

Chapter 125: Teahouse

Outside The Great Trial of Water Crest, numerous organizations still had representatives gathered around. They were there to await the return of their disciples.

It wasn't a rare scene, as these organizations often had a history with each other. It would be unthinkable to leave their talented future generation vulnerable to the malice of their enemies.

At the same time, they gathered to collect information with each other. Unlike in the modern world, the sects didn't have diplomats stationed in each other's territory. A chance to communicate with their peers and acquire intelligence was too good to pass up on. That was why, while they each had their own camp set up, they also had one central hub, where the elders from various organizations gathered.

It was a simple teahouse that one would see in any town. No one would blink an eye at it if not for how out of place it was, existing outside any permanent settlements. However, for the cultivators present, it was nothing special. It simply meant a qualified woodsmith had applied their expertise.

The atmosphere inside this teahouse varied depending on the floor.

On the first floor, many sat around and chatted while sipping on their drinks. The only thing missing from a usual teahouse was a storyteller.

The second floor was slightly less boisterous. It was where the private rooms were, for when they needed to discuss matters requiring discretion.

As for the third floor, it was much quieter. As if there was an invisible barrier that blocked out all the sound from below. It was eerily silent. That was because it was designed that way. It was where cultivators could cultivate in earnest, free from any distractions. While the cultivators could return to their own organization's camp, it was simply more convenient if they planned on staying around.

As it was currently noon, most of the people within this establishment gathered on the first floor.

While they merrily drank their beverage of choice, a discourse had once again broken out.

"Old An, I heard another one of your disciples had just been kicked out yesterday! That means you owe me that bottle of hundred-year White Blossom Wine!"

"You old snake. You've been eyeing my wine for all these years, so how can I know you didn't order your disciples to play any tricks? I'm calling this bet off!"

“You damn fossil, who still plays with worms at your age. You dare to go back on a bet? Do you think I’m as soft as tofu, and will bend as you want? Willing to bet, then you must be willing to lose. Pay up!”

The two elders slammed their tables and stood up to their full height, glaring at each other. The people in the background continued chatting as if nothing was happening. While it partly might have been due to their confidence in their powerful cultivation, a bigger reason was definitely due to the presence of a certain personage.

This special character was Jian Beiyun, the current head disciple of the Nightmoon Valley. As the de facto leading organization within the Luminescent realm, all the elders present gave the young man some face, treating him as their equal. In fact, they gave him more than that. That was due to Nightmoon Valley’s tendency to police the realm. They knew to leave it to a member of their organization when conflict broke out.

“Elder An, Guardian Su, how you are both doing today?”

Jian Beiyun approached with a jovial demeanor, as if he hadn’t witnessed the fighting at all. The two older men in question didn’t disregard him, but instead acted as if they were little boys caught by their parents doing something naughty.

“Young Master Jian! We’re both doing great! Thank you for asking.”

“That’s right, we’re just getting a little too excited due to the small bets we made in jest.”

“Oh, bets? I heard that’s been getting popular among folks around here these days.” He scanned the room, but no one met his gaze. “Seeing how there are significantly fewer youngsters left in the pocket realm, why don’t we make the betting more official? I can be the host, so rest assured to place your bets with me.”

“Ohoho, interesting,” a high-pitched voice laughed out, coming from a large man built like a sumo wrestler. “Brother Jian, let me join in on the fun too. My Myriad Bones Pavilion can co-host it with you. With Brother Jian’s credibility and my financial capabilities, I assume no one has any complaints, right?”

The large man guffawed once more while holding onto his sizeable stomach with both hands. Soon, words of agreement came one after the other, and the matter was settled.

A space in the corner was swiftly cleared out, allowing a gambling table to be set up.

“Place your bets, place your bets! You must bet spirit stones if you’re betting against the house. For side bets using other resources, please go to the other side over there,” a young woman cried out.

“I place twenty orange spirit crystals on Tang Yulian staying the longest!”

“One hundred on Sima Xue!”

“Two hundred on Liang Po!”

As the betting ramped up, Jian Beiyun watched on with his co-host off to the side. Upon seeing the rowdy scene, Jian Beiyun nodded appreciatively.

“Does this satisfy you, Brother Jian?” the extra large-sized man asked.

“Of course, Elder Quan. It’s all thanks to you.”

“Haha, no need to be so formal, and stop calling me elder. I’m not that old yet!”

Jian Beiyun revealed a trace of hesitation through his smile but quickly adjusted it. He had to hold his tongue, lest he offend the large man before him for no reason. Swallowing down his reluctance along with the knowledge of the man’s four-digit age, he replied back merrily.

“Sure thing, Brother Quan. I was just happy to see everyone getting along for once. This is how we should be. United, so those so-called righteous hypocrites won’t dare to overreach.”

The portly elder simply let out a hearty laugh in response.

Their happy times didn’t last long. All of a sudden, the entire venue went silent.

Every cultivator turned to the same direction, at the entrance of the pocket realm. No one spoke for several dozen breaths. But then, all hell broke loose.

“What in the world is happening?! This has never happened before for hundreds of years since the discovery of this realm!”

“Please excuse me, everyone, I must report back to my leader at once.”

“Likewise. Good day to you all.”

While everyone rushed into action, Jian Beiyun and Elder Quan did the same. They rapidly exited the building and flew up to a better vantage point. With their cultivation, they could easily count the blades of grass by the pocket realm at this distance.

However, what they were focused on at the moment wasn’t something tangible. Each cultivator employed their own methods to observe the flow of Qi in the area. Their vision presented a violent vortex of energy rushing into the pocket realm.

“Elder Quan,” Jian Beiyun inadvertently reverted his way of addressing the imposing giant. “As the most experienced person here, what do you make of this situation?”

“Strange. Very strange. Artificial pocket realms normally don’t do this by themselves. We know this realm was created by a powerful organization in the past, but it still can’t operate by itself.

We've confirmed no one was inside before the kids went in. There's no way anyone below the peak of Violet Core could subdue an artifact powerful enough to host such a sizable pocket realm. Hopefully, it is a special function of the artifact created with the old ways unknown to us. Otherwise, I fear it would mean someone had managed to avoid our detection. That is someone far more powerful than what we can handle. We should inform our ancestors to be safe."

Jian Beiyun swallowed hard at his companion arriving at the same conclusion. He had hoped this senior had the knowledge about strange artifacts that could activate themselves. As the possibility of the situation getting out of control grew, he could only silently pray for his junior sister's safety as well as all the young cultivators still inside.

The strange phenomenon that took hold of the pocket realm had alerted all its inhabitants. However, it didn't last long. After half a day, everything returned to normal, and the cultivators put it long behind them. As curious as some of them were, they had more important things to attend to.

After two years since entering the pocket realm, a little over half the people had already been ejected. A majority of those who remained struggled with the few points they had left. Every day was a struggle. This included Wei Ping in Li Lang's group.

He had been stressing about his next breakthrough to the sixth stage of Energy Gathering. Perhaps due to this stress, he was still stuck in his bottleneck. Thankfully, they all entered the pocket realm, having gotten started on a craft. They were ahead of those at their age. That was why their entire group still remained.

However, there was another reason why Wei Ping still had plenty of trial points to spare, despite the bottleneck he faced in his cultivation. It was still fresh in their memory during the day, after the pocket realm was in disarray. Li Lang had invited both him and Long Yi into his room that day to break some news to them.

"I don't know how to say this, so I'll just be direct. I've taken control of this pocket realm."

"Come again?" Long Yi replied.

"I have taken ownership of this pocket realm. I can control who enters and leaves."

"What?!"