

## Daily life 561

### Chapter 561 Placing bets

"By the way senior Yen Xu, was the corpse of their daughter collected?" asked Yang Qing.

He made sure to use voiceless incantation as he posed the question. Regardless of how he felt about the two obsidian serpents, he had to at least pay some modicum of respect and care to their loss which was why he opted to ask the question covertly.

"We didn't. They most likely ate her as their way of honoring her last rites. Why?"

"It's what the male obsidian serpent said, the way he said it. He seems to think he implicated his daughter, but why would he think that not unless she was also exhibiting the same signs of evolution, same as him?"

But what are the odds of two obsidian serpents showing flood dragon evolutionary traits at the same time? The degree of difficulty of morphing into a flood dragon is about as hard as a flood dragon morphing into a true dragon, but now there may potentially be two serpents evolving into flood dragons within the same period, same location and they happen to be related to each other.

Something feels suspect here.." Yang Qing said as he rubbed his chin with his gaze falling on the elderly man.

"The special inquisitor assigned the case had the same suspicions too. The two members of the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate would not waste their manpower in hunting an early palace-stage obsidian serpent, and based on how they conducted their affairs, they had made sufficient preparation at that.

They would not spend all those resources, effort, and even risk because of the branch here, all for an obsidian serpent's body even if their daughter had a wisdom pearl.

With the measures and abilities they had, they were better off targeting the father, but it seemed like they had been specifically aiming for the daughter, which means, there must have been something special about her, that made the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate show a willingness to risk venturing here.

But without the body, it's hard to know and the Committee hasn't yet signed off on extracting the information from their soul since because of their strength a peak domain expert would have to do it, but even then it will leave irreparable damage on them..."

"Mmmh, Senior what do you know about flood dragons?"

"Not much more than the next person. The powerful bodies that they're born with are as strong as a top tier monarch grade defensive artifact and it grows stronger through each growth cycle; how they can manipulate dao in their attacks from a young age, terrifying opponents to meet since they can cross realms to fight especially with their terrifying venom that needs the skills of at least several top tier gold grade alchemists to detoxify, and how their bodies are a treasure trove of precious ingredients.

lightsNovel com Other than that I don't know much about them.."

Yang Qing wasn't that shocked at her admittance of not knowing a lot despite being his senior and a domain expert at that.

The mysteries of the world were infinite and one couldn't know everything. Gold eagle guards needed to have areas they specialized in to ensure their efficiency, and since they always worked in partnerships, it was a model that suited them well.

Each guard had an area that they were good in and an area that they were lacking which would be made up for by their partner.

If you tried to chew more than you could handle, you would end up losing everything. Yang Qing learned that the hard way when he tried to be eye-catching and overzealous in his institute days when he picked every subject he could learn so he could show off.

It was a humbling period for him as he came to realize he wasn't as multitalented as he thought.

"I don't how factual this is, but in one of the scrolls I read, flood dragons have certain elemental affinities to them and it is usually three elements that is water, fire, and or wood. You may find a variant one with the dark element, lightning or wind, and maybe even metal but earth is rare for them.

I don't know about the triggers for their evolution process, but I figure elemental affinity has to be an aspect of it because most recorded cases of successful evolutions have been of reptilian spirit beasts that were skilled in either one or more of those four major elements, but the obsidian serpent is different.

Its primary affinity is to earth and if it has a secondary attribute mostly its metal, but more often than not it's just earth.

Evolving into a flood dragon is hard enough even with a strong affinity to the four above elements, let alone for the obsidian serpent that does not have them. How did he, and presumably his daughter trigger the qualifications for one?

Maybe the answer to that is what those two deacons were after, though how did they even know what to look for?"

"You suspect someone from the Deer Mountain was involved?"

"It can't be ruled out considering their delicate state of affairs in the balance between the weakened royal family and the different noble factions.

Putting aside the dangers of this range, and their dark history with it, this whole place is a treasure trove tempting enough to incite the greed of those in the kingdom.

Maybe some of them are in cahoots with the Blue Flame Crow Syndicate.." Yang Qing said.

The stoic gold eagle guard went silent for a second as a strange light flashed in her eyes as she took sight of the green-haired youth seated comfortably on the grass like he was on a picnic as he held his chin in deep contemplation.

Contrary to how he looked or the never-ending rumors surrounding him around the Order, that green-haired youth had a deeply intuitive mind about him.

Now it made sense to Yen Xu why she was told once he arrived to just leave every matter to him, and focus on the continuous deeper survey of the region in preparation for the array they were about to lay down in the area.

At the time they had not disclosed yet who they would be sending and only did so recently which was about the time Yang Qing was about to complete his sessions with the Auspicious Wood Grove tree.

When the name was revealed to her, she had the same reaction anybody from the Order would have upon hearing the name 'Yang Qing'. He was pretty infamous and was known for his various misdeeds in trying to pull one over the Order. There were even bets going around on what stunt he would pull next, and his success rate.

His infamy usually overshadowed his skills as a judge, and because of how he usually looked people overlooked the fact he was one of the youngest judges at the Order, and now one of the youngest palace court judges. Reaching such heights meant he was anything but simple and Yen Xu got the chance to see how his mind worked.

"Now I can see why he can make trouble for the Order consistently.." she amusedly thought to herself as she made a mental note to place a bet on Yang Qing the next odds that came up, who knows he may have his first victory and the payout was not bad either.

Chapter 562 Contest of presence

"Well I can't speak to the state of affairs within the kingdom itself but your comment about the range being a treasure trove is true.

I doubt even the kingdom itself knows by how much. The survey we did revealed a lot, like how a third of this range hides the entrance to a forming grotto, too bad it's an uninhabitable one.

I was told to give you this by the committee. It contains our findings of the survey done in the area.

There are about a dozen perilous zones in the area, but only three are worth noting, and one is the forming grotto.." Yen Xu said as she handed Yang Qing another grotto.

"Will you be sharing the findings with the kingdom?" asked Yang Qing as he put away the talisman and slowly stood up.

He would go through the list at the library where he would have plenty of subsidiary materials to infer from to fill in the gaps or complement the information provided.

"A few of them, yes, but the majority of them, no. Though we don't intend to harvest anything from those regions since it is still their territory, we are under no obligation to tell them either, like you said, it's not farfetched that some of them are in league with other nefarious organizations.

Of those zones listed there, we will seal the three most perilous zones. Leaving them exposed brings more harm than good."

"Thank you for the list, Senior Yen Xu.." said Yang Qing as he cupped his fists in gratitude to her.

"Now as for you two.." he added as he stared at the obsidian serpent couple.

"Earlier you asked to be released from the seals placed on you. Well you're in luck, I've decided to accept your request.

Though it will only be a temporary release, you will have your freedom today, albeit somewhat.." Yang Qing said.

The elderly man had no movements or change, but the woman seemed to react as she lifted her face. However, she didn't seem like she bought what Yang Qing said.

"If I released their seals, could they break out of here?" asked Yang Qing to the gold eagle guard.

"Only if they were in the middle stages of the domain realm, but as they are, even harming a single blade of grass here is impossible.." Yen Xu curtly said.

"Good, then releasing them now or when the person from the beast hall arrives doesn't matter.." Yang Qing said as he used the token to remove the seals on the obsidian serpents.

"Don't.."

The moment the last seal was undone, the lady looked like she wanted to charge at Yang Qing who was just inches away from her, but the elderly man stopped her as he placed his right hand in front of her.

The woman's murderous gaze flickered slightly between Yang Qing and Yen Xu who was calmly standing next to him. Eventually, she decided against what she was planning and heeded the elderly man's words.

"You're lucky she's here.." the woman said coldly as she and the elderly man stood up.

Yang Qing didn't respond as he smiled at her remark.

Even though the two wouldn't attack due to the presence of Yen Xu it didn't mean they wouldn't try anything.

With the suppression of the luminous starfall array absent, the two instantly released their savage pressure that made the air boil and smell of sulfur.

Their presence as seventh-stage palace realm spirit beasts was fully brought forth.

"There's no need, they hardly match an experience I had recently," Yang Qing said when he saw Yen Xu was about to act.

His experience at the hands of the red abyssal thorn tree that appeared at Ice Emerald Sect a few months ago made the pressure the couple was releasing to feel underwhelming not to mention that even though the seals were removed, they still had deep injuries.

In their clash against Hao Da and the rest, they did not leave unscathed. While outwardly they seemed perfectly okay, inside they were a chaotic mess, which Yang Qing could easily tell from the pale faces, and erratic qi flow.

At their state even without Yen Xu's presence, he could guarantee his life against them, not to mention, that their ace ability which was poison, would have little effect on him because of his Yin Yang jade bones physique.

"Even the Branch Chief and Hao Da, if they were truly intent on escaping, I doubt these two would have been able to stop them. The presence of the members of the Deer Mountain Kingdom must have been a factor as to why they ended up with such heavy injuries in the end.

"I'll need the log of events.." Yang Qing muttered to himself as he stood casually unperturbed by the pressure being released by the two.

His hair started changing into golden orange and ocean blue which was the same color mirrored in his eyes as a mystical light was released from his body that clashed against the pressure being released by the two.

Even though it seemed like his pressure would be swallowed whole by the two, it still held on, with the two showing surprised and uncomfortable expressions the longer the unseen battle went on, which was only a few seconds before the couple put away their pressures, much to Yang Qing's relief.

"This is the last time I show off like that.. The late stage is still the late stage," as he felt the involuntary mild muscle spasms in different parts of his body, though outwardly he pretended to be the picture of perfect calmness, where the heavens could fall and he would remain unmoved.

Yen Xu who could tell he was putting on an act hurriedly stifled her laughter that almost sneaked out.

"I hope you enjoy your week of freedom.." Yang Qing said as he turned to leave.

The same swirling feeling from before appeared as they were leaving, when they reappeared, it was next to the white statue of the bullfrog.

Yang Qing's knees almost gave out the moment he reappeared that he had to quickly support himself using the statue.

"Was all that necessary?" Yen Xu asked no longer holding back her laughter.

"Somethings have to be done.." Yang Qing unabashedly said.

"Well, I'll leave you to your duties, if you need anything just call out my name. Take care Yang Qing and pleasure meeting the person behind the legend.."

lightsNovel.com Yen Xu had already disappeared before she finished the sentence and only her voice and subsequent laughter was left behind.

"What legend is she talking about?" Yang Qing muttered in wonder before he pushed the matter to the back of his mind and decided to pay the kitchen a visit before he went to the library.

Chapter 563 Thirteen Perilous zones

"I really lucked out this time.." Yang Qing said with a muffled tone as he chewed on a piece of the kung pao chicken that he had overflowing on a large plate that looked like it could serve a group of seven people.

He munched on a piece at a time as he made his way to the Library.

The design of the library was a miniaturized version of the main library at the Institute, though it lacked some of the facilities and resources the main library had, it still had the main ones.

lightsnovel.com It was comprised of four floors and space expansion runes had likely been inscribed to create room for those floors.

The first floor had red-grade and white-grade techniques spanning across different schools of cultivation. It had everything from attack and defense-based cultivation arts that favored different kinds of weapons, to professional techniques such as beginner guides to talisman making, ink refining, alchemy guide, introduction to arrays, to utility-based techniques such as herbology and spirit mine identification and the likes.

Other than that it also had bits and pieces of information that touched on geography, a touch of history, customs, and the like.



The second floor had a similar lineup except the grades of the art stored in there were from low to middle-tier orange-grade cultivation arts, and the secondary information recorded was a bit more in-depth than what was on the first floor.

The third floor held top tier orange grade cultivations arts and it also had special measures put in place to aid those in the library. Some of those measures were special rooms for them to practise or experiment what they were studying, there were spirit dew sandalwood incense sticks burning on the floor which were beneficial for clearing the mind and or improving concentration and cognitive abilities.

Several top-tier sky-grade artifacts worked hand in hand with the sandalwood incense sticks along with various arrays to help boost learning abilities.

As for the last and final floor, it was the smallest floor, but also the most important one. It housed seven blue-grade cultivation arts given to the Deer Mountain Branch. In addition, the artifact Yang Qing was told about the ethereal mist chime bell was stored on the fourth floor under a dense layer of blue-grade arrays that could only be disabled with the Branch Chief's token.

Those from the branch could only access the fourth floor with the Branch Chief's approval and a log of access would constantly be shared with the administration department at the main headquarters along with the Judicial Review Committee.

The library was deathly silent with dim lighting and the smell of old books permeating the area. Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh at the coldness of the place as he made his way to the fourth floor.

There was a private office for the Branch Chief on that floor, and in it contained various recording talismans and scrolls that contained all kinds of information on the Deer Mountain Kingdom and the range as a whole.

Part of one's duties as a Branch Chief, other than handle cases, was to keep up appearances and maintain cordial relationships with the powers in the area, but other than that they needed to constantly monitor the surrounding area, to prevent any surprises.

They would then log those excursions and send a copy of the log to the Judicial Review Committee which would then redistribute it to other divisions of the Order, depending on what information was recorded on the logs.

Yang Qing had asked about those logs and was informed there were copies kept in the office on the fourth floor, which became part of the reason Yang Qing decided to read the talisman Yen Xu had given him, in the library.

The office was just as he expected. A chair, spirit dew sandalwood incense burning on the desk, a shelf filled with scrolls, littered with over a dozen well-concealed killing and anti-screaming arrays.

Yang Qing walked as if with deep familiarity with the place and sat down on the chair behind the desk. After he sat, he took out the Branch Chief token and placed it on the left side of the black-brown desk.

Dense runes immediately appeared on the desk as palm-sized rectangular openings appeared on the desk. There were white crystals stored in those rectangular openings, with the openings numbering about 70.

Yang Qing moved to the center and picked up four from the center going right before he finally picked up two at the bottom right close to the edge of the table.

The ones at the center were the oldest logs of the place, while the ones on the bottom right were the most recent.

After he had picked all the talisman logs he needed, he took back the token and the desk went back to normal.

"Now let's see what is in here.." Yang Qing said as he inserted his spiritual sense into the talisman containing information on the in-depth survey of the Deer Mountain Range.

The instant he did, his face couldn't help but contort in shock because of the information contained within it.

"The Deer Mountain Kingdom has been living above a precipice and never knew, and to think they once wanted to consolidate all this territory under their control.

Truly the ignorant know no fear. They must have used all their kingdom's luck to not stumble into any of these places during their plan back then, if they did, there would be no kingdom today, especially these three.." Yang Qing said as he sucked in cold air.

"Disaster and reward go hand in hand but this, would you even live to enjoy the rewards.." he added as he went through the list.

The talisman had a recording of thirteen perilous zones with three described as the most dangerous, catastrophic to the level that they were guaranteed to kill anyone below the domain realm if they ventured in carelessly, and one of them was even dangerous to domain experts.

Chapter 564 Dark remnants

Of the three perilous zones, the grotto Yen Xu mentioned was one of them. East of the Deer Mountain Range, there was a small hill with nothing outstanding other than the fact the grass was always damp every second of every minute of every day despite the season and day.

Due to the weird phenomena, most thought there was something mysterious, possibly some natural treasure lurking in the area that contributed to the phenomena.

However, after countless years of exploration, nothing out of the ordinary other than the drought-resistant grass that was even immune to a certain degree to various fires, nothing special was ever found.

The grass was just at the mortal grade, and the dew that constantly coated its blade and the ground had absolutely no properties one could speak of, though if one was to speak of one attribute it had was it increased the number of flames one would have to use and the duration of preparation, which added an unnecessary burden on an already burdensome state in alchemy.

So over time, the region became one of the regions despite technically not having any dangers to it and was never inhabited. The area was constantly dumped, which added a gloomy feel to the area, and there was nothing worthwhile there. What people didn't know was there was the hill was hiding an embryonic grotto beneath it, and by now it was almost completely fully formed.

From the description given the grotto's form was a cavern full of darkness covered with rocks and water that reached one's ankles. The area was absent of spiritual qi, and the gravity was a hundred times that of the continent's and it increased the longer one was in there. A peak qi refinement realm cultivator would be crushed to meat paste within a minute and that was at the higher periphery, while the deeper regions would take the life of a palace realm cultivator, that is if they even reach that far.

However, what was truly dangerous about the place wasn't the gravity or absence of spiritual qi or the mild coldness that seemed to gradually seep into someone's soul, but the darkness that enshrouded every single area.

It was like a living creature that slowly invaded those who encroached on its territory. It swallows you whole and seals your senses, distorts your perception of time, and slowly breaks your will, as it invades your mind, amplifies all your fears, and brings them to life.

From what was written it seemed like the grotto could materialize one's inner demons into solid real-life forms which would then attack the user whose senses and access to spiritual qi had already been sealed.

The special inquisitor and Yen Xu did explore the grotto sufficiently but even they decided to call it quits before they reached the core region where the spirit of the grotto lay. They still did not know its identity or its full abilities but just from the little bit of exposure and first-hand experience they had, they deemed it one of the most dangerous places within the whole range considering it made early domain experts like themselves wary of exploring the core region.

Disaster and rewards followed each other hand in hand. Based on their experience, the grotto was perfect for tempering one's will, ridding oneself of their heart demons, and even discovering the ones that they didn't know were there.

All this was vital for the growth of a cultivator especially those aiming for a higher realm, polishing one's heart and mind was vital for climbing higher peaks of the cultivation realm. However, all these were built on the premise that one survives the test of the grotto and manages to make it out alive.

lightsNovel.com As things stood from the judgment of the duo, anyone at the early stages of the core formation and below was guaranteed death the moment they stepped in there, while for those of a higher cultivation base, their odds were not easy either the longer they stayed in there.

If you stumbled or were accidentally swallowed by the grotto, there were a few requirements one needed to meet for them to be able to come out again. If you met them, a route would appear in your mind, and if you followed that route, you would end up outside of the grotto.

Both Yen Xu and the special inquisitor found out that they couldn't forcibly make their way out once inside and had to follow the rules of the grotto-like there was some binding dao that made it impossible for them to violate it.

"From what's written here. they found about a dozen corpses in there belonging to late-stage core formation experts, and even two that belonged to palace stage experts.

What's this?!" Yang Qing muttered in shock as he read the disclaimer written at the bottom of the information pertaining to the grotto.

Though it's unconfirmed, we suspect the materialized heart demon can exist outside the grotto and the condition for that is to kill the person they were materialized from.

'If successful, with the grotto's intervention, they can absorb all the memories and attainments of the person and morph into their real-life like they were them.

We have decided to name them 'dark remnants'. We don't know how many have fallen here, but the number is likely, not small.

Various organizations out there may be inhabited by the dark remnants already, who have assumed the lives of their victims.

This is purely conjecture and thus do not yet have a way to confirm the fact. It can only be done if the grotto's spirit is subjugated, provided it doesn't have a fated person yet.

The region will therefore be permanently sealed until more is known about it..'

After reading that, Yang Qing couldn't help but look fearfully behind him when he felt a cold wind brush up against his neck. The silence and dimness of the room seemed to exacerbate his paranoia.

"If their guess is true, just how many organizations could potentially be infiltrated by these dark remnants?"

Are they after something under the orders of the grotto's spirit or is it something they decided of their own volition?"

How many of them could be out there?" Yang Qing wondered as countless thoughts and theories flashed in his mind, each scarier than the next.

As he was lost in a scare cycle of his own, there was a couple who echoed his sentiments.

The obsidian serpent couple had remained in the same posture after Yang Qing left: standing, whilst cautiously looking around them.

"Can you break it?" asked the cold woman to which the elderly man shook his head with a sigh.

"It seems we stumbled to a dangerous place filled with dangerous people. I can't believe a second-stage palace realm human can hold his own against me and the suppressing feel I get from him is different from those feathers.." muttered the elderly man in deep consternation.

"I don't remember the region having people like them, that fire alder bear would have been the first to react if there were such powerful human cultivators around. Or did something happen to it?" said the cold-faced woman in shock as she stared at the elderly man next to her.

"It's not an impossibility considering how that woman was able to subdue and capture us easily.

The sensation I get from her even without these injuries, she would have defeated us just as easily. She is likely in the domain realm.

Even those two we fought, if it wasn't for looking out for the other humans, I doubt we would have been able to stop them if they decided to flee. Just who are they?" he said with a look of hesitation, mild worry, and confusion flashing in his eyes.

"What they said.." the woman paused as if forcibly suppressing something with great difficulty.

"Do you think they were telling the truth about not having anything to do with our daughter's death?" she asked with great difficulty.

The elderly man on seeing her state decided to put his arms around her in a bid to comfort her.

"I don't know about that, but the treasure bone we gave her, I doubt there is anyone who would not covet it, considering it likely belonged to a mature flood dragon.

I doubt anyone would be able to resist it, especially the humans. No matter what the kid said, the body of a flood dragon pales in comparison to a treasure bone, even a damaged one like the one we found.."

The elderly man went silent for a while before he said with deep sorrow and regret,

"Luo'er, I'm sorry I implicated our daughter.."

Chapter 565 Potential fate of the remnants

It took Yang Qing several bites of his Kung Pao chicken before he got the nerve to continue reading the rest of the list.

But to ensure the sensation he felt earlier didn't sneak up on him again he decided to take out a few dawn fire sunstones and place them in different areas of the office bringing some much-needed light and warmth to the room.

The dawn fire sunstones were like gentle miniaturized suns. They were known for absorbing the yang energy of the surroundings and releasing a heat that neutralized cold yin energies and also had a restraining effect on evil spirits and ghost cultivators.

Yang Qing infused some of his yang flames into the stones to increase their abilities a few notches.

Once he confirmed everything was okay and he wasn't being stalked by some dark remnant or maybe even the grotto's spirit since something that was able to create the dark remnants, was bound to be just as insidious, only then did Yang Qing continue with his reading.

"I can't believe the description left me so on edge.." Yang Qing muttered with a wry smile.

"Luckily there wasn't anyone to see. But these dark remnants, if they're the personification of one's heart demons, while the bulk of them are bound to be problematic, surely it can't be all of them, and they may not necessarily be working together.

If we assume they're born with their egos that mirror the cultivator they came out of, then there's a high chance they are working independently and may not necessarily be one team, not unless the grotto influences how they see each other giving them a sense of kinship.

If it's confirmed that they do exist, I wonder how the Order will deal with them," wondered Yang Qing as he scratched the small stubble on his chin.

Considering the potential identity of dark remnants being materialized heart demons, ideally, they should all be exterminated if their identities are uncovered.

However, heart demons come in different forms. They were obsessions, regrets, doubts, and other intense feelings that a cultivator could not get rid of or come to terms with. They continuously linger, eating away at the cultivator.

Some are born out of hatred and vengeance, others from shame, others from jealousy or envy, others from greed, others from regret, and others from a strong sentimental attachment to something that conflicts with what the cultivator has been led to believe or know.

Heart demons start small like some lingering thought which continually feeds off the cultivator until they become heart demons. Ridding one of their heart demons either comes through acceptance or letting go and the reasons one had them were countless. As long as you could feel you had the potential of developing one.



There were countless triggers for example a cultivator who leaves home to pursue the dao or some other reason to make his parents proud or to change their circumstances. That cultivator has the potential to develop a heart demon in two instances: One of them is if he/she never reaches the height they thought they would and develops a level of shame and dejection so deep because they couldn't do what they set out to do and it develops into a heart demon.

The other way was if the cultivator does manage to reach the heights he hoped for, then rushes back home to tell his/her parents of the news only to find they died, which could be due to tragic or natural causes. That cultivator develops a seed of regret for not being there in their parent's final moments, or to help them in case the death was caused by outside forces, and then that lingering regret grows over time into a heart demon.

Presented such a case, if dark remnants were born from the two scenarios, Yang Qing without hesitation would purge the former if he came across it. A heart demon born out of shame of not reaching the heights one envisioned, there was no doubt on how volatile the dark remnant born out of it would be. An intense desire for strength and achievements, and weakness and short fuse when anything highlights the weakness of its shame.

But when it comes to the latter, not unless the remnant did something that broke the guiding rules of the Order, he wasn't sure he would purge it just because it was a heart demon.

lightsNovel.com What he imagined was something born out of regret would do what gave it birth in the first place, and in such a case, the dark remnant may go stand vigil over the parent's grave to its last breath, since that was the thing that gave it existence.

In such a case, was it truly right for him to intervene?

"Well, these are just speculations in the end. It has to be confirmed if they exist, and if they do exist, the Order has people who can think further than I can, they'll be the ones to decide what to do when the time comes.." said Yang Qing with a deep sigh.

His recent experiences made him somewhat sensitive to the whole matter of the grotto considering, not too recently he had a budding heart demon of his own.

If the Order didn't help him deal with it and he ended up stumbling into the grotto, what would his heart demon be like?

However, he immediately shook his head free of those thoughts as he brought his attention back to the next two most perilous zones, with one of them, being declared as potentially calamitous.

"Sword, egg, and a mature dragon vein?" Yang Qing grew more perplexed when he saw the title of the most dangerous zone, that the special inquisitor and the Yen Xu dared not venture in too deep and even requested the presence of someone from the spirit council on what to do next.

'In the northern region of the range, there is a crevice hidden under dense layers of what looked to have been a degraded gold-grade concealing formation array.

The array looks to be at least 50,000 years old based on the degradation...'

"50,000?!" The number made Yang Qing raise his brows.

Chapter 566 Should i leave this place

It was thanks to the degradation that we managed to find the objects hidden beneath the crevice, however, even with its current state, we only realized there was something in there due to mild fluctuations that didn't reveal much other than a slightly abnormal spike in spiritual qi quality.

In its current state, the array can fool even the domain sense of a first-stage domain expert.

The design and origin of the array is unfamiliar to us. However considering how long it has been able to remain intact and functional, despite degradation, the skills of the one who laid it is undoubtedly someone at the top tier of gold grade or a purple grade formation master.

The array itself was strange enough but inside there were even stranger things.

Even though it was concealed well, the area hides a mature dragon spirit vein, though the dragon spirit common with a mature dragon spirit vein was absent and the spiritual qi that surrounded any area other than the crevice seemed to disprove that but its lingering spiritual markings could still be felt within the crevice.

Upon further investigation, we discovered that the reason why the spiritual qi in the area was way less than what was expected of mature dragon spirit veins including the presence of the dragon spirit, and spiritual jade liquid pool common with all mature dragon spirit veins, was because it was all being constantly swallowed by a small palm-sized egg at the center of the crevice.

All the spiritual qi, and the spiritual markings that gave us the clues needed to deduct that there was indeed a mature dragon vein below, all seemed to drain toward the egg.

The egg looked like a piece of sculptured marble and had a red and green swirling coating on its shell.

Despite its seemingly dormant state, we felt a calamitous power being birthed inside of it, and from the design of the egg and the intricate rune markings that were mixed in the red and green wave, we strongly believe that the egg belongs to the one-legged crane like being of destruction, the Bifang Niao...

Yang Qing almost dropped the talisman when he read that part. A grotto that materialized a cultivator's heart demon which had the potential of stealing the cultivator's life was scary enough let alone, a Bifang Niao.

Though they were not as infamous as dragons or phoenixes, by virtue of their bloodline, they were not low on the totem poll either. If someone were to scale them, they were stronger than flood dragons, and the gap between them and mythical creatures such as the phoenixes and vermilion birds wasn't that high.

However, if one were to ask the common populace what they were most afraid of, a dragon or a bifang niao, nine out of ten would say the bifang niao.

The reason for this was simple, the tales surrounding the creature had it dubbed as a harbinger of fiery disaster, a disaster that could ravage half the continent.

The bifang niao looked like a crane, and had one leg, with a red and green feather coat and white beak. It looked benign or even weak owing to its missing leg and its size was that of a regular crane, however, that seemingly pitiable-looking bird created an unquenchable flame that would swallow and destroy everything in its path.

Nothing was immune to its flames be it wood, earth, the ocean itself, or even spiritual qi, any and all who were caught by even the tiniest spark of its flames would be reduced to nothing. Once released its flames never stopped burning.

It was known as the harbinger of destruction and dilapidation because after the target of its ire had been destroyed by its flames, the area would be rendered inhospitable for all life and if no extreme measures are taken for restoration, the effect could last millions of years.

Yang Qing remembered when he was a baby and he fooled around with fire, his mom used to tell him all the terrifying tales surrounding the bifang niao, and it always ended with this,

"Whenever you hear the crackling of burning wood, know the bifang niao is not far back.."

"A bifang niao? is this place even safe with such a creature around even in its egg form and how come there have been no sporadic fires happening in the region? From what I heard, its destructive flames are usually present even in its egg form not unless there was also a containment array in the area, but with its degraded state, shouldn't have a few flames managed to pass through?"

Yang Qing couldn't help but start to regret his decision for so readily agreeing to come here but the die had already been cast, for better or for worse, he had to honor his end of the deal, but if he made a mental note if he was informed that movements were coming from the egg, he would make a break for it.

He didn't care if he got punished for it, saving his body from potentially being barbecued came first.

A few seconds after the thought of being burned to a crisp hit his mind, a strange wondrous glow appeared on his mind as his gaze focused on the description of the egg, however, a few seconds later he shook his head dismissively as he muttered to himself it was impossible.

If one looked closely, one could detect a hint of unwillingness and regret in him.

Above the egg of the bifang niao is a sword in its embryonic form. The sword seems to be the reason that the gold grade formation has held on for this long, however, its role doesn't seem to be simply

anchoring the formation, but, though this isn't proven yet and will need the eyes of gold grade blacksmith, it seems that the sword is both incubating and harvesting the egg.

It seems to be using the bifang niao flames to refine and temper itself.."

"What is this?!!!!" Yang Qing found himself yelling in his office in disbelief.

"A dark grotto and now this, someone is using the flames of one of the most feared creatures on the planet to refine their sword! how is this place safe?! the Order has really done me in.." Yang Qing hysterically said as he started pacing around the office, checking and rechecking the token in his hands to confirm it was still functional.

After the shock, came the hysterical laughs mixed in with tears, before finally a coolness that accepted death overcame him.

"They better make a statue of me or I will haunt them.." Yang Qing muttered in defeat as he sat down to read the last of the three most perilous zone.

At this point, the report could say they found the burning corpse of a phoenix or the tail of a dragon and he would remain unmoved.

He had already been broken by what he had read and resigned himself to death, what more could the next information do?

Luckily the last zone wasn't as dire despite being in the top three of the thirteen perilous zones.

It was a region commonly known as ' the ruins of the wails of the dead'. It was a region in the Deer Mountain Range that looked like the weathered ruins of some long-forgotten organization.

There were mottled pillars with weird syllables which filled the area. Countless explorers and those looking to try their luck at gaining something visited the place, and some even went to the extent of taking some of the pillars with them to research the strange writings in the hopes that they could

uncover some miraculous secret, a hidden cultivation art, some map, all in the hopes of growing their strength.

To date there has been no news of anyone deciphering what those symbols and syllables meant, and from what was written on the report neither did the special inquisitor nor Yen Xu.

Other than the dilapidated pillars, the area was known for its sporadic changes which made it a horrible place to stay. Spiritual qi fluctuations would be all over the place, sometimes high, sometimes pitifully low. Anyone who tried to cultivate there risked suffering a backlash due to those fluctuations that even affected the spiritual element distribution of the area. There would be lightning storms out of the blue, accompanied by dry hot winds, it would turn foggy even with the hot sun out, and it experienced regular earthquakes.

Over time, rumors started floating around that the region was filled with the spirits of those who did something unforgivable and were cursed to never find peace even after their death which was why the region was so chaotic.

lightsNovel.com Such rumors, and the chaos surrounding the area, and pillars that weren't worth much, left the area with little to no presence most of the time.

However, Fen Xu and the special inquisitor discovered there was some sort of natural array that linked different regions 10,000km around the region to the center of that place, and the natural array seemed to have a spatial attribute to it. It seemed to anchor something to that area, and that something was a mysterious realm, more than likely belonging to the owners of those pillars.

However, the natural array and treasure anchoring the realm seemed to have been damaged which was the reason the area was so sporadic. Void energy was occasionally leaking out due to the spatial instability of the mysterious realm, thus affecting the area.

The region would be sealed off until the area's space had been remedied, lest a void creature worm its way through and cause destruction to the regions around.

Chapter 567 A trap or something else?

After the scare given by the first two perilous zones he had read, the next zones were much more palatable.

There was nothing too outlandish about the remaining ten, though the remaining ten were not at the level of the first three in terms of intimidation and the capacity to incite extreme terror to all who came across them, some of them were still threatening enough, especially to the residents of the Deer Mountain Kingdom.

Of the ten there were two that stood out, one of them was the territory of a Fire Adler bear. From the report, the fire adler bear was currently in deep seclusion and seemed to be preparing itself for a breakthrough to the domain realm. From the speculation of Fen Xu and the special inquisitor, the odds of the fire adler bear reaching the domain realm were slim at the present moment, but it had a high chance of taking half a step into the realm, which they judged seemed to be the plan of the spirit beast based on its fluctuation.

To them, a half-step domain realm fire adler bear was nothing much but to the Deer Mountain Kingdom and the rest of the occupants of the range as a whole, it was a real threat.

As far as Yang Qing knew there were no peak or even late stage palace realm expert around the registered organizations in the Deer Mountain Range. The Deer Mountain Kingdom, which was thought to be the most powerful, their most powerful member who was the grand uncle of the current king, an old fossil that wasn't long for this world, was only at the sixth stage of the palace realm.

Should the fire adler bear take that half step, how many organizations around the range would be able to keep it at bay?

A half-step domain expert would be able to take on three or four peak palace realm experts easily, let alone some middle-stage palace stage experts.

Yang Qing couldn't help but feel pity for them. He could imagine their faces when they received the information about the bear. The two obsidian serpents were bad enough let alone the fire adler bear.

"I wonder if the couple and this bear know each other?" Yang Qing wondered.

The information about the fire adler bear was one of the four survey reports that would be shared with the Deer Mountain Kingdom.

Of the remaining three, one was a parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree that had already roused its spirit and was at the first stage of the palace realm. The parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree was notorious for its illusory abilities and the spores it produces. The spores it produced an almost similar effect to the memory-altering gu, except the spores' purpose was to corrode the minds of those it infected and lure them to the sycamore tree itself, which would slowly decompose the host's body and use it as fertilizer for its growth.

The spores not only affected the living but also the dead, as long as the body it infected was intact, the spores could forcibly move the body to the sycamore's location. The tree was both cannibalistic and a renowned scavenger, which was why despite its known danger most preferred to have it around.

With its presence, there was less likelihood of corpse miasma building up in the area, which was why there were a few kingdoms that planted it next to mass burial grounds or regions that had experienced a wide-scale battle. As for the parasitic spores, provided your willpower was strong, the spores would be harmless to you, even if your cultivation base was slightly lower than the sycamore tree.

In the case of the one in Deer Mountain Range, a late-stage core formation expert with strong willpower would be able to resist the spore's influence even with the tree being in the palace realm and even if they got infected, if they had someone powerful next to them, they could be restrained and the spores' effects would disappear after four days.

Yang Qing couldn't help but lick his lips as he wondered if its fruits had matured. Wine made from its fruits was perfect with meat dishes.

The second one shared was a gorge that seemed to have once been the home to a powerful ice artifact. The gorge occasionally leaked powerful cold yin energy at irregular intervals. The energy was powerful enough to freeze a middle-stage core formation expert down to their soul in fifteen seconds.

The final one was a cavern that had a jade nature stone forming within it. Jade nature stone was a natural treasure extremely vital to those at the core formation realm and below, where one needed to establish powerful foundations in preparation for the later stages.

As long as one cultivated next to the jade nature stone, it would strengthen their soul, improve their mental clarity, increase their sensitivity and absorption of qi, along with cleansing their bodies, and helping the cultivator in question awaken their elemental affinity if they have any.



Its uses were truly wonderful, and most organizations usually saved it for the disciples they had the most expectations since finding one wasn't easy. They only formed in areas of perfect harmony and balance between all five elements and the yin and yang energy.

Just as Yang Qing was wondering why the location of the jade nature stone was dubbed as a perilous zone, he found his answer with the next sentence. The jade nature stone had an owner, a mountain jade serpent at the second stage of the palace realm.

While the jade nature stone could help human cultivators set their foundations, it had a different effect on spirit beasts, an effect that was tantamount to giving them a chance at a new life. The jade nature stone could help them purify their bloodline, and the scary part was, that as long as the spirit beast didn't die, it would continue to do so gradually until its last breath.

The process was slow, but if the spirit beast in question had an absurdly long lifespan, they would reap tremendous gains from having a jade nature stone.

Yang Qing once read about a turquoise leaf tortoise that stumbled onto a place that had a jade nature stone when it was but a hatchling. That tortoise in the present day was an alabaster season tortoise and was the guardian beast of the Alabaster saber sect, a rank 1 sect. The sect grounds were on its back and it had an independent weather to the outside world. It was like a walking mysterious realm on its own, and all that was brought about by the jade nature stone.

Of course, luck was also a factor since even with the presence of the jade nature stone, it wasn't a given that it would survive to date, lucky for it, the founder of the Alabaster Saber Sect found it and protected it long enough for it to undergo a monumental transformation.

"Why are they giving this information to the kingdom?" Yang Qing wondered.

If the Deer Mountain Kingdom was to find out about the stone, it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine them trying to take it for themselves, of course, whether they could do it was a different matter altogether. Mountain jade serpents were notorious for their defenses more so one that was already at the palace realm, and because of their deep affinity for the earth and water element, they could create earthquakes, and mudslides capable of causing mass destruction. Though the spirit beast was known for its mild temperament.

"Could it be a trap trying to ferret out the potential leaks of the kingdom? If it is then it seems Senior Fen Xu and the special inquisitor already had the same suspicions as I did.."

Yang Qing leaned back in his chair with a tired expression as he tried to adjust his mental state.

"Luckily, there should be more people from the Order coming. The Deer Mountain Kingdom must have used up all its luck to have been able to survive all these years in such a place.." he said with a sigh.

A tiredness washed over him and he decided to give himself to it as he slept, he only came to half an hour later when Yen Xu used her domain sense to inform him of the arrival of the personnel from the beast hall.

When the handover happened, Yang Qing was amused when he saw the wariness of the obsidian couple toward the person from the beast hall.

The wariness was expected considering the person was filled with the aura of countless spirit beasts on him due to the nature of his job, and among those auras, there was no shortage of ones with terrifying bloodlines.

Yang Qing could feel the mild trembling of their hands when the beast hall personnel walked next to them in greeting.

As they were leaving, Yang Qing did offhandedly try to find out if they knew the fire adler bear, and though they didn't respond, the stiff expression shown by the cold woman proved at the very least they knew of the fire adler bear.

Just as Yang Qing was about to make his way to the kitchen, the administrator Mo Guang found him midway to inform him he had a walk-in case referred to him.

Yang Qing couldn't help but curse his bad luck, not even one day had ended, before a case found him.

Chapter 568 Woes of the outer sect (1)

"A case?" Yang Qing asked partly trying to play dumb and part in the hopes that he had misheard it.

As part of his role as the branch chief, he would still hear cases which was why branch chiefs were mostly judges or inquisitors since that was one of their core duties.

The pavilion also had a courtroom which though wasn't as extravagant looking as those in the headquarters, still had the same grandeur of authority that Order courtrooms had. During the tour, it had been one of the first places the administrator Mo Guang took them to.

"Yes, a case. As you've probably been informed, you will be handling cases that are within the Deer Mountain Range, and the surrounding territories that fall within a 50,000-kilometer radius away from the boundary of the range.

These cases are usually sent to the administration department at the headquarters first for evaluation and it is only when they confirm a few parameters like its location, nearest branch, and abilities and qualifications of the personnel of the closest branch, do they decide whether to send that case to the branch or have it solved at the headquarters.

We have met the criterion for one of those cases. I will leave this with you since it's more of your area of expertise than mine.

It contains details of said case.." Mo Guang said as he handed Yang Qing a recording jade talisman that had a seal on it.

"Thanks.." Yang Qing said with a deflated expression as he took the talisman to the office that was next to the courtroom.

"I hope it's not a handful or one with many twists. Please let it be an easy and direct one.." Yang Qing muttered to himself as he used his gold eagle badge to remove the seal on the talisman.

With the seal removed, he could now read its contents.

The case concerns the Striding Falcon Sect located 32,000 kilometers westward from the Deer Mountain Range.

The sect is a rank 3 sect with the potential of a demotion if it doesn't get another palace realm expert.

lightsNovel.com The sect has only one palace realm expert who as confirmed by the Shadow Hawks Division is at the fourth stage of the palace realm.

The confirmation done by the Shadow Hawks was 15 months ago and it is highly unlikely that the circumstances may have changed, though the Shadow Hawks is re-evaluating the status as we speak.

'The palace realm expert in question goes by the name of Liu Kang, and he was the supreme elder of the sect up until 1,200 years ago when he decided to retire from his position and undergo a death seclusion.

He was already about 12,000 years old at the time and is slowly catching up to his 15,000-year limit to his lifespan..'

"A death seclusion , huh.." Yang Qing muttered with a sigh.

Death seclusion was a cultivator's last-ditch effort at forcing a breakthrough. They would either die in the process or succeed. There was no in-between. You put your entire life at stake.

Most who used such an extreme method were usually cultivators who were at the end of their lifespans. The longer you lived, the scarier the thought of your lifespan ending out on you becomes.

It was easier for most cultivators to accept their death after a heavy injury than for them to accept dying of old age. Watching their lifespan dwindle about was a much more torturous experience than dying to poison or a fatal injury.

The reason for this was simple, it was much easier to accept something that you couldn't change than it was something you could.

A fatal injury like a shattered dantian, one wouldn't be able to do anything about it if it happened to them, but dying of old age, to cultivators that had a remedy and it was simple, just breakthrough to the

next minor or major stage and your cultivation increases, and if you had just one year left, it would shoot up to 500 for just breaking through one level.

Rather than sit and wait for the death that could be changed, it was better to risk it for the chance of averting the disaster, hence death seclusion was born.

If one was to take count, the retired supreme elder of the Striding Falcon Sect who was at the early stage of the palace realm had lived 13,200 years of his lifespan as an early-stage palace realm and was now left with 1,800 years.

To a mortal that was a lot of years, but to cultivators who had seen the change of dynasties and the aging of the world, those years were just but a drop in the eyes of the powerful cultivators.

If the retired supreme elder was able to leap from the fourth stage of the palace realm to the fifth stage of the palace realm he would gain 5,000 years for just that one leap.

Risking it all for that opportunity was understandable, since other than the increase in lifespan, he would be a middle-stage palace realm cultivator which would give him the capital to traverse to different areas he couldn't before or get him through doors he couldn't before. A whole world of opportunities would open before him which would help him improve his abilities or even find other means to increase his lifespan without necessarily having to break through.

Yang Qing soon shook his head free of the scattered thoughts and continued reading the report.

Rumors started floating around that he may have died since nothing had been heard from him the one thousand years which has led to the sect existing in an almost fractured state.

The current sect master, whose master was martial siblings with the former supreme elder leads one faction, while the other faction is being headed by the chief elder who is supported by various parties both within and outside the sect. They have more momentum and support than the sect master's faction and the only reason they have not acted to oust the sect master is because of retired supreme elder Liu Kang. They can not confirm his status whether he is dead or alive, and can only allude to it.

The case in question isn't on the succession of the sect but on those below, more specifically the outer sect disciples.

Chapter 569 Woes of the outer sect (2)

Yang Qing's brows rose in intrigue when he read this.

The case was brought forward by one of their outer sect disciples by the name of Ma Qi. He is 17 years old, in the second stage of the qi refinement realm, and an outer sect disciple of the sect.

He joined the sect three years ago when he was still in the body refinement stage more specifically the silver body stage.

Analysis done shows there was no improvement in his body refinement stage, and broke through to the next stage as a silver body.

"Fourteen years old and he had a silver body, even though he is not a genius at the very least his aptitude should be above average but you want to tell me someone with those abilities only managed to reach the second stage of the qi refinement realm in three years?" Yang Qing muttered with furrowed brows.

About a week ago during one of his sect missions, he reached the Green Sparrow branch and requested the services of the Order.

He has filed a case against the Striding Falcon Sect for the mistreatment of its members, this is a bulk of the outer sect disciples, and failure to deliver on the promises given to said disciples before they joined just as they were taking the entrance examination.

The basis of his claims is on the sect's current treatment of a portion of its outer sect disciples.

'As per his testimony, the sect has been overburdening the outer sect disciples with various chores all over the sect that leaves little to no room for them to cultivate, and some of those chores are even hazardous to them such as the care of the green malachite caterpillar.

He has reported that in a month about a dozen outer sect disciples get maimed during the feeding of the caterpillar.

Those that get maimed, if their torn limb is still intact, do get reattached, but the potions used are usually of the lowest caliber that barely do the job and even the technique behind the reattachment is low.

Their limbs never quite feel the same and are usually defective while those who get maimed either get expelled from the sect or decide to volunteer to be lab rats for the various alchemy test potions in the alchemy division of the sect.

From the account of Ma Qi, the fate of those who choose the latter is far worse than losing a limb and getting expelled..'

"Green malachite caterpillar.." Yang Qing muttered with a strange light in his eyes.

The green malachite caterpillar was a common spirit beast, that most organizations would have as a measure of self-sustainment. It was like the way mortals kept chicken.

The green malachite caterpillar was a humungous caterpillar about the size of four anaconda stitched together. It was green and with spiral blue wing-like markings all over its body.

The reason most organizations kept them was for a few reasons one of the being they required little to no skill to rear them. You only needed to feed them, and their feed wasn't anything special, and earth-rank herbs would do.

Once properly fed, they would produce finger-sized malachites from the various pores of its body.

The malachites were filled with gentle wood energy that had mild healing properties in and by themselves. The malachite mixed in with a healing potion would elevate its properties, and it was the go-to ingredient to be used as a stabilizer in most potion recipes that were at the rank of sky grade and lower due to its gentle properties.

Pouring ground malachite during potion brewing would reduce the level of volatility during the brewing process which increases the odds of success in the completion of the potion or pill.

Its gentle and mild nature made sure it wasn't triggering or negatively reactive with most ingredients, and it wasn't strong enough to alter the properties of a potion, which was why most organizations whether they were an alchemy-centered organization or just a regular sect, clan, or organization with an alchemy hall, they would have malachites in their alchemy repository. It was a must-have as it helped reduce the costs of potion or pill creation.

Since green malachite caterpillars were not hard to rear, most preferred rather than buy, they would produce it themselves by rearing the green malachites and reduce the costs.

The caterpillars were docile in nature and not averse to human beings. Other than food, they didn't concern themselves with anything else. They were voracious eater, and as long as you kept them well-fed, there would be no issues.

lightsnovel.com However, if one were to name one issue was their impatience when they were hungry, the first person to feed in that state was likely to be attacked, and getting sliced apart was not an impossibility since their mandibles were sharp enough to slice through iron like a hot knife through butter. But even then it was not much of an issue, since the green malachite caterpillar lacked agility, and immediately after the attack, their attention would be drawn back to the food.

A qi refinement cultivator with a red-grade movement art even a low-tier art would be able to easily dodge its attacks, and someone with a gold body and no art would be able to easily dodge or even face off directly at its attacks without fear of being maimed since their bodies would be able to withstand it.

The fact that there were a dozen maimings among the outer sect disciples of the Striding Falcon Sect spoke to the lackings of the outer disciples or negligence of the sect towards the nurturing of their disciples.

'Other than taking care of the green malachite, they do almost all the chores of the sect that would normally be handled by servants which leaves them exhausted and little to no room to cultivate.

In addition, when it comes to cultivation resources, they were given a low tier red grade meditation art to cultivate with as the only cultivation art, and they barely receive any guidance on it, whenever classes



are held they have to compete against each other for the opportunity to join the class which per Ma Qi's judgment isn't worth the trouble because they get their monthly resources deducted every time they receive healing from the sect.

Ma Qi is filing a case against the sect in the hopes that it will let him go so he can join another sect, rather than remain and waste his best years at the sect which he claims betrayed their promises.

He hopes for the Order's intervention. He was given a recording talisman to record the happenings of his sect when he went back. We had agreed to meet in a week's time which is today.

Ideally, the Green Sparrow Branch would have handled the situation, however, since the sect itself has a palace realm expert and the branch chief is only at the core formation stage, the matter has been sent to you.

When they bring over Ma Qi, they will bring over any and all information they have about the sect, including its relationship.

The resolution of the matter now rests in your hands, Branch Chief Yang Qing.'

Chapter 570 Case against the Striding Falcon Sect (1)

"If things are as depicted, provided there are no surprises, the resolution shouldn't be that hard.." Yang Qing muttered to himself as he put away the recording talisman and took out his communication talisman.

"Meili, are you busy?"

"No, I was just resting at the lake with Haishi and Bolin. What is it?"

"There is someone from the Green Sparrow branch heading over this way with an outer sect disciple of the Strifing Falcon Sect, I was hoping you could meet with them midway and bring them over, you can go with Ellie.."

"We already have a case?"

"Looks like it. Hopefully, it will not be a complicated one. Once you bring the outer sect disciple over, even if you haven't done the groundwork on the case, I hope you can sit in with me, to take the recordings.."

"No problem.."

"Thanks.."

Once he was done with the call, Yang Qing decided to rest his eyes a bit as he processed the information from the case.

While mistreatment of the lower rank members wasn't an uncommon thing, the level exhibited by the Striding Falcon Sect was baffling, to say the least.

lightsnovel.com It was one thing to minimize guidance on cultivation for those who had joined since some sects have been known to do the same as a form of test for the outer sect disciples. They mostly use it to sieve out those with great comprehension talent or to test the willpower of the new disciples. Some would get complacent or give in to the circumstance, while others would use everything and anything with what they had to etch out a living.

But even in such cases, the disciples would get a decent cultivation art and a little aid in their starting point. However, the case of the Striding Falcon Sect was a little too extreme. They were a rank 3 sect but they could not even spare at least an orange-grade cultivation art for their outer disciples, all they got was a poor red-grade art, and it was a meditation technique at that, and when it came to other resources they even charged their disciples for healing them.

"Is it because of the clash between the two factions? Or is it a rot that was always there and is only now exploding?"

Maybe Ma Qi and the information collected by the Green Sparrow branch will shed more light on the matter.."

Half an hour slowly passed by with Yang Qing soaking in the solemn air of the silent courtroom. It was only a moment later that the silence was broken when the doors to the courtroom opened.

In came Luo Meili who was followed by a scrawny gray-haired young man who looked to be around thirty.

If it wasn't for scanning him with his palace sense and thus confirming his bone age, Yang Qing would not have believed that the person before him was only seventeen years old.

The young man was gray-haired, with sunken cheeks that hid his grey eyes, which were the true picture of exhaustion. He looked like he was just about to collapse. Even though he tried to stand upright, he couldn't hide the exhaustion in his entire being. Yang Qing could detect a sluggishness in his entire body, from his steps down to the movement of his qi within his body.

Despite being a cultivator who had reached the qi refinement realm, a faint bodily odor was being released from his body which was something that rarely happened among qi refinement cultivators since at that stage they would have continuously cleansed their bodies of impurities starting from the body refinement realm.

A qi refinement realm could spend three months without bathing and they would still smell like fresh lilies but the young man before him smelled like he had been submerged in a putrid swamp filled with the pungent dung of a multitude of spirit beasts.

Even without bathing, as long as qi refinement cultivator circulated their cultivation art, their bodies would be continuously cleansed by the spiritual qi they were absorbing and circulating within their bodies, but for the person before to stink like that showed they barely cultivated and for one reason or the other, their bodies have been continuously accumulating a lot of impurities.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh with sympathy as he saw the young man fret about as he looked up and down with embarrassment, especially when his gaze fell on Luo Meili, who was a picture of gentle mature beauty and perfection.

Anybody would feel completely embarrassed and self-conscious in his position. He had a choking tear-jerking odor, his skin was pale and wrinkled, and had patches of dirt in some areas; his robes though were clean, and had the stamp of time on them.

Outersect disciples wore light blue robes, but his was more light grey than blue at this point and looked like it had been made from the thinnest fabric that could be torn by even the slightest brush of wind.

With the way he looked even thinking he was a rogue cultivator was a complement as he looked more like a slave miner with a decade on the job. No one would believe he was an outer sect disciple of a rank 3 sect based on how he looked. It was the reason why he hated going out of the sect for missions, because every time he did he would expose his miserable state to the world. He was too embarrassed to introduce himself as a disciple of the Striding Falcon Sect.

"Just stand here.." Luo Meili softly said as she gently tapped him on his shoulders.

"Th..an..k you.." said the young man with a stammering voice as he looked at her hands hoping the grime from his skin and robe didn't dirty her.

"If my plea doesn't happen I'd rather get eaten by the green malachite caterpillar than spend another day in that sect," thought the young man as he bitterly clenched his fists.

Three years ago before he stepped foot into the Striding Falcon Sect, he was full of life and ambition with a lot to look forward to but after becoming a disciple of the sect, all that was quickly ground out of him until all that was left was the broken smelly husk he was today.

He wasn't sure his mind would be able to take it anymore. The reason he even risked approaching the Order was because of the dangerous thoughts he had started to entertain over the past few months.

"What's the worse that the sect can do to me than they already have.." he thought to himself.