

Daily life 871

Chapter 871 Decay of the major families (9)

From the reports collected on the clan, currently, it operated more like a merchant clan than a clan whose roots were in alchemy. They chased lucrative deals all over with fervent passion to the point of undercutting others ruthlessly in the pursuit of those profits and connections.

Anyone who wasn't at a certain standard, they reduced their association with them, even with those they had a history with like what they did with the Zhang clan by reducing the quota of support they provided them at the border in support of the war efforts.

They suppressed whoever got in their way, be it the founding families like the Chen Clan whom they had a deep feud because the former had decided to try their hand at alchemy which the Gui clan saw as their sole domain and property, or some competitors with no background who refused to lower their heads and submit to them.

They had become tyrants and cut throats in their conduct which was how they ended up landing in Yang Qing's courtroom.

Yu Gen led twenty-three of their clansmen into the courtroom and just like the Chen and Zhang family, the court had allowed provision for someone from their clan to be present at the proceedings and even speak on their behalf should they wish to.

The person who came was their supreme elder called Gui De. He was a quasi-palace stage expert. The reports showed he was their most powerful cultivator with a natural physique, the mist lotus weaver physique that gave him adept skills in illusory arts.

Maybe due to the tense state of the Red Maple Empire, be it from the ruthless competition among the noble families, the veiled threat of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, or dealing with the consequences of the bridges they had burned in their pursuit for wealth, whatever the reason, Gui De and a few others within the clan had decided to focus solely on growing their martial strength. Despite coming from an alchemist clan, Gui De had few accomplishments in that area other than the bare minimum that one would expect from someone coming from a long-standing alchemist clan.

After they were all in the courtroom, Yang Qing went through the regular motions of introduction which involved explaining the rules and the rights of all present, be it the court, the accused, and the defendants before finally he moved on to the charges issued against those present.

The Gui clan had no involvement in blood fiend arts, like the previous two families, however, they had just as much blood on them.

In their relentless pursuit to grow their wealth, and power and to ensure they remained the hegemony of alchemy, they used any and all means to that end. They operated on the motto of fearing the strong and bullying the weak and bully they did.

Of those twenty-two present, some had hired assassins to kill their competitors with some even making special requests such as having the assassins especially torture them before they took their lives, there was even one Gui clan member who had the assassins use mind manipulation arts on one of their competitors and had him slaughter his entire family. After he had done the deed, the spell was canceled and the scene along with the memory of what he had done came flooding back. That person ended up going berserk and took their own life by self-detonation.

There were hundreds of cases that were similar to that one and every single one of them had a brutal ending to them. The Gui clan were shown to be just as vicious as Chen Zholan who had his friend murdered and exploited the grief of that friend's father.

All the twenty-two Gui Clan members present were just another Chen Zholan, though if Yang Qing was asked, they were even more ruthless than Chen Zholan, at least with Chen Zholan, the target of his cruelty was Chen Xue, but with these Gui Clan members, they each had at least fifty victims each, on them, whom they arranged for the most merciless endings unimaginable...

And the reason? A recipe that someone refused to share because it was the last legacy of their family having been passed down for thousands of years,

Another, just because they supplied potions to a customer belonging to the Gui clan despite the sale having no impact on their existing relationship with the Gui Clan.

Countless got tortured, and had their loved ones subjected to torment as they bore witness before finally being given a vicious death. Even until their death, Yang Qing didn't think they found peace.

Having your entire family tortured and slaughtered ruthlessly, all because you sold a few earth-rank potions to someone who decided to buy them from you on a whim.

Who would be able to find peace after something like that happened to them? Yang Qing sure wouldn't.

The investigation done on the clan unearthed their relationship with an assassin organization by the name of Underground Ferrymen. That assassin organization was rumored to be headed by a middle-stage palace realm expert who it was said had managed to execute a palace realm expert when he was in the quasi-palace stage.

Whether that story was true, was of little consequence, what was true was, that the Underground Ferrymen had countless bodies on them, with some of them even coming from some prominent rank three organizations. Their target went from individuals to entire organizations, from silent kills to spectacles, and the Gui Clan, some within their ranks at least, were shown to have deep ties with them dating back almost 4,000 years with even one of their members having married one of the assassins of the Underground Ferrymen.

The investigation unearthed the ties, and the thread though didn't lead to the head of the snake, it did lead to several high-

ranking figures of the organization. After being worked on by the special inquisitors, those captured figures spilled everything including the commissions they took on behalf of some of the Gui clan members, and others that touched on cases other judges had.

It was a windfall for the Order and even more so for Yang Qing, as those members had irrefutable evidence of what the Gui Clan had them do and the arrangements and agreements they had with each other. It was from that pile that Yang Qing discovered the Gui Clan had even gone to the extent of having the Underground ferrymen assassinate a few Zhang clan members so they would be triggered to remain on the border out of vengeance.

That wasn't even the only frame job done at their behest, there were countless. About a third of the chaos in Red Maple Empire was at the machinations of the Gui family.

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Even with the damning evidence presented against them, the Gui clan members under indictment still tried to deny the charges as they tried to shift the blame on other families claiming their innocence in the matter.

They said it was the other families framing them for those deeds because they were jealous that the Gui family was the only one among the six founding families to have still maintained its growth even after their founder had passed on while the rest of the families were struggling to stay afloat.

But with the amount of damning evidence presented against them such as the visual recordings, documents of which some even had soul-binding seals to them, along with the testimonies of the assassins of the Underground Ferryman, their excuses carried no water and the only thing it managed to do was add on to their troubles for lying to the court.

Eventually, they turned on each other as they tried to throw one another under the bus, the blame game eventually extended to other members of the clan and other parties that had evaded the investigative net of the Order.

During their spree of trying to pull others into the mud with them, some even confessed that there were those within their clan who had colluded with members of the Five Clover Kingdom here and there for a significant fee.

One of those implicated in the collusion was an old fossil of the clan, who had trained many in alchemy. Though he wasn't a supreme elder like Gui De, he was just as respected because of his attainments in alchemy, those who had benefited from it, and his age. He could be considered Gui De's uncle by seniority and just like him, he too was a quasi-palace stage expert, though he was weaker and had leveraged the usage of pills to attain it so he could extend his lifespan. His name was Gui Weimin.

Gui De's face darkened when he heard that Gui Weimin had colluded with one of the princes of the Five Clovers Kingdom to supply them pills, potions, and certain rare herbs that could only be found in the core regions of the Empire and in exchange, that prince would grant him an audience with one of the elders of the Zou clan.

Gui De didn't need to hear the rest of the testimony to guess as to Gui Weimin's intentions. The closer Gui Weimin came to exhausting his lifespan and dying, the more fearful he became of it and it wasn't long before the maddened obsession with staying alive kicked in. He burned through countless resources within the clan to stop that from happening.

There were only two ways he could do that, one was if he used a natural treasure that extends his lifespan, and the other was if he broke through to the palace realm. Finding a natural treasure that extends one's lifespan was just as difficult as ascending to the heavens.

Treasures that were capable of such a feat, at the very least, would be at the absolute peak of the ascendant grade and because of their nature, they were rarer to find even when compared to other ascendant and saint grade treasures.

No matter how much wealth they had, even if they emptied the coffers of their entire clan, and even thrown in that of the entire Red Maple Empire, they still wouldn't be able to afford the clues to such a treasure, let alone buy it.

They lacked the resources and the connection to acquire it, and if by some luck they managed to get their hands on it, would they be able to keep it long enough to use it or would the rest of the Red Maple Empire wake up one day and find the entire Gui clan had been slaughtered to the last man within their grounds without a clue who did it or why they did it.

Gui Weimin's situation could only be remedied one way and that was for him to break through to the palace realm and have his lifespan leap from 4,500 to 15,000 years in a single bound. Realistically, it was the only feasible option if it wasn't for the fact that Gui Weimin didn't have enough talent to take that leap, and to make up for it, the clan expended countless resources that could bridge that gap.

They were hemorrhaging resources for that effort, it was Gui Weimin, a senior they all respected and admired, of course, they were going to do all they could to support him, going even to the extent of backstabbing old friends, swallowing up their competitors, lessen their support for the war because they didn't want to pour their resources in two bottomless pits.

If they had to pick between their clan and supporting the war efforts at the border, of course, they would put themselves first. Maybe if they produced a blue-grade alchemist or a palace stage expert they could revisit the issue but with the Gui Clan having no blue-grade alchemist nor a palace realm expert like the Zhang, Mo, or the Duan royal family did, of course, they were going to pick themselves at the expense of the rest.

But even with their self-preservation and how ruthless they had been in how they went about their business, he would have never expected a collusion with the Five Clovers Kingdom.

The reason he never completely agreed to cutting off their entire support at the border was because he knew what would happen to them if the Empire lost that war. The Five Clover Kingdom would carve them up and devour them not sparing even a single bone.

But hearing this.. that one of their well-respected elders was supporting the enemy all so he could escape death, that he didn't see it coming.

What if he was asked to sell out his clan for a chance at extending his life, would he hesitate?

Even though he didn't want to admit it, Gui De felt he knew what Gui Weimin would choose if he had to choose between the two.

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Yang Qing ignoring the inner turmoil of Gui De was hard at work as he gladly recorded everything down which he then transmitted to the Shadow Hawks Division, and the Yellow Plains Branch to follow up on it.

If everything was as those clan members said, the Gui clan would end up receiving a significant blow to their foundations.

Even without those additional testimonies that implicated more members of their clan, just the loss of the twenty-two members present was sure to cause significant damage to their reputation.

About three-quarters of those present were high-ranking elders of the Gui Clan and none of those present wasn't a top-tier orange grade alchemist.

Even if the Gui clan was an alchemist clan, how many top-tier orange-grade alchemists did it have? Losing fifteen top-tier orange-grade alchemists was sure to impact them greatly.

Nurturing alchemists requires considerable resources and time to do, especially ones at the level of those present. Replacing fifteen top-tier orange-grade alchemists would likely take a few hundred years at least.

If they had a blue-grade alchemist to guide them, that timeframe would shrink down considerably but the Gui Clan didn't have one, and if they hadn't yet produced a single one in close to 20,000 years, what were the chances they would produce one anytime soon, or that they would even be allowed the time to do that.

When it came to certain matters such as treason, the Order's hands were tied, what Gui Weimin did or didn't do wasn't the Order's business, but a few hours from now every city from the border to the imperial capital of the Red Maple Empire would know of the snakes they harbored within its territory.

Same with all the single-target assassination victims. Assassinations in the cultivation world weren't exactly a prosecutable offense by the Order. Assassinations were part of the cultivators' world, the Order would only get involved and prosecute someone if the assassination led to the annihilation of an entire household, or organization in which the victims included mortals, children, or people not of that world, or if the Assassin organization used was one that was on the Order's hit list.

For those kinds of assassinations in which their hands were tied, the Order would try its very best to ensure information about the perpetrator reaches anyone with deep ties to the victim. The Order couldn't collect that debt, but that person surely would.

Even if they were symbols of justice and fairness, they were still part of the cultivation world and sometimes its laws took precedence over the Order's laws, one just had to judge when that time was, and the affairs of the Gui clan was one such time.

Yang Qing patiently waited as those elders sold each other out, spilling everything they knew in desperation, not even taking the time to negotiate a deal for the information they spilled. Only when they were done did he deliver the sentence. Gui De did say a few words on their behalf, but his mind wasn't there even as he did it. His words seemed more perfunctory and casual as a result. Like he was doing it just to go with the motion and fulfill his duty as the vice clan master of the Gui clan.

Twenty-one of the twenty-two clan members were sentenced to life imprisonment in Requiem and considering the things they did, their stay there would be anything but pleasant. Yang Qing had a feeling the students at the Institute would be having fresh sparring partners sometime in the future.

As for the one remaining Gui Clan member, Yang Qing exercised his judicial discretion and executed him on the spot in front of the other clan members.

Judicial discretion was the authority granted to a judge to enforce their sentence personally, bypassing the Requiem. To avoid the judges unilaterally taking matters into their own hands all the time, a limit was imposed on its use, and someone of Yang Qing's rank had twelve of them for the year, and he decided to use one today.

Whenever a judge felt they wanted to use it, they would need a majority approval from the spirit council, a high-ranking figure from Requiem, and the Judicial Review Committee. Since all three divisions had a live viewing of the court proceedings via the monitoring arrays in the courtroom, once Yang Qing presented his request to exercise his judicial discretion, it didn't take long to receive a response.

The three divisions approved his request, and unanimously at that. The clan member he executed had been the clan member who had his victim beguiled with an illusory art that had him slaughter his entire family, brutally at that. He had a wife, two concubines, four sons, and two daughters, of which two of his youngest children who were two of his sons, one was seven months old, and the other was almost two years.

That clan member had his victim flay his entire family and the spell was cancelled after he was done. That victim got targeted all because he refused to trade a family heirloom that he wanted to pass down to his eldest child.

The heirloom in question was the core of a spirit beast, a luminous moth. The core had no special abilities other than its ability to heal minor wounds, calm emotions, and induce a peaceful sleep in whoever wore it.

It had been passed down in the victim's family for thousands of years, and he wanted to pass it down to his eldest child, his daughter. But his plan went to shambles when that Gui clan member saw it on him and asked for it.

The victim politely declined as he cited his reasons for doing so in the hopes the Gui clan member would understand. Luminous moths were not rare, and the core they had wasn't all that unique among them either as it belonged to one that was at the early stages. With the might and resources of the Gui Clan,

they could buy thousands of them that were way better than his if they wanted to and would have sold his to them if it wasn't a family heirloom. and the deep sentiment attached to it as a result of it.

Things didn't go as he expected. He ended up controlled by a secret art and massacred his family in a vicious and sadistic way and then was left to stew in the horror he had created. That victim ended up self-detonating after he saw the sight of his flayed family.

Yang Qing executed that clan member by incinerating him to ashes, delivering his death, swiftly, a kindness he didn't afford his victim.

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?Once he was done with the Gui family, Xia Ting arrived just in time to transport them to Requiem. In addition to getting life imprisonment, for the lives they had taken, should anyone related to their victims ever seek recompense through blood duel, the Order will happily oblige.

That order wasn't received well by the convicted Gui clan members. All of them were alchemists and even though most were late-stage core formation experts, Yang Qing could tell by the fluctuations of their cultivation base that they had reached their present realms through pills and potions. Their fragile cultivation base would be exposed and exploited in a blood duel.

"Good riddance.." muttered Yang Qing as Xia Ting took away those clan members. Gui De, their vice clan master, left immediately after the sentencing was done with an urgency to him. No doubt because of the information that showed that one of their clan members was a traitor. If such information got out, and their clan was unprepared for it, they would be left in a precarious position.

Things were already tense as it is and in their pursuit of growing their power and amassing wealth to make up for not having a palace stage expert, they had ruffled a lot of feathers and created a lot of enemies, the least of which were the founding families.

If word got out that their supreme elder had been colluding with the Five Clovers Kingdom, he could already imagine what was likely to happen. Those families would instantly band together and attack them.

When it came to foundations, except for the royal family, the five founding families were at the same level, and though their Gui Clan was wealthier, in terms of core power and foundations, they were not

stronger than the rest, and right now, one could even argue they were slightly weaker when compared against the Zhang and Mo family who both had palace stage experts.

Their founder had left them treasures to help guard their clan grounds against even palace realm experts, but so did the other founding families. If those families combined their forces and resources in earnest, it wouldn't take long for all their defensive measures to be breached.

By Gui De's estimates, it would take no more than four days, and if the royal family got involved, that time would drastically shorten.

"I am sorry Elder Weimin, you brought this upon yourself. I can only hope your death and that of your family will be enough.." Gui De thought as a merciless glint flashed in his eyes.

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It didn't take long after the Gui Clan's case for the next family to be brought in, the Mo family. Fourteen of their clansmen were brought in, of which thirteen were on trial with the extra member being the clan leader who had been allowed in the court as a courtesy by the Order, in case the clan leader wanted to speak at their behest.

Their clan leader, Mo Li, had the same bearing as Chen Xian. He was calm and steady like a boulder but within that calmness lay a tempestuous saber. In terms of bearing, they were similar in that regard, but when it came to talents, that was where the differences appeared, and one of them, it went without saying was Mo Li's cultivation base. He was at the first stage of the palace realm and from the fluctuations he was releasing he looked to be just at the cusp of reaching the second stage.

By Yang Qing's estimates, in about six months to a year, he would have already taken that step, catching up to the Zhang clan's leader who was a second-stage palace realm expert. Though as a saber user, even though Mo Li's cultivation base was lower, even in his current realm, Yang Qing had a feeling he would be able to put up a decent fight against the Zhang clan's patriarch.

And the reason for that was Yang Qing could feel how properly refined Mo Li's saber intent was. It was to the point that even though Mo Li had great control over it to the point he could effortlessly conceal it by blending it within his body, Yang Qing could still feel its intrinsic qualities effortlessly emanating from his body.

It was sharp, free-flowing, and tidal. Looking at Mo Li made him feel like he was looking at a kingfisher stirring a hurricane and a thunderstorm with a flap of its wings on a cold dark night with the only source of light being the dangerous gleam of its talons and beaks.

Only when one had reached a certain threshold in the cultivation of their saber intent, could its 'quality and character' be as evident as Mo Li's was.

When Yang Qing saw him, he could finally understand why it was rumored that the Mo family had been trying to compete with the royal family over the years. The attainments Mo Li had showed, he was qualified to do it. Provided nothing happened, given enough time with the talent he showed, at the very least he would reach the middle stages of the palace realm.

His qualifications aside, after seeing Mo Li and the way he carried himself, Yang Qing did find himself puzzled about something.

After years of being a judge, he had developed a knack for reading people from even the most mundane of things, and based on what he was reading off Mo Li, the Mo Clan Leader didn't seem the type to care one iota about being an emperor or wielding power in that form.

He had seen enough saber experts in his lifetime to be able to tell that Mo Li was a through-and-through bonafide saber fanatic. The purity in his saber intent told him that. To a man like that, even his family and his life came second to his saber. All other things were immaterial and considered hindrances when compared to it.

There was no way a person obsessed with the saber like he did, would spare so much as a second thought lusting after the crown like what the rumors said.

If he was truly in opposition with the royal family it had to be for some other reason, either he was using the royal family as a whetstone to sharpen himself, or there was something else that prompted a man like him to act against them and that something had to be as dear to him as his saber was.

Yang Qing didn't believe the throne had reached that level. As important as it was to most, to someone so devoted to the dao of the saber, the throne would be no more than a distraction for him.

While he was curious about what the underlying reason behind his antagonistic attitude toward the Duan royal family could be, he decided to shelve the matter to focus on the matter at hand, which was the prosecution of the thirteen Mo clan members.

All thirteen members were young noble scions of the clan and had checked off all the stereotypical check boxes that one would expect to see from pampered young masters who had not experienced the wind and the rains of the world. They were arrogant and ruthless to those they deemed weaker than themselves or those they could bully without fear of reprisal while they cowered and whimpered like newborns in front of those they couldn't threaten with their background.

They were all trembling, too scared to even look up. The longer Yang Qing looked at them, he realized something. Their eyes would occasionally dart to their indifferent clan leader and immediately after it would seem like their fear would spike up a notch. A few seconds in, it was clear to him that the reason for their fear wasn't the court or what punishment they were going to receive but rather what terrified them to the point that some almost toppled over, was their clan leader, Mo Li.

If that was the case, then it explained why when it came to the Mo family, none of the high-ranking figures of the clan which included their clan elders and the promising youths were caught up in the investigation, unlike the Chen, Zhang, and Gui clan that had a mix of their elders and youths with potential.

Mo Li was likely a terrifying deterrent within his family and how they conducted themselves. As for how thirteen members still ended up in the Order's crosshairs despite his deterrent, Yang Qing felt it was more than likely because the thirteen members present were too useless in terms of talent to catch his eye as none of the thirteen members was at their core formation realm despite their background.

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They were all of a similar age to Yang Qing but the one who had the highest cultivation base amongst them was only at the eleventh stage of the foundation establishment realm while the rest languished between the sixth and ninth stages.

The other factor was they didn't live at their clan's main grounds where their clan leader was, but instead lived at the various residences that were a million miles away from their clan's main grounds.

All thirteen were residents of Purple City where they used their background and the considerable distance from their clan's main grounds, to lord over the rest. Seeing their reactions, Yang Qing had doubts if they would have had the guts to replicate their crimes at any other place that wasn't that far away from the sight of their clan leader.

He couldn't help but sigh as his gaze fell on them. Even after he made the introductions and explained the rules of the court, none of them dared look up. Left with no alternative, he moved on to list their crimes as he presented the evidence, along with calling some witnesses.

The thirteen clan members were guilty of crimes one would expect to see from some silk-dandy young masters. Cases of bullying here and there, kidnapping, beatings all in the name of face, stealing wives and daughters, and the like.

They also funded a few of the gangs one of them being the Black Viper Gang from which Yang Qing had apprehended a blood fiend cultivator from within their ranks. It was the same gang that the Zou siblings associated with when they lived in Purple City. Its leader, Shu Wei, a second-stage core formation expert was among the list of witnesses. He sang like a canary, especially when he was made aware of what fate would befall him for having a blood-fiend cultivator within his ranks.

From their list of crimes, it was evident the thirteen Mo clan members weren't exactly the brightest of people. Their hubris and name were exploited and used by others for their gain, even the lackeys they had under them used them in one way or another.

With the chaos and crimes they committed, one could always see the trail of others pulling their strings, especially the subsidiaries of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion. They were the primary beneficiaries of those clan members' arrogance and stupidity as they constantly used them to sow discord and chaos all over Purple City in an effort to undermine the City Lord's hold over the city.

In the end, after he listed out their crimes, not one of them offered a word of retort, as they all weakly admitted to their guilt in the matter, stammering as they did.

Yang Qing sentenced them to hard labor for one hundred years. As for what that hard labor would be, he left it to the penalties and rehabilitation office under the administration hall to decide. As the thirteen clan members were being taken away, they all seemed to burst with relief as they left the courtroom.

Throughout the whole proceeding, the clan leader, Mo Li, said no more than ten words, and the words he did speak, it was when greeting Yang Qing, and excusing himself after he was done with the sentencing. In between, he said nothing.

Chapter 874 You talk too much

"How do you want to handle the next group? Will you deal with them individually or do it collectively as a group?" asked Yu Gen once it was just him and Yang Qing in the courtroom with Xia Ting having already gone to handover the Mo clansmen to the penalties and rehabilitation division.

"We are already here.." Yang Qing said with an exhausted sigh as he rubbed the bridges of his eyebrows to exorcise the tenseness he felt due to the upcoming case.

Resting his eyes on his palms, Yang Qing let out another sigh as he rubbed his eyes in the process before looking up smiling wryly at Yu Gen, as he did.

"The cases we have against them aren't exactly things we can directly punish them for. For them, we are no more than middlemen between the aggrieved and them. In the end, what happens is in the hands of the aggrieved.

And since some of those cases overlap amongst them, we might as well do it all at once.

The charges aren't a lot. Let's bring them all in and get it over with. I just hope the others don't lose their nerve.." Yang Qing said as threw himself back to his seat, seemingly hoping it would swallow him.

Yu Gen nodded, wearing the same look and bitter smile Yang Qing had.

"Have his parents arrived or any notable figures from the pavilion?" languidly asked Yang Qing just as Yu Gen was about to leave.

"I haven't seen them, but considering their son is about to stand trial any moment now and they were already informed of it beforehand, and now after your sentencing. I figure they are already in the building or presently with him.."

"Mmh...." murmured Yang Qing absentmindedly as he stared into the glittering stars shining above his courtroom, his mind drifting off elsewhere.

"I really shouldn't have tried to sneak in those three months.." he weakly said, regret in his tone.

"I am glad you think so.."

Yang Qing hurriedly sat straight, his body tense as his head tilted in the direction the voice originated from.

Even though he already knew who the owner of that voice was owing to the unforgettable impact that owner and the voice had left on him for the past few years, he still felt his strength leave his body when he saw the stern, silver-eyed, silver-haired middle-aged man that had now graced his courtroom.

Who else could it be other than Lei Weiyuan?

"His timing is impeccable as always.." thought Yang Qing as his body started feeling like hot prickly needles were popping out at every part of his body, especially his back. His tongue felt dry, his chest seemed to be closing up, and there was also a ringing sound in his ears, but the sensation that took the cake in his body was his beating heart. The fervor with which it drummed, it was no different than the passionate beating drums that would be used to encourage soldiers about to go to war.

"You seem unnerved. I never thought I'd see this side of you... here.." said Lei Weiyuan as his eyes looked around the courtroom.

"How could I not be, Supervisor Lei? I am about to face off with potentially one or more angry domain experts with my puny second-stage palace realm cultivation.

I feel like I'm tempting death here.." Yang Qing said with an aggrieved tone as he used his hands to support his weak torso.

He left a few words unsaid which was that he blamed Lei Weiyuan for all this. If it wasn't for him throwing evaluations on him in his final week, he would never have stepped foot in Purple City, and none of this mess would have fallen on him.

Yang Qing paused in his grumbling when he saw the most terrifying villain he knew, flash a small smile.

"With your ability to attract trouble, I'm sure you'd have ended up in a similar situation at some point in time. No use blaming me..." Lei Weiyuan said, the smile still on his face, as his hands moved as he rubbed his beard. His eyes narrowed as they gleamed with a sage-like light as he added,

"Besides, if it wasn't for your brilliant idea of giving yourself a three-month vacation, you would not be in this mess in the first place..."

Yang Qing instantly felt like jumping over his podium and walloping the old man, but knowing his chances against the fiend, he chose to be a filial junior and endure.

The rush of anger and indignation quickly filled his heart and belly which strangely enough counteracted the nervousness he was feeling.

Lei Weiyuan turned his body away from the podium, turning it in the direction of the entrance.

"You shouldn't worry too much. It's just the Golden Bamboo Pavilion. Even if they allied with the Silver Leaf Empire, it shouldn't be something that should shake you one bit.

Aren't you the one who always shamelessly brags out there about how you have thousands of tall trees here to shelter you from the winds and storms here at the Order?"

Yang Qing's jaws sank, and from the sudden surprise, he inadvertently spoke out his true thoughts.

"How did you know that?"

Realizing what he had just said, he hurriedly placed his palms over his mouth, in a bid to take back his words, but it was already too late for that. It was already out there.

Lei Weiyuan, his hands clasped behind his back, cast a sideways glance toward Yang Qing, expressionless.

"Who doesn't? You're not exactly known for keeping things to yourself, are you? You talk too much.." Lei Weiyuan curtly said.

His delivery and his expression as he did so left Yang Qing feeling too embarrassed, with his retort to the statement being weak mumbles of,

"What's wrong with being expressive and sincere?"

Ignoring Yang Qing's mutterings, which even he didn't believe, Lei Weiyuan turned his attention back to the entrance.

"We each have our roles to play here, nothing more, nothing less. There's no need to shoulder more than that. You do what is expected of you, and we will also do our parts too. Its how the Order has always worked and why despite the odds stacked against us, we are still here, aren't we?"

"We are.." Yang Qing said as he felt his heart lighten.

"That's better.." Lei Weiyuan said.

"Before I forget, both of Lin Duyi's parents will be present during the case. In addition, there will be two more guests other than them. One has a relation to Lin Duyi from his mother's side. No doubt brought here to try and pressure us into some sort of concession.." Lei Weiyuan said still with the same impassive speech, but one could hear the disregard and contempt in his tone.

"The other one is a surprising figure. I can't wait to see their reaction.." he added as he smiled briefly before his expression turned deadpan

Chapter 875 Unfamiliar figures join the proceedings

Yang Qing feeling a sense of dread creep up on him, hesitantly asked,

"What are the cultivation realms of the two guests?"

"They are both in the domain realm," Lei Weiyuan said with an unhurried and calm tone, his demeanor completely opposite to Yang Qing who had already become deathly pale.

Holding his closed right palm in front of him, he started counting from his index finger with absentminded mutterings filled with disbelief.

"There's Lin Guiren, the founder of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion.." he said as he counted his index finger.

"Then there is his wife, Cai Hong.." he added as he moved to his middle finger, before simultaneously raising two more fingers making it four.

"And now we have two more guests, making it four domain experts.." Yang Qing weakly added, his tone shaky, his expression aghast as though he had seen a ghost.

"Supervisor Lei, shouldn't we just dump this case to the domain courts?" Yang Qing asked with a pleading tone.

"What are you going on about? The case is already yours, there is no way it can be moved on. Besides the primary culprit here is the Red Maple Empire, a rank 3 organization. Their rank means it falls directly in your lane as a palace court judge who deals and handles all matters relating to palace realm experts and organizations headed by them.." Lei Weiyuan casually said.

"Besides, you are the primary in this. Having brought this case to the Order's doorstep you should be the one to see it through to the end..."

And because of the numerous things it has unearthed in the process, the merit points and other bonuses you earn from this will be quite substantial.." he added, choosing to use the language Yang Qing appreciated the most, incentives.

However, the target didn't seem like he had the mental capacity to appreciate the incentives, in fact, he seemed rather incensed at the remark as his eyes gritted his teeth in anger before it immediately switched to clattering of fear.

Yang Qing was in no mood or frame of mind to care about the potential merit points and bonuses he would get after all this was done, not with the weight of what he was planning to do. Doing it in the presence of two domain experts and potentially gaining their wrath was already hard enough, let alone now adding four more in the mix.

Could those merit points guarantee his safety against four domain experts? With the Order's long history of being stingy with those things, it was highly unlikely if the celestial nesting weaver was any indication.

That arrogant parasitic bird cost him a lot of merit points to redeem and with the way the treasurer had put it as he redeemed it, the treasurer made it seem like he was getting a steal.

He was bamboozled into believing that the moment he acquired the egg he was well on his way to gain the authority to stand at the same table with mythical creatures and even bargain with them.

As long as the egg was hatched, it was purported that his path to glory was all but guaranteed.

But what did he get? An ulcer, a beast that robbed him of everything; joy, peace, and his meager resources, and what did he get in return for that trade-off, all he got from it was a bird that abused him constantly, constantly shining a glaring light of how poor he was, and maybe a decent nest.

But even though the nest was decent for both relaxing and cultivating, because of that damn bird's mouth, he could never enjoy either, in peace.

As for gaining the right to stand at the same table as mythical beasts, he would likely get eaten at that table because of the celestial nesting weaver's mouth.

Right now talk of merit points and bonuses offered him little to no motivation. What he needed was a sense of security. Potential merit points gave him none of that, right now what he could depend on were a few things. One of them was the monster he was currently in the courtroom with.

Though at this point he still wasn't sure who he was more terrified of, Lei Weiyuan, or those four domain experts.

Other than the old fiend, at least Hou Dehui would be there. Maybe with his history with the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, Yang Qing hoped Hou Dehui's presence would draw their attention to him rather than Yang Qing.

He honestly hoped that they would have enough bad blood between the two to the point that Hou Dehui's presence would leave them unnerved, uncomfortable, and distracted as a consequence of it.

Other than the two domain experts, there was one other thing he could depend on, but in as much as it was dependable, it wasn't foolproof. His hands moved to his medallion that was on the podium, which he clutched tightly as his eyes darted around the courtroom.

Yes, the other thing he could depend on was the courtroom itself. The whole tower was littered with countless arrays and artifacts which he was told were even capable of holding a soul formation expert at bay and the medallion was the key to such a fieresome power.

But even with all that firepower surrounding him, he was still agitated. After all, at the Institute, where the instructors' sole goal was to destroy any shred of hope in them, they had long grown into pessimistic paranoid beings as a result of it.

Right now all Yang Qing could imagine was how his reaction speed may lag behind a domain expert's to the point that it would render the medallion in his hands moot.

If a core formation expert with a saint-grade treasure was suddenly attacked by a peak domain expert, would the presence of that treasure help them survive it or would they die without even knowing how they died?

Just as Yang Qing was about to succumb to another maelstrom of worry, Lei Weiyuan's voice pulled him from that drowning abyss.

"They are here.."

Yang Qing hoped he was referring to Yu Gen and the culprits of the next case, but when the doors of the courtroom and he saw who walked through, his hopes were instantly crushed.

Leading the front was none other than Hou Dehui, with his heroic and carefree demeanor, and unique star-shaped irises that had five pupils in each.

Behind him were five figures. One he instantly recognized having seen him during his promotion ceremony. The figure looked to have been carved from a radiant golden star with his radiant golden hair, eyes that had the presence of the sun in them, and a face and bearing that would mistake him for an immortal.

Who could it be other than one of the founders of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, Lin Guiren? On his left, he was flanked by another person who didn't lose one iota to his presence. It was a lady with light purple hair with matching eyes whose beauty and splendor made her look like a purple star.

With the cold look he received from her, it wasn't hard for Yang Qing to guess her identity. It was Cai Hong, Lin Dui's mother and Lin Guiren's wife. She also had another title to her which Yang Qing recently became aware of, hence his added anxiety, she had been the first princess of the Silver Leaf Empire, an established rank 1 empire. However, she has since abdicated that title so she could be with Lin Guiren.

Chapter 876 Could it be?

Avoiding further eye contact with the woman who looked like she wanted to tear him limb to limb, Yang Qing's gaze moved toward the man walking a few steps behind her. The man looked to be in his late thirties to his early forties with light grey hair that added to the scholar's charm that surrounded him. There was a sense of ease, confidence, and grace to him, that even while walking, it almost seemed like he was gently gliding across the room. It went without saying that he had a visage that looked like it had been carved from the finest jade by the finest craftsmen which went perfectly with the scholarly air he had about him.

Yang Qing may not know who that person was, but from the elegant-looking white robes that were probably made from better materials than the robes Yang Qing had on, Yang Qing guessed he had to be some important figure, and with how close he was to Lin Guiren and Cai Hong, it had to be one of the two guests Lei Weiyuan had mentioned to have some relationship with Cai Hong.

"Is he from the Silver Leaf Empire?" wondered Yang Qing before his question was answered a moment later when he saw a silver leaf pin on one of the pins the man had used to hold his hair in a daoist topknot.

Trailing a few steps behind them were the remaining two people who were walking side by side, though one of them seemed to be purposefully walking a few inches behind the other, almost as if he was deferring to him.

Yang Qing's eyes narrowed as he felt something within him stir when his eyes fell on the guest walking a few inches in front of the other. The guest looked to be in his late thirties, composed with a sense of tranquil gentleness that paired perfectly with his auburn hair and matching eyes.

Looking at him, Yang Qing felt a sense of familiarity with him, which at first he couldn't understand where that sense of familiarity was coming from. But, after a few seconds, it clicked for him as he recalled feeling the same way when he first laid his eyes on the saint-grade treasure, Green Cocoon.

That mercurial saint-grade treasure had not spoken much to him when compared to Universal Robe, or Veiled Destiny, but of the three, he had felt a natural affinity to Green Cocoon.

The sense of familiarity he felt now with that guest when he dug further into, it almost felt similar to what he felt when he interacted with Green Cocoon, though it wasn't exactly the same.

"Who is he?" wondered Yang Qing as he saw the man smile at him.

Yang Qing had no doubt based on the look the man was giving him, he had felt the same thing, probably even more defined than Yang Qing considering how the disparity in their abilities.

Yang Qing deciding to shelve the matter moved his attention to the final person. Earlier, Lei Weiyan had mentioned there would be two additional guests, but as it stood, there were three additional guests. Clearly, Lei Weiyan didn't think it pertinent to mention the third person, and seeing him, Yang Qing could understand why.

Of the five, he was the only one that Yang Qing could actually gauge his strength. The other four were complete enigmas to him. When he looked at the four, he couldn't tell their cultivation base at all. It was

like they were mortals with no cultivation albeit he felt a subtle form of weighty force coming from within his soul wherever he looked at them.

But that feeling was nigh negligible and if it wasn't for his powerful and highly sensitive soul, that sensation would easily overtake him.

The fact that he couldn't feel any cultivation from them could only be an indicator of the gap in their abilities and considering the sensation he felt from them was the same as he had with Lei Weiyuan and Hou Dehui, it could only mean all four were bonafide domain experts. Even without Lei Weiyuan telling him of it beforehand, it would have become easily evident to Yang Qing the moment they stepped into the courtroom.

But when it came to the last person, he could tell his exact cultivation base. The last person, just like him, was at the second stage of the palace realm. He looked to be in his late fifties with a rough look to him with black hair, and a firm build to him. One look at him and one would feel like they were staring at a heated anvil.

Yang Qing's gaze flashed with an inscrutable glow as his eyes went from the middle-aged man with the rough appearance to the young man he felt the sense of familiarity. From the way they were walking, Yang Qing felt those two knew but didn't know each other at the same time. Though he could feel a sense of veneration coming from the rough-looking man.

"Could it be..."

Yang Qing's trail of thought was cut short when Hou Dehui and the rest of the guests arrived at the center of the courtroom, joining Lei Weiyuan in the process.

"Fellow daoist Lin Guiren, you and your team can take that side, while fellow daoist Deng Wei and Gong Jie can take the other.." Hou Dehui politely said as he pointed to his left and to his rest.

Lin Guiren nodded, as he moved to the left side, while the young man, that Hou Dehui called Deng Wei moved to the right side along with the right side.

Though Yang Qing didn't show any outward change in emotion, still wearing an impassive and slightly amiable look, inwardly waves of shock were cascading within him.

"So it was him?!"he thought as he felt his wild guess from a few seconds earlier get confirmed.

"I can't believe he is alive, and a domain expert at that, and him.." Yang Qing's gaze fell on the rough-looking man once more.

"Last I read, only the Zhang, Mo, and the royal family had palace realm experts. Of the remaining three founding families in the Chen Clan, Gui Clan, and Gong Clan, none of them had one.

Who is he? Is he related to them or is he just someone coincidentally sharing the same name with them and happens to coincidentally be standing next to someone sharing the exact name as one of the founders of the Red Maple Empire?

What's happening here?"

Chapter 877 The maiden's impasse

Yang Qing silently circulated his meditation art to forcibly calm himself down. With the group of people in his courtroom, he couldn't afford to let his rumbling thoughts and emotions get the better of him.

"Even with their presence, regardless of why they are all here, all that is immaterial. It doesn't change the facts of the case or what needs to happen.."Yang Qing told himself as he regained his sense of self.

Oddly enough, from the moment the five guests reached the middle of the courtroom, all the anxiety and dread he had from a few moments earlier when it was just him and Lei Weiyuan, it all seemed to vanish. All he had now was an inexplicable sense of calm.

"Is what people feel when they are about to die?"? mused Yang Qing as he relaxed his body and mind, unaware of the gaze Lei Weiyuan had thrown his way.

"This kid... If only he wasn't a lazy schemer..."

..

"I think introductions are in order as we wait for the main parties to arrive. It shouldn't be too long but we can use the little space in time to get the introductions out of the way. What do you think, fellow daoists?" Hou Dehui said with a light smile on his face.

"It's your ground, we will defer to it.." Cai Hong, coldly said, not hiding her displeasure.

Though even with her cold attitude, as someone who had grown up embracing fear since he was small, Yang Qing saw some snippets of it flash in the woman's eyes even as she sarcastically retorted against Hou Dehui, especially when the latter threw an amused look her way.

"Since Lady Cai Hong, has decided to speak up, it is only right we start with your side.." Hou Dehui said, still wearing the same casual and carefree demeanor.

Lin Guiren who had been silent all this time, sighed softly and then cupped his fist.

"My name is Lin Guiren, founder of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion. I hoped to have been here under better circumstances, but such is life. I hope we can all leave here under better ones.." Lin Guiren said, his voice soft, yet resonant.

As he mentioned leaving under better circumstances, part of his attention had drifted to Hou Dehui before it drifted back to Yang Qing, further highlighting to the history between the two sides.

Immediately after beating up the young master Lin Duyi who had been trying to snatch away Ellie with the assistance of the previous emperor of the Red Maple Empire, and the Golden Bamboo Pavilion branch head in charge of the branch in Red Maple Empire, when he called Lei Weiyuan to seek guidance on who to throw the hot potato on, the old fiend purposely mentioned Hou Dehui, highlighting that the latter had a history with one of the founders of the Pavilion by the name of Liang Zhen.

Judging by the reactions Cai Hong and Lin Guiren had toward Hou Dehui, their history with each other seemed to run deep to the point that the couple seemed wary of the latter.

Yang Qing soon shook his head free of the conspiratorial thoughts. Whatever history they had, it was between them. Far be it for him to go snooping on another person's secrets. If Hou Dehui decided to share it at some point in time, Yang Qing would be all too glad to hear it and maybe even lend a hand if he could, but he wouldn't proactively dig up another person's secrets.

After Lin Guiren was done, Cai Hong went next doing little to mask her discontent as she did.

"Cai Hong, mother to the son you arrested.."she callously said, not mincing her words.

Immediately after her, was one of the two domain guests, the scholar.

The scholar cupped his fist with a sense of elegance and grace which Yang Qing felt strongly supported his guess that he was someone from the Silver Leaf Empire.

"My name is Liu Guan and I am the Imperial Household Manager of the Silver Leaf Empire, however, currently I'm here not as the Imperial Household Manager but as a friend offering moral support to a friend and to be in any way service to them and to the court to ensure a peaceful resolution in today's events.."

"Figured as much, but an Imperial Household manager? It seems she hasn't completely fallen out of grace with her father as the rumors suggest.."thought Yang Qing as his gaze alternated between Cai Hong and the Imperial Household Manager, Liu Guan.

Standardly, an Imperial household manager handles the personal affairs of the emperor and the running of the day-to-

day of the palace. At face value, one could mistake them as just servants, no different from the palace maids or the stewards, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

Handling the emperor's personal affairs meant that person was one of the most highly trusted individuals within the emperor's circle which gave them more capital than even some ministers and senior officials.

And handling everything within the palace, meant he had access in places where most would be denied entry, every personnel within the palace effectively fell under his purview from the gardeners to the palace maids, to the stewards, down to the imperial guards who guarded the palace, they were all within his jurisdiction.

This highlighted the amount of power they wielded. Not just anyone could be entrusted with the role. They had to be highly valued by the emperor and also had to show considerable talent worthy of that role. At the end of the day, strength was still king. No matter how valued they were, it would be useless if they didn't have the strength to truly hold onto whatever favor was bestowed upon them.

It was why Yang Qing was surprised to see the Imperial Household Manager of the Silver Leaf Empire was the one accompanying Cai Hong, after all, the stories that floated around showed she had a sour relationship with the current emperor, her father.

When she was younger, she had shown remarkable aptitude for the pen and the sword to the point that the emperor highly favored her to be his successor.

But, once upon a time when she was out gaining experience, training her martial strength at the same time trying to look for talents that would be of benefit to the empire, she stumbled upon a young talented Lin Guiren who captured her young maiden heart.

Completely enamored by him, she made all attempts to be dao partners with him, including offering him the crown of emperor. However, Lin Guiren, the man that he was, had his ambitions, which he and the two other founders of Golden Bamboo Pavilion shared. He didn't want to be emperor or consort and thus rejected her.

This left Cai Hong at an impasse. One was to let it go and forget Lin Guiren and go back to Silver Leaf Empire, and if life went in the expected trajectory, become the Empress of the rank one empire or the other, abandon her titles, and pursue love. She chose the latter, which incensed the emperor to the point that he would have had Lin Guiren killed, if it wasn't for the tremendous potential he showed, along with the other two founders, and also the connection they had.

From what the little bit of information showed, a soul formation expert intervened on their behalf, saving the trio from the ire of Silver Leaf's Emperor. But even if he let them go, he was thoroughly incensed by the whole thing that he proclaimed to the entire Empire that the first princess, Cai Hong was no longer his daughter, and with it all titles and powers associated with it were stripped from her.

But with Liu Guan being here, it showed the relationship between the father and daughter wasn't as irreparable and broken as the rumors showed.

Chapter 878 Deng Wei's Identity.

The one to follow after the Imperial household manager was done, was the person Yang Qing had been most curious about. Even if he felt his guess on his identity was more or less right on the mark, his heart couldn't help but speed up in anticipation when he saw the young man take the stage.

"That damn Mao Mao infected me.." Yang Qing thought, ashamed at the excitement he was showing.

"Like fellow daoist Hou Dehui said, my name is Deng Wei, and before anything else, I would like to thank you all for your accommodation and also to apologize on behalf of my friend's descendants, and mine too, and the Red Maple Empire.." said Deng Wei as he bowed deeply

His actions startled Yang Qing as he had not expected a domain expert to bow before him in apology.

Yang Qing wasn't the only one caught by surprise, as the person next to him, Gong Jie reacted strongly.

"Ancestor, don't do that!" he said frantically with a pitch in his tone showing a level of anxiety and discomfort that one would not expect from such a rough-looking man.

"We are the ones who brought this on and destroyed what you and the rest hoped the Red Maple Empire. We are the culprits and should be the ones to apologize. You had nothing to do with it!" the rough-looking man pleadingly added as he tried to help Deng Wei.

Deng Wei slowly raised his gait which gave the illusion that it was because of the efforts of the rough-looking man, but all present, including the rough-looking man, knew it wasn't. If Deng Wei didn't allow there was no way the rough-looking man would have made him move one millimeter even if he burst forth with the strength of his entire cultivation.

"Hope of Red Maple Empire, huh.." muttered Deng Wei with a melancholic look as his gaze fell on the rough-looking man who was now apologizing for another thing.

"Deng Wei? Forgive me if I am out of turn here, fellow daoist, but are you the same Deng Wei as the rumored seventh founder of the Red Maple Empire?" asked Liu Guan.

"Good job. I can see why you are the Imperial Household Manager.." joyously thought Yang Qing, cheering the household manager's efforts.

Other than Hou Dehui, Lei Weiyuan, and the rough-looking man who presumably knew his identity, everyone else looked on curiously. Even the snappy Cai Hong had her fury abate slightly at the question as her eyes fell on Deng Wei with an appraising look.

Even while being the center of attention, Deng Wei's demeanor was the same as that of a gentle breeze during summer weather.

Looking up, he sighed once more, before he answered,

"Founder?.... I never did much back then to be considered that..." pausing as he looked at Liu Guan and the rest.

"It was all my friend's doing, but to answer your question, while I may not be the founder, that Deng Wei and I are the same. I am surprised that anyone knows of me, seems like someone put me in the history books back then despite me telling the rest not to.." Deng Wei said as his gaze fell on the rough-looking man who lowered his head and smiled sheepishly.

"Thank you for humoring me, fellow daoist Deng Wei.." said Liu Guan, with the same elegant and refined air to him.

"It isn't much.." Deng Wei lightly said as his gaze fell on Lin Guiren.

"Be it today or tomorrow, my identity would have gotten out one way or another. Besides, I would have introduced myself properly to fellow daoist Lin Guiren at some point.." he added with a meaningful undertone to his voice.

"Aren't you behaving a little too arrogant for a sixth-stage domain expert?" said Cai Hong, her tone rife with contempt.

"Am I?.." Deng Wei said with a gentle smile.

"I am sorry if it came off that way. I haven't been interacting with people for a long time. For the past 30,000 years, I have interacted with no more than four people. Since long ago, social interactions have never been my strongest suit. I apologize in advance for my lacking manners, fellow daoist.."

Just as Cai Hong was about to retort again, she paused as Lin Guiren touched her hand, throwing her a look that said don't.

"I look forward to talking and making your acquaintance, daoist Deng Wei. Forgive my wife, it hasn't been the easiest of months for her. I will make sure to apologize properly at a later time.." said Lin Guired with a poised calmness.

"It's okay.."

"Hong'er don't antagonize him. There is something strange about him.."

"Strange how?"

"I don't know. I can't quite put my finger on it but I can feel fleeting strands of a primal force from him. The sensation I am getting from him is similar to what I've felt from the Fu clan patriarch and a few of the elders.."

Cai Hong's pupils trembled slightly before they went back to normal.

"You mean he has a contract with one of the mythical beasts like the Fu Clan does with the golden roc?"

"No, not that. The sensation I'm getting from him is even stronger which makes me wonder if the rumors surrounding him had some truth to it?"

"The one of him being a treefolk?"

"Mmh. If it is true, then even if he is just in the sixth grade of the domain realm, with the mythical bloodline of the treefolk in him, other things aside, as a treefolk, he is guaranteed tremendous vitality, let alone him being a domain expert.

I could defeat him, but killing him is another matter, and even if I could do it, mythical beings like them have soul links within their bloodline. Someone within their bloodline would be alerted and immediately know who did it from the many esoteric means at their disposal.

Besides, his potential ancestry aside, he doesn't strike me as the reckless kind. If he wants to completely cut ties between the Red Maple Empire and us, he should have something that gives him the confidence that he can actually do it.

We already have enough on our plate with our merger with Green Fig Manor, keeping all secrets surrounding the mysterious realm of the Sky rendering sword sect under wraps, and now Duyi'er's matter.

We can't add more to the plate. We have enough to deal with as it is.."

"I know. It's just that I'm worried about Duyi'er. If anything were to happen to him.."

"It won't. I will do everything to help him or guarantee his life at least, no matter the cost. He is my son too and I don't want anything to happen to him either.."

...

Unaware of the covert discussion happening between the couple, Yang Qing was practically beaming at the subtle tenseness in his courtroom. His prayer had been answered. Whatever attention he had feared would be placed solely on him was now being split among different sides. Hou Dehui was getting some, and now it seemed Deng Wei had joined in on the action.

Yang Qing couldn't help but silently give the mysterious founder a thumbs up.

"No wonder I felt some sense of kinship with him.." thought Yang Qing as his spirits rose.

"But a sixth-grade domain expert? How did he manage to increase his cultivation realm so fast? Is it because of his supposed treefolk bloodline?" curiously wondered Yang Qing.

Red Maple Empire was roughly about 35,000 years old, and if he took the accounts written back then as facts, it meant that 35,000 years ago, Deng Wei was not a domain expert. If he were, then they would not have been fleeing from the rank three clan that had been pursuing them back then.

Following that thread, then it meant that it took him 35,000 years to move from the core formation realm to the middle stages of the domain realm staring down at the doors of the late stages. Such a speed was stupendous, even by the Order's standards, after all breaking through to the domain realm seemed like an impossible task, and it was even harder moving from one stage to another.

Some domain experts immediately after breaking through might never improve again, or for others, it might take them those 30,000 years just to move from the first stage to the second stage of the domain realm, and others may never get to step beyond the early stages of the domain realm just to reach the fourth stage, let alone climb to the sixth stage like Deng Wei had done.

Reaching the sixth stage in just 35,000 years was a testament to Deng Wei's abilities, but Yang Qing couldn't help but feel there might have been another factor in why he improved so fast in such a short amount of time. His treefolk bloodline while a factor, may have not been the only thing.

"Maybe it lies with where he has been for the past 35,000 years..." thought Yang Qing.

Chapter 879 The Silver Fiend Acts

Yang Qing's suppositions on the mysteries surrounding Deng Wei were interrupted when the doors to the courtroom were opened.

Because the courtroom was shielded against spiritual sense, almost everyone's attention was captured the moment the doors were opened as they all faced the same direction.

Walking in was Yu Gen, who despite facing the gazes of six domain experts, didn't seem to falter one bit, as his pace and demeanor remained unchanged as he walked into the courtroom.

The same couldn't be said of those following him though as a few of the cultivators behind him looked agitated, even one unable to contain himself.

"Father, Mother!" yelled one of the cultivators in the procession, who in agitation looked to break away from the group, as he ran to the side where Lin Guiren, his wife, and the Silver Leaf Imperial Household Manager.

Yu Gen looked at Yang Qing, almost as if asking, "Do I stop him?"

Yang Qing shook his head sideways, allowing the agitated cultivator to make a beeline for the Golden Bamboo Pavilion team.

"Duyi'er!"

That cultivator wasn't the only one to react. Cai Hong, reacted the same way the moment that cultivator appeared in the courtroom and grew even more when that cultivator called out.

"Mother?!" the cultivator yelled as he cried into Cai Hong's arms.

Who else could it be other than the young scion of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, son to one of the founders of the pavilion, Lin Duyi? Only his current look and demeanor were a stark contrast to what he was when he had that altercation with Yang Qing a few months ago.

He no longer had that flair of a noble prince he had back then. That charm and arrogance that made it seem like he could flip the heavens and the earth with one flip of his hand. Where he looked like he could command the wind and the rain with a single word. There was no shred of that person in him now.

He looked more like an animal that had just received the worst beating of its life and the only thing it managed to keep from that beating, was its life. He looked haggard, cloaked in extreme fear all around,

he was fidgety, and his eyes were bloodshot, no doubt from the fear and anxiety coursing through his body.

When it came to appearance, while his robes still showed he was a person of considerable wealth with how they shimmered with a sense of brilliance and grandeur to them, a testament to the craftsmanship and materials used to create them, but because of how wretched Lin Duyi was, the brilliance of those robes only served to highlight how broken the young scion was. He looked more like a beggar donning imperial garb.

Also for some reason, even though it was impossible for cultivators, especially for one like Lin Duyi who was in the palace realm, it looked like Lin Duyi had lost a little bit of weight. His cheeks and eyes seemed a little bit sunken, along with his chest, which left Yang Qing puzzled.

A palace realm cultivator's body was like a forged monarch-

grade artifact, there was absolutely no way for a cultivator of that realm to lose weight even when they were close to exhausting their lifespan. Even with just a few hours left, their bodies would still maintain the same sturdiness.

The only way for their bodies to change involuntarily was if they were nursing a grievous injury. But as far as Yang Qing knew, other than being imprisoned in a courtyard at the Yellow Plains Branch, no harm befell him. He wasn't tortured in the slightest and the courtyard he was sequestered in was of the same quality as Yang Qing's courtyard minus the furnishings Yang Qing put up over the years after he moved in.

By all accounts, it was a decent courtyard. Yang Qing couldn't help but find it puzzling why Lin Duyi looked so. The previous emperor and the branch manager of the Golden Bamboo Pavillion were all held under the same conditions, and they looked okay, unlike Lin Duyi who looked like he had been held in some dungeon in the deepest recess of the earth where there was no sun, no warmth, and all he had for company were ferocious bloodthirsty creatures that looked to tear him apart.

"What did you do to my son?!" Cai Hong fiercely asked, killing intent flashing in her eyes as her domain pressure was released from her body, and the target of it was Yang Qing.

Yang Qing felt like he was plunged into a cold abyss with the piercing chill of death quickly closing in on him. Just as he felt like he was about to be suffocated, the abyss was dispelled by a warm gentle light. With his regained clarity, he saw where the light came from when he saw Lei Weiyuan wave his sleeves as his stern gaze fell on Cai Hong.

"I will advise you to remember where you are. This isn't the Golden Bamboo Pavilion or the Silver Leaf Empire or any other place that you can act as you please. Act out of place again and I will personally ensure that you know this is the Order.." Lei Weiyuan said, his expression calm as always, but his tone made one feel like they were facing a silver sword that had the might to pierce through the heavens.

Even Yang Qing was taken aback by Lei Weiyuan's presence. He always knew the old fiend was powerful, but because of the disparity in their cultivation realms, he could never tell by how much. Seeing him in action, even if he didn't do much, Yang Qing felt like he had gotten a small glimpse of it.

Cai Hong's expression quickly turned from fierce to solemn as she retracted her killing intent.

"Please forgive my wife for acting out of turn.."

Lin Guiren broke the silence and the heavy atmosphere as he cupped his fist and bowed slightly in apology.

"We will allow such a thing only once..." said Hou Dehui as his gaze fell on Lin Guiren, Cai Hong, and Liu Guan who just like Cai Hong couldn't help but throw a solemn glance toward Lei Weiyuan.

Chapter 880 Struggles Of The Powerful

Apart from Deng Wei, every domain expert present was a late-stage domain expert, be it Cai Hong, Lin Guiren, him and the two domain experts from the Order in Hou Dehui and Lei Weiyuan. Their presence was restrained, and though Liu Guan as a late-stage domain expert could tell so and so were in the late stages of the domain realm, because of the restrained presence, he couldn't accurately gauge deeper into the strength levels.

Coming here, he was already appraised of Hou Dehui by Lin Guiren, who described the judge as terrifying. That appraisal was something Liu Guan took to heart as Lin Guiren even when pitted against the Silver Empire, was someone whose strength was capable of shaking the Empire, barring their soul formation experts.

For someone of such strength calling another terrifying only served to highlight the scariness of Hou Dehui, which was why his all attention had been on Hou Dehui, completely overlooking Lei Weiyuan, but now, as Lei Weiyuan, leaked a bit of his aura as he issued the warning, Liu Guan couldn't overlook him anymore.

He was at the ninth stage of the domain realm, but he felt a credible threat to his life when he felt that aura leak out, and for it to threaten him so could only mean, the silver-haired man with the impassive expression was significantly stronger than him, if he could feel that way just from his aura. He could only imagine what it was like for Cai Hong, who was the target of it whilst also being slightly weaker than him, being at the eighth stage of the domain realm.

"Emperor, what did you throw me into? Even if one of the ancestors was the one standing here, I doubt it would influence much.

While I know well enough to not underestimate them, even my overestimation of them seems to have fallen way off the mark.

I am sorry, princess. I am afraid we have hit an iron wall here. I am afraid the Empire's prestige is insufficient to eat at this table let alone negotiate on it.." thought Liu Guan as he smiled bitterly.

After Lei Weiyuan's warning, some semblance of sanity and control which was marred with a hint of wariness returned to Cai Hong's eyes. That threat helped her contain herself as she reigned in her murderous emotions while tightly embracing Lin Duyi like a mother hen would protect her chick. That embrace only got tighter as Lin Duyi's sobs continued. From the moment he walked into the courtroom up to when he jumped into his mother's embrace, not once did he look up.

His actions drew a lot of awkward looks all around the courtroom, which all seemed to say the same thing.

"He is a palace realm expert, isn't he? How is he still being coddled, so openly at that?"

Even Lin Guiren, despite being the picture of calm was ill at ease in his heart at the display and couldn't help but sigh inwardly in defeat. He knew well enough to not intervene.

By the time he became dao companions with Cai Hong, they were both already in the domain realm, albeit in the early stages. But regardless of whether one was in the early stages or at the latter stages of

the domain realm, just the fact that both he and his wife were in the domain realm meant due to their powerful cultivation bases, their ability to conceive was that much harder.

It was always difficult for powerful cultivators to conceive, and that difficulty grew the further up the realms one moved. A mortal could have seven or eight children by the time they were twenty-three, and that number could possibly even be higher if they had multiple wives and concubines, but for someone in the core formation realm, the circumstances were vastly different.

No matter whether they had multiple wives or partners, in five hundred years that core formation expert may end up having one or two children within that timeframe, and those numbers shrank the higher up the cultivation realm one moved.

That difficulty was hypothesized as the heavenly Dao's way of creating a balance because almost always, the offspring of powerful cultivators had natural aptitudes in cultivation. Most natural physiques were born from powerful cultivators despite those cultivators not having natural physiques themselves.

Just by virtue of their cultivation base, they can inadvertently affect the fortunes of their offspring. Thus to regulate this advantage, the heavenly dao restrains the ability of these cultivators to conceive to the point that some may go their entire lives without a single child despite trying, and this wasn't just applicable to human cultivators but to spirit beasts too. Powerful spirit beasts suffered the same difficulty.

Lin Guiren, being a domain expert at the time had surrendered completely to the possibility he may never have a child and that possibility grew stronger when year after year passed and they weren't able to have one.

He was okay with that eventuality, but the same couldn't be said for his partner, who was always hoping for a child. It took them almost 23,000 years before Lin Duyi was finally conceived.

With how long he took to get here, and the emotional weight it had been, especially on Cai Hong, when he was born, he became her entire world. She spoiled him rotten, acquiescing to his every demand, and for Lin Guiren, while he wasn't as excessive as Cai Hong, he would be lying if he said he wasn't affected greatly by having a son. It was to the point that the relief and joy his birth brought him freed his mind inducing an epiphany in the process that helped him improve his cultivation realm by a single stage, moving from the tenth stage to the eleventh stage of the domain realm.

Even if it was just a single step, the gap within that step was the same as a first-stage domain expert cultivating to the sixth stage of the domain realm. In the later stages, improving by a single step was just as difficult as scaling the heavens.