

## Daily life 531

Chapter 531 Eight months ago (4)

Lai Lei held on to his sword, with a faint silver light flashing in his eyes. He still maintained the same peaceful and graceful aura, despite the tenseness of the situation, while the grey flames of the shadow flame hawk seemed much more vibrant.

They passed halfway through the plain with no incident, it was only when they were almost at the edge that a change finally happened.

Lai Lei tightly gripped his sword as he narrowed his gaze and took a small deep breath. A silver line suddenly flashed in his eyes and he leapt off the shadow flame hawk's back swinging his sword horizontally.

Boom!

A thunderous explosion sounded that parted the hot mist from the plain as sprays of blood suddenly appeared with cleanly sliced yellow flamed thorn chameleons appearing seemingly out of nowhere.

"Fellow Daoist, it can't be that you were hunting the yellow flame-thorned chameleon, and I happened to interrupt your strike, could it?" Lai Lei said as he softly landed on the ground with his gaze fixed on the black-robed person standing a few hundred meters away from him.

The black-robed person had concealed their face with a mask that was made in the image of a spider's abdomen and legs. It was a mix of red and black.

Lai Lei had a nigh imperceptible frown on his face, as it could feel some sort of isolation power being released by the mask. It seemed to isolate everything about the person, about the only thing Lai Lei could tell about the person, was that they were at the quasi-palace stage, the same as him, and the only reason he was able to glean that, was from their earlier clash.

The black-robed person didn't respond to Lai Lei as he pulled a chained deer horn knife. As he pulled it, the motion created a deep tear to the ground. It sliced through it easily like a hot knife through butter.

"Top tier monarch grade weapon, quasi palace stage cultivation, an artifact that can isolate their presence even from me. Whoever that person is, their background isn't simple, and by the looks of it, the attack was deliberate, clearly they seemed to have been waiting for me.."

Lai Lei took slow steps forward which prompted the black-robed person to tighten their grip over the chain connecting two deer knives.

Lai Lei's robes fluttered gracefully as his sword let out a gentle hum.

The pupils of the black-robed person constricted as they detected a sharp piercing sensation surrounding their entire body when the hum sounded. When the person's gaze fell on Lai Lei, even though Lai Lei still had the same charming peace loving look to him, the person felt a tyrannical force of destruction being released from Lai Lei.

"Are they done with the preparation yet? I don't know how long I can hold on against him. Holding on for five minutes seems impossible even with the help of the dragon flame pills. I'll need to use the talisman.."

Just as a black jade talisman appeared in the black-robed person's hand, Lai Lei flicked his sword in rapid succession.

Cascading moon slashes

White wind cutter slices immediately bombarded the black-robed person as it sliced through everything in its path.

The black-robed person who looked just about ready to detonate the black jade talisman in his hands, was immediately put under defensive pressure that he could not even spare a momentary thought toward the talisman in his hand.

Within seconds, the person was already walking a tightrope between surviving and being sliced apart.

The person was cycling the double-horned deer knife chain so fast that it created a blur in their movements, but even then, they struggled to keep Lai Lei's lightning-fast attacks at bay. Slash marks appeared on the black-robed person's body, little by little.

With every attack from Lai Lei, the black-robed person felt like their body had been smashed by a sharp mountain. The resulting force caused their blood to churn with their organs shifting in the process and some of their bones dislocating.

"This can't be...it's barely been a minute.." fearfully thought the black-robed person as they felt the speeds and the weight of the attacks from Lai Lei continuously increase with every passing moment. Their body was already riddled with cuts, their breathing grew labored with the metallic scent of their bleeding body pervading the area.

"I can't hold on.."

The black-robed person sacrificed one of their legs by leaving it undefended so they could get a chance to detonate the talisman by their hand.

However, the black-robed person felt the chain suddenly drop as a cold sensation filled one of their hands, and when they looked over, they saw three of their fingers fly slowly in the air as the talisman slowly fell from their grip.

Before they could register what had happened their whole arm was next to fly.

"SENIOR BROTHER NOOW!!!!!!!!!" the black-robed person who had remained silent all this time finally opened their mouth, and it was to yell for dear life.

"It even isolates the gender of their voice..." muttered Lai Lei in shock as he heard the androgynous voice come from the black-robed person.

He still could not tell their gender or even age.

The black-robed person who expected something to happen after their yell was left in shock when they saw different parts of their body being cleanly dismembered leaving only their torso intact, and just as they thought they were going to survive, they saw a sword pierce straight through their glabella. Even in death, they were still in disbelief.

"If you have partners then there's no need to keep you alive.." Lai Lei muttered as he bent over to pick up the spider abdomen's mask of the black-robed person's body.

However, he immediately paused and dodged to the side where a black lightning streak flashed by.

When he looked up, he saw fourteen black-robed people standing ahead of him with the same type of mask that isolated their sense of self.

A black rusted dagger coated in black lightning was at the center of the group. Lai Lei could tell that the dagger was special and it required eight of the fourteen people before him to maintain.

He could intrinsically feel if he was nicked just slightly by the dagger, he would suffer fatal injuries.

Without hesitation, five talismans instantly appeared in his hands that he immediately detonated, launching them toward the group as he used a silent voiceless transmission to send a message to the shadow flame hawk.

"Shadow, run the way we came from and fly as fast as you can. Use the eagle bracelets like you were taught to launch a distress signal.."

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The shadow flame hawk screeched as though it was saying,

"No, I want to stay.."

Lai Lei sighed as if reading its thoughts.

"I know you want to help but if you stay I will be too distracted with your welfare to go fully out, and considering the line-up, I doubt I can afford a moment's distraction, and it also looks like they came fully prepared.

I don't know if it was me specifically they were targeting, or they were targeting anyone from the Order and I happened to be the unlucky one, but regardless of which is which, they came fully prepared to achieve whatever their goals were, knowing fully well what they would be up against.

Our best course of action is to split. Call for reinforcements while I hold them off, who knows the thought that you escaped might end up affecting their mental states which would give me more to exploit. And if I really can't handle it, I will run. I have no intentions of fighting to the bitter end here, if I really can't win, I can always run.." Lai Lei gently said.

The shadow flame hawk let out a low screech almost mournful as it gently touched its head on Lai Lei's forehead.

"Go.." Lai Lei said as he gave it one last pat on the head.

Grey flames blazed and immediately coated the shadow flame hawk's full body. With a crackle, it immediately disappeared from view and flew away.

"Good.."

The whole exchange had taken just a few seconds, in the meanwhile a chaotic cataclysmic storm was brewing ahead of him.

Lai Lei had detonated five talismans, each containing 80% of Dai Chen's strength as a first-stage palace realm cultivator.

Spiritual qi was swallowed in large amounts, while debris and explosions sounded everywhere.

"Did I curse myself this morning?" Lai Lei wondered with a bitter smile as he took out three more talismans and then decided to add one more.

The last talisman was dark purple and had dark gold runes inscribed on it. Lai Lei had a slightly frightful expression as he held on to it. If given the chance, he would rather not use it because detonating it came with consequences to his body that would end up in his death in the worst-case scenario.

"Hopefully I don't have to use it.." he muttered to himself as he watched the dust cloud clear.

The talismans that had enough power to eviscerate an entire city because of how much destructive power they had, failed to so much as scratch the black-robed group's robes.

A giant black lightning shield had enveloped them like a protective capsule. Everywhere around them had been destroyed, except the place in which they stood on.

Lai Lei wasn't too surprised by the result, since if they dared attack him, surely they had enough confidence in the means they had, especially that dagger that gave him an eerie dangerous sensation.

"It's not quite at the ascendant grade, but it should be close. Just who are these people? Where did they come from? The artifacts, the lineup, it's too high for it to be some no-name group, and how did they even know my route?"

Launching that dagger needed sufficient time and preparation. Clearly, they were sure I'd pass by here for them to be able to launch it in time.

The blocked signal must be there doing too. They must have an artifact on them with void attributes. It's the only thing I can think of that is capable of interfering with the communication talisman.

Luckily the group before me doesn't seem like they have someone capable of controlling the artifact, if there was, I'd be in serious trouble.

Fourteen..let me exhaust the eight some more.."

Lai Lei in quick succession instantly detonated the three talismans and fished out two more from his storage ring, which he detonated immediately after he was done three.

"Looks like it's working.." Lai Lei muttered as he noticed the slightly erratic fluctuations coming from two of the eight black-robed persons who were controlling the dagger and also by the demeanor of their bodies, they seemed to be imploring the remaining seven to act who immediately pulled out their weapons.

Three of them were sword users, one had a green fan made of what looked to be the dried wings of a bird, one was a saber user, one spear user, and one held two saber tooth daggers that released an eerie green-black smoke.

"Of course, they have monarch-grade weapons too.." said Lai Lei when he detected the energy fluctuations being released from their weapons. It was similar to the first black-robed person he had killed.

"I hope twenty minutes will be enough. I can only maintain this for thirty.." muttered Lai Lei as his figure started morphing slightly.

The graceful tyrannical storm of the gentle kirin

A rainbow-colored auspicious light permeated out of the golden scales that had appeared on several parts of his body i.e. his forearms, both sides of the neck, the nose bridge, and the eyebrows.

His eyes had also changed to a pure golden color with an ethereal light fluctuating within them.

A brilliant sword intent was immediately released from his body that cleared the dust storm around and from within it, he charged forth, sword in hand.

The seven black-robed individuals immediately split up in a bid to form an encirclement on Lai Lei.

Three of the sword users charged forward while the fourth remained behind seemingly to guard the eight, who seemed immobilized in the operation of the dagger.

Two of the sword users had mastered sword intent too, which was the materialization of one's sword force to the external surrounding, however, in terms of momentum, theirs lost out to Lai Lei's sword intent which looked to cleanse every impurity by slicing it to dust.

Like an unstoppable force, the moment Lai Lei clashed with the three sword users, he simultaneously deflected the attacks of the two sword users that had mastered sword intent and then borrowed the momentum of the deflection to quickly appear behind the third sword user that had not mastered sword intent.

The third sword user had just detected the danger from their back and was desperately turning his body to deflect it, only to have their arm sliced off with quick precision. The arm sliced off was the one holding the sword.

Lai Lei as if reading the trajectory of the sliced arm immediately kicked it, intercepting an incoming attack from the fan user. The fan in their hands seemed almost lifelike as brown corroded feathers appeared on it. When the fan user waved their fan, and a sandstorm with black smog was produced.

The severed arm that Lai Lei kicked over, which still held onto the sword, immediately parted the sand storm apart with fierce momentum. However, even though the attack seemed parted, the arm started rotting and desiccating, further in the storm, it went.

Immediately after the dual dagger wielder appeared behind Lai Lei aiming for his neck. Lai Lei as if he had eyes at the back of his head plunged his sword backward forcing the dual wielder to dodge to their side, only to be met with an elbow to their jaw as they were dodging.

A cracking sound, likely from a broken mandible immediately sounded from the crash.

"Good, it seems the masks don't provide defense.." thought Lai Lei as he went on to follow up with a slashing attack that aimed for the dual wielder's neck only to be stopped by the spear user and saber user who had each mastered intent, though it was only in the embryonic form.

A fierce explosion was created that sent the dual wielder flying as the saber and spear user were sent back a few steps. The spear of the spear user vibrated forcefully as blood appeared in between their thumb and their index finger.



Before they could even grip their spear properly, a flash of shining radiant light was reflected on their eyes as they saw a graceful sword aiming for their neck and were too helpless to stop it.

Clang!

A metal against metal clash sounded immediately drawing the spear user out of their trance-like state. The spear user felt their body get flung backward by the interceptor who turned out to be the lone sword user who had not joined the attack.

"You must be the one in charge, I take it. I don't know if you would be willing to tell me where you are from and why seven quasi-palace stage experts laid an ambush for me?"

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Lai Lei asked as he rapidly stabbed the sword user over a dozen times. The sword user managed to deflect those stabs, however, they looked to be struggling as the stabs grew. Muffled grunts and a pained look appeared in their eyes during the terrifying onslaught where the sword user felt if they let up as much as an inch, Lai Lei's sword would easily cleave them apart.

The sword user didn't know for how long they would be able to maintain their defense before an opening showed up, but lucky for them, they didn't have to find out as the remaining six members all swarmed Lai Lei, alleviating the pressure on the sword user who looked to be the leader of the group.

The fan user created a sandstorm to surround the entire battlefield. Other than having life-draining properties, it seemed to have slight effects on one's senses, especially the spiritual sense and obscuring vision. The black-robed attackers clearly hoped to limit Lai Lei as much as they could as they seemed to have a way to easily maneuver within the sandstorm.

Unlucky for them, with his ignited bloodline, Lai Lei could easily see them, including even the flows of their qi. He had the thinnest bloodline of the graceful kirin, however, it was thin to the point that he was no different than a person without it, except for the various immunities and sensitivity to qi manipulation it gave him. But after the tireless efforts by the Order, even though, they couldn't increase his blood purity due to how mythical and mysterious the kirin was, they did find a way to force out the latent abilities contained within his bloodline, similar to atavism.

Through a special technique, Lai Lei was able to assume a pseudo-atavistic state of the kirin and gain the abilities contained within his bloodline. When he started, he could only sustain it for three minutes, then

with arduous training, his growing cultivation base, and improvements continuously made to the special technique, he was now able to hold it for thirty minutes.

One of the abilities he gained was something called unveiled spiritual light sight. He was able to see the flow of qi, including its characteristics within a given. The characteristics ran from its elementary composition down to its state and or concentration. The seven black-robed attackers stuck out like fireflies in the dark within that sandstorm.

But with launching that state, came the drawbacks, such as being in a severely weakened state for the next two hours, and if he were to forcibly prolong the state beyond thirty minutes, his foundations and life would very well be put at risk, which was why he hoped to handle the whole ordeal within twenty minutes and use the remaining ten to find a safe location to ask for reinforcements, in case the shadow flame hawk wasn't able to.

Lai Lei feigned that his senses had been affected somewhat to lull the enemy to complacency which it did, as he was able to kill the one sword user who was missing an arm.

The group on realizing the sandstorm likely had no effect on Lai Lei, launched a desperate struggle against him. A rain of different nature and color of attacks were launched on Lai Lei including deploying talismans that contained the power of a palace realm cultivator. Luckily Lai Lei still had two of his own, and his were superior. He used one of the remaining two to deflect their talismans and used the slight opening created to deal heavy blows to them.

Despite being surrounded and walking a tightrope where a single misstep could end in his death, Lai Lei gracefully interwove between attack and defense. He skillfully dodged their attacks like a fish swimming through a current as he counterattacked just as first. Ten minutes in, none of the seven attackers remained uninjured, with a few dismemberments among the group. The only reason they held on for so long was because of the dagger with black lightning.

The backlighting borrowed the domain created by the sandstorm to crisscross and pinpoint Lai Lei. Luckily for Lai Lei, he had the unveiled spiritual light vision, and with it, he was able to detect minute fluctuations as the lightning was about to target him. Whilst he was able to dodge them, it was by a tiny margin. His robes were singed, and he had a few burn marks that could not heal from secondary contact with the lightning.

"This can't go on much longer.." Lai Lei muttered as he felt something dangerous brewing from the dagger.

Kirin's fang of judgment

Lai Lei suddenly exploded with energy as a sharp piercing light burst from his sword. Lai Lei like a specter, crisscrossed around the battlefield slashing and piercing without stop.

The black-robed group that was already struggling, was immediately drowned in an avalanche of radiant sharp tearing attacks from Lai Lei who turned into a reaper within seconds.

The black-robed group started dropping like flies. The spear user was split in half from head to toe, the fan user had a pin-sized hole through their forehead, one of the sword users from sliced apart from their torso, while the other received a clean decapitation, the saber user already had one of the eyes blinded and non dominant arm dismembered, leaving only the dual dagger wielder and the leader, in any fighting form, but even they were not long for the world as they had numerous injuries on their bodies.

Despite the one-sided massacre that was happening before them, they seemed apathetic about it, all working with a single-minded devotion of slaying Lai Lei. The dual wielder was the next to fall as Lai Lei blitzed in between their attack and sliced them cleanly through from shoulder to shoulder.

Lai Lei's desperation grew when he felt whatever was brewing from the black lightning dagger was about to be completed. It was then that the surviving sword user and saber user did something inexplicable and pretended to attack Lai Lei, only to simultaneously detonate their bodies when they were within a certain range of him.

Lai Lei managed to dodge just in the nick of time, thanks to detonating one of his last remaining talismans that took the brunt of the attack, however, he took some damage as the force shifted his internal organs causing him to cough up blood.

The slight disorientation left him open and the black lightning attack managed to strike him on his left foot, searing it off at the ankle, causing Lai Lei to leak gold blood.

However, Lai Lei was in no mood to care about his missing foot when he saw a presence materialize behind the dagger as the life aura in the eight dark-robed experts started to dwindle.

"Are they awakening its spirit.." wondered Lai Lei as the temperature of the area suddenly plummeted that even the ground below was encased in black ice.

A stifling atmosphere filled the area like that of a terrifying slumbering beast awakening.

A dark silhouette of a double-headed snake appeared from the background of the now floating dagger. One of the heads had dark blue eyes that released a frigid chillness that could freeze the soul for eternity while the other had dark eyes that seemed to be the picture of endless desolation.

"I can't hesitate.."

Lai Lei immediately vomited gold blood on the last talisman he had, the purple talisman with black golden runes.

The gold blood was immediately swallowed by the runes that let out a blinding glow and terrifying pressure that seemed to match the one released by the double-headed snake.

Lai Lei's hand that was holding the talisman immediately became emaciated and within seconds it was nothing but bones, as his skin grew paler with his golden scales disappearing one after the other, but even then he didn't flinch as he detonated the talisman with whatever remaining strength he had left.

The world seemed to turn still as all the spiritual qi within a 10-kilometer radius of the purple talisman was immediately sucked by the cracking talisman.

Lai Lei weakly opened his eyes to see some sort of projected image. It was of a dagger being born and inviting a black lightning tribulation that seemed to temper it. Immediately after it dropped and sliced through the monolithic double-headed snake and absorbed them.

Lai Lei suddenly felt like he was the double-headed snake, however, that sensation was warmly and gently washed away when a white ocean appeared and then shrunk to the size of a pearl. The pearl compressed to the size of a needle radiating a terrifying presence that made the space quake.

In an instant, a blinding dawn was created as it charged towards the dagger.

Lai Lei instantly crashed a dove amulet he had on him the moment he saw the two attacks were about to collide as he made a desperate dash to his right.

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A golden membrane with runes in the shape of a dove immediately coated his body like an added layer of skin.

The amulet he had just crashed was a top-tier monarch-grade artifact called the twilight fortress dove. It was a defensive artifact and was a one-time use defensive artifact with a timer.

For three minutes it would protect the user's body against any attacks at the level of a tenth stage palace realm cultivator. It only required the tiniest bit of qi to trigger it, a wisp would do. When triggered it would form a protective membrane on the user for three minutes, and when the three minutes were up whether there was an attack or not, it would shatter and disappear.

Lai Lei didn't choose to use it earlier even with the threat of the dagger because of that particular flaw. At the time he could still handle the lightning attacks being produced by the dagger, even though they posed a fatal threat to him if they managed to strike him.

Triggering the Twilight Fortress Dove for something he could dodge could be considered pretty wasteful especially considering the artifact was a one-time use artifact. From the moment he saw the dagger appear which prompted him to take out the purple talisman, he knew the moment he would use the amulet.

The purple talisman was something the Order had spent countless resources and effort to create. The best-made talismans could only contain 70-80% of a cultivator's full-powered ability, and that value usually shrunk the higher up one moved in the cultivation realms.

The purple talisman he had just triggered contained the 90% full-blown strength of a peak palace stage expert who was inches from the domain realm. A 90% threshold was something thought to be impossible around the continent, but the Order had managed to achieve it at a considerable cost at that.

Creating the purple talisman required considerable resources to create, and a large sum of it was in the ascendant grade. Therefore every employee was given only one such talisman for a couple of reasons one of which was the cost it took to manufacture them but the other was the inherent risk of the

talisman to the user, especially if said user is multiple levels weaker than the power contained in the talisman.

To trigger the talisman, one would need to pour their qi into the talisman, and the amount of qi required was the remaining balance of the power stored in the talisman. In Lai Lei's case, he needed to pour 10% into the talisman, however, the 10% was in reference to the peak palace realm expert whose cultivation spell was used in the making of the talisman. So Lai Lei needed to pour 10% of the spiritual qi contained within the body of a peak palace stage expert, specifically for one who was already at the doors of the domain realm. That 10% wiped out all his reserves even with his atavism state triggered and it even drained his blood and soul essence, any more and he would have been drained to death by the talisman.

The qi required was one of the risks of triggering the talisman, the other was if one successfully triggered it, there was a high likelihood they would be swallowed by the attack contained in the talisman. This was why Lai Lei immediately used his artifact the moment he triggered the talisman. If he got swallowed up in the attack, then his death would be all but guaranteed.

With the protective membrane encapsulating his entire body, he triggered all of the hidden spiritual qi restoration pills stored within his body, which was like a bucket in a dry river. He used the spiritual qi he got to execute his movement speed with the highest speed he could before the cataclysmic explosion from the collision of the white ocean pearl and the black lightning dagger happened.

However, he had clearly underestimated the abilities of peak palace realm cultivators. The two attacks collided before he could make it far. All he saw was a brilliant ray of light colliding with twelve black mountains that had appeared out of nowhere, each exuding a terrifying presence, while below them was a pool of lava.

"What is that?" Lai Lei fearfully thought as he had hammering sounds echoing from the twelve mountains.

The hammering sound was so loud that he instantly felt like it was his very soul that was being hammered to pieces. His soul would have been severely damaged had it not been for the protection afforded by the twilight fortress dove artifact but even with its protective membrane that helped reduce the impact of those hammering sounds on his soul, he still bled from almost every orifice of his body, with a heavy bout of nausea and dizziness assaulting him.

The space started shattering as a world-ending explosion sounded from the point of collision of the two opposing sides. The wave created by the explosion was fierce and fast as it destroyed the land within the area with its effects rapidly spreading outwards, and soon Lai Lei was swallowed in the storm.

The white dove runes that filled the membrane covering his body flickered with a sense of desperation to them almost as if their existence hung at a balance.

Lai Lei's body was immediately filled with miniature cuts that came from burst capillaries. The force of the wave was so high, that he felt an entire world had slammed into him and all he had was an armor made of the lightest feather.

He dug all the willpower he had to maintain his consciousness and try to move away from the area as fast as he could despite feeling like his body had been submerged in quicksand. Despite trying, he could not move an inch, and from the faint cracking sounds he heard coming from his body, he knew the protective membrane wouldn't last long. Barely five seconds had passed, but it looked to be on its last legs and once the membrane disappeared, that would be it for Lai Lei. His body and soul would be shredded to dust within an instant.

"Is this it?" he muttered with a sense of calmness he didn't think he would have.

He moved his eyes and looked at the side behind the twelve mountains where the eight masked men had been. It looked like only five were left. Vision was horrible, and every time Lai Lei opened his eyes even slightly, he felt like they were being squished. All he saw were hazy five silhouettes and then a few hundred meters away from them were what Lai Lei assumed to be body parts of the three missing members.

"Just who were they?" he wondered as he felt his body slowly being sucked into the whirling storm that had been created by the colliding force of the white ocean pearl and the twelve mountains that were now radiating with black lightning.

Lai Lei at this moment had already accepted the fact that he would die. He couldn't move his body and his protective membrane looked to be inches away from breaking.

"There goes my leg.." he muttered as he felt a crack appear on his missing foot. A shredding force penetrated the slight crack in his membrane and ground his foot from the calf to the ankle to dust in an instant before the membrane shielded the rest of the leg from the knee going up.

Just as Lai Lei thought this was it, he felt a current almost guiding him through the storm.

"Spirituality.." he muttered as he saw a white wormhole appear.

Seizing the moment of reprieve created, he charged through the tunnel created and he was moving through, in the midst of that chaotic storm he spotted what looked to be the torso of one of the black-robed people who had assaulted him.

Lai Lei immediately used the tip of his sword to reel him in. He felt the bones in his hands threaten to break the moment he forced his sword outside the protection of the wormhole current. Even though the torso was just a few inches away, he felt like he had to pass through an entire ocean filled with heavy currents just to reach it.

The veins in his arms bulged while his hands burst open as he desperately tried to get his sword to the torso. After much struggle, he managed to drag the torso into the safety of the current provided by the white ocean pearl. Immediately after he made a mad dash through it as it looked to shatter at any moment and his guess proved to be true when it shattered just as he was close to the edge.

Lai Lei borrowed the force of the explosion to launch himself further away from the collision of the two forces.

He executed the Albatross feather flow stride which was a top-tier orange grade art, about the only decent movement art he could fully execute with a missing leg, heavily injured body, and depleted qi reserves.

It was a light step movement art that borrowed the force of the wind to propel the user forward and it also left minimal traces.

Lai Lei glided crisscrossing through uneven terrain that one would not believe that he was running on one leg.



"Silver-scaled oak forest should be about 20 kilometers from here, I can try and see if I can get a signal from there. If I remember correctly there should be a cave set up by the roaming inquisitor that she uses occasionally to rest in between assignments.

I hope my medallion works.." thought Lai Lei as he ran north, leaving behind continuous thunderous explosions that did not seem like abating.

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As he made his way to the forest, he avoided places with large human presence to avoid dragging them in case there were more of the black-robed individuals after him or to avoid more of their cohorts in the off-chance that they had hid themselves with the public in anticipation of if he were to escape.

After circumventing and redirections, after half an hour he finally reached the outskirts of the Silver scaled oak forest. It was already dark by the time he reached it. The moon was already overhead and the forest had a chilly wind flowing through and out of it, accompanied by the sounds of insects.

Lai Lei didn't have the time to cautiously evaluate his surroundings as he immediately plunged into the welcoming darkness of the forest as he headed in the direction of the cave Jiaying had told him about.

Hu Jiaying was a roaming inquisitor who had teamed up with Yang Qing, Xia Boqin, and Kang Huilang during the entrance purple grade test. Since Lai Lei was from the same year as her and had been one of the few who passed the test, they ended up being friends throughout their Institute days and continuously kept in touch despite the demanding schedule of the roaming inquisitors who were in constant deployment for months on end.

In one of their conversations, Yang Qing in typical fashion mocked her in glee for having a worse schedule than him and even bragged about at least being able to sleep in comfort. Not willing to lose out, Hu Jiaying, ended up mentioning the hidden abodes littered all around the continent, that roaming inquisitors could use. She went into great detail about a few of them of which the one in Silver scaled oak forest had been one of them.

Lai Lei decided he would try to get in touch with the Order headquarters once he was at the abode. The abode was filled with protective formations that could shield him from even a domain expert, and it had a powerful communication talisman built for emergencies that was anchored.

As he couldn't afford any sort of delay in his escape, he opted to only stop and make a call once he was at the abode, which till now he wasn't sure if his gold eagle medallion would work or if there were other mechanisms. He could only hope the medallion work as his spiritual qi was quickly depleting, his injuries from the explosion were not light, to say the least. He could feel cracks within his meridians. If he was forced to overexert himself one more time, the cracks would spread to his dantian and trigger an implosion, which was why he was desperate to reach the hidden abode.

He smoothly traversed through the forest without so much as bending the grass despite the speed he was traveling at. The forest was filled with large canopies that added darkness to the region, however, there was dim glittering lighting around the forest courtesy of the silver-scaled oak tree that looked like pieces of the moon sculptured into trees. The forest had a few of them spread widely about, hence the name. They pulsed with a gentle white glow that went on and off as if in rhythmic breathing along with releasing a chilly white mist.

The trees seemed to add a sense of mystical beauty to the forest, that complemented the silence of the night perfectly. It could be considered a tranquil place to rest at if one didn't care about the spirit beasts that inhabited the place which was why it had little human presence.

Lai Lei had already been detected by a few of them, especially with his bleeding body, however, they avoided him due to the pressure he was releasing, and also the speed with which he was traveling made it difficult for them to catch up with him. Lai Lei was able to cover a lot of distance unhindered thanks to this and he was soon just about 10 kilometers away from the area Hu Jiaying mentioned.

However, with the luck he had, he managed to attract the attention of a customer who was undeterred by the pressure he was releasing and his speed didn't seem to be an issue for it.

"At the state I am in, figures even a late-stage core formation ash cinder wolf would try its hand.." Lai Lei said with a bitter smile appeared on his face.

In front of him was a massive wolf the size of a rhino. It had a beautiful silver-white fur that made crackling sounds like that of burning flames every time the wind brushed on it. Its red eyes were currently colored with unrestrained greed as it eyed Lai Lei's body more specifically, the blood that was still dripping from his wounds.

Its greed was insatiable as it saw the droplets. Lai Lei wasn't too surprised as his blood even though it was extremely thin, still contained traces of the kirin, a mythical creature. His blood was akin to an irresistible monumental treasure to the ash-cinder wolf.

"I have one shot at this.." thought Lai Lei as he relaxed his body and made a mental calculation of the remaining spiritual qi and the state of his body. He couldn't afford to overexert himself, which was why he didn't even bother to unsheath his sword. He barely had the strength to use it fully, he could only rely on his hands.

A silent confrontation ensued between the two as they eyed each other waiting for the opportune moment. After circling Lai Lei for a bit, the ash cinder wolf seemed like it couldn't contain itself as it ferociously lunged toward Lai Lei. Its pelt burned with a blue flame, adding a metallic hue to its fur. The blue flame absorbed spiritual qi which it instantly refined to strengthen its coat along with improving its body aspects such as strength, speed, and awareness.

A malevolent grin appeared on its face when it saw Lai Lei's weak gait, along with his trembling body. It judged clearly Lai Lei was on his last legs. However, despite Lai Lei's weakness the ash cinder wolf was not about to underestimate him which was why it triggered its highest flames which were the blue flames, that boosted its abilities to the highest peak. It only used this form against those at the peak stage of the core formation realm, the ones it was not sure it could defeat easily and it had judged Lai Lei to be one such worthy foe.

It aimed to destroy Lai Lei in one move to avoid any latent threats. With a speed that did not match its body, it blurred into a blue streak, and in an instant, its canines were already at Lai Lei's neck. Victory was in sight, however, before it could even register anything, it felt one of its canine shatter followed by a sudden sharp pain to the roof of its mouth, and in the next second, it felt a sense of tiredness and everything went blank.

Its monstrous body fell immediately along with Lai Lei who dragged his arms from his mouth as he held on to a canine tooth that was the size of a dagger. He was breathing heavily as he weakly got up.

"The survival instructor said the liver and the gall bladder have wood properties with healing properties.." he tiredly muttered to himself as he traced the massive body of the ash-cinder wolf whose blue flames were receding.

He traced a line on its abdomen and once he had confirmed he had the right spot, he used the tooth like a sharpened dagger to carve an opening after which he immediately plunged his hands with eyes closed seemingly sensing for something.

"There.." he said as he immediately pulled out his arm from the ash cinder wolf's gut and out came a silver smooth fleshy substance. With zero hesitation, Lai Lei immediately swallowed the substance and immediately started running with the same intensity and desperation he had before.

Chapter 536 Eight months ago (8)

The hundreds of cuts and wounds all over Lai Lei's body started closing up as he moved, though his leg didn't regrow back. He knew an art that could help him with it, but he needed a dense supply of wood element qi, and soul essence to pull it off, two things he was still lacking.

However, the liver and gall bladder of the eighth stage core formation ash cinder wolf he had just defeated were able to provide him with temporary relief as he made his way to the hidden abode. The liver and gall bladder of an ash cinder wolf were usually rich in wood energy which if Lai Lei had not been completely battered would have been enough to not only heal all his wounds but even restore some of the spiritual qi by half, however, the beating he got was not something a liver of a core formation beast could take care of. All it did was take care of some of the minor injuries and give him enough energy to continue his run.

After running for about a quarter of an hour, he finally stopped. The place he stood wasn't particularly different from the rest of the forest. It had one silver-scale oak forest that was at the sky grade, and had a few other trees and undergrowth, with no precious herbs or anything that stood out. It was perfectly mundane.

If Lai Lei hadn't known beforehand that there was a hidden abode in this location, he would have overlooked it. He couldn't sense anything off despite this being the area Hu Jiaying talked about.

"If it can hide someone from a domain expert, figures I can't seem to sense anything. I hope this works.." Lai Lei said to himself as he took out his gold eagle medallion.

He activated it using the assigned activation method which produced a gentle gold light as the medallion seemed to come to life. The eagle suddenly flew from Lai Lei's hands and circled around the small patch of silkfeather thyme that was growing beneath one of the trees.

It gently glided around it released distinct starlights as one glyph after another started appearing on its body.

Lai Lei waited with an abated breath hoping everything would work out as he still wasn't able to detect anything despite covering the silkfeather thyme with his spiritual sense.

The gold eagle flew around the silkfeather thyme for about two minutes before a change finally happened. An almost mirage-like image was released from the silkfeather thyme. Immediately after an almost mechanical voice sounded as Lai Lei suddenly felt his body locked in place.

[confirmed, Lai Lei, 12th stage core formation expert, Inquisitor identity number 4356, state; injured

Entry, permitted]

After the voice finished speaking, Lai Lei felt his body loosen up as he regained the mobility of his body and senses.

The mirage produced from the silkfeather thyme shimmered and then parted revealing a rustic wooden brown building seemingly floating on a pond with a white lotus.

Lai Lei couldn't hide the relief and delight he felt when he saw the quaint courtyard. It was like receiving a new lease of life.

He immediately went in as the mirage closed up behind him with the scene going back to the way it was before it was disturbed by his medallion.

Inside he felt like he was in a different world. The spiritual qi was dense, vibrant, and refreshing. He could feel that even without proactively absorbing it, it was nourishing his body and even cleansing him of the fatigue he had. He even felt healing properties within the spiritual qi.

"Is that the congruent white lotus?" Lai Lei muttered in perplexion as he saw the white lotus that seemed to support the three-story building.

The white lotus seemed to match the same lotus he had seen at the Medicine Valley at the Tranquil coalescing rivers of healing pavilion. He was surprised to see it here, considering it was the anchoring treasure of the pavilion as far as he knew.

It was only after analyzing it for a brief moment did a look of realization flashed in his eyes.

"It's just its essence that has been transplanted here.." he said as he crossed over the stone bridge across the pond to the courtyard.

At the entrance of the bridge was a stone statue of a Bai Ye which was a mythical pheasant that had a feather coating of red, orange, and green feathers. It was rumored to be able to heal hundreds of thousands of maladies and suppression of malevolent spirits. It was considered to be a sanctuary.

Lai Lei assumed the voice he had heard on his head had come from the statue. The respite valley had something similar to verify the identities of those who walked into the valley.

Lai Lei didn't walk inside the building first but instead went to the right side which seemed to have a circular jade green platform attached to one of the petals of the white lotus.

He could tell that the platform was like a healing and cultivation chamber. The platform was filled with arrays that connected to not only the lotus but also the water below it, which seemed to have the same properties as the four combining tranquil rivers that were at the pavilion in the Medicine Valley.

Once at the platform, he put the torso he took from the battlefield aside, and took out his communication talisman to try and see if he could get a signal. If it failed, then he would use the high-grade talisman that was inside the building.

However, he felt the talisman would work. Despite the preparation of the black-robed group, he had doubts, that the group would have a void interference artifact powerful enough to reach this far.

His guess proved to be the correct one, as his communication talisman immediately connected to the administrative department attache assigned to outside emergencies.

"Hello, this is Lai Lei, Chief Inquisitor under Judge Dai Chen, identity number 4356. I me trouble during the conduct of my duties. I was attacked by 15 unknown assailants all at the quasi-palace stage and looked to have an artifact that had once been at the ascendant grade by my guess.

I need help, I am severely injured, and I am at the hidden abode located in silver scaled oak forest.."

"Received. The code?"

[\$&\*#^]

"Contact is already being made to the nearest branches, along with any and all inquisitors or judges of appropriate level that may be within the area.

The spirit council and the Special Inquisitor will also be appraised. Advice is you remain at the abode.."

"Received and thank you..."

Once the call was complete, Lai Lei felt the tenseness that had latched onto his body all this time suddenly leave him.

Chapter 537 Eight months ago (9)

Lai Lei turned to look at the torso one more time, before he shook his head and sat on the jade-green platform to replenish his spiritual qi and heal his injuries, especially the cracks in his meridians that made him feel like a thousand knives were coursing through his body cutting him up.

The runes in the platform immediately lit up the moment Lai Lei started circulating his cultivation art in a bid to draw in the spiritual qi from the river and the white lotus to heal his wounds.

A tendril-like gelatinous translucent string appeared from the platform and wrapped itself around Lai Lei's leg and then proceeded to cover his entire body.

The substance wrapped around him like a burble as green, blue, and yellow lights flashed around it. Black substances were immediately released from Lai Lei's open wounds which immediately closed up after the black smudge was produced.

Within minutes the gelatinous bubble was ink-black with the green, blue, and yellow lights being the only visible things within it.

After a quarter of an hour, the bubble became clear once more revealing a completely healed Lai Lei who though was still missing his leg had a serene look to him.

Lai Lei gently opened his eyes as the gelatinous bubble slowly receded from his body with the dimming of the runes on the jade platform.

He checked his body with satisfaction before his gaze fell on his leg where he couldn't help but sigh.

"Figures it couldn't be restored yet.." he said as he massaged his knee that missed the lower half.

"But after one more hour, the ravaging qi from the clash should have been completely purged out which will make it easier to reform it..." he added as he wiped the black liquid leaking from his leg, accompanied by faint sparks.

"But all in all this is still good, my spiritual qi has been restored halfway and all the other injuries except the leg have been healed completely.." Lai Lei muttered as he stretched his body and then walked over to the torso of one of the black-robed individuals.

"I guess it's about time I see even if it's one of the faces of my would-be attackers.." Lai Lei said as he stretched his hand toward the mask that was still attached to the head on the torso.

The moment Lai Lei's hands made contact, the spider's abdomen mask which was red and black suddenly rippled like a liquid and jumped on Lai Lei's hands.

Lai Lei on detecting the sudden change, reacted swiftly and tried to pull his hand back as he lept backward, however, the mask that had now transformed into a crystal clear syrupy liquid had already reached his hands with terrifying speed.

The moment the white liquid made contact with his hand, Lai Lei could feel his resistance to it quickly erode and was replaced by a sense of comfort like he was falling into his mother's embrace.



Lai Lei's body started relaxing as he took a sit with a warm smile as he saw the white liquid encroach on his hands. It had already gone past his elbow radiating a white gentle glow and was quickly moving up his arm aiming for his neck and finally head.

However, the moment it reached his shoulder, something seemed to have been set off from within Lai Lei's body as golden scales immediately appeared but this time they were denser than before as they seemed to cover every area of him and the auspicious air he released was thicker, and his free hand turned into a crystal white hoof that had ancient glyphs that released a majestic supreme air. His eyes turned golden while two golden dragon-like horns of absolute purity grew from his forehead.

An inscrutable primordial roar escaped from his mouth that seemed to call the power of the heavens as he used his hoof hand to sever his other arm from the shoulder. The white liquid shrieked as if alive when the hoof fell on it. His arm with the white liquid was immediately sent flying as it was dismembered by the golden hoof. Radiant golden blood that released auspicious air was produced from his bleeding shoulders.

A golden white wave was then produced from his mouth with its target being the dismembered arm. An intense shrill scream was produced from the hand that seemed to be burning. The scream subsided after a few seconds, and a minute later the gold-white wave disappeared along with the dismembered arm.

Lai Lei who looked less human and more like a majestic being, immediately collapsed as his body went back to normal. However, he immediately started seizing while cracks appeared in his body as he bled all over.

The twitching got more intense, and a light was being released from the cracks almost as if he was about to implode..

....

65 km away from the Silver scaled oak forest

"You said, Lai Lei?! How was he?! How did he sound?! What was his state?! No, forget it, I will confirm it myself.."

A young lady with light brown hair tied in a ponytail and blue robes with frost flower patterns immediately flew in the direction of the Silver scaled oak forest with conical explosions being produced in the wake of her speed.

...

(Ten minutes later, Hidden abode within Silver scaled oak forest)

"This?! What happened? Lai Lei, are you alive?!" the young lady with brown hair, madly dashed toward the unconscious Lai Lei who was emaciated and looked like a dried-up corpse lying in an unending pool of blood surrounded by green fog and tendrils piercing his entire body.

The young lady quickly poured over a dozen healing potions on the corpse like Lai Lei along with executing every emergency healing art she could think of.

"His dantian and meridians all have cracks just on the verge of shattering...Lai Lei, you need to hang on, didn't we all promise we would go bully the demon instructors when we became powerful.." the young lady frantically muttered as she did all she could to stop the bleeding.

"Hello, hello, this is Roaming inquisitor Hu Jiaying, help! help! Inquisitor Lai Lei is dying, send gold-grade healers, soul formation experts, anyone, Lai Lei won't survive long.."

...

Present day

Yang Qing sighed when he recalled how he only learned about the matter concerning Lai Lei a few months after it happened all because he wanted to fool around more.

In those few months, Dai Chen would have been a deserter had it not been for the intervention of their group who managed to forcibly restrain him with the help of his palace realm inquisitor.

The state in which Lai Lei had been brought in, and the extent of the damage had shaken Dai Chen to his core, and after the shock came rage and impulsiveness. Despite being told not to investigate the matter personally so soon before the special inquisitors confirmed there weren't any looming threats, Dai Chen pretended he had listened and left in search of who harmed Lai Lei despite not having enough clues other than where he was attacked.

His actions though understandable would have landed him in severe disciplinary action because what he was doing not only endangered himself but the lives of those who would have to come to help him.

Kang Huilang, Xia Boqin, Yu Huifang, Zhang Qingge, and Hu Jiaying along with one of his inquisitors immediately intercepted him before he got too far and had to work together to forcibly bring him back and for the next three months until Yang Qing came out of his seclusion, they all ensured they were with him at all times until he cooled down.

They helped keep him sane during that time.

Chapter 538 The ringing of the celestial bell

Yang Qing's gaze turned cloudy as he recalled hearing the news. It had been a little over three months ago and he came out of the tribulation mountain sauntering with swagger with excitement written all over his face.

Things were about to turn better for him. His breakthrough gave him a newfound confidence especially when he felt the vastness of strength that came with being a palace realm cultivator. Then there was the promotion to the outer palace courts waiting for him. He had already grilled Dai Chen and Zhang Qingge on the number of cases, and they had verified his guess, that the cases were fewer than in the core formation courts. His goal of bringing soft life Yang Qing was nearly in sight, and as icing on the cake for an otherwise good and promising future, he had pulled one over Lei Weiyuan.

Things were looking good. However, the joy was immediately cut short when he 'coincidentally' met with Lei Weiyuan. Yang Qing at the time couldn't help himself. He wanted to break the news of his successfully breaking through to the palace realm to Lei Weiyuan while secretly snickering in his heart to Lei Weiyuan's face about how he was the victor this time, but things didn't go as planned. Lei Weiyuan instantly realized the little ruse of Yang Qing from the stability of his cultivation base and his promotion to the outer palace courts immediately got pushed back as he was forced to work those free months he gave himself along with paying a few fines and working with no pay.

Afterward, Lei Weiyuan broke the news of Lai Lei's injury to him which left Yang Qing stupefied at the time. He didn't even manage to hear anything else past Lai Lei had been injured badly and was at the Medical Valley. Yang Qing rushed all the way to where he was hospitalized and the scene shook him even further when he saw Lai Lei. He was in and out of consciousness at the time because of the severe injuries to his soul and the injuries to his dantian that left his qi chaotic.

When Yang Qing visited him, his missing limbs and any other external injuries had already been healed and all that was left was the extensive damage to his soul, meridians, and dantians.

During the first visit, in the midst of the shock of seeing Lai Lei in an unconscious state constantly being monitored by gold-grade physicians, Xia Boqin arrived during his daily visits.

After Yang Qing acclimated slightly to the shock of Lai Lei's state, it was from Xia Boqin that he learned the exact details of what happened to Lai Lei including why he was in his current state. Turns out he had burned his kirin blood essence and the toll it took on him after was much more than he could bear and it was a miracle his body didn't implode after.

They hypothesized that the only reason he survived, was probably because of the essence of the congruent white lotus that was able to stave off the burden on his body long enough for him to receive aid.

Xia Boqin then went on to explain about Dai Chen and how they had to stop and constantly be around him since that time, though by the time Yang Qing came out of his seclusion, he was already calmer, especially when the medical experts of the Medical Valley told him about Lai Lei's improving state and their confidence of being able to fully restore him without leaving any latent injuries.

Yang Qing was absolutely mortified, especially when he thought those three months when all this was going on he had been casually eating food, and wine, laughing as he imagined Lei Weiyuan's unsuspecting look and tinkering around with some talismans.

After his visit and confirming Lai Lei's status he immediately made his way to Dai Chen's abode. Too guilty to say anything, they spent the time drinking his vermilion wine which became a tradition they maintained for the next two months until Dai Chen told Yang Qing he was okay and their sessions switched locations to the Thousands Flavors Restaurant.

However, no matter how much time passed, and even Lai Lei regaining consciousness and looking well enough to even attempt a breakthrough for the palace realm, those events were still fresh on their minds, whether it was the serene-looking Lai Lei, Dai Chen who finally regained his normal wine loving carefree demeanor, or them, they still remembered that day, and the vow they promised.

Two months ago; Kang Huilang, Xia Boqin, Zhang Qingge, Yu Huifang, Hu Jiaying, Yi Jie, and the two other surviving teammates of Lai Lei from the team he was in during the purple grade test, all made a vow to avenge Lai Lei, no matter the cost, even if it put them at odds with the Order, they would still follow through with it, but the prerequisite to that vow was reaching the palace realm.

Both Dai Chen and Lai Lei were unaware of that vow, but the duo on some level knew the group well enough to guess their thoughts, the same way Yang Qing and the rest knew despite Dai Chen looking normal, he would still make the same charge as he did months ago, should any news break out.

Back then, they stopped him in part because it was too risky for Dai Chen, but the other was because they could not help in the vendetta in case anything happened. Other than Zhang Qingge and Hu Jiaying, the rest were all in the peak stage of the core formation realm, and whoever ambushed Lai Lei was capable enough to send 15 quasi-palace stage experts. Their strength was insufficient to help with anything, and Dai Chen going alone wasn't something they'd let him do, so the vow was created. Once they were all at the palace realm, they would all actively look into the matter as they prepared themselves for if or when the mastermind was found.

Yang Qing's eyes blazed with determination as he envisioned that day.

"By the way Lai Lei, the dagger you saw, did the special inquisitors ever find anything about it?" Yang Qing suddenly asked.

As the person involved in the whole saga, ever since Lai Lei regained full consciousness, he has been in close contact with those investigating his case, and therefore knew even more than they did, since the special inquisitors would likely share their findings with Lai Lei to try and dig up more clues.

"They haven't, not even a single thing, which is the weirdest part.."

"Weird why?"

"When I was escaping, I saw the manifestation of a twin-headed abyssal ice basilisk being sliced apart by the dagger and then afterward 12 mountains filled with black lightning appeared along with a pool of lava below and hammering sounds that seemed that they could mold someone's soul into a weapon.

At the time, I thought it was an ability of the dagger, but someone from the spirit council, a gold-grade blacksmith and artificer, said differently after asking for a detailed description of what I saw about the dagger and those manifestations.

What I thought was an ability of the dagger were vestiges of spirituality and had nothing to do with the dagger itself but its maker."

"Vestiges of spirituality?"

"Yes, one can think of it as like a fingerprint or a record left on a weapon by the creator when making the weapon.

As you well know when it comes to blacksmiths and artificers, you only become a blue-grade blacksmith or artificer if the weapon or artifact you create is born with an activated spirit during its creation process, and the stronger the weapon's spirit, the higher your grade.

However, that is not all. When it comes to gold-grade and purple-grade blacksmiths and artificers, the weapons and artifacts they create have the vestige of spirituality, which is a record of their creation process forever branded to them.

That record can only be triggered when your level reaches a certain level and the threshold is usually someone who is at the top tier as a gold grade blacksmith or artificer.

They are able to invoke the Origin Dao to bear witness to their creation, and that moment is forever branded to the weapon or artifact by the Origin Dao.

So what I saw, the mountain, the basilisk, was a record of what happened when the dagger was being created.

Not many blacksmiths or artificers are able to trigger the vestiges of spirituality, all who have, are known, even the hidden ones.

But even with the Order's extensive resources, they were unable to gain any clue as to the creator of that dagger. There are no records at all, which is impossible considering the level of skill involved in creating the dagger.

The blacksmith even surmised that the dagger was very likely a saint-grade weapon considering it was able to trigger black lightning tribulation in its creation, and the basilisk, from the description I gave, they matched it with a mature basilisk that was already at the domain realm, however, that dagger sliced through it like it was nothing, from the moment it appeared.

How could there be no records of such a dagger or its creator on the continent? and the special inquisitors looked through records dating back as far as a million years ago.."

Yang Qing's brow deepened as he said,

"Then that can only mean the creator is not from the continent.."

"It looks that way.." said Lai Lei with a sigh.

"This complicates things.." said Yang Qing, however, his next words were cut short when he heard a bell suddenly ring.

His pupils constricted, and he wasn't the only one as Lai Lei who was the picture of unperturbed calmness instantly turned pale with a frigid expression when he heard the ring.

"The Celestial Bell has been rang!!!!"

Chapter 539 Five rings

A majestic glow circled the entire Medical Valley and from that glow came out an ethereal image of a woman in white robes and golden hair. In her hand, she held a palm-sized bell that had a purple sky and a primordial aura to it. Despite being palm-sized, all who looked at it felt the whole world could be effortlessly swallowed by it.

The bell was producing a ripple sound wave. The sound echoed within the souls of everyone at the Medical Valley and it didn't stop there, it extended to the Requiem, Institute, Main court building, the Respite Valley, all the branches, and secret realms, as it made its way to every single last employee of the Order. It did not matter where they were, or their cultivation base, as long as they were an employee of the Order, they all heard the celestial chime of the bell.

Both Lai Lei and Yang Qing held their breaths as their gazes were solemnly fixed on the woman with golden hair with the bell in her hands.

Employees from the Order all rushed out, as all their gazes were fixed on the woman. Only those from the headquarters could see her visage while those outside all stood or sat in silence, seemingly waiting for something.

Tan Jie had also rushed out from the coalescing tranquility rivers of healing pavilion with clear worry written on her face.

She paused briefly when she saw Lai Lei and Yang Qing together, with her gaze briefly pausing on Lai Lei before she focused it back on the ethereal golden-haired woman above them.

The bell had already rung once, then it rung again.

Yang Qing clenched his fists as he muttered to himself over and over,

"Please ring five times. Please ring five times.."

The third ring came, and when it did, there was a change to the bell as one line of blood dripped on it.

The trio; Yang Qing, Lai Lei, and Tan Jie all had an intense reaction when they saw the line of blood, then what happened next made it seem like they had seen the most horrifying thing in their whole lives.

The bell rang for the fourth time, and with it, the skies changed as they rumbled with a mournful cry.



"Who?!" Yang Qing muttered in disbelief. His voice shook as he said those words. Lai Lei went pale and for a minute it almost looked like he was about to faint, but managed to hang on, while Tan Jie clutched at her robes, with tears welling up in her eyes.

The trio froze solid all waiting with apt attention for the next part, like they were waiting for an Emperor's decree.

The ethereal golden-haired lady's face turned sorrowful which seemed to affect all who looked at her. She then opened her mouth to speak.

"Branch chief Lai Wan has been gravely injured.

Chief Inquisitor Hao Da has been gravely injured

Inquisitor Yi An has been gravely injured

Inquisitor Xie Wen has been confirmed dead

Inquisitor Liu Bai has been confirmed dead.

May they find solace in their next journey.."

A burst of purple light came from the bell as two falling stars appeared in the skies.

A sorrowful melody accompanied their movement until the stars disappeared into the horizon.

"Hao Da's branch?!" Yang Qing muttered in shock.

The purple sky and the ethereal golden-haired woman stayed in the skies for half a minute before the skies went back to normal.

Yang Qing seemed to be struggling with what he heard before he took out his communication talisman.

"Deputy master Ren Shu, is Hao Da okay? Where is he?"

"Come to the Crystal Jade pavilion.."

Yang Qing quickly put away the communication talisman and turned to face Lai Lei.

"Lai Lei, sorry to cut our conversation short, but I need to check on Hao Da. You can pass by my abode later. I had told Dai Chen you could use the properties of the green flame tree in my abode anytime you wished.." Yang Qing said as he cupped his fists in apology.

"Could I come? I may not be as close to Hao Da as you, but.."

Yang Qing did not need a lot of time to guess what Lai Lei was getting to. As someone who once had the subject of the same announcement, it was understandable for Lai Lei to be affected by it.

"Tan Jie, I'll see you later..." Yang Qing said to the shook up Tan Jie who only absentmindedly nodded in return.

Yang Qing sighed when he saw and decided to comfortingly pat her on the back which seemed to have pulled her back from where her mind had disappeared off to, and then pulled Lai Lei and flew off.

In the air, there was one thought that kept going over and over in Yang Qing's mind, and it was the hope that the grave injuries mentioned were not something beyond the Medical Valley's ability to mend.

The bell they heard and the ethereal golden-haired woman were one entity, that was the celestial bell of mourning and jubilation.

The ethereal golden-haired woman was the artifact spirit of the bell that was held in her hands. The bell was a saint-grade artifact and was one of the most powerful artifacts the Order had to their names. It was a void artifact.

The communication talismans they had, were built from studying the celestial bell of mourning and jubilation.

Though that was what it was known by, it wasn't its true name, and it only went by that name because of what it was generally used for over the years.

The celestial bell was used as an announcement artifact by the Order. For it to be graded as one of the most powerful artifacts the Order had in their arsenal, Yang Qing was sure it had other uses which he was not preview to, but what he knew it for, and what most knew it for, was the announcements it made as it had just done a few seconds ago.

The celestial bell of mourning and jubilation was called so because every time there was a serious injury, a death, or something worthwhile to celebrate, the bell would be the one to announce it since its voice and rings could ignore the barriers of space and reach every single member of the Order, no matter where they were. It was perfect for real-time announcements which was why it was used in the announcements of only the vital announcements.

The bell had five rings to it, the first two had no symbolic meaning to them it was only the third, fourth, and fifth rings, that did. The third ring signified the heavy injury of a member, and it was accompanied by the bleeding of the bell, without it, it was just a regular ring, then the fourth which was dreaded even more than the bleeding third ring, signified death. If there was a death, the fourth ring would be accompanied by a sorrowful chime and a change of the skies, followed by the announcement of the artifact's spirit.

As for the fifth ring, this was the most welcomed ring, because the fifth ring was for a celebratory event and usually it was when someone from the Order broke through to the palace realm or the domain realm. Anything below was not announced. The other would be a complete recovery of an Order employee, like when Lai Lei had his dantian completely restored, and all the other injuries completely taken care of, an announcement of his recovery was made.

Chapter 540 Crystal jade pavilion

This was why the moment the artifact's spirit appeared, all Yang Qing had been hoping for was for the rings to be five. Anything else would be bad. In all his years at the Order, this was the fourth time he had

heard the fourth ring that signified the death of a member of the Order, and those previous times, it had been one person, unlike this one where there were two deaths and several severe injuries.

On his way to the Crystal Lake Pavilion, the air was the same all around, which was one of sombreness. Even though everything still ran as it should have after the announcement was done, the graveness in the atmosphere could not be hidden. The heaviness in their steps, the occasional lost look, the way almost every Order employee at the valley would look up, where the artifact spirit of the celestial bell had just been in the hopes that the spirit would suddenly appear and say the announcement was false or would make another announcement of complete recovery of those who were gravely injured.

Whether they knew the victims or not, every Order employee was heavily affected by the announcement whether it was here at the Medical Valley or some remote branch millions of miles away, the sentiment they shared was the same which was distraught worry.

It wasn't long before Yang Qing and Lai Lei reached the Crystal Jade Pavilion. The pavilion was made of crystal clear jade that looked to have blue ocean-like water flowing around it.

Yang Qing already detected countless unfathomable presences as he made his way into the pavilion. At the entrance was a middle-aged man with a gold eagle emblem embroidered on his black robes, along with gold braces with the same symbol. The man was a gold eagle guard.

To prevent any misunderstanding Yang Qing immediately made a call to Ren Shu and informed him of his arrival. He thought it necessary to do so since it was an emergency state and he was not exactly a member of the Medical Valley, he had no reason to be there, even in an emotional capacity.

The only way he would be allowed into the area was if he was a gold-grade healer or alchemist. With such credentials, he would be allowed in, but without, his only option was through the head of the area.

Ren Shu immediately appeared after Yang Qing's call and led him and Lai Lei into the pavilion. Once inside, he immediately disappeared, most likely to supervise the treatments of Hao Da and the rest while Yang Qing and Lai Lei waited for any news on the second floor of the pavilion.

The Crystal Jade Pavilion was established specifically for dealing with life-threatening emergencies of Order employees. Countless lives had been stolen from the reaper's hands thanks to the pavilion, and all who worked here were all at the gold grade.

When Lai Lei was injured, he had been institutionalized here.

"Do you feel okay being here?" Yang Qing asked once he noticed Lai Lei silently looking around.

Even though his face seemed at ease, Yang Qing knew him well enough to notice his emotions seemed a bit shaken when they stepped into the pavilion.

Lai Lei smiled bitterly as he said,

"This place, well is a place of contradiction for me at the moment. I'm both gladdened and terrified by it.

My life was saved and restored here but it also serves as the anchor for where I almost lost it, well this place and the hidden abode at the Silver scaled oak forest.

Even though I don't remember much from back then on how I passed out and lost my hand and supposedly would have imploded and died had the essence of the congruent white lotus intervened, or Hu Jiaying's aid, somehow every time I am here, my body remembers that sensation.." Lai Lei said as he rubbed his mildly trembling hands.

"But it is better now, and the feeling has been slowly leaving me over the past few months, it won't be long now before I can come here without feeling like that, though I hope I'm never back here.." he added with a smile.

"Me too.." said Yang Qing as he closed his eyes to meditate.

After a few minutes, the floor that had just been the two of them now had others. The parents and relatives of the deceased and heavily injured inquisitors from the Deer Mountain Branch were waiting on the second floor with them.

As for the branch chief and Hao Da, Yang Qing did not know much about the branch chief, but from the muffled talks of the relatives and family members present, he gathered the branch chief had a wife and daughter. The wife was a geomancy specialist and mostly surveyed the spirit stone mines of the Order,

but she was currently in secluded meditation. As for the daughter, she was a fourth-year student at the Institute and though she was available, she was too petrified to come to the Crystal Jade Pavilion and asked to be informed of the progress at the Institute.

When he thought of Hao Da, Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh to himself. He had no one, which wasn't unique since there were a lot of orphans who came through the doors of the Order. But in Hao Da's case, his problematic youthful days when he picked fights all the time when he was at the Institute, didn't leave him with a lot of friends, leaving Yang Qing as one of the few and Yang Qing's family. Other than that, Yang Qing didn't think there were that many people Hao Da was close with, seeing that he was immediately deployed to the branches after he graduated to help ground his behavior.

Last he saw Hao Da, Yang Qing believed the method had worked as he seemed less tense, and whatever he had, eating away at him from his time as a student, he seemed to have come to terms with.

"If he made other friends, then it's likely his colleagues from the branch.." Yang Qing thought as a sympathetic sigh escaped his lips.