

## Daily life 41

### Chapter 41 Palace Realm Stage

Yang Qing couldn't help but smile when he saw the man coming over. He hurriedly woke up from his seat. Cheng Yuan turned too to see who the person was. The person had on a light yellow robe that was form-fitting and was rolled back at the sleeves till they reached his elbows. The man had a medium rough-looking beard and hair that was tied up in a round bun with loose strands flowing everywhere. He had light brown eyes that matched his hair. His build was stocky. He looked more like a blacksmith than a chef. What made Cheng Yuan assume he was a chef and not a blacksmith moonlighting as a chef on the side was the clean robes and the crystal-like hands. They stood out against his muscular build.

"Don't stare at his hands too much Cheng Yuan. Even though Jiang Fu never says it, he doesn't like people staring at his hands for long," Cheng Yuan was shocked to hear Yang Qing's voice being transmitted to his head despite the latter not making a sound as he was currently smiling.

"How is he able to do this? I don't think voiceless transmission is something one at the core formation realm can do as far as I can tell master told me it was those at the palace realm who were able to do things like this...Wait could he be? But no it can't be. He is a superior core court judge and as such he should be at that stage. Besides how old is he? He looks to be barely 20 years old. The Order may have talents but even I doubt they'd have a 20-year-old palace realm cultivator. Maybe core formation experts from the Order are of a different breed like how Cao Ying is. The Order has unfathomable means that people at our rank can never fathom," Cheng Yuan internally wondered as he quickly averted his gaze away from the short man's crystal jade-like hands.

In the cultivation realms once one reached the palace stage they would be able to transmit their thoughts using their spiritual sense. Though when they breakthrough to the palace stage it stops being the spiritual sense and becomes the monarch's sense. At that level, their senses can do a lot of things including transmitting their thoughts which is why spirit beasts can communicate with people at the palace stage without the need for voice transmission beads.

"Master Jiang Fu," Yang Qing cheerily said as he went over and exchanged a back pat with the short man. Jiang Fu also reciprocated the pat with the same level of enthusiasm as small chuckles escaped his mouth.

"Young master Yang Qing I told you to stop calling me that. It makes me feel embarrassed being called that by someone a thousand levels more powerful than I am. Where would I put my face if a palace stage expert called a puny core formation expert like myself master." Jiang Fu jokingly said.

"I'll do that when you stop calling me young master making me sound like the scion of some noble family," Yang Qing answered back before both of them broke up laughing shoulder to shoulder. They seemed closer than the friendly relationship a regular customer and a chef would have.

Cheng Yuan's mind was in disarray once he heard Jiang Fu say Yang Qing was a palace stage expert. He almost yelped out the moment he heard, luckily he heard enough self-restraint to hold himself back.

"HOW, HOW HOW HOW HOW...Whhaaaat," Cheng Yuan internally mumbled to himself in fear as he stared at Yang Qing with a terrified gaze. Even as he stared he still found it hard to believe. There was no single aura of an expert flowing out of Yang Qing in fact at the moment it felt like it was being swallowed up by the person named Jiang Fu who had a tempestuous stillness to him like he could erupt at any moment. Though Jiang Fu had withdrawn as much of his pressure as he could, Cheng Yuan still felt his palms sweating and heart racing from being this close to him. As for Yang Qing, he seemed like he wasn't even there. He didn't add or remove anything. He was just a green-haired youth with a slovenly appearance and a happy-go-lucky attitude.

Cheng Yuan had a hard time reconciling one of the stories he had heard about palace stage cultivators and Yang Qing's current look. It was a stark contrast.

In one of the stories recorded by the sect founder, there was a rank 4 kingdom called the Silver sun kingdom that had been under mutiny. Before the mutiny happened the power of the royal family was being encroached upon by the various powerful noble families of the kingdom who had banded together to try and dethrone them and completely devour their resources. There wasn't much power difference between the royal family and the noble families except that the royal family had more core formation experts and resources than the noble families. The noble families produced schemes and plots to wear down those resources and also test the capabilities of the royal family to dig out other hidden trump cards they may have. During all this, the royal family was passive as they did all that they could just to maintain the fragile balance. However, the balance was broken when two of the ancestors of the rebelling noble families had a leap in their cultivation from the peak of core formation realm to half step into the palace stage. It was then that they rallied the rest of the nobles. Even those who were on the fences quickly joined in and charged the royal capital. Within a week all the protection formation and the experts of the capital were destroyed leaving only the royal palace which was the last bastion of the royal family.

Breaking through the royal palace proved more difficult than had been expected. Even after a month of trying they couldn't break through the formation and other protective measures such as the puppets surrounding it. These results drew even more greedy looks from the nobles as they got to see the royal family's true depth and they couldn't wait to swallow this fat sheep. They threw all caution to the wind and pulled out all their trump cards to break the formations around the palace even the two half-step

palace ancestors didn't hold back. Two days into their full-blown attack was when a sudden change overtook the palace and its grounds which were a couple of thousand acres. There was a dark cloud overhead which unlike normal clouds had an overbearing and suppressive effect on cultivators and its effects were more pronounced on the two half-step palace realm cultivators. They instantly knew this was a cloud tribulation for someone breaking through to the palace realm. They madly tried to break the formation fearing the worst from happening but alas they didn't have enough time. After half an hour the cloud tribulation had rained down lightning at a particular spot behind the palace grounds. The moment that tribulation disappeared a powerful aura erupted from there as it rapidly spread and covered the whole palace and soon went beyond it and covered the intruding nobles. They were all pressed down by an overbearing pressure. Those weaker in the foundation realm were crushed into meat paste. Those who could barely stand were the two half-step palace ancestors but they didn't look too good.

It was seconds later that they all saw an old man float above the palace wearing white robes with free-flowing silver-like hair that glistened with the sun. This was the trademark look of the royal family, their silver-like hair that had the glare of the sun. It was rumored that they had the bloodline of a silver sun unicorn. A rain of silver flame sword qi was produced behind him which he used to massacre over ten thousand cultivators who had besieged the palace. Whether they were at the core formation realm or at the foundation realm they were all reduced to ashes instantly leaving behind the two half-step palace ancestors. They tried to ignite their potential and use forbidden arts to escape but they were suppressed with a single palm of the silver-haired old man that they couldn't even detonate themselves. They got their cultivation realm crippled and later got tied to the gates of the capital as a warning to others. In a few seconds, the whole rebellion had been put down.

It was only later during a kingdom-wide celebration that people came to know the old man was the fourth ancestor of the kingdom and that he had broken through to the palace stage hence the celebration. Cheng Yuan was surprised when he read that story he even suspected it was a lie when he asked his master if it was true. His master admitted it was because his master, the sect founder of the green fog swamp sect was sworn brothers with one of the princes from that kingdom. He had offered his help to the prince the moment he heard of the rebellion. During the onset and finally its resolution he witnessed it all, especially the attack of the fourth ancestor.

Against a palace stage expert, even a hundred core formation experts couldn't hold a candle. This event came to be known as the silver sun's flame of retribution.

[Author's notes:

Hey, fellow Daoists I was thinking of writing short bios of various characters every few chapters. Enjoy. You can also write down below which character you want to see their bio.

MC Bio

Name: Yang Qing

Age: 24

Cultivation rank: Outer palace stage (Palace realm 1st stage)

Type of core: Purple core

Chapter 42 42: Birth Of The Sect Ghost

That was the story that ignited Cheng Yuan and Peng Zhen's thirst for cultivation. To one day wield that level of power. If they really did have that kind of ability they could be overlords of the eight zone of the green fog region and the most important part for Cheng Yuan was he could finally avenge Zou Wen and his master against the black cosmos caiman. Zou Wen was killed and later consumed by it as for his master he got heavy injuries fighting against it while trying to protect Peng Zhen and Cheng Yuan from it. Those injuries later hindered his cultivation and his eventual early death. This has always been a huge knot in both his and Peng Zhen's heart. Their master had the talent to reach the palace stage especially with him having a blue core. But in a single day they lost their fellow disciple and their master got fatally wounded though he did cause a massive wound to the beast.

Cheng Yuan couldn't help but clench his fists in frustration. Yang Qing shortly glanced at him when he noticed his change before he continued laughing and chatting with Jiang Fu.

"Oh Jiang Fu this is the sect master of a rank 4 sect Cheng Yuan. Cheng Yuan this is Jiang Fu the chef who made that delicious oolong tea we just had." Yang Qing said once he noticed Cheng Yuan had gotten his emotions in check.

"Cheng Yuan humble greets Master Jiang Fu. I deeply thank you for the insights your oolong tea has given me." Cheng Yuan said as he offered a solemn bow.

"No need for formalities. What you gain at the end of the day is because of your own capabilities. The tea is just a key. Besides I'm not the one you should be thanking it should be my young friend Yang Qing over here. Without him offering it you wouldn't be able to drink. All the best in your trails ahead Sect

master Cheng Yuan," Jiang Fu said in a plain tone. Cheng Yuan nodded in understanding as he cupped his fist in thanks to both him and Yang Qing.

Yang Qing could only smile as he shook his head. Jiang Fu has always been too curt and straightforward.

"Well, Jiang Fu let me offer my congratulations in advance to you breaking through to the palace stage. When will enter closed-door cultivation?" Yang Qing asked as he prepared to leave his one-hour break was almost up and he had to hurry back before the old monster Lei Weiyuan came sniffing around his court.

"I'll be closing tonight I'm already in a refreshed peak state after today's brew and I want to take advantage of that momentum. Thank you once again Yang Qing for your guidance in helping improve my dao. Once I breakthrough I'll make sure to set aside my very first pot for you." Jiang Fu said as he cupped his fist with deep gratitude showing in his eyes.

"It's all due to your constant efforts master Jiang Fu plus I wasn't alone in giving my insights you have Dai Chen and the rest there who offered just as much," Yang Qing said as he gently smiled and placed his hands over Jiang Fu's back.

"Mmmh I'm about to head over too to give them my thanks." Jiang Fu said as he nodded in agreement.

"I need to head out too I'm still in session. I await your good news Jiang Fu," Yang Qing said as he made his way out. Mao Yunru and Yi Jie were already at the entrance waiting for him with Yi Jie frowning with eyes that were telling him to hurry.

Jiang Fu waved goodbye as he went over to Kang Huilang's table. Cheng Yuan was surprised to see he was just as free with them as he was with Yang Qing. Even the shy Zhang Qingge was laughing and chatting along with him freely. He couldn't help but wonder was this guy that free and friendly with everyone.

"He is not that way everyone. It's just that we have known him since we were young. Despite how he seems he is a friendly person once you get to know him. He used to make this sweet blackberry tea and some persimmon cake when we were little it is still Zhang Qingge's favorite to this day. Of us all actually, those two are the closest to each other like a father and his little daughter. He is one of the few people

outside of us that Qingge can hold a conversation without shying up." Yang Qing said as if reading Cheng Yuan's thoughts.

As they were walking away Cheng Yuan couldn't help but look back when he noticed Zhang Qingge blissfully laughing. That laughter raised her already exaggerated beauty a couple of notches that Cheng Yuan couldn't look away. It was refreshing like the morning sun after a cold winter night.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Yi Jie said once Yang Qing and Cheng Yuan had arrived at the door.

"Huh?" Cheng Yuan couldn't help but ask in confusion as he knew the question was directed at him as Yi Jie was looking at him dead eye when he said.

"What my trying to look cool with few words friend is trying to say is don't stare at Zhang Qingge too much or else you'll invite disaster upon yourself," Yang Qing chimed at the side as Yi Jie snorted to his remark.

Yang Qing's remark left Cheng Yuan even more confused than Yi Jie's earlier remark. Despite being warned he couldn't help but instinctively look back at the table again and wonder where the danger came from.

"Is it one of the guys sharing the table with her? It must be. There's no way they'd be this close to such a beauty and not try their chances. One of them might be seeing her. It might be that rough-looking guy Dai Chen was it or the noble like one Xia Boqin. But I have a feeling it's more likely to be the latter. Dammit, how lucky are they? I've been single all my life and the elders of the sect none of them are lookers. Mmmh I should arrange some competition events with some of the sects around us to expand the horizons of the disciples, form some connections and maybe I might find someone to share my woes with. Do I have enough spirit stones for this?..." Cheng Yuan's mind drifted off as he started absentmindedly muttering figures, interest payments, grace periods, deductions, bleeding dry, and dying alone. Yang Qing and the rest couldn't help but wonder what was going around this guy's head.

"Oi sect master, sect master you'll slam your face into the door," Yang Qing couldn't help but warn him once he saw he was still engrossed in his thoughts that he wasn't looking ahead.

Cheng Yuan managed to look up in time narrowly avoiding the door. He smiled sheepishly as the gang finally left the restaurant. Cheng Yuan sneaked one last glance at Zhang Qingge's table as the door was closing.

"You really don't value your life Sect master Cheng Yuan. You're lucky senior sister Qingge's attention is grabbed by Jiang Fu otherwise you'd be close to death right now," Mao Yunru said with some worry in her voice as she looked at Cheng Yuan as if he were a reckless child playing with a sharp knife.

"Huh her attention?" Cheng Yuan couldn't help but ask out loud. Things were not tracking to him as he wondered what Zhang Qingge's distraction had with him escaping death. "Wasn't the risk of death coming from the two guys sharing a table with her," He couldn't help but wonder as he threw Mao Yunru a puzzled look.

"You must be thinking the danger is the guys sharing the table with her but it isn't, the real danger is Zhang Qingge herself. You must have noticed how shy she is. Those at the table with her, myself, and Jiang Fu are about the few people she can hold a normal conversation with without her acting anxious or shy. If she was only shy like a normal person there'd be no problem however she reacts differently than most whenever she is made extremely shy or anxious. Being stared at continuously by strangers, especially one laced with lecherous desire is an extreme trigger for her. She gets anxious, shy, and flustered and her violent side gets triggered. A long while back a core disciple of a rank 4 sect tried to take liberties with her when she was doing her sect evaluations not thinking she was a judge because of how her small frame made her seem young. The disciple was a bit too zealous in his pursuit, especially seeing how shy reacted stoked it further but soon her violent side got triggered and crippled him on the spot. The sect master and other elders came in to try and protect the disciple but Qingge was already in her violent rampaging state. She crippled them too and destroyed half the sect buildings. So you see my good friend Cheng Yuan if you don't want to get your cultivation destroyed in the most painful and violent way, you really shouldn't stare at her so much." Yang Qing innocently explained as he admired Cheng Yuan's skills in getting his skin pale white. It was like the fifth time today.

Cheng Yuan's back was soaked wet as he increased his pace so he could get to the safety of the courts. He had been dancing with a grim reaper without him noticing. This little interlude was what gave rise to the rumor about a ghost patrolling the green fog swamp sect at night. Cheng Yuan was filled with nightmares for years of Zhang Qingge visiting his sect for retribution. He always woke up panic-stricken and pale as a ghost from those nightmares that he had to patrol the sect to confirm they had not been attacked. Some young disciples saw his pale and frenzied state during those patrols and the rumor about a ghost walking the sect grounds started from there.

#### Chapter 44 44: The Flaw Of Talismans And Feng Xin's Scheme

"Are they?" Cheng Yuan asked in a cracked shaky voice as he nervously pointed at Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen who were currently swallowed up in a yellow sunny cloud. His voice was so low that it would

be swallowed up by the space of the courtroom however to the members present even a tiny mosquito buzz was as loud as a dragon's roar.

"They are okay just a little bit worn out from the journey that's all," Feng Xin offhandedly replied. Cheng Yuan heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that.

"How could fatigue cause one to lose their entire hair?" Cheng Yuan thought to himself as he dare not ask it out loud. He stared at the cloud enveloping them suspiciously before his expression finally eased and heaved a sigh of relief. Even if he had a personal feud with them it was still hard for him to remain indifferent if something were to happen to them. Currently of the people left alive in the sect, he had known the two of them longest and had a great relationship with both. At least he thought he did, but after the revelation of today's events, he wasn't so sure.

"Yang Qing what did you do to those talismans? One of them reacted instantly before I even had time to get away. If I wasn't with Ellie we would have been swept up in its attack," Feng Xin said as he gnashed his teeth.

"Huh, there was something wrong with them? I thought these were my best talismans yet. Maybe I got too overzealous when I was making them. I had only just stabilized my realm and successfully pulled a fast one on the old fiend Lei Weiyuan. It was in that high that I started working on the talismans and it sort of went away from me. By the time I came to, there were piles of them lying around. I was in a dissociative fugue state at the time so I don't know what tweaks I added to them in that state. I just knew their general abilities and so forth. But it couldn't have been that bad, could it? I may not be an expert at making talismans but I know enough to be skilled at it." Yang Qing said as he nervously laughed while scratching the back of his head.

"You You You...Yang Qing did you just use me as a guinea pig for your talismans?" Feng Xin said with spittle flying everywhere pointing at Yang Qing with his fingers trembling.

"Calm down Feng Xin atleast you are back safe and sound right?... from your current look it doesn't look like they all malfunctioned. Though I am curious which one went wrong? I may have constructed them in an absent-minded state but I have confidence in their stability and the foundation I built them on. I did it using the insights I got from breaking through to the palace stage. This time I decided to use talismans instead of arrays which I'm more comfortable with as the added difficulty and nature of talismans would help me polish up and dig further into those insights. Those talismans ended up with my dao marks on them as a result of it that's why I'm surprised there were accidents," Yang Qing said as he scratched his smooth chin in thought.



Feng Xin calmed down once he heard Yang Qing mention his dao marks. Yang Qing was known to be lazy, devious, eats too much, leeches of others too much basically an all-around glorified parasite that the Order will never get rid of but of his few redeeming qualities one of them was how he was studious in his cultivation. The only thing that could match the effort he put into his soft life Yang Qing schemes was how meticulous he was in his cultivation.

The Order was a place that gathered talents from all walks of life. Those who passed through its gates constantly pushed the boundaries of what it means to be an elite or a genius. But then there were those whom those boundaries didn't exist for them, they went beyond normal or genius convention. They were monsters through and through who did the unimaginable.

These monsters were the likes of Zhang Qingge who became one of the youngest palace stage judges and cultivator at just 19 years but what made her classified as a monster was her battle aptitude. As a peak core formation expert, she fought against a 1st stage palace realm cultivator for 3 days straight without losing out despite the palace realm cultivator being a cultivator who had a gold core.

There was an oddity like Kang Huilang who achieved two different types of intents within a few months of each other when it would take most people decades to achieve just one of them and those are the lucky ones as most cultivators may spend their entire lives without achieving intent. Whilst those dubbed as genius would take a year to achieve one type of intent. It's rare to see one exhibit two different intents. Intents were an astral manifestation of someone's understanding of his or her weapon despite what kind it was. As such there were different kinds of intents i.e sword intent, saber intent, fist intent, spear intent, dagger intent, palm intent, etc/ To achieve intent of any kind one would need absolute dedication to understanding themselves and their weapon. This was why most cultivators only exhibited one type of intent making Kang Huilang who had two an oddity. The man himself was also an expert at using any weapon. The moment any weapon touched his hands it was like an extended part of himself. Everything seemed smooth and natural like he had been using the weapons for years despite using the weapon for less than a month.

There was a young alchemist who achieved master alchemist status when he was just in the foundation stage. Those who are dubbed masters in alchemy are those who have walked deeper into the alchemy dao that the pills or potions they produce have spirits in them.

One-tenth of the purple-grade cultivation arts at the Order was created by one elder. Purple-grade techniques would be coveted by sect 1 sects and even holy lands. Most rank 1 sects would have one or two and mostly it would be what they inherited from their ancestor or chanced upon in some mysterious realm. But regardless of where it was gotten from it would undoubtedly be one of the most

important sect treasures that would be more valued than even the sect master themselves. Creating one would be considered a lifetime achievement that would leave people edifying you as a legend for a millennium but creating more than one it was unthinkable.

The reason Feng Xin calmed down was that Yang Qing fell under the class of the Order's monsters. When he was at the core formation stage he had improved a few red-grade cultivation techniques to the orange grade with one of them even reaching the blue grade. Since then his feats have only grown including completing incomplete or broken cultivation techniques. His current cultivation mantra was an incomplete purple-grade mantra that he has been refining and improvising on as he continued with his cultivation. Of course, he would occasionally be monitored by the elders of the Order to prevent any mishap. When asked why he opted to choose an incomplete technique instead of using a complete purple-grade technique that was already available, his response was he wanted to walk and see the rest of the journey with his senses otherwise he wouldn't feel like himself. No one but him knew what it meant though it was choked up to the false esteemed master figure he likes to posture as every now and then. However one thing was undeniable, he had an uncanny gift for parsing through different kinds of dao. Improving and improvising techniques meant one had not only completely mastered it to perfection but he had grasped its core and glimpsed enough of its dao to add on it while still maintaining its originality. It has always been debated which was harder to improve on someone else's technique or create a new technique.

"It was the talisman with the cascading dawn whirlpool technique. The moment I input a bit of my qi in it even before I crushed the talisman the technique released itself and almost swallowed us all in its whirlpool," Feng Xin patiently explained. On the side, the cloud enveloping Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen had already been dispelled and they looked much better than before even Gui Bingwen's hair started growing back odd enough it was black, unlike his earlier white web-like hair.

"Mmmh the cascading technique huh. It swallows the enemy and drowns them in yellow and black rays while also targeting their soul. But I don't remember adding anything to this spell though as it's pretty all-round in its offense. Wait, is the problem you were talking about it releasing early and nothing else?" Yang Qing suddenly asked.

"Yes, that was the issue. We were almost swallowed up in the whirlpool," Feng Xin answered showing a puzzled look at Yang Qing's obvious question. Wasn't this what he had been saying over and over?

"Phew, that's good then. The instantaneous reaction wasn't a malfunction it was deliberate. The talisman reacted the way it was meant to," Yang Qing said as he smiled in relief.

"Before you blow your top Feng Xin allow me to explain. I may play a lot but I wouldn't joke with your lives. You and Yi Jie know me well enough to know that I wouldn't do something like that," Yang Qing said.

Feng Xin didn't say anything but the silence was a tacit agreement to it. He may not trust Yang Qing to hold food for him but he trusted him completely to have his back.

"It's because of the recent attacks towards the people of the Order that made me alter a few talismans. Feng Xin, you may have fast agility and reaction speed but that still isn't enough, especially against someone in the palace realm. During our spar, you experienced personally how huge that gulf is and that was only with me holding back. What would you do if you faced off against someone close to or above my level? The only option will be for you to run but it's hard to outrun them if they are as fast as me. The next choice would be to use talismans to aid in your escape. However normal talismans have a time gap that though small is sufficient enough to let the opponent nullify its activation. Feng Xin, palace realm cultivators have a lot of means at their disposal. I only broke through but I have 50 different ways to stop someone from using their talismans what about a much more seasoned and craftier palace realm cultivator?

Talismans are a trump card but they have a fatal flaw which is how long it takes to activate. This is why I made some of those talismans require the tiniest of qi input to trigger self-activation. Yes, it does come with the risk of someone being affected by the spell but it's better than the alternative at least this way you have a chance. Though I should have told you about it beforehand for that I'm sorry." Yang Qing said as he cupped his fists in apology.

"I guessed as much, I'm glad my guess wasn't wrong though I suffered for it. You owe me five meals and that 3,000-year-old glacial rice wine of yours," Feng Xin said as he smiled slightly waving his right hand whose sleeves were torn.

"You give someone an inch they take a mile. I know you've been eyeing it. That's my private stash and not be shared with gluttonous company. But I will share a cup of Jiang Fu's new brew. He is about to breakthrough and he promised me his first pot of oolong tea," Yang Qing said as he formed a greedy smile with tiny droplets of drool leaking out.

"He is!!!! I can't wait." Feng Xin said with an equally greedy and drooling smile. The two for some inexplicable reason ended up staring at the ceiling giggling and gulping nonstop.

"These two are truly cut from the same cloth. Feng Xin must have come yelling, showing a pitiful look so he could score a free meal from Yang Qing. How can two people be so similar," Mao Yunru thought to herself as she shook her head at the two. Yi Jie at the side let out a long tired sigh. It seemed he had come to the same conclusion as Mao Yunru on Feng Xin's scheme.

#### Chapter 45: Tracked Just Ten Minutes Away

"So what happened? For you to decide on using the talismans it should have been someone you judged you couldn't handle. That means someone at the palace stage right?" Yi Jie suddenly asked disrupting the imaginative fantasy those two were in. Feng Xin almost choked on his drool from being startled by the question with Yang Qing throwing Yi Jie an aggrieved look for ruining his food fantasy as he was just getting to the good parts.

"I don't think the trouble had anything to do with the party targeting those from the Order." Feng Xin said seemingly reading the trail of thought Yi Jie was heading to.

"Its source had more to do with the Green fog swamp sect. It seems they had a run-in with the blood ghost hands syndicate. From what these two told me one of their elders the deacon by the name of Dong Yanlin was a member of the syndicate.

When I caught up with these two Dong Yanlin was already dead, destroyed by your spell. Yang Qing how much firepower did you pack in a reconnaissance technique? I saw the aftermath, it had leveled a half a mile radius and my two friends here survived by the skin of their teeth and it was mostly because of that tupelo tree of theirs." Feng Xin suddenly asked when he remembered the scene he had picked Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen in.

"The green swallow technique? Did you see the attack, how great was it, how about the level of its sentience?..." Yang Qing rapidly fired more questions with excitement showing on his face as his spittle flew everywhere that the rest had to form a wide berth from him.

"Calm down will you? I didn't see it in action I only saw its aftermath. For more details, you will have to ask the survivors. But from what I could tell its level of sentience was pretty high." Feng Xin hurriedly replied to stop Yang Qing's bombardment.

"No wonder he drools so much. What's with that level of saliva in his mouth," Feng Xin thought as he took additional steps. At his current distance, he didn't feel safe enough to dodge Yang Qing's spittle.

"Fine fine...Huh, why are you guys standing so far away?" Yang Qing asked in confusion once he had calmed down and noticed the rest standing a few meters away from him.

"Mmmh I wonder why the green swallow would attack though. I put in self-preservation means if it met an attack that it couldn't dodge but speed is its strongest suit if it met something with enough speed to match, our two elder friends here would have long been dead facing something of that level. The only other reason would be if it met something with negative yin qi steeped in murder. The spell itself is made of qi which is Yang in nature the antithesis of negative qi borne from places filled with death and the greater the density of it the adverse the reaction of the spell. I wonder what could trigger it. Feng Xin, did you happen to find anything with a dense negative yin qi in the area?" Yang Qing said as he deeply pondered on the weird reaction from the green swallow spell technique. It was one of the few spells that he still kept using and improving ever since he was in the foundation establishment stage.

"If we are talking about negative dense qi then without a doubt it's from this. Even the guy who was chasing after us it was because I had it in my possession," Feng Xin said as he removed the Ao Yin saber from his storage ring. It was firmly sealed in place with the four-element life divergent seals.

"Is that an Ao yin bone!!!? Someone was even crazy enough to fashion a weapon from it. Those fellows from the blood ghost hands syndicate never disappoint when it comes to doing insane things," Yang Qing said as he picked up the bone saber. Yi Jie and Mao Yunru also had visible frowns on their faces as they stared at it. The Ao Yin tended to have that effect on people. It was a creature built for brutal slaughter and torment. It not only feeds on its victims' flesh but it also imprisons their souls and torments them for almost an eternity. As long as the creature was alive the torment would continue.

Most have been collectively wiped out from the continent. Almost every sect, empire, or clan is united in their fear and hatred for the beast. Though there have been those who had once tried to enslave those ferocious things to use for their gain. Most failed and ended up corrupted by it which led to the eventual destruction of those sects as they had their minds corrupted and made into puppets of perpetual slaughter. However, there was one beast-taming sect called the Myriad beasts sect that succeeded in taming a few of them. Using the Ao Yins they grew to be as strong as the two holy lands from the southern continent. The Myriad beasts sect grew rampantly and tyrannically that the two holy lands i.e. the radiant sword sect and the flowing valley sect joined forces to annihilate them it wasn't only them, different sects and families had also rallied together and the Myriad beasts sect was decimated root and stem. Everything about them even their inheritance was erased from history. It has been over 10,000 years since their destruction. Only the powerful sects have records of its existence.

A huge powerful wave came and went as quickly as it had appeared but it was enough to almost paralyze everyone present. Everyone collectively stared at one place, it was where Yang Qing stood. His

hair was half green and half brown with one of his eyes looking like a moon and the other one looking like the sun. A few seconds later his look went back to normal.

"Hehehe sorry about that, I tried to sneak my spiritual sense in there and got attacked hehehehe but it's all okay now," Yang Qing said as he awkwardly laughed. The remnant spirit of the Ao Yin had attacked him just as it did Feng Xin the moment he tried to sneak a glance. He instinctively attacked it with his full power for a second before he severed his sense however a remnant of that attack leaked out which is why he hurriedly stopped. Yang Qing wasn't worried about destroying the bone as he detected it was from an Ao Yin that was in the late stages of the palace realm. Although it had waned over time it still had the strength of at least an early-stage palace realm cultivator.

"The one who created this weapon is rather insidious. To maintain the Ao Yin's spirit he constantly fed it cultivators' blood and souls. From what I could deduce they numbered in the thousands," Yang Qing coldly said.

"I will have to turn this over to Lei Weiyuan they may have a way to trace its creator using the seal techniques he left on it. So Feng Xin what happened after you left the place where you picked the Ao Yin bone? Did the palace stage cultivator attack you there?" Yang Qing said as he went to place the bone saber on his podium. A gold siegel appeared that sealed it further in place there was even a faint muffled painful roar that was heard the moment the seal landed on the bone.

"No I left there safely without being targeted and once I heard of the possible blood ghost hands involvement I called the green mountain branch for reinforcements. Luckily their branch leader Hu Fang was around and offered to act personally. We agreed to meet halfway at white fork mountains. Flying with Ellie I thought we'd make it in good time before anything unexpected happen but I forgot I had used the cleansing dew on a certain mirage dragonfly I got. Its effects became a tracking beacon for that expert. He caught up with us when we were less than 30 miles away."

..... (40 Minutes earlier)

"Ellie it seems like we are almost there you did a great job there buddy," Feng Xin said as he gently patted Ellie's head. Feng Xin had an old goat skin map in his hand. There was a white symbol moving along the map and it was heading to a mountainous region with the name white fork mountain above. The white symbol was them. The map was a precious monarch-grade treasure used by the Order to get around. Every map was linked to the owner through their blood essence. Wherever the owner had traveled, the features of the area would be highlighted on the map while the areas they hadn't ever stepped into would be a blank canvas.

"At this speed, we will be there in 10 minutes or less," Feng Xin silently muttered to himself. His pupils suddenly froze as he looked behind him. Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen hurriedly looked back because they were surprised to see the look of alarm on Feng Xin's face. It was an even greater shock for Haishi who during her brief interaction with him not once had she seen him even mildly flustered. She joined the rest to look back too and just like the rest she couldn't spot anything. Unlike the two elders beside her, she was visibly terrified when she didn't see anything. She had seen how powerful Feng Xin was and she knew something capable of drawing that look from him was bound to be scary.

It didn't take long for the rest to finally see a red dot speedily zoning in on them.

"Things just couldn't go smoothly tsk a palace stage expert. Ellie, you need to prepare yourself the moment an opportunity comes up you need to use everything you have to fly us away. As long as you buy us a minute or two we may make it through this." Feng Xin said as he removed three purple talismans from his storage ring grimly staring at the figure that was now less than a mile away. The figure only halted when he was half a mile away revealing a scarlet-robed man in his late thirties.

Chapter 46 46: Status Unknown

Peng Zhen and the rest were visibly terrified that they couldn't move an inch. The scarlet-robed man had fully unleashed the pressure from his palace stage cultivation that suffocated everyone present. Ellie screeched in defiance as she tried to maintain her altitude but her wings felt as heavy as 10 tonnes of metal.

"Interesting, a core formation beast that is able to resist my pressure. Its bloodline must be pretty high. What a steal! Huh, that robe. It seems like you're from the Order. I come in peace I just want the leopard storage pouch and the saber that you took from my junior brother. Give me those two things and I'll let you all go," the man said as he smiled calmly waiting for a response.

Barely did he finish speaking when Feng Xin without a second to waste detonated one of the talismans. A whirlpool of black and yellow was immediately formed as it rapidly charged toward the scarlet-robed man. Ellie got dragged into a tiny part of the whirlpool. She screeched as she tried to escape it but she couldn't fly even a single inch away from that whirlpool despite not being the target of the attack its passive effects made it difficult for her to fly away. A huge frosty light was produced which tried to tear through a tiny part of the whirlpool. It was Feng Xin who had attacked. His hair turned white and the iris were pale blue as his sword was dazzling white like his hair.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaargh," Feng Xin loudly yelled as he tried to slice a tiny part of the whirlpool.

Swoosh

An opening was created in just a moment.

"NOW ELLIE BEFORE IT DRAGS US BACK IN," Feng Xin yelled as he urged Ellie who was quick to react as she took advantage of the brief weakness to escape the sphere of influence of the whirlpool. The only reason they had even managed to etch out an escape was that they were caught in the tiny part of it, unlike the scarlet-robed man who was in the thick of it.

"Don't fly away just yet," Feng Xin hurriedly said as he noticed Ellie trying to make a run for it.

A blood-red wave like a cascading ocean was formed as it clashed against the whirlpool. The whirlpool was being whittled down by the second. Feng Xin stared at one of the two remaining purple talismans in his hands as if he was debating something.

"Better safe than sorry," Feng Xin as if coming to a decision inserted his qi and crushed one of the talismans. The qi around the area was swallowed by a vacuum and a green translucent figure was formed from that qi. The figure resembled Yang Qing except it looked lifeless and still.

"Fist of the grand solar eclipse" a worldly voice sounded as the green translucent pulled his right fist back. The image of the eclipse formed on the fist as the figure punched into the whirlpool.

Boom a loud thunderous explosion sounded that made even the air visibly vibrate. Without even being told Ellie was already bolting away. Feng Xin hurriedly grabbed Peng Zhen before they fell off. The impact of the attack had already knocked both Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen out as they bled from all of their orifices. Feng Xin had a huge ringing in his ears with his internal organs screaming in pain. The aftereffects of that attack had shaken his internal organs.

Right now he didn't have any thought of figuring out the result of the attack. Ellie had one of her wings injured in the aftermath of the explosion. It had jolted some of the minor meridians attached to that wing. She was coughing out blood as she fiercely flew. Feng Xin channeled some of his qi into her to protect her internal organs from further damage. It took almost 20 minutes before they saw the signature outline of the white fork mountains. The peaks were steep, sharp, and slender just like the mouth of a fork.



"Ellie, bear with it we're almost there," Feng Xin whispered as Ellie responded weakly with a soft screech. Feng Xin stared ahead before a small smile appeared on his face as he patted Ellie.

"It seems like help has arrived just on time," He said as he breathed in a sigh of relief as he stared ahead. A blue-cloaked figure was moving rapidly in their direction and in less than two minutes he was already there.

"You must be Feng Xin? I'm Hu Fang branch head of the Green mountain branch of the Order. By the look of things, I'm glad I decided to hurry here. Where is the one who did all this? Is he alive or dead or has he fled away?" Hu Fang quickly asked as he examined Feng Xin and Ellie as he quickly turned his head and stared in a certain direction that seemed to be similar to the direction Feng Xin had escaped from.

Hu Fang was a middle-aged man who looked to be in his early forties. He was tall and slender in build with a scholarly air surrounding him. He had short blue hair with a short well-groomed mustache. His eyes were blue with hints of black. Looking at them was like looking at a river. From what Feng Xin knew about him, he was diligent at his work and well-liked by many, and was sure to head one of the major branches. However, he volunteered to be stationed all the way out here in the outskirts of the green mountain county which was part of a rank 3 kingdom the Emerald peak kingdom. A kingdom famous for having over 10,000 mountains each with its distinctive characteristics.

"Glad you could make it branch head Hu Fang. I don't know if the attacker is alive or dead. The moment he was in range I detonated two talismans in succession and left swiftly after. As you can see I didn't have the luxury to wait and find out the result of the attack. From the pressure waves he was emitting he seemed to be in the early stages of the palace realm and if I had to guess maybe in the 2nd or 3rd stage there," Feng Xin said as he quickly removed a few green pills from his storage ring and fed them to Ellie.

"Did you manage to confirm his identity?"

"Seeing how he was asking for the Ao Yin bone the moment he saw me I guess he is from the blood ghost hands,"

"Mmmh this is rather tricky. In your state it would be careless of me to leave you alone then again letting go of someone from the blood ghost hands one at the palace stage at that is rather hard," Hu Fang said as a deep frown formed on his face.

"You can go ahead and check on the assailant and see if he is alive. Ellie will fly at a slow pace so you can easily catch up with us and I have a few more talismans to ensure my protection against someone at the palace realm at least." Feng Xin said as he produced two more purple talismans from his storage ring to try and ease Hu Fang's predicament. It worked because Hu Fang showed a relaxed expression the moment he saw those two talismans.

"Then I'll be off then Feng Xin, be careful. At the slightest sign of trouble detonate the talisman I should be able to sense it and come swiftly," Hu Fang said as he immediately flew away in the direction of the scarlet-robed man.

..... (Present time)

"So that's what happened. When branch leader Hu Fang arrived at the scene he only found a dismembered arm and a large pool of blood but the scarlet-robed man was nowhere to be found. He gave up on trying to locate him and decided to head back to me and guided me halfway then went back to his branch and Ellie and I made the rest of the journey on our own as she had fully healed by that time." Feng Xin finished narrating the turn of events as the rest listened aptly. Cheng Yuan was the most shocked of all especially once he heard of the involvement of the Blood ghost hands syndicate. He couldn't help but worry about the future of the sect.

"Peng Zhen you bastard what did you get us into!!!" He internally yelled as he glared at him. Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen had already awakened midway through Feng Xin's narration. They were glad and surprised to be alive. They never expected to escape from a palace stage expert. During the attack, they passed out the moment the whirlpool was triggered.

"Hahaha, Feng Xin you didn't even try to see if the guy was killed by the talismans. How afraid of him were you?" Yang Qing's laughter started echoing around the courtroom.

"It's because of you I reacted that way. You beat me in less than two minutes when you're just at the 1st stage of the palace realm and that was when you held back as you like to kindly remind me ALL THE TIME SINCE THEN, shameless bastard. What makes you think after being beaten by a first stage I'd have the confidence to try my hand against someone possibly at the 3rd stage who definitely won't hold back? Of course, I ran, I couldn't get away from there fast enough and those dangerous talismans of yours were also a contributing factor in me deciding to escape," Feng Xin snidely remarked not at all ashamed at running. From his pompous expression, he even seemed rather proud of it.

"Okay okay, no need to get touchy you've always had a gifted sense of saving your own hide ever since our institute days. Now that all key members are present it's about time we draw this case to a close," Yang Qing said as he eyed Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen. The duo felt like all their secrets were laid bare beneath that gaze they couldn't help but gulp in trepidation.

#### Chapter 47 47: Peng Zhen's Side Of Things

Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen stared at each other and they could sense the same terror in each other's eyes.

"You two will need to stand to the right of the black blob over there," Feng Xin said as he pointed to the rightmost part of the circular platform. The two elders complied as they made their way completely avoiding eye contact with sect master Cheng Yuan. From the way they acted, they were no different than strangers.

"Yang Qing there are also some things I'll need your input on after the case. I ran into some interesting things in the green fog region." Feng Xin said with an excited smile as he placed emphasis when mentioning the words interesting things.

"How many?" Yang Qing quickly fired a question with excitement showing in his tone accompanied by glowing eyes.

"About six or seven though I'll need help handling one of them it's rather big and will require careful craftsmanship to make the best use of it," Feng Xin said as he slurped his tongue like a dog.

"You two we have a case ongoing can you continue your discussions after we deal with the matter at hand? We are already behind schedule as things stand. I don't want to be found here after working hours. I have a wine discourse I promised to go to today," Yi Jie hurriedly interjected once he saw the discussion between the two gluttons starting to heat up.

"Right message received," Yang Qing solemnly answered with a knowing look

"I understand," Feng Xin responded swiftly with a smirky grin accompanied by a greedy gulp.

Yi Jie formed a small smile as he nodded appreciatively.

"Isn't there anyone normal among these three," Mao Yunru couldn't help but shake her head as she thought to herself. She could tell Yi Jie was putting on a farce about continuing with the case. His real purpose was to get the two to save up whatever they were discussing for his wine recipes. Two gluttons and a wine enthusiast, all who seem to always put their hobbies above their work.

"Ahem let's continue where we left off. Sect master Cheng Yuan from both your and Wen Chang's testimonies it's safe to assume that your feud with her was a result of the machinations of a few elders from your sect being led by your junior brother and the vice sect master Peng Zhen.

Based on what we have heard from Feng Xin his coconspirators are;

- Gui Bingwen the vice leader of the disciplinary hall
- Dong Yanlin who was a deacon in charge of external affairs
- Jia Tingfeng who was in charge of training core disciples before you took over
- Hao Ye who was an elder of the alchemy division

These four conspired with Peng Zhen to cause a feud between you and Wen Chang and when you didn't take each other out they schemed to have you both settle your dispute at the Order leaving the sect unmanned. They emptied the treasury and even dug out the tupelo tree and incapacitated everyone from the sect while they were at it. Luckily no one was found dead by the time Feng Xin arrived there and from his judgment, their survival was by design and not a fluke.

In transit, while making their escape Dong Yanlin's true identity was revealed to be one of a member of the blood ghost hands syndicate. In his escape, he sacrificed Jia Tingfeng and Hao Ye leaving only Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen as the only survivors from the whole debacle. Dong Yanlin is presumed to be dead at the moment as none of his remains were left intact after the attack.

That's about the gist of it right Feng Xin?" Yang Qing asked after he had recounted a summary version of the events.

"Yes, it is," Feng Xin curtly replied.

"Good. Now Elder Peng Zhen I'd like you and your friend to clarify a few things for me before I make a verdict. Before that, as you've well heard my name is Yang Qing, by my side is head inquisitor Yi Jie and at the desk below me is judicial assistant Mao Yunru. Now that the introductions are done there are a few things I'd like to know. One is what is how did you and Dong Yanlin end up as acquaintances? From what Cheng Yuan said, he got into the sect and became an elder under your referral. The other which I think your senior brother over there is more curious about is why you betrayed the sect. Seeing how there were zero casualties as you pilfered the sect should mean you at least have some attachments to it. I'm curious what would drive such a person to betrayal?" Yang Qing softly asked as he motioned Peng Zhen to take the floor.

"Greetings judge Yang Qing. The answer to the second question is related to the first question. I met Dong Yanlin who pretended to be a rogue cultivator at the time during one of my travels outside as I was tempering myself and looking for opportunities to deepen my cultivation. I was wary of him at first but he has a way with people and after partnering together in exploring a few abandoned cultivation abodes we became friends who had shed blood and sweat together. When I felt I had enough harvest from roaming outside I decided to return to the sect for secluded cultivation. I took the opportunity to invite him along to join the sect. He was at the 6th stage of the foundation stage and he didn't seem to be old so I thought he'd be a great addition to the sect. Him surviving as a rogue cultivator and reaching his current realm meant he was a resourceful person which would be a plus for the sect and I had seen him fight so I knew he was capable.

I put forth my proposition, he pretended to be hesitant at first but soon agreed thus we went back to the sect together and I suggested he be made a deacon and deal with the external matters of the sect. I did that because I thought he wouldn't adjust to sect life easily being a rogue cultivator and we could make the best use of his connections if he was a deacon of the sect. With my prestige, it wasn't hard to get him that post. A few months in he had already won the approval of the majority of the sect because of the loan deals and sale channels of our herbs he helped us procure.

A year in was when an accident happened. From the friendship we built outside and later in the sect I was never wary of him I treated him as a brother. He came to my cultivation peak one night to have a drink like we always did on occasion. It has always been a habit of ours to seal our cultivation when drinking to get the most out of it and this time was not any different. I did just that but the moment the wine touched my tongue I felt a sudden overwhelming sense of drowsiness wash over me. I hurriedly tried to unseal my cultivations but Dong Yanlin with extreme speed and calculation hit all of my acupoints and halted me dead in my tracks. From that brief moment, I could tell he was stronger than me because even with my cultivation released I don't think there was any way I could have stopped his attacks. I passed out moments later and when I came to I woke up to find Dong Yanlin's mocking gaze as he sat across from me. I was surprised to be alive but Dong Yanlin soon explained why. It turns out he had

planted a gu and blood seal curse on me that required high concentration and technique, hence why he had to knock me out. Right then and there I tried to detonate myself but the gu swallowed all my explosive energy and the blood seal paralyzed me. Dong Yanlin also warned me that the blood seal would turn me into a corpse cultivator if I tried to kill myself and he would use me to destroy the sect.

I essentially became a puppet to him. Our meeting wasn't an accident as he had been eyeing our sect because of the tupelo tree. As for why he was highly interested enough to scheme this far I can only guess he had some relation with one of their members who had a scuffle with our sect founder but disappeared soon after when their clash drove them to the green fog region.

He was wary of Cheng Yuan and never wanted to engage him directly that's when he suggested the scheme of creating a feud between him and Wen Chang. He wanted the both of them to injure each other gravely and he could easily take care of them. He was the one who provided most of the herbs planted in the treasury vault used to trick Wen Chang. I suggested we pull in other elders to further sell the reuse. Getting elders who were long dissatisfied with Cheng Yuan to follow my plan wasn't hard and should anything happen to them I wouldn't feel guilty over what would happen to people who were willing to betray their sect for their selfish grievances. Dong Yanlin's scheme had helped me route out these dissidents except Gui Bingwen. He was the only one I divulged my current predicament to and Dong Yanlin wouldn't suspect him because as far as people in the sect knew he was being forced into retirement by Cheng Yuan. I needed an extra hand if I was to successfully pull a fast one on Dong Yanlin and other than Cheng Yuan, Gui was the only one I could trust to go along with my plan.

The scheme to cause a feud between Cheng Yuan and Wen Chang worked but I know my senior brother well to know he wouldn't fight it all out with her. After their fight was when I suggested they involve the Order in their dispute. This was to ensure in case my plan against Dong Yanlin failed and ended in the decimation of the sect the two most powerful people of the sect would be alive and safe at the Order and they can always rebuild. It's much easier to restart with two core formation experts at the helm. Mine and Gui's death wouldn't affect the bigger picture.

Dong Yanlin may have pretended around me but all his long schemes led me to the conclusion he had an overtly cautious personality so I had a feeling he would support those two being out of the sect. With all these in place, we had to get an additional helper whom without their presence everything would crumble, that is the Tupelo tree. It had already gained sentience and without its approval, no one would be able to dig it out as it is the most powerful being in the whole sect. Only Cheng Yuan and I knew the tree was sentient making it hard for Dong Yanlin to discover it.

I laid out my plan of destroying Dong Yanlin and whoever he was working with outside the sect and it readily agreed to help. With these, I had confidence that two peak foundation experts, a spiritual tree with the capabilities of a core formation expert, and a sky-rank treasure were enough to deal with any

situation that crops up but as it turns out I had grossly underestimated Dong Yanlin and his background. If it wasn't for that spell and Feng Xin's intervention we would have long been dead and doomed the sect along with us.

I didn't want to use the Order in my schemes but it was the only place I was sure Cheng Yuan and Wen Chang would be safe in case things went wrong. Given Dong Yanlin's cautious nature I doubt he would enter a place without sufficient measures to ensure his escape and I thought those measures must be enough to injure my senior brother. As for Gui Bingwen, he was just being a loyal friend and sect member. I am willing to accept whatever punishment you deem fit but please show mercy and spare my sect and Gui Bingwen," Peng Zhen said as he solemnly bowed at a ninety-degree angle. He wanted to kneel but he didn't want to dirty the pristine floors of the Order with his disheveled robes.

Silence soon ensued in the courtroom with Cheng Yuan's jaws wide open as his body trembled as it went through a rollercoaster of emotions.

Chapter 48 48: Yang Qing Gets Recruited

"Peng you....." Cheng Yuan said in a shaky sorrowful voice as he stared at Peng Zhen in disbelief.

"Why didn't you...."

"There's no need for that Cheng Yuan. I did what I thought was best with what I had. The sect would live on as long as it has you, I on the other hand I'm just a cultivation fanatic. I don't have any other worthwhile skills other than my passion for the dao which always gives me the cold shoulder," Peng Zhen couldn't help but smile bitterly once he said this.

He had been diligently cultivating never slacking off but he was 260 years old and still at the peak of the foundation realm. Dong Yanlin's true face seemed younger than him once he had openly revealed himself in the fight. He seemed to be around 27 years and was already in the 3rd stage of the core formation realm. His senior brother Cheng Yuan was just four years older than him and was already a fifth-stage core formation realm. What about him he has been spending his sole focus on cultivating and was only at the peak of the foundation establishment realm.

"Was I maybe too extreme in my requirements," Peng Zhen couldn't help but wonder to himself as he shook his head.

"Please Judge I knowingly agreed and supported everything Peng Zhen did. Whatever punishment you deem fit to for him I'd like the same treatment." Gui Bingwen who was silent all this time suddenly interjected.

"Gui what are you doing?" Peng Zhen asked in surprise

"Shut it, Peng. You're not going to hog the glory of being a martyr alone and have monuments of you placed all around the sect. I want some monuments too with disciples burning incense for me bawling their eyes at how I had the spirit of a true cultivator. If there is one thing I'm good at is throwing my life away gloriously. Peng, you won't steal this moment from me. Cheng Yuan remember not to be stingy with the monuments, I want excellent craftsmanship that will be able to bring out my heroic demeanor," Gui Bingwen righteously said as he raised his gait showing he won't be dissuaded from his decision.

"Fine, it's not like I don't know you've always been bullheaded. No wonder you're still a single dog till now" Peng Zhen said as he offered a grateful smile to Gui Bingwen.

"Sect master Cheng Yuan you have yourself, nice sect mates. I can see why you went this far," Yang Qing said as he admired the bond between the two elders. Cheng Yuan's eyes were beetroot red with his lips quivering that he couldn't bring himself to say anything. He wanted to speak up for leniency but he doubted whether his words could help change anything. He could only swallow and accept what was to happen next and move forward carrying their wills with him.

"Well then now that we have everything I shall pass my judgment. But before that I need to take care of a little sleeping parasite," Yang Qing said as he flashed from his desk and reappeared where Peng Zhen was. Before Peng Zhen could even register how Yang Qing had blitzed in front of him he was poked in his forehead by Yang Qing. He instantly lurched over and started vomiting blood and a black sticky substance.

"STAY!!" Yang Qing calmly said once he saw the agitated expression Cheng Yuan had as he quickly wanted to make his way over. Cheng Yuan wanted to rush over the moment he saw Peng Zhen vomiting blood but the moment Yang Qing uttered that word it was like his body was chained to the ground. No matter how much he willed it, his body couldn't move an inch. His thoughts operated normally but his body had betrayed him. He couldn't even utter a single word. Gui Bingwen wanted to rush over too but he was paralyzed just the same. Unlike Cheng Yuan who was paralyzed with words, his case was done by a mere gaze.



Peng Zhen continued vomiting as the blood and the black substance started congealing together. He stopped vomiting when a palm size worm that looked like an overgrown larva with razor-sharp teeth and no eyes fell from his throat down to the ground. The worm was black that had red runic symbols drawn over its body. They looked like they were drawn in blood. The worm wiggled as it shrieked like a vulture with shredded vocal cords.

A sudden change soon happened to the blood, the black sticky substance, and the worm once they came into contact together. The worm dissolved like salt in water as the new mixture congealed together and morphed into an oval shape. Within seconds the shape had additional features forming from it which drew surprised expressions from Gui Bingwen and Cheng Yuan who despite being paralyzed could see all that was happening. The features were body parts of a face. First were the ears then the nose then the eyes and finally a mouth. The eyes wiggled as though they were trying to open up.

Peng Zhen who was still coughing had his pupils frozen in fright once he saw the face formed below him as he was lurched over.

"How is he alive? And when did he?" Peng Zhen asked in a shocked shaky voice. How could he not be in shock when the face he just saw below resembled that of Dong Yanlin. By all accounts, he thought he was dead but now here he was, a bloody face that he had just vomited. It was his strong willpower that stopped him from passing out in fright.

"W..h..e...r...e I'm I," a weak raspy parched voice was suddenly produced from the blood pool face of Dong Yanlin.

"Nice of you to join us. You know it's not nice of you to hitchhike on someone else's body without their knowledge. You should ask permission first and discuss terms before doing something like this," Yang Qing said as he put on a playful smile. He pressed something on his golden eagle medallion which then changed the look of the courtroom to look exactly like the site where Feng Xin had found Peng Zhen and the rest. Every single detail was mimicked to resemble that battleground as much as possible.

"Who are you? Are you the one who forcefully broke my technique and ejected me from Peng Zhen's body?" Dong Yanlin coldly asked. His bloody face was fully formed making his communication clearer than before and his eyes finally opened. The whole sclera was black with a red pupil

"I did it because I wanted to ask you a few things," Yang Qing said like he was talking to an old friend.

"Good, good, good... I didn't expect to meet a meddlesome kid. Peng Zhen so this was your trump card?" Dong Yanlin snidely asked as he had a mocking smile on his face.

"Kid seeing how you dispelled my technique I can tell you are someone with talent. I don't know what Peng Zhen offered you but I can offer you much better opportunities. Meeting me can be considered your greatest fortune. I'm part of an organization that is as powerful as any rank 1 sect and it appreciates talents a lot. With your level, you'll be highly favored and nurtured. Reaching the domain realm in a hundred years isn't impossible. I'm even willing to put in a word with my master who is a domain-level expert to take you in as his disciple. What do you think kid?" Dong Yanlin asked as he put on a smug grin. No one could resist a chance at stepping into the domain rank, especially within 100 years. He made such a generous offer because he recognized Yang Qing's talent and wanted to rope him in. The grade of the technique he had used to parasitize Peng Zhen was a blue grade technique and someone who can disrupt and dispel it had to be someone with great talent.

The offer he had made to Yang Qing was also a genuine one. With the blood ghost hands resources, it would not be hard to help someone with his level of talent to reach the domain level. He would get more merit points if he brought someone of this talent to the syndicate and getting his master to accept such a talent would help improve his master's prestige and the overall strength of his faction within the syndicate. The syndicate wasn't united as it was like a viper's nest each viper vying for dominance.

"Domain expert in a hundred years? Mmmh this is a rather intriguing offer. If I say yes what do you want in return? There's no such thing as a free meal, especially from someone like you who has the word villain written over you with that fiendish technique you used on this old man here," Yang Qing calmly asked as he played along.

"Don't worry, I won't ask much I only need your help in recasting my technique on Peng Zhen. In my current state, I won't last long, I need to be incubated in a living being. I'll give you the formulae of the technique. After you have successfully cast it, we will make our way to Amber Town not far from here, and have my senior brother fly us back to the organization. He is a palace stage expert," Dong Yanlin added the last part as a form of threat to warn Yang Qing against trying any funny business.

"I still don't know the name of the organization I'm to join. Care to share their details?"

"I'll reveal it when we make it to Amber Town. We are a hidden organization just like those hidden clans and sects that not many people know of but are extremely powerful," Dong Yanlin said. He would only reveal it when he was in his senior brother's presence. In case Yang Qing rejects his offer taking care of

him won't be hard. This was one of the ways the syndicate recruited. They'd make their offer but if rejected the person would be killed to keep the identity of the recruiter hidden.

"I thought keeping this reuse up would help me glean something but seeing how secretive you are with just a name I guess I can't get much from you. Blood ghost hands members sure love their secrets and mysteries. Oh well, better to send you off to the higher-ups to deal with you. They're sure to be more fruitful at it than I am with their array of techniques specifically geared toward making you chatty. After all, you're not the first blood ghost hands member we have our hands on," Yang Qing said as he gave the most innocent smile he could.

"You who are you?" Dong Yanlin yelled in fear at the sudden change in events.

"Oh sorry, I didn't introduce myself. My name is Yang Qing a soft-life judge from the Order. I've heard great things about you Dong Yanlin and your senior brother too. He disappeared before we could have a chat and left his hand behind. So pitiful. Well, Dong Yanlin I wish you a pleasant stay in the Order. Don't worry we have techniques that will ensure your longevity and safety. Make sure to tell the guys I'm about to send you to about that domain master of yours. They like juicy gossip like those ones. Bye Bye ." Yang Qing cheerily laughed before he waved his medallion as a huge white cocoon enveloped Dong Yanlin and disappeared on the spot as the courtroom resumed its normal appearance.

Chapter 49 49: Wen Chang's Drastic Change.

"Now that the interloper is gone we can resume where we left off." Yang Qing as he waved his hand. A green-blue flame ignited the remaining blood stains on the floor in an instant it was pristine black as before.

"Here, take this for your injuries," Yang Qing said as he tossed a milky white pill that had two orange stripes on it. The stripes were an indication of its suitability to a certain realm. Pills with one stripe were suitable for those in the qi stage and even those at the body refining stage could consume half of the pill safely. Those with two stripes could be used by someone at the foundation realm, those with three stripes were suitable for those in the core formation realm. The higher the number of stripes the higher the cultivation realm it suited. This went on till the domain realm in which the pill had five stripes. As for pills usable by those in the soul formation stage need to have a special characteristic, one of them is the pill needs to induce a tribulation just like a cultivator does when they breakthrough to a higher realm. Pills that survive tribulations are as rare as qilin horns and phoenix feathers. Anyone of them can cause a major upheaval around the continent and an alchemist who can concoct such a pill would be highly sought after and valued in any place even in Holy lands.

Peng Zhen caught the pill and just from a whiff he could feel his whole body being restored and energized. From this, he could tell even among pills that were of this rank it was among the top in

quality. He consumed it without a second thought. Dong Yanlin being forced out of him had caused tears to his meridians and he could even tell a third of his blood essence had been forcibly consumed when the technique Dong Yanlin had used was forcibly removed. The pill flowed down to his dantian where it dissolved and started sending a warm current throughout his body. Wherever the current passed through would be repaired and strengthened. Within half a minute every single meridian and internal organ had been nourished by the pill. The pill had even gone to the extent of purifying his internal qi making it denser and more fluid. Peng Zhen was shocked at how a single pill could do all this. Cleansing qi was something only mid-grade sky-rank treasures could do which despite being mid-grade still cost quite a hefty sum due to how welcomed those effects were.

"Thank you judge Yang Qing," Peng Zhen said as he offered a solemn bow.

"It's nothing. Giving you the pill is not a huge sacrifice on my part. I have thousands and thousands of them lying around. Since they have no use on me I just treat them as candy due to their sweet and refreshing flavor," Yang Qing frivolously said behaving like a spoiled young master. Peng Zhen almost vomited blood once again once he heard what Yang Qing said and that I can waste without care because I'm rich look. Peng Zhen was even tempted to take a swing at him. Yang Qing even went to the extent of removing a handful of those pills from his medallion before he stuffed them in his mouth.

"It seems you're not joining the blood ghost hands syndicate?" Yi Jie calmly asked with a straight face.

"I'm afraid we couldn't quite agree on the terms plus I have the feeling the syndicate will work me to the bone more than the Order would and the jobs would be riskier. I'd rather stay here and deal with one fiend than go into that place which would make the geezer Lei Weiyuan seem like a saint," Yang Qing said as he returned to his podium.

"Tsk" Yi Jie clicked as he made a small frown that disappeared shortly after. Yang Qing couldn't help but stare at him suspiciously after that click.

"This bastard wasn't kidding with that question. He really wanted me to become a lackey of the syndicate. How badly does he want to get rid of me? Just you wait Yi Jie whatever hole Lei Weiyuan throws me into I'll make sure to drag you INTO ALL OF THEM WITH ME. That should teach you mmph," Yang Qing thought to himself as he glared vengefully at Yi Jie.

Yi Jie had been coldly staring forward like some seasoned expert before he felt a huge shiver in his spine as if something dangerous was waiting for him. He couldn't help but look around only to meet Yang Qing's venomous stare.

"What's this guy planning now?" Yi Jie thought with worry flooding his whole body.

"Ahem now on the case of Sect master Cheng Yuan vs Wen Chang I Yang Qing superior court judge of the Order hereby offer my verdict and judgment after having heard all sides of the story....."

CRACK.

Just as Yang Qing was about to continue his deliberation was interrupted when a soft cracking sound like that of an egg was produced in the courtroom. Cheng Yuan had a nervous and hopeful expression once he saw the origin of the cracking sound. It had come from the black blob surrounding Wen Chang that had shrunk further and solidified into an almost clay-like structure. That black substance was filled with cracks all over. Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen had no idea what was inside that black blob. Because of how everything was moving so fast and how eventful their day had been the black blob didn't really register in their minds when they were in the courtroom. Peng Zhen looked thoughtfully at Cheng Yuan's reaction before he made a guess at what was in the black blob.

"Good, now we can have all members present for the final verdict," Yang Qing said as he placed his head beneath his interlocked hands staring at the black blob that was almost shattering.

The cracks increased in number however the explosion Cheng Yuan expected to happen wasn't produced. Once the cracks on the blob were as numerous as the cracks of a dry river bed they turned into black vapor revealing Wen Chang before flowing into her body through her skin. It seemed to pass right into her body.

Cheng Yuan and even Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen couldn't help but be surprised once they saw Wen Chang's current look. She looked completely different than before. For one her size had completely shrunk. Before she was about 20 meters in height and girth but currently she had shrunk to the size of a normal calf that was about 1 meter tall. As for her coat, even someone who didn't know anything about spirit beasts would be able to tell she was a special spirit beast. The leaf symbol on her coat was more vivid and lifelike. One would even mistake it for being the real deal. If one looked more closely one would notice small glyph-like symbols on the midrib of that leaf. They were radiant red in color but their glow was swallowed by the emerald green color of the leaf.

"She seems to have had a better harvest than I expected. Though I think as long as Sect master Cheng Yuan makes the best use of his harvests from today his strides will be longer. But this sect really has

interesting people, especially Peng Zhen. Who would have thought there was someone crazy enough to use that method to improve their pillars," Yang Qing thought to himself as he thoughtfully looked in Peng Zhen's direction.

Wen Chang who had her eyes closed suddenly opened them. They were deep black with a sense of profound wisdom hidden beneath that gaze. She blinked a few times before she readjusted and looked around the courtroom to get her bearings. When her gaze fell on Cheng Yuan it halted for a moment before she bowed her head so low that it touched the floor of the courtroom.

"Thank you so much for taking care of me Sect master and for tolerating my selfish outbursts and greediness. I now realize how foolish and childish I have been. I will make sure to make up for it a hundredfold with this little life of mine and help share your burden for the sect if you'll let me," Wen Chang said solemnly and softly. One could feel the remorse and also maturity in her tone. She still had the voice transmission ball around her which she used to transmit her thoughts.

"You are not at fault Wen Chang. I was at fault too for neglecting my duty as the sect master. You were born in the sect making you an integral part of it. I've been so focused on the bigger picture that I lost sight of the things that were just straight ahead. I will have to shamelessly ask for your help because the sect will need for the trouble that awaits us" Cheng Yuan said as he sighed softly. He was glad Wen Chang was okay but the looming threat of the ghost hands syndicate still gnawed at him and there was also the fate that awaited Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen. Discounting his emotional ties to them, the sect couldn't afford to lose two peak foundation stage members at the same time. Wen Chang was confused at what Cheng Yuan was hinting at but she didn't dwell too much on it as she offered another deep bow of thanks to Yang Qing. She literally owed him her life and without his timely intervention, she may have lost her sanity and gone berserk, and end up imploding. She even profited from his intervention as she felt much clear on her road ahead and her whole sense of self seemed to have metamorphosed. The energy levels within her body were four times as much as before. She looked smaller but she could beat four of her from before effortlessly. It was only now that she realized how wasteful she had been. Her body had ballooned because she never tried to process the energy from the herbs she was fed efficiently. A lot of energy went to waste or stored as fat instead of being converted internally. She had only been focused on eating in quantity instead of converting every herb and converting its nutrients as her own. This was one of the reasons once she woke up she had remorseful toward Cheng Yuan because of how wasteful she was.

"Wen Chang I'm glad you've made it out okay. We have already arrived at the conclusion of your case and Peng Zhen from your sect is also here with us so don't be alarmed as things are more complicated than it seems. Your sect master will fill you in on the details after we are done here," Yang Qing patiently explained.

It was only now that she noticed there were two people to her right. She had conflicting emotions when she saw them, especially Peng Zhen. She has known him since she was a calf and he had basically raised her. He couldn't reconcile the person from then and the traitor she assumed he was. But she held herself back from having an outburst. She doesn't know how but some tiny part of her was keenly aware of how terrifying Yi Jie, Feng Xin, Mao Yunru, and most of all Yang Qing was despite not releasing any of their cultivation. Something intrinsic in her told her they were not to be trifled with.

Yang Qing nodded appreciatively seeing Wen Chang keeping her emotions in check.

"Now we can finally close this case. And this is just the first day of the week. The Order sure is as black-hearted as usual. Hopefully from next week when I'm in the palace courts the string of cases will be simpler and fewer." Yang Qing couldn't help but lament inwardly.

#### Chapter 50 50: Final Verdict

"I Yang Qing as a judge of the superior core court hereby exercise my authority as presiding judge to pass the verdict on the case between Sect master Cheng Yuan vs Wen Chang after having ascertained that I have enough information to make a sound judgment.

I hereby declare Cheng Yuan sect master of the rank 4 sect the Green fog swamp innocent of the accusation made against him of being derelict of his duties and obligations towards Wen Chang. In that line I also declare Wen Chang innocent of welching on her end of the bargain struck between her and the sect. Her innocence is predicated in that her actions were guided and manipulated by the elders from the sect who contrived a false tale and picture that drove her into a feud with sect master Cheng Yuan i.e. Dong Yanlin, Peng Zhen, and the rest of the elders who planted treasures in the sect vault to gaud her into fighting with Cheng Yuan.

However, even though you are innocent in this I would advise you to pay back the amount in emerald milk that you owed to the sect despite having been tricked into your feud. The reason for this is simple, the sect kept its end of the bargain in feeding you and your end of the bargain fell short. As you can already tell through the changes in your current body, the herbs the sect continuously fed you may have not been in the sky rank but they were all mid to high-grade earth-rank treasures whose energy and nutrient is responsible for the huge and explosive change in your body. Without it, the cultivation art wouldn't have helped bring such an enormous change in you.

Do your part Wen Chang to give back to the sect that has spent all it could afford into helping you this far," Yang Qing softly said as he looked at Wen Chang. Wen Chang had her head lowered in embarrassment and was teary-eyed. It was only after her sudden evolution that she realized how spoiled she had been acting.

"I will," Wen Chang's firm voice sounded.

"Good as for you Cheng Yuan don't be stingy with your sky grade resources. I get saving them for the future of the sect but never forget young plants need tall trees to shelter them from the harsh weather before they are able to do it for themselves. You need Wen Chang in her optimal state and that will help give you the needed time and support for your plans. Plus her emerald milk in some circles especially alchemy will be highly valued. They can agree to swap some sky-grade herbs for it, it won't be high-grade ones but it is still sky-grade herbs in the end. I'll give you contacts for some of those alchemy organizations, the negotiations after that will be up to you. Introductions are the best I can do in my capacity." Yang Qing said

"Thank you Judge Yang Qing for all you have done I even don't know how to repay you back," Cheng Yuang said as he offered a bow of gratitude.

"There's nothing to repay. I'm doing this as my duty as a judge of the Order and an advocate of its ideals. If you still want to repay me then ensure I don't see you or the Green fog swamp sect members in these courtrooms again. Having less workload is the best payment you can give me," Yang said as he lightly smiled. Cheng Yuan could only helplessly smile at the statement while Yi Jie and the rest knew Yang Qing was very serious about that suggestion despite coming off as a joke.

"Now as for you two, Elder Peng Zhen and Gui Bingwen. While I respect, understand, and even sympathize with all you had to do for the survival of your sect, it still doesn't change the fact you dragged the Order in your schemes to jump right in the mud with you. You had what you wished for as the Order is thoroughly in waist deep in this now. Dragons have their reverse scales and the Order has its bottom line and you touched upon it despite your well-meaning intentions.

What you did at the very least warrants for your cultivation to be crippled and have you spend the remainder of your days as a laborer in some of the war-torn villages we help support as part of our outreach programmes. In the worst case I sentence your death and fulfill it instantly. But your situation is rather tricky. If I was in your situation with my back against the wall I don't think I'd do anything different and to cripple your cultivation or sentence you to death would make us the villains in this no matter how I look at it but then again I can't pardon you for it because there was a chance Feng Xin would have died in this case for going in blind without having the full picture of things.

As such this is my judgment and punishment afforded to that judgment. Peng Zhen, I find you guilty of making the Order an unwitting accomplice to your actions and schemes and for withholding information



vital in the conduct of our duties and thus leading to the potential endangerment of a member of the Order. This is in violation of the full divulgement Act that falls under article 45 of the Cultivation order.

With this, I hereby sentence you to a life and death sentence of 30 years. In those 30 years, you will serve as a duel partner to the students of the institute of the Order. You will fight with your life on the line as indeed it will be. You will have to engage in a life-and-death battle with the students of the institute who will be in the middle and late stages of the foundation realm. You are to fight them with everything you have and they will do the same. However, for them should their lives be in fatal danger the instructors will step in but for you, they will not. Whether you live or die is entirely in your hands.

These are the ground rules for those battles;

The battle will end either in incapacitation or death. If you incapacitate your opponent or the instructor steps in, it's your win. As for the opponent, their win is either if they incapacitate you or it ends in your death. If you find a kind-hearted opponent you may live even if you lose. The instructors will not interfere in any way.

The battles will happen once every month and they will be one vs one. Any injuries you suffer from the duels will be taken care of by the Order should you survive after each battle.

You are not allowed to hold back otherwise if the instructors detect you holding back your sentence will be alternated and you will be executed on the spot.

That is all for the ground rules if there is anything extra the instructors will inform you.

Since how things panned isn't entirely of your choosing and you didn't have malicious intentions, you won't be imprisoned in the Order. You are allowed to go back to your sect. You only need to be here on the day of your duels. Someone from the Order will bring you back and forth from your sect. I will also give you a blue-grade cultivation art that you may choose to use in your duels since all the cultivation arts the students from the institute use will occasionally be at that grade though some may choose an orange-grade art to temper themselves against you. But to add to your odds having a blue-grade art wouldn't hurt however you are forbidden from sharing it with your sect. All the best Peng Zhen, fight with all you have who knows you may end up benefitting from this should you live till the end of the 30 years.

Now for Gui Bingwen since you were not directly involved in the scheme to drag the Order into the mud and were just a loyal friend, you are fully pardoned of this. I had no intention of punishing you even without Peng Zhen pleading for your acquittal. With this I call the case of Sect master Cheng Yuan vs Wen Chang to a close," Yang Qing said as he banged his gavel downwards.

Mao Yunru lifted her dainty slim hands as a white jade talisman flashed intermittently with a blinding white light. This went on for a few seconds before it stopped. Yang Qing nodded at her as she placed the talisman on his podium which then disappeared immediately after. The white jade talisman was used to record the proceedings and the final ruling of the case and was sent to the higher-ups for recording and review.

"Judge Yang Qing I still want to receive the same punishment as Peng," Gui Bingwen hurriedly pleaded at the side with a firm expression.

"Elder Gui Bingwen I admire you for being a good friend but what you're suggesting will be detrimental to your friend Elder Peng Zhen. With what he will be facing even a moment's distraction could lead to his death. Do you think he would be able to fight at 100% if he is worried about his friend facing the exact same scenario as him? And forgive me for being blunt but Elder Gui your odds of surviving the first duel are less than 10%. I might as well just sentence you to death. Don't look down on your friend, this may not be as hopeless as you imagine it for him. Isn't that right Elder Peng Zhen?" Yang Qing suddenly asked nodding to Peng Zhen

"It is Judge Yang Qing. This is a great opportunity far more than what old bones like myself deserve. Gui, and Cheng, you both know me well enough from a kid till now, one thing has never changed nor wavered and it is my love for cultivation. To anyone else, this would be a tormenting sentence but to me, this is a dream come true, a precious treasure that I would never come by in my lifetime. Clashing with the talents of the Order and gaining firsthand experience of the cultivation moves through the hands of these prodigies, I couldn't think of anything better. I can't help but want to duel with them this instant even a once a month duel doesn't feel enough.

GUI, CHENG, I WILL LIVE!!!!DON'T LOOK DOWN ON ME," Peng Zhen suddenly roared filled with a battle lust so high that it even seemed to manifest physically as a cloak around Peng Zhen. Wen Chang was visibly shocked at his current look as for Gui Bingwen and Cheng Yuan they were silent at first before they smiled in unison with renewed confidence in their eyes.

"I'm sorry I had forgotten what a nut case you are. It's been long since I saw that side of you that I thought it went away," Gui Bingwen said as he lightly chuckled to himself.

"You better keep your word Peng, otherwise I'll have to beat up that caiman by myself," Cheng Yuan added as he smiled too.

"This is actually a boon for me Cheng. Other than you there's barely anyone from the sect who's my match and our spars are not life-threatening either. These duels may give me the stimulation to finally breakthrough to the core formation realm. Plus I even get to learn a blue-grade cultivation art. We will need everything to skin that caiman, we both know he is not weak," Peng Zhen solemnly said as Cheng Yuan nodded in agreement.

"I knew I was right about him. Someone who willingly goes through a cleansing thunder tribulation to improve the grade of his pillars without breaking through isn't a normal person. Not many people would take that risk. Thunder blue grade pillars, what an interesting person hehehehe those students from the Order will be in for the toughest fights of their lives," Yang Qing thought to himself as he smiled cheekily.