

Doctor 1031

Chapter 1031: About the Sect Conference

According to Ren Jingbo, the Sect Gathering of Thousand Lakes Country, held once every five years, was hosted by the Purple Flame Sect, a third-tier sect located in Purple Flame City.

The purpose of hosting the Sect Gathering was twofold: first, the major sects would redistribute interests through Martial Dao contests; second, it provided a platform for the disciples of the various sects to exchange views with each other.

There were a multitude of sects and martial artists in Thousand Lakes Country, yet cultivation resources were extremely scarce, leading to a situation where temples outnumbered monks, and so the major sects competed for their own interests—openly and covertly—their disciples often suffering casualties in the process.

In order to end this vicious competition, the Purple Flame Sect, the most powerful third-tier sect in Thousand Lakes Country, convened the upper echelons of the various sects for consultation and ultimately decided to hold Martial Dao contests every five years, distributing the cultivation resources found within the country according to the rankings.

In other words, the sects that ranked higher in the Martial Dao contest would be allocated more cultivation resources, while those that ranked lower would naturally receive less.

This method of distribution was fair and reasonable; all the major sects were convinced and had nothing to complain about.

There were over a hundred large and small sects combined in Thousand Lakes Country, but only those at least as qualified as Bitao Martial Academy, a fourth-tier sect, were eligible to participate in the Martial Dao contest and the distribution of cultivation resources.

As for those less reputable sects, they were excluded from the Sect Gathering and could only struggle to survive in the interstices.

There were about twenty or thirty fourth-tier sects like Bitao Martial Academy in Thousand Lakes Country. Each could participate in ten places at the Sect Gathering, but in the end, only three disciples could represent their respective sects in the Martial Dao contest.

Although only about two hundred to three hundred disciples from all the major sects participated in the Sect Gathering held every five years, these two to three hundred individuals were the elite among the tens of thousands of martial artists in Thousand Lakes Country.

Having been held for a thousand years by now, the Purple Flame Sect, with a Vast Level Expert at its helm, had always been the undisputed king and overlord of the Sect Gathering's Martial Dao contest. As a result, the Purple Flame Sect alone occupied nearly half of the cultivation resources in Thousand Lakes Country, with the other twenty or so sects dividing among themselves the remaining half.

Over the past thousand years, numerous sects in Thousand Lakes Country had attempted to challenge the hegemony of the Purple Flame Sect, only to fail each time.

A personal transmission disciple of the Purple Flame Sect possessed a cultivation level of Desolate Level Perfection, and even the leaders of fourth-tier sects like Bitao Martial Academy had the qualifications to stand on an equal footing with them.

From this, it could be seen how profound the foundation of the Purple Flame Sect was.

Another purpose of the Sect Gathering was to promote exchanges among the disciples of the various sects. They could compare notes on the Martial Dao, swap cultivation resources, and more, essentially serving as a small-scale martial artist cultivation resource trade fair.

This was also a very popular aspect for the disciples of the various sects because they might exchange for some urgently needed cultivation resources or coveted treasures during the exchange period.

The ten places for Bitao Martial Academy to participate in the Sect Gathering were designated by several individuals personally by Ren Jingbo, then nominated by various elders and stewards. Once they had the ten people together, they could choose a date to set off for the Thousand Lakes Capital City, Purple Flame City.

Thanks to Fang Bai's outstanding performance during this mountain expedition, he had won unanimous favor from the higher-ups of the academy. Therefore, Ren Jingbo was planning to take Fang Bai to the Sect Gathering to temper his mind and broaden his knowledge, laying a solid foundation for his future Martial Dao journey.

Fang Bai did not refuse this.

After his rebirth through possession, Fang Bai had to start over on the Martial Dao, and participating in the Sect Gathering would expose him to more martial artists and cultivation resources. He might even find some opportunities—why not?

"Each Sect Gathering's Martial Dao contest requires that each major sect assigns three disciples to fight, and the three disciples must be selected one each from the personal transmission disciples, core disciples, and inner court disciples..."

Ren Jingbo looked at Fang Bai and said with deep meaning, "Among the core disciples, I plan to nominate you to fight! Just be mentally prepared. As for the personal transmission disciple, Ouyang Jian, who was ranked first, may have perished in the mountains this time, so we'll have to send Shen Yulin instead; and for the inner court disciple, I was originally going to send Huang Miao, but it's unexpected that she was seriously injured by Qi Dongsheng and won't recover for a while... Alas, it seems now that it will be up to Yang Lin for the inner court disciple."

Fang Bai smiled slightly and said, "Dean Ren, I think if inner court disciple Liu Qingqing were to represent our academy in the battle, we'd have greater chances of winning!"

"Liu Qingqing?"

Ren Jingbo was taken aback, then shook his head and said, "Although Liu Qingqing has performed well this time, advancing to become an inner court disciple, her strength is probably still a bit short of Yang Lin's. However, Liu Qingqing has an Innate Spiritual Root, and she will definitely progress faster than Yang Lin. In the next Sect Gathering in five years, she does have a good chance of representing the inner court disciples..."

Fang Bai said, "There's no need to wait five years, she's ready now! I'm willing to bet with Dean Ren that if Liu Qingqing were to duel Yang Lin right now, Yang Lin would undoubtedly be the one to lose. Does Dean Ren believe so?"

"This..."

Ren Jingbo twirled his beard, recalling Liu Qingqing's performance in challenging Chang Dengfeng. Indeed, she had not exerted her full strength. However, while Chang Dengfeng was only ranked tenth among the inner court disciples, Yang Lin was ranked third. It would not be easy for Liu Qingqing to defeat Yang Lin.

"If Dean Ren doesn't believe it, just let Liu Qingqing battle Yang Lin to find out. If Liu Qingqing cannot defeat Yang Lin, I am willing to accept any punishment!" Fang Bai said earnestly.

He strongly recommended Liu Qingqing to participate in the Sect Gathering because he wanted to give her more opportunities to interact with the outside world, which would not only broaden her horizons but also allow her to encounter more chances.

After pondering for a moment, Ren Jingbo nodded and said, "Since you say so, I will have Liu Qingqing and Yang Lin spar tomorrow. Whichever of them wins will represent the inner court disciples!"

Fang Bai said, "Thank you, Dean, for giving Liu Qingqing this chance. I believe she will not disappoint the Dean."

Ren Jingbo pointed at Fang Bai and laughed "ha-ha," teasingly saying, "I heard you and that Liu Qingqing both come from Liuhu Village, and you share a good relationship, right? No wonder you are working hard to secure her a chance to participate in the Sect Gathering!"

Fang Bai smiled lightly and said, "I am also considering the best interests of our academy. Wouldn't the Dean and all the senior executives present here want our academy to achieve even better results at the Sect Gathering? The stronger the disciples who participate in the Martial Dao contest, the more hope we have!"

Zhuang Zhi, coldly interjecting from the side, said, "That sounds really nice, as if Bitao Martial Academy will achieve better results by having Liu Qingqing participate in the Sect Gathering... Hmph, it's still unclear whether that Liu Qingqing will even make it!"

Chapter 1032: Medium Grade Creation Pill

Zhuang Zhi's implication was that Liu Qingqing had to defeat Yang Lin to qualify to represent Bitao Martial Academy at the Sect's Great Meeting in Purple Flame City; otherwise, she would have to stay and cultivate in the academy.

Fang Bai glanced at Zhuang Zhi, his lips curling slightly into a smile that sent chills down Zhuang Zhi's spine and made his back feel cold.

"How can I feel this way?"

Zhuang Zhi was secretly shocked. The moment Fang Bai showed him that smile, he felt a sense of despair and powerlessness like an ant facing an elephant, like mortals facing a deity. It was as if his fate was controlled by Fang Bai, and whether he lived or died was no longer up to him.

Even when facing Ren Jingbo, the dean who was two minor realms higher than him, Zhuang Zhi had never felt such terror.

"It must be an illusion... It has to be an illusion..."

Zhuang Zhi shook his head vigorously and then muttered to himself.

When he looked at Fang Bai again, he found that Fang Bai had already withdrawn his gaze and could only snort in annoyance.

"Steward Zhuang, can't you speak properly? Why the cryptic tone? Has Fang Bai offended you in some way? You're a respected Desolate Level Martial Artist and one of the academy stewards. Even if Fang Bai has upset you, surely as an elder, you needn't stoop to such petty squabbles?"

Ge Feng had always favored Fang Bai and was soon to mentor him in Martial Arts Techniques and impart the Martial Dao Arcane to him. The two of them were almost in a teacher-disciple relationship.

Ge Feng, always protective of his own and disdaining Zhuang Zhi's character, knew Zhuang Zhi was a "lackey" under Elder Lei. Therefore, when he saw Zhuang Zhi speaking harshly to Fang Bai, he couldn't help but stand up for Fang Bai.

Zhuang Zhi, who dared to taunt Fang Bai, didn't dare to confront Ge Feng. Seeing Ge Feng defending Fang Bai, he turned his head away and fell silent.

"In front of Fang Bai, Steward Zhuang indeed is an elder. But in front of Elder Ge, he is but a junior! Elder Ge's barbed words lack the grace of an elder!"

Elder Lei, Zhuang Zhi's backer, seeing Zhuang Zhi embarrassed, sneered in support of him.

Ge Feng remained unbothered, chuckled, and asked, "Between Liu Qingqing and Yang Lin, who do you think will win, Elder Lei?"

Elder Lei was caught off guard by the sudden shift in topic. He frowned and said, "Yang Lin had a duel with Fang Bai not long ago and was heavily injured. His injuries have likely not fully recovered, so the outcome of his fight with Liu Qingqing... is hard to predict."

Originally, when Yang Lin and his cousin, Yang Wei, challenged Hou Ziping and Fang Bai, both were defeated, and Yang Lin was severely reprimanded by Fang Bai. Many thought it would take months for him to recover, but to everyone's surprise, he was soon bouncing back and even took part in this mountain training.

Few knew that after his injuries, Elder Lei had secretly given him several Healing Pills, which led to a swift and full recovery of his strength to its peak.

Elder Lei said Yang Lin hadn't fully recovered, as a way to prepare an excuse should Yang Lin lose to Liu Qingqing, giving him a way to save face.

"Tomorrow's battle between Liu Qingqing and Yang Lin will reveal who is stronger. That's enough for now; everyone should go back and prepare. In three days, once the list of ten participants for the Sect meeting is finalized, we can set out for Purple Flame City."

Ren Jingbo, aware that Ge Feng and Elder Lei often clashed and seeing the Sect meeting drawing near, didn't want to see them argue and affect morale, so he spoke up.

Hearing this, everyone in Lingtian Hall stood up and dispersed.

The sky had already darkened, and under the bright moon that hung high, one could see over a dozen Martial Academy senior members using their movement techniques, swooping down from Lingtian Peak like flying, then each returning to their own dwelling.

"Fang Bai, come here, I have some words for you."

Fang Bai was the last to leave Lingtian Hall, and at the foot of the mountain, he saw a figure ahead waving at him—it was none other than Ge Feng.

"Elder Ge, what are your orders?"

Fang Bai quickened his steps, approached Ge Feng, cupped his fists, and asked respectfully as he bowed.

Ge Feng casually pulled out several bottles of Elixirs and stuffed them into Fang Bai's hands, smiling, "Since you chose me to instruct you in Martial Arts Techniques, we are considered to have a mentor-apprentice relationship. These bottles of Elixir are a gift for our first meeting."

He sighed and continued, "Although I oversee the Elixir Hall in the Martial Academy, the Cultivation Resources stored there don't belong to me personally. Moreover, with my own cultivation needs, my hands are also quite tied... Fang Bai, don't consider it too little!"

Fang Bai lowered his head to look at the bottles of Elixir that Ge Feng had given him, labeled as Gathering Yuan Pills and Healing Pills. Although these Elixirs were of low quality, Fang Bai could feel that the Essence Energy released from the Elixirs inside the bottles was significantly better than those he received monthly from the Elixir Hall.

Fang Bai knew that the Bitao Martial Academy itself could not produce Elixirs, so from menial servant disciples to high-level officials of the Martial Academy, all Elixirs needed for cultivation were acquired through exchanging vast quantities of Essence Stones and Spiritual Medicines from outside—making each bottle incredibly precious.

Although the number of Elixirs Ge Feng gave to Fang Bai was small, their medicinal effects were decent and used by the high-level officials of the Martial Academy for cultivation. This gift was indeed not shabby.

Fang Bai, appreciating Ge Feng's kindness, accepted the gift without any refusal.

"Elder Ge, this Creation Pill I have here was obtained during an experience before I entered our Bitao Martial Academy. It's a mid-quality Creation Pill, which I think would be more suitable for your use. I'm giving it to you as a tribute now."

As Fang Bai spoke, he flipped his right hand, and a white jade bottle specifically for storing Elixirs appeared in his palm, which he handed to Ge Feng.

The white jade bottle looked exceptionally exquisite, and the clean bottle body was inscribed with the words "Creation Pill."

The Creation Pill could significantly enhance a Martial Artist's success rate during breakthroughs in realm advancements, especially for a practitioner like Ge Feng who had failed numerous attempts—it held a tremendous allure.

When Ge Feng initially heard the words "Creation Pill," he thought Fang Bai had brought out a low-quality Creation Pill and did not take it seriously. As soon as he heard "mid-quality Creation Pill," his body jolted violently, and he visibly became excited.

"This Creation Pill... is it really mid-quality?"

Ge Feng's gaze was fixed on the white jade bottle in Fang Bai's palm, forcibly suppressing the excitement in his heart, and asked with a quavering voice.

"You can see for yourself," Fang Bai said with a smile, handing the white jade bottle filled with mid-quality Creation Pill to Ge Feng.

Ge Feng's hands trembled as he pulled out the bottle stopper, and a dense, pure Essence Energy immediately emanated from the mouth of the bottle.

"Indeed... it really is a mid-quality Creation Pill..."

Ge Feng, sensing the dense and pure Essence Energy, murmured to himself, and before he knew it, tears had filled his face.

Chapter 1033: A Token of Sincerity

Fang Bai stood to one side, smiling as he watched Ge Feng's excited loss of composure, knowing what the bottle of Creation Pills meant to him.

From the first moment Fang Bai had met Ge Feng, he had seen that Ge Feng's cultivation level had been stuck at a bottleneck for a long time, just one step away from a breakthrough.

However, Fang Bai also understood that some martial artists were limited by their own physique, cultivation resources, or chance encounters, and this one step difference could become an insurmountable threshold that they could never overcome in their lifetime.

This was the case for Ge Feng, who without some fortuitous encounter, was likely doomed to remain at the mid-level Desolate rank for the rest of his life, unable to achieve further breakthroughs.

Although low-grade Creation Pills could increase the success rate of advancing in rank at critical moments, Ge Feng had previously exchanged a significant amount of cultivation resources to obtain a few pills, only to find himself unable to advance as hoped, which greatly disappointed him.

The low-grade Creation Pills were much more expensive than other elixirs, and in order to exchange for a few to increase his chances of advancing, Ge Feng had exhausted all his years of accumulated cultivation resources. Finding them ineffective and unable to afford the high exchange cost, he had no choice but to give up.

Ge Feng had once heard a pharmacist in the Martial Artists Trading Market of Purple Flame City say that only a mid-grade Creation Pill could possibly help him break his shackles and succeed in advancing.

Hearing the pharmacist's words, Ge Feng had despaired.

If he could hardly afford the expensive price of low-grade Creation Pills, how could he afford the mid-grade ones, which were many times more effective?

Moreover, no pharmacist in a small country like Thousand Lakes Country could refine mid-grade Creation Pills; one would have to try his luck in other countries.

But so far, Ge Feng had not heard any news about mid-grade Creation Pills; otherwise, he would have gone to any length to acquire a few no matter the cost.

Some martial artists, to progress further on the path of Martial Dao, were even willing to risk their lives in their madness.

And now, Ge Feng had merely offered a few bottles of low-grade elixirs as a greeting gift to Fang Bai, who in turn had reciprocated with a bottle of the mid-grade Creation Pills that Ge Feng had been dreaming of, making him feel as if he were in an unreal dream.

When Fang Bai uttered the words "mid-grade Creation Pill," Ge Feng even bit his own tongue secretly to check if he was dreaming.

The pain at the tip of his tongue confirmed everything was real; the bottle of mid-grade Creation Pills Fang Bai had given him was now quietly resting in the palm of his hand, the bottle emitting a dazzling, brilliant glow.

That Ge Feng hadn't burst into an excited laughter and dance on the spot was already him exercising extreme restraint.

Amidst his excitement, Ge Feng felt somewhat ashamed, thinking that his greeting gift to Fang Bai was too insubstantial, not even close to the value of the mid-grade Creation Pills Fang Bai had given him.

Ge Feng wanted to show the demeanor of an elder and politely refuse Fang Bai's generosity, returning the mid-grade Creation Pill, but a part of him ten thousand times didn't want to let go.

For Ge Feng, having this bottle of mid-grade Creation Pills meant that his next attempt to break through to a higher level of the Desolate realm would have a success rate of over ninety percent, which was almost a certainty.

For a Desolate Level martial artist, every minor increase in cultivation level could extend their lifespan by several decades, and with those extra decades devoted to cultivation, it was possible to advance yet again and continue to defy life's limitations.

Therefore, one could imagine just how important Fang Bai's bottle of mid-grade Creation Pills was to Ge Feng.

"I've heard that the potency of a mid-grade elixir is too intense. Martial Artists with low Cultivation Levels could damage or even rupture their meridians if they rashly consume mid-grade Spiritual Medicine, as their bodies might not withstand the Essence Energy converted by the medicine's power. Therefore, I think it's better to give it to Elder Ge. This is a token of my regard, and I hope Elder Ge will kindly accept it,"

Fang Bai seemed to have guessed Ge Feng's thoughts, and spoke with a serious demeanor.

In fact, mid-grade elixirs weren't of much use to Fang Bai at this point, and during his prior training period, he had obtained some mid-grade Spirit Pills from the relics of Desolate Level Martial Artists in the Stone Forest illusion formation. Now, offering a bottle to Ge Feng served to establish a good karmic connection.

"If I stubbornly refuse your sincere gift, I would appear to be too affected... Alright, I'll accept this generous gift!"

Ge Feng picked up the bottle of mid-grade Creation Pills, examined it over and over, his expression one of sheer delight. He then carefully placed the jade bottle back in its place and, when he looked at Fang Bai again, his gaze was filled with kindness and added gratitude.

If he had merely regarded Fang Bai as his own Disciple before, now Fang Bai had become like a nephew in his eyes.

Ge Feng had already decided that from now on, he would spare no effort in guiding Fang Bai on the Martial Dao, for not to do so would be a disservice to the mid-grade Creation Pill Fang Bai had given him.

"Here's wishing Elder Ge success in advancing to the next rank and reaching new heights in Cultivation Level!"

Fang Bai complimented Ge Feng with a smile, then cupped his fists and bowed to take his leave.

"This Fang Bai knows how to advance and retreat, is perceptive and composed, not boastful or impetuous, and possesses a Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root. His future achievements are immeasurable. I, Ge Feng, might even bask in his reflected glory!"

Ge Feng watched Fang Bai's retreating figure with admiration and murmured to himself. Then he checked his surroundings and, seeing that no one was around, he carefully took out the bottle of mid-grade Creation Pills once more to examine.

"Whether I can advance this time depends entirely on you, my treasure! Don't let me down!"

Ge Feng inspected the jade bottle for a long time before once again tucking it into his chest, filled with excitement, and used his movement technique to return to his residence to begin a secluded meditation.

The Sect's grand assembly was to be held in three days, and the list of ten selected participants would be announced to the public then. At that time, Ge Feng, as one of the Martial Academy's high-ranking officials, would lead the team to Purple Flame City.

Ge Feng planned to use these three days to diligently Cultivate, striving to make a breakthrough in his realm before departing. It would ensure greater security for their trip to Purple Flame City and make it more successful.

If he could advance to a high rank of the Desolate Level, Elder Ge's status within the Bitao Martial Academy would be on par with the two Vice Deans, and that overbearing Elder Lei Li, who often clashed with him, would have no choice but to bow his proud head in respect, humbly tending to his demeanor in Ge's presence.

At the thought of this, Ge Feng's spirits were sky-high.

By contrast, after parting with Ge Feng and returning to his residence, Fang Bai's mood wasn't nearly as good.

On his way back, Fang Bai noticed someone tracking him. When he discreetly extended his Divine Sense to investigate, he realized it was Steward Zhuang Zhi.

Zhuang Zhi thought his tracking skills were so advanced that he could remain undetected by gods and ghosts alike, but unbeknownst to him, every move he made was completely within Fang Bai's control.

After entering his own courtyard, Fang Bai noticed Zhuang Zhi lingered nearby for a moment before departing, heading in the direction Fang Bai had expected, toward the residence of Elder Lei Li who was in charge of the Classics Hall.

Chapter 1034: Anticipation

Fang Bai knew that Zhuang Zhi's tracking of him was definitely not with good intentions, and his visit to Lei Li could also be a discussion of some conspiracy.

However, Fang Bai couldn't be bothered to follow and eavesdrop.

In Fang Bai's eyes, whether it was Zhuang Zhi with his low-rank Desolate Level cultivation or Lei Li with his mid-rank Desolate Level strength, they were both just clowns. With just the two of them, they would find it difficult to cause any trouble for him.

Fang Bai firmly believed that in front of absolute power, any conspiracy or trickery was illusory. With one punch, everything would dissipate into smoke.

In the following two days, like many other Martial Academy disciples who had returned from their training experiences, Fang Bai also chose to enter closed-door training.

From this training experience in the mountains, Huang Miao, Hou Ziping, Liu Qingqing, and Liu Liehu all made some progress in strength, while Fang Bai had also obtained quite a few cultivation resources.

However, one session of Fang Bai's closed-door training would consume tens of thousands of Essence Stones and dozens or even hundreds of Elixirs, so the cultivation resources he obtained were just a drop in the bucket, unable to effectively alleviate the scarcity of his cultivation resources.

Fang Bai was actually quite looking forward to his upcoming trip to Purple Flame City.

He had heard that there was a large Martial Artists Trading Market in Purple Flame City where martial artists from all corners would gather daily, trading various types of cultivation resources and even having the chance to see many treasures that martial artists dreamed of obtaining.

What interested Fang Bai the most was that within this large trading market, there were Pharmacists and Artifact Refiners who regularly offered their services to create Elixirs or Spiritual Artifacts for all the martial artists.

Of course, martial artists who wanted to create Elixirs or Spiritual Artifacts had to pay a substantial "service fee" to the Pharmacists or Artifact Refiners; hence, they were typically among the martial artists in the Martial Dao World least lacking in cultivation resources.

Moreover, as Pharmacists and Artifact Refiners possessed Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Roots and were usually martial dao powerhouses, along with their vast networks, ordinary martial artists coveted their enormous cultivation resources but did not dare to easily entertain the thought of targeting them.

The Elixirs required for the cultivation of Bitao Martial Academy disciples were partly created by the Pharmacists in the Trading Market.

Upon learning this news, Fang Bai's heart stirred greatly, thinking that if he went to Purple Flame City, he could change his appearance and earn a fortune in cultivation resources by refining Elixirs and crafting artifacts for other martial artists at the trading market.

Although Fang Bai's strength had greatly diminished compared to his peak as the Immortal Emperor, his mind was filled with thousands upon thousands of secret alchemy and artifact refining techniques. Fang Bai was confident that if he were to take action, he would not be inferior to any of the Pharmacists or Artifact Refiners in Purple Flame City.

He just didn't know if he started taking the Pharmacists' and Artifact Refiners' business, whether they would join forces to deal with him.

Inside Fang Bai's Spatial Ring now were the sinews, flesh, and hides of two mid-rank Spirit Beasts, two mid-rank Spirit Cores, and many mid-grade Spiritual Medicines, Iceheart Fruits, that were over five hundred years old.

These were all cultivation resources that Fang Bai had obtained during his mountain training, each one a rare treasure in the eyes of martial artists. Fang Bai planned to take some of them to the trading market in Purple Flame City to exchange for some urgently needed cultivation resources.

Of course, all these things had to be done in secret upon reaching Purple Flame City, without letting other people from the Bitao Martial Academy know, including Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu. After all, earning cultivation resources by refining Elixirs and crafting artifacts in Purple Flame City might encroach upon some Pharmacists' or Artifact Refiners' interests, potentially leading to their hostility or even attacks. Fang Bai did not want to bring any trouble to Liu Qingqing and the others.

In the next two days of secluded cultivation, Fang Bai, with a limited number of Essence Stones, laid out a Shielding Array within the small courtyard he resided in, to prevent the intense fluctuations generated during his cultivation from being sensed by the high-ranking members of the Martial Academy.

Although the Heaven and Earth Origin Energy in the True Martial Realm was much richer compared to the previous Secular World, lacking a large amount of cultivation resources meant that Fang Bai showed no signs of advancement in the better part of half a year since arriving in the True Martial Realm. However, the volume of the Chaos Essence Qi, composed of seven types of Essence Energy within his Qi Sea, had increased and had also become more refined and concentrated, which laid a solid foundation for his future advancements.

Fang Bai was a possessor of the Chaos True Body, and his strength was many times greater than other Martial Artists at the same realm, yet the difficulty of advancement also increased manifold; every cultivation session required far more resources than for his peers.

Furthermore, as his realm and cultivation level rose, Fang Bai's demand for cultivation resources would reach a level unimaginable to an ordinary Martial Artist.

The two days passed in a blink of an eye. During these two days, the Origin Energy surged and filled the small courtyard where Fang Bai was, the pressure it exerted was astonishing, such that even Ren Jingbo, the headmaster of the Martial Academy, would not be able to withstand it if he abruptly entered this courtyard.

Fortunately, the Origin Energy and the pressure were confined within the small courtyard by the Shielding Array Fang Bai had set up, and from the outside, nothing unusual could be detected; thus, no one was alarmed.

In the early hours of the third day, when Fang Bai concluded his cultivation, he sensed a fluctuation of Essence Energy coming from the direction of the Elixir Hall, followed closely by an excited and exhilarating long howl.

The howl echoed among the mountains, and from it, one could feel that the person who issued the howl was extremely excited and exuberant.

"Elder Ge has advanced in realm! It seems the mid-grade Creation Pill I gave him has played a crucial role."

Fang Bai walked out of the courtyard and stood on the edge of the cliff, looking towards the peak of the mountain where the Elixir Hall was located, by the light of the moon, a slight smile appearing at the corner of his mouth.

Dawn broke soon after, and the sonorous sounds of the bell suddenly rang out—Bitao Martial Academy was summoning all Disciples to gather at the plaza in front of the gate.

Fang Bai, along with thousands of Bitao Martial Academy disciples, dressed in uniforms representing their various statuses and ranks, swept down from their residences on the various mountains, converging into streams of people rushing towards the vast plaza.

After thousands of disciples had assembled on the plaza, a group of high-ranked officials from the Martial Academy, led by Ren Jingbo, appeared on the Stone Platform.

Fang Bai's gaze fell on Ge Feng, who was looking spirited and energetic; as expected, he had indeed advanced to the High Rank Desolate level realm, on par with the two Vice Heads.

Although Ge Feng deliberately concealed his cultivation level, he couldn't escape Fang Bai's keen perception.

However, because Ge Feng had just advanced, his realm was not very stable, so in terms of combat power, he still could not compare to the two Vice Heads.

When Fang Bai looked towards Ge Feng, it happened that Ge Feng was also glancing at him. Both men exchanged knowing smiles, and gratitude was clearly visible in Ge Feng's smile.

The main purpose of the Martial Academy's high-ranking officials' convening all Disciples was to announce the list of ten people who would be attending the Sect's conference in the Thousand Lakes Capital City, Purple Flame City, and to encourage them to cultivate diligently. Those who could not go to Purple Flame City this time should strive for a chance in the next one.

The ten individuals participating in the Sect's conference included one leading Elder, three Personal Transmission Disciples, three Core Disciples, and three Inner Court Disciples, the same as in previous years.

However, the selection of Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing to the list of Core Disciples and Inner Court Disciples respectively took many Martial Academy disciples by surprise.

Chapter 1035: Ten People

Though Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing both performed incredibly well two days ago in the Martial Academy disciple challenge, rising to Core Disciple and Inner Court Disciple respectively, their rankings on the

combat power list were still not at the forefront. Sending them to the Sect conference in Purple Flame City could potentially lower the Bitao Martial Academy's standings in the Martial Dao competition.

This was a common thought among many disciples of Bitao Martial Academy.

In past Sect conferences, Bitao Martial Academy typically ranked around tenth among the twenty eligible Sects, receiving limited cultivation resources, hence delaying many disciples' cultivation progress.

For this Sect conference, the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy hoped that the attendees would achieve good results in order to secure more cultivation resources for the Academy.

However, when Dean Ren announced the list of ten participants, including Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing, many disciples felt disappointed, believing that neither the strength nor the experience of the two were sufficient for such a heavy responsibility.

If because of them, Bitao Martial Academy's rank in the Sect conference were to fall instead of rise, then according to the conference rules, the cultivation resources allocated to their Academy would be even fewer.

None of the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy wanted to see that.

But, this list of ten was decided jointly by the entire leadership of the Academy, and would no longer be changed, despite some disciples feeling discontented.

"Everyone, please quiet down and let me say a few words..."

Dean Ren seemed to sense the dissatisfaction among some of the disciples below the stage, cleared his throat, and said loudly, "I know, the participation of Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing in the Sect conference surprised and unsettled you. But, you really don't need to worry. Just yesterday evening, I specially arranged for Liu Qingqing to duel with Yang Lin, who ranks third on the Inner Court disciples' combat power list. Yang Lin was defeated by Liu Qingqing within ten moves... Are you reassured now?"

As soon as Dean Ren finished speaking, thousands of disciples below the stage burst into a buzz of activity, with many showing incredulous expressions on their faces, turning their heads to look at Liu Qingqing.

Liu Qingqing, dressed in a green robe, stood prettily in the area designated for Inner Court disciples. She was clear-skinned and slender, appearing like a pristine Green Lotus.

Many Martial Academy disciples noticed that compared to the disciple challenge two days ago, Liu Qingqing's expression lacked a few traces of tender charm and shyness, but gained more calm, composure, and confidence.

This version of Liu Qingqing further captivated the male disciples already paying attention to her.

"Sister's expression, she's clearly imitating Brother Fang!"

Liu Liehu, standing with a group of External Courtyard disciples, secretly chuckled to himself when he saw his sister Liu Qingqing's expression and demeanor.

In fact, not just Liu Qingqing, Liu Liehu himself was deeply influenced by Fang Bai, so much so that many of his usual expressions and actions involuntarily mimicked Fang Bai.

However, Liu Liehu's imitation of Fang Bai felt a bit like trying to draw a tiger but ending up with something resembling a dog, whereas a youthful and beautiful girl like Liu Qingqing learning it, had a unique charm.

Some Martial Academy disciples also looked at Yang Lin, noticing his head hung low, a face full of shame, which essentially confirmed the truth of Dean Ren's words.

Currently on the Inner Court disciples' combat power list, Tu Hu, who originally ranked first, had now advanced to Core Disciple, thereby making Huang Miao, who was second, the first; Liu Qingqing had defeated Yang Lin who was ranked immediately after Huang Miao, naturally earning her the second position.

Thus, it was only natural for Liu Qingqing to represent the Inner Court disciples in the battle.

"As for Fang Bai, his ability to defeat Qi Dongsheng, who ranks tenth on the Core Disciples' combat power list in one move, sufficiently proves his extraordinary strength. Based on my judgment and experience, Fang Bai's strength is certainly among the top three rankers of the Core Disciples' combat power list!"

Dean Ren continued, his gaze sweeping over the top three rankers on the Core Disciple combat power list—Long Xing, Yun Yan, and Zheng Lingtian—before momentarily pausing on Zheng Lingtian.

Zheng Lingtian, upon noticing Dean Ren looking at him, twitched the corners of his mouth slightly, his face turning extremely pale, mixed with shades of depression and discontent.

Had it not been for Fang Bai, Zheng Lingtian would have been the sole candidate from Bitao Martial Academy to attend the Sect Assembly in Purple Flame City. However, after deliberations by the Martial Academy's leadership yesterday, they shockingly chose Fang Bai as his replacement, leaving him no choice but to obediently stay at the academy.

Though Zheng Lingtian felt dissatisfied, he dared not openly show it, being merely a Core Disciple. How could he defy the decision made by the Martial Academy's leadership?

Moreover, Zheng Lingtian had the awareness that Fang Bai managed to defeat Qi Dongsheng with a single move, whereas he himself had neither the confidence nor the certainty. Thus, he couldn't help but acknowledge and accept Fang Bai's replacement.

Ren Jingbo's words served like an injection of adrenaline to the thousands of disciples present, bringing smiles and radiance back to the faces of many who were initially very disappointed.

"Senior Brother Fang, I believe in you!"

"Junior Sister Liu, push on!"

"Sweep through the disciples of all Sects and bring honor to our Martial Academy!"

"Look forward to your triumphant return!"

...

Thousands of Martial Academy disciples chatted and cheered for both Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing.

Representing the Inner Court disciples were three people, namely Huang Miao, Liu Qingqing, and Yang Lin.

Representing the Core Disciples were three individuals, namely Long Xing, Yun Yan, and Fang Bai.

Representing the Personal Transmission Disciples were three individuals, namely Shen Yulin, Yang Gang, and Hua Hua.

Plus one Elder leading the team, Elder Ge.

At this point, the ten-member quota to attend the Sect Assembly in Purple Flame City had been finalized and became familiar among the Martial Academy's disciples.

In the eyes of Bitao Martial Academy's disciples, this lineup was undoubtedly strong, but this "strength" was minimal compared to those top-ranking Sects, hardly worth mentioning.

"Elder Ge and the ten members will soon depart for Purple Flame City to participate in the once-every-five-years Sect Assembly... Come, let us together wish Elder Ge and his team smooth sailing and great success!"

"Smooth sailing and great success!"

Thousands of Bitao Martial Academy disciples shouted in unison, their voices creating a buzzing sound in everyone's ears.

"Let's go... let's go... Once you leave, never think of coming back... Haha, no matter how good your talent or how high your aptitude, it's all in vain if you die halfway... Fang Bai, Fang Bai, thinking of competing with me? You're not even qualified!"

Lei Li squinted his eyes, watching as Elder Ge led Fang Bai and the others depart amidst the focus of the crowd, gradually moving farther away, his lips curling into a sinister smile, a hint of murderous intention emanating from him.

Zhuang Zhi was also smiling, his smile equally malicious.

Fang Bai kept an eye on the movements of Lei Li and Zhuang Zhi.

As he followed Elder Ge and the others departing from the square, Fang Bai's Divine Sense extended, covering a radius of two thousand meters. Thus, although he did not turn his head back, he could still "see" the sinister-smiling faces of Lei Li and Zhuang Zhi.

Chapter 1036: Fiery Sect

"It seems that the journey to Purple Flame City won't be peaceful all the way! Hah... Two fools who overestimate their abilities. They're simply seeking their own deaths!"

Fang Bai's Divine Sense withdrew from Lei Li and Zhuang Zhi, a mocking smile appearing on the corner of his mouth.

There had been no interaction between Fang Bai and Lei Li, let alone any grudge. Fang Bai didn't understand why the old man targeted him, and from what he had overheard Lei Li muttering, it seemed Lei Li intended to kill him on their way to Purple Flame City.

Fang Bai was a martial arts prodigy the likes of which Bitao Martial Academy had never seen before, favored and valued by the majority of the academy's upper echelons. Yet Lei Li and Zhuang Zhi, as part of these upper echelons, had conspired to kill him, which was truly illogical.

However, the killing intent exhibited by Lei Li was fleeting, and aside from Fang Bai, no one else had detected it.

If another disciple of Bitao Martial Academy were to learn that the two powerful figures, Lei Li and Zhuang Zhi, wanted to kill them, they would be extremely anxious and lose sleep over it.

But Fang Bai didn't care about it at all. After leaving the plaza in front of the mountain gate with Ge Feng and the others, he dismissed the matter from his mind.

And that was the confidence of the strong.

Led by Ge Feng, the ten-member team from Bitao Martial Academy arrived at the stables at the foot of the mountain, and each selected a "Swiftwind Horse."

The Swiftwind Horse was the offspring of a normal horse and a Wind System Spirit Beast, domesticated and bred by martial artists. Due to its speed, endurance, and affordability, it quickly became the martial artists' preferred mode of transportation.

Although some martial artists could move very quickly on their own, even surpassing Swiftwind Horses, such sustained rapid movement consumed a great deal of Essence Energy. Therefore, unless there was an emergency, martial artists usually chose to ride Swiftwind Horses for long journeys.

Compared to some minor sects, Bitao Martial Academy, as a fourth-ranked Sect, was quite wealthy. They had their own stable that bred Swiftwind Horses, conveniently providing disciples with transportation for their missions.

The Bitao Martial Academy was thousands of miles away from Purple Flame City. With stops along the way, it would take roughly five days to reach their destination, so Fang Bai and the others selected horses that looked particularly robust.

...

Hooves clattered, dust billowed.

Ten sturdy Swiftwind Horses sped out of the stables, kicking up dust clouds as they charged toward Purple Flame City in the Thousand Lakes Capital City, thousands of miles away.

This ten-member team represented the thousands of disciples from Bitao Martial Academy to attend the Sect Conference. The results of the martial arts competition would directly determine the academy's significant interests for the next five years. Therefore, including Ge Feng, nearly everyone was excited and nervous, fearing they might let down the high hopes of their fellow disciples.

Only Fang Bai remained calm, always wearing an expression of serene detachment as if nothing could disrupt his composure.

For this reason, Ge Feng held him in high esteem, more convinced than ever that Fang Bai had the makings of a grandmaster and was destined for great things.

The ten Swiftwind Horses galloped along the wide and smooth road, with Ge Feng leading the way at the front, followed closely by three Personal Transmission Disciples, and then the three Core Disciples, with three Inner Court Disciples bringing up the rear.

On the first day, the Bitao Martial Academy's team traveled over a thousand miles. As evening approached, they stopped at a small market town to rest and replenish food and drink, planning to set off again early the next morning.

The ten found a relatively clean inn where they entrusted their Swiftwind Horses to the care of the inn's servants. After opening ten rooms and washing up, they gathered in the inn's ground-floor hall to eat, drink, laugh, connect with fellow disciples, and didn't disperse until late into the night, each returning to their own lodgings to rest.

Among the ten-member team from Bitao Martial Academy participating in the Sect Conference, besides being favored by Ge Feng, Fang Bai also had good relations with Liu Qingqing and Huang Miao.

Shen Yulin was an impulsive and righteous person and was quite enthusiastic towards Fang Bai as well.

As for Yang Lin, due to previous conflicts with Fang Bai, although he now treated Fang Bai with distant respect on the surface, he still harbored a deep hatred for him.

The other disciples, such as Core Disciple Long Xing, Yun Yan, and Personal Transmission Disciples Yang Gang and Hua Hua, due to their infrequent interactions with Fang Bai, had a relationship with him that couldn't be considered either good or bad but was just a common camaraderie among sect members.

Fang Bai noticed and remembered each person's attitude towards him.

Fang Bai believed that after the Sect Conference concluded, his performance would surprise Long Xing and the others, ensuring they would no longer dare to look down on him.

At the same time, he also hoped to make those of the ilk of Yang Lin who harbored malicious thoughts against him refrain from doing so in the future, forcing them to keep their tails between their legs and behave.

The night passed peacefully, with neither Lei Li nor Zhuang Zhi appearing nearby; however, Fang Bai had a premonition that Lei Li would definitely cause some trouble during this period.

The following morning, the ten-member team from Bitao Martial Academy continued their journey towards Purple Flame City.

Before entering a mountainous region, Ge Feng and his team encountered another group also heading to Purple Flame City for the Sect Conference.

This team, similar in composition and overall strength to the Bitao Martial Academy team, was also led by an Elder with nine accompanying disciples.

According to Shen Yulin, the leading Personal Transmission Disciple, this team belonged to the Fiery Sect, a Fourth-Rank Sect with comparable strength to Bitao Martial Academy. Their territories also bordered each other.

For years, Bitao Martial Academy and Fiery Sect, both significantly lacking in cultivation resources, had more than once engaged in bloody conflicts over Essence Stone Veins and wild Spiritual Medicines found along their borders, but neither had gained much advantage over the other.

After the intervention and mediation by the Third-Rank Purple Flame Sect, both sides agreed to exercise restraint and not invade each other's territories, thus preventing any large-scale conflicts with heavy disciple casualties.

However, when the disciples of both sects met, they often glared at each other with brows furrowed, an air of defiance on both sides.

The ten Fiery Sect disciples, also mounted on Swiftwind Horses, consisted of an equal mix of males and females, all dressed in the uniform red attire of the sect, appearing like surges of blazing flames.

"Brother Ge, we meet again!"

A slightly effeminate voice came from the Fiery Sect group. The voice was not loud, but it carried an undertone of True Essence Force that caused Huang Miao, Liu Qingqing, and others' eardrums to buzz and their bodies to sway, nearly falling off their Swiftwind Horses.

The speaker was none other than Leng Han, the leading Elder of the Fiery Sect team.

Although Leng Han's voice might have been somewhat high-pitched and effeminate, as if that of a eunuch, in person, he was a tall and burly elder, standing nearly two meters tall with bushy eyebrows and fierce eyes.

Interestingly, like Ge Feng, Leng Han also oversaw his sect's Elixir Hall, responsible for distributing and managing the sect's cultivation resources, which granted him significant power.

Leng Han himself was a formidable figure with mid-Desolate Level strength; he had previously been evenly matched with Ge Feng in a duel. In recent years, feeling his power had increased substantially, he had been seeking an opportunity to challenge Ge Feng once more, aiming to defeat him and quash Bitao Martial Academy's prestige.

Chapter 1037: Showing Off

Ge Feng and Leng Han had crossed paths numerous times and knew each other well. He knew that this man was a smiling tiger with honeyed words yet a malicious heart. Dealing with such a person required utmost caution, otherwise, one might inadvertently fall into his trap.

For someone like Leng Han, Ge Feng always tried to keep as much distance as possible; not because he was afraid of Leng Han, but because he did not want to stir up trouble.

Encountering Leng Han here was somewhat unexpected for Ge Feng. Originally, he did not intend to engage with Leng Han, but since Leng Han had taken the initiative to speak to him, Ge Feng felt it impolite to ignore him. He cupped his hands and said indifferently, "Elder Leng, two years have passed, and you still radiate charm!"

Leng Han laughed heartily, "The same goes for you! The same goes for you!"

He sized up Ge Feng, sensing from him a Martial Artist Aura that subtly overpowered his own, which greatly surprised him.

Before this, Leng Han and Ge Feng had fought each other several times, with their strengths evenly matched and neither able to best the other.

Over the past two years, Leng Han had encountered some fortuitous opportunities. Although his Cultivation Level had not advanced to a higher rank, his strength had improved considerably. He thought he could defeat Ge Feng and had even planned to use the opportunity of the Sect's grand meeting to challenge him, hoping to humiliate Ge Feng in the process.

However, what Leng Han did not expect was that Ge Feng's progress over these two years had been even greater than his own.

With this revelation, the previously haughty Leng Han immediately became more restrained, and his smile widened, though it seemed somewhat forced.

"Elder Ge, your Cultivation has improved greatly in the past two years! Truly joyous and commendable!"

Leng Han said with a forced smile, cupping his hands though filled with mixed feelings inside.

Ge Feng noticed the change in Leng Han's expression and felt somewhat smug. However, he humbly replied, "Oh, Elder Leng, you've improved as well! When we have time, shall we spar again?"

"Ah... that... we'll discuss it later... discuss it later..."

Leng Han, doubting he was a match for Ge Feng, hemmed and hawed, not daring to agree on the spot. He thought Ge Feng's public challenge was meant to embarrass him and couldn't help feeling secretly annoyed.

Ge Feng smiled and did not pursue the matter further.

The two teams of twenty Martial Artists rode their Swiftwind Horses side by side along the broad road, their disciples occasionally exchanging glances, each filled with contempt and disdain.

Leng Han and Ge Feng occasionally exchanged a few words and sometimes looked back, their gazes sweeping meaningfully over Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing.

"Brother Fang, that Elder Leng has such a strange way of looking at people, it gives me the creeps."

When Leng Han's gaze swept over her, Liu Qingqing felt like she was being watched by a ferocious Spirit Beast, making her uncomfortable all over, so she urged her Swiftwind Horse closer to Fang Bai and spoke in a low voice.

Although Liu Qingqing spoke softly, Leng Han heard her clearly. He chuckled and turned his head, "Young lady, don't be afraid, I have no ill intentions towards you. It's just that the two of you look a bit unfamiliar, which I find quite strange... Are you two disciples representing the Bitao Martial Academy at the Sect's grand meeting?"

"Both of them are newly recruited disciples of my Bitao Martial Academy. With Innate Spiritual Roots and such young age, as long as we are willing to invest in Cultivation Resources to nurture them, they are sure to shine brightly in the Martial Dao and become the mainstay of my Bitao Martial Academy! And with them, my Bitao Martial Academy is sure to rise to prominence!"

Seeing Elder Leng show interest in Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing, the two disciples from Bitao Martial Academy with the most potential, Ge Feng felt quite proud and started to boast about them.

In past Sect Conferences, Elder Leng's Fiery Sect had always ranked slightly better than Bitao Martial Academy in the Martial Dao competition segment, thus suppressing Bitao Martial Academy overall.

Because of this, the disciples of the Fiery Sect seldom ridiculed those from the Bitao Martial Academy, while the disciples of the Bitao Martial Academy, from top to bottom, all held a grudge inside, helpless that their skills were inferior, having to swallow their anger.

What made Bitao Martial Academy even more wary was that the Fiery Sect had some connections with the Purple Flame Sect.

It was said that the daughter of Fiery Sect's Sect Master had married the son of an elder from Purple Flame Sect. Although this marriage alliance didn't bring substantial benefits to the Fiery Sect, within the borders of Thousand Lakes Country, there were very few other sects who dared to provoke the Fiery Sect.

Bitao Martial Academy and Fiery Sect had continuous conflicts over border cultivation resources, even leading to small-scale clashes. Because of this, they were suppressed by the Purple Flame Sect, and over the years, they had never recovered, reducing them to a second-rate sect among the third-grade sects.

Meeting Elder Leng this time, Ge Feng finally found an opportunity to vent the anger in his chest and proudly boasted about the two genius disciples, Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing.

So what if your Fiery Sect has stronger overall strength? So what if you are backed by the Purple Flame Sect? Now our Bitao Martial Academy has Fang Bai, Liu Qingqing, and Gao Shuxian, all three with Innate Spiritual Roots and all Martial Dao geniuses. Once they grow up, there is hope that they will surpass you!

As Ge Feng introduced Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing, his chest swelled with pride, but he failed to notice the intense murderous intent flash briefly in Elder Leng's eyes.

"Oh my, it turns out that your esteemed academy has recruited two disciples with Innate Spiritual Roots. That's truly a cause for celebration! Your academy's rise is in sight! The rise is in sight!"

Elder Leng gave an insincere smile, seizing the opportunity to squint his eyes and scrutinize Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing closely, as if trying to see right through them.

Under his gaze, Liu Qingqing felt somewhat nervous, entirely uncomfortable, and turned her face away to avoid looking at him.

Fang Bai, however, stood his ground, calmly confronting Elder Leng.

"This young man is indeed not simple! By getting rid of him, we eliminate a future threat to both the Fiery Sect and the Purple Flame Sect!"

Elder Leng thought to himself.

"The main purpose of Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing attending the Sect Conference in Purple Flame City this time is to broaden their horizons and hone their spirits. Whether they can help Bitao Martial Academy achieve good results in the Martial Dao competition segment is of secondary importance..."

Hearing Elder Leng's praise, Ge Feng was in high spirits and modestly downplayed it a few times.

The core disciples and direct disciples from the Fiery Sect who accompanied Elder Leng looked at Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing with some hostility, eager to challenge them right then and there to see what capabilities had earned Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing such high remarks from Elder Leng.

After Fang Bai became a core disciple, he kept his realm suppressed at the High Rank of Heaven Level. Therefore, to the eyes of the Fiery Sect's disciples, he did not appear strong, which gave them the confidence to act provocatively.

Fang Bai ignored this, leaving the Fiery Sect disciples with a disdainful glance before turning to chat and laugh with Liu Qingqing.

For the rest of the journey, both Elder Leng and the nine disciples from the Fiery Sect he led talked much less and reined in their previous arrogance.

Chapter 1038: Soul Severing Valley

Disciples of the Fiery Sect had always looked down on the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy; when the two teams met just now, they had sneered coldly, ridiculing Shen Yulin and the others as defeated subordinates.

However, their mockery was quickly stopped by Leng Han.

After realizing that Ge Feng's cultivation level had surpassed his own, Leng Han broke out in a cold sweat and quickly halted the Fiery Sect disciples from continuing their mockery of the Bitao Martial Academy disciples. He was secretly relieved that he hadn't uttered any insulting remarks to Ge Feng, for if he had angered Ge Feng, he might have suffered greatly.

Leng Han did not want to start a conflict with an opponent he might not be able to defeat before the Sect Conference began, lest it affect the Fiery Sect's performance at this Sect Conference.

The two teams from Fiery Sect and Bitao Martial Academy, one after the other, urged their Swiftwind Horses along the wide road, racing forward.

Along the way, the disciples from both sides harbored their own thoughts, sharing almost no interaction.

After a day and a night of rapid travel, the two teams reached a mountain range that stretched out before them, spanning thousands of miles.

From afar, the peaks that made up the mountain range were almost entirely shrouded in silver, with thick snow covering the mountains. Piercing cold currents brewed among the peaks, occasionally swept out by gusts of wind, spreading in all directions and carrying the bone-chilling cold with them.

When the disciples of both teams were still tens of miles away from the mountain range, they already felt the biting cold hitting them head-on. Those with slightly weaker strength could not withstand the invasion of the cold and could not help but shiver.

"Up ahead is the Blizzard Mountain Range; inside, the wind and snow are fierce, the terrain is complex, and dangerous Spirit Beasts roam. Once we enter, everyone must stay close around me and don't get separated!"

Ge Feng forcefully pulled on the reins of his Swiftwind Horse, slowing it down, then looked apprehensively towards the Blizzard Mountain Range ahead and spoke solemnly to Fang Bai and the others.

The Fiery Sect disciples also slowed down their pace, including Leng Han, each with a grave expression, as if facing a formidable enemy.

If the two teams wanted to reach Purple Flame City before the Sect Conference began, they had to pass through a mountain path in the Blizzard Mountain Range; otherwise, they would have to take a detour.

However, detouring around the Blizzard Mountain Range would cost them at least half a month more. By then, even if they rushed to Purple Flame City, the Sect Conference would already be over.

Such an outcome was unacceptable for both the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy and the Fiery Sect.

The detour was too long and time-consuming, hence many martial artists going to Purple Flame City would choose to pass directly through the Blizzard Mountain Range.

The path through the Blizzard Mountain Range was a narrow valley about several miles wide and three hundred miles long.

Due to the constant fierce snowstorms in the valley and temperatures dropping to the limits that ordinary martial artists could endure, plus the presence of Spirit Beasts, it was fraught with danger and often saw martial artists perish there, thus earning the nickname "Soul Severing Valley."

However, in this world, many martial artists possessed a spirit of adventure and fearlessness towards death. Despite the dangers of Soul Severing Valley, a large number of martial artists still chose to pass through it each year.

For some martial artists, crossing Soul Severing Valley was also a brief trial by fire; surviving its life-and-death challenges might lead to greater insights in their martial path.

The environment inside Soul Severing Valley was harsh, with Spirit Beasts roaming. Heaven Level Martial Artists entering it faced significant risks, but Desolate Level Martial Artists were able to handle it with ease. Therefore, for teams like those from Bitao Martial Academy and Fiery Sect heading to Purple Flame City to participate in the Sect Conference, they were usually led by a Desolate Level Martial Artist. This way, in encountering danger, they could easily resolve it to prevent casualties.

Upon hearing Elder Ge's shout, Shen Yulin and the others quickly gathered around him, weapons in hand, their expressions serious, their nerves tightly wound.

Among the nine disciples of Bitao Martial Academy, aside from Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing, the other seven had represented Bitao Martial Academy at the Sect Conference in Purple Flame City and had experience traversing Soul Severing Valley. They vividly remembered the dangers within the valley, but they also understood that as long as they closely followed Elder Ge, even if they encountered danger, they could turn peril into safety and safely cross the three-hundred-li valley.

Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing rode side by side, staying very close so that Fang Bai could help Liu Qingqing promptly if she encountered any danger in the valley.

"Elder Ge, we will go ahead! See you on the other end of Soul Severing Valley!"

The team from Fiery Sect entered Soul Severing Valley ahead of the others. Before entering, Leng Han left these words with a smile, his gaze sweeping over Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing once again.

"Brother Fang, that Elder Leng looked at us again! I always feel that he harbors ill intentions..."

Liu Qingqing whispered to Fang Bai.

Fang Bai smiled faintly and said, "Don't worry; we have Elder Ge watching over you. If that Elder Leng dares to make a move against us, Elder Ge will definitely teach him a lesson!"

Elder Ge's mind was largely preoccupied with the upcoming Sect Conference. He didn't notice the murderous glances that Leng Han repeatedly directed at Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing. However, he heard the conversation between Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing clearly and nodded with a chuckle, "Fang Bai is right; as long as I am here, he, Leng Han, wouldn't dare touch a hair on your heads!"

Elder Ge's cultivation level was now a minor realm higher than Leng Han's, giving him an overwhelming advantage for the first time, so he spoke with great confidence.

"Did you notice that the old man Leng Han didn't seem as arrogant as before when he saw our Elder Ge this time?"

"It must be that Elder Ge's strength has surpassed his, making him scared."

"Indeed! In the past, when Leng Han saw Elder Ge, he would always mock and ridicule him, but this time he kept a smiling face throughout!"

"Elder Ge is mighty!"

"At this Sect Conference, let's fight for our pride and make sure to trample Fiery Sect underfoot!"

"Yes! Let's hold our heads high at this Sect Conference!"

...

Shen Yulin, Huang Miao, and the other disciples of Bitao Martial Academy expressed their disdain and contempt for Fiery Sect.

Seeing the nine disciples so spirited, Elder Ge couldn't help feeling invigorated as well. Seeing that the disciples were ready, he waved his large hand and said, "My disciples, follow me into the valley!"

The ten-member team from Bitao Martial Academy, with Elder Ge at the center, formed a circular formation and rode their Swiftwind Horses through the entrance of Soul Severing Valley.

It was the first time for Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing to pass through Soul Severing Valley, and their initial impression was that the wind was strong, the snow heavy, and the temperature low inside the valley.

Although outside the valley, there were also gusts of cold wind, sweeping snowflakes, and extremely low temperatures, once they entered the valley, the wind, snow, and cold intensified dramatically, far surpassing that outside the valley.

Chapter 1039: Sudden Assault

Outside Soul Severing Valley, although the snow raged wildly and the environment was harsh, ordinary Martial Artists could still endure it.

However, once one entered Soul Severing Valley, the deeper they went, the more terrifying they found the natural might of heaven and earth.

The cold wind was like a knife, whistling sharply as it whistled past one's body; slightly weaker Martial Artists felt as if their skin was being torn apart, causing bursts of pain, forcing them to consume their Essence Energy to form a Defense Qi Shield for protection.

And the snow swept up by the raging wind, as strong as hidden weapons launched from a Heaven Level Martial Artist's hands, crashed onto the Martial Artists' Defense Qi Shields around their bodies, causing intense tremors, giving a feeling that they might collapse at any moment.

Among the ten from Bitao Martial Academy, Fang Bai's physical body was robust, allowing him to withstand the stormy snow as if it were merely an itch through his boots.

Meanwhile, Liu Qingqing possessed an Innate Water Spirit Root, and was naturally close to the Water Element Qi. The snow here contained a large amount of Water Element Qi, so she also did not fear the wind and snow.

Ge Feng was a Desolate Level Martial Artist with thick True Yuan and great strength, capable of contending with the natural might of this place.

Therefore, of the ten Bitao Martial Academy Disciples who entered Soul Severing Valley, aside from Fang Bai, Liu Qingqing, and Ge Feng, who were not affected by the adverse environment, the other seven Disciples all felt tremendous pressure and had to circulate their True Yuan to resist.

The ten Swiftwind Horses, with their tough skins and strong resistance to cold, were also unafraid of the raging windstorm.

Martial Artists entering Soul Severing Valley would feel as if the inside and outside of the valley were two totally different worlds—the inside was hell, and the outside was paradise.

In Soul Severing Valley, due to the fierce snow obliterating the sky and severely obstructing visibility, even a powerful Desolate Level Martial Artist like Ge Feng could only see clearly within ten meters; anything farther became a blur. He had to rely on the Martial Artists' unique keen senses to detect any lurking dangers.

The Fiery Sect team walking ahead of them had already disappeared without a trace, and their situation was unknown.

As the guardian of the team, surrounded by nine disciples, Ge Feng dared not be careless for even a moment because he knew that from the moment their team entered Soul Severing Valley, they might have already been targeted by some Spirit Beasts.

Although there were no Spirit Beasts in Soul Severing Valley as powerful as a Desolate Level Martial Artist among humans, there were plenty of Spirit Beasts with hundreds of years of beast age, especially the groups of Snow Leopards and Snow Wolves, which were particularly ferocious. Their overall strength was definitely not weaker than some middle-rank Spirit Beasts, making them the undisputed kings of this Ice Valley.

These Spirit Beasts, usually having white fur, typically lurked between the thick ice and snow on both sides of the valley, very difficult to detect. Once they spotted human Martial Artists passing by, they might launch a sudden attack, catching them completely off guard.

Over the years, most human Martial Artists who perished in the valley were killed by Spirit Beast attacks, with only a minority dying from the natural forces.

Shen Yulin, Huang Miao, and the others felt fortunate that they had already covered more than half of their journey in Soul Severing Valley without encountering any dangers, which was unusually smooth compared to previous experiences.

However, in Ge Feng's view, such unnatural smoothness was likely a harbinger of demons, making him even more worried, feeling that greater danger could be lurking around them.

"It's strange, when we walked here before, we encountered Spirit Beast attacks at least a few times, but this time, why haven't we seen any trace of Spirit Beasts? It's as if all the Spirit Beasts in Soul Severing Valley suddenly disappeared..."

Shen Yulin also began to feel that something was not right and said with a frown.

Shen Yulin had already represented Bitao Martial Academy in attending the Sect Conference at Purple Flame City for the third time. In the previous two instances, while crossing the Soul Severing Valley, their team had encountered numerous Spirit Beast attacks, engaging in intense battles before they finally managed to pass through the Blizzard Mountain Range.

This time, she had mentally prepared herself for battles with the Spirit Beasts, but unexpectedly, aside from the relentless storm, the Spirit Beasts seemed to have evaporated from the earth, leaving no trace—this situation was extraordinarily abnormal.

"Everyone, don't let your guard down!"

Ge Feng loudly reminded everyone.

Just then, the wind suddenly grew much more fierce, and the snow became even wilder and denser, significantly reducing visibility.

"Be careful!"

Remaining vigilant, Ge Feng suddenly sensed four strong Martial Artist Auras filled with intense killing intent coming at them from the front, back, left, and right directions simultaneously. Faintly visible were four figures, fast as lightning, closing in on them and instantly surrounding them.

The four Martial Artist Auras came from two Desolate Level Low Rank Martial Artists and two Desolate Level Mid Rank Martial Artists.

The sudden ambush by the four Desolate Level Martial Artists greatly shocked Ge Feng, who internally cursed the bad luck.

Although Ge Feng had advanced to a Desolate Level High Rank Martial Artist, with strength far surpassing any of the opponents and capable of contending against the attacks of all four adversaries if he exerted all his effort, his greatest concern was that if the opponents assigned two Mid Rank Martial Artists to tie him down, the remaining two Low Rank Martial Artists could target the nine other disciples. That would be troublesome.

The two Desolate Level Mid Rank Martial Artists, though not a match for Ge Feng, could still engage him for a while, preoccupying him and preventing him from assisting elsewhere. During this time, the other two Desolate Level Low Rank Martial Artists could easily slaughter all nine disciples of the Bitao Martial Academy who merely possessed Heaven Level Realm cultivation.

What Ge Feng feared most had regrettably occurred.

The four swiftly attacking Desolate Level Martial Artists split up; two Mid Rank Martial Artists lunged at Ge Feng, while the other two Low Rank Martial Artists directly targeted Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing.

"Is their target Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing?"

In an instant, Ge Feng seemed to understand something and couldn't help but be engulfed in both shock and anger.

To Ge Feng, among the nine accompanying disciples, Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing weren't the strongest. Yet, they were the primary targets of the attack. It was evident that someone was aware of the Innate

Spiritual Root possessed by Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing and feared the threat they might pose in the future, aiming to eliminate them beforehand.

Yet, the Sect powers that had grievances with Bitao Martial Academy were more than just one or two, and it was difficult for Ge Feng to determine the culprit behind this at the moment.

Out of the thousands of disciples in Bitao Martial Academy, only three possessed Innate Spiritual Roots, and Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing were two of them. Moreover, Fang Bai was the most outstanding genius the academy had seen in nearly ten thousand years. If these two were killed here, Ge Feng felt he would be utterly inexcusable.

"Kill!"

With a heart full of rage, Ge Feng let out a thunderous roar, instantly raising his fighting spirit to the apex. He then slashed out with the blade in his hand.

The sky filled with blade shadows, transforming into a net of blades enveloping the True Yuan and sweeping toward the two Desolate Level Mid Rank Martial Artists who had already struck close to him.

Chapter 1040: Fang Bai Goes Missing

Ge Feng, a high-rank Desolate Level powerhouse, unleashed a full-force strike with incredible might.

His slash released a fierce and unrivaled invisible blade aura from the blade, spreading forward in a fan shape. The blade aura seemed to cut through the violent cold wind and forcefully blocked the fierce snow. Even the two mid-rank Desolate Level Martial Artists who had ambushed them had to halt their advancement and chose to retreat and evade under the pressure of the blade aura.

"Brother Fang!"

Ge Feng had forced back the two strong foes with one slash and felt a surge of joy. However, he suddenly heard Liu Qingqing's cry of alarm and his heart jolted in shock. He quickly turned his head to look for Fang Bai, but Fang Bai had disappeared.

And the two early-rank Desolate Level Martial Artists who were assigned to attack Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing had also vanished amidst the vast blizzard at the same time.

"Where is Fang Bai?"

Ge Feng shouted fiercely while his eyes darted around. All he saw, however, was the howling wind sweeping the skies full of snow. There was no sign of Fang Bai.

He couldn't even sense Fang Bai's Martial Artist Aura.

"I don't know! Brother Fang was right beside me just a moment ago, and then he disappeared..."

Liu Qingqing replied with a sob in her voice.

At that moment, the two mid-rank Desolate Level Martial Artists who had attacked Ge Feng also turned and sped away, quickly disappearing swallowed by the blizzard.

The four Desolate Level Martial Artists came and went like the wind, clearly having planned it beforehand, targeting Fang Bai.

Fang Bai was the greatest hope for the future rise of Bitao Martial Academy; any mishap befalling him would be a tremendous blow to the academy.

Ge Feng thought Fang Bai had been abducted by the opponents and never expected them to act so swiftly. Overwhelmed by shock and anger, he couldn't help but let out a skyward roar and leapt off the Swiftwind Horse, searching within a radius of dozens of yards, but to no avail.

Ge Feng wanted to leave the team to search further for Fang Bai but was also worried that once he left, he might fall into the enemy's trap of luring the tiger away from the mountain, which could lead to Liu Qingqing and the other eight disciples being attacked.

But if he stayed there guarding the eight disciples, Fang Bai might face dire consequences...

For a moment, Ge Feng found himself in a dilemma, unable to decide.

"Elder Ge, Brother Fang... Senior Brother Fang... he won't be in trouble, will he?"

Liu Qingqing, seeing the grim expression on Ge Feng's face and the mysterious disappearance of Fang Bai, was extremely worried and asked with a trembling voice.

Just now, the attention of Ge Feng and the others had been entirely drawn by the four attackers; nobody noticed Fang Bai, not even Liu Qingqing who was closest to him. She only felt a flicker beside her, and when she focused her eyes to look again, Fang Bai's figure was already gone.

"This... ah..."

Ge Feng looked dejected and sighed deeply, unsure how to answer Liu Qingqing.

Of course, Ge Feng hoped that Fang Bai was safe, but the four assailants just then were brimming with killing intent, clearly intending to kill Fang Bai. If Fang Bai had really been abducted by them, the chances were grim.

Thinking of such an outstanding talent who might have fallen before he even rose, Ge Feng felt an overwhelming sadness, and his heart was filled with agony.

"Brother Fang is so powerful, he must be fine... he must be fine... may the heavens protect him..."

Liu Qingqing, realizing something from Ge Feng's expression, felt as if her heart was struck heavily. She looked around in a panic, praying for Fang Bai under her breath, her beautiful eyes brimming with tears, ready to fall.

How she wished that Fang Bai could appear before her, piercing through the fierce wind and blizzard with his usual confident smile, giving her a surprise.

However, her prayers were only met with the howling wind and the swirling blizzard.

"Brother Fang, where are you! Can you hear me?"

As Fang Bai did not appear after a long while, Liu Qingqing's spirit nearly collapsed, and large teardrops surged from her eyes, rolling down her cheeks and dropping to the ground with a patter.

Suddenly, Liu Qingqing bit her lip, a determined look on her pretty face. Amid the cries of surprise from Huang Miao and others, she twisted her waist and leaped off the Swiftwind Horse, then madly rushed into the blizzard ahead.

"Junior Sister Liu!"

Huang Miao and Liu Qingqing had once trained in the mountains together and were quite close. Seeing her rush into the blizzard, worried she might come to harm, he immediately spurred his Swiftwind Horse to follow her.

Ge Feng and the others, naturally, also followed closely.

The nine people from Bitao Martial Academy spent several hours searching back and forth in the stormy Soul Severing Valley. They encountered another team of Martial Artists passing through the valley; Ge Feng asked if they had seen four Desolate Level Martial Artists and carefully described Fang Bai, but all the martial artists shook their heads in confusion.

Liu Qingqing's pretty face turned pale, void of any color, tears streaming down, her heart aching like it was being sliced by knives, and her voice had long since been cried hoarse.

Shen Yulin, Huang Miao, and others wanted to console Liu Qingqing, but Ge Feng stopped them.

Ge Feng knew Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing were close, and now with Fang Bai missing without a trace, Liu Qingqing was understandably heartbroken. It was better for her to cry her heart out; bottling it up inside would only cause more harm.

With Fang Bai's fate uncertain, among the nine from Bitao Martial Academy, only Yang Lin, who had once been reprimanded by Fang Bai, felt a secret satisfaction, although he still pretended to be as somber as everyone else.

"Qingqing, let's go! Maybe Fang Bai was just kidnapped by the opponents and isn't in any life-threatening danger?"

When Ge Feng said this, even he didn't quite believe it.

Seeing Liu Qingqing's wooden expression and blank gaze, Ge Feng, worried she might do something desperate, sternly added, "Even if Fang Bai really has fallen, what you need to do now is to improve your strength, empower yourself, then find out who murdered Fang Bai and avenge him!"

"Yes... to avenge... If Brother Fang is no longer here, I will tread through the entire True Martial Realm to find the murderer and avenge Brother Fang..."

A frightening fierceness suddenly shot from Liu Qingqing's beautiful eyes, even making Ge Feng shudder when their gazes met, thinking how the usually gentle Liu Qingqing now emanated such a heavy killing intent, almost like transforming into a deadly female warrior.

Previously, Liu Qingqing was very dependent on Fang Bai, thinking that anything could be perfectly resolved with him around. But now, with Fang Bai's fate unknown, Liu Qingqing suddenly felt much more mature.

"Elder Ge is right, I need to become strong, to find out the identities of those four attackers! No matter who they are or how powerful, I won't let them go!"

Liu Qingqing wiped her tears, leapt onto her Swiftwind Horse, nodded to Ge Feng, and said, "Elder Ge, let's continue moving forward, to Purple Flame City!"