mostly due to how the youth looked, on the outside he seemed to be a seasoned warrior with a large physique. But there he was panicking as if Xue was someone to be feared. The girl kind of knew why he was acting like this, attributing it to him being inexperienced with girls.

Suddenly everyone was mingling with each other. Zhang Tai got surrounded by quite a lot of people, being the person with the best score on the first test. He also scored quite well on the other ones and was well known by now. Quite a few Feng maidens were trying to chat it up with him, but some from the Huo clan were there too.

Zhang Liu was trying to wrestle away from the busty midget but wasn't having any luck as the girl was surprisingly strong. For some reason, she had it in for him and the youth wasn't sure why. Time passed and soon the doors from the last trial were opened, a couple of older looking people walked out that belonged to the testing crew.

Everyone was guided inside, the last test would be starting soon it would probably take a couple of days till it finished.

Chapter 140

The five hundred or so people were led to a large hall where they stood and waited. Everyone was keeping to themselves in the previously created groups, only a couple of people could be seen alone without any factions backing them up. This hall was mostly empty with torches lined up on the walls that shone brightly.

The trial participants had walked down into the unknown for quite some time before arriving here. The place they were led to was apparently deep underground under the city. The hall was quite immense and the ceiling was at least twenty meters tall. There were large square pillars holding it up with bright-lit torches that seemed to be burning without the need for oil.

There were several men standing on the other end of this hall, they wore a familiar set of robes that these junior participants were already familiar with as they belonged to the people responsible for the testing process. Everyone looked to them as it was time for the last test to start, a lot of the youths feeling those butterflies in their stomachs.

“Welcome, you have managed to best your peers but now the real trial begins!”

There was something like a large gate close to where the testing personnel was standing at. The strange thing about this gate was that it wasn't leading anywhere. There were wide stairs leading up to it but nothing behind it, not a tunnel or anything of the sort. The youths looked at each other while the people that worked for the dark palm sect chuckled on the inside, laughing at these backwater cultivator's lack of knowledge.

Suddenly the large circular shaped gate that was embedded into the wall started vibrating. Everyone could feel massive spiritual energy radiation coming off of it. Some Chinese symbols started appearing on the rocky surface of that gate, a burst of energy making the whole thing light up in one go. Suddenly something that looked like water exploded forward startling the young contestants.

“W-what is that...”

“It looks like a pond of water but on the wall...”

This was what some people called a 'portal' it was shining with deep blue light, the surface looked like a pond which was waving around. While the young people were gazing at the strange phenomenon the people in the room spoke out.

“This is what we call a transfer gate, you will walk through this treasure and be placed inside the last trial ground. As you might have heard, the place you will be transported to will be unknown, if you're lucky you might even appear near a treasure!”

The youths looked at the strange-looking treasure that looked like a teleportation gate. It looked a lot different than the teleportation array that was located in the secret ground. The senior member picked up a rock for a presentation and threw it inside the watery like surface. The item that was thrown vanish inside and the surface just rippled like it was made from water.

“As you can see, you just need to go through it, so don't be afraid.”

The man laughed a bit after seeing how these young cultivators reacted, most of them never having seen a teleportation treasure like this. Something like this was a well-kept secret among powerful clans, being able to teleport was a big advantage if it came to battle. Mostly due to logistics, you could easily transport resources to your warriors and army without having to leave your well-protected fortress. You didn't need to worry about enemy attacks hitting your transport line either.

This wasn't something widely spread though, even this place only allowed people to teleport within the trial grounds and at a random fashion to boot. The dark palm sect possessed the knowledge to build teleportation gates like this, but there were very few of them around as they just used up way too many resources. This one was only valid for the trial period as it couldn't be used for long-range teleportation between cities. The sect only had the teleportation treasures situated in their core cities and strongholds.

“Please proceed to the gate in an orderly fashion, but don't go in, all at once.”

A line was formed and the youths started vanishing while the teleportation gate rippled as if something splashed inside of it. In time everyone found themselves alone in various sections of the large trial ground, it consisted mostly of wide corridors with faint light but some were pitch dark. The less

fortunate people ended up in the middle of traps or around automated dolls that started chasing them the moment they got a glimpse of the enemy.

One of those unlucky people was the Zhang Clan prodigy, Zhang Tai. At first, he thought he hit the jackpot, ending up close to some spiritual herbs that were just growing to the side. The herb that he spotted was giving off some strong spiritual energies and had a nice mint smell to it. Was this the fabled seven-star sage? he thought before moving up to it, hoping to pocket it with him. Spatial rings were forbidden in this area, the cultivators could only bring as much as they could carry with them.

But just as he was about to pluck the herb from the ground, he noticed something staring at him. After he pushed some spiritual energy into his eyes to get a better look he saw quite the army of wooden dolls. They weren't the humanoid looking ones that were at the corridor though. Those didn't have sickles for arms and swords for legs, these here were clearly enhanced to kill. He quickly grabbed the herb and bolted away, not really keen on finding out if he was able to handle these automatons on his own. The moment he snatched the treasure though, the group of battle puppets chased after him.

Zhang Liu, on the other hand, was dropped off in an unsuspecting corridor with nothing in particular around him. After traveling for some minutes, hoping to find something he noticed some strange fluctuations right above him. Before he could react to the strange phenomenon he saw a large posterior right in front of his face. Bewildered by the display he didn't react in time and got hit by it and tumbled to the ground. He started wiggling around and could hear the person on top of him gasp, with a rather cute voice.

The person on top of him quickly jumped off his face, he groaned as he felt a foot hitting his stomach as the female to who the posterior belonged to jumped away. He gasped yet again, the moment he saw who the person was that landed on him.

"Mmmmm...pervert!..."

This was the small Feng Nuana, that was blushing slightly while holding her short skirt from her robe down. She had apparently been teleported in the same place that Zhang Liu did, as her clan was the one next in line right after the Zhang clan.

This place was quite large as it covered the underground area under the whole city that housed millions of people in it. There were many corridors and the chances of meeting at the start were slim. The whole test had a time limit of a week, so the contestants had the incentive to find others and strip them of their tokens. After this, they could either wait out the whole extent of the trial or try to find one of the exit teleportation gates that were scattered around the large maze-like area. But you wouldn't find more than a handful of those, so waiting it out was quite a valid strategy.

The test finally started, the young adults inside started looking for their allies and enemies alike. They all had some baggage in the form of food and weapons with them. This would be a true test of their survival skills. While everything was unfolding a certain white-haired man was sitting with his legs crossed, staring at a scroll.

"Well... think I got all that I need now... let me just get through this one last time..."

This was, of course, the glorious Zhang Clan Patriarch, Zhang Dong. He had written down the whole cultivation process on the paper, with pointers on how to go through into the Nascent soul. He had

managed to fashion a small formation to help him with controlling the spiritual energy in his own body. He also produced a helpful pill that would boost his vitality and concentration during the task. There wasn't really more that he could do, being already a step through the door he just needed to take the next one further in.

"Okay, this is it... time to become one with the world and one with myself..."

This would be quite the quality change for him as he would be gaining something called a nascent soul. This would fully awaken something called the Spiritual Sense. At first, he thought this was something similar to the aura detection technique that he used before, but it wasn't quite that. If he understood it correctly, it would push him towards being one with himself and one with the world around him. Making him able to sense other energies and truths that the world of cultivation had to offer, and not just other cultivators.

"Here goes nothing... wonder what gramps will say when he finds out..."

He chuckled to himself, he knew that no one expected him to reach this level so soon. If he succeeded he would be the youngest Nascent soul practitioner in the world. From what he knew, the world record wasn't even under the hundred-year mark. People at the great circle of core formation would prepare for years before attempting a breakthrough.

'Guess maxing out your cultivation level wasn't all that easy... But I guess the techniques they use are also faulty and have more restrictions than mine.'

He smacked both his cheeks with his palms to pump himself up and sat down in a traditional lotus position. Golden lightning crackled around him and his body started radiating a massive amount of spiritual energy. The space around him warped and he slowly started floating off the ground.

The lightning that was coming off his body collided with the ground, some strange patterns emerging from under his floating form. The area shined brightly as the electricity was absorbed and then redistributed back into the man floating above. This was the formation that was working to help with Matt's spiritual energy usage, pushing it back into him so that not much of it was wasted on the surroundings.

His cultivation was fully utilized as he felt his power rising and rising. He could feel his golden lightning core shaking as it got bathed in his divine lightning energies. His foundation pillars also reacted, humming together as they resonated with his cultivation core that began expanding in size. His core took in his divine lightning energies while his whole body surged with power.

Matt could feel his body changing, his core got bigger and bigger and he knew that the moment it shattered it would unearth a soul underneath. He wasn't hasty though, making sure to follow his battle plan and slowly perform this procedure like a surgeon doing an operation. The time for action came soon enough, the man opened up his eyes which were noting more than golden saucers filled with lightning energy.

"Now... shatter!"

He tossed his head upwards and shouted out, the last surge of Qi ventured forth through his meridians and invaded his core shattering it into pieces in one go. The process wasn't painful but it wasn't anything

enjoyable either as sweat run down his forehead. He could suddenly feel it, there was something deep inside of him. He tried looking at the thing that was now there, the 'soul' that was formed looked at him back and he felt like he was looking at himself from within.

"So... this is my nascent soul..."

The soul looked like a tiny person, a small version of himself. The odd thing about the tiny person living inside of him was, that he wasn't one hundred percent similar to his current appearance. From what Matt could tell, the soul living inside of him had features that he possessed in his old life, like his eye color. It was as if his old persona had mixed with his current one to form this strange-looking nascent soul. Still, he had broken through, power was surging through his entire body, power like he had never felt before.

He grasped his hand, the surrounding space contorted to his might as his golden lightning energies burst forth. Massive winds were produced by this simple hand gesture that didn't really have his full force behind it. He was feeling rather peculiar, he could feel it... he could feel everything around him, it was as if he was one with the world.