

Daily life 511

Chapter 511 End of the grace period

Egg peak, Yang Qing couldn't help but let out a nostalgic sigh as he made his way there. Egg peak also known as the peak of first despair. Though when Yang Qing was starting out, he did not know it went by that name, none of the first years in the first month do, it's only after a few months have passed by do they get to know it by that name.

It's usually in the fifth month going forward that they get to know Egg Peak by that moniker.

Egg Peak, though called a peak, was a territory of its own. It was as big as the cities found in prosperous rank 3 kingdoms and empires.

Throughout their time there, the whole territory was used to house the first years and all the facilities and training resources they would require.

Every single training regimen that they would ever require, was catered for there. It was like a mini world for cultivation.

There were combat areas that either took the form of arenas or platforms filled with formation arrays that created various situations, natural landscapes that had been inlaid by some treasure to create a calamitous environment, forests stacked with all kinds of spirit beasts and spiritual plants to hone their survival skills, herb gardens, mountains, valleys, swamps and rivers, mines, pavilions to practice weapon refinement, talisman crafting, formation and disabling of arrays, alchemy and a library, to name a few. Also inclusive of the facilities were cultivation abodes and special meditation areas.

It was complete with everything those who got into the Institute would need to completely excavate their potential.

When Yang Qing first laid eyes on it, he couldn't believe his eyes. It had mystical aurora lights mixed in with the ethereal mist, giving the region an air of grandeur.

He wasn't the only one. It happened to every trainee the moment they first laid their eyes on it. Everything was beyond their imagination, from the training facilities to the wisdom contained within the peak, down to its basics such as the spiritual qi and other daily life services.

Yang Qing wept in joy when he visited the mess hall. It was an all-you-can-eat buffet, for no cost which was the best price for someone like him who had nothing to his name, and the quality of the food in terms of taste and richness, was to die for.

During the early days, he was a bit careful and well-mannered in his eating habits. He only ate four meals a day, and it was light, though it was light according to his gluttonous judgment because to others it was normal.

Every day he would increase his amount subtly to test the waters and see if there were restrictions on how much one could eat, and by the second week, he let loose when he realized there were absolutely no restrictions. He ended up camping there in those first months.

He remembered how blissful he had been, thinking this was paradise. There was plenty of good-tasting food, rich facilities, and resources that he didn't have to fight for, no any of those internal politics, and the instructors were kind and gentle with them from the moment they got in.

What he didn't know was, that they were getting fattened up for slaughter, the slaughter that would happen from the fifth month going onwards to their last day at the institute, where they would pay back every resource and food they gobbled up in those first four months, several times over.

The first four months were the grace period days. Where there were no demands, no torture,? they still had some life in them along with lively and hope-filled eyes.

But from the first day of the fifth month, the illusion breaks, and the death trap that is the Institute and their captors, the instructors finally reveal their true selves, fiends in human skins.

"I wonder how bad it will be today.." Yang Qing gleefully thought.

He had a few goals for visiting the Egg Peak today. One was because he was genuinely rooting for Peng Zhen and hoped he would do well. Peng Zhen used the Order in order to ensure his sect's survival. His motives though pure, attracted consequences for using trickery to drag the Order into the mud without telling them, and for that he was sentenced to a life-and-death duel once a month for the next ten years. Yang Qing hoped he would survive and live to the end but ultimately it would depend on his abilities and luck too in case he got a defeat that didn't end with his death.

The second goal was to see the blue-grade art he gave him, the Brilliant ray fist technique in action. The art could be considered one of his most prized treasures since it was the only blue-grade art to date he had ever managed to create by improving upon a red-grade cultivation art.

While he uses the art himself, every chance he gets to try and improve on it, seeing it being used by someone else may give him perspective and insight he would not normally get.

As for the final reason, it was to maintain tradition. Ever since he graduated from the Institute, once a year he would come and see the first fights held at the Egg Peak, the breaking-in fights.

Seeing the moment the hope of those young students get pummeled out of them that first time made him feel refreshed. No matter how bad a day or a month he had, the moment he stepped into the arenas of Egg Peak to see those fights, he would feel cleansed and renewed.

Therefore it eventually became a tradition, almost a ritual for him. As long as he was around he would always come for the very first duel.

Without him noticing it, his smile grew wider the closer he got to the combat arenas.

The fight this time would be held at the white tiger mountain. The mountain was high up and had caved in to form the maw of a tiger, and its snow-filled peak led to it being called the white tiger mountain.

When Yang Qing arrived from the air, he drew curious filled eyes from the students below. There were about 70 of them.

They all looked up with shining eyes because they could tell Yang Qing was at least a palace stage cultivator, seeing how he could float in the air so casually. They did not know his post, since Yang Qing was dressed casually. He looked like some casual farmer from the get-up he had on.

He had on a green coat, white shirt, green shorts, and straw sandals underneath, and a beat-up wine gourd at his waist.

Yang Qing casually analyzed their gazes. It was different from what he would get if he decided to visit the Butterfly Peak which was the peak that housed those who were in their final year. All together the Institute had four peaks namely; Egg Peak, Larva Peak, Pupa Peak, and finally Butterfly Peak.

Egg Peak housed first years, Larva Peak housed second years, Pupa Peak housed third years and Butterfly Peak housed fourth years, which was the final point.

Had Yang Qing visited any of the other three peaks, the look they would have given him would have been of genuine respect, especially from those in the Pupa Peak and Butterfly Peak, when compared to those of Egg Peak, who other than a fleeting curiosity, a little awe, most of them had competitive and even combative flames in their eyes.

Those from the Pupa and Butterfly Peak, have already been baptized by the terrifying flames of the Institute, which washes away any sense of confidence, and self-worth, and leaves you a broken shell, struggling to survive each day.

Yang Qing's appearance before them would be filled with respect as they would see him as a successful survivor who made it to the other side. They knew what it meant to survive because they had endured a substantial bit themselves, however, when it came to those from the Egg Peak it was a different story.

The looks they gave Yang Qing were completely different. It was almost as if they were saying, that in just a few years or even less, they would be where Yang Qing was and even maybe outshine him. They saw Yang Qing as no more than a stepping stone to the glamor-filled lives they had each envisioned for themselves from the moment they passed the entrance examinations.

They were filled to the brim with bluster and pride. They had already given themselves the crowns of prodigies of the Order, the shining jewels. They couldn't wait to let out that brilliance.

The first four months were made easy for them by design, to bring out this side of them to the surface, which the Institute would then ruthlessly wash away from the fifth month to their last day. Whatever brilliance they thought they had would be blotted out every day with the darkness of the Institute and its trusty instructors.

The dragons and tigers they thought they were would be pummeled until they wore new identities, the worms of the earth, and one of the ways they did that was through these life-and-death duels.

Yang Qing rubbed his hands in excitement as he envisioned the instant knockouts, the torn limbs, and the shock-filled eyes about to descend on these arrogant first years. They were about to experience a shocking rebirth.

Chapter 512 Gold Eagle Shield Guard

To Yang Qing, there were arrogant faces he couldn't wait to see transformed. Of course, there were a few good eggs within that group too. Those who had not let the four-month grace period dull their senses. Those who could still remember what life was like before they stepped into the Order, and what it took to survive, or those who could still remember how harrowing the entrance examination was.

That group though few still had the same sense of wariness and caution that they had when they were doing their examinations.

Yang Qing managed to spot nine of them from the bunch of seventy students.

He couldn't judge the students who were indolent, casually taking in the sights around them talking, laughing, showing little to no caution as to why they had been called to this battle arena.

It was only human to want to relax and it wasn't like the Institute advertised its real face out there, so not many people outside of those who have been in it knew what it was really like. To the outside world, it was a dreamscape that churned out talent after talent on behalf of the Order. A place where even a normal pig had the potential of being turned into a fearsome tiger if admitted to the Institute.

"They really do embody fairness to the extreme.." muttered Yang Qing as he found a spot on the cliff to relax as he waited for the events to unfold.

Even without asking or being told, he knew the current students were those who had graduated from the blue grade test which was the lowest classification of entrance test that the Order has.

It was meant for those who had an average aptitude. However, that was only as per the Order's standards. Average to them would be elite in most sects and organizations. For example during Yang

Qing's test, Lai Rou and Bu Fei had developed saber sense and sword sense respectively, but even with such an achievement, they were only qualified to take the blue grade test.

Above the blue grade, was the gold grade and the purple grade test, with the latter being the highest test the Order gave out. Those who qualified for the purple grade test already had direct admissions to the Institute, though they didn't know that.

As the cream of the crop, they were subjected to the worst possible test that they could be given. It was so horrible that on average every year only three or four people finished it, and the test usually lasted between seven months to a year, while the gold grade usually lasted for about four to five months, though it wasn't as brutal as the purple grade test it was multiple levels higher than all the blue grade tests combined.

As per Yang Qing's estimates, those who came in the same batch as the current students, the ones who qualified for the gold grade test were just about to finish their tests, while those who qualified for the purple grade test were still doing it, and had two more months to continue, that is if they were still conscious and some sort of piece that enabled them to continue with the test.

In the purple grade test, you would only be removed if you were a breathe away from death, a literal breath, so until then, you would endure everything up until that moment, whether it was collapsed lungs, dismembered limbs, poisoning and the like, you would not get healed or retrieved until you were literally inches away from death's door.

Those who have undergone the gold and purple grade tests would not be as easygoing as the students in front of Yang Qing, were.

If they had been the ones present, they would have been huddled together like little chicks, their eyes darting around them over and over in fear, with tensed up bodies, that were ready to retaliate or run at a moment's notice, unlike the group before him.

They were disjointed and lacked that sense of unified front, they were nothing more than strangers with one or two people seeming to have a bond, and even then it seemed superficial, and they lacked a sense of fear in them.

The reason Yang Qing said the Order embodies fairness, is because the students before him would be purposefully subjected to the same level of torment that their counterparts in the gold grade and purple grade tests endured.

"I hope Zou Yi and the rest are doing okay.." Yang Qing muttered to himself as he took out a bag of crispy fried sunflower seeds.

Zou Yi, his sister, and the group they formed had been sent to the test site for a gold grade test for two months for failing to be among the top fifteen during the test. They would be put through the paces for the next two months by the instructors there before they rejoined the rest.

While those who successfully made it with them, should have started their first week and were likely still doing inductions around Egg Peak, and those with families or dependants, would be working on relocation.

"Yoh, don't you have anything better to do other than come to these tests?"

As Yang Qing was happily munching on his sunflower seeds, he almost choked on them when a young man who looked to be in his early thirties, with black hair tied simply with a papyrus reed, handsome face, sword-sharp eyes, suddenly appeared next to him without him noticing. He only realized there was someone next to him when that man spoke.

"Instructor Pan, nice to see you. Your heroic bearing hasn't waned one bit.." said Yang Qing with an obsequious smile as he cupped his fists to the young man in black and white robes that had the symbol of a robin sown on them.

"You seem genuinely surprised when I appeared? Almost as if caught by surprise. Have you been slacking off in your training, now that you're in the palace realm?" the young man ominously asked as he narrowed his eyes with a serious expression.

Yang Qing felt his blood freeze over when he saw that look.

"I knew it, the Instructors are much scarier even than the founder of the Ice Emerald Sect when she turned into a Ba She.

I should expect nothing less from a former gold eagle shield guard.." thought Yang Qing as he felt his body involuntary shake to the formless pressure radiating from Instructor Pan.

Gold Eagle Shield Guard was a special force that was usually deployed to key areas owned by the Order outside of its headquarters.

For example, when a branch was being created, a gold eagle shield guard would be deployed in the early stage to ensure security as it was being built and would only leave after the branch was built to completion and the personnel deployed there had settled for a year.

Other than branches, there were special locations such as mines, territories within the Millionsfold Treasure Ocean, Ruins, and other mysterious realms and grottos that were protected by the Gold Eagle Shield Guard.

They were the first line of defense for the interests of the Order outside. For one to join they needed to have the capability to handle three professions and also a gifted cultivator. The minimum requirement was one needed to have a gold core at least to be considered.

Their training was very rigorous and exhaustive. Before one became a gold eagle shield guard, they would work at various departments to hone their secondary professions, and it needed to be at an above-average standard before they could move to the next training.

They were troves of wisdom and experience. From the rumor Yang Qing had heard when he was a hatchling at the Institute was that since the founding of the Order till now, the number of Gold Eagle Shield Guards was no more than a hundred and the instructor Pan, who was eyeing him like he wanted to retrain Yang Qing on the spot had been one of them.

Chapter 513 Lessons For The Unhatched (1)

After getting a brief tale of how it was back then from Meng Chao, Yang Qing couldn't help but throw Instructor Pan a respectful gaze.

For the Order to establish its foothold back then, how hard must have it been for the Gold Eagle Shield Guards back then.

"Thank you, Instructor Pan.." Yang Qing suddenly said which drew a quizzical look from the Instructor, however, he didn't dwell too much on it as he had pressing issues at hand.

"You still haven't answered, have you been slacking student Qing.." he sternly asked.

Yang Qing shivered as the name seemed to dredge up memories he had worked very hard to repress over the years.

"No! No! No! I haven't, instructor Pan.." Yang Qing hurriedly said as backed away.

"I got injured the other day which rendered me incapable of operating at full capacity. My spiritual sense was one of the things affected.." he added.

He couldn't afford to be 'trained' in front of the young chics, not after he had come all this way to see them get that 'training' instead.

Instructor Pan who had an austere and taciturn expression the whole time, finally showed a surprised look.

"You may goof around a lot but even I know how capable you are.. Who was the opponent? Was it a domain expert? .." he asked with a frosty expression that hid a murderous intent within.

"The instructor fiend have emotions?" wondered Yang Qing before he went and recounted the events at the Medical Valley and also his leave of absence from work, lest the Instructor think he was being a truant and drag him back to the courts.

The instructor didn't say much after he heard the tale. An awkward silence ensued for a bit before he finally said,

"Make sure to take proper care of yourself. I'll be off then.."

"Oh, and his name was Peng Zhen, right, the one you had sent?" he asked as he was leaving for the ground.

"Yes.."

"He seems capable... He would be an excellent molder for these feeble eggs.."

Yang Qing shivered as he saw the malevolent smile creeping up on Instructor Pan's face as he made it to the platform below.

The students below dressed in black and orange robes with the image of a robin sown on them went silent when they saw Instructor Pan appear on the platform.

Instructor Pan eyed the students as he exuded a slight pressure on them which made them all flinch as if a ravenous predator was eyeing them.

Yang Qing chuckled as he swallowed a handful of sunflower seeds in clear excitement.

"It's about to begin.."

After a few seconds, Instructor Pan reigned in the pressure. The students present were mostly at the peak stage of the first, second, and third stages of the foundation establishment realm with a few being at the peak of the qi refinement realm.

Almost every single one of them had been at the qi refinement realm when they did their entrance examination, and those that were already in the foundation establishment realm at the time of the test either had blue grade pillars while those that didn't would be absent in today's group because they would have to disperse their cultivation base and start from scratch if their pillars had been below the blue grade.

It was similar to what happened to Bu Fei, who despite having sword sense or being close to 100 years old, was told by Yang Qing he would have to recultivate from scratch and rebuild his foundations again since he only had white-grade pillars that would stifle his progress forward if he stayed with them.

In the four-month duration before today's test, the students were pumped full of resources like fattened calves and then were trained and guided personally by the instructors from cultivation to fighting techniques which helped them experience explosive growths in a short amount of time, which was one of the reasons they all seemed arrogant.

However, what they didn't know was, that in the next few months, they would be beaten and tortured to the bone, and they would barely have enough strength or time to improve their cultivation base by more than a few minor realms in the next few months.

There's a reason why despite the Institute being a resource-rich place, every student by the time they complete their final year, their cultivation base is usually only in the early stage of the core formation realm, and it is only after they leave the Institute do they get to experience rapid rises in their cultivation base.

The years at the institute are spent hammering the foundations and the basics in the most brutal and painful way possible into their bodies.

It's only in the first four months of their first year do they get the chance to experience explosive growth and the reason for that is so they don't die, to give them enough vitality as sandbags. To lengthen their ability to endure whatever the instructors would do to them.

The students started murmuring to themselves as they could feel something strange brewing. What they didn't know was that was their sixth sense kicking in, the same one birds would get every time a major earthquake was underway but unlike the birds, they had no idea what was coming.

"Now then, today we will be doing something we call a test of incubation. It's a test aimed at helping you gain the abilities and more importantly the character that will help you find your footing within the Order and the demands it will place on you when you begin your duties.

The test will strengthen, elevate you, and help you reach and see heights you never thought possible.

You will come to discover things about yourselves and of each other during this test. Make sure you keep the lessons you learn here at heart, and I will also make an announcement after the test.

Many of you must be wondering what test it will be, and some of you may have already guessed it involves combat.."

The students eyed each other with clear battle intent as he said that.

"However, you will not be fighting each other, but them.." as Instructor Pan said this a gentle swirl of leaves appeared, and in the midst of those leaves there were thirty cultivators wearing similar dull grey robes with most radiating a bloodthirsty aura that could only come from those who have slaughtered thousands.

Yang Qing spotted Peng Zhen within that group. He was an outlier as he had a gentle and stable aura to him.

Chapter 514 Lessons For The Unhatched (2)

Peng Zhen, who had been cautiously eyeing the students from the Order, felt a presence looking over him, prompting him to look up, where he saw a young, gentle-looking green-haired youth with something in his mouth smiling at him.

"Judge Yang Qing?! What is he doing here?" he wondered as he offered a polite and respectful bow.

He had been practicing the blue-grade art, the Brilliant ray fist technique for a month now and though he was still in the beginner stages in terms of understanding it, he couldn't help but be awed by its profundities.

The cultivation art though was a fist technique primarily, it contained other aspects that were meant to build one's abilities toward reaching the full potential of the art. There was accompanying movement art, healing art, finger art, and palm art that had an equal measure in defensive and offensive properties.

The art also strengthened his body the more he practiced it, making him more sensitive to spiritual qi, and his own qi seemed to have a quality being developed as he continued to practice the art. He could feel it had a purifying effect, though presently it was extremely mild whose effects compared to mortal rank pills with a similar effect.

However, he had only started cultivating the art, the more he practiced it, the more he felt the purifying quality within his qi would grow along with his comprehension and experience with the Brilliant ray fist technique.

Having a purifying attribute within his qi, could be considered one of the greatest harvests Peng Zhen could ever gain from the art. When he considered its value and implications, it was even more vital to him than the core technique. This was because the Green Fog region where their sect was located was a poisonous place.

It was almost guaranteed that you would not take more than six steps before you stumbled on something poisonous. It could be a creature, plant, water, or even the air itself. Anything could poison you within the region.

Within their sect, they had to plant herbs and various plants with purification and detoxifying effects, along with that they also had to set up various cleansing and poison detection arrays all over the sect which were constantly monitored because of being continuously triggered. Those arrays were one of the biggest resource guzzlers for the sect, because of how many spirit stones and treasures with purifying, detoxifying, and alarming abilities, they had to burn through within a short duration.

However, those arrays and measures were vital to the survival of the sect. However even with the measures they put in place, and having survived in the Green Fog swamp for thousands of years, they still have poison epidemics within the sect through various means. A spirit beast the size of a small insect bypasses their protection, conceals itself, and lays eggs within their sect grounds, then when the time is ripe they hatches and attacks the sect en masse, or a strange plant manages to invade their territory in the form of spores and creates a miasma plague once inside.

For a poison-rich region that continuously innovated and churned out different ways of spreading poison, the Green Fog Swamp sect could not completely make their sect airtight against poisoning incidents. About the only place that was completely free of poison and eliminated all risk was the sect master's courtyard where the Tupelo tree grew, but with it out of commission in its hibernated state, no place was completely safe within the territory of the sect.

Peng Zhen having a purifying ability within his qi meant he could use it to create safe spots around the sect using his qi as a conduit, the healing arts would be more potent, and he could now roam in certain regions of the Green fog region with an added level of protection against poisoning.

The Green fog region was one of the richest resource-filled areas in the Southern Continent, however, its poisonous terrain, and the suppressed spiritual sense, and the huge spirit beast population were some of the main reasons most including the inhabitants of the area didn't explore it as much, but now, Peng Zhen felt if he got more familiar with it, he could explore the regions surrounding their sect for resources, and there was also the sentence handed to Chen Yuan. He could help him in creating the botanical list he was charged with.

Peng Zhen couldn't help but sigh with gratitude. The sentence he was given felt more like a blessing than anything else.

"I don't know if the rice from the sect will even come close to repaying the favor he has given me.." wondered Peng Zhen before he cleared his mind of all worries and focused on the matter at hand. I think you should take a look at

Even if he was given a blue grade art, and had a higher cultivation base than the young students he saw before him, he couldn't afford to lower his guard.

He was still serving a life and death sentence, which he couldn't afford to lose, especially with the recent happenings at the Green Fog Region and his opponents despite only being in the early stages of the foundation establishment realm while he was at the peak stage himself, two minor realms above them, he didn't favor his odds as he would be facing elites, known to fight across realms.

He still remembered what Yang Qing told him when he handed out the sentence. He had to fight as though his life was on the line because it would be, and he would risk it over and over again so that he could live at the end of it. He should not hold back in any form whatsoever, and that was what Peng Zhen intended to do.

As someone who lived in the Green Fog Swamp, a place where death was prevalent every second, he was no stranger to risking one's life for survival.

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At the arena, a palpable tense atmosphere was created when the prisoners from the Requiem arrived.

"The opponents you will be facing will be the inmates of Requiem. In the few months that you have been here, you should already be familiar with some of the core facilities of the Order, with Requiem being one of them.

The prison where we imprison heinous cultivators who are judged to be too dangerous or irredeemable to be let out.

The cultivators you see before are from there..."

Instructor Pan's introduction drew breaths of cold air from the students whose gazes quickly turned from shock to eagerness. They saw the inmates as nothing more than lambs slated for slaughter.

The bulk of them were all too eager, they couldn't wait for the fight to start so they could show their brilliance and the fruits of their labor for the past four months.

To some, this was the prelude to their illustrious achievements where their names would be sung far and wide and even eclipse their fellow students.

They each threw each other competitive glances as if they were saying 'Who will have the cleanest and fastest wins under their belt.' In their minds, despite their opponents having higher cultivation bases with the least of them having a sixth stage foundation establishment realm cultivation base, their victory was already guaranteed. The only question was how beautiful their wins would be.

Chapter 515 Lessons For The Unhatched (3)

Yang Qing couldn't help but smile when he saw this while Instructor Pan remained indifferent to the whole thing as he went on to explain the rules of the duel.

"The fight will be a simple format with not that many rules in it. First and foremost the fight will be a one-on-one, and it is a life and death duel..."

Instructor Pan ignored the startled looks of the students as he went on with his explanation.

"The inmates will be fighting with their lives on the line. As per the rules, we have asked them to throw everything they have at you. They will be fighting to kill you, because if they don't, if I detect them holding back even a little, I will execute them on the spot.

As for you, I would advise you to fight with all you have, if you want to live.." said Instructor Pan as his gaze narrowed on the students who all flinched.

"While I will not execute you, poor results will breed grave consequences which will be no different than experiencing death. Don't hold back for your sake.

In the fight the inmates' death and survival hinge on your choice, as long as the inmates go all out, I will not interfere in whether you allow them to live or kill them in the fight.

I will only intervene when you're about to die and lucky for us we have someone in our midst a former student, who is now a palace court judge whose skills in healing stand out even among the greats of our Medical Valley despite it not being his primary focus.

With him here as long as you have a single breath in you, he can instantly restore you. Judge Yang Qing, could I leave this matter to you?"

The students all looked up in surprise at the revelation that Yang Qing was a judge. From his clothing, they had all assumed he was a farmer in the herb gardens of the Order, but hearing he was a palace court judge and one skilled at healing, changed the way they saw him.

"Since Instructor Pan has asked, I will happily oblige, and do my best.." said Yang Qing with a polite smile.

"Good with him here, you can forget dying, so don't worry about killing them, and if by some unlucky event one dies, you will not be sentenced for it, and we will just count it as our loss and negligence.

Hold nothing back, eliminate all qualms, and fight to kill, though based on the reputations you have, I doubt any of you have any misgivings about it.." said Instructor Pan as he addressed the inmates.

"Since you put it so nicely, I would be considered a reprobate if I didn't commit myself.."

"I can't wait to repay back all the torture I endured.."

"Instructor don't go welching on the promise, I need to soak my back in the twilight yin pond like you promised. These aching joints need them.."

"How long has it been since I have seen blood that wasn't my own? Don't worry young ones, this kind senior will ensure you will have pleasant memories of me, kekekekekek.."

The inmates all clamored as they let out their natures. Only a few remained silent.

The students all had strange looks on their faces as they looked at Instructor Pan. They all seemed to be asking,

"Why does it seem you're on their side more than ours.."

Instructor Pan noticing their gazes offered a smile as he said,

"You get rewards too. For every victory you will receive 100 merit points, by now you should be keenly aware of how valuable they are.."

Greedy gazes instantly appeared in all the students.

"In addition, your performance here will influence your grade reviews. Now as to the last rule well it concerns victory and defeat.

When it comes to the inmates, it will be considered their victory if they knock you unconscious or if I am forced to intervene when you're close to death as for them is if they die, or end up unconscious in the fight.

To all who survive, they will be healed the instance the fight ends, and there will be no time limit on the fight. I think you should take a look at

I will give you all a minute to prepare yourselves before I announce the first contestants.." said Instructor Pan.

A few of the students and the inmates sat down in meditation while others talked, and others threw each other combative glances.

During that short break, Instructor Pan gave Yang Qing a jade containing the names of the students and the criminals and their accompanying crimes.

A minute quickly flew by and the first contestants were called to the center of the arena.

"First to fight is Ren Jie from the Insitute and your opponent is Zou Hong.."

When Instructor Pan made the announcement two people walked in from the opposite sides of the arena.

From the student's side came out a heroic-looking youth with silver hair and black eyes. He had a long sword in his hand and a cultivation base that was at the second stage of the foundation establishment realm.

"Instructor Pan is insidious as ever.." muttered Yang Qing when he realized why Ren Jie was the first to be called up.

His opponent on the other side was a thin, pale-skinned man who looked to be in his early thirties. He was nothing but skin and bones, and his robes hung loosely on his body exposing his ribbed chest that had thousands of blade scars.

He walked languidly to the center of the arena looking like he could collapse and fall over any minute. He had black hair and his head was hung low as he let out crazy chuckles. He held two hook swords in his hands.

From the jade handed to him, the inmate by the name of Zou Hong was infamous for his brutal nature. He had once slaughtered all the workers and customers within a restaurant because the restaurant served him meat that wasn't bloody enough.

He killed the one who served him, then moved to the chef, which incited rage from the customers who intervened, however, all of them were slaughtered, brutally at that. Their bodies were thinly sliced like ingredients in the attack, leaving the restaurant covered in pools of blood.

Thinly sliced corpses became his trademark in his road of infamy. By the time he fell on the Order's radar, he had slaughtered thousands.

He had the lowest cultivation base of the bunch of inmates, with the sixth level of the foundation establishment realm cultivation base.

When he reached the center of the platform he raised his head with a manic snicker escaping his lips as he eyed the silver-haired youth like a prey readied for slaughter.

"It's been some time since I have prepared ingredients kekeke... I hope I haven't gotten rusty.." Zou Hong said as he licked his hook swords.

All equipment used, whether it was the student's side or the inmates' side, were of similar quality and rank which was middle tier earth grade weapons.

The silver-haired youth by the name of Ren Jie ignored the provocation as he unsheathed his sword awaiting the instructions from Instructor Pan to begin the fight.

"Begin.."

The moment the announcement was made, the thin Zou Hong who looked too weak to even stand, burst with a speed that created galing winds.

There was a hundred-meter gap between him and Ren Jie, however, he crossed half that within an instant as his body turned darker like it was rusting.

Ren Jie wasn't far behind as he used what looked to be a top-tier orange-grade art to charge in.

The art made his body seem as light as a feather and as nimble as a swallow, however, the instant he caught up with Zou Rong, his body changed and a lightning tempest was released from his body down his blade which clashed with Zou Rong's hook swords creating a thunderous explosion.

Both opponents adhered to Instructor Pan's words and went all out from the start. One was an overbearing force of lightning, and the other was a metallic wind tempest that aimed to shred everything in its path.

Chapter 516 Lessons For The Unhatched (4)

Within the time it took to blink, they had exchanged over 20 moves, each aiming to slaughter the other. Every move that they made was made with the intent to kill.

Ren Jie's movements and attacks were continuous and fluid, which showed that his foundations were rock solid. He was only using top-tier orange grade cultivation arts whether it was the movement art or attacking cultivation arts.

Yang Qing could already decipher which they were the instant his body made the slightest of movements and even the degree of expertise Ren Jie had in them.

The orange grade arts he was using were the mainstay cultivation arts the Institute trained the students in the first four months, though they did teach them one blue grade art, but the bulk of the time they were trained in orange grade arts.

There were various factors and reasons why the instructors preferred to first train the students in orange grade arts, instead of focusing on the more superior blue grade, gold grade, or even purple grade arts.

Some of the reasons were; to help the students acclimate well to their breakthrough, to have a better grasp of their strength, a top tier orange grade art would do a far better job than a low tier blue grade art.

Blue-grade arts were difficult to grasp and even if one grasped it, someone at the early stages of the foundation establishment realm or in the qi refinement, would not be able to fully bring out the might of the blue-grade arts, and it would also hinder the understanding of their own bodies because of the strain the blue grade arts would have on them.

Therefore to better hone their instincts, and grasp of their abilities, the instructors usually started the students off with orange-grade arts.

The instructors would hand over a list of preselected top-tier orange-grade arts, and the students would choose which ones they would like to learn. It was usually a maximum of five. Any more, and it would prove problematic because the instructors would give them one-on-one tutoring in the early weeks before it evolved into group classes.

For the sake of efficiency, they couldn't learn more with the help of the instructors, though they could add to their list for self-study, but the maximum the instructors could guide them on was a fixed five.

Most usually went with five or less, since more was never best. Despite being orange-grade arts, it didn't mean they could be grasped easily. One needed to give them a fair bit of attention to gain any meaningful mastery of them. For orange-grade arts, achieving anything less than the blooming stage in terms of mastery was considered mediocre. Because it was only when one reached the blooming stage would the orange-grade arts be considered fully in use.

From Ren Jie's exchange of attacks with Zou Hong, Yang Qing could tell the movement art he practiced was a top-tier orange-grade art by the name of the weightless water-gliding step of the phaseless lizard.

The art was aimed at strengthening the leg muscles, with the core of the body acting as the conductor. One's control of their legs needed to be gentle and light to the point you could borrow the wind and the force of your movement or even the movement from the opponent's attack to increase your speed.

It wasn't the best when it came to running away from an opponent but when it came to a dueling movement art, it was one of the best, especially in a battle of attrition since it operated on borrowing the force of the attacker to sustain itself, and it also emphasized on using minimal movements as possible. Yang Qing could already tell Ren Jie was already at the blooming stage with it.

And for attacking, he could tell he went with the orange-grade art the thunderous crane sword art. It paired perfectly with the weightless water gliding step of the phaseless lizard since it focused on fluidity strikes continuously built upon the previous move be it attack or defend.

As for his opponent, even when the skilled Ren Jie, Zou Hong seemed to hold his own against him. Yang Qing could tell he had a natural physique that had the metal and wind attributes, which made him perfectly balanced in attack and defense.

Zou Hong's fight pattern seemed haphazard without clear movement patterns. He seemed to react solely on instinct, however, those movements though irregular, had a certain accuracy to them. Every attack, every roll of the body, everything he did seemed to add a lethality to his attack. Were it any other opponent he was facing, they would have lost by now and even though Ren Jie kept him at bay, it wasn't as easy as any of the students or even maybe Ren Jie himself would have expected even with Zou Hong not being at 100%, since before he was brought here, he had been under the special care of the requiem guards.

The longer the fight went on, the more Zou Hong's experience as a murderous rogue cultivator began to show. This was someone who had fought for countless years. From his file he was already 98 years old, and from when he was young to date, who knew how many fights he has been in? Probably several hundred more than the 16-year-old Ren Jie.

Ren Jie made a downward lightning slash toward Zou Hong to try and slice his shoulder, however, Zou Hong managed to twist his body and bones like a boneless creature and then borrowed the momentum of Ren Jie's slash by using his two hook swords to swing rotationally on his sword. By the time he swung upwards, his leg was already at the neck of Ren Jie aiming to slice his head apart.

Ren Jie managed to dodge in the nick of time, by twisting his waist while he bent backwards. He managed to disrupt the trajectory of the kick with the twist, evading the kick by an inch but even then, a shallow cut appeared below his eye.

Zou Hong's pupils contracted when he saw the blood on Ren Jie's face. His face contorted to a frenzied bloodthirsty look as he manically laughed while increasing the speeds of his attacks. A tempest wind of destruction was created with his crazy swings that didn't seem to follow any rhyme or reason.

For the next few minutes, Ren Jie was put on the defense, dodging and deflecting the attacks by a hair's breadth each time, with Zou Hong's momentum growing by the second.

Murmurings appeared from the student's side each surprised at Ren Jie being pushed around, one of them even mocked Ren Jie for his lackluster abilities, and how he was losing face for the Order, while on the inmates' side, they were celebrating, and cheering like it was their win.

Chapter 517 Lessons For The Unhatched (5)

Zou Hong battering Ren Jie and putting him on the ropes, to them was like Zou Hong avenging them for all they endured in Requiem. Some of them even had the urge to jump in and slaughter Ren Jie in the most brutal way possible, to vent the shame, frustration, and fear they all had in their hearts from their daily lives in the Requiem. However, they dared not too because of the presence of Instructor Pan and Yang Qing.

These were two palace realm cultivators from the Order, and they were just in the foundation establishment. While they were bloodthirsty and heinous individuals, they were no death seekers.

The only thing they could do was engrave the memory of Ren Jie getting pushed around by Zou Hong, as they eagerly waited their turn to replicate the results or even do more than what Zou Hong was doing.

Instructor Pan didn't interfere with their cheering and jeering as he remained indifferent to the whole thing, while Yang Qing the chosen healer for the fight, had a twinkle in his eye as he watched the fight along with the reactions from both sides.

"Should be about now.." he muttered, taking out another handful of sunflower seeds to munch on.

At the arena, Ren Jie who was pushed around, tightened the grip on his longsword as his eyes changed and went hollow.

He immediately used the hilt of his sword and the tip of his blade to simultaneously block two of Zou Hong's hook swords for a millisecond. As he made the block, his mouth suddenly opened and he produced a sombre melodic owl whistle.

A silhouette of the eyes of an owl appeared behind him and disappeared just as fast as it had appeared. Its appearance and disappearance were so fast that the only people who managed to notice what had appeared were Yang Qing and Instructor Pan. The rest all they saw was a grey light flash and disappear followed by an unexpected scene before them.

Zou Hong who looked like an unforgiving and unrelenting storm, paused for a second like his body had been paralyzed with his eyes looking distant and hollow for just a second before they regained their normal look.

However, that second of absenteeism proved fatal as Ren Jie twisted his wrist creating a lightning-speed arc attack that severed his hands at the wrist as he dashed forward. When he reappeared at the back of Zou Hong, who still seemed confused at what happened with a thin line appearing on his neck.

"Have I been sliced? kekekeke.." said Zou Hong with the same manic smile as his head slowly fell from his neck. His body fell down like a log a moment later, with silence covering the area.

The change had happened too fast for them to follow. One minute it looked like Zou Hong was winning but in just a second he had already been decapitated.

Frowns could be seen forming from the inmates' side, while from the student's side, they all looked at the heavy-breathing Ren Jie with a new look. Most of the seventy students had already written his fight off as a loss based on how he was being pushed back, they didn't expect him to overturn the situation and even win, especially in such a manner. Some couldn't even tell how he had done it.

"Well done.." Yang Qing said as he flashed from where he was sitting and reappeared next to Ren Jie who was as pale as snow. His lips were purple, his eyes looked to be grey and his breathing was ragged and shallow, as his body continuously spasmed.' He looked to just be on the brink of falling unconscious.

Yang Qing placed his hand on his back as a green-blue water wave condensed on his palm which he then poured into Ren Jie through his back.

Within three breaths, color had returned to Ren Jie, and his body stopped shaking and the pounding headache, and fatigue he felt down his soul seemed to have been renewed.

He couldn't help but look in shock at the goofy-looking green-haired judge next to him. As someone who knew the state his body had been in, he was filled with shock at the instant full restoration of his body.

He had used a soul type blue grade art that put undue pressure on his soul and body to defeat Zou Hong, he was sure he was well on his way to collapsing after executing the last move with his soul drained, his body aching all over, but now, he felt like he could go again, he even felt more refreshed than before the fight.

He couldn't help but marvel at Yang Qing's abilities, especially, if he considered Instructor Pan's introduction, which said healing wasn't his primary occupation.

"Thhhthank you, senior.." Ren Jie said as he stammered.

"You're welcome, and good fight.." Yang Qing casually said as he patted him on the back.

"You need to move for the next contestant. You don't want to get on Instructor Pan's bad side, otherwise, the overdrawn effect you felt when you executed the Soul Captivating Nebula Owl art will pale in comparison to what he will do to you if you don't leave.." Yang Qing whispered as he quickly disappeared from the center of the arena to his sitting spot.

Ren Jie was dazed for a bit before he hurriedly left the arena as he cautiously eyed the indifferent-looking instructor Pan with his gaze alternating to the casual-looking Yang Qing.

"Winner Ren Jie.." announced Instructor Pan as he waved his sleeve producing a silver flame that burned Zou Hong's body to dust.

"Next is..."

When he opened his mouth to make the next announcement, the fighters from both sides were no longer as casual as they seemed before. The inmates thought they had an advantage in their cultivation realms, however, they now saw one of their own die. They had to reevaluate the 70 students, while on the students' side, they thought victory was all but guaranteed to them, but seeing the way Zou Hong fought, they couldn't afford to be careless.

When Yang Qing saw who Instructor Pan called next he couldn't help but shake his head with a smile.

When he saw Ren Jie being the first to be sent up, he had an inkling to what Instructor Pan was playing at, and seeing the second person he called up, his guess had just been confirmed.

He couldn't help but offer his condolences to the group that had no idea they were being led by the nose.

Chapter 518 Lessons For The Unhatched (6)

Instructor Pan gave one minute for the next contestants to prepare themselves. From the students' side was an ordinary-looking girl named Mei Ling.

She was thin and small in stature, and despite being 16 years old, she looked like she was 11. She was at the third stage of the foundation establishment realm and from the choice of weapon, she looked to be a sword user just like Ren Jie.

Her opponent was Jin Zhang also known as the 'infernal demon Zhang'. Despite the emaciating experience prisoners were subjected to in Requiem, his physique was still enormous and burly. He looked like a bull in human skin as his entire body radiated suffocating heat. He had no weapons and just viciously clenched his fists as he eyed the small Mei Ling who was about the size of one of his thighs.

Jin Zhang loved fighting and would use any opportunity he could get to engage in combat and most were usually to the death. During one of his ventures, he came across a small town in the middle of nowhere where he heard a rumor that it harbored a reclusive expert with great spear skills.

Jin Zhang in typical fashion sought after the expert and when he found him, he asked him for a duel to the death. The reclusive expert had a family at the time which was the reason he decided to abandon the rogue cultivator's life and settle down peacefully.

With a lot to lose, he rejected Jin Zhang's request and even offered to refer him to various cultivators and even special tournaments that Jin Zhang would enjoy due to the nature of those tournaments. However, Jin Zhang heard none of it, as he was as obstinate as a bull.

He wanted a thrilling fight with the reclusive spear expert, one in which they all went all out, so he devised a plan that would force the reclusive expert to fight him in all earnest. Behind the simplistic brute face hid a sinister person who would do anything to get a thrilling fight.

So he hired an assassin organization he was familiar with and had them kidnap the wife and daughter of the reclusive expert along with slaughtering the small town he lived in, so they could lure him out, to make the kidnapping a success.

Jin Zhang waited a year before the plan was put into motion, which was a success. After he received the wife and daughter in his custody he beheaded them both and came to the reclusive expert's doorstep with each of their heads in his hands.

The reclusive expert mad with fury gave him the fight he so desperately wanted. Jin Zhang managed to defeat and kill the expert but not without receiving nasty wounds of his own that left him unconscious in the small town.

A rogue cultivator acquainted with an inquisitor of the Order happened to come across the town and reported the matter to the inquisitor. Jin Zhang had already left by the time she appeared, however, after a few months, the inquisitor investigating the matter managed to track and capture him.

Of the inmates present, he was the newest having only been at the Requiem for seven months. He had a cultivation base that was at the seventh stage of the foundation establishment realm, and from what Yang Qing read about him, he practiced an incomplete blue-grade art by the name, of Marauding Fangs of the Fire Bull. An art that boosted all his physical abilities to insane levels along with destructive power.

Yang Qing couldn't wait for the fight to start. Meanwhile, some of the students were already surrounding Ren Jie asking him about the details that happened when the fight was about to end. They were still in disbelief at how Ren Jie pulled it off despite seeming to be on the losing end.

Yang Qing, Instructor Pan, and some of the seasoned inmates were the ones who saw what happened more so Yang Qing and Instructor Pan.

While Ren Jie seemed like he was being pushed back and struggling, which in part was true, it was also deliberate on his part. He used being pushed on the edge, to read the pattern of attacks from Zou Hong, while he continuously familiarized himself with his own arts. He had only been practicing them for four months, and despite being at the blooming stage already, understanding and experience were two different things. He needed enough time, to condense his understanding to experience, which being on the defense helped him do.

As for Zou Hong, while his attacks seemed rampant, unplanned, uncoordinated, random, and reactive, something done on a whim even with unpredictability follows a routine. While his attacks seemed random and unpredictable, they were filled with predictable patterns. Attacks no matter how random would follow subconscious choices, and for some keen enough, they would be able to detect those choices. From the muscle movement, twist of the body, handling of the weapon, positioning and so much more.

Zou Hong's unpredictable attack patterns had patterns in them ingrained from the countless battles he had over the years. He could fool many, but his muscle memory and natural movements would sell him out to anyone with enough defensive skill which was the foundation of the Institute's teaching on defense. It involved analyzing and breaking down an opponent's habits down to the unconscious ones in the smallest time possible and Ren Jie was able to do that, which was credit to him because most would not be able to do it in under four months. The only way someone like him would be able to pull it off is if they poured themselves wholly into it for those four months with no rest to the point of breaking down.

With his attack patterns deciphered, the rest was easy, Ren Jie timed his defensive counter perfectly so that he could halt the attack long enough to deploy a blue-grade soul technique that paralyzed him long enough to be struck down. It was a meticulous and thorough approach.

A minute passed by and Instructor Pan announced the start of the next match between Mei Ling and Jin Zhang.

Similar to the first fight, few words were exchanged with only Jin Zhang being the one to say a few words which fell along the lines of 'he was truly happy to get a worthwhile fight, especially with the dangerous vibes he was receiving from the ordinary-looking small Mei Ling.

A thrilling fight was what Jin Zhang asked for, and a thrilling fight he got. Mei Ling matched him power for power, attack for attack, she did not bother to dodge. It was a simple bloody and ruthless brawl. One used his fists that could shatter and incinerate a mountain while the other was tyrannical with her sword.

Jin Zhang laughed joyfully the longer the fight went on, even with his eyes and body covered in blood and his breath ragged. He kept swinging and swinging his fists bringing chaos and destruction as it met with the other equally destructive force.

Mei Ling was covered in blood too, however, her whole demeanor was calm and still, like it wasn't her that was fighting and she was nothing more than a detached spectator.

20 minutes passed by with the two opponents still going at it, however, when the clock approached the half-hour mark was when things started to change, and the bloodied stalemate was broken.

Before the thirty-minute mark, the speeds and the weight of their attacks seemed to be more or less similar, however, that gradually changed after half an hour. Mei Ling's attack grew more powerful and faster, as a tide movement sound was produced from her attacks.

Chapter 519 Lessons For The Unhatched (7)

As the fight went on, Jin Zhang's punches and movements got swallowed in an unrelenting tide of sword strikes. Mei Ling's figure couldn't be seen in the avalanche, all that was present was an ocean tide sound accompanied by a spray of blood.

After a quarter of an hour passed since the change in Mei Ling's attack, Jin Zhang's uproarious laughter that he had maintained all throughout the fight suddenly stopped as he fell backward with a satisfied smile on his face. He was missing all his limbs that had been smoothly sliced to mince while every part of his torso to his face was filled with deep slashing marks. His blood had a firey element to it that attempted to burn the floor every time it dripped on it, however, it was useless since the arena was built to handle the fight of even peak domain experts.

Standing a few inches away from him was the tiny Mei Ling who was completely drenched in blood from head to toe. The only visible part of her body was her eyes, which seemed zombie-like as her gaze was firmly fixed on the dismembered Jin Zhang lying in a pool of his blood. The thin sword in her hands was shaking along with her body which other than trembling was also releasing steam. She looked like she was trying to move, but for the life of her, she could not take as much as a single step, even blinking her eyes proved to be laborious.

"Winner, Mei Ling.." announced Instructor Pan, which was the cue for Yang Qing to step into the arena.

Yang Qing immediately appeared next to Mei Ling as he congratulated her, though, by the state she was in, he had doubts if she had him at all due to the pain and strain her body was in because of the art she had just executed.

The cultivation art she had just executed was the Augmented unrelenting severing sword tide art which could be considered a quasi-blue-grade art. The attack was aimed at compounding the sword strike's power and speed with every swing. Any user who used it would abandon any form of defense and would only focus on swinging the sword without pause or doubt.

It required one to have a strong will that they would not be deterred or shaken to halt their movement even if they were just about to be cut apart. The sword strikes needed to be continuous and like its name unrelenting. As long as one maintains and gradually increases the momentum and intensity of their attacks, the power and the momentum of the sword strikes would increase to the point the one being attacked would feel like they were being bombarded by an ocean tide of sword strikes with each strike weighing like an ocean. The strikes borrow that weight to increase the speeds, so other than a strong will to not pause in between the attacks, one needed a strong body to maintain the weight of the attack.

It was for this reason that Mei Ling could barely move with her body shaking. The move had drained her of every qi and strength she had if Jin Zhang had held on for a minute longer he would have been the victor as Mei Ling would have been too worn out and defenseless to do anything. However, though the Augmented unrelenting severing sword tide had a lot of demands and risks to the user, the power of its attack, especially at its peak is as strong as any low-tier blue-grade art. The only reason it wasn't yet considered one, was it needed a continuous flow of uninterrupted chain of attacks to draw out that force, whereas blue grade arts can release it at the onset.

A cool blue-green light was produced by Yang Qing which enveloped Mei Ling, healing her wounds, restoring her qi, and alleviating her fatigue and mental strain in one full motion. Mei Ling who was an unmovable boulder of stillness had a look of surprise similar to the one Ren Jie had when Yang Qing healed her.

"Will....she.....be....okay?" laboriously asked Jin Zhang in between coughing copious amounts of blood as his hazy eyes fell on Yang Qing and Mei Ling.

"She will.." answered Yang Qing.

"Good,....litt...le... gi.rl th..an..k you f..or the f...ight," said Jin Zhang with a pure child-looking smile.

Yang Qing waved his sleeves and another blue-green light enveloped Jin Zhang who was moments from passing out.

The moment the light fell on him, his wounds rapidly closed up at a speed visible to the ear, and then his limbs started regrowing. In less than a minute, Jin Zhang who was already having tea with death was pulled back and his banged-up body that had no limbs was reborn. It was like the Jin Zhang from a few seconds ago was nothing but an illusion.

Jin Zhang who had nothing but fighting in his mind was shocked even more so than Mei Ling.

"Why did you heal me?" he asked as he got up and started clenching and unclenching his fists, unsure that they were real.

"It's part of the rules of combat. As long as you have a breath in you when the winner is announced, you will receive full healing, same as the students.." Yang Qing calmly said which drew surprised looks from both the students' and the inmates' side.

Even though they heard the rule being mentioned, they didn't expect it to be upheld.

A complicated look flashed before Jin Zhang's eyes before his normal laugh and look appeared on his face.

"Well thank you, I guess. Do I get to fight again?" he asked.

"What? Do you want to fight me?" asked Yang Qing with a simple grin.

"If I was at the same realm, sure, I would love nothing more, but as I am, I doubt it will be a fight. I enjoy fights, not a single-sided beating.."

"Your fight for the day has ended, but you will be called up again. But if your level remains as it is, I doubt you will get to enjoy a lot of them.." Yang Qing meaningfully said.

Jin Zhang stared at him for a short moment which then fell on the students before finally settling on Mei Ling whose calm demeanor had returned. He laughed once more as he said,

"You may be right about that.."

He turned and left to the inmates' side while Mei Ling bowed in thanks to Yang Qing as she left for her side, leaving the arena for the next participants.

The students of the Institute won the next seven bouts after Mei Ling's fight, with three of the seven ending in the deaths of the inmates. Although none of the seven won, the win had been hard-fought to the end.

It was only when it came to the tenth fight did a change finally happened which drew a tug of smile on both Instructor Pan's and Yang Qing's lips.

"As expected.."

Chapter 520 Filial Elegy Of The Mountain And River (1)

When the next contestant came forward, Yang Qing's eyes narrowed with hidden glee. It was a young man with a heroic bearing and a handsome appearance. He had short blonde hair and emerald-green

eyes. His face looked like it had been sculptured by the finest materials at the hands of a talented craftsman.

He held a pure white silver spear in his hand as he walked with a sense of confidence and calmness about him. His cultivation base was at the third stage of the foundation establishment realm and he did not seem that far away from forming his fourth pillar. Though Yang Qing didn't have his palace sense and could therefore not confirm it, he felt like the young man had quasi-gold-grade pillars. These were blue-grade pillars that had motes of gold radiance in them. When he was breaking through to the core formation realm, provided his foundations were good, he had a good chance of forming a gold core if he put enough effort and had sufficient guidance and resources, which was something he was guaranteed to have at the Institute.

The blonde-haired student's name was Mu Li, and from the eyes he was getting from the students especially those of the female gender, he seemed like a popular person within his class.

"Instructor Pan, how did he perform in his entrance examination?" asked Yang Qing using a secret voiceless incantation since he couldn't use his palace sense to communicate.

"He was first, and he finished by a large margin at that. He had already developed spear sense at the time and even though he was only at the beginning stages, he was armed with a blue-grade spear art.." answered Instructor Pan.

"Why was he sent to the blue grade test? With his achievements, he had met the standards for the gold grade test?" asked Yang Qing.

"The choice came from the preliminary evaluator, which at the time I didn't understand, however, after interacting with him these past few months, I could understand why. You should already have a sense of it, right?"

Yang Qing paused for a bit before answering as he deeply studied the blonde-haired youth making his way to the center of the arena.

"Mmmh, so that's why...Considering who he is coming up against, seems like you've judged right now is the best time?"

"Yes we have already created a plan for him, should last six months.."

"SIX!!" Yang Qing yelled in shock

"Forgive me for the outburst, but six, won't he break?!" he added.

"After four months, we already know his threshold and how far we can take it as we add a little at a time.."

"Excited as usual.." thought Yang Qing when he detected a hint of expectation and delight in Instructor Pan's tone.

Yang Qing had a sympathetic look as his gaze fell on the contestants below him.

"There's no one better than Guo Feng to be the catalyst, I guess..." Yang Qing said as his gaze fell on the opponent that the blonde-haired student would be facing.

His opponent was a slender-looking elderly man with a white beard that had reached his chest, that was perfectly straight, and white hair tied in a bun with a few loose strands hanging on his forehead.

The elderly-looking man had an indifferent expression on his face as he stood in a ramrod posture. It gave one the sensation that a mountain could fall on him and he would not bend for even an inch.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh when his gaze fell on the elderly man. Every Institute student for the past seventy years knew him.

"He looks just about ready to form his core.." Yang Qing muttered to himself.

The elderly man's name was Guo Feng and he had once been a core elder of a declining rank 4 sect by the name of the Enduring Rain Mountain sect. The sect had a rich history having stood around for almost 45,000 years, which was considered extremely long for a rank 4 sect and the reason it survived

that long was because it once had an early-stage domain expert in its helm at some point in time during their history.

However, despite having an early-stage domain expert, the sect still fell into decline. The early-stage domain expert once explored a dangerous ruin and he ended up getting corrupted with one of the objects stored within that ruin, which he brought back to the sect.

The corruptive effect of the object left him in a paranoid and frenzied state. When it started, its effects were small like small outbursts here and there, nothing too serious, getting triggered by the smallest of things, micromanaging every little thing, then it progressed to violence when he attacked his personal disciple for fear he was scheming against him then it moved to the elders and the fights were no longer just fight where he injured the opponent but he started killing them.

That was the point where the sect members could not adopt a wait-and-see approach,]. They acted as they feared the domain expert who was their supreme elder at the time had been corrupted by a parasite or through some insidious means of a fiendish expert skilled with manipulating the soul.

After investigations, they managed to find the root of it, which was the object the supreme elder always had on him, which was a jade sculpture of a double-headed vulture that had two irises.

However, even if they found the cause of it, they could not separate their supreme elder from it, as he was the strongest cultivator in the sect, with the remaining two supreme elders along with the sect master being at the peak stage of the palace realm. But because of their long history and the connections they built up, they managed to draw in the help of a friend of the supreme elder.

Working together, they tried to suppress and restrain the supreme elder, however, the statue reacted when it detected the danger to itself and the supreme elder. The statue boosted the abilities of the supreme elder who managed to injure the domain expert they had called over. Seeing the situation turning for worse with the statue attempting to corrupt them and the domain expert they had called over, the higher-ups of the sects which were nine palace realm experts and fifty late-stage core formation experts, triggered a forbidden art to try and subdue their supreme elder long enough for the domain expert to act.

The forbidden art was deployed successfully and they did manage to subdue their supreme elder and the statue in the process, however, things didn't go as they had expected because the domain expert they had invited over, took advantage of the opportunity they had created to flee.

With no help, the higher-ups were forced to maintain the forbidden art, had they stopped it early, all they would have gotten was a few serious injuries that would have taken a decade or two to heal but without a domain expert, they were forced to push the forbidden art to the extreme which meant sacrificing their cultivation base and lives, and to make sure they succeeded all remaining core formation experts within the sect jumped in to add more power to the art.

Their sacrifice paid off because they managed to suppress their supreme elder long enough for him to gain a brief window of clarity. The supreme elder used that window to destroy the statue which proved more difficult than anyone from the sect had expected as it required the the supreme elder to sacrifice his life and also borrow the power of the forbidden art to destroy that sculpture.

That history lent credence to the saying birds die for food and men die for treasure. The Enduring River And Mountain Sect, lost almost everything that day. Their core power died all in a single moment, their facilities, core legacies, and treasures got destroyed in the process too, and their foundations got hollowed out, all in a single instance.

A sect that had a domain expert, thirteen palace realm experts, and over a hundred core formation experts, lost all of them because of a cursed treasure.