

Doctor 1071

Chapter 1071: We're Going to Prosper!

Fang Bai's words sounded like a fool's dream to Ge Feng and the others.

Yet, when they looked at Fang Bai's expression, it didn't seem like he was making it up on the spot, which left them uncertain about the truth.

"Senior Brother Fang, at a time like this, when everyone is thinking about how to make this crisis disappear into thin air, here you are, seemingly in the mood for jokes. Heh, you must be hoping that our Bitao Martial Academy gets banned by the three alchemists, right?"

Yang Lin's words were a veiled attack, dripping with sarcasm.

Yang Lin had always harbored resentment towards Fang Bai, but since he wasn't as strong, he dared not openly confront Fang Bai. Instead, he seized opportunities like these to verbally lash out, confident that even if Fang Bai got angry, he wouldn't dare to trouble him in front of Elder Ge and the other sect members.

"Senior Brother Yang, how do you know that Senior Brother Fang is joking? I believe in Senior Brother Fang; he would never lie!"

Liu Qingqing was the most steadfast supporter and protector of Fang Bai in this group. Hearing the spite in Yang Lin's words, her beautiful eyes shone with a sharp light, and she glared coldly at him.

When Yang Lin felt her piercing gaze sweep over him, it was like being stabbed with two swords. His scalp tingled, his body shuddered, and his head subconsciously shrank back.

Although Liu Qingqing was a Disciple of the Inner Court just like Yang Lin and ranked lower than Yang Lin on the power scale of the Inner Court Disciples, it was because she kept a low profile. If it came down to actual combat capabilities, Liu Qingqing was far superior to Yang Lin. Therefore, when she exerted even a bit of her imposing aura, Yang Lin could barely withstand it.

"I could also claim that I've met a high-grade Pill Master... Who can't boast and exaggerate? If Senior Brother Fang has truly met Senior Bai, then show us some proof! If there's proof, then I'll believe it!"

Yang Lin muttered under his breath. Seeing Liu Qingqing's eyes widen with a fierce gaze, he got startled, his figure swayed, and he positioned himself behind Ge Feng to avoid Liu Qingqing attacking him.

Although Ge Feng was dissatisfied with Yang Lin's snide remarks, he himself was doubtful about Fang Bai having truly met Senior Bai. The idea that Senior Bai would want to pass on the Alchemy Technique to Fang Bai seemed improbable.

In the True Martial Realm, Alchemists and Artifact Refiners greatly valued the inheritance of Alchemy and Artifact Refining Techniques, and they would not easily teach others. Even if Fang Bai had truly met Senior Bai, and Senior Bai saw potential in Fang Bai, based solely on their brief encounter, it was highly unlikely Senior Bai would teach him the Alchemy Technique.

"Fang Bai, is what you're saying true? Have you really met Senior Bai?"

Despite his skepticism, Ge Feng asked Fang Bai again, still clinging to a shred of hope, because who could be certain about anything in this world? What if what Fang Bai was saying was true?

If it were true, having a mid-grade Alchemist and Artifact Refiner take a liking to Fang Bai and willing to pass on the Alchemy, it would be an incredibly rare opportunity.

Fang Bai was a disciple of the Bitao Martial Academy, and if he became an Alchemist, it would also be a rare opportunity for the academy.

"These Space Rings, as well as these bottles of mid-grade Elixirs, were greeting gifts from Senior Bai to me!"

Fang Bai's intention was to quietly help Ge Feng and the others so they wouldn't leave their trip to Purple Flame City empty-handed. However, Fang Bai also knew that they would find it hard to believe the story he had made up, so he took out several bottles of different types of mid-grade Elixirs from the Spatial Ring he wore on his finger and placed them on the stone table in front of Ge Feng.

As Fang Bai retrieved the Elixirs from the Spatial Ring, a stream of Essence Energy flowed into it, making the ring flicker with a dark glow. Although it was fleeting, Ge Feng and the others clearly saw that it was, in fact, a mid-grade Spatial Ring.

Crafting Spiritual Artifacts was extraordinarily difficult, and the materials required for their creation were non-renewable. Therefore, a Spiritual Artifact of the same grade was much more valuable than an Elixir.

The mid-grade storage Spiritual Artifact worn by Fang Bai was worth at least ten mid-grade Spirit Pills, a tenfold difference.

The several bottles of mid-grade Elixirs laid out on the stone table by Fang Bai were a part of his compensation for refining pills for others at the Martial Artists Trading Market earlier that day. Taking them out to show Ge Feng and the others was undoubtedly the strongest evidence.

In the entire Purple Flame City, apart from the Elder of Tribute of the Purple Flame Sect, Hong Qitian, there was only that Senior Bai who could produce mid-grade Elixirs. If these mid-grade Elixirs in Fang Bai's possession were not gifts from Senior Bai, then who else could it have been?

"If you still think I'm lying now, then there's nothing more I can do!"

Fang Bai looked at the stunned Ge Feng and the others, with a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, he shrugged and said.

"I don't know whether others believe it or not, but I absolutely do! Fang Bai, you lucky guy, you've met a patron. You're going to make it big!"

After snapping out of his daze, Ge Feng couldn't contain his elation. He suddenly stood up and looked at Fang Bai as he spoke, his voice trembling with excitement.

Shen Yulin and the others also looked towards Fang Bai, their eyes glittering with envy.

They were envious of Fang Bai for obtaining mid-grade Elixirs and a mid-grade Spiritual Artifact, but even more so for the favor and recognition he received from a mid-grade Elixir Master and mid-grade Artifact Refiner.

Senior Bai had only mentioned teaching Fang Bai the Alchemy Technique and hadn't said anything about taking Fang Bai as his disciple; thus, Elder Ge would not only not stop Fang Bai but would also strongly support him.

Once Fang Bai had learned the Alchemy Technique from Senior Bai, it would be of great significance to both Fang Bai himself and the Bitao Martial Academy.

Aside from Yang Lin, everyone at the scene was excited and thrilled for Fang Bai.

Yang Lin, however, stared at the ground, his gaze erratic and uncertain, lost in thought.

But everyone else was busy bombarding Fang Bai with questions, paying no attention to Yang Lin.

When Ge Feng asked Fang Bai about the whereabouts of Senior Bai, Fang Bai tactfully refused to answer, citing Senior Bai's preference for peace, his desire not to be disturbed by strangers, and Fang Bai's own promise to keep Senior Bai's secrets.

Ge Feng understood. Every unique and eccentric individual had their odd temperament. Since Senior Bai didn't wish for others to know his residence, then let it be.

Afterwards, they chatted about Senior Bai for a while, and as it was getting late, Ge Feng handed over all the Cultivation Resources he had brought to Fang Bai, asking him to find time the next day to seek out Senior Bai to help with refining pills. Then everyone went back to their rooms to rest.

After entering his room, Fang Bai washed up, sat cross-legged on his bed, circulated his Cultivation Technique, and mentally rehearsed his Martial Arts, silently waiting for midnight to arrive.

At midnight, the weather changed abruptly. Dark clouds blanketed the sky, fierce winds arose, thunder rumbled, and a downpour deluged Purple Flame City, swallowing it in an instant.

Countless dazzling Lightning Snakes tumbled and twined amidst the ink clouds and torrential rain, constantly spitting and uncertain. They occasionally struck down upon the tall and protruding rocks and trees in the area, releasing an astonishing power. Their formidable force was capable of turning those rocks and trees to dust in an instant.

Chapter 1072: Drawing a Turtle on the Face

That night at the Purple Flame Sect was like the end of the world, a terrifying sight.

Tens of thousands of disciples from the Purple Flame Sect, as well as hundreds of disciples from various major sects across Thousand Lakes Country who had come to attend the sect conference, regardless of how powerful they were or how tough their bodies were, stayed obediently in their own houses that mad stormy night. They dared not go out at random to contend against the natural forces of heaven and earth with their own flesh and blood.

The buildings at the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters were all constructed from a special kind of stone that was several times harder than steel, possessing extremely strong defensive capabilities. When those energy-filled Lightning Snakes struck the houses, they only left some minor marks and did not harm the individuals inside.

After midnight, when the thunder momentarily paused, the Lightning Snakes vanished, and the whole world plunged into pitch darkness, a figure silently swept out from Fang Bai's residence like a ghost of the night, turning into an indistinguishable afterimage as it rushed into the heavy rain.

Boom boom boom...

Crack...

When the thunder and lightning reappeared, illuminating the entire Purple Flame City, that figure had disappeared as if vanished from the earth.

Although the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters was filled with experts, no one sensed the Martial Artist Aura of that person.

That figure, naturally, was Fang Bai.

It was a dark and stormy night for murder.

Fang Bai had chosen to act against Zu Yu tonight to sabotage the marriage arrangement between Zhuge Lian and Zu Yu. This stormy night with flashing lightning offered better cover for hiding his movements, amounting to heaven lending a hand to Fang Bai.

Earlier, Fang Bai had released his Divine Sense and located Zu Yu's Essence Energy in a courtyard a kilometer away, sure that it was Zu Yu's residence. He rushed into the rain curtain at great speed, quickly closing in on Zu Yu's dwelling.

Zu Yu's residence was close to the core area of the Purple Flame Sect where, including the Sect Master Zu Tiangang, sixteen Vast Level Experts resided.

The lineup of sixteen Vast Level Experts was incredibly strong, formidable enough that even a novice at the Cosmic Level Realm would not dare underestimate them; thus, for a Martial Artist below the Cosmic Level Realm to quietly approach the core area without being detected was almost impossible.

However, Fang Bai was adept in the secret technique of concealing his own Martial Artist Aura. Once he used this technique, his entire being merged with the Essence Energy of the surrounding environment, rendering his Aura undetectable, and even his figure hard to see. Thus, he made his way stealthily to the courtyard where Zu Yu lived without alerting any experts of the Purple Flame Sect.

Standing outside the courtyard, Fang Bai could clearly hear Zu Yu, who was inside his room talking with several Purple Flame Sect disciples about how to deal with him, how to win over Zhuge Lian's heart, and other similar topics.

Disciples from a third-grade sect naturally felt a sense of superiority over those from a fourth-grade sect. In the mouths of Zu Yu and his companions, Fang Bai, who was from a fourth-grade sect, seemed like an ant they could easily crush.

Fang Bai listened but was not annoyed; he just slightly curved his lips, pulling out a sneer of mockery.

After the people inside had agreed on some plans against Fang Bai, they left one after the other, leaving only Zu Yu behind.

"Fang Bai, competing with me for a woman? You're not worthy! If you don't leave Purple Flame City before tomorrow's welcome banquet, don't blame me for being ruthless!" Zu Yu murmured to himself as he walked to the window, looking out into the rain curtain.

Crack...

A flash of lightning split from the dark clouds, and Zu Yu's sullen face, illuminated by the flash, appeared even more ferocious and terrifying.

Just then, a figure appeared outside the window like a spectral apparition.

"Elder Hong?"

Illuminated by the lightning, Zu Yu froze as he recognized the familiar face outside the window.

The man outside was none other than Hong Qitian, Elder of Tribute of the Purple Flame Sect.

"Elder Hong, please come inside and have a seat!"

After a brief pause, Zu Yu, who had snapped back to his senses, hurried to the door and bowed slightly, gesturing an invitation.

Hong Qitian was known for his aloof and arrogant demeanor, setting his own rules. In the entire Purple Flame Sect, no one but the Sect Master Zu Tiangang could command his respect; disciples like Zu Yu were beneath his consideration.

Not only was Hong Qitian a mid-grade alchemist, but he was also a mid-level Vast Level expert, a rarity in the whole Thousand Lakes Country; he had every right to his pride, and others not only didn't resent him for it but accepted it as only natural.

Like many other disciples of the Purple Flame Sect, Zu Yu also wanted to ingratiate himself with Hong Qitian, but he had never had the opportunity. Now, with Hong Qitian suddenly appearing at his residence, he felt both startled and pleasantly surprised, yet also a bit puzzled. He couldn't understand why Elder Hong had graced him with a visit.

Hong Qitian grunted, then entered Zu Yu's room with an arrogant expression on his face.

It was then that Zu Yu noticed something extraordinary—Hong Qitian, who always wore the Elder's robe of the Purple Flame Sect, was now inexplicably dressed in a black shirt, which surprised him greatly.

"I wonder why Elder Hong is visiting. What brings you here?"

Once Hong Qitian had sprawled out in a chair inside the room, Zu Yu asked respectfully.

Narrowing his eyes at Zu Yu, Hong Qitian suddenly grinned and said, "I've come especially to see you."

"To see me?"

Zu Yu was startled.

"Yes, to see you!"

With a smile still on his face, Hong Qitian stared at Zu Yu's fair and handsome features and mysteriously said, "I've been entrusted by someone to deliver something to you."

"Entrusted by whom? What is it that you are delivering?"

Zu Yu was utterly confused, unable to fathom who could commission Elder Hong to bring him a gift.

With a chuckle, a curious glint passed through Hong Qitian's eyes as he spoke in a magnetic tone to Zu Yu, "Look into my eyes, and I'll tell you."

Zu Yu's gaze unconsciously met Hong Qitian's eyes, and then he could no longer look away.

Hong Qitian's eyes seemed like vortexes in the ocean, black holes in the starry sky, generating a powerful centripetal force. Zu Yu felt himself sucked in completely, and after a whirlwind sensation, he lost consciousness.

Watching Zu Yu collapsed on the ground and unconscious, the smile slowly faded from Hong Qitian's face. His facial muscles shifted rapidly, and in the blink of an eye, the outward appearance of a weathered old man in his sixties transformed into that of a youth in his early twenties.

With sharp eyebrows and bright eyes, and a mouth with red lips and white teeth, carrying an otherworldly air, it was none other than Fang Bai.

"The one who asked me to deliver something to you is Zhuge Lian, and as for what it is... ha, it's two little turtles... painted on your face. With this, Zu Yu, your looks ruined, tomorrow's welcoming banquet at the Purple Flame Sect will surely be embarrassed to bring up the matter of the marriage alliance, right?"

Fang Bai slowly stood up and squatted next to Zu Yu. With a flick of his hands, two hair-thin needles appeared at his fingertips.

He pinched the needles, swinging them simultaneously on the left and right cheeks of Zu Yu. In just a moment, the lifelike images of two little turtles appeared on each of Zu Yu's cheeks, looking quite comical.

Chapter 1073: Night Raid in the Rain

"Sigh...It has been a long time since I drew anything, and my skills have really declined!"

Fang Bai put away his tools, dusted off his hands, and looked at his "artwork," clearly not too satisfied.

While carving two small turtles on Zu Yu's face, Fang Bai had infused each stroke with True Essence Force. The force penetrated Zu Yu's flesh, blood, muscles, and bones to such an extent that Zu Yu could no longer use the Disguise Technique.

That meant, unless Zu Yu destroyed his entire face, the two small turtles would stay with him for life, impossible to remove.

Actually, for Zu Yu, having two small turtles carved on his face could be considered lucky. If Fang Bai had been crueler, it wouldn't have been his face that was destroyed but his very life.

After admiring his "masterpiece" for a moment, Fang Bai stood up and rushed back into the curtain of rain.

Fang Bai did not immediately return to his residence but released his Divine Sense, spreading it towards the core area of the Purple Flame Sect Headquarter. He quickly sensed the presence of Elder of Tribute Hong Qitian in a grand main hall within a luxurious courtyard.

Previously, Fang Bai had been provoked by Hong Qitian at the Martial Artists Trading Market. Although Hong Qitian had admitted defeat and retreated, knowing he could not beat Fang Bai, that didn't mean Fang Bai would let the matter go.

Taking advantage of the moment to deal with Zu Yu, Fang Bai planned to also give that old fellow Hong Qitian a hard time.

When he was about a hundred meters away from Hong Qitian's courtyard, Fang Bai stopped, spread his palms, and with a gesture grabbing at the void above the ground, a "whoosh" sounded as two three-foot-thick stone slabs flew up from the ground, supported in his hands.

"Go!"

With that command, Fang Bai leapt into the air, and as he shouted lightly, he hurled the thick stone slabs forward, one after the other, slamming them viciously towards the main hall where Hong Qitian resided.

The two stone slabs, infused with True Essence Force, flew like cannonballs, accompanied by astonishing power, breaking through the air at an incredible speed, and smashing towards the main hall of Hong Qitian's residence with a whistling sound.

As he released the two stone slabs, Fang Bai turned and dashed towards his own residence, his figure slicing through the rain like a sharp arrow, instantly covering several hundred meters.

Fang Bai knew the two stone slabs he had thrown would disturb many of the Purple Flame Sect's higher-ups and cause quite a bit of trouble for Hong Qitian.

"Who is it?"

Hong Qitian, who was sitting cross-legged in front of the Pill Furnace refining elixirs, suddenly sensed two risky forces rapidly approaching. His eyes widened, his figure transformed into a shadow, and he rushed out to the exterior courtyard. Looking up, he saw two dark shadows, separated by several yards, breaking through the rain and over the tall courtyard walls, hurtling towards his main hall.

Hong Qitian's eyes were fierce, recognizing the two black shadows as stone slabs, and from the True Essence Force contained within them, he could tell the martial artist who threw them was not weaker than himself.

Such a powerful intruder breaking into the core area of the Purple Flame Sect was unprecedented in recent years, and the assailant had even launched an attack on him. This unknown motive made Hong Qitian's complexion darken and his heart beat frantically. He immediately puffed his cheeks and issued a long howl, calling for nearby Purple Flame Sect experts to come to his support.

Meanwhile, the Fire Primordial Qi within Hong Qitian thrummed wildly, a large quantity of bright-red Fire Primordial Qi swiftly gathering at his fists. His fists seemed to be enveloped in roaring flames, illuminating the night sky for several yards around.

As the torrential rain fell, the moment it neared Hong Qitian's fists, it was instantaneously evaporated by the high temperature of the Fire Primordial Qi, turning into wisps of white smoke that vanished.

In the main hall behind Hong Qitian, there was a low-grade Spiritual Artifact, an Alchemy Furnace Cauldron, and a large number of elixirs that had already been refined, as well as Spiritual Medicine prepared for further alchemy. If the main hall were to be struck by two slabs infused with True Yuan, it would certainly suffer severe damage, and it would be difficult to say whether the Furnace Cauldron and Cultivation Resources could be preserved.

If such a consequence were to occur, Hong Qitian would certainly be infuriated beyond reason.

Hong Qitian, with his eyes blood-red, prepared to fight with all his might to protect his Furnace Cauldron and Cultivation Resources.

"Break for me!"

Just as the two slabs were about to pass overhead and shatter the main hall behind him, Hong Qitian leapt up two zhang high, and in a loud shout, he threw his fists one after another.

As a Vast Level Expert, he was already capable of condensing Essence Energy outside of his body, allowing him to attack without physical contact, something that a Desolate Level Expert could not do.

The two bursts of Fire Primordial Qi that Hong Qitian unleashed, detached from his fists, also carried formidable energy as they confronted the two thick slabs fiercely dropping from the sky.

"Boom!"

"Boom!"

The Fire Primordial Qi collided with the two slabs in midair, creating two thunderous noises. Although the roar of storm and the crackling of lightning negated some of the noise, a number of disciples from the Purple Flame Sect were still startled and rushed out to see what was happening.

Including Zu Tiangang, the Sect Master of the Purple Flame Sect, several Vast Level Experts reacted immediately and swept towards Hong Qitian's residence.

The powerful shockwave produced from the collision of Fire Primordial Qi and the slabs crazily dispersed in all directions, causing even the raging storm to pause for a moment.

The floor slabs of the Purple Flame Sect were made of special stone material, which was inherently robust; these were further infused with Earth Element Qi by Fang Bai, making them doubly solid. Despite Hong Qitian's all-out effort, he had underestimated the hardness and impact of the two slabs.

The stone slabs thrown with full force by Fang Bai could be compared to the strike of a beginner Cosmic Level Expert. How could Hong Qitian, a middle rank Vast Level Martial Artist, easily withstand them?

The collision between the Fire Primordial Qi and the stone slabs did not result in the crumbled stone outcome Hong Qitian had anticipated. Instead, each slab merely broke into two or three pieces, the remaining force unyieldingly striking Hong Qitian and the main hall behind him.

Hong Qitian grunted dully as if struck by lightning, blood spraying from his mouth as he fell from the sky onto the ground. Were it not for his Essence Energy protection, he might have passed out on the spot.

Although he was seriously injured, he could not stand up immediately and had to sit cross-legged on the ground, swallowing a Healing Pill to recuperate his breath.

However, Hong Qitian was relieved that he did not sense any accompanying dangerous aura, indicating that the strong individual who had thrown the slabs might have already left and had no intention of killing him. Otherwise, he surely would have been in mortal danger.

Several loud noises came from the main hall behind him. Hong Qitian knew that some parts of the hall might have collapsed, and the Furnace Cauldron along with the Cultivation Resources inside would suffer some losses. He couldn't help but display a painful expression.

After a dozen breaths, several Vast Level Martial Artists from the Purple Flame Sect successively landed in Hong Qitian's courtyard. Seeing Hong Qitian, who was sitting on the ground recuperating, and the damaged main hall, each one of them was dumbfounded and showed a look of disbelief.

"Elder Hong, what happened?"

Seeing that Hong Qitian had opened his eyes, Zu Tiangang took a deep breath and asked with a gloomy face.

Chapter 1074: What to Do?

"What's going on? I'd like to know what's happening too..."

Hearing Zu Tiangang's inquiry, Hong Qitian muttered to himself before turning to look at the severely damaged main hall behind him. Thinking of the invaluable Furnace Cauldron and the vast amount of Cultivation Resources inside, he couldn't help but feel a surge of anger, causing the blood to churn within him and uncontrollably spout another mouthful of fresh blood.

Zu Tiangang and the others, seeing this, exchanged glances, considerably moved.

Just now, Hong Qitian had emitted a howl to call for support, clearly having encountered a powerful attacker. Zu Tiangang and his company had raced to the scene in just a matter of moments. Initially, they thought they could surround the attacker, but to their disbelief, the assailant had already left after severely injuring Hong Qitian and damaging part of the main hall where Hong resided.

What shocked them even more was that from start to finish, including Zu Tiangang, a Vast Level Perfection strongman, none of the Purple Flame Sect Disciples sensed the attacker's Martial Artist Aura.

This meant that the assailant successfully deceived all Purple Flame Sect Disciples, stealthily infiltrated the core area of the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters, and launched this attack on Hong Qitian.

This situation indicated that the attacker's strength was definitely greater than Hong Qitian's and was skilled in using secret techniques to conceal his aura, making it impossible for the Purple Flame Sect Disciples to sense his presence.

Who exactly was this shadowy assailant, and how formidable was his strength? What was his purpose in attacking Hong Qitian?

This incident was shrouded in mystery and strangeness, and it was this very enigma that left the high-ranking officials of the Purple Flame Sect feeling deeply unsettled.

"I was refining Elixirs in the hall just now when I suddenly sensed an impending crisis. When I went out to check, I saw two stone slabs flying toward me..."

Hong Qitian wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth, suppressed the tumultuous aura within him, and recounted the incident to Zu Tiangang and the others.

"The two stone slabs that injured Elder Hong, the strength of the attacker is indeed extraordinary!"

Listening to Hong Qitian, Zu Tiangang said with a grave expression.

"Sect Master, what should we do now?"

An Elder of the Purple Flame Sect, with a worried expression, asked solemnly.

The other high-ranking officials of the Purple Flame Sect also turned their gaze towards Zu Tiangang.

With the imminent gathering of the Thousand Lakes Country Sect Convention, the vicinity of the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters was thronged with hundreds of elite Sect Disciples from various major Sects of Thousand Lakes Country, along with invited guests like those from the Xuannv Sect to observe. If this humiliating incident were to leak, it would not only please other Sects with ulterior motives but would also make every Disciple of the Purple Flame Sect feel endangered.

"Until the matter is thoroughly investigated, no one must divulge any information about this. Otherwise... death without mercy! Furthermore..."

Zu Tiangang furrowed his brows in thought for a moment, suddenly his body filled with Killing Qi and his eyes emitting a fierce light, he instructed in a deep voice, "Elder Zhu, Elder Wu, you two lead a team to conduct a thorough search within the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters for any suspicious individuals hiding or lurking. Also... pay special attention to the residences of Sect Disciples attending the Sect Convention!"

He continued, "Elder Han, Elder Zhou, mobilize all resources within Purple Flame City and investigate any formidable martial artists that have recently appeared!"

Then, Zu Tiangang instructed the two Deputy Sect Masters to lead people to appease the disciples from various sects participating in the sect conference, allowing them to rest easy and continue with the welcome luncheon as planned tomorrow.

"Elder Hong, you are severely injured. You do not have to participate in this sect conference. Rest well at your residence!"

Zu Tiangang had something on his mind and, leaving these words behind, he prepared to leave.

"Sect Master, today at the Martial Artists Trading Market, a mid-grade Alchemist and Artifact Refiner named Bai Fang rented a stall to refine elixirs and artifacts for people. Bai Fang is not old, about forty years old. After hearing about him, I specifically went to meet him, hoping to befriend him. However, he made outrageous statements, claiming he wanted to become the number one Alchemist of the Purple Flame Sect, superior to me. I was so angry that I argued with him, but we did not come to blows. I'm not sure if he is related to this incident."

Hong Qitian hesitated for a moment but still stopped Zu Tiangang and told him about the near conflict he had with the guy named "Bai Fang" at dusk.

Previously, Hong Qitian was worried that if Zu Tiangang knew about "Bai Fang," he might invite him to join the Purple Flame Sect, which could potentially affect his own status within the sect. Therefore, he hadn't told Zu Tiangang. But with the current situation and Zu Tiangang sending people to gather information, it was impossible to keep it from Zu Tiangang any longer. It was better to come clean himself.

Hong Qitian was well aware that even if Zu Tiangang was displeased with him for offending "Bai Fang," he would not turn against him, as the higher echelons of the Purple Flame Sect relied on him to refine mid-grade elixirs for their cultivation.

Unless Zu Tiangang could find another mid-grade Alchemist— but such Alchemists are extremely rare, so finding another would not be easy.

"However, Bai Fang's strength is not far from mine, yet the attackers earlier had much greater strength than I do, so it's unlikely to be Bai Fang. But whether or not he is related to this incident, I can't be certain. After all, besides him, I don't have other enemies. The only issue I have is with Bai Fang."

Hong Qitian believed that as Bai Fang was both a mid-grade Alchemist and Artifact Refiner, he must have many powerful friends. It was quite possible that by provoking him, he could have invited a stronger martial artist to retaliate.

"Hmm, I understand."

After listening to Hong Qitian complete his report, Zu Tiangang's expression remained neutral as he nodded and didn't say much. He left two stewards to look after Hong Qitian and then left with the others.

"That old bastard Hong Qitian! He's truly detestable!"

As soon as he stepped out of the main gate of Hong Qitian's courtyard, Zu Tiangang's expression instantly darkened, and he cursed Hong Qitian internally.

Just as Hong Qitian had guessed, although Zu Tiangang was very dissatisfied upon learning about the enmity between Hong Qitian and Bai Fang, he was helpless as the Purple Flame Sect's desire to maintain its status as a third-grade major sect and the upper echelons' desire to enhance their power relied on the elixirs refined by Hong Qitian.

Zu Tiangang had already decided to personally visit the Martial Artists Trading Market tomorrow, hoping to meet the Alchemist and Artifact Refiner named Bai Fang. He planned to offer him generous benefits and ultimately recruit him into the Purple Flame Sect as an Elder of Tribute, similar to Hong Qitian.

Even if Bai Fang were unwilling to join the Purple Flame Sect, Zu Tiangang decided it was essential to establish a good relationship with him. A martial artist who was both a mid-grade Alchemist and Artifact Refiner was highly sought after everywhere; offending him would be harmful and useless.

He just hoped Bai Fang wouldn't bear a grudge and resent the Purple Flame Sect because of Hong Qitian. If that were the case, it would be troublesome.

Thinking of this, Zu Tiangang couldn't help but curse Hong Qitian internally once again.

Chapter 1075: Who Did It?

This night within Purple Flame City, undercurrents surged wildly as thousands of Martial Artists associated with the Purple Flame Sect sprang into action, casting an invisible net across every corner of the city.

Soon afterwards, valuable pieces of information from all around Purple Flame City converged in the Sect Master Hall of the Purple Flame Sect for the senior members' reference.

What puzzled Zu Tiangang and others was the fact that the mysterious warrior named "Bai Fang" had seemingly vanished into thin air, leaving not a single trace behind, making it unknown whether he had already left Purple Flame City.

Zu Tiangang had his disciples capture Second You and others from the Martial Artists Trading Market who had had dealings with Bai Fang, resorting to all kinds of methods to interrogate them, yet they could not extract any information about Bai Fang's whereabouts.

As dawn approached and the heavy rain stopped, the sky cleared.

Two disciples responsible for searching the Purple Flame Sect Headquarter hurried back to the Sect Master Hall, bringing with them the unconscious Zu Yu.

"Sect Master, while we were searching Elder Brother Zu's room, we found him collapsed on the floor, unconscious, and someone had carved... carved two turtles on his face," reported a disciple of the Purple Flame Sect, bowing with clasped hands to Zu Tiangang, who sat upon the Sect Master's throne.

Zu Tiangang's gaze hardened as he looked down at Zu Yu, and when he saw the ridiculous turtles etched on his cheeks, he flew into a towering rage, suddenly standing up with his fists tightly clenched as murderous intent instantly filled the entire Sect Master Hall.

The two Purple Flame Sect disciples standing below were enveloped by this murderous aura, feeling as if tidal waves were crashing in from all directions, threatening to engulf and drown them, giving them a

sense of despair as if on the brink of death, so they hastily knelt on the ground, their bodies trembling violently.

"Leave Zu Yu here, you may withdraw," Zu Tiangang finally managed to suppress his anger after a moment and waved his hand for the two disciples to leave.

The disciples, as if granted amnesty, quickly exited the Sect Master Hall.

Zu Tiangang's face was as cold as frost as he descended the steps and squatted down beside Zu Yu. Upon realizing that Zu Yu was just unconscious and not injured, he silently breathed a sigh of relief.

Zu Yu possessed an Innate Fire Spirit Root and at the mere age of twenty-seven, he had already reached the Desolate Level Perfection realm, heralded as the most outstanding Martial Dao Genius of the Purple Flame Sect in a thousand years. If something were to happen to him, it would be a significant blow to the Purple Flame Sect.

"Who on earth did this? Was it that Bai Fang, or someone connected to him?"

As Zu Tiangang looked at the small turtles carved on the cheeks of Zu Yu, the muscles around his mouth twitched, and the anger in his chest flared up again.

Zu Tiangang had already deduced that the person who had carved the turtles on Zu Yu's face had used a marvelous True Essence Force to internally damage the muscles and bones of Zu Yu's face, to the extent that unless Zu Yu encountered some fortunate opportunity, it would be very difficult to remove the turtles.

Zu Yu was originally a handsome man and was set to represent the Purple Flame Sect in a marriage alliance with the Xuannv Sect at this sect assembly. But now his appearance was essentially ruined, making him unworthy of the Xuannv Sect's direct disciple Zhuge Lian. The marriage alliance between the two sects was likely doomed.

"Zu Yu, wake up!"

Zu Tiangang attempted to awaken Zu Yu, wanting to ask about the origin of the turtles carved on his face, but despite trying all methods, he saw no response and eventually gave up in discouragement.

Only when the sky was fully light did Zu Yu's body stir and, as if waking from a profound dream, he slowly opened his eyes.

"Foster... foster father?"

Zu Yu picked himself up from the ground, shook his fuzzy head clear, and only then realized he was inside the Sect Master Hall. Zu Tiangang sat imposingly upon the Sect Master's throne, his face grim as he looked down at him.

Not only was Zu Yu one of the Purple Flame Sect's direct disciples, but he was also the foster son taken in by Zu Tiangang, regarded by many disciples as the next Sect Master successor. The recent alliance through marriage between the Purple Flame Sect and the Xuannv Sect was vigorously promoted by Zu Tiangang himself.

Yet, neither Zu Tiangang nor Zu Yu could have anticipated that just before the Sect's grand assembly was about to commence, an incident like the current one would occur, not only disrupting the plans for another marriage alliance with the Xuannv Sect but also subjecting Zu Yu to a profound disgrace.

If the current matter couldn't be resolved adequately, it would cast a shadow over Zu Yu, possibly affecting his future path in Martial Dao cultivation.

"Recount what happened last night... in detail, and don't miss any detail!"

Seeing Zu Yu awaken, Zu Tiangang slowly spoke, his tone leaving no room for refusal.

Zu Tiangang was certain that whatever had happened last night to the Elder of Tribute Hong Qitian, who was attacked, must be related to the turtle images scarred onto Zu Yu's face—possibly the work of the same person.

"Last night's incident? What happened last night?"

Having just come to, Zu Yu was still somewhat confused, and upon hearing this, he looked bewildered, failing to understand why Zu Tiangang would ask about it.

"You can't remember what happened last night?"

Seeing Zu Yu's perplexed expression, which did not seem feigned, Zu Tiangang inwardly marveled, speculating that last night's assailant must have used some arcane secret technique to knock Zu Yu unconscious first before scarring the turtle images onto his face, resulting in Zu Yu only coming to at this point, unaware of the disfigurement.

Zu Yu had been around Zu Tiangang for a long time and understood his character very well. Seeing the cold spark in his eyes and the dark cloud on his face, Zu Yu knew that a fiery anger was simmering inside him, ready to explode at any moment, and realized something serious must have occurred.

"Last night... aside from Elder Hong making a visit to my place, nothing else happened... Oh yes, Elder Hong always wears the garb of our Purple Flame Sect elders, but last night he came in a black robe, and his expression was a bit odd..."

Zu Yu carefully recalled last night's encounter with Elder Hong, speaking cautiously, "Also, after Elder Hong came over last night, he said he was entrusted by someone to give me something, and then asked me to look into his eyes. I just glanced for a moment and then knew nothing..."

"What time did Elder Hong visit you?"

Zu Tiangang's heart was already piecing together what might have happened as he asked with a grave tone.

Zu Yu replied, "Not long after midnight."

Zu Tiangang said, "At that time, Elder Hong was in his main hall concocting elixirs, and afterward, he was attacked and gravely injured... Thus, it's impossible for Elder Hong to have been at your place then."

"Ah? This... this..."

Zu Yu, being a clever person, suddenly understood, exclaiming, "Someone impersonated Elder Hong to visit me!"

Then, puzzled, he said, "But what could be the purpose behind such an act? Could it be that they wanted to frame Elder Hong? Yet if they intended to frame him, why would they attack Elder Hong as well? Strange..."

Zu Yu didn't understand, and neither did Zu Tiangang; however, Zu Tiangang was now regarding Bai Fang as the primary suspect in this incident.

Chapter 1076: The Same Person?

In Zu Tiangang's view, the feud between Hong Qitian and that Bai Fang was very likely the spark that ignited this incident.

But there was still one thing that Zu Tiangang couldn't figure out: after Bai Fang had severely injured Hong Qitian, why had he attacked Zu Yu as well? Could there have been some enmity between the two?

For one strong enough to seriously injure Hong Qitian, it would have been a piece of cake to kill Zu Yu, so if there really were some vendetta, why did he merely carve two turtles onto Zu Yu's face? Could it be he disdained murder and instead sought to humiliate Zu Yu with this act?

Zu Zhenggang was utterly perplexed and his brows knit tightly together.

Standing in the great hall, Zu Yu felt anxious, remained silent, and also pondered over the grievous injury suffered by Elder Hong.

"It can now be confirmed that the Elder Hong who appeared in your room at midnight yesterday was someone disguised via a transformation. That person not only attacked and seriously wounded Elder Hong but also... you."

Zu Tiangang pointed towards a crystal-polished mirror on the left side of the hall and sighed, "There's a mirror over there, go and take a look at your face."

"My face?"

Upon hearing Zu Tiangang's words, Zu Yu's heart skipped a beat, and he intuitively felt something terrible had happened, raising his hand to touch his own face, only to feel crisscrossing, uneven scars under his fingertips.

"This..."

Zu Yu had already guessed what had happened, his face showing horror, and with a stumble, he stood in front of the mirror as large as a millstone.

In the crystal mirror appeared a ridiculous and ugly visage, its expression first blank, then quickly cycling through shock, rage, despair... Each change twisted the muscles and contorted the blood vessels on the face, making it even more fearsomely grotesque.

"My face... my face... what happened to it... what happened..."

Zu Yu's hands trembled as he touched the cheeks marked with turtles, his face a portrait of a wish to cry but lacking the tears.

Zu Yu was young and handsome, with exceptional abilities, a gracefully charming young man. Not only were there many admirers among his own Sect's senior and junior sisters, but he was also quite favored by the female disciples of other Sects. Zu Yu himself took pride in this, as though he was indeed the most handsome man under the heavens.

But to Zu Yu's utter disbelief, he had turned into this non-human, ghost-like figure overnight. The blow was colossal, almost causing him to completely collapse.

"Zu Yu, calm down! Though your face is ruined, it's not beyond healing!"

Seeing Zu Yu muttering to himself with a vacant look, Zu Tiangang worried that he wouldn't handle the shock and that it could affect his future cultivation. Thus, he spoke up to comfort him.

"Really?"

Zu Yu looked up at Zu Tiangang, hope flickering in his eyes.

"Indeed. This world possesses many spirit pills and miraculous medicines, some that can alter one's constitution, and others that can even resurrect the dead. Rest assured, I will use all of the Sect's resources to search for an Elixir for you; someday, you will be restored to your original self."

Even though Zu Tiangang knew it would be very difficult for Zu Yu's disfigured appearance to be restored, he still nodded earnestly as he spoke.

Zu Yu was a Martial Dao Genius that the Purple Flame Sect saw once in a millennium. Zu Tiangang didn't want him to be downhearted over his looks, affecting his cultivation, and could only try to stabilize him temporarily.

In Zu Tiangang's opinion, as long as Zu Yu immersed himself in cultivation, perhaps in time, he would gradually forget the concern for his appearance.

Zu Tiangang believed that as long as a Martial Artist's strength was powerful enough, their appearance, whether ugly or not, would not cause them concern when it came to women.

Zu Tiangang, a formidable figure who stood with one foot in the Cosmic Level Realm, was seen as an omnipotent being in Zu Yu's eyes; hence, Zu Yu took his words to heart.

"If I find out who did this, I swear to tear them to pieces and scatter their remains. If I don't, the hatred in my heart will never be dispelled!"

Zu Yu gradually regained his composure, hatred surging in his eyes. He clenched his fists tight and through gritted teeth, he declared.

Zu Tiangang paced slowly in the grand hall, a solemn expression on his face as he said, "Looking at the current situation, the most suspicious character is Bai Fang, who appeared in the Martial Artists Trading

Market. However... it makes sense that he would hold a grudge against Elder Hong and attack him, but why would he want to disfigure your face? This is something I can't understand. Zu Yu, have you ever provoked this Bai Fang before?"

"No... I don't even know this Bai Fang!"

Zu Yu shook his head vigorously, denying it with a sorrowful tone, "I only heard about an Alchemist and Artifact Refiner appearing at the Martial Artists Trading Market yesterday. I had planned to go and see today... but then this happened..."

"Is that so? You aren't lying?"

"If I lie, may the heavens strike me with thunder and I shall not die a good death!"

"Hmm."

Zu Tiangang nodded and stroked his chin beard thoughtfully before asking again, "Have you provoked anyone else recently?"

Zu Yu thought about last night's near conflict with a disciple of the Xuannv Sect, Zhuge Lian, and Fang Bai from Bitao Martial Academy. His lips moved, but he didn't dare to speak up, worried that Zu Tiangang would scold him for stirring up trouble. He quickly said, "No..."

"Speak the truth!"

Zu Tiangang read the expression on Zu Yu's face and knew he was hiding something. He spoke harshly, "If you dare to deceive me and I find out later, I will not spare you!"

Zu Yu shivered, knowing full well that Zu Tiangang was ruthless enough to follow through on his threats, even to his own sworn son.

"Ah... I have just remembered! Last evening, as I was strolling through the city with two fellow disciples, we encountered Zhuge Lian from the Xuannv Sect and Fang Bai from Bitao Martial Academy. Considering I will eventually have to form a Martial Dao alliance with Zhuge Lian, I was angered to see her with another man and went over to exchange some words with Fang Bai... I was very restrained and did not start a fight with them, and after a while, we both went our separate ways..."

Zu Yu confessed the events of the previous night earnestly, not daring to hide a single detail, even the minutiae.

"Bitao Martial Academy... Fang Bai... Fang Bai..."

Zu Tiangang muttered to himself, then suddenly, a thought crossed his mind, and he frowned, "Fang Bai... reversed, it is Bai Fang... could they be the same person?"

"Impossible! That Fang Bai is just a youth in his early twenties, a Core Disciple of the Bitao Martial Academy. He's no match for me, let alone Elder Hong!" Zu Yu replied decisively.

Zu Tiangang thought for a moment, then nodded, saying, "Yes, it's unlikely to be him. How could someone capable of gravely injuring Elder Hong condescend to remain in the Bitao Martial Academy, a mere fourth-ranked Sect? Perhaps I'm overthinking..."

Zu Tiangang's mind was in a tumult, needing some peace to sort things out properly. He waved his hand dismissively at Zu Yu, "There's nothing more to discuss here, you may leave... You will not need to attend today's welcoming lunch banquet. As for the alliance with the Xuannv Sect, we'll have to let that matter drop."

"Understood, Elder."

Zu Yu bowed with a clasped fist to Zu Tiangang, paying his respects before he turned away with a heavy heart.

Chapter 1077: Telling Secrets

At dawn, Fang Bai stepped out of his room and into the courtyard outside, absorbing the Heaven and Earth Origin Energy permeating the air.

The location of the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters, dotted with mountains and waters and flourishing with Spiritual Medicine, was a place of spiritual beauty. The richness of the Heaven and Earth Origin Energy here was much stronger than at Bitao Martial Academy. Disciples of the Purple Flame Sect, bathing in such an environment all year round, naturally achieved twice the result with half the effort in cultivating their Martial Arts Techniques.

Last night, after Fang Bai had gravely injured Hong Qitian and destroyed Zu Yu's appearance, he calmly left the core area of the Purple Flame Sect and returned to his own room. He sat cross-legged and cultivated until dawn.

As for what would happen inside the Purple Flame Sect after his departure, he could roughly predict but was too lazy to use his Divine Sense to investigate.

Not long after Fang Bai arrived in the courtyard, Ge Feng and others also appeared one after another. The ten gathered together for a short conversation, then, just like the previous day, they dispersed to go out, agreeing to return before noon to attend a welcome luncheon hosted by the Purple Flame Sect for the disciples of various sects.

Liu Qingqing wanted to go shopping with Fang Bai, but under the arrangement of Elder Ge and Ge Feng, Fang Bai had to take some Cultivation Resources to seek help from Senior Bai Fang with Alchemy. Consequently, Qingqing had no choice but to go to the city and have fun with Huang Miao and Shen Yulin.

The other several disciples from Bitao Martial Academy also went to their respective destinations.

Yang Lin watched as Fang Bai and the others left one by one, his expression changing and his eyes flickering. After hesitating for a moment, he seemed to have made some decision and was the last to leave the courtyard.

The direction Yang Lin headed toward was the core area of the Purple Flame Sect.

He was going to find Hong Qitian and tell him about Fang Bai's acquaintance with that Senior Bai Fang.

Despite Ge Feng's repeated warnings last night, instructing the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy to keep the secret and not reveal anything about Fang Bai's acquaintance with Senior Bai Fang to anyone, Yang Lin ignored it.

In Yang Lin's view, since Hong Qitian and Senior Bai Fang had clashed at the Martial Artists Trading Market, the two must be enemies. If Hong Qitian knew that Fang Bai was acquainted with Senior Bai Fang, he might blame Fang Bai out of association.

Hong Qitian was a Vast Level Expert. Even if he struck down Fang Bai, Bitao Martial Academy could only swallow the bitter pill in silence, daring not to express their anger.

And that was exactly what Yang Lin wanted to see.

Moreover, as a middle-grade alchemist, Hong Qitian might reward him with some Cultivation Resources if he was pleased with the information. A middle-grade Alchemist would surely not be stingy—Yang Lin might end up making a fortune.

With this thought, Yang Lin's heart blossomed with joy, and his steps became much lighter.

Soon, Yang Lin arrived at the core area of the Purple Flame Sect, but he was stopped by a few disciples on duty.

"I need to see your Elder Hong. I have urgent matters to discuss. Please report it!"

Yang Lin, with a guilty conscience, looked around before whispering.

"Elder Hong is in seclusion and is not seeing anyone!"

One of the Purple Flame Sect's duty disciples replied indifferently.

Yang Lin urgently said, "I truly have important matters to report to Elder Hong! It's about that Senior Bai Fang... It's very important, and I must speak to Elder Hong face to face... If it causes any delay, you all won't be able to afford the consequences!"

The Purple Flame Sect disciple saw that Yang Lin did not seem to be lying and furrowed his brows, saying, "Elder Hong will not meet with anyone within the next few days. If you have important matters, you can report them to our Sect Master as well! If you wish, I can inform him for you and see if the Sect Master is willing to meet you! How about it?"

Upon hearing this, Yang Lin's heart suddenly felt half as cold, and he immediately thought that Hong Qitian was an Elder of the Purple Flame Sect, closely related to the interests of the sect. Reporting this matter to the Sect Master of the Purple Flame Sect was nearly the same, so he immediately nodded in agreement.

"Wait here."

The Purple Flame Sect disciple turned and swept toward the Sect Master Hall. After a moment, he returned and told Yang Lin that the Sect Master agreed to meet him.

Under the guidance of that Purple Flame Sect disciple, Yang Lin was brought into the Purple Flame Sect Master Hall and saw Zu Tiangang, who sat high on the Sect Master's throne.

Yang Lin was a disciple of the Inner Court from a fourth-grade sect, and Zu Tiangang was a Sect Master from a third-grade sect. In terms of both status and power, they were worlds apart, incomparable.

Yang Lin thought that even Ren Jingbo, the head of Bitao Martial Academy, would find it difficult to meet Zu Tiangang, yet he was summoned alone. This was a tremendous honor, and his heart thumped wildly, overwhelmed with excitement.

"As expected of a third-grade sect, such terrifying pressure! No wonder people say that a strong person's gaze can kill. Indeed, it is no false claim!"

Yang Lin only glanced at Zu Tiangang once before immediately lowering his head, not daring to meet his gaze directly. He felt Zu Tiangang's gaze like two bolts of lightning striking him, causing his skin to tingle painfully, as if a more intense gaze could pierce through his body.

"What is your name? What is your role in Bitao Martial Academy?"

Yang Lin was feeling frightened and uneasy when Zu Tiangang's indifferent and authoritative voice reached his ears.

"Disciple Yang Lin, I am a disciple of the Inner Court at Bitao Martial Academy."

Yang Lin replied with his head bowed, utterly respectful.

"I heard you have information about Bai Fang to tell Elder Hong? Elder Hong is in seclusion, but you can tell me the matter, and it's the same. I will pass the message to Elder Hong for you. Rest assured, as long as what you say is useful, I will ensure Elder Hong rewards you sufficiently!"

Zu Tiangang continued.

Zu Tiangang, frazzled by last night's incident and still unsure who was responsible, heard that someone knew something about Bai Fang and immediately summoned them, hoping to obtain some clues.

Upon hearing that there was a benefit to be gained, Yang Lin's heart leapt with joy and he said, "Reporting to Ancestor Sect Master, here is what happened: Last night, a disciple from our Bitao Martial Academy, Fang Bai, came back from outside the city and said he encountered a Senior called Bai Fang. This Senior Bai saw his good potential and wanted to teach him the Alchemy Technique, and told him that if he ever wants to practice alchemy or artifact refining, he could directly seek his help..."

Yang Lin paused and looked up to see Zu Tiangang listening intently, and continued, "At that time, Fang Bai didn't dare agree without consulting first, so he came back to ask Elder Ge for advice. Such an opportunity, naturally, Elder Ge agreed. I heard that your sect's Elder Hong had a conflict in the Martial Artists Trading Market with that Senior Bai, and Fang Bai has good relations with that Senior Bai, which could be seen as going against Elder Hong. Therefore... I came to report to Elder Hong... Ancestor Sect Master, is this news useful?"

Zu Tiangang nodded and said, "If this is true, it is indeed useful."

Yang Lin patted his chest and said, "Disciple dares to guarantee with my life! If there is a single false word, I do not deserve to die well!"

Zu Tiangang smiled and said, "Good, I believe you. I will ask you again, where is Fang Bai currently?"

Yang Lin said, "He took the cultivation resources given to him by Elder Ge and went outside the city to meet that Senior Bai to refine Elixirs."

"Hehe... Bitao Martial Academy has made contact with a mid-grade Alchemist and mid-grade Artifact Refiner, which shows promise for rising. Perhaps one day, they might rise to a third-grade sect and pose a situation of tripartite rivalry with our Purple Flame Sect!"

Although Zu Tiangang's face wore a smile, his gaze emitted a chilling coldness that made one's heart throb.

Chapter 1078: Unease

In Thousand Lakes Country, the Purple Flame Sect was the sole third-grade sect, dominating vastly, controlling most of the cultivation resources of Thousand Lakes Country. As Sect Master, Zu Tiangang was absolutely unwilling to see a powerful competitor arise.

Thus, the Purple Flame Sect had always been doing everything in its power to suppress sect forces including the Bitao Martial Academy, not only controlling most of the cultivation resources within Thousand Lakes Country but also forcing those sect forces to pay a hefty "protection fee" annually. The goal was to prevent these sects from having ample cultivation resources, to hinder the rapid growth of their disciples, and to avoid them posing a threat to the Purple Flame Sect.

It had proven that this method of suppression was very effective; for thousands of years within Thousand Lakes Country, no sect force had been able to shake the hegemony of the Purple Flame Sect.

However, now a mid-grade Alchemist and Artifact Refiner who had suddenly appeared in Purple Flame City, named Bai Fang, had taken an interest in Fang Bai, a disciple of the Bitao Martial Academy's Inner

Court. Not only had he promised to craft elixirs for Fang Bai, but he was also planning to pass on the art of alchemy to him.

If this was true, then the overall strength of the Bitao Martial Academy, with the help of a mid-grade Alchemist and Artifact Refiner, would quickly increase. Perhaps one day, the Bitao Martial Academy might indeed be able to challenge the hegemonic status of the Purple Flame Sect, which was not good news for the Purple Flame Sect.

Originally, Zu Tiangang had still harbored a slight hope of making amends with Bai Fang.

But now, intense killing intent had arisen in his heart; he not only wanted to kill Bai Fang but also wanted to eliminate Fang Bai, the disciple from the Bitao Martial Academy, to prevent future troubles.

"You are called Yang Lin, right? This information you've provided is very useful!"

Zu Tiangang suppressed the killing qi in his heart, showing a slight smile and graciously said to Yang Lin, "If you get any more information that would be useful to our Purple Flame Sect, feel free to tell me. I won't let you go unrewarded! Take this Spatial Ring, it contains some cultivation resources, as a reward for you!"

As he spoke, Zu Tiangang lifted his left hand, and a Spatial Ring slowly floated toward Yang Lin.

Yang Lin caught the Spatial Ring and looked at it, feeling extremely excited.

In the True Martial Realm, storage artifacts were very precious. Even the low-grade storage artifacts were only something that high-level sect members or major sect disciples could afford to forge. For a martial artist like Yang Lin, it was something he had always dreamed of.

Yang Lin knew that just this low-grade Spatial Ring he held was worth a great deal, equivalent to a hundred bottles of elixirs or 100,000 Essence Stones.

"This Spatial Ring was just crafted; wear it on your finger, and as soon as you channel a strand of Essence Energy into it, you can open the ring's space."

Seeing that Yang Lin was holding the Spatial Ring unsure of what to do, knowing it was his first time handling one, Zu Tiangang explained with a smile.

Upon hearing this, Yang Lin immediately wore the Spatial Ring on his left hand's finger and channeled a strand of Essence Energy into it, revealing a room-sized space filled with some Essence Stones and elixirs. Seeing the quantity, enough for several years of his cultivation, he was overwhelmed with joy.

"Thank you for the reward, Sect Master Zu!"

Yang Lin bowed deeply to Zu Tiangang, expressing his gratitude with tears of gratitude.

"Good, use the elixirs and Essence Stones inside! If you bring more good news in the future, I will reward you even more! Alright, you may leave now."

Zu Tiangang waved his hand.

Normally, for a Heaven Level Martial Artist like Yang Lin, Zu Tiangang wouldn't bother much; if it weren't for Yang Lin providing an important clue this time, he wouldn't have spoken so much to him.

After Yang Lin left, Zu Tiangang's expression quickly turned cold, and he immediately summoned many high-level members of the Purple Flame Sect to come to the Sect Master Hall for a secret meeting.

Subsequently, many disciples from the Purple Flame Sect were dispatched. A portion of them went to monitor the Bitao Martial Academy disciples within Purple Flame City, while another group searched outside the city for Fang Bai and Bai Fang. Once they found any trace of the two, Zu Tiangang planned to lead the upper echelons of the Purple Flame Sect to storm out after today's welcome luncheon, fully intending to encircle and eliminate both individuals.

Although Bai Fang's abilities might far surpass those of Hong Qitian, Zu Tiangang believed that even if he were a Cosmic Level novice, facing the concerted attack of over a dozen Vast Level experts from his side would prove too challenging.

As midday approached, Zu Tiangang finally received a message from his disciples, stating that Fang Bai, a disciple of the Bitao Martial Academy, had returned from outside the city and had met up with Ge Feng and others, heading to the Reception Hall.

As for Bai Fang, there was still no sign of him.

This made Zu Tiangang somewhat anxious and uneasy.

The inner court disciple from Bitao Martial Academy, Fang Bai, had gone outside the city to meet Bai Fang, which meant Bai Fang was still near Purple Flame City. Yet, despite the Purple Flame Sect sending so many people to search outside, they had not found any trace of Bai Fang, showing how sophisticated his hiding techniques were.

And that Bitao Martial Academy disciple, Fang Bai, was only discovered by the Purple Flame Sect disciples after he had returned to the city, presumably also practicing some secret technique of concealment to avoid the extensive search by the Purple Flame Sect disciples outside the city.

Zu Tiangang wasn't too concerned about Fang Bai. After all, Fang Bai was merely an inner court disciple from a Grade Four sect, too weak to pose any real threat.

But Bai Fang was different. Being a Vast Level Martial Artist, superior to Hong Qitian, and also both an Alchemist and an Artifact Refiner, he was a dangerous character capable of threatening the vested interests of the Purple Flame Sect. If Bai Fang were not eliminated, Zu Tiangang would have trouble resting easy.

"If we can't find Bai Fang, then we'll have to start with Bitao Martial Academy disciple Fang Bai!"

Zu Tiangang thought to himself.

"My Sect Master, all the disciples attending the sect conference have now arrived at the Reception Hall."

While Zu Tiangang was deep in thought, a Purple Flame Sect disciple came to report.

"I see. I will be there soon."

Zu Tiangang responded gravely.

Organizing the five-yearly sect conference was the Purple Flame Sect's top priority. Zu Tiangang decided to temporarily put aside other matters.

Zu Tiangang slowly stood up from his seat and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself before leaving the Sect Master Hall. Accompanied by a group of Purple Flame Sect high-ranking members, he headed to the grand Reception Hall to host the welcome luncheon.

The Reception Hall, capable of accommodating a thousand people, was lively with disciples from all over Thousand Lakes Country and several hundred invited disciples from various sects. They gathered around each round table, some discussing animatedly and others whispering quietly—it was a buzzing scene.

Dozens of beautiful female disciples from the Purple Flame Sect, dressed in uniform, bustled around the Reception Hall, placing dishes of food and beverages on the tables.

The so-called delicacies consisted of roasted Spirit Beast Meat and some low-grade Spirit Fruits.

The beverages, made from some low-grade Spirit Fruits, were fragrant, fresh, and exceedingly tasty.

These foods and drinks were beneficial for Martial Artists, and only a Grade Three sect like the Purple Flame Sect could afford such generosity to their guests.

Chapter 1079: Cannot be Merciful

With the participation of disciples from major sects and the invited observers, there were a total of four to five hundred people at the Sect Gathering. Fortunately, the Reception Hall was spacious enough to accommodate hundreds of people without feeling crowded.

In the hall, there were several dozen round tables, each capable of seating ten people. Historically, the limit for participants from each sect at the Sect Gathering was indeed ten, which meant a sect could perfectly fill one round table.

The placement of the round tables was of varying quality, and the disciples from the various sects couldn't just sit anywhere they liked. Usually, the seating would be allocated based on the rankings from the sparring section of the previous Sect Gathering.

Those sects with better rankings had their disciples sitting at round tables positioned centrally and towards the front, while those with poorer rankings had to content themselves with seats at tables towards the back and in the corners.

The Bitao Martial Academy had always been middle-ranking in the sparring section of previous Sect Gatherings, so their seating position wasn't too bad.

At this moment, led by Ge Feng, the ten disciples of the Bitao Martial Academy were sitting at a slightly rearward and left-offset round table, whispering among themselves with faces flush with excitement and agitation.

Their excitement had nothing to do with today's welcome luncheon; rather, it stemmed from earlier when Fang Bai returned from outside the city, bringing the elixirs urgently needed by the Bitao Martial Academy.

The elixirs were refined by Senior Bai whom Fang Bai had requested help from outside the city. Although they were lower grade elixirs, they were of the highest quality within that category, and the success rate of their creation was impressively high. Furthermore, in consideration of Fang Bai, Senior Bai only charged a ten percent fee, making the deal countless times better than when Ge Feng used to have the Wu siblings refine elixirs at the Martial Artists Trading Market.

Therefore, out of the ten people, excluding Fang Bai and Yang Lin, all were infinitely grateful to the unseen Senior Bai and envious of Fang Bai's great fortune of meeting such a benefactor.

Ge Feng was naturally pleased that Senior Bai favored and appreciated Fang Bai, but with his extensive experience in braving numerous trials, he knew all too well that this matter was not only to be kept from publicity but also to be strictly confidential. Otherwise, it might bring significant trouble to both Fang Bai and the Bitao Martial Academy.

Thus, on more than one occasion, Ge Feng privately exhorted Shen Yulin and the other disciples of the Bitao Martial Academy to keep the matter to themselves, warning that any leak would be severely punished according to the academy's regulations.

Yang Lin, who felt like a thief in his guilt, would tremble every time he faced Ge Feng's stern warnings, but he harbored no regrets. He knew that the Purple Flame Sect would never allow Senior Bai to get close to Fang Bai and would certainly take action against the Master, and even Fang Bai would not be spared.

Shortly after Ge Feng and his group took their seats at the round table, the disciples of the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect, also of Tier-4 standing, took their places at the neighboring tables in succession.

The Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect maintained an alliance, and the territories managed by them and the Bitao Martial Academy bordered each other. Friction over various interests often occurred between the two, leading to fights when their disciples met, although they always exercised restraint. There had been injuries but never a fatality.

During past Sect Gatherings, encounters between the disciples of the two sides usually resulted in nothing more than mutual disregard. However, on this occasion, while en route to Purple Flame City through the Blizzard Mountain Range's Soul Severing Valley, Fang Bai had suffered a joint attack by the traitor from Bitao Martial Academy, Lei Li, Fiery Sect Elder Leng Han, and Cloud Feather Sect Steward Chang Feng. If it hadn't been for a Master's assistance, he would have been in grave danger.

As a result, Ge Feng and his fellow disciples from the Bitao Martial Academy were filled with resentment towards the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect. Upon seeing the disciples of the two sects, they glared at them with eyes full of wrath and a surging desire to fight.

The disciples of the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect met their gaze without showing weakness.

The group of dozens of disciples from the three sects faced off in the Reception Hall like gamecocks, on the verge of a confrontation.

"You two sects know very well the despicable acts you've committed. We'll settle this account with you later," Ge Feng said through clenched teeth, suppressing his rage, aware that the Purple Flame Sect would not allow them to cause trouble here.

"We're ready when you are," they replied.

The Elders leading the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect responded with cold laughs.

As high-ranking members of their Sects, the Elders from the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect were fully aware of the attack on Fang Bai but had also recently received news of the death of their own Sect members involved in the attack. They were astonished by this and could only pretend ignorance for the time being.

As the target of the attack, Fang Bai, however, wore a smile, showing no sign of anger.

"Brother Fang, the disciples of these two Sects are despicable! They wanted to harm you; you can't let them off easily!"

Liu Qingqing clenched her little fists tightly, speaking indignantly.

Although Liu Qingqing was inexperienced in the ways of the world, she was already well versed in the rule that "might makes right" in this world. She knew that with Fang Bai's strength, handling the disciples of the two Sects would be no problem.

"Don't worry, Qingqing, I know what to do."

Fang Bai smiled at Liu Qingqing.

Fang Bai had always conducted himself by the principle "If no one offends me, I offend no one. But if someone offends me, I shall offend them," and the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect's involvement in the attack on him, aiming to put him to death, had touched his raw nerve; naturally, he would retaliate.

On this trip to Purple Flame City, Fang Bai had gained a general understanding of the situation in Thousand Lakes Country and decided to deal with the Purple Flame Sect first, then clean up some of the smaller Sects at odds with Bitao Martial Academy to carve out a new territory for the Martial Academy. It was a gesture to show his connection and goodwill toward Bitao Martial Academy.

From the smile on Fang Bai's face, Liu Qingqing caught a hint of murderous intent and understood his thoughts, nodding vigorously.

"Fang Bai, I know you're harboring anger inside, but the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect, with their combined strength, are not to be underestimated. You must not act rashly! Once we get back to the Martial Academy, we will take care of everything for you!"

Ge Feng had some understanding of Fang Bai and knew that his calm exterior did not reflect his turbulent inner emotions. Concerned that he might take rash action, he advised in a low voice.

"What if Senior Bai is willing to help me?"

Fang Bai asked with a smile.

Ge Feng paused, his eyes then lighting up. Glancing at the arrogant disciples of the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect, he fell silent.

Senior Bai, who was able to fight a battle against the Elder of Tribute of the Purple Flame Sect, Hong Qitian, was at least a mid-Vast Level Master. If he were willing to support Fang Bai, the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect would hardly escape calamity.

Ge Feng, who had seen his fair share of survival of the fittest, was as tough as iron. Even if the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect faced annihilation and countless disciples died or were injured, it would be no more than they deserved, and Ge Feng would not feel any pity or sympathy.

The question was whether Fang Bai could persuade Senior Bai.

"The Sect Master of the Purple Flame Sect has arrived!"

Just as the disciples from the two Sects were confronting each other, someone shouted loudly.

Upon hearing this, the disciples from Bitao Martial Academy and those from the Fiery Sect and Cloud Feather Sect ended their confrontation and returned to their respective round tables. They stood there, witnessing Zu Tiangang's impressive entrance into the Reception Hall.

Chapter 1080: Lunch Banquet

In the Reception Hall, it was originally noisy and bustling, but once Zu Tiangang appeared, nearly all the Martial Artists were enveloped by an invisible oppressive force, as if standing deep within the vast ocean, with the immense pressure from all directions making it difficult for them to breathe.

The overwhelming presence of Zu Tiangang, a Vast Level Perfection powerhouse, deterred everyone present except Fang Bai. Some Martial Artists who were previously sitting and chatting found themselves involuntarily standing up.

Almost a thousand gazes simultaneously turned towards Zu Tiangang, the Sect Master of Purple Flame Sect and the strongest person in Thousand Lakes Country, their expressions revealing a hint of respect and fear.

The scene fell into complete silence, a hush descending over the area.

Fang Bai and Liu Qingqing stood shoulder to shoulder. Unlike the other nervous and respectful Martial Artists around them, the two displayed a relaxed demeanor, showing not the slightest sign of reverence.

Zhuge Lian, on her first venture down the mountain for training, had a naive fearlessness like a calf unaware of tigers and held no awe towards Zu Tiangang either.

Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian were seated quite far from each other at the round table, unable to converse directly, their occasional communication limited to looks. During which, Fang Bai informed Zhuge Lian about Zu Yu's disfigurement through the Thread Condensation Sound Transmission Technique, causing Zhuge Lian's heart to blossom with delight, her pretty face unable to hide her excitement.

Originally, Zhuge Lian and Zu Yu were both handsome and beautiful, possessing Innate Spiritual Roots and being Direct Disciples of third-tier Sects, which made them a suitable match. Hence, the high ranks of both Purple Flame Sect and Xuannv Sect held their union in high regard.

But now, with Zu Yu's disfigurement, it would be difficult for him to be matched with Zhuge Lian, giving her ample reason to refuse this marriage arrangement.

Zhuge Lian, naturally filled with gratitude for Fang Bai's intervention, couldn't help but glance his way several times.

Liu Qingqing, with her keen senses, quickly noticed Zhuge Lian's frequent gazes. Thus, two bright-eyed and white-toothed, ethereally beautiful girls exchanged many glances in the air, sizing each other up.

Fang Bai's attention was mostly on Zu Tiangang, and he did not notice the unusual expressions of the two women.

In previous welcome feasts, all the high ranks of Purple Flame Sect would attend, but this time, some astute Martial Artists noticed that Elder of Tribute Hong Qitian, as well as Zu Tiangang's foster son Zu Yu, had not shown up.

Hong Qitian was an important member among the high ranks of Purple Flame Sect, and Zu Yu was the top Direct Disciple of the Sect; their absence from such a significant event seemed unusual.

Some quickly connected this to the disturbance that emanated from the core area of Purple Flame Sect the previous midnight, as if something major had transpired. Although the Sect later explained to the Disciples of different Sects attending the grand assembly that the noise was simply the result of Purple Flame Sect Disciples practicing their Martial Arts, this explanation was clearly unconvincing.

All the Sect Disciples speculated in secret about the reason behind Hong Qitian and Zu Yu's absence from the welcome banquet, but no one dared to ask aloud for fear of ruffling Zu Tiangang's feathers and displeasing him.

However, for Han Xingyu, the leader of Xuannv Sect, this was not a concern,

"Sect Master Zu, why is your Sect's Disciple Zu Yu absent from the banquet?"

Han Xingyu bowed slightly towards Zu Tiangang and asked coolly. Although her face showed no emotion, one could discern the displeasure in her tone.

"This... Zu Yu had some urgent matters to attend to, which is why he couldn't attend today's welcome luncheon. For the oversight, I ask for Elder Han's forgiveness," Zu Tiangang replied with a smile, though the smile contained a hint of embarrassment and annoyance.

After the severe injuries to Hong Qitian and the disfigurement of Zu Yu the night before, Zu Tiangang was frazzled and irate. He had intended to explain to Han Xingyu after the sect conference ended, but unexpectedly, Han Xingyu directly questioned him about Zu Yu, which felt like pouring salt on his wounds and ignited his frustration.

However, the Xuannv Sect had always been on good terms with the Purple Flame Sect, and their overall strength was not inferior to that of the Purple Flame Sect. Zu Tiangang did not want to spoil relations over this incident with Han Xingyu, and knowing that he was at fault, he lowered his stance and expressed his apologies to Han Xingyu.

Seeing this, Han Xingyu could not say much else, but still felt dissatisfied, thinking that she, bearing the mission of the Xuannv Sect, had come to discuss a marriage alliance with the Purple Flame Sect. However, the relevant party, Zu Yu, was absent from the welcome banquet without prior explanation, which was tantamount to an insult to the Xuannv Sect, unforgivably upsetting to anyone in her place.

At noontime, the welcome luncheon officially began.

Following tradition, Zu Tiangang, on behalf of the host Purple Flame Sect, gave a brief welcoming speech, after which leaders of various sects also said a few words, expressing gratitude for the hospitable treatment by the Purple Flame Sect.

Finally, the Elder Zhike of the Purple Flame Sect publicly announced that the most important fighting competition of the sect conference would commence the following morning.

After the Elder Zhike of the Purple Flame Sect finished speaking, disciples from various sects eagerly warmed up, all hoping to achieve a good ranking in the sect conference's competition to secure more cultivation resources.

Like the Bitao Martial Academy and the Fiery Sect, both sects govern adjacent territories where a mountain range with many Spiritual Medicines grow. According to the rules of this world, these Spiritual Medicines should be shared by both sects, and their distribution, more or less, would be decided by their rankings attained in the sect conference.

Because Bitao Martial Academy and Fiery Sect had similar rankings in past conferences, theoretically, they should equally share the Spiritual Medicines. However, defining this equal distribution was complicated and sometimes led to conflicts between the two sects.

If the Bitao Martial Academy significantly outperformed Fiery Sect in the competition, the distribution would be much simpler.

The converse was also true.

If the Bitao Martial Academy or Fiery Sect refused to stick to the allocated share of Spiritual Medicines to harvest, it would be equivalent to breaking the rules, and they would face the condemnation, scorn, or even collective attacks from other sects.

After the luncheon started, Zu Tiangang, having many issues to deal with, was not in the mood for feasting. He offered toasts to the representatives of various sects, exchanged a few pleasantries, and then left early.

When the luncheon was over, the disciples from the various sects didn't go out to stroll or have fun; instead, they all returned to their accommodations to focus and meditate, aiming to be in their optimal state for the competition starting the next day.

"Elder Ge, I must visit Senior Bai," Fang Bai spoke quietly to Ge Feng as they walked out of the Reception Hall with the others. "Senior Bai knows I'm participating in the sect conference's fighting competition and wants to lend me his support, so my strength can improve before the fights tomorrow."

"Good... good... This is a great opportunity for you! Go on, but be very careful on your way," Ge Feng, his eyes shining with excitement, initially wanted to escort Fang Bai himself but knew that Senior Bai disliked meeting strangers. He reluctantly decided against it and whispered a few words of caution to Fang Bai, who then set off on his own.