

Daily life 101

Chapter 101 Ripple Effects Around The Cases (3)

A slender long almost green gem-like figure was being dragged in the mouth of a caiman that had deep wounds all over its body. One of its eyes was a bleeding hole, there were deep gashing wounds that revealed its internal organs and bone and it was missing half its tail. In addition, there were deep white frost marks on some of its wounds.

As for the slender green gem-like figure, half of its body seemed to be encased in ice and it had a lacerated hole in its head almost as if something violently exploded there.

Bleergh!

The caiman vomited a pool of blood as it viciously and cautiously eyed its surrounding.

"I MAY BE INJURED BUT I'M STILL MORE THAN CAPABLE OF HANDLING A FEW SMALL FRIES.

Come at me at your own peril, "roared the caiman.

No sooner had it made that statement than it was ambushed by three spirit beasts. One of them was a chameleon with green glowing thorns all over its body, the other was a 30-meter praying mantis that had saber-like arms that seemed to have been soaked in blood due to the red tinge they had and the last spirit beast was a two-headed vulture that seemed blind in all its eyes with its grey cloudy eyes with no pupils.

As if on tacit understanding they all rushed the caiman from different sides while matching their speeds and distance so no one spirit beast arrives earlier than the rest however it was all for naught because when they were just a few meters away they got drowned by a dark waterfall curtain produced from the caiman's body. It dissected their bodies like a knife through butter. The three spirit beasts were dead before they hit the ground.

"Anyone else want to try me?" the caiman madly roared as it viciously eyed its surroundings. The only response it got was a cold silence.

Hmmph!

It picked up the slender green gem-like viper into its mouth and continued walking albeit at a slow-motioned pace.

It only managed to walk a couple of more steps ahead before it had to drop the green viper from its mouth as it wheezed and panted.

"Li Lun you really are a vicious bastard. Other than hiding your ninth base cultivation realm you even detonated your wisdom pearl. What happened to supporting each other as fellow false kings," said the caiman. One could hear the derision in his tone as he said the words, false kings.

Within the pupils that were filled with anger, there was also a visible tremble of fear as he eyed the frosted side of the viper.

"I wonder who did this? I don't know if I should thank them or hate them. If you were not injured things may not have ended the way I wanted but such an injury was even difficult for me to solve with my devouring ability. Half of the flesh gone to waste just like that," said the black cosmos caiman with a tinge of fear and regret.

Despite the green flash viper being injured, the battle had been hard fought to the bitter end with the caiman narrowly winning as it ended up with injuries that may take atleast a few decades to heal despite spirit beasts having high vitality and regenerative capabilities.

In addition to the injuries caused by the green flash viper, it also received a new one when it tried to devour the frosting ice from the green flash viper's body. The attack rebounded on it that it had to terminate the process before it was at risk of being frozen too just like the green flash viper.

"Without Li Lun holding it back I only have a few hours before his whole corpse is covered in ice. If that happens then I will have really made this trip for nothing...

A few hours should be enough to get to my lair. Li Lun I hope you have enough energy in your body to push me to the peak then it will not be too late to settle accounts with that bastard alligator or maybe I will pay a visit to the turtle and increase my odds but before that, there is another place I have to visit.

Green fog swamp sect you still have a debt to pay. Now that I know your general whereabouts you will be my first stop zekekekekekeke.

I LIAO YING will be the true ruler of this region," the black cosmos caiman ferociously said with a maddened craving for power flashing in his eyes.

He picked up the green flash viper before he was enveloped in darkness and disappeared.

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Somewhere in the eighth zone of the green fog region.

"The tremors have stopped. It seems that little arrogant Liao Ying won. I thought the viper had potential too bad its luck seems to have run out," an ancient deep slow voice sounded in an area that had a small lake filled with yellow leaves on top that made it hard to see what was below.

The area was surrounded by green fog however there was a bit of sunlight cascading down adding a gentle glow to the lake.

By the lake was an open patch of grass forming a 500-meter radius around the lake. However, within that patch, there were two things that stood out. One of them was a small hill that was about 50 meters. The hill was dull grey but occasionally it would have red trickling lines form on it like pulsating veins and strange runes.

Right next to the strange hill was an enormous tree that had the girth of an elephant with a height of 100 meters. It was the source of the yellow leaves filling the lake. However, what stood out about it wasn't its huge girth but the red pearls forming from its branches. Inside those red pearls were tiny orange flames dancing around. Any alchemist worth his cauldron would definitely know what this tree was, it was a red pearl tree.

Just like its name, it was a tree that formed red pearls instead of fruits. Without even consuming it, the red pearls had soul-soothing and strengthening effects just like the earthvine wood except the red pearls were a hundred times better since those pearls could only be produced by a red pearl tree that

was in the monarch grade. The number of red pearl fruits formed showed how high up the monarch grade the tree was. The red pearl tree by the lake had a hundred of them showing it was a high-grade monarch rank tree.

It was unheard of for a tree of this level to be present in zone eight as trees and other herbs that were on the higher end of the monarch grade were usually spotted in the deeper parts of zone seven or zone six and above. Yet here it stood, vibrant and creating a meditation hallowed ground.

The lake that was calm started trembling and warping as if a crevice was forming from an earthquake and volcanic eruption combined. Two golden eyes appeared above the surface while beneath was a dark shadow whose size seemed to have covered the whole lake. The moment the golden eyes appeared the hill trembled as a head appeared from it. It was a turtle's head filled with red wave symbols on its forehead but when it opened its eyes a river of blood seemed to be flowing in its pupils that even the air had a metallic blood smell.

"Do you think he is stupid enough to come here Su Gen?" a majestic gentle voice came from the golden-eyed creature. Though it was gentle, the flames in the red pearls kept swaying as if in jubilation at the coming of their king.

"He might be? He might have tried to hide it well but that ambitious and vindictive heart of his was still there to see even when he was crying and begging you to spare his life. I can only assume it has grown further ever since then especially with him becoming a false king...who knows I might even be his next target now that he is done with the viper," said the hill-sized turtle by the name of Su Gen.

"I left him alive precisely because of that personality of his. With a character like that making loud noises less attention would be placed on me. But if he decides to bare his weak fangs well.....it's too much trouble, Su Gen you deal with it as a fellow false king," the golden-eyed creature said as it lightly chuckled which sent shock waves around the lake revealing a part of its body that was covered in golden scales.

"Surely you jest my king. Getting that title was the best way to contain information flow in this zone. I have no intention of competing with little children for fame or territory," Su Gen said as he smiled in embarrassment.

"I'm not a king anymore. Here I'm just Ren Qiang. A loser who lost a battle for supremacy in the sixth zone that I had to run away all the way down here in the eighth zone just to preserve my life," the golden-eyed creature said as he ruefully sighed.

"King you only lost because.." just as Su Gen was about to continue he got interrupted.

"It's okay Su Gen, whether I was ambushed by a group doesn't change the fact that I lost. All's fair in war. But don't worry we will soon return to where we belong. The red pearl tree and the clear soul-quenching lake have helped in mending my wisdom pearl. It should only be a matter of time before it's fully restored. In the meantime, I leave the rest to you old friend, the only one to stick by me despite my fall from grace," the golden-eyed creature gently and tiredly said before his body got submerged. Despite the fatigue in its tone, its majesty still remained.

"As you wish my king," Su Gen said as his head once again shrunk back into his body and the prior tranquil calmness was restored.

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Deeper zone of the green fog region.

There was a young man and a young woman seated next to each other with the young woman leaning her head into the young man's chest. They were all epitomes of beauty and gentle elegance.

The young man had long smooth flowing crystalline hair that looked like it was made of the purest water. He had on pure white robes that looked to have been made of insect wing-like material. His skin was fair with a gentle smile and a tranquil look. The young lady equally matched him in look and temperament though her gentleness seemed more motherly. She too had the same crystalline hair tied and held together with a pin that looked to have one-half of an insect wing attached to it. Their eyes were what stood out the most as they had irises that were composed of different colors. The bottom part was purple with a hint of blue while the sides had hints of orange with the top being clear like the surface of water.

They were currently staring at a garden that would have driven the entire southern continent wild as the garden was filled with hundreds and hundreds of ascendant-grade herbs. Of these herbs, most were at the top level of the ascendant grade. At the center of the field, there were two herbs that stood out. It seemed like all the ascendant herbs were paying obeisance to them.

One of them was a purple lotus and the other was a blue flower that was about 3 meters tall surrounded by a starlight dome.

"It seems like our silly daughter has left. The sensors we placed in her lair haven't lit up in quite a while," The young man softly said.

"I hope she did. She spent way too much time in there alone. I was even tempted a couple of times to go bring her here," the young woman said with worry and a hint of relief in her tone.

"You know we can't," the young man gently said as he comfortingly patted the young woman's shoulders.

"I know but still.." the young woman said with guilt flooding her eyes.

"She'll be okay. let her go and see the world and in case anything happens there are still the seals we placed on her that should protect her even against an early-stage soul formation expert," said the young man.

"We have failed that girl. We didn't even get to tell her the name we gave her,"

"I think her choosing a name she loves is the best thing. When the time comes we can go ask her ourselves. The tracker we placed on her is still active though it seems to be veiled by a powerful barrier. I can only roughly tell which side of the continent she is in.

We can go search for her when our guard shift ends and the other party comes to replace us," said the young man in an attempt to ease the young woman beside him. It seemed to have worked as she seemed less ill at ease.

"Okay," said the young woman.

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The young lady paused as if suddenly recollecting something

"Maybe we can get that human cultivator who once came here to show us around. He owes us for saving his life otherwise if he had budged in here while the raven was on duty or any other of the rest then despite what tricks he had on him as an early soul formation expert, his life would be forfeited," said the young lady as she chuckled remembering how rooted in fear the cultivator had been just from the release of their auras.

"Jinhai isn't that bad. He is just serious and dutiful in his work," said the young man trying to defend his friend.

"Among us thirteen fog supremes only you get along with him well," said the young lady.

But just as the young man was about to reply both he and the young lady hurriedly stood up as a faint green light flashed beyond the garden. There was an otherworldly celestial light being produced from the green light.

The purple lotus produced a huge purple mist as the blue flower dispersed its starlight dome making the whole scene seem like an explosion of stars in a purple sky.

The young man and the lady hurriedly knelt as they bowed their heads with extreme reverence pouring from them.

A few seconds later the celestial light and the green flashing disappeared and the purple lotus and blue flower went back to their earlier looks.

"It seems the queen's seclusion is almost over," said the young man who still didn't get up despite the light disappearing.

The young woman nodded back as she too retained her kneeling posture with a solemn look.

At this moment in different parts around the deepest part of the green fog region, 11 creatures were all reverentially genuflecting in the direction the celestial light had come from.

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A few meters from the green fog swamp sect.

A team of around 30 cultivators and a cow could be seen shuttling around the swamp in a coordinated fashion with the young cultivators being sheltered in the middle as they were flanked to the front, side, and back by older cultivators.

They all seemed worn out, ragged, and on edge as if they had been in a fight for their lives.

All the cultivators had a symbol of the tupelo tree embroidered on their robes.

"Peng," a middle-aged man with a wizened look addressed the cultivator next to him who had the steadiness of an immovable mountain.

The two cultivators were Cheng Yuan and Peng Zhen respectively and the green-leafed cow holding the rear of the formation was Wen Chang.

Once their case was done they decided to make a rush back to their sect so they could settle a couple of affairs and also replant the Tupelo tree before it shut off into hibernation.

The Order had graciously transported them using one of their airships halfway which was what helped them complete their journey back to the sect in a single day when it would have taken them three days if they used their own means.

They had thought the trip back would be the same as usual. With Cheng Yuan's core formation realm cultivation, they would deter most of the beasts in zone ten and nine then they would have to be only weary of the beasts in zone eight since they were mostly in the core formation realm.

However, all hell broke loose the moment they stepped into the green fog region. Zone ten which usually only had spirit beasts that were in the qi refining realm was now filled with spirit beasts in the foundation stage.

Normally when spirit beasts in the qi refining stage and the foundation establishment stage detected someone at the core formation realm they would avoid them but this time as if in a maddened frenzy, Cheng Yuan's team got attacked despite him releasing his cultivation pressure to warn them off.

When they got into zone nine the situation only seemed to get worse as the area was filled with peak foundation spirit beasts and even a few early-stage core formation spirit beasts. The moment Cheng Yuan's group made an appearance they got charged just like in zone ten. The spirit beasts involved in the attack were mostly the peak foundation spirit beasts with only a few of the early-stage core formation spirit beasts joining in. The former attacked from wild frenzy while the latter was trying to fish in troubled waters.

The early stage core formation spirit beasts had made their moves when the fight between Cheng Yuan's team and the peak foundation spirit beasts got intense hoping to catch their team off-guard and grab a few of the young disciples.

However unlucky for them both Cheng Yuan and Wen Chang had made great strides in their cultivation due to Yang Qing's intervention. In addition, they had enormous energy in them, especially Cheng Yuan who had the energy-rich foods from the Thousand flavor restaurant in his system in addition to the energy from the oolong tea made by a quasi-palace stage expert.

He had a surplus of energy to burn which helped him in confronting the core formation spirit beasts that were trying their hands as Wen Chang, Peng Zhen, Gui Bingwen, and a few other elders in the team held off the other spirit beasts.

With the experience from the two zones, they stepped into zone eight with extreme caution preparing for a bitter fight to get back to the sect. However, the attacks by stronger spirit beasts they expected to get didn't happen.

It was eerily quiet that they could hear each other's breathing as they ran. Only when they moved a little deeper into zone eight did they realize why the area seemed like a graveyard. There were exploded ground, broken trees, and gruesomely torn corpses of spirit beasts widely spread about most likely from unlucky spirit beasts caught up in the attack.

The deeper in they went, the more pronounced the scale of destruction. At first, Cheng Yuan and the rest had no idea what had happened but the more areas of destruction they passed through the grimmer their looks became especially on Peng Zhen's and Cheng Yuan's faces.

They detected one of the auras left behind in the destroyed areas. A corroding and devouring aura. It was a bit too familiar to them, one they have not forgotten in over 50 years.

It was only when their sect was almost in sight did Cheng Yuan dared to address Peng Zhen.

"I know. It must be him and by the looks of it he has gotten stronger than when he faced off against master," Peng Zhen said as he clenched his fists together with hatred flashing in his eyes.

"Based on the scale of destruction he must have clashed against a powerful spirit beast maybe even one of the false kings. Some part of me hopes he is dead while another hopes he is alive so I can skin him myself," Cheng Yuan said as he gritted his teeth and tightly gripped the smooth green longsword in his hand.

"I doubt he is dead. We both saw how cunning and sturdy he is. He more than likely came out of this alive though he may have gotten a few serious injuries that will put him out of commission for a few years atleast. Cheng, we need to ensure we use that time to get stronger not only us but the sect too.

That vindictive beast will definitely target the sect once it's healed or it may even decide to do it earlier. We need to prepare as fast as we can. The future of the sect depends on it," Peng Zhen grimly said.

"I know. I intend to go into seclusion immediately and make the most out of the opportunity judge Yang Qing gave me. Luckily Wen Chang made a harvest too, with her present strength and the emerald milk, we will be able to push the sect forward faster than I had calculated.

We really owe judge Yang Qing too much that I don't know how we can even begin to repay it. The only worrying situation is your life-and-death duels, Peng.

You will be fighting against the elites of the Order. I managed to catch a glimpse of this sleeping dragon and it was a terrifying sight Peng," Cheng Yuan couldn't help but say with worry in his tone.

"The die has already been cast, there's not much we can do now. I think we even got off easy. I get to fight against monsters and practice a blue-grade art and all I have to trade is potentially my life. Isn't

that what we cultivators do? Risk our lives for opportunities to grow our strength. In my eyes this isn't any different infact it's even a better opportunity than roaming through ruins.

Peng if I die then it only means my talent amounted only to that much. It's not that much of a loss to the sect. You have Wen Chang now to hold the forte and there is also Shi Rong who if times permits will definitely exceed us both," Peng Zhen said as both he and Cheng Yuan secretly glanced at a medium-height youth with platinum silvery white hair and yellow eyes. Other than his hair he didn't have any features that stood out. He was ordinary looking, with a build that seemed more for a scholar than a cultivator. He would be easily assumed in a crowd.

However, it was this ordinary-looking youth who looked to be about 16 or 17 the youngest of the bunch wasn't breathing heavily and his expression wasn't fatigued like his fellow disciples. His breathing was even and despite being close to the sect entrance he was still very alert of his surroundings as his eyes kept darting around. But the most striking feature of all was his cultivation base.

His fluctuations showed he was already at the sixth stage of foundation establishment very close to breaking into the seventh stage.

In the eyes of the elders present including Peng Zhen and Cheng Yuan his worth was the same as the Tupelo tree, the foundation of their sect. He was also a joint disciple to both Peng Zhen and Cheng Yuan and if everything went well, the one to inherit the sect master's position from Cheng Yuan.

"Okay then," Cheng Yuan said as he refocused his gaze.

"You know Cheng, You keep thinking what will happen if I die but what if I survive those 30 years? Do you know how much gains I will have made if I even manage to survive a single year? Like I said before, I have no intention of losing...I will try to survive to the very end," Peng Zhen said as his eyes flashed with battle intent.

Cheng Yuan didn't say anything and only nodded. But his expression seemed to have eased a bit.

The group soon made their way past the illusory and protection array that hid their sect as they made their way to Peng Zhen's peak to check on the rest of the sect members that were left behind.

"This...what happened here?" Peng Zhen said in shock as things were much different than he left them.

"When we left this wasn't here?" said Gui Bingwen equally in shock as he arrived by Peng Zhen and Cheng Yuan's side.

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Cheng Yuan whose sword was already drawn started to do a detailed search of the area with his spiritual sense. His expression grew tenser by the second.

"I can't detect anyone close by, what about you Wen Chang?" Cheng Yuan quickly asked as they shrank their formation and made it tightly knit.

"I h.a.v.e.n.t e.i.t.h.e.r," Wen Chang's raspy voice sounded. When they left the Order she did not have the voice transmission ball the Order lent her therefore she could only go back to using the cheap voice transmission bead the sect had bought her.

Due to its degraded quality, it made her voice sound like her voice chord had been filled with dry sand.

Cheng Yuan made a silent note to upgrade her voice transmission bead. It was up the priority list of must-do things before he went into seclusion but first they had to determine the situation at hand.

"Can you detect anything past this fog?" Peng Zhen asked as he stared at the white misty fog that surrounded what was once his hall. The fog wasn't spread anywhere else beyond the hall where he had left the rest of his sect members passed out from the altered poison fog he had used on them.

But now not a single inch of the hall could be seen.

"I can't detect anything. Every time I try to use my spiritual sense on the fog the only thing I detect is an endless fog and the longer my sense is in contact with the fog the hazier it gets almost as if its being sapped of strength," Cheng Yuan said as he withdrew his spiritual sense.

Just as they were debating on what other means to try, the fog dissipated by itself revealing Peng Zhen's hall and the already awake sect members who were now outside. By the look of things, they seemed to

have been trying to break through the fog. Their weapons were drawn with evidence of attack marks all over.

"Sect master, vice sect master Peng you're here already..was the fog your doing Peng?" an elderly man with white hair, and an equally white long beard that reached his chest with a rich herb smell on him quickly stepped out from the crowd that just came out of Peng Zhen's hall.

"Hu Qiu I'm glad you're okay for a second there I didn't know what to think when I saw that white fog," said Peng Zhen.

"So it wasn't you?" Hu Qiu asked with a dumbfounded look as he stared around.

"It looks like a temporary formation was placed here by someone and by the look of things the materials were pretty expensive. Just these formation flags themselves are made of high-ranked sky-grade materials. It looks like the formation collapsed on its own because the spirit stone used to power it drained," said another elder from the crowd.

In his hand, he held a small pristine white formation flag that looked like it was made of pure ice. He had a fanatical gaze as he scrutinized the flag from top to bottom over and over.

"It must have been Inquisitor Feng Xin's doing then," Peng Zhen quickly said the moment he heard the elder's deductions. Seeing that the formation didn't attack the other sect members despite their attempts at breaking it, he surmised the array's intention was isolation and protection instead of attack.

Based on those clues and the quality of the materials used and the time that had passed since he left the peak only Feng Xin who must have passed by the sect in search of him could fit the bill.

A look of relief washed over Peng Zhen and Cheng Yuan once they came to that conclusion. It had been a rather tense day especially with old enemies resurfacing and potentially coming after them.

"It seems things went well and Hao Ye...," said Hu Qiu as a complicated look flashed in his eyes. It was one of relief, sorrow, and regret.

"He and Jia Tingfeng died at Dong Yanlin's hands. There is a lot we need to talk about and it can't wait," Peng Zhen said as he glanced at Cheng Yuan who nodded back in agreement.

"Everyone kindly head back to your quarters. I will be holding an all-sect assembly in a few days. Elder Shu Yun kindly take charge for the moment and ensure that the sect is on high alert and closely patrol the sect ground boundaries and the main entrance.

At the slightest sign of disturbance make sure to release the distress talisman. Grab a couple of the inner elders, chief disciples, and outer core elders to make the rounds with you. Also Wen Chang please help her. My mind will be at ease with you helping her," Cheng Yuan said as he addressed a young lady who looked to be in her late 30s wearing the green and black robe worn by elders of the green fog swamp sect.

"All core elders are to come with me to my peak immediately for an emergency meeting.

Shi Rong, you will also be coming along as there are a few things you need to be aware of," said Cheng Yuan as he addressed the platinum white silver-haired youth with yellow eyes and thin scholarly build, and an ordinary look.

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A few minutes later in the sect master's meeting hall.

A group of fifteen people was currently seated in lotus positions with a large round table made of a white silver juniper tree at the center.

Of the fifteen members, the majority were old elders with only four being young with Shi Rong being the youngest. But none of the elders present looked down on the four young people in the meeting as they all had the qualifications to be there as core elders. The requirement of being a core elder in the green fog swamp sect was to have a cultivation base that was at least in the ninth stage of the foundation establishment realm.

The only exception was Shi Rong who was at the sixth stage of the foundation establishment realm. However, his current achievements had well earned him a seat with the rest of them. Though he was

currently seated behind Peng Zhen and Cheng Yuan. He knew though he was invited his part was to listen.

"I will start with the good news first before we get to the graver matters," said Cheng Yuan to start off the meeting.

"First, Wen Chang has made a qualitative improvement in her cultivation as you have all noticed with her current look. She has agreed to cooperate with the sect in supplying the emerald milk.

Elder Mo Ying you will work with her and use the proceeds from the milk sale to clear some of the debts we have while leaving some for the young cultivators' sect nurturing program. Also, you will use a part of the funds to purchase low-rank sky-grade herbs for Wen Chang while we also try to grow our own.

Elder Hu Qiu, I will need your assistance on the herb growth matter.

I will also be going into seclusion for quite some time as I made a bit of a harvest. In my absence Peng Zhen will handle all matters though he too will occasionally be absent so Hu Qiu you will have to leave some of your affairs in the alchemy division to someone else as you handle the sect affairs from time to time," Cheng Yuan rapidly said as Elder Hu Qiu the head of the alchemy division and Elder Mo Ying the head of the logistics division both nodded.

"Now to graver matters. The tupelo tree will be undergoing a metamorphism hibernation and will thus be out of commission for an indefinite time. We will have to monitor the sect constantly for any miasma leakages without its purifying dome present.

The next two matters are much graver so you need to prepare yourselves," said Cheng Yuan as he paused to eye every member present. The mood turned somber with beads of sweat flowing down a few elders' faces.

"The black cosmos caiman who we all know as one of the false kings just had a fight with another powerful spirit beast in this zone. It's unknown who won but both Peng and I are going on the assumption that the bastard survived and possibly won.

If things go as we have guessed we are more likely its target due to the feud we have from back then when it ate our junior sister Kang Mei and clashed against our master, the previous sect leader Tang Shanyuan.

Our master managed to severely injure it but not without paying a price himself that led to his death when he later succumbed to his wounds.

I don't know how long we have but you all need to work under the assumption it may strike at any moment.

Peng and I will be the ones to face it though it's extremely cunning so we don't know what moves it may pull. It may lead other spirit beasts over. You all need to ensure you guide the young ones below you with much more intensity while still working on your own cultivations.

The treasury will be opened to you all including the sect master's private vault. That together with the emerald milk should help us rapidly improve," just as Cheng Yuan was about to continue, Peng Zhen raised his hand to interject.

"In addition to what the sect master has said, I will also be guiding all elders in specialized combat training. So be prepared, that includes you too Shi Rong," Peng Zhen calmly said.

For some reason, everyone seemed more terrified of Peng Zhen's news than the one about the possible attack from the black cosmos caiman.

"As for the last matter well I think it's better Peng Zhen explains it," Cheng Yuan said as he passed the floor to Peng Zhen.

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"I don't know if Hu Qiu told you much. To some of you, it may have come as a surprise why someone who poisoned you is seated here when what he did is tantamount to betrayal of the sect.

First I want to offer my apologies for poisoning you and keeping you in the dark about certain matters," said Peng Zhen as he got up and bowed.

He was right. Among the elders present, most kept throwing strange looks Peng Zhen's way throughout the whole meeting. A couple of them even wanted to interrupt the sect master's speech but the news was too huge for them to interrupt.

"Who you once knew as Dong Yanlin is a member of the scarlet blood ghost hands. He used me and placed a seal on me to try and infiltrate the sect so he can target the tupelo tree.

With him closely monitoring my movements I couldn't let you all know and could only involve Cheng Yuan, Gui, and Hu Qiu here. The smaller the group the less likely he would notice anything off.

We decided the best course of action was to lure him out and confront him outside the sect. The dispute with Wen Chang was all a ruse and the involvement of the Order was to leave a path for survival for the sect in case the worst happened.

At the time we didn't know he was a member of the scarlet blood ghost hands. It was only later when Gui, I, and the Tupelo tree almost perished confronting him did we discover that terrifying fact.

Jia Tingfeng and Hao Ye died under his hands. Though they were traitors who put their selfish needs before the sect so it's no loss to the sect.

We don't know if Dong Yanlin was working alone or he was under orders. We can only hope he was working alone otherwise if it's the latter we may have to consider relocating if a monolith such as the scarlet blood ghost hands targets us," Peng Zhen solemnly said.

Everyone within the room was visibly shaken. They already knew about scarlet blood ghost hands from the sect founder's records and how he had run away from one of their members all the way to the green fog region.

The whole matter sent them all on edge with blood draining from their faces. This was a solid rank 1 organization that was notorious for its unscrupulous means even among underworld organizations. They were just a rank 4 sect, just a sneeze from them was sufficient to blow the green fog swamp sect from existence.

"Things may not turn out as bad as we think. For one Dong Yanlin seemed utterly selfish, greedy, and ambitious so he may have been acting on his own. Even if he wasn't the matter is now under the Order's eye seeing how Dong Yanlin is already in their custody," Peng Zhen said trying to lift their moods. It seemed to have worked though the crowd was still petrified some color had returned to their skin.

"All right that is all. I will hold an assembly in three days' time after which I will be going into seclusion," Cheng Yuan said as he closed off the meeting.

All the elders got up and left leaving behind Peng Zhen, Hu Qiu the head of the alchemy division and Shi Rong.

"Shi Rong with me going into seclusion and the Tupelo tree in hibernation you will no longer cultivate on this peak but will instead move to Peng Zhen's peak and when he is absent you will also be the temporary master of that peak," said Cheng Yuan with his gaze turning gentle from his earlier stern and solemn look.

"I will do as master asks," Shi Rong said as he performed a curt bow.

"Go on then," Cheng Yuan said as he lightly smiled with Peng Zhen showing a softer expression too like watching their grandchild leave.

"That child is a blessing to this sect. I only hope the sect survives to help him reach his true potential," Hu Qiu said as he sighed.

Mmmh.

Both Cheng Yuan and Peng Zhen nodded in agreement.

"With you going into seclusion and things already resolved you will be needing this back," Hu Qiu said as he took out a vial that had a pure white liquid that had an almost ethereal feel to it with a faint cloudy wisp floating above it.

"We really danced by the skin of our teeth," Cheng Yuan said as he took the vial and uncorked it. The white liquid turned to vapor as it diffused into Cheng Yuan's body via his nose, eyes, and ears.

Cheng Yuan who looked like a haggard old geezer staring at death's door now suddenly transformed as his skin got tighter and rosier. His greying hair turned glossy black with only a few greying temples remaining. His body turned firmer and straight like a spear. His eyes were no longer turbid but with a deep black clarity.

"It feels good to get part of my soul back.," Just as Cheng Yuan was about to continue he quickly froze.

"So that's the trick you used to seal your memories huh..a soul-splitting technique," a lazy teasing voice sounded in Cheng Yuan's mental sea before it manifested into a gigantic image with two moons for eyes.

Cheng Yuan gulped once he saw this figure because he had seen it once before. It was earlier today when Yang Qing intervened before Wen Chang could go berserk.

"Not good sect master Cheng Yuan..I'll keep this short and quick since this is a timed delay art.

Sect master Cheng Yuan I Judge Yang Qing hereby find you guilty of breaking the full divulging article both willingly and knowingly as such your sentence shall be mmh let's see the green fog swamp sect is skilled in alchemy and Feng Xin did say the area is filled with all sorts of herbs.

Very well, Cheng Yuan, you shall provide the Order with a botany catalog of the plants in the green fog region. The catalog shall contain a brief physical description of the plant, its habitat, and chemical characteristics.

The grade of plants in your reports shall be left to your discretion whether they are of mortal rank, earth rank or sky rank.

However, do note you will be graded and the better your grade the quicker your sentence will be completed.

The timing of your sentence is indeterminate. It will only end when the review committee in charge of your supervision decides you have provided results to a satisfactory level. Don't worry they will give you the grading system they will be working with so you can monitor your progress.

In addition, you can also provide information on current events whether strange or normal that have happened in your zone or any other region you may have information access to. This will also go towards reducing your sentence so be as detailed and thorough as you can.

That is all. All the best sect master Cheng Yuan. I will now be sealing your mental sea with ten seals. They will be unlocked by the review committee every time you hit a mile mark or target in your sentence.

Goodbye," Yang Qing's figure burst into mists of lights that congealed together into huge chains filled with white ancient looking scribbles that locked Cheng Yuan's mental sea as a huge moon and sun floated above the Chains.

Cheng Yuan coughed blood as his skin grew paler.

"Cheng, what's wrong?" Peng Zhen hurried to Cheng Yuan's side once he saw him vomit blood with Hu Qiu doing the same.

"Did the reattachment backfire? But it shouldn't, should it?" said Hu Qiu in a panic.

"It didn't fail. The Order found out about our little trick and punished me for it," Cheng Yuan said as he ruefully smiled.

"How?" Peng Zhen shockingly asked.

"Judge Yang Qing knew from the very beginning. He seemed to have anticipated it as he placed some sort of time-delayed art on me that would only be triggered if my state changed," Cheng Yuan said as he tried to stabilize himself.

Having his mental sea sealed he felt as if someone had taken a sledgehammer to his head and eyes. The mental sea was what controlled a cultivator's spiritual sense without it they couldn't use their spiritual senses.

A cultivator's spiritual sense was more reliable than using their eyes, nose, ears or touch when sensing their surroundings. The details one could see through the spiritual sense were much higher and finer no matter whether it was day or night. To a cultivator's spiritual sense, there was no distinction and the spiritual sense detection only got better the more powerful the cultivator became. It went to the extent that they could even detect budding souls with their spiritual sense such as those in the palace realm.

They could detect the budding spirits of artifacts and weapons. The uses of spiritual sense only got more and more diverse the more powerful one became. It was one of the most integral parts of a cultivator. What most called a cultivator's intuition was mostly a reflex built from a honed spiritual sense.

Cheng Yuan felt naked and unprotected without his. He had grown so used to having his spiritual sense always activated within a 200-meter radius around him that he now felt completely exposed and unsafe without it.

Before the seals in his mental sea got unlocked he would have to rely on his eyes and other physical senses to get by.

He quickly informed Peng Zhen and Hu Qiu what his sentencing was before he decided to shut himself off for seclusion. With his mental sea shackled he might as well close himself in and ensure his realm was raised to a sufficient level to increase his odds of survival, especially with the looming threat from the black cosmos caiman.

Chapter 105 105: Ripple Effects Around The Cases (7)

Meanwhile in Yang Qing's courtyard

Yang Qing's eyes had turned pure white like the moon and it wasn't only his eyes, his whole body including his hair turned pure white. It seemed like his whole being and even demeanor had transformed into a celestial body more specifically the moon.

There was a tranquil yet solitary sense to him. Some of the people present like the judges and the inquisitors were not surprised to see him in this state as they had seen that form on him more than once.

However, Cao Ying and his friends felt their minds go into a gentle blankness almost as if they were hypnotized. Bolin and Haishi were not doing any better either as they seemed a bit dazed too though theirs was a little bit less severe compared to Cao Ying and his fellow institute friends.

About a minute later Yang Qing's look went back to normal and with it, the effects that came along with his prior look disappeared.

"Sorry about that," said Yang Qing to Cao Ying and the rest once he noticed their puzzled looks after they had come off their dazed stupor.

They only remembered Yang Qing's hair color start to transform from his usual green into a pure white color. After that their minds went blank. Bolin and Haishi's minds went blank a few moments after that when Yang Qing's eyes turned into two moons.

Bolin couldn't help but reevaluate this new boss of his, the same applied to Haishi too. From their earlier experience in the green fog swamp, Feng Xin was the scariest cultivator they met so even amongst the crowd they feared and revered Feng Xin more than the rest. For one it was because everyone present had restrained the auras that accompanied their cultivation realm for obvious reasons and the other was because Haishi and Bolin were too weak to even sense their cultivation realm.

It was hard to fear something unknown at the same level as a fear you know, a very real threat that you have personally experienced.

This was what happened to Bolin and Haishi. Even if they knew Yang Qing was Feng Xin's boss, to them Feng Xin seemed much scarier as they had experienced a part of his abilities whereas Yang Qing seemed like a happy-go-lucky goofy boss.

However, they now had to reevaluate this boss of theirs with a lot of wariness attached to it meanwhile Cao Ying and his fellow students had completely different reactions as they looked at Yang Qing with shining eyes that were filled with awe which made Yang Qing feel rather embarrassed as he rubbed his nose.

Mao Yunru and the rest of his inquisitors threw a questioning look toward him almost as if asking what had happened.

"There was a loose end pending on the first case. Now it can be considered officially closed. I was right about the sect master. He really was the mastermind behind the whole plan while Peng Zhen was just the executor," said Yang Qing as he smiled clearly pleased with himself.

"Excuse me for a bit I need to give a heads up to the review committee," said Yang Qing as he fished out a communication talisman from his storage ring and called the review committee.

They were the ones in charge of following up on the sentences the Judges made on their cases. Its supervision, implementation, and enforcement fell under their purview.

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A special location within the main headquarters of the cultivation order society

"STOOOOOOOOOP!!! STOP I WILL TALK," said a young man with deep red hair who was currently kneeling as he was bound to the floor of the room with white golden chains that had sickles penetrating the young man's body.

His body kept producing black smoke almost as if something was being cleansed from him. The whole room was radiant white almost without embellishment.

"Stop it!!! I said I will talk...I will tell you everything about the scarlet blood ghost hands," the young man with the red hair hurriedly pleaded as he saw one of the three old men surrounding him raise his palm with a kind smiling gesture on his face.

This young man was none other than Dong Yanlin who had earlier pretended to be a rogue cultivator so he could infiltrate the green fog swamp sect with the intention of stealing the tupelo tree. However, his plan backfired when he ended up with his body decimated by one of the talismans Feng Xin had unleashed to track Peng Zhen and the rest.

But here he was with a fully formed body, unlike the bloody blob he was a few hours ago in the courtroom when he had parasitized Peng Zhen.

However, he was the farthest thing from being exhilarated on having his body reformed. All this was because of the three old men surrounding him. They all seemed different ; one was short and rotund with bird-like eyes like an owl's, the other was middle height with a careless and slovenly appearance as his hair and beard were all over and messy with wrinkled robes however despite all that he had an otherworldly charm that made the clumsy appearance seem perfect. The last one was thin, tall, and had his eyes closed. There was a white lotus flower symbol on his forehead that kept spinning almost like cleansing everything around.

Though those old men seemed vastly different from each other they had one thing in common which was the robes they wore. They had pure red robes with the words, special inquisition etched on the back.

They were seated in futon cushions as they surrounded Dong Yanlin.

When Dong Yanlin got transported here it was the short rotund owl-eyed old man who reformed his body with a wave of his hand, a few complex seals, and a few herbs he had never seen before being added to the mix.

It took only three hours before his body was fully reformed by that old man. However, his celebration of having a body was cut short when he was asked to inform on his organization. His placing in the organization, their branches, other known parties they were known to be in cahoots with, whether his attack on the green fog swamp sect was a planned move from the scarlet blood ghost hands or was he acting alone, who his backer was seeing how many treasures he had on him for a core formation expert.

Of course, Dong Yanlin wouldn't be a proper member of an underground organization if he willingly divulged that information without first mocking his captors endlessly and with tonnes of creativity and flair at that, denying all knowledge of what scarlet blood ghost hands even is and also last but not least hypothetically threaten them using the weight of scarlet blood ghost hands that he was definitely not a member of and how they would give the three old men the most painful of deaths if they even touched a hair of his despite not being a member of the scarlet blood ghost hands.

Two of the three old men only kindly smiled at this, almost as if enjoying a play from their favorite grandchild. They even clapped a few times at Dong Yanlin's creativity on how their deaths would be. It was only when Dong Yanlin was fully done did the last sleeping old man finally act. He sleepily flicked his forehead and chains got produced from the floor deeply entrenching themselves into his body.

The chains seemed intangible and benign as they had a gentle healing feel to them but the moment they made contact with Dong Yanlin's body it was like magma had been poured on him. The pain was not only on his body but his soul too.

He had been enduring that torture for almost two hours now. He broke ten minutes after the chains pierced him but for some reason, it seemed like his voice had been sealed no matter how much he tried to yell he was turning traitor. It was only now that he could finally speak.

"Who would have thought such a young child would have so many innocents death on him? The scarlet blood ghost hands sure know how to nurture their young.

Kid, those chains you see before you would have no effect on someone who hasn't slaughtered the innocent but to someone who seems like they have slaughtered women, children the old alike it has a torturous effect like what you are enduring now.

This is the chains of retribution and remorse. The stench of grievance and slaughter on you must have ruined Mo Ye's sleep for him to choose to act against a little core expert like yourself mister Dong Yanlin.

Forgive me I even forgot to introduce myself. As the host, it is rather unbecoming of me.

Hi, my name is Feng Lei, to my left is Xu Ling, and to my right, the person currently asleep and the one currently giving you a good clean bath is Mo Ye.

We are special inquisitors. Our job is to seek information on special organizations just like yours so we will be in your care from now on. Do be as detailed as you can. Mo Ye if you would, please," gently said Feng Lei the slovenly dressed old man.

Mo Ye the sleeping old man waved his hands and the white gold chains disappeared as the spinning white lotus on his forehead came to a stop.

Dong Yanlin fell onto the floor like a wooden log as partial relief washed over him though he still felt like he was still being mildly burned.

"Now we can continue but before that, I need to take care of the pesky seal. You scarlet blood ghost hands members sure are ruthless even to your own members," said Feng Lei as he pointed his right index hand towards Dong Yanlin's forehead.

Dong Yanlin flinched but the expected pain he expected to find was not there. All he heard was a clanking sound from his mental sea like something had been shattered.

Unbeknown to him there was a blood seal on his forehead that had appeared and cracked like shattered glass a millisecond after it appeared.

"Now Dong Yanlin we can start," Feng Lei joyfully said as a kettle of ginseng tea and biscuits appeared in front of him.

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Inside a dark cave filled with red glyphs all over, and floating grey candles was a man in his late thirties with a half-man bun ponytail and scarlet red robes that they may have well been robes made of blood. He was currently missing an arm.

"I can't believe I got injured just from talismans, what if the owner had been there..." the man couldn't help but sigh.

He was currently sitting in a lotus position as he stared complicatedly at a small black pool in front of him. He seemed to have resolved himself as he made a few hand seals that were absorbed by the ghostly floating candles which later plunged themselves into the black pool forming a complicated circular script that had an eerie green glow to them.

"Gui'er what is it? Does it have anything to do with why my spiritual mark on the Ao Yin saber was severed?" an elderly voice sounded from the black pool as it congealed to form an old man's face. His features were not visible with only a general outline of the face forming in the black sludgy pool. It was slender with a long slow beard that narrowed downwards like a cone.

"Master this unfilial disciple regrets to inform you that Dong Yanlin is missing and your Ao Yin saber too," the man called Gui hurriedly knelt and bowed his head that it touched the floor as he addressed the face in the black blob. His shoulders were faintly trembling.

"What happened?" the elderly voice calmly asked.

The calmer the voice sounded the more fearful the man called Gui seemed.

"I think Dong Yanlin got captured by the Order along with your saber. I tried to recover both him and the saber but I was too weak. I ended up having to escape before reinforcements could arrive. Please punish this disciple for his uselessness," said Gui as he further lowered his head that it even created a small round caving on the ground.

"I was wondering who was strong enough to take your arm? So the Order is involved?

What was Yanlin involved in to draw the attention of the Order?" asked the elderly man.

"I'm not quite sure as he was very secretive about it, all I know is what he was involved in had something to do with the green fog region. I did manage to see a couple of individuals with the inquisitor I was chasing after. They seem to belong to some sect with a tupelo tree symbol. If my guess is not wrong whatever Dong Yanlin was involved in had something to do with them.

I can stay and find out more master," said Gui.

"No need. With Dong Yanlin in their custody, you have to assume they know about you already and the hideouts you are currently using. The Order seems to have found a way of cracking the self-implosion seals we place on every member's mental sea for secrecy based on how many branches and members fell to their hands in the past few years.

Luckily that silly boy doesn't know much. It's a shame, he was a promising child.

Gui'er you will need to cease all activity and lay low to safeguard your other identity. We spent a lot of effort creating it. Go resume your post and forget about all other matters. You are to refrain from having

contact with any known blood ghost hand member with the only exception being your senior sister. She will be your only point person to us from now on. All pertinent information will be relayed to you via her and vice versa.

As for the matter concerning Dong Yanlin, we will leave it be for now. The Order will definitely be on high alert on any matter concerning our organization. We are not in a position to engage with them at the moment but that eyesore may not be around for very long.

A repeat of the myriad beasts sect isn't that far off hehehehe," the elderly man chuckled as his image disappeared.

Gui's back flinched at that ending statement. He waited till almost five minutes had elapsed before he finally got up.

"I guess it's time I went back to my sect," said Gui as his body dissolved into a puddle and reformed once more into a middle age man's body with a slim build and stern face.

The same half-man bun ponytail was still retained however a part of his hairline had white strands adding a mature charm to it. His swords which were red along with the black scabbard with scarlet clouds transformed into a sky blue scabbard with the sword guards transforming into feather-like grips. His scarlet robes were now sky blue with white cloud patterns around it with a small feather symbol in the middle.

He removed a token from his storage ring. It looked like a feather sword with the name Ai engraved on it. He put it in his pocket before he used one of his dual swords as a flying sword and flew out of the cave.

Once he was a few meters away the cave dissolved into a black puddle that then evaporated away. All that was left was bare land that smelt a little rotten.

Chapter 106 106: Ripple Effects Around The Cases (8)

The royal capital of the Midnight flower kingdom

"From now on you're no longer Shen Shi, Shen Ding, Shen Tian the rogue cultivators from this moment forth you are now Shen Shi, Shen Ding, Shen Tian reclamation, restoration, and rehabilitation workers.

Your cultivation and combat abilities have no merit whatsoever here. All I want from you three is your ability to follow instructions and a solid work ethic.

As deemed by the decision made by the review committee from the penalties and rehabilitation offices your 12-year sentence will begin with the land restoration and rehabilitation project in the Midnight flower kingdom," a young man in robes that were half black and half white currently addressed three men who seemed to be triplets.

The three brothers were none other than the Shen brothers who had lost their case against the Earthvine restaurant which landed them with a twelve-year sentence and in debt to the Order for 15,000 middle-grade spirit stones.

Their earlier arrogance, wildness, and disdain had been washed from their face all that was left was looks of obedience filled with fear.

The young man in the black and white robes was a member of the review committee in charge of the enforcement of the sentences made by the judges.

Members of the review committee may not be the most battle-oriented bunch in the whole Order but their strength and specialties lay elsewhere. They specialized in areas that didn't necessarily tie to cultivation. Still, they were nonetheless an important aspect of life such as planting and the care of herbs, geomancy, and mineralogy especially when it came to laying down buildings and mining spirit stones and precious metals respectively, cooking, and other areas of expertise that mortals pay attention too such as disaster management.

The youth currently supervising the Shen brothers had specialty skills when it came to disaster management such as the flood that had hit the Midnight flower kingdom submerging a third of the kingdom.

"We will be starting in these three provinces as we make our way upwards. We will be mending and restoring the floodplains of the rivers along the way along with planting flaming juniper trees to speed up the process. I will also need you to master a particular formation blueprint for fortification that will be integral in the restoration," said the young man as he pointed at a detailed map of the Midnight flower kingdom that was spread over the table.

"The whole kingdom needs to be put back together better than before in the 15 months that you will be here. I'm a pretty straightforward person, as long as you do your job well I will not be stingy with your evaluations but if you try to pull fast ones or I detect any hint of complacency in your actions, the duration of your next sentence in the miasma fields will be doubled," the young man sternly said which sent shivers down the spines of the three brothers.

"US THREE BROTHERS WILL GO ABOVE AND BEYOND MASTER WEN JIAN," the three brothers hurriedly yelled with gusto as they bowed trying to show their honesty and determination to do what is expected of them.

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In a well-furnished office room within the Earthvine restaurant.

"You are free to do what you want Zhong Quan just don't go too overboard. Losing a few businesses attached to our organizations won't raise any eyebrows in the grand scheme of things, especially with our merger with the Maple leaf manor on the way.

Just make sure the bottom line is kept otherwise even if you are an in-name disciple of one of the heads of the Golden bamboo pavilion it will not be enough to keep you out of trouble.

We don't need more trouble with our attention focused on the merger.

Later Zhong Quan," said a cold-sounding female voice.

"Good," Zhong Quan, currently seated in his office, grinned malevolently as a red baleful aura surrounded him like a cloak.

The earlier genial, kind, and welcoming face had all but disappeared and was replaced with a fiendish face that found reverie in battle and slaughter. It made one wonder which of these sides was the real Zhong Quan.

"It's time to settle accounts with you bastards. Just because I don't like trouble you think I'm soft persimmon cake that you even sent three little arrogant rogue cultivators to create trouble in my restaurant. Just you wait... I've long since wanted to expand the kitchen," Zhong Quan said as he licked his teeth.

He swiftly got up and made his way out of the office that was located on the third floor.

"Boss you will not be having your lunch as usual?" said one of the chefs who had seen Zhong Quan making his way down the stairs.

"Not now. There are some small matters I need to attend to so we can expand the kitchen and even our menu. Sometime in the future we may have distinguished guests coming over and we need to put our best foot forward for that guest," said Zhong Quan as he genially smiled. His welcoming friendly uncle persona had returned.

He still remembered the 50% off offer he had made to Yang Qing when they had a nonverbal exchange between a seasoned merchant and a seasoned glutton. He had to make sure he had some extra funds to cover the potential losses he would incur from Yang Qing. Luckily he had a few friends with deep pockets who owed him one.

Meanwhile, the chef cast a strange look as he stared at Zhong Quan's departing figure.

In all his years working there the Earthvine restaurant never showed any preferential treatment not even to the royalty of the Emerald lily kingdom who occasionally came to dine at the restaurant. Zhong Quan always insisted on equal treatment whether they be royalty or commoner, cultivator or mortal they all received the same level of treatment the moment they stepped through those doors.

The only times he has seen Zhong Quan make exceptions did not exceed the number of fingers on his hand and in those times they were usually some big shots from the Golden bamboo pavilion.

But here he was, about to expand a kitchen for a customer when he had even refused the king of the Emerald lily kingdom's request for the third floor to be emptied so he could dine.

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Two groups of three by three were currently seated in a small dome-shaped gazebo in the middle of a blue-green lake. Every single material there from the white tiger wood used to build the gazebo, to the futons made of fur from a dream cloud fox, an amber-colored marble table made of amber from a 20,000-year-old graceful evergreen tree, and incense stick from red spring sandalwood.

Everything here screamed opulence as every single object within the gazebo was at least made from high-rank monarch-grade material with the white tiger wood being the most expensive as a low-rank ascendant-grade material.

There were three men on one side of the marble table with two women and a single guy on the other end. The all-men group was all wearing black robes with an emblem of a golden bamboo pavilion embroidered on the coat while the opposite side had yellow autumn robes with a symbol of a maple leaf that had a small purple butterfly on it.

"With these for the most part the merger between our Golden bamboo pavilion and your maple leaf manor can be considered complete. The groundwork stuff can be handled by our subordinates gradually," said one of the men seating in the middle from the side whose team was all wearing black robes with a golden bamboo pavilion embroidered on it.

He had golden long smooth flowing hair that was tied in a top knot with a golden-colored bamboo stick. Every detail of him seemed to have been sculptured with perfection in mind. Though he looked like someone in his late thirties his deep black eyes seemed to hide the history of an epoch recorded in a single glance.

He was currently addressing the lady seating in the middle across the table from his. She too had a beauty that was inexplicable. She had amber eyes that matched the table with light brown hair tied loosely into a bun with a leaf-shaped hair clip. She had the vibe of a cool refreshing breeze from a long summer day.

"It seems we have, founder Lin Guiren," softly said the lady as she offered a courteous calming smile.

"Pardon me for asking but there was something I wanted to ask since we can now be considered to be on the same ship after all," said the lady.

"If there is something founder Yan Meifeng needs to know I would be more than happy to oblige," said the golden-haired man by the name of Lin Guiren.

"It's about those three palace stage experts in your custody. What do you plan to do with them?" asked Yan Meifeng with no change in her expression.

"We have no intention of harming them in any way but they will have to remain in our custody for now. We can't have them leaking information about the mysterious realm they stumbled onto. The fewer people who know the better after all that realm contains the inheritance of the Nebulous star sect. If word of it got out even the holy lands will stake their claim to it. Luckily there has not been evidence of that many people having the token that grants them entry into that realm other than us and those palace stage experts.

But we can never be too careful, who knows maybe other organizations and sects more powerful than us have tokens too. Isn't that why we formed this merger of ours, to increase our odds of gaining great harvest from that realm," Lin Guiren calmly said.

Every member present had somber pensive looks with a hint of excitement flashing through their eyes.

"If the mysterious realm of the Nebulous star sect is as illustrious as just the outer grounds seemed then we may very well be the next Flowing valley sect who grew from just a low-ranking herb farm into a holy ground," said the only gentleman in the maple leaf manor side. He had a pale almost sickly-looking face with black spot marks around his eyes with dark green hair matching his eyes. Even though he looked sickly he still had a noble temperament to him and a sense of deeply ingrained pride in his bones.

When he spoke about the Flowing valley sect there was no sense of reverence one would expect when mentioning a holy land but it was instead deep anger. This sentiment didn't only appear on him but on Yan Meifeng and the other lady too whose expressions turned cold before Yan Meifeng's expression turned warm once more.

This little change didn't escape Lin Guiren's eyes whose expression remained stoic as it always was during the entire exchange.

"Shame what will happen to the sect of those palace stage experts though. It's a sect with a rich history after all," said Yan Meifeng as a look of pity and a hint of remorse showed on her face.

"There's nothing we can do to alter the course we are on and the effects that come with it..the destruction of that sect may even end up as a boon for us, especially if those three palace stage experts mentioned anything about the Nebulous star's mysterious realm. With its destruction any potential leak can be closed off," one of the men on Lin Guiren's side coldly said.

The rest didn't say anything but they seemed to tacitly agree with his thoughts.

Chapter 107 107: Ripple Effects Around The Cases (9)

Inside the meeting hall of the sect master's courtyard in the Yellow lotus sect.

"Sect master, why did you come back with Zhao Qi? Didn't we all agree that he will be sent to the Mountain springs pavilion so that his life can be spared? Now that you have brought him here isn't that the same as signing his death warrant," One of the elders currently assembled in the hall didn't even wait for the meeting to start before he fired his question.

He was slim and short with greying hair that was neatly tied in a daoist top knot. His eyes flashed with faint sparks of white lightning.

Sect master Han Qingling couldn't help but sigh at this.

"Wei Peng I know he is your disciple and you care about him, but do you think I as the sect master would be negligible of his care?"

Wei Peng who looked like he still had a few more things to say went silent from sect master Han Qingling's words.

"I'm sorry for my earlier impudence but I'm still lost on why Zhao Qi came back to the sect with you. Leaving the sect was a good thing, especially with the things we put him through to ensure his safety. A fresh start someplace else away from all that would be best for him.

He may try to hide it but I can tell that kid hides a lot of heartaches and I don't think it is solely tied to his treatment by the sect the past few years," Wei Peng said as he sighed with regret.

His sentiment was echoed around the hall as the elders all held guilty looks. They had all signed off on this course of action so they could safeguard Zhao Qi's life but it didn't mean they didn't hate the action as it involved ruining a promising young man's reputation all because they were too weak.

Were they strong, would they have to go to such extremes and subterfuge just to ensure their disciples' lives were protected?

"Zhao Qi came back of his own volition. I had to tell the judge in charge of our case our current situation and the ruse we had created though I feel there was no need to as the judge seemed to have suspected something was off from the very start," Sect master Han Qingling said as a complicated expression flashed in his eyes from today's events.

None of the elders including Wei Peng interrupted as they felt sect master Han Qingling still had more to add.

"There were various things that happened during the case that I'm not at liberty to reveal yet but there are a few things that I can say.

First, there is a way to avoid this calamity and secondly, we have formed an alliance with one of the leaders of the Mountain springs pavilion. To that effect Wei Peng, I will need you to get in contact with your friend from the White ginseng pavilion and ask them if they have a way to get the lightning aurora sunflower," said sect master Han Qingling as he eyed Zhao Qi's master.

"I will ask them, though what do you need that herb for? It may be a monarch-grade herb but its only use is cleansing miasma and breaking other poison-related curses?" Wei Peng couldn't help but ask with a puzzled expression.

"It's for one of their leaders who got injured by a cultivation art and from what pavilion owner Liu Yun said it seems like it could be a poison-related art. He offered to pay for the herb himself once we confirmed its presence but we will be buying the herb on his behalf.

It's the least we can do after what we did and for those of you here who think we are wasting whatever resources we have left to do that just think of it as buying the services of a quasi-palace stage expert who is just inches away from breaking through to the palace sage.

We all know just a single monarch-grade herb isn't enough to buy the services of a quasi-palace stage expert much less a potential palace stage expert," sect master Han Qingling calmly said as he eyed the elders around.

He knew there might be some who might be against him using whatever little resources they have left into helping an outsider instead of focusing it all internally, especially with the looming threat above their necks. But once sect master Han Qingling mentioned a potential palace stage expert those hidden frowns and displeasure turned to pleasant surprises.

"I have no objections to the sect master's plans. Qingling whatever you decide is the best path forward we will do our best to support it. We know if it wasn't for your loyalty to the sect with your talent you would have gotten into any sect you wished and even got a better position and resources but instead, you are here with us.

Whatever Qingling says goes. Our part is to be his arms and legs," One of the oldest elders in the group thunderously said with a fierce threatening pressure being produced from his body.

He was one of the four quasi-palace stage experts that the Yellow lotus sect had. Of the remaining three one was Sect master Han Qingling, the other was Wei Peng and the last one was an equally aged elder who seemed to be in the same generation as the elder who had made that statement.

The old elder's comments made some of the other elders who had something to say probably in opposition, shrink back.

"Thank you supreme elder Huang for your support," Sect master Han Qingling politely said as he bowed in thanks. Even though he was stronger he still had deference for Elder Huang and the other equally old elder. They were both supreme elders that were part of the previous generation, the same as his master.

They should have been in a long seclusion to try and break through to the palace stage but they broke their seclusion so they could support their sect. They were already over three thousand years old and the more time passed the fewer odds they will have of breaking through to the palace stage naturally due to vitality setbacks. For that sect master Han Qingling was deeply grateful to them.

"So what's this plan you have that can help us avoid the danger we face?" supreme elder Huang gingerly asked as he smiled.

"It's with this," sect master Han Qingling said as he passed around a few formation blueprints.

"THIS? Sect master where did you find a monarch grade formation blueprint...from the look of things it seems like a mobile one. There are some parts that I don't understand due to my own ineptitude but the rank of this formation matches the one laid in the sect by supreme elder Tingfeng....

Enlai, come see?" One of the elders who seemed to be an expert in formations excitedly said as he called over another elder who became equally as engrossed with the formation blueprint once his eyes fell on it. They looked like kids with a new cool toy.

The elders once they realized the exquisiteness of the formation drawn on the blueprint couldn't help but look questioningly at sect master Han Qingling.

Buying a monarch-grade herb and buying a monarch-grade formation blueprint was not the same thing. The former could only benefit a single person most of the time and was a single-use item while the latter could ensure the survival of an entire organization such as a sect, clan, or kingdom. Therefore when it came even to pricing they were miles apart. It was why they were shocked the sect master had a formation blueprint of such a level on him. They knew their current financial situation well, there was no way they could afford something of that level especially when a formation blueprint was many times more expensive than a formation disc or flag of the same grade.

"Did the Order give you this?" asked one of the remaining supreme elders.

"No, I got it from someplace different which I currently can't reveal yet. All you need to know is thanks to this formation we can guarantee our survival for at least two or three years and as you may have noticed it doesn't need to be laid down next to a spirit vein just spirit stones and a few treasures as anchors would do.

That time should be sufficient for me to breakthrough to the palace stage and when the time comes I will have more than enough capital to call our enemies into account," said sect master Han Qingling as his gaze turned cold and valiant.

"I will also be making a public apology to clear Zhao Qi's name, in addition, I will be allowing Zhao Qi to learn our core art, the 36 leaves of the yellow lotus.

Don't worry Peng you should know with his sturdy foundations he is not at risk for learning the art while still being in the early stages of the foundation stage as opposed to the later stages like we set," Sect master Han Qingling said once he saw the worried frown on elder Wei Peng's face.

"That will be all...I need you all to get started on the formation and setting them up all around the sect. Supreme elder Huang, supreme elder Bingwen, and Elder Wei Peng please remain behind there is another matter we need to discuss," sect master Han Qingling said as he addressed the three elders. He had decided they were the three he would introduce to Deng Chao.

For one they were the three he trusted most and for the other, they were quasi-palace stage experts. A few pointers from Deng Chao may very well help them cross that threshold which would add another safety net when the Yellow lotus sect gains four palace stage experts.

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"Boss we have eyes on the target. Based on his cultivation base aura he seems to be preparing to breakthrough to the palace stage. Should we take him now or do it after he breaks through."

Two people wearing dark cloaks were currently eyeing a short sturdy middle-aged man who seemed to be heading to his abode.

"Wait until the target breaks through to the palace stage otherwise he will be of no use to us," replied a cold-sounding voice from the other end of the communication talisman being held by one of the two cloaked men.

"Sir what about the Order? He may not be an employee there but he works at a restaurant stationed there. Won't this draw unwanted eyes?" one of the men couldn't help but hesitantly ask with clear worry and trepidation in his tone.

"You should only concern yourself with the task at hand. Failure is not permitted," said the cold voice as the connection went off.

The two men stared at each other as they ruefully smiled at their rock-and-hard place situation before they decided to just focus on the matter at hand. They feared the person at the other end of the call more than what hypothetically the Order would do to them if caught.

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Inside Meng Chao's chambers

"It seems the rats have caught the bait. Time to see where their nest is and finally see whether my hunch was right," said Meng Chao as he craftily smiled while taking ice jasmine tea.

Chapter 108 108: Ripple Effects Around The Cases (10)

At Yang Qing's courtyard, the party was already well on its way. The fear Cao Ying's friends had earlier when they came had all but disappeared. They still had a little bit of reservation but they could now hold decent conversations, and be bold in the amount they ate as they joyously laughed at some of the jokes the party members were making. Though one couldn't know if it was because the jokes were genuinely funny or if they were just fawning over their seniors.

Yang Qing, Feng Xin, Yi Jie, Zheng Hu, and Dai Chen were currently in Yang Qing's backyard staring at the massive over 100-meter body of the green flowered babirusa.

Of the members present only Yang Qing and Feng Xin had come to carve up the beast while the rest had their own agendas. Zheng Hu wanted to see a spirit beast of the green fog region up close, Yi Jie wanted a little blood to add to his rising wave blood wine that was a mixture of powerful herbs and blood drained from powerful spirit beasts. It may be his potent wine yet. As for Dai Chen, the boozehound, he was dutifully following Yi Jie since he had carried the gourd with the hundred-leaf sugar cane wine with him.

"Will we be carving the whole thing up or do you just want to deal with the leg for the party?" asked Yang Qing as he greedily sized the babirusa.

Feng Xin hesitated for a bit as he pondered what would be the best course of action.

"Let's carve it all up at a go. There may be a potential loss in flavor if we carved it up partly," said Feng Xin.

"Great, I can't wait to see how many tonnes we will harvest from it," Yang Qing eagerly said as he took out what looked like a grey hide from his storage ring.

The babirusa was lifted and then laid on top of the grey hide which lit up with a few glyphs before it went back to normal.

"With this, no single drop or quality of the meat will be lost," Yang Qing said with pride in his tone.

The grey hide was a high-rank sky-grade artifact whose only purpose lay in the preservation of the quality of organic matter. Other than that it was useless for anything else. The main ingredient used in making the hide was skin from aquatic illusions perch a creature skilled in adaptability to its surroundings. The hide was also treated with a few herbs to make sure no fire or cold would affect it. It was also impervious to the stabbing.

Were it any other sensible person they would have fashioned the hide into armor due to its properties rather than a tarp for butchering meat.

Feng Xin nodded in approval once he saw the hide before Yang Qing and he went off to their grand undertaking. Zheng Hu, Yi Jie, and Dai Chen were made into assistants to store up the viscera and other parts that had niche eaters or parts that were better suited for alchemy than being eaten such as the fangs.

After thirty minutes the whole green flowered babirusa had been expertly carved with the loin, leg, blade, head, and other parts being carefully separated. Even its hide was neatly processed with not a single pound of flesh left on it. It was as smooth as a baby's skin.

Yang Qing and Feng Xin had their arms over each other shoulder to shoulder as they admired their handiwork.

"Feng Xin I have to say this time you got a steal. Look at the quality," Yang Qing said as his eyes glittered admiring the red-pink mountain of meat lain over the grey hide.

"I'm even a little tempted to keep it all for myself," said Feng Xin before he detected a murderous red glare coming from Yang Qing.

"I said tempted," Feng Xin said as he dryly chuckled.

"As agreed I will provide just a single leg no more," said Feng Xin with no room for debate before he hurriedly stored the rest of the meat leaving only a single hind leg and blood that Yi Jie was skillfully collecting.

"I can't wait to see how it thashtes," said Yang Qing as heavy drool affected his speech towards the end.

The group quickly hurried back to barbecue the meat. The moment the leg was placed over a flame the flavorful smell it produced left every stomach present grumbling no gender or race was spared.

Even Haishi who had said she would begrudgingly eat the babirusa if offered had forgotten her oath to her comrade. Her compound eyes filled with over a hundred lenses were flashing with lights like shooting stars were exploding in her eyes. Any sort of reservation she had went up in smoke the moment that flavorful scent hit her.

"This celestial shall allow you all to share half since I'm feeling magnanimous today," the celestial nesting weaver's lazy but arrogant voice sounded in everyone's ear as it too joined the glutton bandwagon.

"Oh allow is it?... I think someone is getting arrogant just because he is at the fourth stage of the palace stage. I think we need to reeducate you. A few stages in difference don't mean a thing sometimes," Yang Qing menacingly said as he pressed his knuckles together.

Almost everyone present had that menacing look on them even Cao Ying.

"This celestial is not budging, if a celestial nesting weaver lets go of its treasure then what is it? It's a matter of principle," the celestial nesting weaver arrogantly said still not aware of his circumstances.

It was only when four simultaneous punches, kicks, and even bites came in that the celestial nesting weaver knew it had said something it shouldn't have. However, the die had been cast, it had to go all the way. So even if it was being mobbed by everyone present its arrogant mouth never stopped moving.

It was only when the leg had been perfectly barbecued with herbs and spices and even slathered with one of the wine collections from Yi Jie did the beating stop.

Everyone involved in giving the celestial nesting weaver a beating were currently panting and wheezing while the celestial nesting weaver only had a few ruffled feathers but it looked otherwise okay in fact better when compared to the rest.

"You think we'd be able to live how we want if we didn't have thick skin to accompany us? You need to have at least dragon talons to penetrate my defense and not those soft noodles you call arms," the celestial nesting weaver mockingly said as its gaze lingered mostly on Kang Huilang who was the one that had thrown the most punches, kicks, and bites. Though there were two people who did nothing but bite it all this while, it couldn't help but look wearily at them.

"Let's carve," Yang Qing yelled like a commander going to battle trying to raise his soldiers' morale. The rest like loyal soldiers heading to the greatest battle of their lives roared accordingly while Bolin and Haishi chirped.

Pieces of the babirusa were passed around with cups of the vermilion fruit wine and the hundred sugar cane wine accompanying it.

Whatever everyone had thought the delicious-smelling babirusa would taste like, it went above their expectations that it even left Feng Xin and Yang Qing weeping as they took careful bites unlike how they voraciously gulped their other foods.

"Such a shame we don't have anyone among us skilled in the cooking dao..maybe next time we should invite Qi Shan over. With her skills can you imagine the levels this flavor would rise?" said Yang Qing as the rest sighed along with him including Haishi and Bolin who didn't even know who Qi Shan was.

It lasted only a second before the sigh was replaced with crisp crunching sounds, toasts, and cheers that eventually led to an arm wrestle between Huilang and Yang Qing, a marvelous guqin melody courtesy of

Su Jinjing, and accompanying horrible vocals from Dai Chen and Zheng Hu who did nothing but bellow out like whales over and over.

The welcome party lasted till 3:00 am with even Chief Song joining the mix with a few other Order employees who happened to stop by to pick up their wine orders from Yi Jie.

Feng Xin had to give out a few more spare ribs when the company grew much to his displeasure and vehement refusal. It was only after sufficient bribery and threats did he finally relent.

When 3:00 am came the crowd started leaving one by one till finally only Yi Jie and Feng Xin were left. Yi Jie decided to just stay over since it was just a few hours till they had to clock in. Knowing Yang Qing's morning antics it was safer to keep a close watch on him.

They were currently enjoying glacial ice mint tea while Feng Xin was busy finishing up the leftovers.

"Which abode did you get Wen Yingjie?" asked Yang Qing as savored the mint tea in his hand.

"The fourth-grade spirit calming cavern," answered Yi Jie.

"Mmmh, well in terms of meditation and concentration it should support him well," said Yang Qing as he nodded in approval.

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Spirit calming cavern IV

Wen Yingjie the rogue cultivator whose saber kept attracting lightning tribulations due to its budding spirit was currently in a dark room filled with water.

He was seated in a lotus position as he grimly stared at the rustic old dusty lamp before him. It was engraved with the image of a white octopus with ancient writings surrounding its tentacles.

The lamp before him was a treasured artifact that stored the blue-grade soul cultivation art that he would need so he could split half his soul and bind it to his saber before he went on to temper it with his saber intent.

Yi Jie had repeatedly warned him how painful the process would be which made him pensive even if he was going to be cultivating a blue-grade cultivation art.

"No time like the present. I only have four months to learn this art before it automatically gets wiped off my mind. Grandpa and the rest will have to handle things with the black jade syndicate and find out what they were doing with the prince. Now all I need to do is focus on my battle. If I survive this maybe the palace stage won't be that far off and I can finally return home," Wen Yingjie said as he gritted his teeth and used his spiritual sense to study the cultivation art stored in the lamp.

"The three hearts of the radiant octopus," Wen Yingjie silently muttered as the art's name appeared in his mind.

Chapter 109 109: Second Day Cases And Yang Qing's Preparation

Four hours quickly passed by before the time came for Yang Qing, Yi Jie, and Feng Xin to go back to work. Due to how fluid an inquisitor's job was they never kept exact hours for their jobs. There were cases that would leave them on duty for almost one week straight with no break and there were cases that only took half a day for them to get all the pertinent information they would need before the matter is submitted to the judge they're attached to.

While Yang Qing and Yi Jie were already in the courtroom starting on the pile of cases for the day, Feng Xin had a few hours to kill before he would be needed for another case. He used that time to liquidate some of his assets i.e. some of the spirit beasts he slaughtered from the green fog region such as the iron shot frog, ice-beaked egret, corroding heron, and such. Some of his spoils such as the corroding heron was sold to one of the alchemists for a pretty good sum which he used to finally pay off some of his outstanding debts from some of the restaurants around and got delisted.

His final stop was the Thousand flavors restaurant. Unlike other places, this was the only place he had good credit and it was also the only place he sold a few parts of the green flowered babirusa. At the end of the deal both he and the manager of the restaurant left with pleased looks on their faces.

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Much to Yang Qing's delight the cases that he had during the day were much less cumbersome than the prior day's cases. One of the cases was a prince who tried to dine and dash in a rank 4 restaurant within his kingdom however things did not go as planned as his guards were swiftly defeated when they tried to force their way out. To avoid any further troubles the restaurant decided to bring the matter to the Order rather than settle it with the kingdom. In the restaurant owner's mind, he wondered if a prince acted this wantonly what about the king? Rather than risk it they would rather throw the hot potato the Order's way and ensure their safety.

The next case was a groom suing his wife for lying about her age. The groom was a seventh-stage core formation expert while the bride was a tenth-stage core formation expert. While the bride seemed to be the stronger of the two based solely on cultivation bases but in terms of potential the groom was miles ahead. He was just about 70 years old while his bride was close to 600 years. With core formation experts having a life expectancy of about 4,500 years, her age could be considered young considering she was at the late stages of the core formation realm.

When cultivators broke through to the core formation stage they could retain their youth form despite what age they are. Some cultivators choose to revert to their youth form when they were about 20 years or so while others choose to maintain a mature look of a person in the mid-40s to 50s while others don't mind their body showing their true age.

When it came to the groom and bride; the groom despite being 70 years had chosen to retain his youth as he resembled a young man in his early thirties while the bride decided to go the same route and retained her youth looks from when she was 30 years. She was a dashing beauty with a gentle and warm face. Age was about the only thing she changed as her looks were what she truly looked like when she was that age. However, she had lied to the man that she was 63 years old. It was only during the wedding when the groom was given an artifact that checks the true bone age of cultivators that he discovered his wife to be was almost ten times older than he was.

He was appalled when he discovered the situation. Of course, he aired his grievances, words were exchanged, and swords and talismans were drawn. At the end of it all, the groom suffered a beating from her brothers, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of the bride. Not only him but even the guest who gave out the age bone-checking artifact was not forgotten for his part in all this. It was only due to the bride's plea that he survived with just a solid beating nothing else though it would still require a few months to heal.

The bride's family confiscated everything from the groom including the wedding gifts. The groom was originally a rogue cultivator while the bride was from a prominent rank 4 clan that had over forty core formation experts with her grandfather, great grandfather both being at the peak of the core formation stage.

It was also partly due to the bride's resources and his natural talents that he managed to reach his current realm.

Yang Qing had a bit of difficulty with the case because on one hand other than lying about her age the bride by the name of Li Mei did sincerely love the groom Hao Ren to the point she even used her own allotted resources to help support his cultivation.

The age lie came from fear and insecurities that Hao Ren would look down on her and leave for greater skies as for her she had spent most of her life cultivating as life passed her by till she decided she wanted to pursue something different and maybe start a family.

As for the groom Hao Ren, the age difference did shake him a bit as his wife-to-be was as old as his ancestor though the lie was what got to him and the beating he got from her family did little to help the situation. And also the family never treated him well. They always treated him with scorn and disdain due to his rogue status and lacking any backing whatsoever. It was only due to his talent that he had any leg up in the family. He only ever tolerated them because of Li Mei. But after the fiasco that happened on the wedding day he had sworn that he would never step into the Li family grounds. His association with them was over. Some part of him was even entertaining the idea of going back and giving the whole family a thorough beating when he reached the peak of the core formation stage. He had a quasi-blue core while most of the Li family had red and orange cores. In the same realm, he would be able to best them due to the advantage of the quality of his core.

In the end, Yang Qing ordered the family to pay his medical bills and give half the wedding presents to Hao Ren which the Li family head didn't like but had to go along with it. Though Li Mei's persuasion had a part to play in it.

Yang Qing also tried to convince Hao Ren to give Li Mei a chance as throughout the whole process it was evident how much she still loved him as she didn't even so much as contest a single thing.

Hao Ren after hesitating, in the end, agreed but only if Li Mei left her family and started over with him, to which she agreed.

With help from the Order they managed to resettle someplace far away from the Li clan territory.

As for the last case Yang Qing dealt with, it was even simpler as he only had to serve as a witness and officiator to a duel. Two rank 3 sects were fighting over ownership of a pseudo monarch rank treasure. None wanted to relent to the other and to prevent other sects from profiting from their all-out clash they decided to settle their dispute through an official life-and-death duel under the supervision of the Order.

To prevent wide-scale destruction brought about by cultivators fighting over treasures the Order created an official duel on their grounds to help reduce this risk.

Each sect would choose five cultivators and the rank or title of the cultivators didn't matter. The Order provided both the venue and standardized weapons to both sides to ensure the duel had a modicum of fairness.

The first to score three wins would be declared the winner. On normal occasions, it was usually straightforward since a winner would be produced within those five matches and sometimes it didn't even reach five but in this case, for some strange reason, the two sects had an almost indefinite tie as almost 15 cultivators from both sides ended up fighting.

Due to the severe losses both sects suffered as the majority of the 15 cultivators fielded by both parties were elders, the two sects decided that a merger between the two sects would be better. That way they could cover the losses they suffered by combining their numbers which would also help them guard against others who might have some ideas about the quasi-monarch stage artifact.

Since the Order also acts as witnesses and officiators in mergers when asked, the two sects decided to invoke the services of the Order at a fee of course. An agreement was made between the two sects and the Order to which Yang Qing was assigned as the arbiter to the merger. Though he would only be able to do the job only when he was officially a palace court judge as his current rank didn't allow him to supervise any mergers.

Luckily the two sects still needed time to sell the idea to the rest of the sect and put their affairs in order while Yang Qing's promotion ceremony and official induction were just a few days away.

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The moment the last case ended Yang Qing bolted from the courtroom without even waiting for Yi Jie to chauffeur him home. He had a very important party to prepare for, the welcome party for Zhu Lao the dean of cultivation history and dissection also famously known for his creation of the gold-grade art, the shadow void steps.

All day Yang Qing had been counting down the hours till the end of his shift so he could rush to the party Meng Chao 'generously' invited him to.

Chapter 110 110: Room Of Strange Trinkets

Yang Qing was in his room with a pile of robes thrown haphazardly on the floor. Ordinarily, he would have just used his issued judge robes that had a customized feature that let it transform into any type of robe he wished but he didn't want to do that.

It was a mental thing since he would feel off going to a party with his work clothes. After mulling over what to wear he finally settled on wearing white inner robes with a green coat. He even tied his hair for once into a tiny half ponytail.

"Now what should I bring? The party will definitely mostly have big shots at the domain realm, nothing I have will catch their eye."

Another dilemma soon presented itself. Almost every decent thing he had, either went to his stomach, work-related fines, and the huge nesting project courtesy of the celestial nesting weaver. Even if it didn't he didn't think he had any treasures that would catch the eyes of a domain expert like Zhu Lao who wasn't just any domain expert but a dean at the institute of the Order.

Every dean at the minimum was required to have a cultivation base that was at least in the ninth stage of the domain realm and their understanding of the dao needed to be a cut above the rest. They also needed to be skilled in multiple areas. Dean Zhu Lao's expertise lay in dissecting cultivation arts and the study of different languages that extended even to sacred spirit beast languages like the ones dragons, phoenixes, Kun penguins, and other top-tier spirit beasts used.

To these spirit beasts, part of their powers lay in their tongue. They could move oceans, split mountains, and cause a torrential of stars to fall with particular cries.

It was due to the insights he gained from researching their language that Dean Zhu Lao was even able to dissect some of the spirit beast's innate traits and abilities and modify them into cultivation arts that could be used by people.

His breadth of knowledge was sufficient to cover a 100-foot dome library. It was because of this that Yang Qing was apprehensive about what gift to give.

On one hand, Dean Zhu Lao was an expert in the domain realm so the resources he got from the Order weren't small either in quantity or quality and to top it all he was also a dean which meant he had additional resources that came with the post.

Whereas Yang Qing was just a salary man surviving on the meager salary of a core court judge and leaving way beyond his means, especially with the expensive celestial nesting weaver.

"I guess I'll just have to pick something from my unknown collection," Yang Qing said as he made his way to a room that seemed like it was a storage room. It was filled with all sorts of trinkets from weird-looking broken mirrors to pebbles, old torn book covers with strange symbols and no pages, weird dried-up plants, scrolls in the shape of wine gourds, broken weapons, etc.

The room seemed to be more like a place where people dumped the things they didn't need or things that got damaged. However, in Yang Qing's eyes the most valuable thing in his abode other than the green flame tree, the purple lightning bamboo forest, and the eclipse tree, was this storage room and the things in it. He had even used a bulk of his merit points to have this room retrofitted with over ten top rank blue grade formation arrays just to guard the things in it.

Due to his deep interest in archeology and how far deep he went down that rabbit hole, he ended up gaining a hoarder habit of collecting strange things he came across whether they had any value or not. As long as it caught his eye he bought it. He was a regular frequenter of auction houses and open-air markets where cultivators put any goods they had on their stalls.

Most cultivators preferred going to auction houses as you would know exactly what you were buying thanks to the efforts of the auction house's own appraisers but in exchange, the prices for the goods were high whereas buying from the open air market was different. The goods were much cheaper however there were no appraisal notes attached to the good you bought. So half the time neither the buyer nor the seller knew the true value of the object of trade especially the more bizarre the object seemed.

The trade usually went either way. Sometimes the seller would make a steal and sell a useless item whose only worth is its strange look for a hefty sum and other times it's the buyer who ends up buying a precious artifact, or high-grade cultivation art hidden somewhere within the strange for cheap. It usually went either way.

Yang Qing got a few steals from these open-air market sales. On more than one occasion he has found a few incomplete blue-grade arts, random historical records of a particular time, strange techniques such as alchemical techniques that had disappeared into obscurity with the passage of time, part of a bestiary record e.t.c and other times it was a burst. He'd end up with cursed weapons, normal objects that just looked strange, and even on one occasion he thought he had stumbled to some sort of celestial rock only for it to end up being dung of a mutated spirit beast that had likely ingested something it should not have. Then there were those objects whose origins he could not yet decipher with his current skills, knowledge or the objects were too degraded to glean anything from them.

Without exception, whether useful or not, known or unknown every trinket he got was stored here even the celestial dung. He had a look of gratification as he admired his collection. Half of the objects stored here, he couldn't decipher their true origins or worth. He decided to pick something from the undeciphered pile and use it as a gift.

Dean Zhu Lao was an archeological nerd just like he was. Yang Qing was willing to take a gamble that one of the objects in the unknown pile may end up catching his eye. With that, he would have opened up a connection with a fellow kindred spirit whom he would shamelessly consult for free from time to time.

Yang Qing couldn't help but snicker once he thought of the potential free appraisal labor from a seasoned expert like dean Zhu Lao.

"I guess you will have to do," said Yang Qing as he picked up an arc-shaped tablet made from clay-like material. The tablet was dark grey and time had left its mark on it as the bottom right corner was filled with cracks.

There were weird logo syllabic scripts on the old worn-out tablet. Just as Yang Qing was holding it the scripts started to interchange and transform into images of waves, sand dunes, flowing rivers, and strange animals Yang Qing had never seen before among other things. The strange transformation was not an uncommon occurrence as it happened once a day at different times. The irregular intervals made

it difficult for Yang Qing to gain any clue about the trigger for its transformations. About the only thing that was consistent was the transformations happened only once a year.

Despite using all resources available he still had no clue what those syllables meant or what the tablet held. Even the material used to make the tablet was a mystery.

That tablet was among the top strangest objects he had in his collection and despite its current look, it was also one of the scariest. When Yang Qing bought it, the owner almost seemed relieved to get rid of it. At the time Yang Qing didn't understand why as he didn't detect anything dangerous from it even when he scanned it with his spiritual sense.

It was only later after fiddling around with it that he realized why the seller seemed thin, haggard like he had just survived a drought and a storm at the same time.

Once every year on a full moon the tablet would release sounds that mimic ocean waves and from that wave came a sound that was gentle as a calm wind and at times as ferocious as thunder that it would even shake your soul.

Luckily for Yang Qing either because he was stronger than the seller and always slept in the celestial nesting weaver's nest or the tablet was drained of energy due to the passage of time but those sounds had little effect on him in fact they helped him sleep well on occasion and even freshened his soul. He would have slept with it in the nest if he wasn't afraid the celestial nesting weaver would steal it and transform it into part of its nest.

However, there was one aspect of the tablet that made Yang Qing cautious with it. When he bought it after making no heads or tails on the logo syllables he decided to transfer some of his qi into it to see if he would get any reaction. It turned out to be a fatal mistake as the tablet ended up sucking all his qi and only stopped when it somehow detected there was no more qi to drain. It was from that moment on that the symbols started to transform into images of waves, sand dunes, etc.

At the time Yang Qing was still in the middle stages of the core formation realm however he knew his qi reserves well. Due to his flawless jade physique and the innate attribute that came along with it plus his cultivation art, his qi volume was enough to rival those in the peak of the core formation realm. That level of qi reserve was sufficient to power a few top-rank sky-grade formation arrays but when it came to the tablet it was only enough to invoke the symbol transformation feature that happened once a year.

Once Yang Qing reached the palace realm he did try to feed the tablet his qi and just like before, it drained him completely and only stopped when there was no more qi to drain. This time the only thing that changed was a few luminescent dots that appeared on the curved edges of the tablet. They were so tiny that one would overlook them and they seem to have no effect. But the ocean noises the tablet produced seemed to have stopped the moment the dots appeared.

Yang Qing figured he would at least have to be in the later stages of the palace realm or the domain stage before he could gain anything from the tablet. Who knew how long it might take, he might as well give it to Dean Zhu Lao and score a favor with him and find out what mysteries the tablet held with his assistance.

He had this knacky feeling the secrets the tablet hid would be enormous and if they were he would soon be swimming in merit points and maybe just maybe decide his own work schedule.

Yang Qing lightly chuckled once his thoughts reached there as he made his way out of his courtyard carefully holding the tablet.