

Martial 3241

Chapter 3241, Conflict Outside the Gate

Along the way, Yang Kai finally learnt an unknown side of Wen Zi Shan. Wen Zi Shan was a chatterbox! He chattered on and on without stopping. Although Yang Kai used to think that Wen Zi Shan was rather unreliable, they had never interacted with each other for long; therefore, he did not know what kind of personality Wen Zi Shan had. It wasn't until now that he finally experienced it for himself.

Wen Zi Shan initially pestered Gao Xue Ting for a bit, but his enthusiasm naturally received a cold reaction. In the whole of Azure Sun Temple, only Gao Xue Ting dared to be so openly disrespectful to him.

After being rebuffed by Gao Xue Ting's attitude, Wen Zi Shan slowed down to keep pace with Yang Kai and the others instead. He began talking about the past and the present with a burst of joy. Luo Chen and Xiao Bai Yi had relatively cold and aloof personalities and were men of few words, so they responded tersely out of respect since Wen Zi Shan was still technically their Temple Master. However, they closed their eyes after a few words as if to meditate and rest. Thus, Yang Kai and Murong Xiao Xiao got the worst of it instead.

Fortunately, Wen Zi Shan did not pester those two for long. Half a day later, he fell behind to join the others at the back, smoothly inserting himself into the group of Dao Source, Origin King, and Origin Returning Realm Juniors, allowing Murong Xiao Xiao to finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, the group of disciples at the back were rather polite and respectful. Wen Zi Shan was so approachable even though he was the Temple Master, so how could his disciples not get along with him? Especially those disciples that were patted on the shoulder and loudly praised by Wen Zi Shan as he declared, "You are the future of the Temple! The Temple's prosperity will depend on you from now on!" They were practically glowing with pride and feeling emotional beyond words, seemingly on the verge of digging out their hearts for him to see how loyal they were to the Temple.

Yang Kai looked back at Wen Zi Shan from time to time, and the expressions on his face were very colourful. [I have to admit that I am pretty unreliable as the Palace Master of High Heaven Palace, but compared to Wen Zi Shan, aren't I like a rock for everyone to lean on?]

The group travelled non-stop, passing by several cities along the way and even using a few Space Arrays to cover vast distances more quickly. When evening rolled around, the group arrived at Orthodoxy Temple. The undulating mountains here were extremely majestic and looked like a large Dragon crawling on the ground. The scenery was beautiful and the weather was pleasant.

Orthodoxy Temple was one of the top Sects in the Southern Territory; therefore, it was only natural that it occupied a Cultivation Paradise. The environment here was no worse than Azure Sun Temple. In addition, it had a beautiful landscape. Looking out into the distance, the clouds and mist rolled off the

mountains everywhere the eye could see; moreover, the afterglow of the setting sun dyed the world in a golden light.

There was a crowd of people in front of the main gate of Orthodoxy Temple, making for a lively scene. Since the Martial Gathering was right around the corner, many people had arrived to participate in the event. It was no surprise; the Martial Gathering was a grand event for the entire Southern Territory after all.

Putting aside the generous rewards that made one green with envy, one could also gain the attention of their respective Elders if they performed well during the competition. Moreover, there were many cultivators from humble backgrounds who wanted to create a path for their future in the Martial Gathering. It wasn't as though there was no precedent. The cultivators from humble backgrounds might not be able to join the group events, but if they could deliver a stellar performance in the individual competitions, most of them would be able to successfully join a major Sect or force.

On the other hand, the major Sects were striving for rankings and reputation. The generous rewards came second. Meanwhile, those rewards were very tempting to some of the smaller Sects and clans. It was also a chance to achieve unlimited success. Who would be willing to miss out on this opportunity? Hence, each and every Martial Gathering was extremely popular, and the participants entering the competition were too many to count.

Tomorrow was the day the Martial Gathering officially began, so it appeared Azure Sun Temple had arrived just in the nick of time. It was one of the top Sects in the Southern Territory after all so it was only natural to show off a little. Although Wen Zi Shan was not very reliable, he still understood the importance of such things.

Orthodoxy Temple's Sect Defending Array had been deactivated today and many people were standing outside to welcome the guests.

As soon as the group from Azure Sun Temple landed, an elderly man dressed in black and an elegant looking young man immediately came forward to greet them. Both of these men were in the Emperor Realm with the elderly one being a Second-Order Emperor while the young man was a First-Order.

"Welcome, Temple Master Wen. It is an honour for Orthodoxy Temple to have you here. Do forgive us for any discourtesy in our hospitality." The elderly man stepped forward and greeted them with a smile.

Wen Zi Shan also put on the appearance of a dignified Temple Master, acting as though that chatterbox during the journey had not been him as he smiled faintly, "Elder Feng, you are too polite. Are you here to greet the guests today?"

The elderly man was none other than Feng Ming, an Elder of Orthodoxy Temple. Yang Kai had met him several times before, so they were not strangers to each other. Besides, Feng Ming had worked together with Gao Xue Ting on many occasions and had also been present at various events, including the Four Seasons Realm, the Demon Qi eruption outside Maplewood City, and the Demon Spirits' revival at the Southern Swamp. It was just that he and Yang Kai did not belong in the same generation, so they rarely interacted with each other. On the other hand, Yang Kai was on rather friendly terms with the young man behind him.

It was clear that the young man had noticed Yang Kai and his eyes lit up as he cupped his fists, "Brother Yang, you came too."

Yang Kai replied, "Brother Zhuang."

This young man was the rising star of Orthodoxy Temple, Zhuang Bu Fan. He had been present at both the Four Seasons Realm and the Shattered Star Sea as he was from the same generation as Yang Kai, Xiao Bai Yi, and Murong Xiao Xiao; therefore, they were not strangers to each other. Now that they had gathered in the same place, it was only expected that they wanted to have a chat together.

As a result, Luo Chen was pushed to the side and forgotten. Fortunately, he had an aloof personality by nature and did not feel embarrassed by the situation. He simply stood there quietly without saying a word.

While they were chatting away, they suddenly heard a sniggering sound coming from afar. Everybody turned to look in the direction and saw a giant longsword rushing in their direction at a high speed from the horizon. The terrifying Sword Intent felt as though it could cause injuries despite the distance between them so no one dared to underestimate it.

Feng Ming smiled, "Holy Master Ma has arrived."

Wen Zi Shan spat disdainfully, already feeling fed up, "He sure knows how to time his arrival."

He seemed to have felt like he had suffered a loss just by arriving a little earlier.

It was well known that Star Soul Palace would send their people over to watch the Southern Territory Martial Gathering, so even Wen Zi Shan had to personally lead his team as a sign of respect. Therefore, it was only to be expected that Heavenly Martial Holy Land, which was also one of the top Sects in the Southern Territory, would not be any less respectful. Holy Master Ma Qing also personally led his Sect's team this time.

Since they were old acquaintances, Wen Zi Shan immediately knew that Ma Qing was here the moment he saw the sword light. The sword light approached from afar and soon arrived, dissipating to reveal several dozen people with the one leading them being a ruddy-faced white-haired old man. His figure was thin but his gaze was as sharp as a sword and he held himself tall and straight, giving off a piercing aura.

[He's Ma Qing?] Yang Kai couldn't help glancing at the man curiously. It was his first time meeting the Holy Master of Heavenly Martial Holy Land so he was surprised to learn that it was an old man. In comparison, Wen Zi Shan was more pleasing to the eye.

Feng Ming apologized and took his leave to give his greetings to Ma Qing.

Ma Qing and the others cupped their fists and returned Feng Ming's greetings. The number of people who came from Heavenly Martial Holy Land was similar to Azure Sun Temple. There were four Emperors, each leading a team of several dozen disciples of various cultivation Realms. They were clearly the elites of the elites.

"Brother Wen," Ma Qing held one hand behind his back and stroked his beard with the other, nodding slightly at Wen Zi Shan.

Wen Zi Shan spoke in a pointed voice, "Brother Ma, you're as punctual as ever." He seemed to be teasing Ma Qing for arriving just in time.

Ma Qing replied calmly, "My disciples were a little absent-minded, so there were some delays on the road."

Wen Zi Shan laughed, "If you knew that they were going to be a little absent-minded, then you should have departed earlier. It's rude of you to make Brother Lei wait."

"You seem to have just arrived yourself, Brother Wen."

"Tsk." He curled his lips into a sneer, "We arrived a long time ago. I was simply chatting with Elder Feng until now."

The two seemed to have some grievances between them so they went at each other's throats the moment they met. It wasn't just the respective Temple Master and Holy Master who were acting in this manner, the disciples under them were also behaving in a similar fashion. The disciples of Azure Sun Temple were glaring daggers at the disciples of Heavenly Martial Holy Land while the latter was not backing down from the challenge and glared right back. Both parties got along as well as oil and water.

Yang Kai was amazed by the sight. He might be a High-Rank Guest Elder of Azure Sun Temple, but he didn't know much about Azure Sun Temple's actual situation. He did not know what kind of grudge they had against Heavenly Martial Holy Land for the disciples to get into a silent confrontation with the other party as soon as they met.

The Temple Master and Holy Master standing at the top were not to be trifled with, and the disciples under them were no pushovers either. The same held true for the Emperor Realm Elders of the two forces.

Yang Kai turned his head to see that Murong Xiao Xiao and the others were also glaring at the four Emperor Realm Masters of Heavenly Martial Holy Land, sparks almost flying in the air between them.

[What is with this situation!?] Yang Kai was utterly confused.

Then, a young man walked out from among the four Elders of Heavenly Martial Holy Land. The young man had a wild and rebellious air around him, and the look in his eyes was sharp and cold. He looked like he had a beast that could jump out to attack others at any time lying dormant inside him. That wasn't all; his eyes were very strange too. The left pupil was red and the right was faint blue. The skin and hair of the left side were fiery red, but the right side of the body was snowy white. It was an extremely unsettling sight.

[Wu Chang! He sure lives up to his name!] There was a rising star in every generation among the top Sects of the Southern Territory. The rising star of Azure Sun Temple was Xia Sheng, Orthodoxy Temple had Zhuang Bu Fan, and Heavenly Martial Holy Land had Wu Chang.

Yang Kai had exchanged blows with Wu Chang before in the Four Seasons Realm, so he knew just how difficult an opponent this boy was. Wu Chang seemed to have some sort of Special Constitution which greatly enhanced his combat ability. During the last Southern Territory Martial Gathering, Xia Sheng had apparently been defeated by Wu Chang and placed second in the individual rankings as a result. Although Azure Sun Temple regained its pride by ranking at the top in the group competition, the first

person people thought of when talking about the number one among the younger generation in the Southern Territory was Wu Chang, not Xia Sheng.

Not to forget, Lan Xun of Star Soul Palace, who was also an extraordinary talent. Unfortunately, Star Soul Palace did not send any of its disciples to participate in the Martial Gathering, so Lan Xun was not included among the rankings.

Yang Kai secretly made a conjecture in his heart. [Could this animosity between the two Sects be related to the last Southern Territory Martial Gathering?]

Xia Sheng had been overwhelmed by Wu Chang in the individual rankings, which upset Azure Sun Temple. Meanwhile, Heavenly Martial Holy Land had suffered a terrible defeat to Azure Sun Temple in the group rankings, which definitely upset Heavenly Martial Holy Land in return.

Wu Chang swept his gaze over the crowd with his heterochromatic eyes before turning to look at Yang Kai, "Xia Sheng didn't come?" He seemed slightly disappointed.

Yang Kai replied, "Senior Brother Xia is stationed at Spirit Lake Palace and is unable to leave his post."

"Coward!" Wu Chang coldly snorted.

Xiao Bai Yi's lowered eyes lifted abruptly as he glared at Wu Chang with a gaze as sharp as a sword. Likewise, Murong Xiao Xiao also glared at Wu Chang angrily. Wu Chang had insulted one of them the moment they met; moreover, the person he had insulted was none other than Xia Sheng.

Xia Sheng was a leading figure who represented Azure Sun Temple, so how could Azure Sun Temple take this insult lying down?

Feng Ming glanced over in this direction, whether intentionally or unintentionally; however, he did not seem inclined to stop them and just continued chatting and laughing away with Wen Zi Shan.

Wen Zi Shan was also acting as though he had not heard a thing. As the Temple Master, it was not appropriate for him to intervene in the fights between those below him. The same went for Ma Qing.

The top three Sects in the Southern Territory might cooperate on many occasions, but the competition between them was very fierce too. Every one of them wanted to dominate the others. Unfortunately, nobody dared to confront each other openly with Star Soul Palace watching over them from the top. Hence, it did not hurt to let those below them make a little commotion here and there...

Chapter 3242, Gathering of Emperor Realm Masters

"Why do you feel the need to insult him?" Yang Kai looked at Wu Chang calmly.

Wu Chang sneered, "He doesn't even have the courage to face me, how is he not a coward?"

Murong Xiao Xiao angrily snapped, "Senior Brother Xia has responsibilities he must attend to! It's not because he doesn't dare to meet you!"

Wu Chang put his hands behind his back, "Anybody can make excuses. He is probably scared of the embarrassment he will face if he loses to me again."

"That's not true!" She wanted to continue arguing with Wu Chang, but Yang Kai raised his hand to stop her and spoke ambiguously, "I've heard about the last Martial Gathering. Momentary gains and losses are truly nothing special. Before coming here, Senior Brother Xia told me Brother Wu Chang was an enthusiastic and active man, so he asked me to keep you company."

Yang Kai had not even seen Xia Sheng's face recently, so his words were naturally a lie; however, he was now representing Azure Sun Temple so how could he willingly let somebody else humiliate them? It was only expected that Yang Kai would retaliate when attacked. Yang Kai first had to balance out the aggression before they could talk about anything else.

"You?" Wu Chang swept his eyes over Yang Kai and nodded lightly, "You just barely qualify, I guess. I hope I won't be too disappointed."

"Who knows? You might be in for a pleasant surprise!" Yang Kai raised his brow in response. [You rabid dog! You better not end up in my hands, or I'll make you regret it!]

"Shameless boasting!" Wu Chang sneered.

Then, Chen Wen Hao turned around and shouted, "Wu Chang, enough! This is Orthodoxy Temple, stop acting so presumptuously!"

Gao Xue Ting also spoke up, "That's enough, both of you."

Wu Chang looked sullen but he could not refute his Elder in front of outsiders, lest he embarrass his Sect. With a flick of his sleeves, Wu Chang turned away and looked elsewhere. Yang Kai and the others couldn't be bothered to continue pestering him either; hence, the commotion passed without incident. They all knew that nobody could make a move under these circumstances, so if they continued arguing with each other, they would only embarrass themselves instead.

Wen Zi Shan laughed, "The younger generation are truly vigorous. Good! Good!"

Feng Ming did not comment on that statement, instead just cupping his fists and commenting, "Most of our fellow cultivators from the Southern Territory have arrived, and the Temple Master is entertaining them right now. Gentlemen, please come this way." Turning to look at Zhuang Bu Fan, he instructed, "Xiao Fan, bring these two Seniors to the guest hall."

"Yes!" Zhuang Bu Fan replied. Stretching out his hand, he beckoned, "This way, please."

Feng Ming followed up, "Temple Master Wen, Holy Master Ma, please forgive me as I still have a duty to carry out and cannot accompany you further."

"Don't worry about it, Elder Feng. Let's talk again later." Wen Zi Shan smiled lightly and followed after Zhuang Bu Fan with his hands behind his back, heading towards the top of a nearby mountain.

Similarly, Ma Qing nodded at Feng Ming in acknowledgement before leading the people from Heavenly Martial Holy Land and following closely behind the rest. Surprisingly, they didn't quarrel over who took priority.

As the group of people slowly drifted into the distance, Feng Ming suddenly looked back, fixed his gaze on Yang Kai, and slightly furrowed his brow. When there was nobody else around him, he took out a communication artifact, poured his Divine Sense into it, and delivered a message to an unknown person.

Halfway up the mountain, the group came across a three-way fork in the road. There were Orthodoxy Temple's disciples waiting both on the left and right paths of the fork who bowed when the group approached and stretched out their hands in a welcoming gesture.

Zhuang Bu Fan turned around and said, "Seniors, please arrange for the disciples participating in the Martial Gathering to go either left or right."

Only Emperor Realm Masters were qualified to ascend to the top of the mountain, so the disciples behind them could not follow along. That was something everybody had known since the beginning.

Wen Zi Shan turned around and motioned to the rest, after which Gao Xue Ting immediately arranged for the disciples of Azure Sun Temple to follow a servant along the path to the right. On the other hand, Heavenly Martial Holy Land naturally chose the path to the left. The disciples of both Sects did not get along, so if they were housed in the same living quarters, they would probably start fighting each other before the Martial Gathering even began tomorrow. It should also be noted that there would not be an Emperor Realm Master around to suppress their fights.

After that, the remaining group of people followed Zhuang Bu Fan and continued onward. Whilst climbing up the stairs, the people of both Sects were cleanly split into two groups on the left and right sides respectively.

They soon arrived at the summit of the mountain where a magnificent palace entered their vision. It had an extraordinary aura about it and maidservants were already waiting for them outside.

Zhuang Bu Fan led the group of people into the palace and entered a hall, at which point a loud noise came from within, causing Yang Kai, Murong Xiao Xiao, and the others to look at each other in surprise. They had not expected it to be so lively already. Glancing around, they couldn't help feeling shocked. There were no less than five hundred or six hundred people inside this hall; moreover, most of them were Emperor Realm Masters while the rest were servants who navigated freely among them. The hall was filled with tables, and the tables were covered with various delicacies and fine wine.

The hall was full of guests, and the atmosphere within was extremely lively. People came and went from time to time, lifting their glasses in toast. A group of more than forty young girls were also dancing in the middle of the hall. They were not dressed scantily, but they were all quite beautiful, with slim waists and ample curves. Dancing gracefully, they attracted some people to watch them with enchanting smiles.

Although these dancers had been arranged by Orthodoxy Temple to add to the excitement, the Sect's reputation was on the line; therefore, they did not create any kind of obscene scene. People might look down on them if these girls were dressed scantily, so the current arrangement was much more suitable to show off the impression Orthodoxy Temple wanted to display.

However, most of the attention was not on the dancers as this was the place where many of the Emperor Realm Masters of the Southern Territory were assembled. The Sect Masters of each Sect and the Patriarchs of various clans had gathered in the same place, so it was a prime time to make connections and form relations. Who would still have the time to pay attention to those dancers under these circumstances? It was not easy for so many Emperor Realm Masters to convene in one place after all.

The moment Wen Zi Shan and Ma Qing walked into the hall with the rest following behind them, somebody immediately put down their wine glass and stood up to greet them, "Temple Master Wen, Holy Master Ma."

As soon as the voice sounded, the noisy hall went silent. Everyone turned to look at them, and the greetings poured out endlessly. Wen Zi Shan smiled and returned the greetings in all directions while walking all the way to the front of the hall under Zhuang Bu Fan's guidance. Meanwhile, Ma Qing didn't even glance to the side, his expression remaining cold and aloof. Fortunately, those who knew him well were aware that he was always like this and that he wasn't disrespecting them.

A sturdy man in black attire sat at the head of the hall and glanced over with a smile, tilting his head towards an elegantly dressed middle-aged man sitting on his right as he said, "I told you, right? They will surely arrive within a quarter-hour and look; they're here!"

The elegantly dressed man smiled in response, "You are truly astute, Brother Lei."

The only person who could sit in the main seat in this place was the Temple Master of Orthodoxy Temple, Lei Gu. No one else had this qualification. It went without saying that the elegantly dressed man was the Sect Master of one of the Sects in the Southern Territory, a Second-Order Emperor. Moreover, his seat was placed quite far to the front.

"Brother Lei!"

Wen Zi Shan and Ma Qing stepped forward and cupped their fists.

Lei Gu stood up, "Many thanks for coming all this way. Please, have a seat."

Although there were many tables in this hall and every seat was occupied, four tables located on the left and right of the main table remained empty. Nobody dared to occupy these seats as these four tables were clearly reserved for the people from Azure Sun Temple and Heavenly Martial Holy Land.

Wen Zi Shan and Ma Qing separated and moved in two different directions, each sitting with their Elders at the left and right tables. Wen Zi Shan and Ma Qing each occupied a table with the Elders from their Sects. Azure Sun Temple had one more person than Heavenly Martial Holy Land, so the seats at their table were just enough to accommodate all of them and a servant immediately came forward to serve wine for everyone.

Afterward, Lei Gu got up slowly, held up a wine glass in his hand, and spoke in a loud voice, "The time has once again come for the Southern Territory Martial Gathering! This is a momentous event and I offer my thanks to all the support from the Southern Territory's Masters. This Lei will be hosting the Martial Gathering at Orthodoxy Temple, and both the Sect and I shall do our best to create a fair environment for everybody in the Southern Territory to compete. I wish your disciples great success and

prosperity! May you lead the future hope of the Southern Territory! I offer this toast as a sign of my respect. Cheers!”

“Many thanks, Temple Master Lei!” Everybody in the hall replied in unison, lifting their wine glasses and drinking together. It was an extremely lively scene.

Raising a toast was part of the etiquette Lei Gu had to follow as the host of the Southern Territory Martial Gathering. Following that, everybody was free to do as they pleased. Tomorrow was the day the Martial Gathering began, so it was inevitable for their disciples to suffer injuries and losses once the event began. At the time, they would not be as harmonious anymore.

Many people came to Azure Sun Temple’s table to offer a toast, but most went straight to Gao Xue Ting. Luo Chen rarely interacted with others, so he did not have this honour. On the other hand, Yang Kai, Xiao Bai Yi, and Murong Xiao Xiao were only there to gain some experience and did not know many Emperor Realm Masters. It went without saying that they were ignored, but they were happy to have time to themselves.

Yang Kai took the time to inquire with Murong Xiao Xiao and finally learned why their relationship with Heavenly Martial Holy Land was so tense. It turned out as he expected. It was indeed because of the competition for first place in the individual rankings and group rankings during the last Martial Gathering. Neither Sect was willing to admit defeat, so it was only natural for there to be some friction between them.

One hour later, Lei Gu, Wen Zi Shan, and Ma Qing left the venue early. They had to gather together to discuss matters regarding tomorrow’s Martial Gathering, the arrangement of the name lists, and the planning of the venue. Although everything would be taken care of by Orthodoxy Temple in the end, Wen Zi Shan and Ma Qing had to check just in case Orthodoxy Temple sabotaged anything.

After these three people left, the atmosphere in the hall suddenly became more energetic. It could be seen that the presence of these three people still stressed the others out to a certain extent.

Yang Kai looked around while eating and drinking, looking rather bored. He had been a little interested in the Martial Gathering at the beginning; however, after coming to this place, he realized that it was nothing special. If this matter had not been pushed onto him, he would have gone home by now.

Although nothing major would happen to High Heaven Palace in the Northern Territory, the dust had yet to settle from recent events and it was a little worrying not to be there in person. It was also because his cultivation was higher now. Yang Kai was a Second-Order Emperor Realm Master; hence, the competition between those in the Dao Source Realm, the Origin King Realm, and the Origin Returning Realm no longer raised his interest. He had already killed off numerous Emperor Realm Masters so these little fights no longer excited him. Even so, Azure Sun Temple had assigned this matter to him, so he had no choice but to follow along.

He suddenly recalled something and turned to look at Gao Xue Ting as he asked, “Senior Sister Gao, what did that Wu Chang mean when he said that Senior Brother Xia is afraid of losing to him again? Does this Martial Gathering have a competition between Emperors?”

Gao Xue Ting replied, “No, not during the Martial Gathering, but there will be an exchange of pointers after the Martial Gathering; however, it is entirely voluntary. It doesn’t have any prizes either. It’s purely for improving relations between each other.”

Yang Kai grumbled in a non-committal manner and secretly decided that if Wu Chang came to provoke him again, he would definitely teach the latter a harsh lesson. [Who cares what kind of Special Constitution he has? He can’t be stronger than a Third-Order Emperor, right?]

Yang Kai was certain that he would have no problem dealing with a Third-Order Emperor Realm Master with his current strength, and if he used all his trump cards, a Third-Order Emperor Realm Master could only retreat before him.

[I wonder if Wu Chang will give me the opportunity to go all out.]

Lifting his wine glass to his lips, Yang Kai glanced sideways and saw Wu Chang heading in his direction. Wu Chang’s one blue and one red eye was rather strange. Yang Kai snickered with a scornful expression, which nearly made Wu Chang mad with rage.

Chapter 3243, This Person Cannot Remain

The banquet ended in the middle of the night and the people of Azure Sun Temple were led to their accommodation by a maidservant soon after, arriving on a mountain peak with rich World Energy and beautiful scenery, covered in soft moonlight that spilled across the ground and illuminated the land.

There was a palace on top of the peak where the people of the Azure Sun Temple were staying. The disciples had long arrived to rest and the maidservant respectfully took her leave after leading them here, while local staff led them to their respective guest rooms.

It didn’t take long before everyone was settled in, and after tidying up a little, Yang Kai’s brow furrowed slightly. Taking out a communication artifact and studying it for a bit he frowned slightly and opened his door to walk out. Turning a corner, he came to another room and knocked gently on the door.

“Come in.” Gao Xue Ting’s voice came from inside.

Yang Kai pushed the door open and entered the room only to see Wen Zi Shan, Luo Chen, Xiao Bai Yi, and Murong Xiao Xiao inside the room, so he couldn’t help but curiously ask, “What’s going on?”

Wen Zi Shan held up a jade slip and waved it slightly, “You have work to do.” Saying so, he threw the jade slip over.

Yang Kai reached out his hand to catch it. Closing the door behind him, he swept his Divine Sense over the jade slip and murmured, wondering, “What is this?”

The jade slip contained a series of name lists, and each name had a corresponding number associated with it. Reading this list Yang Kai felt utterly bewildered as he saw his name appear more than once.

Gao Xue Ting explained, "The reason we brought so many Elders here is not only to encourage the disciples to do their best in the competition but also to act as referees."

"Referees?" Yang Kai was stunned.

"That's right." She continued explaining, "The Martial Gathering is divided into three categories, namely the Dao Source Realm, Origin King Realm, and Origin Returning Realm. Putting aside the Origin King Realm and the Origin Returning Realm for the time being, the fights between the disciples in the Dao Source Realm should not be underestimated. An Emperor Realm Master is needed to act as a Referee. The first reason is to ensure that the competition is fair while the second reason is to ensure that there are no accidental deaths during the competition."

After listening to her explanation, Yang Kai understood the situation a little. The Martial Gathering was supposed to be a friendly competition, but many things could go wrong during a fight. The probability of unnecessary injury or even death occurring was very high, so a stronger Master was needed in order to prevent such occurrences from happening. However, only an Emperor Realm Master could stop or provide emergency assistance in the competition between cultivators in the Dao Source Realm; after all, it would look very bad for all involved if hundreds of people died in the Martial Gathering.

Upon learning this, Yang Kai studied the jade slip carefully again and then asked, "In other words, I am in charge of the Eighth Arena for a total of five days?"

Gao Xue Ting nodded, "Yes. The Martial Gathering will be held for a month. Junior Brother Yang, you only need to be in charge of the Eighth Arena during the individual rankings. Don't forget the time slots. The rest will be taken care of by the others in turn."

Yang Kai nodded, indicating that he had memorized the information. Many of the Emperor Realm Masters in the Southern Territory were here this time around, and for that reason, he only needed to participate for five days rather than for thirty days all by himself.

Mulling over it, he asked, "Doesn't that give some people the opportunity to cheat for personal gain? If the disciples from my Sect are on the stage, I will inevitably be more biased towards them."

Wen Zi Shan chuckled, "Everybody has their pride, so even if they have this opportunity, nobody would be too obvious in their actions. They will try to ensure fairness as much as possible. Besides, there will be many others watching the arena aside from the Referees in charge, so I'm afraid it won't be that easy to cheat."

Gao Xue Ting added, "In any case, there is only one thing you need to keep in mind. There must be no deaths. Other than that, you can use your own judgement."

Yang Kai nodded, "I will do my best." He did not take this duty too seriously. Although he was being a Referee the first time in his life, protecting and preventing two Dao Source Realm Masters from killing each other was no big deal with his current strength.

Aside from Yang Kai, Xiao Bai Yi and Murong Xiao Xiao were also given the same task and they all had to act as Referees for approximately five days each. Wen Zi Shan talked about a few other things before everyone dispersed. Following that, Gao Xue Ting took out a communication artifact, summoned the disciples participating in the competition, and gave another round of explanation.

At the same time, in a secret room on another Spirit Peak, a burly man sat on the ground. His body was wrapped in black Qi that filled the entire room, constantly twisting and writhing like a snake. It was a terrifying sight.

A knock sounded on the door, and the burly man suddenly opened his eyes that were swirling with red and black light. There were no whites in his eyes whatsoever and a less courageous person would have been frightened to death by the sight.

As soon as he opened his eyes, the black Qi wandering aimlessly in the secret room swiftly retracted into his body as if it was being summoned by something. The red and black colours in his eyes gradually returned to their original colours, and the black Qi disappeared. He now looked no different from an ordinary Human.

“Come in!” An imposing voice rang out and the door was opened, after which an elderly man walked in.

The burly man looked up at the elderly man and asked, “Why is that boy here?”

The elderly man frowned and replied, “I was extremely surprised too. I have not heard from him for more than ten years and it was said he was no longer in the Southern Territory. I don’t know why he appeared here at this point in time.”

The burly man cursed, “Damn it, is this Wen Zi Shan doing? He couldn’t have called that boy over just for the Martial Gathering, right?”

“Maybe it’s all just a coincidence?”

The burly man coldly snorted, “Coincidence or not, this person cannot remain. He will become a huge obstacle to my plans.”

The elderly man frowned, “Sir, do you mean...”

“We need to prevent trouble before it happens. Think of a way to get rid of him.”

The elderly man was silent for a while before he frowned deeply, “He won’t be easy to dispatch.”

“If he were easy to remove, would I call you here? The Martial Gathering will last for a month, so find a safe way to do it within that time, and be sure to leave no traces.”

“Yes!” The elderly man bowed, and seeing as there were no other instructions, he took his leave. He came out of the secret room and let out a long sigh. It would not have mattered if it were just an ordinary Emperor Realm Master. If that was the case, all he needed to do was gather enough manpower and it would all work out somehow. However, that person had a particularly annoying ability, he was proficient in the Dao of Space. Even if he couldn’t win a fight, he was good at escaping, and if he were to escape and spread the news of their existence, their plans would be endangered.

[This is going to be difficult!] After mulling over it for a long time, the elderly man made up his mind. [It looks like I can only ask the people over there to take action. Besides, only those people can stealthily sneak up on him and strike a fatal blow.]

After making up his mind, he left in a hurry.

The sky was clear for tens of thousands of kilometres as though it was washed clean. Banners were being displayed and people were crowded around in a huge valley surrounded by mountains. This was the place where the Southern Territory Martial Gathering was being held. Tens of thousands of cultivators from across the entire Southern Territory had gathered in Orthodoxy Temple, and apart from this valley, there was no other place that could accommodate so many people participating in the competition together.

There were hundreds of arenas scattered around the inside of the valley like chess pieces, all of which were carefully crafted and protected by Spirit Arrays. There were enough to ensure several hundred pairs of cultivators could fight to their heart's content at the same time.

On the eastern side of the mountain, there was a row of stairs lined with newly built pavilions that were set up with tables. Sitting in this spot gave one a full view of everything in the mountain valley. The Emperor Realm Masters of each major Sect in the Southern Territory came here in twos and threes. They took their seats after some polite talk. Naturally, the people of the top three Sects sat at the top of the stands.

The Sect Masters of all three top forces made an appearance on the first day of the Martial Gathering, whether they wanted to or not. That was because people even more important than them would be arriving on the scene, and they could not afford to be impolite.

In the mountain valley, tens of thousands of cultivators who were about to participate in Martial Gathering held their breaths in silence as a tense atmosphere spread across the area. Many looked up at the mountainside with a look of reverence, secretly fantasizing about sitting there one day. The Martial Gathering was the best stage for them to achieve great success overnight. As long as their performance stood out in the Martial Gathering, those that already had good backgrounds would receive better resources for cultivation while those from humble backgrounds might obtain the chance to join a more powerful force.

Unfortunately, the Emperor Realm Masters in the stands seemed oblivious to this mood and continued to talk and laugh happily among themselves.

All of a sudden, a stream of light came from the distance and headed straight to the stands.

"They're here," Lei Gu smiled and got up first. Everybody else hurriedly stood up too. At first, some people secretly wondered who it was that dared to fly into Orthodoxy Temple so arrogantly; however, they could make a guess after seeing how Lei Gu was acting and did not dare to be disrespectful either.

The light landed in front of the crowd to reveal several figures. The leader looked magnificent and heroic. He was a Third-Order Emperor Realm Master with an imposing aura. The people behind him were well-groomed and had extraordinary temperaments, regardless of their cultivation. The people from Star Soul Palace had arrived. Moreover, their leader was none other than Xiao Yu Yang.

"Greetings, Brother Xiao." Lei Gu and the others bowed in unison.

Xiao Yu Yang smiled and responded politely, "Please rise, it was this Xiao who was tardy. I apologize for being late."

Every time the Southern Territory Martial Gathering was held, Star Soul Palace would surely send a representative as this was a huge event. As the patron saint of the Southern Territory, Star Soul Palace would definitely participate in it as the hegemon Sect. Be that as it may, they did not send their disciples to participate in the event but took on a supervisory role instead.

“Not at all, not at all, Brother Xiao is right on time.” Lei Gu chuckled. Although their cultivations were technically the same, Xiao Yu Yang came as a representative of Star Soul Palace, so how could he be disrespectful?

Lei Gu showed Xiao Yu Yang to his seat and made casual small talk along the way. Then, Xiao Yu Yang declared, “It’s almost time. Let’s begin.”

Nodding in response, Lei Gu signalled Feng Ming with a look. Feng Ming immediately stepped forward, took out a scroll, unfurled it with both hands, and read out loud from it, “Today, tens of thousands of young handsome men and women from the Southern Territory have gathered together for the Martial Gathering. Orthodoxy Temple is honoured beyond words. Led by Star Soul Palace, several rules for this competition have been drawn up and all participants are expected to abide by them. If these rules are violated, severe punishment will be given...”

His voice wasn’t loud, but it spread throughout the mountain valley under the use of his Emperor Qi and allowed everyone to hear clearly.

There were not many rules of course, as that would be meaningless, but some restrictions were still necessary. For instance, attacking a person who had already given up was not allowed; and the use of Spirit Pills during the competition was not allowed, especially those items that stimulated one’s potential to increase their strength temporarily. If the consumption of Spirit Pills was detected, not only would the participant be punished severely, but the Sect they belonged to would be in trouble too.

These rules were the same for each Martial Gathering so before coming here, the Elders of their respective Sects would have repeatedly told their disciples about them. As such, the tens of thousands of participants had already memorized these rules. Nevertheless, certain procedures were still necessary and had to be carried out.

For a time, Feng Ming’s voice was the only sound echoing in the mountain valley. Once all the rules were read out, the rewards would be announced, which was the real highlight of the day. Most only joined the competition to fight for these benefits; thus, the tens of thousands of disciples in the mountain valley were all looking forward to this announcement.

Chapter 3244, Yu Zhuo

The rewards for every Martial Gathering were extremely generous; after all, if the rewards were not good enough, then they would not motivate the people to try their hardest in the competition. Under normal circumstances, the rewards were jointly prepared by the top three Sects while Star Soul Palace

would also contribute. The prizes usually included pills, Secret Arts, and Secret Techniques that were highly coveted.

What excited the tens of thousands of participating cultivators further was that the first place in the individual and group rankings would not only receive generous rewards, but they would also obtain the rights to enter the Restricted Areas of the top three Sects to cultivate for a time limit of one month each.

Each of the top three Sects in the Southern Territory had their own special cultivation zones. Azure Sun Temple had the Divine Ascension Mirror World, Heavenly Martial Holy Land had the Martial Intent Temple, and Orthodoxy Temple had the Outer Astral Wind, each with its own advantages. There was no need to explain much about the Divine Ascension Mirror World as it was naturally a place for cultivating the Soul. On the other hand, the Martial Intent Temple was a Restricted Area to perceive various Daos while the Outer Astral Wind of Orthodoxy Temple was an excellent place for Body Tempering.

These areas of the three top forces covered the cultivation necessities of a cultivator. If one could visit each of these three places then their future would be boundless. Who wouldn't be moved by rewards like these? Things like cultivation resources were auxiliaries, while one's own strength was their foundation. In addition, the first-place winners would also have the right to choose to join any one of the top three Sects and be nurtured as one of the Core Disciples within that Sect.

As soon as the rewards were announced, all the cultivators in the mountain valley became short of breath and beside themselves with excitement.

Having said that, the first-place winners of the past Martial Gatherings had always belonged to the three top forces. Moreover, they were all Core Disciples of their respective Sects, so while these rewards might be hugely attractive to 99% of the participants, to the disciples of the three top forces, they were nothing more than an extra flower in a bouquet.

The reason for putting out such a reward was so that the cultivators, other than ones in the three top forces, would be motivated to go all out and strive to obtain the best ranking they could get. In all the years that the Martial Gathering was held, upsets had certainly been seen. Moreover, they had happened more than once. Those existences that had originally been unknown had emerged victorious in the Martial Gathering and were taken in by the three great forces as a result. In the end, they would eventually achieve extraordinary results.

The rewards for second place were slightly inferior in comparison. They could still choose to join any one of the three top forces as a Core Disciple; however, the reward of entering all three Restricted Areas was reduced down to only two. The rewards for third place dwindled once again as they could only choose to join any one of the three top forces and enter any one of their three secret areas.

Further down, the cultivators would only receive material rewards. They could no longer choose to join the top three Sects nor received the chance to cultivate in the Restricted Areas.

With the announcements finished, the tens of thousands of cultivators in the mountain valley rolled up their sleeves and secretly vowed to themselves to perform well in the competition; after all, this was their chance to achieve great things.

When Feng Ming finished reading out the rules and the rewards, he turned back to glance behind him. Xiao Yu Yang smiled at Feng Ming slightly, indicating that he had nothing to say. Only then did Feng Ming raise his hand and shout, "Let the competition begin!"

Guang...

The deafening sound of gongs and drums resounded throughout the valley from somewhere. Following that, figures flew out from halfway up the mountain. Each figure was a different colour stream of light, which made it look as though a meteor shower was falling out of the sky. One after another, they landed on the stages that were scattered across the mountain valley like chess pieces.

Yang Kai was among them. As a Referee, it was only natural that he was the first to appear on the stage. Speaking of which, it was quite funny that he was acting as a Referee for the first time in his life. Nevertheless, he was rather calm about it since he had the knowledge and life experience to adapt.

Standing on the Eighth Arena, he took out a jade slip and used his Divine Sense to check the contents. The jade slip contained a series of numbers, and each number represented a cultivator. The order of appearance and their respective opponents had been pre-arranged, so all he needed to do was call out the numbers of both parties, monitor the match, and make a fair ruling at the end. Lifting his gaze to look around, he loudly announced, "Round 1. No. 3018 against No. 15611!"

As soon as his voice sounded, a petite figure flew out from below the stage and landed firmly on the arena. That person bowed at him and greeted him crisply, "Greetings, Senior."

[I became their Senior just like that?] Yang Kai sniffed a little. [I seriously wonder whether I am older than this girl.]

However, with his current strength, not many people across the entire Star Boundary could still stand on equal footing with him, much less claim to be his Senior.

As such, Yang Kai nodded and smiled at that person, only then studying her carefully. It turned out to be a petite woman with two delicate ponytails at the back of her head. Her black hair swayed in the wind, and her modest dress set off her exquisite and curvy figure. She certainly did not look very old as the aura of youth had yet to fade from her face. Additionally, her cultivation was fairly good. She was in the Second-Order Dao Source Realm, but he could not tell which Sect she came from.

While Yang Kai was still studying her, another person appeared on the other side of the arena. It was a brave and heroic-looking young man dressed in black attire that flapped wildly in the wind. He had an assertive aura, and his eyes were filled with a fierce light, making him appear extremely dangerous.

[A Third-Order Dao Source Realm!] Yang Kai glanced at the man and secretly thought to himself. [This is going to be difficult for No. 3018.]

Not everyone was capable of fighting above their realm or killing opponents that were supposedly stronger than themselves like Yang Kai could. Most of the time, the difference of one Minor Realm was enough to create a huge disparity in strength. If not for that, why else would everybody do their best to cultivate in hopes of a breakthrough? It went without saying that these kinds of things could not be generalized of course and in a life-or-death situation, mental state, grasp of the situation in the battle,

and ability to adapt to changes were the keys to determining victory or defeat. That was why there were so many examples of the weak defeating the strong.

No. 3018 bowed upon seeing her opponent enter the stage and politely greeted, "Yu Zhuo of Luo Sha Sect!"

Regardless of how the battle progressed later, the necessary etiquette should still be maintained. Besides, the Referee was still watching from the side.

On the contrary, the young man in black attire did not seem to share the same sentiment. He simply lifted his hand, pointed at this Yu Zhuo from Luo Sha Sect, and expressionlessly demanded, "Scram. You are no match for me."

His tone was not arrogant but simply matter-of-fact. It sounded as though he was just stating the truth, and he was certainly qualified to speak in such a manner. His cultivation was higher than his opponent by a whole Minor Realm after all.

When Yu Zhuo heard those words, a flash of anger flitted across her face and she bit her red lips lightly and rebuked, "We haven't even fought yet! How can you be sure that I am no match for you!?"

The man in black attire replied, "Do not refuse a toast only to be forced to drink a forfeit."

Yu Zhuo was livid, but nevertheless, she abruptly took a deep breath and calmed the rage in her heart. Turning to look at Yang Kai, who was standing there calmly, she asked, "Senior, may we start?"

She was already standing here, so how could she be chased away with just a few words from her opponent? Even so, the other party's belittling attitude had truly incensed her. If not for her good upbringing, she might have already attacked without even caring to check with Yang Kai.

Yang Kai lowered his gaze and folded his arms in front of his chest in a calm and easy-going manner and nodded, "Of course."

The truth was that those two could have started fighting the moment both of them stepped onto the arena, but Yu Zhuo's respectful attitude had gained her some favorability.

As soon as the words left Yang Kai's mouth, the man in black attire lunged toward Yu Zhuo like a whirlwind. A sword as tall as a man appeared in his hands and flashed with lightning. He appeared in front of her in an instant and brought his sword slashing down on her head. There was no holding back just because she was a woman and from his posture, it seemed like he wouldn't be satisfied unless he cut her in half.

Yu Zhuo was shocked as she had not expected her opponent to attack without any warning. Moreover, his attack came so abruptly and there had been no prior indication at all. In a flurry, she hastily summoned a soft whip that she used to immediately protect her vitals.

A series of clashing sounds rang out and sparks flew everywhere. Two figures moved across the arena swiftly, with one falling back while the other pressed forward. The young man in black attire was pursuing his opponent closely and the power behind his sword was extremely heavy, each swing he made wide and sweeping. His posture was completely focused on attacking and he did not put any

effort into defending whatsoever. His attacks pushed Yu Zhuo so hard that she could barely keep up with them.

His cultivation was one Minor Realm higher than hers; furthermore, he had momentum on his side as he had launched the first attack, so it was only natural that he had the upper hand in the fight. Be that as it may, Yu Zhuo wasn't bad either. The soft whip in her hand was like an extension of her arm and despite losing the initiative in the fight, she had instantly defended herself against her opponent's sudden onslaught of attacks. Although she was a little out of breath and even showed some signs of being defeated, she displayed neither weakness nor vulnerability.

Yang Kai watched the scene before him with a slightly raised brow and began observing seriously. He had no choice but to be serious here as he was the Referee of the Eighth Arena, and it was his job to prevent unnecessary death or injury. In other words, he had to stop the fight as soon as he noticed that one side's defeat was clear and before unnecessary harm was done. It was only the first battle on the first day of the Martial Gathering, so he didn't want anything to go wrong either.

If he had to be honest with himself, he was biased towards Yu Zhuo from a personal standpoint. It had nothing to do with gender, it was just that Yu Zhuo had been polite to him while on the contrary, that man in black attire's arrogant attitude annoyed him. [I am the Referee of the Eighth Arena. It's bad enough that you didn't greet me as 'Senior'. But, what do you mean by not even looking my way even when you come up to the stage?]

However, Referees could not be partial to any one party, so Yang Kai could only watch the situation and sigh inwardly at the same time. [This Yu Zhuo is at a great disadvantage. Not only is her cultivation lower than her opponent's, but she also lost the initiative in the fight. If nothing changes, the victor will be decided soon.]

The two continued their high-speed chase in the arena and reached the edge of the ring in the blink of an eye.

Yu Zhuo had been forced to retreat all the way here, so she didn't have the time to pay attention to the situation at her feet at all. By the time she lost her footing and noticed that something was wrong, it was too late. She would lose the moment she fell out of the ring whether she could still fight or not. The sudden change made her panic and she let out a cry of surprise as her body fell backwards unstably.

Conversely, this was exactly what the young man in black had been waiting for. He had been in pursuit all this time, so he saw from a different perspective and noticed something Yu Zhuo couldn't; thus, he smiled savagely as he shouted, "Fall!"

While speaking, he slashed his sword down at her body.

Yang Kai nearly couldn't stop himself from making a move, but at that critical moment, Yu Zhuo's body bent at an incredible angle. She had one foot holding onto the edge of the arena as her body bent backwards just enough to avoid the blow from the man in black. Immediately following that, she flicked her soft whip and wrapped it around her opponent's sword and used it as leverage to twist herself up and landed softly behind him.

Their positions were reversed in an instant.

Many cultivators watching from the audience were stunned while a certain group of cultivators cheered wildly. They were, without a doubt, Yu Zhuo's fellow Sect members that were cheering for her.

Even Yang Kai was stunned as he had not expected Yu Zhuo to find a way out of that desperate situation under those circumstances. He could tell that she had not planned for this to happen as her reactions and the panic on her face when she lost her footing just now had not been faked. She simply overcame the crisis and prevented herself from falling out of the ring entirely by relying on her ability to adapt and react to the situation.

Chapter 3245, Admitting Defeat

Yu Zhuo didn't stop to take a breather even after escaping her crisis. She flicked the soft whip in her hand, sending it striking like a snake out of its pit. The soft whip struck out at the man in black's back like a gale of wind that could not be stopped.

The man in black slashed backwards as he spun around blindly, having already noticed that things were dire when he lost his target.

Guang...

A clashing sound rang out as the man swayed for a moment before catching his balance. On the contrary, Yu Zhuo was sent flying by a powerful shockwave from his counterattack, coughing up a mouthful of blood mid-air before landing on the ground unsteadily.

Yang Kai secretly thought to himself. [What a pity. If Yu Zhuo had the same cultivation as her opponent, she would have won with that attack just now.]

Unfortunately, she was one Minor Realm weaker than her opponent, so with her hasty attack, she failed to make use of this great opportunity. Instead, she even suffered some minor injuries from being countered by her opponent.

In the middle of all that tension, the two of them had narrowly escaped defeat. It was truly a dazzling and mind-blowing fight.

Yang Kai couldn't help but cheer up somewhat. He couldn't believe that he managed to encounter these two people in the very first round on the very first day of the competition. He could tell that both of them, be it Yu Zhuo or the man in black, were extremely impressive in terms of strength in the Dao Source Realm. People like them would have been prioritized and nurtured carefully even within the top three Sects.

Yang Kai suddenly discovered that he had underestimated all the smaller Sects. There was a reason why a Sect could establish its heritage for thousands of years. It wasn't just the top Sects that could produce outstanding talents.

He suddenly thought of Luo Yuan from Eight Paths Sect. Back then, the Four Seasons Realm had raised the reputation of two people. One had been Yang Kai as he had successfully refined a batch of Extraordinary Treasure Pills, which were known as a Heaven-defying item, with only a Dao Source Realm cultivation. With such an achievement, it would have been hard not to take notice of him. On the other hand, Luo Yuan from Eight Paths Sect was the other rising star.

Eight Paths Sect was a small Sect in the Southern Territory, one that couldn't even compare to Blue Feather Sect at the time. However, Luo Yuan, who originated from Eight Paths Sect, was a fearless rising star. He was not even afraid of Wu Chang and fought against him in an almost even manner. His strength was evident.

Speaking of Luo Yuan, Yang Kai suddenly recalled seeing somebody who slightly resembled Luo Yuan yesterday. Unfortunately, they had been too far apart and he had not paid much attention, so he couldn't be sure if it truly was Luo Yuan. [It might actually have been that guy. Eight Paths Sect is also from the Southern Territory after all so it doesn't make sense for them not to participate in the Martial Gathering.]

While Yang Kai was caught up in his thoughts, Yu Zhuo and the man in black began exchanging blows again. Their figures clashed in the arena as sword met whip, releasing loud clanking noises.

One was aggressive while the other was flexible, but they were fighting on equal terms. Both parties were unable to determine a winner. It was not a one-sided situation. Thus, the unusual situation attracted many other cultivators to come and watch this fight. It didn't take long before the Eighth Arena was surrounded by spectators. They all had solemn expressions as they watched the fight in the arena, secretly analysing how they could win if they encountered either of these two as opponents.

Yang Kai was watching with great enthusiasm too, and if it wasn't for High Heaven Palace no longer accepting new disciples, he would have asked Hua Qing Si to hold a similar competition. A competition like this might be tedious to organize and run, but it was indeed the best way to select outstanding talents. Unfortunately, it could not guarantee the personality and character of these talents.

A quarter-hour later, the man in black became more and more hostile. It was no surprise. His opponent's cultivation was lower than his, and he believed that he should have been able to finish her off easily. Conversely, the woman who was running around endlessly turned out to be the most difficult opponent he had ever faced. He couldn't help feeling frustrated, and his attacks became fiercer as a result.

Yu Zhuo was constantly meeting his attacks by relying on her rapid reaction and flexible Movement Skills. However, the gap in their cultivation was her biggest shortcoming. Fighting up until now had not been easy, and while winning the fight would not be impossible, it was certainly a difficult prospect. With her hair a mess and many wounds on her body, she appeared quite dishevelled and her breathing was ragged as her chest heaved heavily. Fine beads of sweat were sliding down her face, but nevertheless, she gritted her teeth and refused to admit defeat.

Even so, Yang Kai could see that Yu Zhuo's hand holding the long whip was trembling. She had been constantly clashing with her opponent's sword, so how could she bear the violent force transmitted through the whip to her arm for so long?

The man in black was aware of this too and was utilising his strong point to attack her weakness without giving her any space to catch her breath. Instead, he kept forcing her to keep up with him.

Finally, the sound of something breaking rang out when that sword came into contact with the soft whip again. That soft whip was cut into two by the sword, and the front end flew out.

The man in black was overjoyed by the situation. He had enough of his opponent's whip and now that he had destroyed this artifact, his opponent would have no power to fight back. He looked up with a cold and stern gaze to see a flash of panic flitting across Yu Zhuo's face as she hurriedly tried to back away. But, how could he allow her to retreat so easily?

"Die!" He roared as his sword came slashing down and a triumphant expression appeared on his face, as though victory was already in his grasp.

[I won! It sure wasn't eas...!] Before he could finish his thought though, he suddenly saw the panic on her face disappearing and a hint of cunning flashed across her eyes as she executed some kind of Secret Technique. It was accompanied by the sound of something slicing through the air behind him,

[This is bad!] His expression changed drastically. He might not know what trick she was trying to pull, but it was clear he had fallen into her trap. Unfortunately for him, it was too late to pull back at this point so a vicious glint flashed across his eyes as he pushed his sword even harder to bring it down faster than before.

Yu Zhuo hurriedly guarded herself with the half of her whip that remained in her hands, but the other party's blow at full strength was too great and she could not stop his attack. Consequently, the sword slashed down from her shoulder all the way to her abdomen. It almost cut her into two. Blood spurted out of her mouth when the powerful force hit her like a tidal wave and she flew backwards like a sack. While she was flying through the air though, the Secret Technique she cast just before took effect.

The man in black felt something tightening around his body and finally knew what she had been planning all along. The half of the soft whip that had flown away after being cut by him had flown back while he was not paying attention and wrapped itself around him while he was caught off guard. Then, an inexplicable force emerged from the soft whip and suppressed his cultivation, making him unable to circulate his Source Qi smoothly.

Raising his head, a look of despair appeared on his face as he saw Yu Zhuo hurl the half of her soft whip in her hands at him. The whip segment was flying straight towards his forehead and he knew that if this attack landed, he would undoubtedly die in his current suppressed state.

"I surrender!" He hurriedly yelled.

The whip froze mid-motion, just a finger's length from his forehead. Just a little bit more and it would have bored a hole through his head. Even the energy from the tip of this whip was pressing against his forehead painfully like an awl, frightening him so badly that he broke out in a cold sweat.

The reason the whip had stopped in front of the man in black was not Yu Zhuo's doing, of course, but rather it was because Yang Kai had made a move. When that man in black surrendered, Yang Kai reached out and grabbed at something in the air, catching the soft whip mid-flight and protecting that

young man from death. He simultaneously lifted his other hand and caught Yu Zhuo's body that had been thrown backwards by freezing her in mid-air.

The man in black glanced in Yu Zhuo's direction in shock, then his expression turned incredibly ugly. That was because her body was floating right at the edge of the arena. It was only a little bit more before she left the range of the arena. [Damn it! I almost had it! If I was slightly slower in admitting defeat, she would definitely have lost this match!]

However, it was a matter of life and death so how could he dare to hesitate? It was useless to be upset now.

Yang Kai released his grip, and the soft whip that had stopped in front of the man in black's forehead fell to the ground. Meanwhile, Yang Kai slightly retracted his other hand and Yu Zhuo, who was lifted by an invisible force before she slowly floated over to Yang Kai and landed in front of him. Lowering his gaze, he studied this girl at his feet and frowned.

The first match was rather brutal. The man in black might not have suffered heavy injuries, but he had narrowly escaped death. After suffering a loss, he would never underestimate a person with weaker cultivation than himself ever again. On the other hand, Yu Zhuo was in a far worse condition. She had faced a huge disadvantage in this confrontation and at this moment, both her arms were shaking uncontrollably. There was also a bloody wound stretching from her shoulder to her waist. Moreover, blood was spurting out of the wound without stopping. It looked extremely terrible. This was a serious injury that while not life-threatening, would definitely preclude her from competing in the next battle if not treated properly.

Yang Kai sighed softly and crouched down, pressed one hand on Yu Zhuo's shoulder, and used his Emperor Qi to stabilize her injury before he subtly took out a healing pill and stuffed it into her mouth.

Yu Zhuo's gaze was a little dazed as it was obvious that she had been beaten up pretty badly and had yet to recover from the impact. When she saw that Yang Kai was healing her, she couldn't help looking a little apologetic. Nevertheless, she asked in a trembling voice, "Did I... win?"

Yang Kai looked at her expressionlessly and announced in a loud voice, "The winner, No. 3018!"

Upon hearing those words, her eyes sparkled with a look of surprise and she laughed happily. She had yet to exit the arena when that man in black had surrendered, so she had won. However, she soon couldn't bring herself to laugh anymore as there was a debilitating pain radiating from her wound. Bracing herself mentally, she lifted her head to examine her condition and immediately blushed beet red.

Her clothes where the man in black had slashed her were torn open and exposed her delicate belly as a result. The people in the audience might not be able to see anything due to the angle, but the Referee was crouching down right in front of her could, so it was impossible for him to not see her exposed skin. Yu Zhuo instantly had the urge to pass out from shame.

Yang Kai had not noticed this and only sensed that this girl was too stiff. When he noticed something strange about her complexion though and he followed her gaze, his expression twitched slightly in response before he took out a set of clothing from his Space Ring and covered her wound with it. After that, he lifted his gaze, turned to the audience, and shouted, "Who here is from her Sect?"

Two beautiful women immediately rushed forward and cupped their fists, "Senior."

"Bring her away for treatment," He waved his hand dismissively.

The two women thanked him, stored Yu Zhuo's artifact away, supported her on both sides, and helped her off the stage.

There was silence in the audience. When Yu Zhuo walked off, everybody involuntarily moved to the side and opened a path for her, their expressions full of respect.

On the stage, the defeated man in black stood there for a while before he shook his head silently and bowed to Yang Kai before flying off the stage. He had lost in the first match, but it was not without gain for him. He still had more chances to return, so he was not too worried.

As for Yang Kai, he stood on the stage and fulfilled his job as Referee. With a meticulous expression, he took out a jade slip and shouted, "No. 6051 against No. 8036."

Chapter 3246, Failing Miserably at an Easy Task

Perhaps it was because the match between Yu Zhuo and that young man in black had started off so well that the next batch of cultivators who entered the arena went all out to showcase their abilities. All sorts of profound methods were used and the fights were extremely exciting, even drawing a nod from Yang Kai in acknowledgement. Of course, some fights were boring and lacklustre where nothing really stood out about them. Yang Kai would have dozed off if not for his job as the Referee.

A day passed just like that, and when evening rolled around, the sounds of fighting coming from all the arenas in the mountain valley stopped. Tens of thousands of cultivators rested at different spots, waiting for the fights to continue tomorrow.

Yang Kai returned to the Spirit Peak that was Azure Sun Temple's temporary living quarters. The entire day had worn him out. In reality, he only stood in the arena and watched the fights, rarely having to take action, but maintaining focus for the whole day was still mentally taxing.

He had just rested for an hour when Gao Xue Ting sent a message and told him to follow her somewhere. With no other choice, he pushed open the door and stepped out. Several Elders of Azure Sun Temple were standing outside the palace, and as soon as Yang Kai appeared, Wen Zi Shan grinned, "Let's go."

"Go? Where?" Yang Kai couldn't help feeling suspicious.

"You'll know when you get there." Wen Zi Shan had an enigmatic expression on his face as he led everybody to fly in a certain direction.

After asking Gao Xue Ting during the journey, Yang Kai learned that they were going to participate in an exchange meeting.

The Southern Territory Martial Gathering was a grand event where tens of thousands of elite disciples and hundreds of Emperor Realm Masters gathered together, making it a rare opportunity.

During the day, the Emperor Realm Masters were responsible for being Referees and maintaining order around the Martial Gathering. They were unable to extract themselves from their duties; therefore, they would only get together at night to communicate with each other. That was the standard practice at every Martial Gathering.

With so many Emperor Realm Masters present, every one of them would have something valuable in their possession. These items might not be cost-effective to sell, but they could be exchanged with others for the treasures they needed. Needless to say, Orthodoxy Temple, as the host of the Martial Gathering, would collect many treasures especially to get the ball rolling during the exchange meeting.

The exchange meeting was also not just a one-time thing and would be held on the first night, then every five days going forward. Hence, a total of six meetings would be held to ensure that all the Emperor Realm Masters present would have a chance to obtain things they wanted.

Upon hearing about the exchange meeting, Yang Kai became a bit more interested. When they arrived at the meeting place, he saw hundreds of Emperor Realm Masters gathered inside a hall. Although there were many people inside, it was not noisy as only surging waves of Spiritual Energy, indicating that these people were silently communicating with each other via Divine Sense, could be felt.

Once the people from Orthodoxy Temple arrived, they gave a simple opening speech and the exchange meeting officially started. As the host of the Martial Gathering, Orthodoxy Temple took the lead in bringing out several valuable treasures to get everyone excited. Following that, a constant stream of people came up on stage to exchange the things they didn't want with others for things they did.

The exchange meeting was just a platform. As for how the exchanges went down so that both parties were not at a loss would require both sides to discuss the details carefully in private.

For the time being, the people from Azure Sun Temple were not making any moves. Yang Kai did not know what the others were thinking, but in his case, it was just that he had not seen anything that he was interested in. His current experience and knowledge were no longer comparable to the past. Ordinary treasures hardly tempted him anymore so he mainly came here just to join in on the fun.

On the contrary, Xiao Bai Yi and Murong Xiao Xiao seemed to be fascinated by many things; however, they only became Emperor Realm Masters not long ago so their assets were not abundant. They had nothing to bring out that could be exchanged for these treasures, so they could only sigh at their own helplessness.

Just after the first half of the night, the exchange meeting ended and everybody dispersed back to their own quarters. It wasn't until the next day when the Martial Gathering started again that the mountain valley which had been quiet for a night became lively again.

Yang Kai did not join in on the fun again and simply sat inside his guest room meditating and resting. There was no need for him to act as a Referee today, so he had some free time on his hands. Seeing as he had nothing better to do, he decided to enter the Small Sealed World and check out the situation inside. He had been very busy recently and failed to pay much attention to the situation of the Small

Sealed World as a result; hence, it was only natural that he wanted to take a look now that he had some free time.

As soon as he entered the Small Sealed World, he felt something in the world similar to an invisible Will observing him for a moment. It felt as though a sleeping Dragon had opened its eyes and glanced at him before closing its eyes again. Knowing that it was Gun-Gun, he wasn't bothered by it.

While he was in the Star Field, Yang Kai had used the Small Sealed World as a medium to display the Heaven Devouring Battle Law to devour a number of Cultivation Stars. His actions inadvertently gave birth to a sentient Will in the Small Sealed World, which was Gun-Gun. It could be said to be a significant harvest. It was just that Gun-Gun did not have much self-awareness. Its existence itself was very peculiar and, even now, Yang Kai did not know how it came to be. Even if he was given another chance to repeat his actions, he wasn't sure if he could produce a second Gun-Gun.

At present, the Small Sealed World was vast and its vitality was flourishing. Gun-Gun had devoured several Cultivation Stars in Grand Desolation Star Field, and not only did it merge the territories of those Cultivation Stars with its own, but it also brought all the creatures that were living on those Cultivation Stars into the Small Sealed World. They were now living inside this place, introducing a cycle of life and death, as well as creation and destruction, which allowed the world to take its first step in acquiring a cycle of reincarnation.

It was hard to explain in words; however, Yang Kai could sense that the current Small Sealed World was different from how it had been before. It felt as though this was now a real world. With just a thought, he felt an invisible and magnificent power pouring into his body, giving him a sense that he was the world itself.

[World Force!] Only by comprehending World Force could a person qualify to become a Great Emperor.

Yang Kai was pleasantly surprised by this power that he could distinctly feel now. Although he could control the Small Sealed World in the past, he never felt the World Force as clearly as he did now. It would seem that Gun-Gun's actions of devouring those few Cultivation Stars and introducing countless living creatures had brought about various changes to the Small Sealed World.

Yang Kai was only a Second-Order Emperor right now, but he wasn't going to stop at the Emperor Realm. He was destined to climb higher, even if his future was full of thorns.

Taking a deep breath and closing his eyes, Yang Kai released his Divine Sense into the surroundings and concentrated on obtaining enlightenment. It was a wondrous feeling that made his whole body feel warm and indescribably comfortable. It was as though his entire being had melted and integrated into the world. At the same time, it felt like he was lying in his mother's arms. Without any interference from the outside world, he allowed his body and mind to drift endlessly.

There was no need to deliberately try to feel anything as the world itself had turned into a warm bed that tempted a person to fall asleep in it and never wake up again just so that they could remain in this intoxicating state forever. Invisible and intangible power converged from all directions, surrounding Yang Kai in layers like a silkworm's cocoon.

The entire world was silent as Yang Kai closed his eyes to maintain this amazing state. All of a sudden, a coolness suddenly entered his mind and all of the comfortable warmth disappeared without warning. An

indescribable sense of crisis washed over him, causing him to open his eyes abruptly. His vision blurred and all he could sense was that the Divine Sense he had released into his surroundings was showing signs of fully merging with the world. This horrified him so much that his expression changed greatly and he pushed his Spiritual Energy hard to force himself awake.

His Divine Sense that had been spreading outward like a tide rushed back into him all at once with a loud explosive sound. Both his ears went deaf and his vision went dark. Spitting out a mouthful of fresh blood, Yang Kai stiffly collapsed to the ground and he did not know how long passed before his dazed eyes gradually focused again. An unimaginable pain came from all over his body as though he had been stabbed thousands of times over. In particular, his head felt like it was being torn apart. His fingers twitched slightly as his consciousness slowly came back and it was only with great difficulty that he finally managed to sit up cross-legged and meditated to adjust his breathing.

At this very moment, his entire body was covered in sweat as though he had just been fished out of the sea, and his expression was filled with a lingering sense of fear. Yang Kai did not know exactly what had happened just now as he simply wanted to use the Small Sealed World to comprehend World Force, but that act alone had caused his Soul to show signs of disintegration instead. If it wasn't for the Soul Warming Lotus coming into play at the critical moment, it would have ended badly for him.

[What happened!?! It was just a small insight, yet I nearly failed at such an easy task.] Yang Kai didn't know whether to laugh or cry; nevertheless, he had a vague feeling that the so-called World Force was not something he could handle with his current strength. It was precisely because he was unprepared yet still touched on the existence of World Force that he could not withstand it.

The Emperor Qi in his body was rather chaotic and he wanted to investigate the situation but found that he could not gather his Spiritual Energy; thus, he had no choice but to give up for now.

After a long rest, Yang Kai slowly regained his strength. His thoughts flashed, and he instantly appeared in the medicine garden. The entire Small Sealed World had undergone tremendous changes, yet the medicine garden had not changed at all. This was the core area of the Small Sealed World and also a Forbidden Zone.

Yang Kai had long concealed the medicine garden through various means, obscuring it from the outside world. It was impossible for anyone to even see what was going on inside. Even an Emperor Realm Master would not be able to intrude on the area without his permission.

Upon entering the medicine garden, however, Yang Kai discovered that there were many people gathered around this area. Those people were all Origin Kings and were clearly cultivators from the various Cultivation Stars that Gun-Gun had devoured. They probably discovered the strangeness of the medicine garden and were trying to get a glimpse of what was inside. Unfortunately, they were helpless due to their lack of strength. None of them could enter, so they gathered in twos and threes to discuss ways to enter the medicine garden.

That scene amused Yang Kai as he never imagined that his medicine garden would be so attractive to these people. He had placed billions upon billions of living creatures in the Small Sealed World for two reasons. One, Gun-Gun had not been picky about what it took in when it devoured those Cultivation Stars, swallowing people along with rocks and trees equally. Although Yang Kai had the means to eliminate them all, it would be very time consuming; thus, he decided to leave them be. The second

reason was that he wanted to see what kind of changes the Small Sealed World would experience after billions of these living creatures moved in.

Reality had proven that the Small Sealed World did undergo various changes. If the previous Small Sealed World could be described as just an empty shell, then the current Small Sealed World had been significantly enriched. It was as though a walking corpse had gained vitality. The Small Sealed World had successfully become a complete world which was clear from just the changes in its World Force.

Be that as it may, Yang Kai would not allow these cultivators to have any ideas about his medicine garden so he lifted his hand gently and an invisible force spread to the surroundings. In the next instant, the many cultivators gathered around the medicine garden looked horrified as they were pushed backwards by something beyond their control. It was almost as if a large, invisible hand was dragging them backwards. It didn't matter whether they were a Second-Order Origin King or a Third-Order Origin King, no one was capable of resisting this force, causing all of them to acutely feel their own insignificance.

Chapter 3247, Changes in the Medicine Garden

"If anyone dares to approach this place again, they will be killed without mercy!" A majestic voice resounded throughout the world like rumbling thunder at that moment. The expressions of all the cultivators standing firm just now changed drastically as they could tell that the voice belonged to the so-called 'Master of the World'. How could they dare to remain in place? Thus, they quickly fled.

When two small, delicate beings noticed the situation on this side, they flew over from the medicine garden like dancing butterflies, arrived before Yang Kai, and bowed, "Sir."

They were none other than Mu Zhu and Mu Lu, whom Yang Kai had brought over from the Ancient Wild Lands.

Mu Zhu gave Yang Kai a once-over and stretched out her hands to cover her red lips, "Sir, are you hurt?" Yang Kai was in a miserable state, so it was hard not to notice how bad he looked.

Yang Kai waved at them weakly and continued to adjust his breathing.

The two Wood Spirits glanced at each other and nodded at the same time. They suddenly shifted so that one stood in the air in front of him while the other flew to stand behind him. They simultaneously formed a set of seals with their hands to activate some kind of Secret Technique. An emerald curtain of light appeared out of nowhere and enveloped Yang Kai next. Wisps of light that resembled fireflies flew out of the emerald curtain and filled his surroundings. Then, these bits of light entered his body with every breath he took.

Yang Kai was aware of their movements but showed no intention of stopping them. He had long heard that the Wood Spirit Clan was exceptional at healing injuries, so how could he not understand what they were trying to do at this moment? As he breathed in the green light, he felt the pain in his body fading

away and being replaced by a feeling of comfort. His body gradually restored its strength, and even his Soul quickly recovered.

Investigating his condition, Yang Kai was a little surprised to find that his body was filled with emerald light now. Moreover, that light was brimming with vitality as it repaired his damaged body. The emerald light was obviously the doing of the two Wood Spirits.

Cracking his eyes open slightly, Yang Kai peeked at his surroundings. The small figure floating in front of him had a solemn expression on her face while sweat slowly slid down the tip of her nose. It would seem that providing this kind of treatment was a burden on them too. Yang Kai honestly could not tell these two Wood Spirits apart, but based on their demeanours, the one in front of him was probably Mu Zhu because Mu Lu was shy and became embarrassed easily.

Seeming to sense his peeping gaze, Mu Zhu smiled at him and he calmly closed his eyes again.

With these two Wood Spirits assisting him in healing his injuries, Yang Kai's entire body relaxed.

The entire process took no more than an hour, and by the time he opened his eyes again, he was fully recovered. Mu Zhu and Mu Lu seemed aware of the changes too and stopped in unison, causing the emerald curtain of light enveloping him to disappear without a trace. Even the emerald wisps of light faded away.

"Thank you." Yang Kai said.

Mu Zhu pursed her lips, "You are being too polite, Sir."

Yang Kai stood up, swept his Divine Sense over the medicine garden, and couldn't help raising his brow. He had planted all sorts of spirit flowers, spirit medicines, and exotic herbs in this medicine garden over the years, but he had never taken care of them properly before. That was because the Immortal Tree was planted here. The Immortal Tree had limitless vitality, so combined with the nutrient-rich soil and the many Earth Vein Crystals in the medicine garden, nothing would wilt even if he just randomly planted anything he wanted here. But, looking at it now, the huge medicine garden had been tidied up and organized. The spirit grasses and exotic herbs were neatly arranged at different plots with some of the shorter plants having already born fruit. There were blue fruits, green fruits, and red fruits all over the place, making it look very pleasing to look at.

Yang Kai was certain that everything was thanks to the work of the two Wood Spirits because he had only planted everything at random before. There had never been such careful planning and structuring before. He also saw many plants that he had never seen before that seemed like they had just sprouted not too long ago.

The Immortal Tree that was only as tall as a person and the Firmament Tree were particularly conspicuous. They were located at the centre of the medicine garden and as he looked over at the Immortal Tree, Yang Kai saw that two of its leaves were rolled up like tiny beds. Then, he looked at the Firmament Tree and saw a similar scenario. He chuckled, "Do you usually sleep on those leaves?"

Mu Zhu and Mu Lu glanced at each other briefly before the former asked, "Is that bad? If it's no good, we..."

Yang Kai waved his hand casually, "You are the experts here. You can do whatever you want."

“Many thanks, Sir!”

Yang Kai simply smiled, “What are you thanking me for? I should be thanking you instead.”

The Wood Spirit Clan specialized in taking care of plants since ancient times. If one had a Wood Spirit in their medicine garden, the output of the medicine garden would increase by at least 30%. He had not expected Mu Na to force two of her clansmen onto him, but that showed just how attractive rare plants were to the Wood Spirit Clan.

In the beginning, Mu Zhu and Mu Lu had not been willing to separate from their clansmen; however, they understood why their Matriarch had assigned them this duty after they arrived in this medicine garden. The unparalleled Immortal Tree that only existed in legends and the incomparably mysterious Firmament Tree were both existences that could only be read about in ancient books. These two had never expected to find them both here in this small medicine garden.

The two Wood Spirits were stunned the moment they entered the medicine garden the other day and it wasn't until then that they understood the Matriarch's intent. Only the Wood Spirit Clan was capable of caring for these two precious treasures properly. Besides, Mu Zhu and Mu Lu would also receive huge returns by taking care of them. That was related to the special cultivation method of the Wood Spirit Clan, which was not known to outsiders.

Mu Zhu bit her red lip lightly and nervously reported, “Sir, we also planted some things here without your permission.”

“I noticed,” He had long discovered that there were many seedlings that had just sprouted in this medicine garden, and although he did not know what they were, he was certain that they were rare spirit medicines since the two Wood Spirits were the ones to plant them. Of course, he was not going to stop Mu Zhu and Mu Lu from planting these things if they wanted to; after all, he would be the one to profit from this when the plants matured.

Upon seeing that Yang Kai had no objections, Mu Zhu couldn't help feeling relieved. Every Wood Spirit collected a lot of rare seeds so what they had planted in this medicine garden were the seeds she and Mu Lu had collected. If Yang Kai had objected to their actions, they would have been very reluctant to get rid of those plants. Fortunately, Yang Kai seemed to have no intentions of doing so.

“You can plant whatever you want. You don't need to inform me. I have handed the care of the medicine garden to you, so you can call the shots here.”

“Many thanks, Sir!” Mu Zhu broke out into a smile. Then, she hesitated as though she had something to say.

“If you have something to ask, you can go ahead and say it. No need to hesitate.”

Mu Zhu glanced at Mu Lu, then she nudged at the latter. Mu Lu blushed and shyly said, “Sir, can you expand the medicine garden? Right now, the place is a little... small.”

The medicine garden was of course not small. Many of the herbs he had collected over the years were all planted here, so how could it be small? Nevertheless, it was small to a Wood Spirit. A medicine garden of this size could easily be handled by Mu Lu or Mu Zhu alone; therefore, they felt as though there was not enough for them to do.

“Of course I can expand it. How much do you want me to expand it by?” He looked at Mu Lu with a smile.

Mu Lu considered it for a moment and said, “About double the current size?”

“Good, is there anything else you want?”

She lowered her head shyly and whispered, “It would be nice if Sir could bring more seeds for us from the outside.”

“En, no problem,” Now that High Heaven Palace was a powerful force that literally dominated one of the four Territories, searching for some seeds was not a problem at all.

Those were all the requests the two Wood Spirits had at the moment, and they looked extremely satisfied after making them. Afterwards, the two enthusiastically invited Yang Kai to tour the newly organized medicine garden. It wasn't to take credit for their work, they simply wanted to show him the results of their labour.

Yang Kai did not refuse their offer. Hence, he took a stroll around the medicine garden with them. The two Wood Spirits accompanied him, one on each side. They would explain some things to him from time to time, which gave him a little more insight into such matters. He had to admit that the Wood Spirit Clan's understanding of plants was truly unparalleled. They were familiar with the characteristics, growth environment, maturity cycle, and harvesting methods of every spirit medicine here.

Half a day later, Yang Kai left after doubling the area of the medicine garden as Mu Zhu and Mu Lu had requested. The newly added parts of the medicine garden were completely empty, and he left it as it was for them to deal with themselves.

Over the next few days, Yang Kai spent most of his time meditating in his room. While he was meditating, he thought back on the insight he had gained back in the Small Sealed World. Although his attempt had failed miserably, it was not without gain. At the very least, he had a better understanding of World Force now.

A few more days later, he had to serve as a Referee for a day again. That night, Yang Kai called up Xiao Bai Yi and Murong Xiao Xiao to join the exchange meeting.

The last time he came, he had only been there to join in on the fun; however, he came prepared this time as he had something he wanted to exchange. It was rare for so many Emperor Realm Masters to gather together in one place; therefore, Yang Kai was confident he could obtain some strange and peculiar seeds from them to fulfil the requests of the two Wood Spirits.

As for the items he could use for the exchange, he had many Monster Beast Cores of various grades in his possession that would surely cause a stir if he brought them out. He also had all kinds of artifacts and elixirs. In the end, he chose to bring out some Emperor Grade Spirit Pills as well, and as expected, taking out two bottles of Emperor Grade Spirit Pills aroused the interest of many people. In the end, he managed to exchange for some seeds as he wished, and when he returned to his room, he handed them to Mu Zhu and Mu Lu.

The two Wood Spirits were naturally delighted to see that Yang Kai had obtained seeds so quickly. Although they had their own collections, the seeds they had on hand were not enough now that the

medicine garden had been expanded. The seeds Yang Kai obtained at the exchange came just in time to solve their urgent need, so they kept asking him to bring more and naturally he agreed to their requests.

However, there were probably no more seeds to be exchanged for at the exchange meeting. Even if these Masters had some seeds, they had simply been something they collected by chance. It was impossible for them to treat those seeds like treasures the way Wood Spirits did, so they wouldn't be bothered to bring many with them.

Therefore, Yang Kai could only wait for the Martial Gathering to finish and figure out a solution once he returned to the Northern Territory. He believed that collecting some seeds would be easy with the power of the entire Northern Territory.

On this day, Yang Kai was meditating in his room when he suddenly heard a knock on the door. Opening his eyes, he raised his hand and the door opened. A woman dressed as a maid stood outside and bowed politely, "Elder Yang, there is someone here requesting to meet with you."

The maid was a disciple Orthodoxy Temple had sent to serve them, but since Emperor Realm Masters did not need much in the way of service, most of the time this maid just helped run some minor errands for them.

"Who is it?" Yang Kai felt a little curious. [Since they are asking to meet me, that can only mean that they hold a status lower than mine. I can't think of anybody who would ask to meet me at this time though.]

"A young woman. She claims that she is here to thank you for saving her life. She seems to be called... Yu Zhuo."

Chapter 3248, Thank You Gift

Yang Kai was stunned. [If I remember correctly, she's the girl who fought in the first match in the Eighth Arena on the first day of the Martial Gathering.]

Smiling lightly, his first reaction was to refuse her. He was the Referee that day; hence, it was his job to help her when she was sent flying. He did not expect repayment for what he did. However, he thought about it again. [She is already here, so refusing will make me seem a little unapproachable and unkind.]

The words were on the tip of his tongue when he changed what he wanted to say, "Show her in."

"Yes!" The maid responded before retreating.

Outside the hall, Yu Zhuo stood there respectfully with both hands held flat in front of her. She was holding a set of clean clothing that she had washed previously with a nervous expression. She had no idea whether the person known as 'Elder Yang' would be willing to meet with her. After being rescued by Yang Kai the other day, she rested for a day and recovered fully. She initially wanted to thank him

immediately, but unfortunately, she did not know who he was or which Sect he belonged to. She had been asking around for the past few days and finally obtained some information today.

The Referee who rescued her and even fed her a Spirit Pill turned out to be the famous High-Rank Guest Elder of Azure Sun Temple. Yang Kai's name was familiar to most of the people in the Southern Territory. Refining the Extraordinary Treasure Pill in the Four Seasons Realm, being instated as a High-Rank Guest Elder of Azure Sun Temple, and clashing with the Elder of Star Soul Palace during the canonization ceremony. News about him had long since spread across the lands. It was just that he had been keeping a relatively low profile for the past ten years, so he had gradually been forgotten as a result.

Yu Zhuo never imagined that she would be so fortunate as to cross paths with such a person; thus, she couldn't help feeling surprised, and upon learning his identity, she immediately rushed over.

Many disciples of Azure Sun Temple came and went while she was waiting there, almost all of them glancing at her strangely. Some even came over to ask the reason she was here, but when they learnt that she was here to meet Yang Kai, they didn't bother her anymore.

Just as she was battling with her uncertainties, the maid came back. Yu Zhuo's expression froze as she stared at the maid nervously, but luckily, the maid smiled and said, "Elder Yang invites you inside."

"Many thanks," Yu Zhuo nodded politely.

The maid didn't say anything else, turning around to lead the way. Yu Zhuo composed herself and followed behind the maid, soon arriving in front of a certain room. The maid stretched out her hand to gesture for her to enter. Yu Zhuo breathed in lightly and stepped into the room.

There was only one person in the room, standing by the window with his hands behind his back, staring out at the distant scenery. He turned around when he heard a sound and when their eyes met, Yu Zhuo immediately recognized this man as the Referee of the Eighth Arena.

"Luo Sha Sect disciple Yu Zhuo, greets Senior!" She quickly stepped forward and gave a half bow.

Yang Kai looked her up and down, then he fixed his gaze on the clothes she was holding in her hands, immediately having an idea of what was going on. Smiling, he asked, "How can I help you?"

Yu Zhuo lifted her head and stared at him with big, bright eyes that held no fear while respectfully replying, "Senior rescued me the other day and even gave me a precious Spirit Pill to aid with my recovery. That's why I came here today to express my gratitude."

Yang Kai waved his hand dismissively, "I was just doing my job. You are being too polite."

To which Yu Zhuo smiled, "It might have been Senior's job to save me, but giving me a Spirit Pill was a kind deed. Although my consciousness was hazy at the time, it's not like I completely lost consciousness. If not for the Spirit Pill Senior gave me, I would not have been able to continue the competition the next day."

Those words were the truth. She might not know what grade Spirit Pill he had secretly given her was, but if not for that Spirit Pill, she would not have been able to go all out in the following competitions. She even suspected that it was an Emperor Grade Spirit Pill because only such a pill could have such powerful restorative effects, allowing her to recover completely by the very next day.

Yang Kai smiled slightly, neither affirming nor denying her words. It stood to reason that he, a Referee, shouldn't have given any Spirit Pills to a contestant; however, he had done it without anybody noticing so he believed that nobody else was the wiser and Yu Zhuo would not speak about it. Besides, it was taken after the fight, so even if someone did notice, who would really care?

Yu Zhuo took a step forward and held up the clothes she was holding in her hands next, "Senior, I washed your clothes and came to return them."

Yang Kai nodded, "You can put them down over there." He didn't reach out to take them either.

It was just an ordinary set of clothes, one he took out to cover her wounds without much thought and had no intention of taking them back. Nevertheless, her actions gave him a good impression of her.

Yu Zhuo obediently placed those clothes down to the side then, turning around, she studied the environment in the room curiously. She didn't show any timidity, rather, she seemed rather forward instead.

Seeing this, Yang Kai rubbed his nose and asked, "Is there anything else?"

The door was left open to avoid unsavoury rumours, but it wasn't good for a lone man and woman to be seen in the same room alone. Moreover, he was still a Referee, so how would it be perceived if he were seen privately contacting a contestant participating in the Martial Gathering? If word got out about this, he could not guarantee that they would not be slandered. Therefore, his words were politely asking his guests to leave.

Yu Zhuo was not a fool and she could perceive the meaning behind his words; thus, she hurriedly took out a beautiful shirt from her Space Ring and apologetically said, "Yu Zhuo will forever remember Senior's kindness that day. I didn't know what to give you as thanks, but it so happened that I saw a good shirt while at the shopping district nearby and I bought it. If Senior doesn't mind... Please accept it."

Her voice became softer and softer as she obviously realized that it was inappropriate for a woman to give a man she barely knew clothes. It was just that she really had no idea what to give him as thanks.

Yang Kai's cultivation was no secret; furthermore, the fact that he could bring out an Emperor Grade Spirit Pill to treat her wounds indicated that he came from an affluent background. With her financial resources, even the things she could afford to buy only by going bankrupt would probably be of no value to him. Rather than wasting her money like that, she figured buying him a new set of clothes would be more appropriate; after all, she had dirtied his with her blood. It could be considered an act of reciprocation. It didn't matter how expensive it was, it was the thought that counted.

Glancing at that shirt, Yang Kai didn't know whether to laugh or cry. This was the first time anyone had gifted him clothes. In addition, it was somebody he barely interacted with before. The funniest point was that it was a gift from a woman. If somebody were to witness this particular moment, it would be hard not to misunderstand the situation.

Staring at Yu Zhuo thoughtfully, Yang Kai calmly stated, "As a Referee in the Martial Gathering, it is only natural that I be impartial in the arena. Rescuing you was simply part of my job. Giving you that Spirit Pill

was the least I could do since the fight was over. If it had been anybody else, I would have done the same.”

The implied meaning behind his words was that she shouldn't overthink things. Yang Kai was a little suspicious as to whether this woman had any special reasons for approaching him, but if she did, wouldn't she be a little too scheming?

Upon hearing those words, Yu Zhuo nodded, “It is as you say, Senior.”

Yang Kai stared at her unblinkingly.

Although she wasn't looking at him, she seemed to sense something out of the corner of her eyes and suddenly felt extremely uncomfortable. Lowering her head, she said, “If it is not to Senior's liking, I will take it back.”

She couldn't help feeling a little sad. Even so, she bowed elegantly, “I won't intrude any further, Senior. I will be taking my leave.”

[Aahh... It's just clothes. Why did I shamelessly take them out?] Thinking about it now, she couldn't help feeling a little embarrassed.

But to her surprise, Yang Kai suddenly added, “It's a thank you gift, so there's no reason for you to take it back.”

She glanced up at him with a stunned expression.

Before she could respond, Yang Kai took the shirt from her but did not try it on. The main reason was that the clothes were a little too flashy and he would definitely look extremely gaudy in them, so how could he dare wear them?

Seeing him accept her gift, Yu Zhuo suddenly broke out into a smile. She had two small dimples in her cheeks, and her gaze only contained pure happiness.

[It seems that I worried too much.] Yang Kai judged after seeing her reaction.

“Please get some rest, Senior. I will take my leave now.” Yu Zhuo paid her respects again, feeling happy both physically and mentally.

“Wait a moment.” Yang Kai raised his hand.

“Is there something else, Senior?” She half-turned to look at him curiously.

“You mentioned the shopping district just now. Is there a shopping district nearby?”

Yu Zhuo nodded, “En. There is a big shopping district in Orthodoxy Temple that sells everything and anything. Have you never been there before, Senior?”

Yang Kai shook his head as he really had not known about it and asked, “Where is it?”

“It's just below the valley, not far from here. If Senior wishes to visit it, I can bring you there,” She voluntarily offered.

“Just point me in the direction. I'll go by myself.”

She smilingly replied, "It's quite alright. Besides, I've finished my match for today, so I have nothing better to do."

Yang Kai had no idea what she was thinking. [Doesn't she understand I'm trying to avoid scandals?]

When she heard that he wanted to visit the shopping district, Yu Zhuo became very enthusiastic and even added, "What do you want to buy, Senior? I'm quite familiar with the shopping district and can show you around."

Yang Kai felt awkward turning down such enthusiastic kindness, so after pondering in silence for a moment, he decided to just go with the flow and nodded, "Good. Then, I'll be troubling you."

She hurriedly waved her hands dismissively, "Senior is being too polite."

After deciding on the matter, they immediately walked out together. Yang Kai pushed his Emperor Qi and wrapped her up with it before flying in the direction of the shopping district that she pointed out.

He casually asked about the situation of her battles over the past few days and learnt that she had passed all of them without suffering a single defeat, making him feel some admiration for her. Truthfully, he had noticed from day one that her performance would surely have caught the interest of many people, regardless of the final results of the Martial Gathering.

As long as Luo Sha Sect was willing to let her go, he had the feeling that the top three Sects of the Southern Territory would not object to taking her in. The question was whether Luo Sha Sect would be willing to let her go. No, they would surely refuse as it wasn't easy for them to produce a disciple like her. How could they let her go so easily? Besides, it was unclear whether she herself was willing to leave Luo Sha Sect.

They chatted away throughout the entire journey, and Yang Kai got a better understanding of her personality. She was a lively and cheerful character, not a calculative or manipulative person. Yang Kai was not repulsed by people like her. Not to mention that she was rather good looking and her voice was very pleasant to the ears, so it wasn't a bad feeling being around her.

"The Martial Gathering has always been a place to change one's fate overnight. If somebody invites you to join a better Sect on the day the Martial Gathering ends, how will you choose?" Yang Kai casually asked.

Yu Zhuo's expression turned solemn at those words as she declared, "I am greatly indebted to the Master Sect, and my Honoured Master is no different from my biological mother. I will not leave Luo Sha Sect for any reason." After a pause, she looked at him and asked, "Senior, are you asking me to join Azure Sun Temple?"

She looked troubled and didn't seem to know how to respond.

Yang Kai waved his hand casually, "I was just asking curiously, I didn't have such intentions."

"Oh," Yu Zhuo nodded. Then, she suddenly pointed downward, "We're here. That's the shopping district."

Chapter 3249, Dark Horse

Almost the entire mountain valley of more than a dozen kilometres long was the site of this shopping district with the ground on both sides of the canyon and even caves on the cliffside lined with shops. Countless cultivators came and went, and the endless shouting was deafening. This was the shopping district of Orthodoxy Temple, so all the shops were the property of Orthodoxy Temple, and some were businesses run by the disciples themselves. Anything and everything was sold here, but although it was generally a lively place, it was never as bustling as this.

The main reason for the activity was the recent opening of the Martial Gathering. Tens of thousands of cultivators from all around the Southern Territory had gathered here so it was only natural for some of them to come here for a stroll. Before Yang Kai landed, he saw that the cultivators walking about underneath were all dressed differently, with disciples of the same Sect wearing similar uniforms walking about in groups of threes or fives.

Every major Sect would have a shopping district like this one. Azure Sun Temple had a shopping district too, but Yang Kai had never been there before. Be that as it may, it would not be any inferior to this one.

They were not stopped by anybody when they landed in front of the shopping district, so Yang Kai and Yu Zhuo entered the shopping district without any trouble. Women were born with an inherent interest in places like these, and Yu Zhuo was already a lively and cheerful girl, so she was all smiles after arriving here. Walking backwards with her hands behind her back as she faced Yang Kai, she looked at him and asked, "What is Senior interested in buying here?"

Despite walking backwards, it was as though she had eyes on the back of her head, and from time to time, she would shift her shoulders slightly to avoid the crowd.

"I want to buy some seeds," Yang Kai looked around.

He decided to come here out of the blue to buy some seeds. The main reason was that Mu Zhu and Mu Lu had a high demand for seeds recently. Although he managed to exchange for some rare seeds during the last exchange meeting, they were not enough for the two Wood Spirits' use. When he sent the seeds over to them, the two Wood Spirits only kept pestering him to bring over more as soon as possible. Yang Kai didn't know there was a shopping district here before, but now that he did, he figured he might as well come and check it out.

"Seeds?" Yu Zhuo was a little taken aback by this request as she had not expected him to come here for something so simple, but after thinking about it for a moment, she said, "I know where to find them. Follow me, Senior."

While speaking, she turned around and wormed her way into the crowd like a fish swimming in water. She was very nimble and her pace was neither fast nor slow, so he did not fall behind too much.

Not long after, the two of them came to a certain shop, one that sold herbs. These shops would generally carry some seeds for sale, but there wouldn't be much in terms of quantity. That turned out to be the case here too as following Yu Zhuo's inquiry, the shopkeeper only took out a few types of seeds.

Yang Kai quickly checked through them without turning his nose up at them. He immediately wanted to pay for them and leave, but to his surprise, Yu Zhuo began haggling with the shopkeeper over the price. She was very witty and eloquent, forcing the price down by a fifth of the original price. It was very amusing for Yang Kai to watch. Yu Zhuo also tried to snatch the bill, but how could he allow her to pay? It was only natural that he did not agree.

After leaving that shop, Yu Zhuo led Yang Kai to the next one. She seemed rather familiar with this area, so who knows how many times she had been here before? Approximately half a day later, the pair finished walking the shopping district that spanned more than a dozen kilometres and Yang Kai had gotten quite a good haul. Although the seeds he bought were not priceless treasures, the two Wood Spirits had not specified much in their request so he figured he would let them try planting these seeds and see how it went.

“Do you still have anything you want to buy, Senior?” She blinked at him.

“Not for the time being,” He smiled slightly and looked at her. “You still have a match tomorrow, so you should go back early to rest. Many thanks for accompanying me today.”

Yu Zhuo smiled so widely that her eyes curved into crescent-like shapes as she replied, “It was my pleasure. Senior, please don’t hesitate to ask me if you have any other requests.”

Pausing for a moment, she added, “I’ll take my leave now. Senior, you should also go back and rest soon.”

Yang Kai nodded and only then did Yu Zhuo fly up into the sky. Halfway up, she turned around to look at him again and waved at him energetically. Watching her leave, he weighed the bag in his hand that was filled with seeds before casually stuffing it into the Sealed World Bead. He simply placed the bag in front of the medicine garden as he was certain that Mu Zhu and Mu Lu would be able to find it. Afterwards, Yang Kai turned around and flew towards the Spirit Peak that was the temporary accommodation for the people from Azure Sun Temple.

News about Yu Zhuo of Luo Sha Sect coming to find Yang Kai spread like wildfire among all the people of Azure Sun Temple, and Murong Xiao Xiao even dropped by just to ask about it, wondering if Yang Kai and Yu Zhuo had some sort of secret relationship between them. It left Yang Kai feeling rather speechless. Even Gao Xue Ting looked at him strangely when this matter came up. Needless to say, Xiao Bai Yi’s expression of contempt made Yang Kai’s blood boil.

The following days passed by calmly without anything remarkable happening. In a few more days, Yang Kai would need to come out of retreat, go to the mountain valley, and serve as a Referee for a day. As time went on, more and more cultivators were eliminated from the competition and those that could continue to stand in the arena were more or less famous talents.

During this period, Yu Zhuo stood on the Eighth Arena again. Her opponent was, once again, another person in the Third-Order Dao Source Realm. This battle was even more difficult than the one she faced on the first day, but even so, she resolved the fight due and taking advantage of her flexible tactics and keen battle sense, she used everything she had to knock her opponent out of the ring.

Unfortunately, Yang Kai could tell that it would be impossible for her to make it to the top ten even though her abilities were outstanding because her cultivation was a huge shortcoming. If she was also in the Third-Order Dao Source Realm, she would surely make it into the top five in this Martial Gathering.

Yang Kai did not go to the exchange meeting between the Emperor Realm Masters again as there was nothing to be gained from it now. However, Gao Xue Ting came back to deliver a message to him. Many of the Emperor Realm Masters wanted to exchange for the Emperor Grade Spirit Pills in his possession again, even saying he could set his price. His only response was to ignore them all.

Taking out the Emperor Grade Spirit Pills to exchange them for rare seeds was something he did as a one-time thing. How could he possibly bring out even more Emperor Grade Spirit Pills that everybody was coveting?

On the 20th day of the Martial Gathering, the results of the individual rankings came out. The first-place winner was not a disciple from Azure Sun Temple nor even the disciples of any of the three top forces. Instead, it was somebody from Eight Paths Sect.

Moreover, it was somebody Yang Kai knew. That person was the daughter of the previous Sect Master of Eight Paths Sect, Su Zi.

The fact that the competition was won by a small and unknown Sect was a huge blow to the pride of the three top Sects.

Yang Kai and Su Zi had not interacted much with each other of course, all he knew was that she had feelings for Luo Yuan. Back when he refined the Extraordinary Treasure Pills in the Four Seasons Realm, she had asked to exchange for one of them from him, originally planning to gift the pill to Luo Yuan to aid him in becoming an Emperor Realm Master as soon as possible. Unfortunately, Luo Yuan had not appreciated her sentiment and stuffed the Extraordinary Treasure Pill into her mouth, forcing her to swallow it instead.

After so many years, Su Zi's cultivation finally reached the peak of the Third-Order Dao Source Realm and it would not be hard for her to become an Emperor Realm Master with the Extraordinary Treasure Pill from back then as her foundation. Nevertheless, she completely overwhelmed tens of thousands of young talented individuals in the Southern Territory and brought glory to Eight Paths Sect by winning the individual competition. For that reason, a little-known Sect like the Eight Paths Sect once again caught the attention of many Masters.

The truth was that ever since the day Luo Yuan became an Emperor Realm Master, Eight Paths Sect was no longer the same small Sect it had been back in the past. It had expanded its influence greatly, while Luo Yuan had assumed the position of Sect Master.

It was easy to imagine how much honour and glory Su Zi's victory in the individual rankings of the Martial Gathering had brought to Eight Paths Sect. The current Eight Paths Sect was just slightly poorer in heritage with Luo Yuan being the only Emperor Realm Master overseeing the Sect. But, in time, when both he and Su Zi had fully spread their wings, they were bound to lead Eight Paths Sect to prosperity.

It should not be forgotten that the reward for obtaining first place in the Martial Gathering was permission to enter the secret cultivation areas of the three top Sects. Combining that with the

supplementary effects of the Extraordinary Treasure Pill, Su Zi would surely advance into the Emperor Realm in short order. It truly made one green with envy just thinking about it.

The second-place winner was actually Xue Yi from Azure Sun Temple. This result did not disappoint, and at the very least, he had overpowered the participating disciples of Orthodoxy Temple and Heavenly Martial Holy Land.

The third-place winner belonged to the Orthodoxy Temple while Heavenly Martial Holy Land missed out on the top three spots this time around, causing the Elder leading their team to look extremely vexed. He was probably troubled by how he was going to assume responsibility for the disgrace. As the results continued further down the rankings, most of the disciples from the major Sects were ranked in front, highlighting the heritage of these forces.

Now that the individual rankings were over, the remaining ten days would be used for group battles. The competition venue was still the same mountain valley, but hundreds of Emperor Realm Masters spent a whole day removing all small arenas and reorganizing the valley into ten large ones. Each arena could fit up to about a hundred people fighting at once.

In the individual rankings, only one Referee was needed for each battle, but that would not work for the group rankings. Every arena needed five Referees to ensure that there were no casualties in each battle. It went without saying that Yang Kai was also recruited. Just as before, everyone took turns to act as a Referee, rotating once every three days this time.

In order to compete for the group rankings, the disciples fought with everything they had and the battles were very flashy and intense. Every method and every trick came into play during these battles and it was quite the spectacle. It was also very difficult to imagine that they were doing all this just to obtain the first place in the rankings. Still, it was no wonder seeing as the rankings would determine the reputation of their Sects. Who would dare to be sloppy about it?

The disciples Azure Sun Temple sent out were all elites, and regardless of their individual rankings, they were invincible in the group rankings. Their opponents couldn't even lay a finger on them in the first few matches and it wasn't until they met the disciples of the other two top Sects that they had more difficult battles.

On this day, Yang Kai was meditating as usual when the maid came to report that Yu Zhuo was asking to meet him again. Ever since the first time she came here, she would visit every few days; however, she always had legitimate reasons. It was mainly to send some seeds to him. When she saw that he had been very interested in those seeds back at the shopping district, she went back and asked her Sect members to help collect more, and every few days, she would come to deliver them.

This was the third time she had done so already, and although these seeds were not expensive, Yang Kai had a vague feeling that something was not right. This young woman's gaze was gradually becoming more and more attached over time. Yang Kai was not inexperienced in these matters, so how could he not know her intentions? Perhaps, he had planted a seed in her when he saved her back then and that seed was slowly showing signs of taking root in her due to their constant contact these days.

Of course, Yu Zhuo was very careful to conceal her feelings, but Yang Kai was not blind so it was impossible for him not to notice after so much time. As such, he felt that it was necessary to have a

serious talk with her. He really did not want to get entangled with any more women right now, besides, he still had yet to figure out what was going on with Ji Yao; hence, he asked the maid to show her in.

Soon, a head popped out from behind the door and Yu Zhuo smilingly said, "I hope I'm not bothering you, Senior."

After meeting several times, she realized that Yang Kai did not put up any pretences; thus, she had gotten very familiar with him.

"You are already here, so what does it matter if you did bother me?" Yang Kai looked at her, rolling his eyes. After meeting several times, they had naturally become much more familiar with one another.

Silavin: Scheduled wrongly last week. Sorry about that.

Chapter 3250 , Night Assault

Yu Zhuo stuck out her tongue, slipped into the room, took out an animal skin bag like it was a priceless treasure, and handed it to Yang Kai, "I found some more seeds for you. Have a look."

Yang Kai reached out to accept them before he quietly murmured., "You don't need to keep searching anymore. I have enough now."

Yu Zhuo was taken aback by those words for a moment before she grunted noncommittally in reply. Her expression seemed a little disappointed, but she quickly cheered up again and asked, "Senior, what are you collecting these seeds for?"

He smiled, "My wife asked me to, so how can I be careless about it?"

"Your wife?" She was obviously startled, "Senior, you have a wife!?"

[Why didn't I hear about this before!? I've been asking around about him a lot over the past few days, but I didn't hear about this at all!]

Yang Kai nodded, picking up his teacup as he took a sip and calmly replied, "I have a few."

[A few...] Yu Zhuo couldn't help feeling a little out of sorts and immediately sank into a state of desolation. She was no longer as lively and cheerful as before. She clearly seemed rather absent-minded upon learning that Yang Kai was married, moreover, to several women at that. Then, after making small talk for a bit, she took the initiative to leave.

Yang Kai saw Yu Zhuo off at the door, and watching her slightly hunched back as she left, he slowly shook his head. He had no choice but to reveal some of his personal information to her in hopes of ending this mess quickly.

The group ranking battles continued on in full swing, and as the battles progressed, the ones remaining were all elites so the fights became more intense as a result. The heritage of many Sects across the

Southern Territory was showcased in these battles. The longer they remained in the competition, the stronger the influence of the Sect behind them. Needless to say, none of the top three Sects were eliminated from the competition.

Unsurprisingly, the last three groups competing against each other belonged to the top three Sects. The group from Azure Sun Temple finally lived up to expectations and won first place in the competition in the Dao Source Realm category by an overwhelming margin. Although they lost in the Origin King Realm and the Origin Returning Realm categories, those losses were not a big deal.

The final results of the rankings were out. Hundreds of Emperor Realm Masters, as well as tens of thousands of participating disciples, gathered in the mountain valley once again. Following that, Xiao Yu Yang announced the top ten winners for each category of the competition and the rewards they were to receive. The cultivators and Sects whose names were called out received great honour. On the other hand, those who lost secretly vowed to themselves to wash this shame clean in the next Martial Gathering.

The Southern Territory Martial Gathering was now over, but nobody left. According to tradition, Orthodoxy Temple, as the host of the Martial Gathering, would throw a huge banquet on the final night of the Martial Gathering. It didn't matter whether it was the Emperor Realm Masters who came to provide support or the tens of thousands of disciples who participated in the competition, all were invited to the banquet.

The banquet would be held in the evening, and since there was still some time until then, Yang Kai returned to his living quarters to wait. Not long after, the maid came to report that Yu Zhuo was asking to meet him again and he couldn't help feeling a headache coming on. Pondering in silence for a moment, he ordered, "Tell her I'm not here."

Although he had not made himself entirely clear the last time, the meaning behind his words had been obvious enough. He did not know what Yu Zhuo was thinking, but he really did not wish to continue with this ambiguous relationship.

The maid glanced at him curiously and could not understand why he refused to even meet with Yu Zhuo when he had been very kind towards her previously. Nevertheless, it was not her place to interfere and she could only retreat obediently.

Outside the hall, the maid returned, turned to Yu Zhuo, and said, "Elder Yang is not in."

Yu Zhuo exclaimed, "But, I saw him return!"

The maid smiled, "Perhaps, he went out again."

Yu Zhuo clearly did not believe those words as she had seen Yang Kai return to this place with her own eyes and there had been no trace of him going out again, so how could he not be in? Just as she was about to ask the maid to check again, she suddenly seemed to realize something and forced out a smile before bowing, "Many thanks."

The maid shook her head, "It was nothing."

Yu Zhuo turned around and her eyes abruptly reddened. She sullenly flew off in the direction of her living quarters but halfway there, she stopped and turned around to stare at the place where Yang Kai was living. She energetically waved her hand in that direction before hurriedly rushing away.

Yang Kai stood by the window, and upon seeing her actions, he sighed. He could only wish for her happiness in his heart now that things had come to this, hoping that she could put this behind her as soon as possible.

That night, the mountain valley was extremely lively as tens of thousands of people were gathered together. Countless tables were set up all across the entire mountain valley, and many maidservants made their way among them. Even the disciples of Orthodoxy Temple were busy as they constantly served up food and wine. The banquet spread out in all directions. It was rare to see such a grand occasion and drinks flowed freely, making the atmosphere extremely festive.

At the place where everybody from Azure Sun Temple was gathered, Yang Kai looked around and asked curiously, "Where is Senior Sister Gao?"

He did not see Gao Xue Ting anywhere all evening.

Murong Xiao Xiao replied, "Senior Sister mentioned that she was feeling under the weather, so she didn't come."

"Is she okay?" He looked concerned.

Murong Xiao Xiao blushed a little and quietly replied, "It's nothing. She'll be fine with some rest."

Looking at her expression, Yang Kai wisely did not inquire further into the matter.

People kept coming over to propose a toast, so the people from Azure Sun Temple couldn't just sit around relaxing. Wen Zi Shan gave an order, and several Emperor Realm Masters had no choice but to bring their wine glasses with them to offer toasts to others. On the way back, Yang Kai's expression changed suddenly as he turned his head to the side and saw a figure flashing by, rushing into the darkness and disappearing out of sight.

"What was that?" He frowned. Putting down the wine glass in his hand, he chased after the figure and a moment later, he saw a person waiting for him approximately several hundreds of metres ahead. He walked over and cupped his fists, "Senior Brother Luo."

Luo Chen turned to look at Yang Kai and quietly said, "Come with me."

"Where?" Yang Kai furrowed his brow. It had been Luo Chen who quietly sent a Divine Sense transmission to him just now, asking him to come over. Speaking of which, there had not been much interaction between them although the two of them both belonged to Azure Sun Temple.

This person was even less talkative than Xiao Bai Yi. At the very least, Xiao Bai Yi would offer a comment once in a while. On the other hand, Luo Chen was practically no different from a mute. He wouldn't make a sound even if he was hit with a stick. He seemed to be an outlier even in Azure Sun Temple and according to Murong Xiao Xiao, none of the many Elders in the temple had a particularly close relationship with him.

Yang Kai did not have much interaction with Luo Chen either and hadn't exchanged more than a few words with him before, thus there was no friendship between them at all. Hence, Yang Kai seriously had no idea why Luo Chen called him out in the middle of the night.

"Senior Sister Gao wishes to meet you," Luo Chen responded as he led the way.

"Senior Sister Gao..." Yang Kai was stunned. At the same time, he couldn't help criticizing in his heart. [Why are they acting so secretly? If Gao Xue Ting is looking for me, she could have come to me directly, why send Luo Chen to deliver the message?]

Suppressing the doubts in his heart, he followed behind Luo Chen, but after a while, he frowned, "Senior Brother Luo, this is not the way back."

Judging by the direction they were going, they seemed to be flying out of Orthodoxy Temple and it was making Yang Kai feel more and more suspicious. However, Luo Chen, who was leading the way, refused to give him any explanation whatsoever. Yang Kai couldn't shake the feeling that something was off and his figure came to a sudden stop as he stared at Luo Chen's back. In response, Luo Chen stopped and looked back at him.

"Senior Brother Luo, what is going on?" He frowned at Luo Chen.

Luo Chen repeated, "Senior Sister Gao wishes to meet you."

Yang Kai asked, "Why does Senior Sister want to meet me?"

Luo Chen said, "I am only responsible for delivering the message. I don't know anything about the specifics."

Yang Kai stared at Luo Chen for a long time before he took out a communication artifact, poured some Divine Sense into it, and contacted Gao Xue Ting himself. Luo Chen's behaviour was making him feel very suspicious; therefore, he couldn't afford to care about offending the person in front of him anymore. [Let's contact Gao Xue Ting and figure out what's going on for now.]

Yang Kai quickly received a response from the communication artifact, and upon reading the message, he looked stunned. It turned out that Gao Xue Ting really wanted to meet him, but she didn't mention the reason. She only said that he would know once he arrived.

Putting away the communication artifact, he bowed to Luo Chen with a slight sense of shame. What he did just now showed that he did not trust Luo Chen, but facts had shown him that he was simply overthinking things.

Luo Chen seemed unaffected and continued to lead the way without saying a word.

After a while, the two left Orthodoxy Temple and nobody stopped them. Yang Kai followed Luo Chen and sped into the distance. About an hour later, Luo Chen stretched out a finger and pointed at a tall mountain in the distance, "Senior Sister Gao is waiting for you over there."

Yang Kai tilted his head to look at Luo Chen, "Are you not going?"

Luo Chen shook his head, turned around, and left.

Yang Kai was speechless. [Serves you right for not having any friends. Nobody can handle such an attitude! I wonder how Gao Xue Ting managed to make him move.]

Glancing in the direction Luo Chen had pointed, Yang Kai saw a peak not that far away; thus, he continued heading in that direction.

Landing at the top of the mountain peak, he glanced about his surroundings but there was nobody around. He used his Divine Sense to scan his surroundings, but there were no signs of life around.

“Senior Sister Gao!” He shouted, but there was no response.

Yang Kai couldn't help feeling that the events of tonight were getting stranger and stranger by the moment. First, Gao Xue Ting entrusted Luo Chen with a message for him, but he didn't see her anywhere now that he had arrived at their supposed meeting place. Could it be that she hadn't arrived yet?

Feeling suspicious, he took out his communication artifact and poured his Divine Sense into it again. He wanted to ask Gao Xue Ting about the situation; however, there was no response from her this time around.

Just as Yang Kai was focused on fiddling with the communication artifact, a shadow silently appeared from the darkness behind him. The shadow had appeared like a wisp of black smoke, without any warning nor the slightest indication whatsoever. What was even stranger was that Yang Kai didn't seem to notice it at all even though it was so close at hand.

The black shadow slowly condensed into a blurry figure that looked like it could be blown away by the wind. The figure lifted a hand, and a black dagger appeared in its grip. Then, it stabbed the dagger towards Yang Kai's back slowly.

The moon was hidden by the clouds and the wind was strong. The world was quiet, with only the sounds of the birds and insects coming from all directions.

Meanwhile, Yang Kai was still fiddling with the communication artifact, scowling deeply, unaware of the crisis coming from behind him.

At that moment, the sounds of the birds and insects disappeared abruptly, as though they had been frightened by something. All the sounds of the night vanished in that instant and at the same time, the dagger that had slowly been moving towards Yang Kai suddenly burst forward at an unimaginable speed, stabbing violently into his back.

A sharp pain burst out, and the Emperor Qi in Yang Kai's body exploded outward. The communication artifact in his hand turned into a cloud of dust as his body tensed, becoming as tough as metal. The forearm length dagger didn't manage to stab any further than a finger length into Yang Kai, so despite being aimed at his heart, it instead became trapped in place by his muscles.

The black shadow holding the dagger swayed erratically for a moment. The position where its eyes were located shone with a light of surprise. It seemed that it had not expected its certain-kill attack would be blocked like this. Although it had managed to stab its dagger into Yang Kai, its actions had not achieved the desired effect. Considering the situation briefly, it immediately understood the crux of the problem. There was something wrong with this man's body, making it incomparable to an ordinary cultivator's.

Without giving that black shadow any time to react, Yang Kai turned around with a furious glare and punched out.