

Daily life 791

Chapter 791 Dancing Lilies

Even though he had never been to the Sunbirch Kingdom, Yang Qing had been given an extremely detailed layout of the Kingdom that included vivid maps that were a rendition of the physical thing, down to the history and relationships of the kingdom with special detail given to Camel Lake Town.

Such knowledge helped him walk around the town with the same familiarity as he would in his backyard. Out of curiosity rather than head directly to the sect grounds of the Scorpion Lotus Sect, he decided to cut through the center of the town that was already bustling with activity just like Purple City of the Red Maple Empire was.

However, unlike the Purple City, Camel Lake Town didn't seem to have the vicious underbelly lurking within it like Purple City did. The liveliness of Camel Lake Town had a sense of warmth, unlike Purple City, which had a more cold transactional aspect.

"This smell.."

Yang Qing's gaze lit up when he was baptized by the aroma of the white butterfly lilies the moment he stepped into the town. It had a natural, gentle, and cooling sensation to it. Every time one breathed in its scent, it made one feel like they were being refreshed and renewed.

Yang Qing took another whiff as his eyes glittered from discovery.

"This gentleness, it resembles the gentleness of a jade yin liquid vein, could the lake have one.."

To fulfill his curiosity Yang Qing made his way to the lake where he found countless cultivators admiring the beauty of the lake and the lilies as the gentle morning breeze carried its scent over. Some looked to be meditating next to it, however, no one seemed to dare step into the lake.

After walking into the area, Yang Qing understood why. There were experts both open and hidden at the late stages of the core formation realm surveilling the lake and also surrounding the lake there was a low-tier blue-grade array that had two functions. One was to maintain the conditions of the lake like a greenhouse, and the other was to serve as a barrier. The barrier was one way, it kept those out from

getting in, but what was in the barrier could get out which was how the essence of the white butterfly lilies was able to pass through.

Yang Qing debated on whether to attempt to break in. The array was not overly complex, given enough time, he would be able to find its weak point. But ultimately he decided against it.

"Besides I don't need to go in there to confirm if there is a yin jade liquid vein within the lake.." thought Yang Qing as his amber eyes flickered with a shade of white. If one looked closely one would see the image of the moon flashing indistinctively within his pupils.

He closed his eyes, spreading his senses to the scent coming from the white butterfly lilies. With his eyes closed, he had blocked everything out, all that was there was darkness before a wavelike stream of grey appeared within the darkness, a second later that grey stream turned white, a mellow white which Yang Qing followed like a meandering river until he reached its source which was a pond of pristine white liquid that had a gentle coolness to it.

"It does have one, though the quantity is small, no wonder the kingdom let it be, maybe they hope its quantity will increase over time.." Yang Qing muttered, a smile appearing on his face as he turned to leave the area.

Yin jade liquid was purified and condensed yin qi. Consuming it could strengthen one's soul to double its size, along with also healing any wounds related to the soul that were considered the most difficult to deal with. Those with a yin-based physique would see considerable improvements in their abilities after consuming it. It was also an excellent ingredient for refining yin attribute potions, pills, or artifacts that were at the monarch grade. Even if it wasn't a yin-based weapon, quenching a weapon in yin-jade liquid increased the likelihood of the weapon or artifact awakening its spirit.

It was a valuable resource, however, it was exhaustible and took a long time to form. In his estimates, the small pond beneath the lake that was about 20 meters in radius had likely taken at least 5,000 years to reach that size. The vein likely squeezed a drop every few years which was why most used it sparingly or preferred to exploit its passive abilities that would not drain it like what the Sunbirch Kingdom had done.

Immediately after Yang Qing left the area, there was a commotion among the cultivators there.

"Old Cheng, do you feel something different?"

"Different? Different how? You're not about to use this as an excuse to shamelessly brag about being handsome are you? I don't mean to offend you, Ol' Bu but I've seen prettier green spit toads.."

"You? Good, and to think I spoke good things about you to Madam Ning.."

"Mmph, who are you lying to? You don't think I know, you've had your eye on her, and those good things you claim are telling her about me, you think I don't know it was you who lied to her that I have a loving wife, and two filial sons. Whatever chance I had with her is all gone. Even if I tell her it was a lie, that I have no one, she will just think I am a scoundrel trying to cheat.

Ol' Bu from now on don't say good things about me, I'd rather pay some bard... Mmh, this smell.."

"That's what I was saying, the scent of the lilies seems crispier. The fatigue I had from brewing potions all night seems to alleviating rapidly.."

"My thoughts seem clearer and faster. Has something happened to the lake?"

"Oi look at that.. do those lilies look to be dancing?"

"You're seeing things, Old Wen. Wait! What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be breaking through, wait, those robes.."

"I already did a few hours ago. Those few months in seclusion without breathing in the lilies were pure torture. I felt like some part of me was dying in there. Ol' Huan look, they really are dancing.."

"Are you sure you need to be here? Shouldn't you be consolidating your base? If you're not careful then all the effort you put into breaking through will,.....wait they really are dancing.."

"I told you.."

Chapter 792 Meeting With The Network (1)

Yang Qing unaware of the commotion he had left behind from his interaction with the lilies, was already outside the Scorpion lotus sect. His eyes shone with a runic light as the protective ward that hid the sect from the outside world came into view. It was in the shape of a scorpion and was a blend of attack and defense, with its attacking aspect being the most potent of the two.

From its strength, Yang Qing had no doubt it could kill a peak-stage core formation expert. It could be considered to be at the very top amongst orange-grade arrays.

Though it was lethal against those in the core formation realm, to him it was as fragile as a spider's web. A wave of his hand and it would shatter. The illusory effect was useless against him also as he could see every single thing that was happening in the sect.

The disciples were hard at work in their duties. The youngest of the disciples whom Yang Qing assumed to be outer sect disciples because of where their abodes were, their cultivation bases, the color of their robes, and their demeanor, those disciples were busy rushing all over the place, some were headed to the lecture hall for their classes, others to what looked like a library, others to the alchemy halls, others to the gardens, with others passionately showing off to their fellow disciples on a cultivation art they learned.

The more senior disciples, whom Yang Qing assumed to be the inner disciples, were more reserved and contained, unlike the younger disciples. Some were meditating, others were practicing their cultivation arts, pausing every now and then to evaluate their performance, and others were having discussions with the elders of their sect.

As for the elders, some were guiding disciples, while others were in deep seclusion. Yang Qing managed to spot his target, the sect master of the sect. It was a mature-looking woman who looked to be in her forties, with a slender face, fair skin, black flowing hair, and an air of wisdom and stability around her. She was also the person with the highest cultivation base, with her being at the ninth stage of the core formation realm, and based on the fluctuations Yang Qing sensed from her, it wouldn't be long now before reaching the tenth stage.

Her name was Yu Mei and she was walking side by side with an elderly man next to her who had a similar cultivation base to her, while at the back of her, she was shadowed by three young cultivators who were all at the early stages of the core formation realm.

From the awestruck looks they were shooting at her, Yang Qing guessed they might be her disciples, as the three wore robes similar to the inner disciples despite their cultivation base which Yang Qing found

rather peculiar because their cultivation bases matched some of the elders in the sect, but yet the robes seemed to delineate they were still disciples.

The object of discussion between Yu Mei and the elderly man seemed to be the delicate-looking crystal-white colored scorpions whose carapaces looked like they had been engraved with white vines with lotus on them. The size and number of the lotus seemed to vary from one scorpion to another.

The scorpions were lotus scorpions whose venom if refined well made one of the best cures for all kinds of toxins and miasma owing to the natural immunity of the scorpion which was immune to over a thousand different poisons. Which wasn't strange considering their most favored meals were toxic spiritual herbs and spirit beasts, followed by areas with dense miasma, yin energy, or spiritual qi with dense water elements.

They released a mist at night that purified the spiritual qi around them to make it gentle enough for their young ones to absorb easily. They were one of the few gregarious spirit beasts that liked to live as a herd.

Yang Qing had heard that their flesh was incredibly tasty but despite his gluttonous nature, he would never eat one. They were gentle and sociable creatures which could be seen in how the younger ones playfully congregated around Yu Mei, the elderly man, and the three disciples.

Once they bonded with someone, they were fiercely protective of them even at the risk of their lives. That was how the Scorpion Lotus Sect came to be. The jade slip given to Yang Qing mentioned that the founder was saved by a lotus scorpion couple that he was close with. They ended up in danger and the couple sacrificed their lives to give him and their brood of three lotus scorpions a chance at survival. The founder escaped safely and ended up raising the three lotus scorpions in the place of their parents. This was how he ended up in Camel Lake Town which had a gentle yin environment suitable for their growth.

Yu Mei was a descendant of that founder. The Order appraised her of her ancestry when she tried to join. Her talents were not sufficient to join but because of her background, which she had no idea of, she was given an alternative way of joining, and that was becoming a source, and in exchange, the Order would secretly support her and the sect by association.

The Scorpion Lotus Sect still existed by the time she was told of her relation with it, but it had been falling on hard times and wasn't what it was today. It only had a single core formation expert holding things together, unlike now when they had about thirty of them.

The flesh of the lotus scorpion was great for refining a cultivator's soul and in terms of purging toxins from one's body, it worked just as well as their refined venom, even better, because its flesh didn't require the hands of a skilled alchemist to transform it a usable form. One could eat it as is.

Because of its value, the Scorpion Lotus Sect which had a herd of them, was constantly targetted, falling on hard times. The reason they held on so long was because of support from one of the noble clans of the Sunbirch Kingdom.

After Yu Mei accepted her role as an informant, she was trained in everything about nurturing lotus scorpions, the knowledge even exceeding what the Scorpion Lotus Sect had accumulated since it was founded, and using the Green Jade Pavilion, the Order funneled resources into the sect, helping it develop into what it was today.

Because of her ancestry, and the struggles the sect had, her integration into the sect had been somewhat easy, which was further helped by her sincere efforts to protect her ancestor's legacy. She had grown up alone, unaware of her background. When she joined the Order, she had been an orphan who had been working at an inn. She fled the inn when the owner made inappropriate advances prompting her to slap him. Fearing for her safety and no one to turn to, she made her way to the Order in the hopes that she would be accepted and find shelter under its wings.

For someone who felt like nothing, had nothing, and believed she would live a nothing life, finding out about her ancestor, his story, and the legacy he left behind, she finally had something, something worth living for. She was not nothing.

Chapter 793 Meeting With The Network (2)

Yang Qing decided to wait a few more minutes to see if Yu Mei would wind up her discussion before he contacted her. He used those few minutes to admire the sect as he wondered if he had joined a sect would his life have been similar to theirs or would it have played out as a perfect replica of his fears with him being suppressed by a jealous disciple who has some backing in and out of the sect.

"For the many treacherous surprises the Order gave me, at least that one wasn't one of them.." thought Yang Qing as he smiled bitterly.

A few minutes quickly passed by and the sect master did not seem to be anywhere close to being done. Yang Qing, consciously aware of how much time he had, took out the crystal luan feather which he used as a forewarning for sect master Yu Mei.

Yu Mei who had been discussing with the vice sect master about increasing the number of frost-scaled salmon in some of the ponds as feed for the lotus scorpions frowned when she sensed fluctuations coming out of her storage ring. She had assumed it was her communication talisman like always, regretting her decision to bring it with her.

However, her look soon turned to shock when she sensed the fluctuations weren't from her communication talisman but from a crystallized feather.

"Vice sect master Su Yi, please excuse me, I have urgent matters to attend to, I will talk to you later.." Yu Mei said as she hurriedly vanished from the spot at extreme speeds leaving the baffled vice sect master and the three disciples.

"What happened?"

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Sect master chambers

Once in her chambers, Yu Mei activated all the arrays surrounding her chamber, and when she didn't feel it was enough, she took out a few talismans which she hurriedly ignited, and only then did she furtively take out the crystal feather that was pulsating with the gentle glow of the sun.

The moment she took it out, it stopped reacting. Just as she was wondering what to do next, she heard a voice transmitted to her mind.

"Sect master Yu Mei, my name is Yang Qing. I'm the new palace court judge attached to you. I am sorry for interrupting you while you were busy but I am rather short on time and a great distance to cover, I hope you don't take offense.."

"No, no, it's okay, I should be the one to apologize. I was informed you would be making contact, I should have cleared my schedule in advance.." Yu Mei nervously said as she looked around her.

"Thanks for your consideration. Where would you like to meet, we could do it at the branch of the Green Jade pavilion in town, or alternatively, we could do it here since I am already here. Which would you prefer?"

Yu Mei hesitated slightly before she said,

"If you don't find it beneath you, here would be okay.."

"Thanks for your hospitality in advance.."

"Let me then.." Yu Mei had just taken out her sect master's token which controlled the arrays around the sect and her chambers, looking to dispel them and allow Yang Qing entry, however, she paused in shock when she saw someone who looked to be in his late thirties, brown hair, brown eyes, donning grey robes and had a simple but robust aura suddenly appear in front of her.

"I should have figured our array couldn't keep someone of your stature out.." she said with a rueful smile.

"Sorry for the rude entry, but dispelling the array could draw some attention to why you did it. This way is safer.." Yang Qing said as he smiled guiltily hiding his other reason for passing through the array like that.

With a polite smile on her face, Yu Mei got up, cupped her fist with a slight bow as she said,

"Yu Mei, the snow rabbit greets you.."

Yang Qing cupped his fist as he said,

"Yang Qing, the green jade hawk, greets you.."

After both had confirmed their identities to each other using a code handed to them by the Shadow Hawks, Yu Mei spoke up.

"Would you like some tea, I have snowberry tea. It's not much but we grow it ourselves, the environment here gives it a unique flavor.."

"Thank you, I would appreciate it.."

Yu Mei got up and went for the swan-shaped kettle to her right and poured Yang Qing a cup before she poured one for herself as she took a sit.

"How is it?" she asked with a nervous look.

"Great as advertised. If it's not a bother before I leave, could you spare some berries for me.."

"Gladly.." Yu Mei said, her excitement clearly showing.

Yang Qing couldn't help but rub his nose in embarrassment at Yu Mei's reactions. Despite her looks, she was already, 113 years old, going by age she was Yang Qing's senior several times over, but their interaction made Yang Qing feel like he was her parent.

Yang Qing hesitated on whether to tell her he was just a 20-

year-old youth and show his real face while he was at it, but he decided against it. He would rather bear with the awkwardness than take the risk of revealing his true face. Cultivators could have their memories and souls easily read, he would rather not put Yu Mei at risk.

Luckily Yu Mei was able to sense his awkwardness and adjusted her demeanor accordingly.

"How are you finding life as a sect master? I couldn't help but admire all you have done here.."

Yu Mei turned her gaze out the window as she smiled fondly.

"It was hard at first, with the pressures of trying not to screw up and the desperation of trying to keep the sect afloat, I nearly broke trying to carry all that by myself.

I had no idea what I was doing and had to constantly pretend that I did, but it quickly grew on me, no thanks to all the help I received from the seniors here and the Order.

You have all given me more than I can ever hope to give back. How about you?"

"Similar too in some respect. I still feel like some hatchling just starting a lot of the days constantly seeking help from my seniors, but all in all, it has grown on me. Though I wouldn't admit it to the Order, or they'll exploit me further.." said Yang Qing, his comment prompting laughter from the two.

"Well, I could always give you a post here if you want.." Yu Mei teasingly said.

"I might take you on that someday.."

The conversation flowed smoothly between the two as they familiarized themselves with each other. The relationship was something that would follow them for their entire lives. Even if Yang Qing retired from his post and took another post, he would still be Yu Mei's contact, her and the others from his network.

Toward the end, Yu Mei shared a bit of the news she had on hand which Yang Qing was surprised to find had some indirect link with the Golden Bamboo Pavilion. One of the leading clans in the Sunbirch Kingdom had a close relationship with someone from Maple Leaf Manor. The information provided suggested the merge between the two rank two organizations was almost complete. In half a year, to a year, it should be complete. The information left Yang Qing wondering what could possibly make the two powerful organizations to ally with each other.

Yang Qing after exhorting Yu Mei about not hesitating to ask for help and not exposing herself to unnecessary risks on behalf of the Order, called Bai Chen for his location. They met up a few kilometers away from the town, leaving for the next place, Five Peak Valley in the Moon Pine Kingdom which happened to border Wei Yingjie's kingdom, the Blue Oak Kingdom.

Chapter 794 Meeting with the network (3)

"I wonder how he is doing?" mused Yang Qing as he thought of Wen Yingjie.

"With the spirit of his saber already awakened and the leap in cultivation to the quasi-palace realm stage. It should be enough to handle whatever it is that seemed to be weighing heavily on him and pay his debts too.."

Yang Qing stretched his hand with a content smile as he felt the breeze brush up against his hands and the warmth of the sun on his face. He had decided for the remainder of the trip, rather than spend it in his chambers, he would rather spend it outdoors soaking in the scenery.

He couldn't help but feel he had misused his spirit stones somewhat. Then again if he hadn't used it, the trip would have taken longer than four days which he'd rather avoid. While the scenery was beautiful and all, he would rather not stay away from the comforts of the Order longer than he should. Who knows what fate might throw his way if he dared tempt it?

The journey to the Five Peak Valley took close to ten hours, with old passengers alighting and new ones being picked up on the way over. Bai Chen had at some point joined Yang Qing by the deck where they shared some of Yang Qing's fine stash of wine with Bai Chen bringing the dishes that would accompany the wine.

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As they were approaching the border of the Moonpine Kingdom, a palace realm expert belonging to the kingdom approached the ship as it was about to cross into the kingdom. Because it was a palace realm expert, Bai Chen was the one left to handle the communications instead of the assigned staff member who was in charge of such things.

From the brief stop, Yang Qing noticed that the garrison stationed below had a significant number of core formation experts, numbering close to three hundred with seventeen of them at the peak of the core formation realm and two that were in the quasi palace realm. There was a palpable sense of tension and unease surrounding the entire station.

Yang Qing could sense that though the palace realm guard seemed to be communicating casually with Bai Chen, his entire body was strung like a drawn bow ready to strike at a moment's notice. It wasn't only the palace realm guard who seemed to be on guard. The guards below were already lined up in a combat formation, with their qi signatures synchronized, ready to act when needed, and though it was hidden behind layers of arrays, Yang Qing detected the fluctuations of a monarch-grade treasure.

Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder what could have put the kingdom so on edge. As far as he knew, he had not heard of any frictions coming from the Moonpine Kingdom or its neighbors. novel.com

The discussion between Bai Chen and the palace realm guard continued for a bit before the guard's gaze openly fell on Yang Qing.

"I had a feeling this would happen.." thought Yang Qing as he saw Bai Chen and the guard walking over to him with the former throwing him an apologetic smile.

From the moment the palace realm guard stepped onto the ship, his attention had been on Bai Chen and Yang Qing. Yang Qing had disguised his face but not his cultivation realm which was likely to be the reason the guard's attention was on him. The guard was at the first stage of the palace realm, Yang Qing had enough confidence that his camouflage had not been seen through.

"Sorry for the disturbance fellow daoist, my name is Su Chen, the general of the Southfront of the kingdom. Could I have a moment of your time.." said the palace realm guard as he cupped his fists.

"My name is Yang Qing. How can I be of service, General Su Chen?" Yang Qing said as he felt the general tense his muscles, even more, the closer he was to Yang Qing.

"I hope you don't take offense but the compound belonging to one of the high-ranking noble families within our kingdom was broken into and they were robbed of a precious artifact and a few of their members were killed or injured in the process of that theft. The theft occurred a few days ago and we have not found the culprit yet.

Because of said events, we are forced to verify the identity of every person who comes into our kingdom. If I may be so bold as to ask, what is your purpose for coming to our kingdom and your background too?

I'd also like to inform you, that your entry into our kingdom would only be allowed if someone of repute within the kingdom vouches for your identity and entry.."

"Does that only apply to me or to the rest too?" Yang Qing calmly asked.

"It applies to all who have affairs within our kingdom. Those that don't will be exempt from the rules, however, they will have to remain on the ship. We have come to an agreement with daoist Bai Chen on that. He has agreed to let one of our guards remain on the ship for the duration it will be within the kingdom to ensure the said agreement is observed..." Su Chen patiently explained.

"I am sorry daoist, I tried, but it seems neither of us can step foot in there without those terms. I will deduct the costs for the inconvenience caused.." said Bai Chen in an apologetic tone.

"No, it's okay. Things like this happen all the time. Very well, General Su Chen, I will comply with the rules. My name is Yang Qing and I am the owner of the Green Jade Pavilion. The reason for my visit is to check on the workings of one of our subsidiaries, Serenity Ambrosia Store in Five Peak Valley..."

The eyes of Su Chen flickered slightly when he heard of the Green Jade Pavilion and the Serenity Ambrosia Store. The store was famous for dealing in high-quality sky-ranked herbs in large volumes and wide variety. Other than its products, the other reason that made the store famous within the kingdom was its background. It was a subsidiary of the Green Jade Pavilion that in turn was a subsidiary of the White Rose Pavilion.

Even though the relationship between them and the White Rose Pavilion wasn't direct, the fact that there was a connection was enough to guarantee that those of the Moonpine Kingdom would treat it with respect.

Su Chen couldn't help but feel uncomfortable about his current predicament. If what Yang Qing said proved to be true, that he was the owner of the Green Jade Pavilion, then he risked offending someone with ties to one of the most powerful organizations in the continent.

"It can't be helped, orders are orders, but I will have to inform them after this.."

"The store owner, Mister Cui Song already knows of my arrival, he can vouch for me. I don't know if he would be acceptable as a guarantor?"

"No, no, store owner Cui Song would be more than enough.."

Yang Qing raised his brow slightly in surprise at the change in tone and demeanor of the general.

Chapter 795 Meeting with the network (4)

Before he left, Yang Qing had already communicated with the heads of the Green Jade Pavilion and appraised them of his intent to visit several of the subsidiaries and main stores. He had left it to them to inform those subsidiaries and main stores of his arrival to avoid the hustle of a mixup in identities where those store owners and staff don't believe he is who he says he is. After all, the Green Jade Pavilion owner was an unknown who had never made an appearance up until Yang Qing was given that identity.

People would distrust someone they had never seen even if he had the jade token. It was better if the information came from someone they did know.

Seeing the complications in the Moonpine Kingdom, he was glad for the arrangements he had made. A second later, the store owner of the Serenity Ambrosia vouched for him even telling the general that he could come in person to do so, which the general said was not necessary.

With everything in place, they didn't have to wait for too long before the ship resumed its course. Yang Qing was the only one among the passengers who was making a stop in the Moonpine kingdom. General Su Chen after apologizing a few times, dispatched one of the guards who was at the quasi-palace stage to accompany the ship during its stay in the kingdom.

The rest of the journey to the five peak valley was smooth, and it wasn't long before they docked a ways away from the center of the town. Yang Qing was the only one who left the ferry this time, with Bai Chen's movement and the other passengers restricted to where they had docked the ferry. Bai Chen couldn't pick up or drop off other fares in the meantime.

To avoid the awkwardness of making Bai Chen wait for him too long, Yang Qing decided he would try to make his meeting with his contact as brief as he could. The contact in comparison to the rest of in his network was the youngest in the program.

His name was Liu Chen and he had been in the program for 48 years. Even in terms of age, he was also the youngest as he was 62 years old. Integrating him into the Liu Clan was fairly easy as every cultivating clan had a way of verifying their members through their bloodline. The Order trained him up for a few years before they finally let him go to the Liu Clan. The training was to help him survive but also stand out once he was in the clan.

The preparation proved fruitful as despite his age and with no one to back him at the start, he was currently one of their elders and the youngest one at that. With his cultivation base at the fifth stage of the core formation realm, he was held in high esteem within his clan and was even groomed to take over the position as the next clan leader.

On the way over to the Serenity Ambrosia Store, Yang Qing had already decided on the means he would use to make contact with the young elder. With the entire kingdom on high alert, he couldn't guarantee that he wouldn't be trailed if he tried to sneak over. Seeing the reaction of General Su Chen at the mention of the store gave him the idea of which means to use.

Yang Qing made his way to the store where he met the overzealous store owner practically beaming as he welcomed him. He would have probably made a showing of it like some Emperor's welcome had Yang Qing not mentioned repetitively he didn't want something ostentatious much to the disappointment of the store owner.

However, he didn't reject all of Cui Song's displays of hospitality. Cui Song had suggested hosting a welcoming meal for him in one of the most famous restaurants in the Five Peak Valley, the Sizzling Paradise Dining Inn. Yang Qing accepted the offer and even had Cui Song invite the five peak clans of the valley over and other prominent figures of the valley as a form of acknowledgment for all the good business they brought.

With the pull the store had, it wouldn't be difficult for Cui Song to invite those clans on short notice, and considering it was a personal invite from him, those who answered the invite would be the bigwigs of those clans, and he had no doubt, the Liu Clan leader would bring Liu Chen with him to expand his horizons and also as a statement that he was his successor.

Yang Qing realized that he had underestimated the strength of the reputation the Serenity Ambrosia Store had in its surroundings. It didn't take long for all the clans and the rest to confirm their attendance and in half an hour they were all congregated at the Sizzling Paradise Dining Inn.

With every who's who of the valley in attendance, Cui Song as a seasoned merchant, handled his role as the host beautifully, sparing Yang Qing the effort of exercising his soft skills. As he had the seat of honor, Yang Qing didn't have to interact much, restricting his interaction with the heads of the clans, and in the middle of that, he was able to establish contact with Liu Chen.

With no palace realm present, he was able to make his introductions to Liu Chen via his palace sense before he covertly handed him a sensory artifact that he could use to transmit his thoughts.

With the artifact's help, he was able to learn from Liu Chen a bit of what had transpired in the kingdom, though he didn't know much. Even though the Liu clan was one of the peak clans of the Five Peak Valley, that was restricted to the valley. Outside the valley, they were nothing much as none of the five clans had a palace realm expert, and even if they did have one, they could not rival the foundations of the noble families settled in the royal capital, the true powerhouse factions of the kingdom.

The five peak clans of the valley were subordinate to one of those families, and the Liu Clan was no exception. It was from that relationship that Liu Chen through their clan leader learned a bit of what happened. One of the noble families, the Chen clan, had something robbed, of what exactly it was, Liu Chen had no idea, and even the noble family who fed them that information had no idea, the only thing they had was a guess that whatever it was, it was related to something they found in some mysterious realm a few hundred years ago.

Liu Chen offered to dig around more, but Yang Qing warned him against it. If Liu Chen started digging around, he was liable to draw suspicion from that family, and if they had lost something precious, who knew what they were liable to do in a fit of anger? It was better for Liu Chen to make a wide berth between him and the affairs of that family.

Yang Qing didn't linger long after making contact, he exchanged a few perfunctory words with the guests and store owner Cui Hong before he took his leave and left for the next place, the home of millions of artifacts, Thousandforge City, of the Divine Armament Sect, a rank two sect, famous for producing countless ascendant and monarch grade artifacts since its establishment.

Just like the Saint Herb Garden was revered by medical cultivators, the Divine Armament Sect was held with the same regard by artificers and refiners.

Chapter 796 Visit completed

The Divine Armament Sect's name was just as spread as the Saint Herb Garden even though the latter was a rank one sect and the former was a rank two sect, the level of renown between the two sects was the same, and in terms of foundation and history, the Divine Armament Sect didn't lose out either.

The sect was just as old as any of the rank-one organizations and at some point in their history, they had soul formation experts, with three of them having reached the realm of purple-grade refiners. It was unknown how they lost those experts but their works remained. Who knew how many saint-grade artifacts lay within the main grounds of the sect?

Even without a soul formation expert, the Divine Armament Sect could still defend itself against a power with a soul formation expert using their foundations. History was proof of it. After the loss of their soul formation experts, the sect had been besieged by rank one sects, with a single soul formation expert being dispatched from each sect.

Countless organizations had been drooling over the Divine Armament Sect's artifacts and legacies. They just never revealed that greed openly, but with the loss of their soul formation experts, the sect was ripe for harvesting. It was the way of the world. Any organization that successfully managed to rise, was at the bones of another.

Even the Order was not any different to the notion. When they were starting up, facing tonnes of enmity and backlash from the continent, they retaliated in fierce momentum in part to establish their name and a means of deterrent, but another reason was to speed up its growth and independence. The organizations they destroyed, they plundered mercilessly. It was how they rapidly amassed the resources they needed to develop rapidly, and it was a practice they still continued to date.

After the destruction of the Ice Emerald Sect, there were administrators from the Order sent to clear anything of value from the sect and should another organization happen to suffer the same fate as the Ice Emerald Sect at the Order's hands, the same exact thing would happen to them.

An organization's destruction didn't just mean the elimination of its members, but of everything that formed its skeleton and this was a trait shared by all. Vultures that would pick a corpse clean and that was what the four rank one organizations looked to do with the Divine Armament Sect, except what they assumed was a weakened horse tied to a cart filled with countless treasures ripe for the taking turned out to be a lean camel with a lot of bite and strength in it.

It is unknown how, but the four soul formation masters along with those who had besieged the sect, were all slaughtered to the last person. Not a single person survived to tell the tale, but the general consensus was it had to have been linked to some artifact they had stored away in their sect which had no problem slaughtering four soul formation experts and close to fifty domain experts, and over a thousand palace realm experts to the last person, in a single moment and with no survivor.

Since then, the Divine Armament Sect has never been attacked again. Even without that artifact, Yang Qing had doubts about whether the sect would be at risk in case of another attack. The Order firmly suspects that they already have a soul formation expert, and more than likely not just one. It would be bizarre for a sect as prosperous as the Divine Armament Sect to not have one appear in the past 80,000 years. No matter how difficult reaching the Soul Formation realm is, for a sect that had a foundation and

history stretching back 500,000 years, they would not struggle to reproduce another soul formation expert in 80,000 years.

The journey to Thousandforge City took almost two days. The distance between Moonpine Kingdom and the city was almost triple the distance between Sunbirch Kingdom and Moonpine Kingdom.

The journey over had been uneventful. Over half the passengers had been dropped off before they completed the trip with more being picked up on the way whose destination happened to be Thousandforge City.

Entry into the city was much smoother than their prior experience in Moonpine Kingdom. When they reached the city, there was no need for verification or for one of the staff members to go meet with one of the leading officials of the city. With extreme familiarity, Bai Chen led the ferry to a certain section of the city that seemed to have been the designated spot for transport ferries.

Thousandforge City was one of the countless cities within the territory of the Divine Armament Sect whose territory matched that of any rank one empire. Most sects with a territory of its size would opt to have factions such as kingdoms or other sects to manage such a territory on their behalf while they concentrated on the affairs within the sect itself which was why most rank one and rank two sects, within their territory one would find long-established kingdoms and other sects like what happened with the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect which housed the Summerfield Kingdom and countless other organizations.

However, when it came to the territory of the Divine Armament Sect things were different. Their territory was divided into cities which were governed by the members of the sect. The reason for doing so was to prevent oppression that would in turn bring out stagnation. The sect was highly obsessed with all manner of artifact refinement and they would do anything to promote its progress. Its cities served as hubs that welcomed all who wished to ply their craft within their territory.

If they had a kingdom within their territory, that freedom of admission would be affected, as those kingdoms would only act in accordance with their interests of growing their powers which may not necessarily align with what the sect wanted. The sect hoped its territory would be the birthless of countless ideas and legacies of artifact refinement which was why it created countless cities just like the Thousandforge City throughout their territory, where the only requirement of admission needed was your passion as a forger.

The cities were fitted with arrays, filled with all sorts of treasures, with the ground filled with countless earth fire veins and other resources, all to provide an optimum environment for refinement.

They too used the ranking system the Order used to tier their cities, which was also a reflection of the scale of the environment they provided. Their cities went from Tier 4 which was the lowest to Tier 1 which was the highest. The Tiers were classified in accordance with the level of skill and product produced. Tier 4 cities produced earth rank artifacts, Tier 3 produced sky grade, Tier 2 produced monarch grade artifacts, and lastly Tier 1 City produced ascendant grade artifacts. Thousandforge City was a Tier 3 City.

For those looking to lay their roots in those cities by admission, they needed to show they had standout abilities in producing the graded artifacts within the Tier they were seeking admission for. Getting approved for settlement was considered a high honor both within the territory of the sect but also outside as it also meant that one was a standout amongst their peers.

Once the ferry settled in, almost all the passengers alighted even though for some that wasn't their stop. The allure of a city of the Divine Armament Sect wasn't something anyone could resist. The cities were lined with countless artifacts that were countless whose qualities were the highest one could ever come across, and when it came to variety, it surpassed one's imagination. As long as you could think it, you could be sure that one of the cities of the Divine Armament Sect was sure to have it. It was why countless cultivators swarmed those cities. The cost was a bit more steep than in most places, but the quality and finding something that suited you was guaranteed.

Yang Qing soaked in the vibrancy of Thousandforge City as he made his way to one of its shops, the Ember Lightning Flame Salamander Pavilion. The owner was one of the members of his network.

His deciphered history showed he belonged to a lineage of blacksmiths that had the bloodline of an ember lightning flame salamander. The bloodline gave them natural control of the lightning and flame element and sturdy physiques.

Those advantages led them to forging and through concerted efforts from generation to generation, similar to what the Yang family had done with body refinement, they created a defined process into their forging art that borrowed the advantages of their bloodline. The forging art was a blue grade that they named the Hundred Revolutions Ember Lightning Flame refinement art which they continually improved and used to grow their abilities.

They managed to produce several blue-grade artificers spread out through the generations, however, they fell into decline at some point at the hands of a poor successor, and eventually through a series of circumstances that family was shattered, and their legacy disappeared along with it.

The owner of the Ember Lightning Flame Salamander, named Zhang Tao, had no idea of his ancestry and only came to know of it through the Order. Zhang Tao was given the blue-grade art, along with being given foundational training on artifact refinement.

After he was done, he had the choice to form a clan following his ancestor's route but decided to start a pavilion instead. The Order did all they could, making sure he had the sturdiest foundation. Though he didn't have a standout talent for it, he had the tenacity for it, and it eventually showed through when he managed to gain entry into one of the cities of the Divine Armament Sect. He started in the lowest tier, Tier Four, and finally made his way to Tier Three, where he has been for the past 158 years as a top-tier orange-grade refiner.

Among those in his network, there was no one better placed to provide him with information than Zhang Tao. As a refiner admitted into one of the cities of the Divine Armament Sect, he interacted with thousands upon thousands of cultivators looking to buy his wares, spread through all walks of life. His network could run off of Zhang Tao alone.

Yang Qing soon found his shop, a two-storey red brick pavilion with signage of an almost lifelike salamander spewing ember flames coated with lightning from its mouth.

Yang Qing was not surprised to find a long line of cultivators, some coming in, and others going out, and others waiting, all wearing the same look on their faces, a look of excitement. One of the staff members noticed Yang Qing and quickly came to attend to him, especially when said staff member realized he couldn't see through Yang Qing's cultivation base. It was for this reason that when Yang Qing asked to see Zhang Tao, on a normal day, the staff member would have offered a polite rejection, but the mysteriousness surrounding Yang Qing prompted him to act prudently, especially when Yang Qing told him to tell Zhang Tao that it was an old friend from Green Jade Pavilion.

It wasn't long after that Zhang Tao made an appearance. He looked nothing like a weapon refiner. His body was scrawny, his skin was lustrous and smooth which could be seen from his hair too, which was a mix of red and gold.

"No wonder there are so many female cultivators.." thought Yang Qing when he saw the undisguised looks of infatuation from the customers when Zhang Tao made an appearance with some even making open confessions drawing an embarrassed smile from Zhang Tao as he politely rejected them.

When he reached Yang Qing, they greeted each other with extreme familiarity like they were old friends before leaving toward the back area of the pavilion where there was a quaint courtyard.

Seeing the growing line of customers, Yang Qing didn't keep Zhang Tao for long, keeping the conversation brief and casual which mostly centered on Yang Qing familiarizing himself with Zhang Tao whom he found to be a pretty thorough individual. Zhang Tao recorded every piece of information that came through his doors whether it was important or not and the recordings were placed into the handle of his refining hammer.

The information was a lot to go through in one sitting, so Yang Qing decided to take it with him and go through it once he was done with all his visits. As for Zhang Tao, his request was for the Order to find him another person who shared his bloodline so he could have him succeed him. If the Order couldn't find one, he would be forced to look for a dao companion in the hopes that maybe the children he had with her would end up with a higher concentrated bloodline of the ember lightning flame salamander than his.

Seeing the amount of 'suitors' he had, he could see why Zhang Tao was distressed about finding a successor through that route.

"Tsk, the struggles of the beautiful.." he thought enviously as he looked at the reflection of the simplistic and ordinary face he had decided to use.

Unwilling to remain a second longer, Yang Qing left the shop and it wasn't long before they departed for his last visit which was with the sect master of the Spring Rain Sword Sect in Snow Dawn Province of the Great Chen Empire, which just like the Divine Armament Sect was a rank two Empire.

The journey took a day and the visit was shorter as Snow Dawn Province was a pretty secluded region within the Great Chen Empire. In terms of information, there wasn't much to get from the sect master of the Spring Rain Sword Sect.

The sect master of the Spring Rain Sword Sect was an outlier when compared to the rest within the network. His name was Mu Gen and when he joined the Order, he had the talent to be accepted as one of its members, however, he chose to go to the Spring Rain Sword Sect which had been founded by his great-grandmother, who had been born with the silver peony sword heart physique making her quite the talent in sword cultivation.

Her name was Mu Wen and she had reached the domain realm because of her talents and was respected by the powerful factions and figures of the Great Chen Empire, and rumor had it that even one of the royal members loved her.

The Spring Rain Sword Sect was founded by her at the peak of her power, however, before it had enough time to grow, she died in the Green Fog Region, leaving the sect, as a tender shoot, with the person with the highest cultivation base, her disciple, who was at the core formation realm, and the sect only had about sixty members at the time.

Keeping the sect afloat was a struggle with just fifty members and the environment where the sect was situated while it was rich in spiritual qi and resources, during certain periods of the year it was assaulted with cold frigid qi that could freeze a cultivator's soul. Those who could endure and survive the frigid qi would have their souls strengthened in the process and the qi also contained pure spiritual qi that contained traces of the dao. This was why Mu Wen founded the sect there. However, despite its advantages, not many could survive that frigid qi and other than the effects it created, it brought other dangerous things too, like spirit beasts that had long learned to thrive in it and used it as a cover to sometimes attack the human cultivators that inhabited the Snow Dawn Province and the Spring Rain Sword Sect was located in the outer fringes of the province where the frigid qi would be densest and attacks were the harshest too.

With her demise, the sect managed to hang on thanks to the arrays and artifacts that guarded the sect, along with some support from the Great Chen Empire. However, because of the conditions of that place and the death of the founder, a lot left the sect with few remaining, and over the years because of the harsh conditions of the area, to date, the number of disciples the sect has doesn't number more than 100.

Despite the harsh conditions, Mu Gen opted to join the sect instead of the Order when given the choice, so he could protect his great-grandmother's legacy which was heavily influenced by how close he had been with his mother, her granddaughter, when she was alive. Going to the sect was his way of honoring them both.

With his talent and the Order's support, Mu Gen reached the palace realm and eventually became the sect master. Yang Qing wasn't surprised to find that the sect practiced winter's embrace meditation art of the frozen serenity scripture which was tailored perfectly for the environment around the sect. The art aimed to create a sanctuary for the mind and soul within a desolate state, and the location of the sect, was as desolate as one could get.

After familiarizing himself with Mu Gen, Yang Qing could finally call a close to his visits. Though he still had eight more contacts from his network list, he had three years to establish contact with them, which was more than enough time to do it. He was in no urgency to blow his vacation days doing it.

Chapter 797 Be Careful

Before leaving, Yang Qing left the sect master of the Spring Rain Sword Sect with a couple of hundred pearls that he had imbued with pure yang qi which sect master Mu Gen could use to help some of his members endure the frigid cold qi surrounding them better. The pearls could benefit even the sect master himself.

The purity of the yang qi was in respect to Yang Qing's present state. Even before the slight developments made to his physique, both his yin and yang qi were pure enough to rival naturally formed treasures based on those energies, and with the recent developments, that purity had grown.

As long as the sect kept those pearls on them, they could forget about being frozen by the frigid qi and could focus on extracting its benefits without fear of dying in the process. The Order had likely already provided Mu Gen with means to survive and exploit the frigid qi, but it couldn't hurt to have more means, especially considering how deep in the wilderness they were, away from any civilization.

Considering the environmental constraints of the area with the dangers from the frigid qi and the spirit beasts lurking in the tundra forest that neighbored them, the sparse human habitation, for safety, the sect likely limited themselves in the number of times they left.

Unless absolutely necessary, they likely never left, and those who could leave were likely to be the elders with powerful cultivation bases to survive the dangers that surrounded the place. Most sects usually left errands running to the disciples for merit points or had station points within their territory where they dealt with merchant organizations, but such luxuries were absent where the Spring Rain Sword Sect was located.

The horrible weather and the dangers all around made the area sparsely populated. If the sect wanted anything, they had to move to the central city located at the center of the province which was 100,000 kilometers away from where the sect was located. They had few members and the dangers presented

limited those who could make the trip. Yang Qing's pearls would likely save them the trip for a few years, as each pearl could protect the user for at least 10 years because of the purity of the yang qi. Rather than run errands, the elders could use that time to cultivate and grow their strength, which the Spring Rain Sword Sect desperately needed if they were going to survive in the area.

While Yang Qing wasn't completely sure, he felt the tundra forest that neighbored them likely had spirit beasts that had reached the domain realm otherwise the Great Chen Empire would have already subjugated the entire forest and placed it under their control. When he left, out of curiosity Yang Qing sneaked to the outskirts of the forest, and at that distance, he could feel the richness and profundities contained within the qi.

Because of his physique, he had no fear of the cold frigid qi; he was like a fish in water there. Just from that brief interaction, he knew if he cultivated in the deeper parts of the forest where the frigid qi was likely richer and denser, the gains he would make would be monumental both in terms of his physique and even mastery of certain arts related to the water element. And from the quality, having experienced the spiritual qi produced by a mature dragon vein he could feel the qi from within the tundra and that of a mature dragon vein was not different. The reason it caused fatalities was likely because of the overwhelming purity of that qi.

There was no way an entity like the Great Chen Empire would leave a place like that alone not unless there was something in there that deterred them from occupying it. As a rank two Empire, only a domain-level existence could deter them.

As Yang Qing was leaving, he couldn't help but wonder why the founder of the Spring Rain Sword Sect decided to build her sect so close to the tundra if it indeed did have a domain-level spirit beast. That was no different than throwing one's self into the mouth of a dragon not unless...

...

"Did I keep you waiting long?" asked Yang Qing as he made his way into the ferry where he found Bai Chen sipping some boiling wine by the deck with some of the staff members.

By the time they reached the Snow Dawn Province, the ferry was empty of passengers save for Yang Qing. For once he didn't have the weight of delaying others on him as he made his visit.

"Not long, are you done?" Bai Chen asked as he handed Yang Qing a cup.

Yang Qing taking a sip and helping himself to the wine answered,

"I am. We can now head back to Gold Eagle Town.."

"Any place you want to stop over as we head over there?"

"Not really, but if you have suggestions of places with good scenery and food, feel free to pass through those places on the route over.."

"I just happen to know a few.." Bai Chen said with a smile.

The trip back was leisurely with Bai Chen leaving the steering to one of the staff members as he and Yang Qing exchanged tales of their experiences which were mostly centered on embarrassing tales which was a lifesaver for Yang Qing. He might not have adventurous or heroic tales owing to his cowardly nature, but when it came to embarrassing tales, he had that in plenty.

On the way back, they picked up more passengers as they made stopovers in cities bustling with activity where Yang Qing took the brief pauses provided by those stopovers to sample dishes and other specialties from those cities. He was even lucky enough to find a cultivation air market where he splurged a little to buy bizarre-looking trinkets and mundane ones here and there in the hopes that they hid some mysteries beneath their rough exteriors.

Time quickly passed by and it wasn't long before they arrived at Gold Eagle Town, which remained the same as they had left it, except it was nighttime by the time they arrived, but it was still as active as daytime. To cultivators who didn't need to sleep, and could see in perfect clarity whether night or day, the concept of night and day was lost on them.

"Thank you for the trip, Bai Chen.." Yang Qing said as he alighted from the ferry.

"Thank you for your patronage, Yang Qing, and should you need our services again, please don't hesitate to reach out, and should you hear of people needing escort services, please don't hesitate to send them

our way. We would appreciate the business and we would also give you a nice discount for the referral.." Bai Chen said as he rubbed his hands together with a mercantile smile on his face.

Yang Qing dryly laughed as he said,

"If i come across any, I will make sure to send them your way. Take care, Bai Chen.."

"Take care, Yang Qing."

As Yang Qing was leaving he paused slightly which prompted a curious glance from Bai Chen.

"I have a friend who told me that the Ice Emerald Sect over the years had been hunting down organizations that had arts related to the Frozen Serenity Scripture and were likely doing so at the behest of someone.

A few rank-three organizations were destroyed in the process. While the sect itself may be gone, who knows why they were looking for those arts. Be careful Bai Chen, In case of anything feel free to reach me..." Yang Qing solemnly said.

"Many thanks, fellow daoist. As someone who has survived as a rogue cultivator for this long, prudence has been my greatest and constant companion.." said Bai Chen as he cupped his fists in gratitude to Yang Qing.

"That's good.." Yang Qing said as he waved his hands as he disappeared to the skies.

After he left, Bai Chen's eyes flashed with killing intent slightly as he clenched his fists before his look turned calm as he made his way back to the Bluefin Courtyard.

Chapter 798 Surprise Caller

When he was several kilometers outside of Gold Eagle Town, Yang Qing dispelled his camouflage.

"Now this is more like it.." Yang Qing said as he cracked his neck and massaged his cheekbones as he admired his appearance from the reflection on a water mirror he had conjured up.

"Nothing beats this look.." he muttered, enlarging the water mirror to reflect his entire body. He spent a few minutes gazing up and down his reflection to ensure his body was exactly as it had been. Only after he was satisfied that he was 'naturally handsome' as before did he make his way to the Order.

Once he arrived, he made a stopover at the External Logistics Division to meet with the Shadow Hawks liaison, Mei Cheng. As always, the place was swamped with eager cultivators looking to redeem their pay.

Yang Qing didn't have to wait long before Mei Cheng pointed communicated with her eyes for him to meet her in the room they met prior.

"Sorry to keep you waiting.."

"No, not at all, senior Mei Cheng.."

"How was the trip?"

"Informative, different, and a bit pressurizing if I'm being honest. Meeting with them has changed things for me.."

"In what way?"

"Well,.. " Yang Qing paused as memories of the fate of the Ice Emerald Sect, the Hua Clan, the Xin Clan, and the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect flashed in his mind.

"The world we live in is unforgiving, ruthless, where the line between growth and destruction is very thin. They are living in that world every day. If something were to happen to them, would I be able to make it in time to avert it, or prevent the absolute worst from happening or would they end up like the rest, suffering the fate of the cases that come across my courtroom?"

The weight is heavy.." Yang Qing said with a somber sigh.

"I would like to say it gets easier with time, but it doesn't. It is a worry that will continue to follow you as long as you continue to care about them.

It's not a bad thing though. That worry, as long as it continues to exist will keep you alert and invested in their wellbeing. You will think and do everything you can to prevent whatever worries you have from being a reality.

From my experience, stopping your contacts from acting recklessly is one way and the other... This one has much more guarantee than the former.."

Mei Chen paused slightly, taking a sip of her tea before leaning back comfortably in her chair, locking her gaze with Yang Qing, who couldn't hide his curiosity.

"If you want to prevent your worries from becoming a reality, the surefire way I know is.. you just have to be strong. Strength at the end is everything.." Mei Cheng said with an air of seriousness.

"When you reach the domain realm, the concept of distance shrinks considerably. You can cover tens of thousands of kilometers in the time it takes me to gulp down this cup of tea. You will always have comfort in knowing that if something happens, you can make it in the shortest amount of time possible.

And if distance is an issue, domain experts have countless means to protect others even at a distance, imprints being one of them or other means available to them, and as a domain expert, you won't have to worry about someone deciphering your connection to them like you are now, so you can act freely.

The more powerful you are, the more you can do about those worries you have, but until then as your senior, I will share my insights and you can borrow from others who are in a similar situation to you, on the various safeguards you can use..."

"Thank you for that.." said Yang Qing with a sincere smile of gratitude.

"Anytime. I know the burden is not a light one, that and everything else you have to deal with. I'll help in any way I can, but with this old bones of mine, there is only so much I can do. You need to break through

to the domain realm by this time next year so I can get my well-deserved rest.." Mei Chen teasingly said as she feigned the look of an old frail lady.

"I'll do what I can.." Yang Qing said feigning the serious look of someone undertaking a grand mission before he and Mei Cheng burst out laughing.

Yang Qing exchanged a few more words with Mei Cheng as he gave her the information slip Zhang Tao had handed to him as he left his store, while Mei Cheng handed him a slip containing all the information they had gathered about Jiang Xiang, the emerald spirit weaving fox that had helped the fire adler bear with the evolution of the daughter of the obsidian couple.

After they were done, Yang Qing left directly for his abode, skipping his routine of passing by one of the dining establishments at the Order as he always did immediately after coming back. He still had a lot of leftovers from his little excursion on the restaurants and sideway stalls he visited on the trip back.

Just before he reached his abode, he felt a reaction coming from his communication talisman.

"Is it Meifeng?" he muttered as he took out the talisman. Not a single day passed by without her calling, even during his trip, she made sure to call each day.

"Huh.." Yang Qing said in surprise before answering the call.

"Grandpa Ma Bo, how are you? I was just thinking about you.." Yang Qing fawningly said.

"No need to waste your bootlicking you shameless squirt, I don't have any resources for you to mooch off. How can you still be this way even as a palace court judge? You probably get more resources than I do by now. How can someone be this greedy.."

"It's not greed, it's sentiment. Since I was small, I always enjoyed your gifts. That hasn't changed. You could give me an earth-rank treasure and I'd still be excited.."

"Yes, yes..fine, while I don't have anything in the way of resources to give you, I did dig into that matter of the foundation circle."

"What did you find?" Yang Qing said his gaze turning serious.

The obsidian serpent's daughter had her evolution guided by a foundation circle which was what human cultivators used in the body refinement realm. However, that circle was altered and used on the daughter and even succeeded in helping her evolve into a flood dragon.

The foundation circle was created with the human body in mind, and as far as Yang Qing knew, spirit beasts had no need for it because of their naturally powerful bodies. He didn't even know it worked on them but Jiang Xiang had managed to use it to support an evolution, whose difficulty was miles ahead of body refinement which was enough to draw his curiosity if something like this had ever been done before which was why he contacted Ma Bo to use his connections as a guest lecturer of the Jade Leaf Academy to dig into the matter. Their collection of arts and techniques was vaster than the Order's.

Chapter 799 Lunatic Prodigies

Without needing Yang Qing's reminder, Ma Bo continued,

"There were two organizations that were known to have used the foundation circle to aid in the evolution of their spirit beasts, and sometimes even to aid in the speeds of their cultivation. One of them should come as no surprise, it was the Myriad Beasts Sect but even they, if what I read is to be believed, their technique was borrowed from another's work, the Ghost Lamp Saccorophagus Sect.

The records show they were the true creators of that technique. Considering their reputation it isn't even surprising.."

Yang Qing felt like a thunderclap had gone off in his mind. Because of the many things he was juggling around when he saw the foundation circle, the Myriad Beasts Sect despite being so obvious, the thought never crossed his mind about them, which was a huge oversight on his mind all things considered.

The Myriad Beast Sect, just like the Radiant Sword Sect, and the Flowing Valley Sect, was a holy land. However, they were found to be experimenting with the vicious Ao Yin beast, which prompted a public outcry among the masses and they were attacked by the entire continent, eventually leading to their destruction.

Researching dangerous blood bloodthirsty creatures like the Ao Yin aside, the Myriad Beast Sect had grown their strength to the rank of a holy land because of their expertise with spirit beasts and rumor

had it they even had a mythical one as their sect guardian. If the Myriad Beast Sect claimed to be the second in the nurturing and development of spirit beasts, no one would claim to be first.

They were that good, and after their destruction, the two holy lands grabbed their core secrets, while the rest split what remained. As far as he knew there were a few rank-one organizations that grew from what they pilfered from their ruins. One of those organizations was the Scarlet Blood Ghost Hands Syndicate. Their founder was rumored to have found a bit of the research related to the Ao Yin along with a treasure that he now uses to hide the headquarters of the syndicate.

He wasn't the only one, countless others had their fortunes changed from whatever they harvested from the ruins of the Myriad Beasts Sect.

Yang Qing couldn't help but admonish himself for overlooking such an obvious clue in the Myriad Beasts Sect.

"Grandpa Ma Bo, you said considering the reputation of the Ghost Lamp Saccophagus Sect, it isn't surprising that the technique originated from them. What do you mean by that? As far as I know about the sect, they were famous for creating heinous art like the non-luminous nether flames, the soul-sealing pill, blood parasite string puppetry art, and countless others. Using a foundation circle to help with an evolution, doesn't exactly match the arts they are known for.." Yang Qing said airing his doubt.

"Who says just because they created evil arts and techniques that that's the only thing they were capable of? The founder of the Crimson Tide is famous for creating the blood refinement art, Blood Ressurrection, and Damnation Tide, an art rumored to have reached the purple grade.

Whenever he is mentioned that is what people know him for. They ignore the fact that he had mastered the core cultivation arts of his previous sect to perfection. He created the blood resurrection and damnation tide because he was dissatisfied with his former sect's art which he claimed could hardly extract even half his potential.

That was in fact the real reason he fell out with his former sect. They couldn't handle the disdain he showed for their legacies and a fight broke out which eventually ended in that sect's destruction. The story floating around was a misrepresentation of the actual facts, but that's a story for another day.

That founder when he was developing the blood resurrection and damnation tide, he didn't just create it out of the blue. Having improved one cultivation art yourself, you know the effort it requires, right.."

"Mmmh.."

"Then you can imagine how much effort he put into making the well-known instability of blood refinement into something stable. Because of the instability, most blood arts can never reach past the blue grade, even reaching the blue grade is an achievement in and of itself. Creating a blood refinement art at the blue grade has the same level of difficulty as creating a gold grade art.

You can only imagine the level of difficulty creating one that touched the gates of the purple grades. In the process of improving that art, he created countless meditation arts that strengthened the soul and mind, along with formation arrays that helped cultivate the mind. A couple of them had reached the gold grade, and they were not blood refinement arts.

The rank two sect, 36 Lotus of Enlightenment sect built their core legacy off one of those meditation arts.

That founder was a blood refinement cultivator but he was a prodigy with orthodox arts too having created a few himself and the Ghost Lamp Saccophagus Sect is the name. It was filled with countless prodigies who had the same talent as the founder of the Crimson Tide, and just like him lacked restraint on what they pursued.

They created countless cultivation arts and techniques across all schools of cultivation and uncovered the properties and mysteries of countless treasures. Be it alchemy, talisman refining, formation arrays, weapon and artifact refinement, soul and body cultivation, herbology, beast taming, herbology, astrology, geomancy, medicine and poison refinement, curses, bloodline activations, they researched it all, and they were the pioneers of groundbreaking discoveries that we benefit from today.

For every 100 foundational techniques, arts, and recipes you see today, four would have their roots inevitably tied to the Ghost Lamp Saccophagus Sect.

I don't know how far back the sect existed, but even now people are still discovering their research projects all over the continent and some are way ahead of what we have now. They were absolute lunatics who would go to any lengths for their research which was often not a pretty picture, but it can

not be denied, a bit of the cultivation in this continent was pulled forward because of them, something we are still harvesting even now. The spirit beast evolution foundation circle process more than likely originated from them.

Yang Qing, assumptions could cost you your life. Never assume cultivators only have one root, you never know how many branching roots they have hidden in the ground. Do well to remember that, especially in your role.. It will prevent you from being blindsided."

Yang Qing's eyes widened in fear with cold sweat forming from his hairline. When he was training Mao Yunru, he always warned her against being closed-minded as it restricted one's view of things, but here he was doing the same thing and he wasn't even aware. Subconscious habits were sometimes the scariest of things.

With a solemn expression even though Ma Bo was not in front of him, Yang Qing bowed as he said,

"Thanks for the reminder, Grandpa Ma.."

"It's nothing..."

"Grandpa Ma, how much do you think it would cost to acquire that foundational circle evolution technique?"

"Are you looking to buy it? I am sorry to break it to you, Yang Qing, you might have considerable wealth from your ceremony, but I doubt even if you sold it all you'd be able to acquire it.

Neither can I, sadly. I did try to redeem a copy here, but the merit points required is something that would require me to work tirelessly to nurture a single blue-grade alchemist every year for the next two hundred years.

That should tell you how hard it is to acquire it. As an individual, it's hard, not unless you're a well-established domain expert with considerable reputation and resources. If not, the only other way is by being affiliated with a powerful organization that has the resources to acquire it.

I think the Order more than likely has it, and like the Jade Leaf Academy that has one too, the means of acquiring it from them is likely to just be as stringent.

I advise you to give up getting your greedy hands on it, but if you can't help yourself you can always try your like exploring the continent. The Ghost Lamp Saccophagus Sect had thousands of mysterious realms and other research grounds spread all around the continent. Not all have been unearthed, maybe you can find a record of the technique there for free, but knowing you...

How can you be stingy and cowardly at the same time? If you want something for free, you'll have to risk yourself out there. Nothing is truly free, stingy kid and before you ask, I don't have any spirit stones or treasures for you to borrow. .."

"I wasn't going to do that, Grandpa Ma. Even I am not that shameless.." Yang Qing said as he rubbed his nose in embarrassment and guilt. He had indeed been entertaining the thought but with the statement that was made, he was too embarrassed to go through with it.

"You're sure?"

"Yes, I am sure. Can't you trust my character just this once? I've grown. I'm not that bratty child from before. I have matured.." Yang Qing said with righteous indignation.

"Okay then.."

Yang Qing knowing Ma Bo didn't buy it, decided to change the subject to the doubt he had in his heart borne from the information provided.

"Do you think the White Rose Pavilion could have something like that?"

"They definitely do. It goes without saying.. They're merchants.."

"Is it something that their staff members can gain access to easily?"

"Depends on the rank of the staff member. One of their executives and high-ranked elders might have access to it, but for the rest, I think it would be even harder for them than us. Merchants would bleed even their family members dry, given the chance.

For any low-ranking staff member to gain access to it, they would have likely have to trade something of an equivalent value to the technique. Why do you ask?"

Yang Qing went on to explain his findings in the Deer Mountain Range, restricting the subject matter to the foundation circle, the evolution process, and those involved.

"Evolution into a flood dragon? Even with the treasure bone, it couldn't have been easy. Jiang Xiang might not be a simple character, he might be a prodigy, because even with the technique, not many would be able to help an obsidian serpent evolve into a flood dragon given the contradictory foundational natures of the two, but they were able to pull it off?

I can give him being a spirit beast maybe gives him an advantage of having intimate familiarity with the workings of the body of a fellow spirit beast, but he would need the same matching knowledge with the foundational technique to pull it off. Having the method isn't enough. Extreme familiarity with it is the defining factor and with spirit beasts' struggles with human cultivation arts he must be quite the talent.."

"He must be.." Yang Qing said, his thoughts drifting elsewhere accompanied by a deep frown.

"Thank you very much, Grandpa Ma.."

"I don't want your thanks, I want spirit stones and spiritual herbs. Next time I pass by, I want several kilograms worth, preferably the ones tainted by the aura of your physique. I have had a lot of success with them in my experiments...

Take care, Yang Qing."

Not giving Yang Qing a chance to weasel out, Ma Bo quickly ended the call leaving Yang Qing smiling bitterly as he went into his abode.

"Luckily Ma Yuan had already harvested some when he was redoing the backyard.."

Chapter 800 The Light Aurora Curtain

When Yang Qing walked into his abode, he found Ma Yuan exactly where he expected to find him. He was hard at work transforming Yang Qing's compound into an immortal's botanical garden. It had an ethereal glow, mesmerizing scent, and refreshing melody of life. Yang Qing was surprised to discover that his aura which had contaminated every single part of his abode seemed to have been activated because of the changes around it. It felt like it was breathing and bonding with the changes around filled with excitement.

As he sensed its transformation, Yang Qing's eyes lit up as he could feel his cultivation base stirring. He could sense a budding mysterious truth growing within the aura that surrounded his abode as it blended in rhythmic synergy with the various forms of life around it from the birds to the insects, to the fish, to every plant, down to the spiritual qi. Every single living and non-living component seemed to be working in tandem with each other with his aura as the binding component.

As the originator, Yang Qing could see and sense this change all too well. The scene that only he could see was a wave of beautiful light curtain-like an aurora that was filled with lights of different colors with the prevalent ones being green, blue, earthen brown, and golden brown. That light curtain was pulsating with a mysterious aura as it enveloped the entire compound.

Ma Yuan was with his daughter Ma Ling tending to a young sap of royal crown maple. The ethereal light curtain that was flowing gently like an aurora borealis had covered them and the baobab. Yang Qing could see the vibrant colors within that light curtain flow in and out of Ma Yuan, Ma Ling, and the royal crown baobab.

Wavy threads of light flowed in and out of them, interconnecting with other lines crisscrossing all over the compound creating a cycling connection of life. Yang Qing felt the changes happening within that connection, it was like every component of his compound was communicating with one another.

From the connection he could feel the empyrean wasp hovering next to Ma Yuan seemed to be saying,

"Oi, Ma Yuan, be careful with that baby maple, at that angle, it won't be able to produce the best sap.."

Though Ma Yuan couldn't hear the empyrean wasp or even realize its presence with how focused he was, somehow he kept adjusting the position of the royal crown maple in accordance with the wishes of the empyrean wasp.

As the royal crown maple was being moved, through the line, Yang Qing could feel its nervousness, the kind one would get at being in an unfamiliar place. The maple was like a little child thrown in a room full of adults and was familiar with none of them.

"Hhhelloo seniors.." it nervously transmitted as some of its leaves curled up in fear.

As Ma Yuan was moving it, that nervously slowly left its body and was soon replaced with a feeling of comfort.

"This feels nice.."

That feeling was transmitted to Ma Yuan who inadvertently found himself smiling even if he didn't know why.

All around the compound, Yang Qing could see conversations and interconnected relationships being established.

Whether it was the aqua butterfly that released tiny droplets of cool qi from its wings on winter goji berries that seemed to be getting a little too dry or the spirit-cleansing hibiscus that seemed to be beckoning the sapphire scarab beetles to have some of its nectar, or the green flame tree that was playing mediator by releasing its restorative, calming and nurturing essence to the shimmering ocean apple tree and the magma bark orange tree that seemed to be competing against each other or the ox head mushroom that seemed to be leeching of the excess fire energy from the soil because the mirage glow magnolia was feeling a little overwhelmed.

And for Ma Yuan, the instigator of all this, somehow whether it was the plants, the insects, and birds, even the earth itself seemed to know that he was injured somewhat so they kept pouring life energy into him with him none the wiser about it and it wasn't just him, even Ma Ling, though the greatest concentration was on Ma Yuan.

His core and dantian were still shattered, but Yang Qing could feel his body was being refined, reinvigorated, and elevated by the concerted efforts of the relations he had established with the different components of the environment.

Yang Qing could clearly see every aspect of his body being renewed, strengthened, and transformed to its optimal state, whether it was his skin, his blood vessels, organs, bones, or even his meridians that had long dried up ever since his dantian and core were shattered seemed like a cracked dry river bed that had been doused with short rain. There was still no water in it, but one could see there was a potential of a stream forming in there. The desiccation was being treated.

Because of the different elements flowing to him, no part was left unattended. Elemental body refinement went by a maxim. Water refines the spirit, wood refines the organs, earth refines the skin and bones and lastly, fire refines the blood and flesh. All elements combine you achieve the cycle of perfection and stability.

Even though there was no change to Ma Yuan's dantian, and his cultivation base was still crippled, the base state of his body was being restored to what his life order would be as a core formation expert. Yang Qing could feel his vigor and vitality being slowly pushed forward to what it should have been had his core and dantian remained intact.

The journey of cultivation was the transformation of one's body, essence, and spirit. Every time they improve by either a minor realm or a major realm, these three factors are continuously changed, and in the process, their entire being is transformed.

It is why cultivators stop needing food, sleep, and even breathing at a certain point. It is because their body, and how it functions changes. No longer do they need food to maintain their organ functions, or sleep to renew their bodies and minds.

The introduction of foundation pillars or cores changes that. Through pillars and cores, spiritual qi is absorbed and converted into an energy that the body survives, and slowly by slowly the body adapts, and is modified to subsist on that energy. Their bodies change and their minds along with it.

Ma Yuan's body was that of a core formation expert, but he lacked the core to sustain its functions which was why he needed copious amounts of food rich in spiritual qi to carry the job his core would have been doing. If he did not meet their needs, he would be lethargic and his body would slowly deteriorate over time, though it wouldn't be a drastic change, it would be there, and his original life expectancy would dwindle along with it.

As a late-stage core formation expert, he should have lived for at least 4,500 years, but with his core shattered, if he doesn't maintain the spiritual energy levels it requires, that expectancy would likely drop to 2,500- 3,000 years. Yang Qing had already planned to give him a few treasures rich in life essence to help like the vermilion lotus seeds or the green flame tree's leaves which when ground into a tea, though the flavor wasn't there, was rich in wood and flame element energy that would provide all the sustenance his body needed.

But seeing the changes happening before him, that seemed to no longer be needed.