

Daily life 521

Chapter 521 Filial Elegy Of The Mountain And River (2)

The surviving sect members had to move from the location where their sect was located because they no longer had the strength to retain it and thus could only move to one of the most outskirt branches they had that still remained loyal to the sect as most branches immediately turned and renamed themselves as new sects the moment they heard what happened to the Main branch.

Despite countless years passing by, the sect was never able to regain its former glory and has just been stuck as a rank 4 sect which in part is due to missing the two canons of their legacy art; The elegy of the enduring still mountain and river of piety cultivation art. It was a gold-grade art, it was rumored to have been created by a grieving son to honor the wishes of his mother to live a long and healthy life. He created that art to honor that wish. The art was aimed at strengthening one's heart, mind, and body to ensure longevity in all circumstances.

The art in its complete form was a gold-grade art. The creator was a rogue cultivator and he ended up passing the art down to his only disciple who ended up creating the Enduring Mountains And Rivers Sect using it as its foundation.

The art was split into three canons. The first canon was used in establishing the foundation from the body refining realm to the core formation realm, once one mastered the first canon to perfection, and had reached the peak stage of the core formation realm they would gain the qualification to master the second canon that would be used for breaking through to the palace realm and would sustain them throughout that realm while the last canon was used in the domain realm.

The first canon was distributed all throughout the sect and its branches while the second and third were rumored to have been inscribed on a steele by its creator, in which he imbued his will onto the steele. Without reaching the perfection realm in the prior canon, if one attempted to learn the next canon, they would have their bodies destroyed through qi deviation triggered by forcefully learning it. The canon was created that way. One had to reach perfection in terms of mastery before they could learn the next or risk having their cultivation base and body destroyed.

Those from the branch, if they met the requirement, would visit the main sect and learn the next canon, but with the destruction that happened at the sect, the Steele that contained the second and third canon got destroyed in the process and was thus lost forever.

Guo Feng had been an elder in charge of guiding the new disciples of the sect and like most, he had grown up hearing the stories of how great their sect was and idolized it to the point of obsession. Like most within the sect, he hoped that his sect could one day return to those heights which was why when he realized his talent was not high enough to make it a reality, he decided to devote his life to guiding the new disciples.

He was strict, passionate, and zealous in that endeavor, however, it ended up being problematic when he grew extreme in his methods. New disciples would get injured more heavily in their training to the point of being traumatized and then it grew even further when some had their cultivation bases crippled.

Despite being warned, he refused claiming those unable to survive his training showed they were unable to carry the mantle of the sect forward and that the sect would be fine without them.

When the number of crippled disciples grew too high and their ability to attract more disciples plummeted as a result of it, the sect master finally acted.

The sect master could not bring himself to treat Guo Feng to the sect's rules which involved getting his cultivation base crippled and banishing him from the sect. With the number of grudges he accumulated over the years as an instructor, it was no different than sentencing him to his death, which he could not do. Guo Feng's heart was in the right place even though his methods were extreme, and when he was charged, he was willing to accept the punishment, readily.

The sect master unable to come up with a solution decided to send the matter to the Order to make a judgment on it. He was given the option of a rehabilitation program or getting sent to Requiem, to which he chose the latter. He was looking to die and hoped he would get that chance at the Requiem.

It wasn't until one of the Instructors read his file, did his circumstances change. He was given the option to be part of the life and death duels and his reward was the option to perfect the first canon of his sect's legacy art.

Once any art reached the blue grade, it had a will or spirituality to it that grew the higher up the grade one moved. If Guo Feng reached the perfection realm in terms of mastery and understanding of the first art, then the art itself may guide him to the door of the second cannon. It was something commonly seen in interconnected and fragmented gold-grade arts.

As long as one had the main root foundation of the art, they could gain insight into the next parts without seeing the other parts, but they had to reach the absolute peak of perfection to induce an epiphany to the next parts.

Guo Feng on hearing this, immediately agreed and has been engaged in those duels for the past seventy years improving his mastery over the art every time which had helped him survive to this point, and from what Yang Qing could tell he was about ready to reach the core formation realm.

The fact that the blonde-haired student was matched up against Guo Feng his defeat was all but set in stone as Guo Feng had blue grade pillars himself and over the years he has even defeated a few gold grade pillars and forced a bitter draw against a few purple grade pillars.

And what happened next when the fight was announced to begin wasn't a surprise to Yang Qing.

The blonde-haired youth declared confidently that he would defeat Guo Feng in ten moves and if he didn't, it would be considered his loss.

He launched his blue grade art; the golden flame swallow spear art at the onset bringing a fearsome momentum with him that drew solemn looks from the inmate side and gasps of awe from the students' side but what happened next brought a deathly silence to the arena.

Guo Feng punched slowly, however, the movement of his punch created a sonic pulse that tore apart the golden flame spear art aiming to run him through. The attack was destroyed to smithereens without the punch diminishing in force. The punch went on to smash the blonde haired in his stomach producing a quaking sound in the process.

The student flew like a kite whose strings had been cut as he smashed at the walls of the cliff surrounding the arena and dropped unconscious with just a breath left.

Instructor Pan announced the winner but all the participants were wide-eyed, in shock at what had just transpired while the cause of all this bowed to Instructor Pan and calmly left the arena.

Chapter 522 Nurturing Fear (1)

All, whether it was the students or the inmates, each and every one of them looked at Guo Feng differently as he calmly walked away. No one could believe such a slim decrepit-looking body would hide such terrifying power underneath.

An air of wariness and confusion hit both sides before some semblance of calmness started to fill the area when Instructor Pan announced the next participants.

Most of the students still seemed slightly shaken more than the next person to be called up. It was a young girl by the name of Zhu Wang. She was fifteen years old, blue hair, and a saber user.

As she walked over her eyes kept darting behind her where her fellow student, Mu Li, the blonde-haired student, lay unconscious. Yang Qing gently pulled his unconscious body out of the crack and healed his wounds.

His internal organs had been shifted, and his ribs were all cracked, though, in terms of damage, it could be considered pretty light, all things considered. Guo Feng had controlled his force exquisitely and spread the right amount of damage all around his body. It was enough to hurt him, but not enough to cripple him.

In a single breath, Yang Qing had healed all his wounds.

"Huh..what happened? Where am I?" Mu Li woke up groggy.

Yang Qing helped him up and then left for his seat, leaving the next part to Instructor Pan.

Mu Li shook his head a few times as his brows coiled up in deep consternation.

"What happened?" he muttered over and over, and when he saw the sympathetic and awkward looks he was receiving from the students it didn't take long for him to connect the dots, especially, when he saw the deep crevice next to him and his torn robes.

"Did I lose? DiD I MU LI LOSE?! No! No! It can't be.." his expression soon turned livid as he rushed to the center of the arena.

However, his dash was interrupted halfway when a cold voice sounded. It was Instructor Pan's voice.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Instructor Pan who was floating above the center of the arena exuded a coldness that made the hot-tempered Mu Li pause in his steps as a look of fright appeared on his face, however, when his gaze fell on the students, the deep crack behind him and the detached looking Guo Feng in front of him, a feeling of rage and indignation got reignited.

"Instructor Pan, i don't mean any disrespect, but i feel the inmate cheated. How could I have been defeated that fast? he likely used a secret artifact or some taboo artifact. There is no way i could have lost to him.." he angrily said.

"Is that so?" asked Instructor Pan without a change in his expression and tone.

Mu Li flinched a bit but he managed to pull enough courage to answer back despite the dangerous air surrounding Instructor Pan. I think you should take a look at

"I would like to request a rematch, Instructor, and I don't mind if he uses the same hidden artifact or taboo art.."

"He did not use any artifact or taboo art. Every inmate present has been screened and when it comes to taboo arts, does it matter if they use it or not, it's part of their arsenal. These fights are meant to prepare you.

Do you think the enemies you face will do things fairly or chivalrously? They will use tricks, dubious means, curses, and taboo arts, they will gang up on you, deploy poison, and use subterfuge and misinformation to try and gain an upper hand over you.

They will use anything and everything against you, and you need to be prepared for that. There will be no, I want a rematch because you have used an underhanded means or whatever excuse you will come up with as your last breath leaves your corpse.

Mu Li, do you think we are playing here? From the way I see it, you and most of you here, all just want the title of being members of the Order. You want to wear that crown despite not knowing the cost it takes to hold it.

There are no laurels in what we do, no fame, no renown, all you will get for your efforts is the ire of the entire cultivation world because we are an anomaly that is destroying the accepted way of life within the continent.

You may save someone today in the conduct of your duties, but in the next, they will no longer be the victim but an assailant whom you will have to apprehend and if that is not possible, you will have to destroy.

So, Mu Li, I ask again does it matter if he used a taboo art or not?" Instructor Pan asked as an overbearing pressure enveloped the entire arena.

It was early in the day with the sun high up, however, as he asked the question, light seemed to turn dimmer while the temperature dropped.

The students, Mu Li included felt a deep primal fear that they could not stop well up from within them.

"But like I said, Guo Feng did not use any taboo art. He defeated you in a straightforward manner. He even went easy on you, had he gone all out, broken bones and shifted organs would have been the least of your worries.

In simple terms, you were just too weak Mu Li, but don't worry, you will have all the rematches you want because, for the next six months, you will be living in the Purple Twilight Forest where there will be no shortage of things as strong if not stronger than Guo Feng, and the best part, they do not hold the same reservations as he does.

You will have your fill of rematches Mu Li." Instructor Pan ominously said as he waved his sleeves creating a subtle force that pulled Mu Li away from the arena and placed him next to the other students.

Mu Li had a distraught and lost look on his face. Even though he did not know what the Purple Twilight Forest was, but from the way Instructor Pan put it, it was bound to be a horrifying place.

Of those present only Instructor Pan and Yang Qing knew of it. Yang Qing couldn't help but throw a sympathetic look toward Mu Li. The Purple Twilight Forest was one of the test sites for the purple grade test.

Chapter 523 Nurturing Fear (2)

The forest was dark all throughout the year with the only source of light being a purple star mist that enveloped the forest. The forest was a literal version of an oxymoron which was why it was always called the nightmare paradise.

The forest was rich in resources and spiritual qi, and the purple mist helped to improve one's comprehension abilities. However, the forest was also home to spirit beasts and spiritual plants that had taken advantage of those conditions to develop themselves. There were also natural phenomena, dangerous at that, that continuously flooded the place such as lightning storms, and because of how rich the area was, tribulation lightnings were not in short supply either.

It was an area fraught with danger at every turn and for the Purple grade test, the participants would have to traverse the whole of it to the finish line. He couldn't help but feel for Mu Li, yes, Yang Qing enjoyed the one shot he received from Guo Feng, but he couldn't help but sympathize.

The Mu Li he saw now, would be broken within days of staying there, and he would be living there for six months, even though it would be a set quadrant and he would not be asked to traverse the whole forest like Yang Qing and the rest of the testees were asked to, but still even staying in a set area was bound to be a harrowing experience.

Instructor Pan didn't lie when he said there were countless creatures there that were as strong, if not stronger than Guo Feng. Mu Li would have to forget what sleep, comfort, or what safe is, for those six months, he would have to make friends with paranoia, pain, losing limbs, and seeing his own body torn apart for a duration of time.

Mu Li would come out a different person at the end of it. He would come out a renewed coward, hyper-alert with a more than healthy suspicion and wariness of everything and everyone, and a deep appreciation for his intact limbs. Yang Qing remembered how he spent hours wriggling his fingers with tears in his eyes. One gets a newfound respect and appreciation for the little things in life not losing your appendages every minute or so.

While it would be one of the worst experiences Mu Li would have to go through, it was something he needed, and he would grow from it. It didn't take long for Yang Qing to guess that the reason Mu Li wasn't sent to the gold grade test at the start despite his achievements, was his willpower and mentality. They were too low, and if he was thrown in there at the start, he would have been traumatized beyond repair. But now, the instructor's have already studied him enough to tailor a training regimen that would help him build it up, and the place they chose to do that at, was the Purple Twilight Forest.

With Mu Li lost in his thoughts at what was exactly waiting for him at the other end, as Yang Qing had already taken out joss sticks to burn in his remembrance, the next fight resumed. The girl sent from the students' side lost her fight, and in her case, Instructor Pan had to step in before she received the death blow.

The next fifteen fights all ended in defeats by the students' side, though most were close defeats where the inmates had to use their experiences of dancing on the blade's edge to squeeze a win-through in the end, while cases like Guo Feng's were rare. Only two more people managed to replicate what he did, though they did not do it as smoothly as he did. One of them was a lady who had the Ashen Obsidian Viper physique which made every part of her poisonous, along with having extreme agility. She defeated her opponent after a few minutes.

The other person to have a smooth victory was a short stout man with long arms that seemed ill-fit for his body as they seemed longer than his entire height. He too had a special physique. He had the diamond cerulean spider monkey physique that gave him a nigh impenetrable defense. He barrelled straight through the attacks he received from his opponent and used a restraining cultivation spell to trap his opponent and bombarded them with a rain of fists.

After the consecutive losses, the moods all around shifted. The students who were full of spirit and contempt at the start all had dark looks on their faces, even the likes of Ren Jie, and Mei Li who had won their fights along with the seven others after them didn't look too good either. I think you should take a look at

If it went by tally, the inmates were already leading, and they couldn't help but worry if there were other terrifying experts like Guo Feng remaining from the inmates' side.

Over at the inmates' side, there was a liveliness and a sense of bloodthirstiness growing, the kind a predator would get after spotting an injured prey.

Luckily for the students' side, they managed to win the next two fights after that, which helped uplift the spirits of those who would come next. Though the two fights that they won, were hard-fought, the inmates they were fighting against managed to survive in the end, while the students were all on the brink of losing consciousness with heavy injuries to them.

Even though the two wins were not pretty, they drew a look of approval from both Yang Qing and Instructor Pan. The goal of the matchup was slowly being achieved, which was to change the attitudes of the students and the indolence they had, there was now a maddened desperation in them, something that wasn't there. They no longer looked down on their opponents or were careless, and when they fought, they did so like they were risking their lives.

The matchups from Instructor Pan were deliberate which made it easy for Yang Qing to guess how things would pan out. The first seven participants from the students' side were the ones Yang Qing noted were cautious, and studying their surroundings before the test had even begun. They were alert, and the way they carried themselves including how their bodies seemed to be just ready to burst out with power at a moment's notice, showed it was something they had been honing in the four months during their grace period. They did not let up and their results showed.

Instructor Pan had chosen to start with them to create the illusion that the fights were easy, which would make the already arrogant students even more reckless, and when it came to the matchups of those wreckless students, Instructor Pan had a clear grasp of their abilities in those four months, so choosing opponents that would have high chances of defeating them wasn't that difficult.

The students might think their defeat was because they let down their guards, but what they didn't know was it was already set in stone from the moment the life-and-death duel was planned and the goal of it, had been achieved.

The students no longer had the haughty look from before, they were now analyzing each fight as though their lives depended on it. The inmates were no longer lambs for slaughter, they were ferocious tigers who would devour them if they showed even the slightest of openings.

A healthy fear was growing in them, and that fear would continuously be nurtured throughout their period at the Institute until it reached the point where they were so paranoid that they would gain a second nature to themselves and that nature would be going all out against any opponent before they had the chance to turn the tables on you. It did not matter if the opponent was a whole two realms lower than you, assume they would beat you if given the chance, so use everything, even be underhanded if you have to, as long as you're breathing in the end, you have won.

Three fights passed by before finally, it was Peng Zhen's turn.

Chapter 524 Peng Zhen's fight (1)

The three fights ended with two wins and one loss for the students' team. Though there was still a loss, the shift in mentality and attitude was evident in the students.

The results were commendable for the students despite the close three fights. The difference between win and defeat was minuscule and it usually fell down to who had more capacity to endure a beating than the other long enough to outlast his/her opponent.

Nonetheless, regardless of the results, their efforts could be seen. Instructor Pan had set up their matches and he matched the students against opponents he felt they had a high chance of losing against. The fact that they could claw a win or force a bitter win from their opponent showed they had grown a bit from who and how they were before the dueling test started.

Peng Zhen was among the final participants from the first group of convicts selected. The students at the arena numbered seventy while the convicts numbered thirty, and while some of them could handle several fights in a row, the Instructors usually let them have one fight a day, so they could improve themselves should they survive, and be even tougher opponents for the students when they were next called upon.

There was another inmate group in waiting, the moment Peng Zhen's group finished their fights. These groups would usually have a mix of regulars like Guo Feng and new inmates who have been judged to have enough combat acumen to push the students.

Peng Zhen's opponent was a young man by the name of Bai Chen. He had a muscular physique and wielded a glaive. He was at the third stage of the foundation establishment realm.

Peng Zhen didn't have a weapon, which was no surprise to Yang Qing, who could tell from the first moment they met that Peng Zhen wielded his body as a weapon. His body had been repetitively tempered and strengthened to that end.

Instructor Pan gave them a minute to prepare themselves before he announced the start of the match.

The moment the announcement was made both Bai Chen and Peng Zhen charged toward each other.

A white blizzard cyclone in the form of a tiger was created when Bai Chen thrust his glaive toward Peng Zhen. The move he had executed was a top-tier orange-grade art by the name of Maw of the Blizzard Tiger. It was an art that had a restraining ability accompanied by a powerful destructive force.

Peng Zhen on facing the attack did not halt his steps and instead met it head-on.

Scarab white shield

Peng Zhen's skin glowed as a white golden coating appeared on it. The coating looked like the exoskeleton of a beetle.

The moment Bai Chen's attack reached his body it was like it had clashed against an immovable metal.

A clinging sound was produced from the attack as Peng Zhen punched through the blizzard cyclone tiger.

Clang!

His fist collided heavily with Bai Chen's spear causing an air explosion. Bai Chen gritted his teeth as his muscles bulged with him tightening the grip on his glaive.

His glaive was vibrating heavily from the clash with a sharp stinging pain coursing through his arm from the collision. He had to forcibly endure the pain to prevent the glaive from leaving his hand.

Bai Chen muscled through the attack as he retaliated with a circular swing of his glaive that halted Peng Zhen in his tracks as the attack threatened to take away a limb if he bulldozed through, even with the white gold shield that coated his skin.

However, even with a pause in his movement, his attack didn't stop as he performed a down swipe with his palm which created tidal scythe-shaped attacks made of pure white light that had a terrifying tearing force at their edges.

Bai Chen was immediately forced into the defensive as he used his glaive to swipe away the attack. Though he managed to successfully disperse the attack, he was forced back a few steps as a searing pain assaulted his hands like he had been burned.

A grim expression appeared on his face when he saw Peng Zhen swipe his palms four times in quick succession creating four more white tidal scythe attacks.

Ape storm of the five chariots

Bai Chen swallowed in the air, while his arms suddenly mushroomed as a result. He swung his glaive with a rapid rotation of his body with terrifying momentum and weight beneath his steps. It was like an avalanche and an eruption had descended beneath his feet.

He tore through the four attacks in one single motion with his rotational momentum still ongoing as it was aimed at Peng Zheng's neck who was forced to suddenly raise his right hand and use it as a shield for his neck.

Peng Zhen felt like the force of five mountains had suddenly been slammed into his forearm. The white golden glow on his skin let a more intense radiant glow as though he was using it to fight against the force that aimed to tear his hand along with his neck apart.

The golden radiance being released from his skin eventually gave out as a cracking sound was produced.

Bai Chen's glaive broke through the white gold exoskeleton and then proceeded to slice into his arm. Bai Chen's eyes bulged wide open with fury as he pushed with all his might to slice more into Peng Zhen's forearm.

The muscle in Peng Zhen's arm suddenly constricted and tightened, halting the progress of the glaive while he used his other hand to launch a counterattack.

His finger let out a piercing light that seemed to burn as hot as the sun which he rapidly used to pierce at Bai Chen as he aimed for his neck.

Though Yang Qing didn't know the defensive art Peng Zhen was using since it wasn't part of the brilliant ray fist art he had given him, he recognized the finger light attack he had just released.

The attack was part of the brilliant ray fist technique. It was one of the many supplementary moves contained within the art known as the solar flare finger technique that combined the force of the entire body into a single point, the finger, and as one's mastery over the technique grew, one could display it over five fingers simultaneously, and if mastered to perfection, one could tear through any defensive treasure from the sky rank to below, very effortlessly.

Yang Qing could tell Peng Zhen's mastery over the art wasn't very high but the level he had reached, coupled with his cultivation base and his rich experience, was sufficient to trouble Bai Chen who was immediately forced to abandon his attack as he used the pommel of his glaive to deflect Peng Zhen's attack.

The pommel caved in as finger finger-sized hole appeared on it.

"What kind of art is that?" Bai Chen warily thought as he charged up another attack.

A terrifying pressure was released from his body as a silhouette of a dragon with five different colors appeared around him with its tail coiling around his glaive.

Peng Zhen no longer delayed and immediately launched rapid continuous punches, with his fists letting out a gentle but penetrative white light with every punch.

Alarm bells rang from his body when he detected the change on Bai Chen's body and could no longer afford to delay using the blue-grade art Yang Qing had given him even if his mastery of it wasn't even at the blooming stage yet.

His fists rained on Bai Chen with unrelenting force as he aimed to disrupt whatever art Bai Chen was about to use, however, his fists which seemed to have enough force to punch a hole through a mountain were immediately swallowed when the silhouette of the dragon surrounding Bai Chen opened its mouth and released a blue whirlpool.

Peng Zhen's fists were drowned in the blue whirlpool that seemed to have scale-like markings floating within it.

Chapter 525 Peng Zhen's fight (2)

"Oh, the kid has mastered the five-element dragon art.." muttered Yang Qing in pleasant surprise as he eyed Bai Chen.

The silhouette surrounding Bai Chen was of a dragon that had five colors signifying the five elements, and the colors appeared on different parts of its body.

Just from the silhouette alone, he recognized the art. The five-element dragon art was a low-tier blue-grade art that required the user to have a certain level of mastery over the five elements. It required the user to have an understanding of the five elements deep enough for them to be able to alternate them seamlessly in use.

While the art itself wasn't the most powerful when it came to potent attacks, it was one of the most stable, especially when it came to fighting a battle of attrition against an unknown foe. It was adaptable, able to grant offense and defense in one single motion provided the user had a good grasp of the elements and the art itself to be able to switch seamlessly in combat.

It had five moves based on the five elements; the dragon breath blue aqua whirlpool which Bai Chen had just released, the dragon silver fang blade storm, the stoneheart dragon tremor strike, the verdant dragon scales, and the inferno dragon claw strike, which combined became the five element dragon strike.

Bai Chen quickly showed his mastery over the art, he seemed to be just at the cusp of reaching the blooming stage.

He defended against the fists using the aqua whirlpool move while he retaliated with the stoneheart dragon tremor that produced a rebounding ripple force every time it struck Peng Zhen's body, and if a

slight opening showed up, Bai Chen would deploy the inferno dragon claw strike which just like its name was a claw art which transformed his hand into a dragon claw that was coated with crimson red magma.

Peng Zhen struggled against the inferno dragon claw strike the most as it seemed to melt away his qi along with his art making him expend a lot of qi to try and maintain them. As for the silver fang blade storm, it acted as a restraining art that restricted Peng Zhen's movements by raining white piercing arrow-shaped storming attacks on him. Alone, they were nothing much, but hundreds of them had enough force to cause serious damage to Peng Zhen.

Peng Zhen's own defensive arts seemed to struggle against the onslaught of Bai Chen's moves, and when it came to the blue-grade art Yang Qing had gifted him he seemed to have only mastered two moves; the fist art which was the main component, and the solar flare finger art. He still had not mastered the rest, especially the movement art ray tracing steps that would have provided him with much breathing space had he learned it even a little.

However, his experience as a seasoned cultivator who had survived countless battles in a place as fraught with danger as the green fog region finally showed. He weathered through the attacks Bai Chen threw at him. The ones he could accommodate, he took straight on while retaliating with attacks of his own, and the ones he couldn't afford to get injured by, he dodged with calculated experience.

The fight lasted for almost an hour before cracks showed up in Bai Chen's attack pattern when he got too anxious for a win creating an opportunity for Peng Zhen to exploit, which he did as he launched a tidal wave of fists that knocked Bai Chen out after a minute, prompting the end of the fight.

Once the announcement was made, Peng Zhen waited for Yang Qing to finish healing Bai Chen, and when he woke up, he offered Bai Chen a Daoist salute for his performance in the fight as he nodded towards Yang Qing as he left the arena.

During the small interlude, he also informed Yang Qing of the bags of rice he had brought over much to Yang Qing's delight, who told him he would see him when the fights were over.

After three hours all the thirty inmates present were done with their fights with six recorded fatalities. The winners were excited as they would get to receive the rewards promised to them which was usually a week at a selected cultivation ground. Such a situation was a win-win situation for both the Institute and the inmates themselves. The inmates would get a break from Requiem while also getting the chance to strengthen themselves which would increase their odds of survival and even winning when they fought

the next time. As for the Institute, the more powerful those convicts were, the more they would stir up the students to keep applying themselves.

Though of the group, only Peng Zhen wasn't receiving a reward as this life and death duel was his sentence, and unlike the rest, he only had one fight a month, and he got to go back to his sect after. That freedom was considered his reward while the blue-grade art Yang Qing gave him, was more of Yang Qing helping him out as it was not something normally done.

However, some of the inmates, if they had accumulated a certain number of wins, would be given the option of having a cultivation art as a reward. But to trigger such a reward, they would need to have 200 wins under their belt, which was not an easy thing to do, so most used whatever art they knew along with their experiences.

After the thirty inmates were done, the next batch was brought over, and with the lessons ingrained in them, the students didn't drop their guard and managed to win 34 of the 40 matches they had with four draws and two defeats. But before they could celebrate their wins, Instructor Pan poured cold water over their parade by telling them, they would be having the life and death duels on the same day every week from now till their last day at the Institute. They all turned pale at the announcement.

Yang Qing left soon after, meeting up with Peng Zhen who had been waiting for him at the court building along with his assigned review committee guard, who was responsible for taking him back to his sect and bringing him over on the day of his match, which was once a month.

Yang Qing exchanged a few pleasantries with him as he gleefully accepted one tonne of crystal white rice. He thanked Peng Zhen profusely for it, and while he couldn't offer Peng Zhen direct pointers on the Brilliant ray fist art, since despite his admiration of him, Peng Zhen was still serving a sentence, and some semblance of fairness and rules had to be maintained, Yang Qing did offer indirect suggestions to Peng Zhen, such as studying various spiritual plants and creatures on how they acted.

Other than them, how or where to find said creatures and what Peng Zhen would learn from them, was ultimately up to him.

Chapter 526 Accidental happening at the abode

After enjoying the uplifting thrashing of the new students at the Institute, Yang Qing resumed his normal schedule in the following days.

At his mother's insistence that had a few meal bribes mixed in, Yang Qing 'reluctantly' ended up staying at his parent's house for almost a week. He had to be filial and did not do it for the tantalizing meals his mother cooked up in the week he was there to the point he contemplated maybe moving back for a month or two would not be a bad thing.

However, in the end, his sense of independence won the fight. He moved back to his abode after a week but not without promising his mother that for the next month, he would pass by once a month to which Yang Qing could only helplessly agree to it when he saw her well-concealed worry as she made the plea.

Even without her plea, he would still have had to make regular visits back home because of his father who had now become a regular instead of the absentee he had been.

Just as his grandfather had suggested, Yang Qing and his father documented almost every change within Yang Qing since his physique went into a hibernated state.

Yang Qing was deeply awed by his father's meticulousness and the way in which he conducted their study. It was well-structured and methodical. Every documentation, finding, and hypothesis seemed to be targeting or building toward something. Slowly by slowly the fog of his physique was being parted with help from his father and at some point, his brother got involved too, as he brought other secondary materials such as ancient scrolls that contained ideas that cultivators around the world across different time periods had about the peerless jade physique.

Things seemed to be improving all round. Even though there were no tangible benefits yet, he could intuitively feel he was making progress when it came to understanding his physique, and in its absence, just as Ren Shu and the Valley Master suggested, he was making improvements in his understanding of the medical arts they had taught him, and also his own understanding of the Universal Duality Of The Myriad Worlds Cultivation art was improving gradually.

His physique had helped him in the conduct of these arts, it added an almost instinctual advantage toward it kind of like how cats could climb on trees without knowing how they did it, but with his physique in hibernation, he focused on understanding the details he may have overlooked due to the presence of his physique that may have filled that gap for him, and the harvests were great.

When his physique was fully restored, he knew he would experience a qualitative jump in the execution of his abilities, and it wasn't only that, he could already feel the barrier leading to the second stage of the palace realm was already loose and would not take much effort for him to take that leap. However,

he had held off for a number of reasons one of which was he wasn't at 100% yet with his physique in an almost comatose state, and he still had the mental demons from the Ice Emerald Sect to deal with.

When it came to his meetings with the saint grade tree, the Auspicious Grove, the experience with the brook of clarity was still taxing, however, the increase in the time given to him for its restorative properties was a welcomed bonus. The Auspicious Grove had increased the time from two hours to four hours. The two hours were used to relax his mind from the harrowing experience of reliving every detail of what happened at the Ice Emerald Sect, while the additional two hours, Yang Qing took advantage of the mental relaxation it brought him to meditate and delve deeper into his cultivation art, and also his Dao.

He still remembered the question Green Cocoon had asked him on what he thought Vitality was, which was the Dao he used to break through to the palace realm. With mind-clearing effects from the colorful aurora mist produced by the brook that also boosted his cognitive abilities, he could spare some time toward that end.

Ma Yuan's current state also managed to free him of some of the guilt-ridden mental burdens he had. Ma Yuan seemed to have some life in him as he worked in Yang Qing's backyard. After his sessions with Ma Ling, he would come straight to Yang Qing's abode. Yang Qing used his merit points to redeem all kinds of seedlings from the regular treasure vault of the Order, which he then gave to Ma Yuan. In addition, he even permanently redeemed a few herbology books that had a complete step-by-step guide on how to care for those seedlings to maturity, which he gave to Ma Yuan to study.

Ma Yuan was all over the moon when he got those books. He constantly pored through the books with an infatuated gaze like that of a kid who had gotten the gift he/she most wanted. He barely slept because of it.

Of course, in the early days when he came over to Yang Qing's abode, an accident happened to Ma Yuan. Starlight who had been wholly absorbed into refining the wisdom pearl Yang Qing had given it, ignoring everything outside, finally took a break, and when it did, it discovered Ma Yuan, gleefully examining Yang Qing's backyard. The moment it saw him, despite being familiar with Ma Yuan as they both became acquainted with Yang Qing on the same day and place, it still attacked him. It could still remember Yang Qing had asked it to be his guard, and thus it acted, faithfully executing its commands.

A fight broke out between the two and luckily Ma Yuan still had his core formation body and his rich combat experience as a rogue cultivator to rely on so he was able to hang on long enough for Ellie the cloud-swallowing kite, to save him.

She had come over in typical fashion to maintain her weekly routine of 'requisitioning' a reasonable amount of fish from Yang Qing's pond when she knew he would not be around. She did not want to disturb him, she was reasonable and considerate that way.

When she arrived, she saw Ma Yuan barely hanging on, she ignored it as she had priorities. Nothing came before food, not Ma Yuan and not even her own well-being. It was a creed that Feng Xin and Yang Qing had ingrained into her ever since she was a young chic, and it was a creed she has upheld to this day, and she wasn't about to break it.

It was only when she was done picking the finest of fish from the school did, she stepped in to save Ma Yuan. She slapped the Starlight crab around before she knocked it unconscious, otherwise knowing how obstinate the crab was, it would follow her to the ends of the earth if left awake. She left soon after.

Chapter 527 Young man by the white lotus

Ma Yuan later shared what had transpired, which earned the Starlight crab another beating from Yang Qing, which left it feeling very greaved that it made a few inscrutable noises which Yang Qing loosely interpreted as it saying it would never come out of the pond again, if that was the treatment it was getting for doing its job.

To prevent any future trouble because Yang Qing didn't quite trust Starlight, he employed a few measures to keep Ma Yuan safe. One was to ask the two black dragon horses to keep an eye on Ma Yuan when he was around. With their presence, the starlight crab could forget about acting up. Ideally, he would have asked the Celestial nesting weaver, but it was too lazy and arrogant to agree. It would likely mock Yang Qing if he dared ask.

The other thing Yang Qing did to ensure Ma Yuan's safety was to give him a top-tier sky-grade defensive treasure. It was a blue vortex jade whale amulet that would produce a vortex seal shield that would completely protect Ma Yuan against the full-blown attacks of an 11th-stage core formation expert. That defense could be sustained for three days, and before the defense broke, it had a lethal attack that would retaliate every force of attack it had sustained onto the attacker before it broke apart.

With Ma Yuan's safety assured, they both went about their activities with relative ease. Ma Yuan spent his time in between Yang Qing's abode and the Medical Valley, which helped him improve his mental state every day while Yang Qing spent his days at the Medical Valley honing his arts, the Auspicious Grove to take care of his mind and contemplate about his Dao, and having discussions with his father, brother and occasionally his grandfather in their deciphering of his physique. He also shared his notes

with Ren Shu after, who was still hard at work along with the Valley Master to ensure the Medical Valley did not have any latent threats hanging about.

His schedule remained relatively the same for the next few weeks, it was only near the end of the third week did a change happen to his routine.

He was headed to the Coalescing Tranquility Rivers Of Healing pavilion when he spotted someone seated cross-legged next to the white lotus that was at the center of where the four rivers combined. The lotus atop which the pavilion was built on.

The lotus was the congruent graceful white lotus, and it was an ascendant-grade spiritual plant not too far away from becoming a saint-grade plant itself based on the estimates of Ren Shu. Yang Qing concurred with that estimate, as the lotus plant grew increasingly inscrutable and had an ethereal air to it that grew more distinctive by day.

Next to one of the petals of the lotus flower was the backside of what seemed like the back of a young man who had donned pure white robes, he had short wavy black hair. His presence seemed to mirror the gentleness and the tranquility being exuded by the lotus like he was an extension of it.

Yang Qing on seeing the figure, halted in his steps. Even without seeing the face of the person, he instantly knew who the person was, how could he not when over the past year, their judge group had thought about him a lot, and he came into the Institute in the same year as him, and he had the same distinctive peaceful aura about him even back then.

Yang Qing slowly walked over, stepping at certain points within the river before he finally stopped next to the black-haired man.

"Yang Qing..." the man turned his head to his left revealing a charming young face with a tranquil smile and eyes.

"Lai Lei, you decided to take a walk.." said Yang Qing as he sat next to him.

"Well, there's no better place than this. It became a habit of mine to come here every day to meditate when I was admitted. Now that I've been discharged, I find it hard to break the habit.

I grew attached to the lotus when I was here, and I think we became friends, right, senior.." the young man said as he stretched his smooth jade-like hands toward the petal closest to them.

The petal shimmered with an ethereal glow when his hand made contact almost as if in agreement with his statement.

"Tsk, I am not surprised. You have always been able to charm anything..." Yang Qing muttered with a jealous scoff.

"I doubt it, if senior lotus was made to choose between us, I have a feeling she would choose you.." Lai Lei said with a smile.

"How are you?" Yang Qing hesitantly asked as he ran his hands through the water creating ripples.

"Better than I was...You? Dai told me you had a thorny case.."

"Better than I was, too..."

"Thank you for watching over Dai when I got injured. Knowing him, he would have done something crazy if you all were not there to help him.."

"It was nothing. He would have done the same thing for us.." said Yang Qing as his gaze turned distant.

Eight months ago, the peaceful-looking young man seated next to him had been ambushed by fifteen half-step palace realm experts in the conduct of his duties while he himself had been a half-step palace realm expert himself.

He managed to breakthrough the besiegement by slaughtering ten of his fifteen attackers, however, he lost an arm and a leg along with suffering various grievous injuries, one of which was cracks in his dantian.

He managed to escape long enough to contact the headquarters who alerted the nearest branch to send reinforcements along with any inquisitor or Order employee that was close by. A domain-level roaming inquisitor was close and managed to reach him in time to deliver him to the headquarters where the Medical Valley got hard at work to repair his injuries.

They restored his limbs, along with various injuries he had suffered including purging his body of the curses and poisoning he had been inflicted with before they proceeded to work on his dantian that was filled with cracks close to shattering.

The senior figures of the Medical Valley worked on him to help repair it, and finally, about a month ago, he was given a clean bill of health.

Yang Qing could tell from the stable rhythmic fluctuations of qi energy that he was releasing, that everything within his body was running smoothly as it should and by the looks of it, he looked just about ready to take the leap into the palace realm.

Things were better now, but back then when the news reached them, it was a grim period, more so for Dai Chen who considered Lai Lei a brother more than his chief inquisitor.

Chapter 528 Eight months ago (1)

Yang Qing looked up, his gaze taking in the clear sunny sky above and the cool wind brushing up against his skin as his mind slowly drifted a few months ago.

...

Eight months ago, Dai Chen's judge chamber

"Lei, why are you still taking missions when you should be preparing to break through to the palace realm?"

Cheng Qing and I can't handle the workload by ourselves, and the two roaming inquisitors I was assigned, one of them has already taken a break from work to prepare for her breakthrough and the administrative department has said it will be quite some time before they send another one.." said Dai Chen as he poured himself a crystal clear rice wine.

He proceeded to pour Lai Lei one.

"Mmmh, is this Yi Jie's work?" Lai Lei asked in surprise as he savored the chill mellow flavor of the rice wine.

"No, though his skills have undoubtedly grown over the years. I found this thanks to Yang Qing's suggestion.

He told me there was this old man who just moved into the White Baobab Kingdom, whose ply of trade was in winemaking. From what his king friend had told him, the old man's family has a long history of wine-making that dates back 50, 000 years.

So during my sect evaluations, I decided to pass by the kingdom and sample his wine for myself and see if there was some truth to what Yang Qing told me, and it turns out there was.

Old man Feng's Silverleaf nectar wine is really something special and easily among the top ten wines I've had..." Dai Chen said as an infatuated flame burned in his eyes as he swirled in his eyes.

"I will need to make another trip there soon, the batch he gave me is almost done, and it should be about time for the frost snake wine he told me about to be ready.

Lai Lei can you believe it, he has been brewing that wine for ten years. I can't wait..." Dai Chen excitedly said as he licked his lips. Lai Lei could only helplessly shake his head at this as he took another sip.

"Yang Qing should already be at Tribulation Mountain, right?" asked Lai Lei trying to change the topic from wines.

"Mmh, it should be his third month now..." Dai Chen suddenly laughed when he finished his statement.

"What?"

"Yang Qing was practically beaming with joy when he was about to head to the mountain. Most people would be slightly anxious due to the pressure of breaking through safely and the threat of the tribulation lightning, but with how joyful he was, one would think he was going for a vacation.."

"But isn't he? To him, even tribulation lightning is better than working and there's also the free time he gets before and after the tribulation lightning falls. How bad does he hate working?" Lai Lei said before he and Dai Chen burst laughing.

"He has always been an odd one. I wouldn't be surprised if he ends up pulling something there.."

"There's no doubt about that, he always had a knack for attracting trouble, even during our Institute days.."

"Your year sure had a lot of talents coming in. I can't believe you, Kang Huilang, Xia Boqin, Feng Xin, Yi Jie, Huifeng, Hu Jiaying, and Yang Qing all came in at the same time.

All we could hear about from the Instructors back then was how we had terrifying juniors behind us and if we dared slack we would soon be overtaken by them.." said Dai Chen as he leaned back in his seat.

"Don't lump me in with their lot, especially Kang Huilang, Yang Qing, Xia Boqin, and Hu Jiaying. They were complete freaks, especially with the manner in which they survived the purple grade test at Rest Gaze Peak.." Lai Lei said with a bitter smile and a flash of fear in his eyes.

"Hahahaha, I heard they abandoned all caution and created a chaotic storm in there. Drawing the attention of all the spirit beasts in there, especially the lords, and triggering almost every trap they came across to add further chaos to the mix.

I feel shivers just imagining it.."

"I doubt any group could have pulled off what they did and lived through it. Their lineup was the perfect grouping for it. A team that complemented itself on extreme attack and extreme defense.

Because of the chaos they created, the test grew harder for the rest of us, especially the team I was in. We ended up stumbling onto two lords; a blood rage bear and a mist blight pangolin. Half our team along with another team we had partnered up with got wiped out before we managed to defeat those two.

At the time, we thought it was the Instructors doing that things got suddenly chaotic, only after did we know it was Yang Qing and the rest, and at that time we were too exhausted and traumatized to do anything..."

Dai Chen let out an uproarious laughter when he saw LaiLei's pitiful face as he recalled those events.

"But at least it helped you all hone your survival skills in a chaotic environment. I bet the life and death duels were less frightening to your lot after that experience.."

"That's one way to look at it.." Lai Lei said as he took his last sip and got up.

"Dai, I'll be off. After I'm done with the case I'm currently handling, I will head directly to the mountain. Save me the frost snake wine after I come out, will you?"

"Good, I will...by the way what's the case? Is it another walk-in one?"

"Mmh, a rank 4 clan is claiming ownership over an artifact in some rank 4 sect. The clan claims the artifact is their clan's heirloom from 7,000 years ago, and it got lost when one of their elders who had it on him went missing.

They've requested a death duel challenge to the sect and requested the Order to act as the witness since the sect apparently has some connection with a rank 3 empire.

I am just going to confirm if the artifact really belonged to the clan at some point in time and present my findings to the administration department, and if it does, then handling the duel may very well be sent to the outer palace courts, who knows, you may even end up presiding over it.."

"A treasure tribunal showdown huh.." Dai Chen said with a sigh.

Chapter 529 Eight months ago (2)

The death duel challenge also known as the treasure tribunal challenge was an officiated battle between two factions who had a dispute over something and could not come to some sort of agreement, and the level of their dispute was high enough to the point they would come to death blows at any minute.

In such an event, they could fight it out amongst themselves without oversight or they could choose to involve the Order in the affair.

Fights between factions weren't illegal, and neither were fights over treasures. It only became illegal when innocents were dragged into the chaos of the battle between those factions, but as long as no innocents were affected, and the casualties were only from those factions, then the Order would not intervene. They upheld the unmentioned rules of the cultivation world.

However, despite being bystanders in such situations, to help reduce the cycle of hatred and grudges or be forced to step in when innocents have already become victims, the Order formulated something called a death duel.

During a death duel, the Order would provide a neutral ground where there were no people around, it was basically a wasteland, where the different factions could fight it out without repercussions. The fight could be an all-out brawl that involves every member of their respective factions or a fight selection, where each faction chooses their top combatants to fight in a one-on-one duel or battle royale. The victor would be the side with the last surviving member.

The Order would uphold the results of the fight as per the agreed-upon terms among the different factions. The terms had to be clear and distinct for the Order to be able to enforce it. One of those terms was the duration of the effect of the agreement. The Order would not protect the terms of the agreement indefinitely and was usually for a set period of time. There were attached costs to the enforcement timeline, with it increasing the longer the time of enforcement was.

Since the Order wanted more organizations to choose this option, and reduce the chaos that they would cause if they fought on their own terms, unmonitored, the costs were usually tailored in accordance with the fiscal capabilities of the factions in question.

Within that duration, it would not matter if the losing faction had a stronger ally or relative, the Order would uphold the terms agreed upon to the last day. Most factions that didn't have a web connection

preferred to have this form of duel, and for the Order to be involved, the claims for the dispute had to be legitimate.

For example in the case that Lai Lei was working on, if his investigations showed that the artifact had never been a part of the clan claiming that it was their heirloom, then the Order would not be involved in the dispute in any form whatsoever, but if the claim was proved to be true, then they would act as officiators and upholders of the terms and conditions of the fight, including providing a territory for the fight.

Even though these officiated duels reduced the amount of chaos caused to the continent, it was still a gory sight to behold especially to the judge who would be serving as witness to it. It was not a pretty sight, especially if it was an all-out fight, where both sides agreed that they would fight to the last person from the leaders all the way down to the negligible servants, they would all be involved in the fight.

Dai Chen had already officiated one, and he wasn't that enthusiastic about officiating another.

"Oh yeah, can you give this to Yang Qing when he comes out? Tell him it's my gift for his successful breakthrough.." Lai Lei said as he tossed over a white jade talisman.

"What's in here?" asked Dai Chen as he stored the talisman away.

"He and Feng Xin made a list of tasty ingredients, I found a lake containing one of them, the emberwhisker catfish. The area is pretty secluded and uninhabited by humans. The coordinates are recorded in there.." Lai Lei said as he turned to leave.

"Take care, Lei. You still have the talismans?"

"I do, I barely have a situation to use them. They've just been collecting dust.."

"I sometimes forget what a battlefiend you are sometimes.." said Dai Chen with a laugh when he noticed the regrettable expression Lai Lei had on his face for not getting an opportunity to use the talismans he had made.

Lai Lei didn't say anything and just smiled and left.

...

Tribulation mountain, silent willow cave

"The tribulation wasn't that bad. So this is the palace realm? This sense of invincibility. I could defeat ten of me in the core formation realm with just a wave of my palm. I can't believe how dangerous it was for me every time I left the headquarters for those pesky evaluations.

I always knew the Order was up to no good, sending me out there with my paltry strength, but now, no, no, Yang Qing, don't let yourself get swallowed up by your sudden leap in strength.

Remember your weakness, if I feel this much power, what about a domain expert? How much stronger are they than me? They could probably sneeze on me and pulverize my body and soul.

Nope, I am never leaving the headquarters not unless they give me a saint-grade treasure, but would one be enough?"

Yang Qing scratched his chin with his soot-covered body releasing black flakes with every scratch.

"No I need to get two but would the stingy Order give me some, knowing them, they would not, and if they did, they would likely harvest everything they could from me to pay back the worth of those two treasures and with interest too. No, no, it is too risky.

The only other option is to either redeem them with merit points but even then I would have to slave I don't know for how long until I earned enough to redeem one, the other.." Yang Qing's grin turned smug as his eyes let out a radiant glow. He looked like a black cat with golden eyes.

"I am already a palace realm cultivator, and in terms of cases, I have already met the needed number for me to be immediately promoted to the outer palace court after this. The ceremony, the ceremony is my only hope of getting a saint-grade treasure, too bad the holy lands never come to these things, otherwise my odds of getting high would be high.

Outer palace court judge, hehehehe, days of slaving for days with no sleep because of endless core court cases are now over.

Soft life Yang Qing the Order almost killed you, but you now have a chance at life," Yang Qing choked up as tears started trickling down his face.

"It was long but we are here, now what to do? I already told Old Fiend Lei I would take eight months to a year to break through and stabilize myself but it only took three months.

I will spend the next two months stabilizing my realm as for the next three or so months after that, hehehe, I will take my well-deserved rest..."

His stomach immediately grumbled after that which prompted him to dig out a storage ring that had been deeply embedded into a crevice by the wall of the cave about five hundred meters away from where he was.

"The palace realm sure is something.." Yang Qing muttered in amazement as he covered the distance in a single breath to pick up the ring and flashed back to where he had just been.

"A roast chicken and vermillion wine ought to be the perfect celebratory meal...hehehe enjoying a good meal and the joyous thought of pulling one over Old man Lei is satisfying. Life is starting to look good.." joyously muttered Yang Qing as he poured his qi into the ring and a golden crisp chicken and wine gourd flashed out of it along with a white goose cushion.

Chapter 530 Eight months ago (3)

Above the skies of the Scarlet Peony sect,

"This should about confirm it. The ocean turtle cauldron did belong to the Duan family at some point. The spiritual markings of their founder and the subsequent three clan leaders are still present in the cauldron.

They hid their markings well, almost as if they knew the cauldron would be lost one day. Mmh but I wonder where they managed to find the cauldron.

It looks like it has been around since antiquity and despite almost 70% damage, it's still releasing energy undulations that closely resemble that of a low-tier monarch-grade artifact. Too bad its spirit seemed to have been destroyed ruining any chances of restoring it to its former glory, but even then, I can see why the two of them would rather go to war than let it go.

A cauldron that is able to pacify volatile ingredients without the need for the alchemist to use their spiritual sense and soul essence to contain the volatility, not only that, it's also able to strengthen the spiritual essence of the alchemist, enabling them to maintain their peak state for long durations of time. With such advantages, even an orange-grade alchemist would be able to concoct blue-grade potions.

How did the Duan family risk traveling with such a treasure? Anyone worth their salt would be able to tell how valuable the cauldron is at a glance, especially its materials, the shell of a viridian ocean turtle.

The one who crafted it surely would have been at the gold grade.

Well, my work here is done. I just need to submit the findings and let the department handle the rest. Mmh should I pass by the White Baobab Kingdom and see if the wine Dai talked about is ready? The Kingdom isn't far from here. What do you think Shadow? Should we make a detour?" Lai Lei said as he stroked the head of the shadow flame hawk he was seated on.

The shadow flame hawk was about 20 meters long with its wing span being half that. It had a grey flame cloak on its neck that extended all the way to the underside of its feathers creating an infinity loop image.

The shadow flame hawk was known for its incognito abilities. Its shadow flames are able to isolate its presence from every sense including scanning by divine sense. Its flames also act as a barrier or protection against soul-based attacks and it has mild healing capabilities when it comes to curses.

Even though it was known mostly for its stealthy and sentinel capabilities, its speed was above average. It could cover a 100-kilometer distance in ten minutes.

The shadow hawk narrowed its eyes in pleasure as it welcomed Lai Lei's scratches.

"I take that as a yes.." Lai Lei said as he took out a yellow parchment that had a detailed map of their area.

"The White Baobab Kingdom is here, and we are here.. we can pass through the broken whale fin peak to make it in good time. Shadow take us away.." Lai Lei said as he used a cultivation spell to project their travel route to the shadow flame hawk which screeched in acknowledgment and flapped its wings which despite being large didn't create as much of a breeze with their movements.

When they were a few kilometers away, Lai Lei took out his communication talisman to call the Administrative department member who had given him the case to inform him of the findings.

His eyes narrowed when he saw the runes of the communication talisman weakly flicker instead of letting out the gentle golden glow they usually did.

"Shadow be alert.." he immediately said as he narrowed his gaze toward his surroundings. They were currently flying above a place known as the jagged rock-scorched plains.

The plain lacked human presence due to its barren nature. There were poisonous yellow magma channels that crisscrossed all over the plains. The magma made the air dry and inhospitable to both people and animals as it not only raised the temperature to abnormally high levels, but it released steam that contaminated the spiritual qi of the area. If a foundation establishment cultivator were to try to absorb said contaminated qi, their meridians, and innards would be boiled from within by the tainted qi and exhibit symptoms of flame poisoning, which if left unattended, would kill them within ten minutes, which would leave their bodies calcified into yellow rocks, similar to the jagged yellow rocks that were all over the plain.

There were very few animal species and plants that could survive the area, and each one of them was poisonous, with the most dangerous species being the yellow poisonous flamed thorn chameleon. It was like a fish in water in such a treacherous environment, continuously feeding and growing stronger from the magma-tainted qi and its flames. It was stealthy and its whole body except its eyes was filled with minuscule thorns that would be coated with poisonous yellow flames upon release.

A yellow poisonous flamed thorn chameleon in the foundation establishment stage could easily fall a spirit beast at the core formation realm if they were in this environment. It was a king here, however, if you took it out, its strength would plummet to the point even a fledgling qi refinement spirit cub would easily kill it, but within this plain, it was one of the most dangerous things to come across.

Lai Lei's alertness, however, wasn't to those chameleons or to the tainted spiritual qi in the area. To both he and the shadow flame hawk, if they wanted to, they could acclimate to the area even more so than the chameleon if they wanted to. His wariness was to the strange reaction of his communication talisman, and his instincts honed by years of experience were screaming, telling him that something was afoot.

He had already unsheathed his long sword as he restrained his spiritual sense to within 200 meters of his body even though his normal range was above 500 meters. His shrinking spiritual sense was part of the combat training preparations given by the Institute.

If you suspected you were being ambushed and your spiritual sense deployed at normal range didn't detect it, you needed to shrink it by half and concentrate on it within that range which results in the amplification of your spiritual sense. The details one could get in a concentrated range would be higher than if it was left at the normal range. However, in exchange for concentrated clarity, one sacrificed the allowance of distance for reacting to the ambush. So those who did this had to train their reactionary speeds to the peak, which the Institute ensured it did, along with the training afforded to Inquisitors.