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Chapter 211 Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts

Yang Qing's Yin Yang jade bone physique made him sensitive to certain types of qi, especially ones related to slaughter, fiendish qi, or corpse qi. Yang Qing didn't detect a dense slaughter qi on Ma Yuan which meant he had fewer bodies on him.

If he could, Yang Qing wanted to help him with whatever pushed a man like him who seemed to be at the prime of his life, to the point he would willingly sentence himself to a painful death. From the earlier words that he spoke in a daze, he felt it had something to do with the person who was called Ruo.

He hoped the two days would be enough for Ma Yuan to get comfortable enough to open up to him about his circumstances, once he realized he was from the Order. If two days weren't enough, Yang Qing was willing to bring him back to the Order and book him an inn there and give him some time to think things through. If by the end of it, he still didn't feel comfortable sharing, then Yang Qing would leave it at just that and wish him well. But if he did decide to share his story, then Yang Qing was willing to help, if it was within his means to do so. If it was above his pay grade, then he would gladly dump it on Lei Weiyuan's lap.

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True to his words, during the entire journey to the Diamond Body sect, not once did Yang Qing broach up the matter of Ma Yuan's past. They just silently drank wine enjoying the lonely skies atop Ellie's back.

Starlight was also with them. Yang Qing had placed him in the barrel he used to store the redears and bluegill from the Yin-rich lake. The blue-green water in the barrel had dense spiritual qi that had a gentle attribute that would help Starlight in his attempt at refining the wisdom pearl from the cyclone arc prawn.

The preliminary phase of refining the wisdom pearl was a critical juncture for it. If a blunder occurred during its attempt, the wisdom pearl would either disintegrate to ashes with all its insights disappearing, or the starlight crab would suffer a backlash from the pearl when all the insights stored in there instantaneously flooded its mind. The resultant effect would be the insights would saturate its mental sea slowly eating away at its spirituality till it finally ends up going berserk. From that point, it would only be a matter of time before it imploded.

In addition to the spiritually rich blue-green water, Yang Qing also dropped a few sky-rank herbs that were perfect for strengthening its mental state. Whatever happened next, it would have to depend on Starlight.

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Yang Qing's group managed to reach the Diamond Body sect's territory about an hour later. The sect had dispatched one of their high-ranking elders to assist Yang Qing in his evaluations. The elder in question was a fourth-stage palace realm expert, which was a way for the sect to give face to Yang Qing.

By the time Yang Qing arrived, they already had everything in place, including the area in which Yang Qing would conduct his evaluation. They had set it at one of their branches that had been emptied out of its disciples. The only people who were left behind were the servants and the branch leader. Everything proceeded rather smoothly, especially with the assistance of the palace realm elder.

After a couple of hours, Yang Qing easily completed all 270 evaluations. Yang Qing wasn't sure if it was because of the prestige of the Diamond body sect or something else entirely, but none of the 270 organizations who came for the evaluation tried to scheme their way through their evaluations. All 270 organizations passed, though their results were not as outstanding as the ones from the Blue Lotus Kingdom.

The bulk of the organizations had red-grade pillars, while those that had orange-grade pillars didn't number more than ten. In terms of physiques, they were few in number and were of the general variety. Almost all of the recorded physiques were related to the wood element and they were of the low-grade kind at that, which didn't offer too much of a benefit to the user.

When Yang Qing was done, he exchanged a few pleasantries with the elder from the Diamond Body sect before he made his way to the territory of the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts. He had Ma Yuan with him during the evaluations, which came as a shocker to him when he realized Yang Qing was from the Order and also the respect showed by the palace realm elder towards Yang Qing.

Ma Yuan assumed it was the Order's prestige at play there, instead of it being a palace realm expert showing respect for another, especially to one so young.

Ma Yuan seemed to be out of sorts from the moment Yang Qing revealed his title. Even when they left, he seemed dazed like he had a lot of thoughts flooding his mind.

His rapidly contorting face gave away some of those thoughts. His look occasionally shifted through a multitude of emotions some of them being hesitation, dilemma, and fear. With how intense his emotions were, it wasn't hard for Yang Qing to see through some of them. With the hesitation in play, it atleast showed Ma Yuan was open to sharing, it only needed time.

Even with him close to the edge, Yang Qing decided to let things flow organically rather than forcefully steering it.

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The Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort's territory wasn't that far from the Diamond Body sect. Their journey took them about two hours.

Just like the Spiritual temperance sect, the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort had a loose control over its territory. Other than a small annual tribute, they didn't demand much from those within their territory. But unlike the Spiritual temperance sect that liked to close itself off from its territory, the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort had over a dozen branches spread all around its territory. The branches' purpose wasn't oversight, but to lessen the barrier between them and those settling within their territory, while also growing their business through the use of that relationship.

The Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort is one of the few independent mercenary organizations that has managed to create a strong base for themselves. Their primary business is the transport and protection of goods from one point to another. Their specialty is, long-distance coverage. In addition to that, they also handle security for various auction houses.

The organization has been in existence for almost 20,000 years and has built a solid reputation for itself around the continent due to its service and strength.

They don't discriminate when it comes to their clientele, which has been one of the factors behind their growth over the years. With their amenable rates, even a rankless organization could hire their services. They have taken work from rankless organizations to high-ranking organizations like the Order.

It was from that established relationship that Yang Qing was able to gain their assistance on short notice, for his evaluations.

Chapter 212 Looking For Clues

From the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort's end, they had sent the head of logistics to assist Yang Qing in his endeavors. The head of logistics was a middle-aged man with a slender build and a scholarly air to him. His name was Yun Wei and had been one of the instrumental figures who helped the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort to reach the heights it did, today.

He had a genial personality and was very meticulous and erudite in everything he undertook. He knew the background of all the organizations within their territory by heart, to the point that one would mistake him for their founder because of the depth of information he knew about each organization. It didn't matter whether it was ranked or unranked, he knew enough about all of them. He even gave Yang Qing a well-drafted list of all the organizations that would likely reach a promotion standard before the year's-end.

Yang Qing gladly accepted the list since he spotted a number of rank 5 organizations predicted for promotion within the year. When he moved to the palace courts he would start handling the promotion of rank 5 organizations to rank 4 organizations. The information Yun Wei provided would help him plan his evaluations better when the time came.

Yang Qing recorded that favor in his heart. When he returned back to the Order he would push for a few more contracts to be thrown in the way of the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort. He was a lazy parasite most of the time but every now and then he'd have an ant's conscience in him, when he went above and beyond in returning favors.

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With Yun Wei's help, Yang Qing was able to complete all 300 evaluations within a short period of time. The evaluation had been free flowing just like it was at the Diamond Body Sect's territory.

Their results were also not that bad, though there were a few organizations that tried to pull something. Their futures seemed to turn bleak the moment they got caught. The cold look Yun Wei threw at them the moment they were exposed, was enough for them to know their future within the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort's territory would not be an easy one.

The reaction of those who got caught had a ripple effect on those who were about to be evaluated. Once they revealed Yun Wei's displeasure, a few organizations decided to opt out of the evaluations.

Of the 300 organizations, 8 were caught cheating, 14 opted out and the remaining 278 organizations passed their evaluations. Of the 278, there were about 30 organizations that had members with blue grade pillars which was the highest record since Yang Qing started his joint evaluations. Those with white grade pillars were just two organizations, while the remaining bulk either had orange grade pillars or high tier red grade pillars.

Ironically though, with such good results, the recorded physique among all the organizations that came, was just one. It was an iron fog physique, which wasn't a particularly eye-catching physique since its strength and effectiveness were tied to the user's cultivation base.

The physique was a utility-based physique that had no lethality to it. Those with the iron fog physique were able to produce a grey fog that would shield them from being scanned by a cultivator's spiritual sense by creating a formless field of disruption around their body.

The range and capabilities of the physique were restricted to the user's strength. A foundation establishment expert with that physique would not be able to shield themselves from the spiritual sense of someone in the core formation expert. Those the fog could work on were those who were in the same realm as them. Though it had some good points to it even with such a restriction. The more the fog was used, the more it strengthened the user's mental sea and as a result fortified their spiritual senses too.

It may not directly help in a frontal confrontation but it was more than enough for helping someone make a clean escape or those whose occupations lay in espionage and spying.

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Yang Qing wasn't that surprised by the results, though the same couldn't be said for Ma Yuan whose eyes were saucers during the whole thing, especially when the count of blue-grade pillars reached 20.

Yang Qing expected such a result from the place and the reason for that was the presence of Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts in the area. In addition to their core duties, the mercenary organization also acted as go-betweens and procurers. Because their commissions and contract works had them on

different parts of the continent for days on end, for the better part of the year, that exposure left them with a lot of knowledge and access to all sorts of goods and information from all over the continent. For a fee, they could get you whatever you wanted as long as it was within their means to do so and was on their travel route.

Those within their territory would use the connections of the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts to buy cultivation arts and other resources such as cultivation pills or formation array blueprints, through them. And because prices of these goods varied from place to place, thanks to the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort's vast travel route, they had the option of getting whatever they wanted at a cheap price.

For an additional fee separate from their commission, the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort would also provide a tabulated list of common goods and their prices across different locations. With such access, it was only reasonable that those organizations would experience explosive growth.

By Yang Qing's estimates, it wouldn't be too long before the region was swarming with rank 3 organizations.

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"Chief Yun Wei, pardon my impudence but can I ask you for a favor?"

Ma Yuan who had been silent all this while suddenly spoke up. He was clearly very anxious about his request, based on the trembling in his voice when he asked and his shaky hands.

Yang Qing couldn't help but look his way with perplexion. Based on the severity of the look Ma Yuan had, Yang Qing guessed the matter more than likely had something to do with his present circumstances.

"If it's within my means, I would be more than happy to help, Brother Ma Yuan," Yun Wei politely replied.

Even though Yun Wei was a palace realm expert and Ma Yuan was just someone with a crippled cultivation base, who even at his prime would have been unworthy of being called brother by a palace realm expert, Yun Wei still afforded Ma Yuan respect because of his association with Yang Qing.

In all the areas Yang Qing went to with Ma Yuan, he introduced him as his friend which was sufficient to cover him with his halo.

In Yun Wei's mind, he was all too glad to help Ma Yuan since this was a chance of deepening the organization's good karma with Yang Qing via Ma Yuan.

All members present were aware of what was at play here. Yang Qing knew Yun Wei wanted to deepen the connection with him by agreeing to that request and Ma Yuan knew whatever assistance was afforded to him, was all because of Yang Qing. Otherwise, there was no way he'd be able to ask a favor of someone as lofty as Chief Yun Wei.

He felt a bit guilty since he knew he was basically using Yang Qing to further his ends but he had to do it. Things such as pride and face had long become weights he couldn't afford to carry over the past few years.

Ma Yuan on seeing Yun Wei's agreement took out something from his storage ring. The storage ring was about the only possession he had on him.

What he took out was a small shard about the size of a pinkie. The shard was crystalline with a faint violet-white lustre to it. It could easily be mistaken for an expensive gem because of how magnificent it looked.

However, there was one indistinct feature that made one unable to call it a gem, and that was the freezing attribute it had. From the moment it was taken out, the temperature within a 50-meter radius around it, suddenly plummeted. It didn't visibly release anything for one to expect such a change from it. Just its mere presence and exposure to the air caused a sudden and severe dip in temperature within seconds of it being brought out.

Yang Qing's pupils constricted when he saw the shard. He noticed that the energy within that shard was the same as the energy he had detected in Ma Yuan's shattered dantian. With how clear the fluctuations were, he had no doubt the source was the same.

"What dense Yin energy," Yun Wei muttered in consternation as he narrowed his gaze on the shard in Ma Yuan's hands.

Ma Yuan's hands immediately began frosting over, the moment he had the shard in his hands, but he paid it no heed despite the tremendous pain it was definitely inflicting on him.

"Chief Yun Wei, can you please help me find any organization whose attacks closely resemble this shard? Any information no matter how small is fine.

I don't have much to my name but I would be willing to repay the favor many times over, including staking my own life if you were to help me with this," Ma Yuan solemnly said as he made a deep ninety-degree bow with his hands placed forward like a servant presenting something to his master.

"This....brother Ma Yuan you don't need to be like this," Yun Wei softly said as he helped Ma Yuan up.

He could tell the shard had a deep importance to the man and one that wasn't tied to anything good. When Ma Yuan removed the shard, a faint killing intent flashed in his eyes as he was holding the shard.

" While I can't say with definite assurity that I may be able to find which organization this belongs to, but I can tell the list is likely to be small, based on the effects on this shard. There are not that many organizations that I know of with a yin-based technique this strong.

The search may take some time and you have to be prepared that there's a chance it may not bear any results at all. The scale of the search will be continent-wide after all, and there are some areas we may not be able to pass through even with our connections.

Perhaps....." Yun Wei left a few words unsaid but his look was enough to give away his thoughts as his gaze fell on Yang Qing.

The roots of the Order were far more widespread than theirs were and investigations into matters such as this were more of the Order's forte compared to them.

Chapter 213 Ma Yuan Makes His Choice

With Yun Wei's overt gesture, it wasn't that hard for Ma Yuan to notice the connotation behind it. His look turned complicated because of it, but he gritted his teeth as he firmed himself. Since he had already opened that can of worms by taking advantage of Yang Qing's relationship, he would go all in.

"Judge Yang Qing would you please....?" said Ma Yuan with a faint quiver in his voice as he passed over the shard to Yang Qing.

There was a bit of expectation and also worry in his eyes as he handed over the shard to Yang Qing.

For some reason unbeknown even to himself, he was more nervous asking for Yang Qing's help than he was when he asked it from Chief Yun Wei, even though ironically the former was more predisposed to help him than the latter.

Before Yang Qing took the shard, his gaze, and demeanor had a sudden shift. There was a formless regal pressure coming from him as his gaze bore down on Ma Yuan.

"Brother Ma Yuan, before I take a look there's something we need to get straight first. Are you making the request to me as a friend or as a member of the Order?" Asked Yang Qing. Although his tone was polite and soft, the weight of it made even Yun Wei who was virtually a bystander in this, feel his heart race like he had stakes in it too.

Ma Yuan who was the subject of it all, was in an even worse state. His knees almost buckled as they shook slightly, his heart pounded so much that he was sure it was audible to the outside, his insides felt like they were in knots and his tongue was drier than a desert.

He understood the implications of Yang Qing's words. If he asked it as a friend, he would still have autonomy over how the matter progressed and the direction of the whole thing would depend on him, but if he asked for Yang Qing's help in his official capacity as a member of the Order, then the whole dynamic changes. The whole case would be under the authority of the Order from that moment on and the whole matter would thus be subject to its rules and regulations.

His role in the matter would become passive. He would switch from an active participant to a witness. Whatever happened next, he would have no influence whatsoever.

Both sides had pros and cons to it, one gave him autonomy on how things progressed, but all he'd get was Yang Qing's help as a friend, while the other he'd lose all decision-making rights but in exchange he'd get the help of a monolithic organization like the Order.

Despite the ramifications of his choice, Ma Yuan had no hesitation in deciding what was best, to him, it was a no-brainer on which choice was the best.

Yang Qing's demeanor and question may have thrown him off for a bit, which made him flustered, but even in that state, the choice he needed to make to fulfill his promise, was as clear as day.

"I, Ma Yuan would like to beseech the Order to help me investigate the disappearance of my wife and daughter who were forcefully taken away from me, seven years ago."

Ma Yuan's voice boomed as he said those words. Every syllable and sentence was uttered with a firm heaviness to it.

When Ma Yuan uttered the last sentence, he felt relief wash over his whole body. It was a relief he hasn't felt in a long time ever since his wife and child got taken. He doesn't know why, but tears started streaming down his cheeks along with the relief. He tried to stop them, but once the floodgates opened, no matter how hard he tried, he found it hard to close them back up.

However, luckily for him, he didn't cry for too long because a minute later he passed out. Yang Qing flashed to where he was and caught him before he fell.

Yang Qing placed Ma Yuan over his shoulders and then he went on to gently drop him on Ellie's back.

"I, Yang Qing in my capacity as a judge of the Order, accept your request. Rest now Ma Yuan," Yang Qing softly said to the passed-out Ma Yuan.

He sighed when he saw Ma Yuan weakly smile in his passed-out state. He could tell that the moment Ma Yuan completed his request, something within him finally let go.

He had been forcefully enduring the past seven years and that volatile strain took its toll on both his soul and body. Ma Yuan looked like he had been holding everything together within him with a thin string, and finally, that string snapped when he completed his request. Everything he has been overriding and forcefully enduring in the past seven years flooded his body all at once. Without the string to forcefully stitch all that damage into place, his mind and body easily gave in and he passed out.

Though it would be more apt to say, his mind and body finally got the rest they needed for what it was put through, for those seven years.

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"Chief Yun Wei, even with the Order taking charge of the matter, I would still like to uphold Ma Yuan's earlier request. Whatever information and clues you might dig up about this shard, please transmit them to the Order, no matter how small.

Also, consider this as an official request from the Order. All the stipulations regarding the remuneration of your services are now in effect should you agree," Yang Qing said as he carefully split a piece of the shard and handed it to Yun Wei.

Yang Qing purposely made one piece larger than the other during his split. He handed the larger piece to Yun Wei while he remained with the smaller piece.

Just like it did to Ma Yuan when he held it, the shard tried to freeze both Yang Qing's and Yun Wei's hands the moment they held it. The latter used his spiritual qi as a barrier to protect his hands when he held the shard, while the former seemed almost immune to the shard's effect.

Yang Qing's hand would start frosting from the nails but it would disappear just as fast, as if there was a massive hole swallowing that ice. After a minute of rapid flashing of the appearance and disappearance of the frost, the shard seemed like it had lost its effect on Yang Qing's hand. Its freezing effect no longer appeared on his nails after the minute mark passed

Chapter 214 [Bonus]Issuing An Official Commission

"Judge Yang Qing, we of the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts are willing to handle the investigation, and there is no need for us to be paid. We already owe the Order a lot, this can be considered our way of paying back," said Yun Wei as he grabbed the shard Yang Qing handed to him.

"While I appreciate the sentiment, Chief Yun Wei, the Order's regulations not only bind those who pass through its doors but us to, and the organization as a whole.

Some of the rules we can be flexible with, but not when a case is involved. I can freely accept your help during evaluations but a case is a different matter altogether. Because of its severity, all members associated with the case are bound by its rules and none is exempted from it, including the Order.

So I must insist Chief Yun Wei, for me to accept your help, it must be within the confines of the regulations that make an allowance for it. I can't accept the help for free because of the various implications behind it. If you were to insist on doing it for free, then I will have no choice but to terminate the request." Yang Qing politely said.

"Since Judge Yang Qing has put it that way, then on behalf of the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts, I accept the terms and conditions set on the request," Chief Yun Wei solemnly said as he offered a daoist salute.

"Thank you very much, Chief Yun Wei, for your cooperation and understanding. I hope for a fruitful venture for us both," Yang Qing said as he cupped his fists in return.

"Since you're not new to this, the same terms of remuneration grading apply.

Though I still don't know the full story yet, with the few insights I've managed to obtain, the case may involve someone either at the peak stage of the core formation realm or someone at the palace realm.

The basis of that judgment is, as you can tell Ma Yuan is someone who once had a middle-stage core formation cultivation base. While I don't know how strong he was before he lost it, I can tell he had a gold stage body, so he couldn't have been that bad.

Despite his strength, his dantian was shattered cleanly and in one strike at that. The traces of the attack left in his dantian share the same energy as the one in this shard.

Using both of these clues, the person who could successfully pull off that attack has to be someone who at the very least is a peak stage core formation realm expert, with a strong foundation at that or he/she is someone at the palace realm.

As such, because the case may potentially involve someone at the palace realm, the standard rates of the palace realm are the ones that will be in effect for this commission.

The Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort will be receiving an upfront fee of 45,000 high-grade spirit stones or may redeem it for something else from the Order in the equivalent of that amount.

Your final payment at the end of the commission will be subject to the strength of the perpetrator and quality of the information, whose grading will be in respect to the completion of the case," Yang Qing said as he took out a golden-colored scroll which he used to draft a promissory note and an official contract between the Order and the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts.

As a superior core court judge, it was well within his rights to do so. After he finished drafting the document, he stamped it with his gold eagle medallion and left a gap for Yun Wei to sign on behalf of the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort. They would present that document to the administration department, sub-office; remunerations, to get their payment and their contract on file.

"I know you know this already, with the numerous commissions and contracts you have done for the Order, but the Order asks us to be redundant about these matters.

If the case ends up involving someone or an organization with the highest powerbase being someone at the early stages of the palace realm, your maximum payout for that case will be 250,000 high-grade spirit stones or a redeemable item of that amount. The quality of your information will determine whether you get that maximum payout or not and the judgment is left to the discretion of the Judge in charge of that case, which will be me.

If the matter involves a party in the middle stages of the palace realm, then the maximum payout is 500,000 high-grade spirit stones or a redeemable item of that amount.

If the matter involves a party in the late stage of the palace realm, the maximum payout is 750,000 high-grade spirit stones or a redeemable item of that amount.

At any point during the course of your investigation, should you suspect the matter involves a party in the domain realm, you are to cease all investigations immediately and present your speculations to the person in charge of the case, which will be me.

The Order will hold payment pending an investigation into your claims. If the speculation is found to be true, then the Order will pay you 1,000,000 high-grade spirit stones, a blue-grade formation blueprint, a blue-grade cultivation art, and a double quota will be given to your organization for five years.

Please note, you are not to investigate the matter further if you have even the tiniest of suspicions the matter involves a party in the domain realm. All your investigations are to cease immediately, I repeat all your investigations are to cease immediately and you are to present your findings to the Order.

Should you ignore the warning, and proceed, whatever circumstances arise from it will be borne by you alone.

Do you understand?" Yang Qing asked in a serious tone.

He had to reemphasize the last part of his statement over and over again because there had been a number of organizations in the past that got greedy for success and tried to handle matters that were above their abilities. The result of that greed was the annihilation of those organizations, leaving the Order to bear the infamy of being labeled as the cause of their destruction.

It was for this reason, the Order emphasized caution above all else when they gave out commissions and contracts to outside organizations.

"I understand," Chief Yun Wei solemnly replied.

"Okay then, thank you for your help Chief Yun Wei, should you require additional support, please don't hesitate to ask," Yang Qing said in a relaxed tone as he smiled.

"I will gladly take you up on that," Chief Yun Wei said with a chuckle.

They exchanged a few more words after that, to iron out a few details here and there in regards to the commission.

After Yang Qing was done with that, he immediately set off for the final evaluation point within the upper half of his quadrant. The final point of that half would be in the White Baobab Kingdom, a rank 4

kingdom favored for its delicacies. It's the one place Yang Qing in his whole route that he was actually excited about visiting even if work was involved.

Chapter 215 The Prince Who Became King.

Half an hour passed by with Ma Yuan still asleep. Yang Qing had decided to let him rest and they'd discuss matters concerning the disappearance of his wife and daughter once he woke up.

Yang Qing stored away the shard the moment they left the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escort's territory. He wasn't in a hurry to dig into the case yet, since he still had his evaluations to complete first and a ceremony to prepare for immediately after.

But even with the packed schedule looming ahead, Yang Qing, at this moment, was as chipper as he could be.

He had a bag of crispy fried sunflower seeds on his lap, which he gingerly snacked on as he sang a song he was definitely butchering. He didn't seem like he knew the lyrics to it at all and was just ad-libbing it, using whatever words came to mind.

He doesn't leave the confines of the Order often even during his leave, but in the few moments he does, one of his favorite stopovers has always been the White Baobab Kingdom.

The Kingdom wasn't exactly a powerhouse and even among rank 4 kingdoms, it could be considered average at best in terms of overall power. When it came to history, it has been around for less than 500 years. However, despite all these, Yang Qing still rates it as among one of the best places one could ever visit, though this opinion wasn't shared by many and only a select niche of people thought so, one of them being Yang Qing and the other being Feng Xin.

The Kingdom was a haven for food and foodies. Not many kingdoms around its rank could come close to the number of restaurants the White Baobab Kingdom had.

Based on Yang Qing's rough estimate from when he visited the place, he guessed there were atleast a thousand restaurants in the capital alone.

The Kingdom was founded by some fallen prince of some kingdom, who fell out of grace with the king because of his hobbies. He got removed from the line of succession, deprived of his family name and identity as a prince, and banished from the kingdom.

Though his father, the king wasn't completely ruthless as he gave him a substantial amount of money to go start over someplace else. That prince was all too glad with the banishment, as he had no interest in being the king of that kingdom. While he had zero interest in the throne, he did have an unhealthy obsession with something else, and that was food.

He would forsake everything else for food and not just any food. In his own words, "It was food that had a spirit to it, a reflection of its creator. Food that had an identity."

It didn't matter whether it was from some side road stall, or some fancy restaurant, as long as it met that criteria, he would eat it. But if it didn't have it, it didn't matter who cooked it or their reputation or their establishment, he would not eat it.

Even though he was a food enthusiast like Yang Qing and Feng Xin, he was a completely different brand of epicure.

The latter two had no scruples about what they ate, and what they called food had a loose definition to them. Sweet-smelling poison could be considered a delicacy to them as much as red braised pork could be considered one for someone else.

Whereas for that prince, food to him were ingredients that had been prepared and sealed with the unadulterated spirit of its chef. He didn't care whether it looked good or smelt nice, as long it had the sincerest efforts of the chef, that would be a delicacy to him.

His preference and Yang Qing's or Feng Xin's were almost similar in some regards, and the distinction was slim.

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With money in hand, that prince roamed from place to place, sampling foods from different parts of the continent. It was during that journey, that a little idea sprouted in his heart.

How great would it be if he created a kingdom whose sole focus was food? Creating a place that would draw in Chefs from all over the Southern continent and potentially even pass that.

While he could travel from place to place, his cultivation base restricted the areas he could visit and how much he could cover, but having a central location that drew just even the tiniest portion of the chefs around the continent, would ensure he could sample a multitude of different foods with little risk and half the effort.

With a goal now, for the first time in his life despite constantly being pushed by his father and refusing, he finally gave attention to his cultivation base.

When he was banished he was just an eighth-stage foundation establishment cultivator despite all the resources afforded to him as a prince. He never cultivated, and whatever improvement he had, was a passive effect of the food he ate.

Despite all this, that prince had top-rank blue-grade pillars. Yang Qing remembered laughing so hard when he read his background. He could understand the anger of the King when he banished him. The prince could be considered a source of both envy and disappointment to him.

As a cultivator, it would hurt if you saw someone who barely paid any attention to his cultivation reach heights you could never reach and the only way of you reaching those heights is if you staked your life. One bitterly cultivates to the point of death to achieve glory, while the other eats to glory and that glory isn't even something he sort and was just a by-product.

Even though they were father and son, Yang Qing had a feeling the king may have contemplated killing his son a few times over the matter.

As for the disappointed bit, Yang Qing supposed the king as a parent, may have been disappointed with the prince as a waste of natural talent. Who knew the heights the prince could reach If he actually gave even the tiniest of efforts, which in all his years at the palace never did? Even when threatened with torture, he still refused to cultivate.

With no other option, to protect his sanity and the prince's life, banishment seemed like the only plausible solution at the time. Ironically though, it was as a result of that banishment that the prince who would rather get imprisoned in dark ice than cultivate, finally decided to cultivate.

He roamed around the continent, growing his strength as he looked for a suitable location for establishing his food utopia. It took him 50 years before he found a bandit hideout that fit his criteria. Sword in hand, he cleaved his way through that hideout and created the foundation of the White Baobab Kingdom from that rubble.

By Yang Qing's count, 293 years have passed since then. A prince who wanted nothing about ruling and cultivating, grew to be a quasi-palace stage palace realm cultivator and established a rank 4 kingdom in that time. And that kingdom was well on its way to potentially becoming a rank 3 kingdom should he break through to the palace realm. At that time it would have overtaken his parent's kingdom, which was still a rank 4 kingdom.

Yang Qing wryly laughed as he thought of how many cultivators had likely vomited blood when they heard of that prince's story. What about his father? The story of someone who founded a kingdom to further his hobbies. Worse, he actually succeeded and in one of the shortest times possible at that.

While tonnes of people out there surely hated his guts from envy, Yang Qing rather admired and respected him. He felt like the Southern continent definitely needed more kingdoms like the White Baobab kingdom.

The kingdom has been explosively growing over the years. When it started, it went through a period of stagnation since the idea of a food-driven kingdom was out of the norm, but with the prince's persistent efforts, his strength, and the relationships he had cultivated over the years in his food spree, he managed to get the kingdom off the ground.

The number of Chefs who came over at the beginning was few, but with time, that number slowly mushroomed and a hundred years ago when it had a solid base, their numbers experienced a massive growth that hasn't waned to date.

The only thing that may slow their numbers down, was the size of the kingdom. With it being originally a bandit's hideout, the size was small. It has grown over the years but not by much since it's bordered by a few rank 3 and well-established rank 4 organizations on all sides.

The only measures they employed to combat the size issue, was to limit the size of land allocated to each establishment, and from what the prince, now King of White Baobab kingdom told Yang Qing, he had the intention of laying a space expansion array in the capital to increase its size. However, such an endeavor was costly, both in terms of labor and the materials needed to pull it off.

The cost was beyond the kingdom's current capacity to afford it, not unless they got sponsored by a rank 2 and above organization, which the king was against. Yang Qing occasionally donates a part of his income to the goal though, along with Feng Xin and the owners of the restaurants within the White Baobab Kingdom. Who knows within a century, the amount may be enough to kick-start the project and lay the groundwork.

Just as Yang Qing was calculating the amount he'd be donating after he got his new pay as a palace court judge, the White Baobab kingdom appeared on the horizon. On reflex, Yang Qing inhaled deeply with a wide smile on his face. Even a hundred kilometers away and so high up, he could detect a faint aroma of food in the air. The welcome sign of the White Baobab Kingdom.

"Longwei, you're a genius," Yang Qing muttered as his eyes gleamed with excitement.

Chapter 216 A Welcome To Baobab Kingdom For Newcomers

The closer Yang Qing got to the White Baobab Kingdom, the wider his smile became.

It didn't take long before the full aroma of the kingdom came flooding toward him the closer he got to the kingdom. The effect resembled that of the Thousand Flavors restaurant, except the one from the kingdom was a hundred times more intense.

For a kingdom that was only formed in less than 500 years, its security was very lax, especially at its borders. There was barely any security at the border and those who were supposed to be in charge of it, acted more like a welcome party, more than anything else.

The design was made on purpose by the king because he wanted the Chefs to feel more at ease coming to his kingdom and he thought the rules of entry being lax, may help in that regard.

His plan seemed to have worked as the number of chefs who come flooding in every day, grew, but it also had an adverse effect. With the lax security, it created a window for nefarious characters to behave however they wanted.

Like right now, Yang Qing spotted a bandit in the foundation establishment realm who was attempting to mug a group whose highest member was only at the eighth level of the qi refinement realm.

They seemed to be newcomers and based on the attires of some of them, they looked like chefs. They had a couple of wagons filled with all sorts of ingredients and equipment. The foundation establishment bandit seemed to be targeting those things.

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"Looks like both parties are new to this place. The place is not an easy target as you think. The White Baobab Kingdom always looks after its own," Yang Qing muttered as he placed his chin on his palm searching for the best angle to enjoy the show.

No sooner had he finished that statement than a blinding silver streak flashed from one of the buildings next to where the mugging was taking place.

That streak flew at an alarming speed in the direction of the foundation establishment bandit who was currently toying with the eighth stage qi refinement cultivator.

Just as the bandit raised his hand to swing the saber in his hand at the qi refinement cultivator, he saw the hand that was holding the weapon fly in the air.

It took him a few seconds to register that the hand he saw flying before him, was his.

His hand was sliced cleanly and smoothly at the wrist. When he was about to yell, he lost the entire arm, followed by his next hand, then the arm.

The dismemberment soon moved from the hands to his legs. It only stopped when the last leg was sliced cleanly off. Despite the gory nature of what had just transpired, the bloody scene that should have appeared from the event was completely absent.

The joints where the arms and legs were separated from, seemed like they had been cauterized, staunching the bleeding.

All members were shocked at what just happened, both the thief and his targets. Everything had happened too fast for them to register what just happened.

After the shock, soon came the pain for the foundation establishment bandit. He started screaming in pain as he begged forgiveness from the unknown party that had just sliced his limbs off. The only response he got was a swift bashing to the head that left him unconscious.

"Welcome to the White Baobab Kingdom, you are Chefs moving in right?" A crisp, warm lady's voice came from the building the silver streak had come from.

"Ye..es we are, " the eighth stage qi refinement cultivator was the one who replied once he was out of the stupor created by the sudden events. He was being toyed with to death just a few seconds ago, but now the perpetrator lay dismembered beneath his feet, with no idea how it even happened.

The flurry of emotions that came at him at the moment left him unable to think or communicate properly.

When he thought he would die, all he had was endless regret for choosing to leave his home and start over someplace, all because he heard the place was a haven for cooks. Ever since he was a kid, cooking was the one thing he could do properly. This left him mocked in his hometown, where alchemy was the mainstay. But despite that, he stuck to it and even manage to make a name for himself within that town.

He had thought he'd spend his entire life there, but that all changed when one of the customers he served, mentioned the White Baobab Kingdom in passing and how it was a place filled with Chefs as far as the eye could see.

At first, he didn't believe it since he thought it was the ramblings of a drunk. How could such a place exist when he, the son of the mayor of their town got endless ridicule and grief when he started out as a chef?

While he had managed to build to make a name for himself as a chef, even if the people around town no longer ridiculed him for his choice, there still existed a form of stigma against him, like what he did was no different than a fool's errand and he would not amount to much with that path. They enjoyed his

food but never respected his path, so he found it hard to believe that there'd be a whole kingdom built exactly for what he had been ridiculed for, all his life.

Despite how preposterous he thought of it, he could not silence the voice in his head,

"What if that place really existed and it wasn't the rumblings of someone who had drunk too much 4,000-year-old yellow clam wine."

That place would be something beyond his wildest dreams. Hasn't he always been dreaming about finding just another person to have a cooking dao discussion with, just like how the alchemists in town would compare notes at times? Finding others, just like him who had a fervent passion for cooking, mentors to learn from, different paths to explore...A kingdom built for chefs was exactly that, an answer to his desires and more.

Once that thought took root in his heart, he couldn't erase it. He used whatever spirit stones he had saved over the years to find out if such a place really existed. After two months, he finally found the answer he wanted, that place really did exist and has been in existence for at least 100 years.

The day he found out, he wept in euphoria and endless joy because at that moment he felt it, he wasn't alone and he wasn't wrong for pursuing cooking. There was a kingdom filled with thousands and thousands of people who shared the same belief as he did.

From that day he resolved himself to move there along with his wife and three children. The place was far and he was too weak to complete the journey alone, so he saved up for five years and finally had enough to hire a decent mercenary organization to escort him there.

The journey itself took almost one year but finally, he reached it, the object of his dreams, the White Baobab Kingdom, the land of chefs. Just like Yang Qing, he too got captivated by the aroma that was leaking out of the kingdom even when one was miles away.

Chapter 217 [Bonus]Journey That Began With A Scrambled Egg

If he had any doubts before that, it was erased completely by that welcoming smell. When they reached the border, the mercenary organization they had hired, parted ways with them upon the completion of their mission. The eighth stage qi refinement cultivator thanked them and even paid them a little extra for all that they had done for them, to get them here in one piece.

Who would have expected that the moment they parted ways with the mercenary organization, he'd get attacked a few minutes later? The high of reaching his dream place got ruthlessly smashed down. In that moment, when the bandit was about to cleave him in half with his axe, for a brief second he thought maybe he was wrong and being an alchemist would have been better for him. He was about to die along with his family because he couldn't let go of cooking.

But here he was, alive and in the White Baobab Kingdom. He didn't quite know how to feel after the experience he had. Does he stay and continue on or does he take the experience he just had as a warning sign to change paths?

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"What is the one food you've always liked cooking ever since you were a child?"

Just when he was lost in his thoughts, he saw a young man with green hair standing in front of him with a kind smile. For some reason unbeknownst to him, he felt some sort of affinity to the person.

That feeling has appeared to him four times in his entire life, that's with the green-haired man standing in front of him being put into account. The feeling seemed to follow no pattern, rhyme, or reason. Once was when he was a kid and there was a purple cat that had snuck into his courtyard when he was experimenting with a scrambled egg recipe. He got that feeling from the purple cat which to this date, he always felt that cat wasn't normal, he didn't know why, just instinct.

The second time it happened was with his wife when she came in as a customer the first time when he had just started up his restaurant, the third time was with the customer who had told him about the White Baobab Kingdom, and now with the green-haired youth standing in front of him.

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"If I had to choose one, it would be scrambled eggs with tomatoes," he answered on reflex.

"Oh, I love scrambled eggs. There's something about it, no matter how much time passes by, one would always enjoy it, whether you are a baby, youth, or old. It's a timeless food and one can make many

variations to it, so you can always surprise yourself..." the green-haired youth rapped on enthusiastically about scrambled eggs and the various neat tricks he has added to his, over the years.

The eighth qi refinement cultivator who had been heavy-hearted about what to do next, got sucked into the rhythm of the conversation about scrambled eggs and the enthusiasm of the green-haired youth, that he too started sharing his own experiences.

Within a few minutes, people who were complete strangers to each other were patting each other's backs as they laughed and talked with enthusiasm. At some point their discussion drew in another person, a slender, slightly mature lady with red hair holding a butcher's knife in her hands joined in on the conversation at some point. As time progressed, the crowd in the discussion group kept growing.

After fifteen minutes the crowd's number had grown to 12 people enthusiastically discussing different food recipes, their experiences; the good ones and the embarrassing ones while trading laughs.

In between those laughs, a makeshift barbeque was prepared by some members of the crowd. The green-haired youth slowly disappeared to the background without the eighth stage qi refinement cultivator noticing, as he was too engrossed in admiring the preparation of sweet and sour spare ribs, by one of the members.

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"Longwei, it seems you have snagged another talent. Maybe I should quit the Order and just move here permanently." Yang Qing seemed like he was talking to himself as he sat atop Ellie while staring down at the small crowd below.

"I've told you over a hundred times that you should just move here, but you're always harping on about duty, justice, honor, and all the other values that definitely are just made-up excuses.

Feng Xin told me the real reason when he was last here. Qing how can you be so cowardly and you even have the cheek to call yourself the unrivaled spear of the Order? How can someone be so shameless?"

A grey vined crane suddenly appeared in front of Yang Qing, like it had shimmered out of thin air. There was a tall slender handsome young man seated atop it and ahead of him were dozens of plates filled with different kinds of dishes from poultry to beef, to seafood, to vegetable and soup dishes.

He currently had a bowl of soft noodles and boiled eggs in his hands that he was gently slurping away.

"Are you even going to share, you bastard?" Yang Qing asked with greed flashing in his eyes.

"Only if you have something of trade," the young man gingerly answered.

"Don't I get anything for helping you recruit a new member? He may end up being something special in the future," Yang Qing said as his gaze fell on a young blue-haired man who was nodding his head like a young chick, as he listened to some person who was cooking next to him. The blue-haired man was the eighth stage qi refinement realm cultivator that he had just been conversing with about scrambled eggs.

"I have to agree, there is something peculiar about him which I can't quite place,, it's almost ethereal. I think it must be the same for them, though theirs might be different than ours," said the young man as he took a bite of the boiled egg in his noodle soup.

"I wonder what interesting foods he will create," both Yang Qing and the young man simultaneously said as their gazes fell on the blue-haired young man.

They didn't know it yet, but a thousand years later that blue-haired young man became one of the premier cultivators to prove their dao through cooking and ended up becoming a soul formation expert.

When asked how he reached the heights he reached, his response was, "It started with scrambled eggs". This was why even his daoist name when he became a soul formation expert, was ' Daoist golden way scrambled eggs'.

Chapter 218 Finishing The Evaluations In The Northern Quadrant

"Have you had everything set up?" Yang Qing asked, directing the question to the young man who had just finished up with the noodles and was moving on to a stir-fried mix of vegetables.

"Mmmh," the man nodded as he savored the crunchy flavor of his festivals.

"And?" Yang Qing impatiently asked. His stomach grumbled immediately after asking the question, which drew laughter from the young man.

"They're all at the square of the vegetable and soup street. You're in luck, I told them to prepare something for you for their evaluations," the young man offhandedly said as he took another vegetable with his chopsticks.

"Do you think I'm judging a food competition," Yang Qing muttered under his breath. Though he said that, internally he was ecstatic. He'd get to sample a lot of different dishes.

The organizations being evaluated within the White Baobab Kingdom were 50. The majority of the organizations being evaluated were restaurants, while the remaining few were organizations that had an indirect relation to it, such as merchant stores that dealt in the supply of food ingredients.

There were no sects being evaluated within his list since it was a rarity for a sect to startup in the White Baobab Kingdom. The White Baobab Kingdom gave priority to restaurants and they also didn't have that much land to give.

In the whole kingdom, there were only two sects. They were both rank 4 sects, but were at the lower end of the spectrum when it came to rank 4 organizations. The only reason they were allowed to settle in the kingdom was because as per their terms of settlement, they agreed to act as buffers for the kingdom.

They were allocated lands that were at the border of the kingdom, more specifically the borders that the kingdom shared with organizations that they had poor relationships with.

Those two sects could develop and recruit however they wanted within the kingdom and did not have to pay tribute, but in exchange for being allowed to settle within the White Baobab Kingdom, they had to keep an eye on the border. Should an attack happen, they were to do all they could, to stall for time before the reinforcements from the palace came.

The king was also a bit lax on that decree since he allowed them to give up should the enemy be multiple levels above their capacity to handle.

Despite not being cooking-based organizations, other than the king and the party that he had when he was formulating the kingdom, these two sects could be considered the oldest organizations within the White Baobab Kingdom. They have been there for close to 150 years and have embedded themselves into the culture of the Kingdom.

The White Baobab Kingdom may not be able to compare to other well-established rank 4 organizations in terms of overall power scale, despite having a quasi-palace realm cultivator, but it was one of the most close-knit kingdoms Yang Qing has ever been to.

As a young kingdom, that was one of the most fundamental things it could have to help propel it forward. Yang Qing couldn't help but look forward to the day it finally bloomed into a top-tier kingdom.

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As Yang Qing was daydreaming about how many restaurants the White Baobab Kingdom would have if it became a top-tier powerhouse, the young man led him to the square of the vegetable and soup street.

True to its status as a cooking-based kingdom, the streets and the arrangement of the kingdom were done according to a type of dish. For ease of arrangement and planning, organizations that specialized in a particular type of food were all placed in the same area and that area was named after the food they specialized in.

It made things easier in terms of navigation by customers and also for new chefs and even proper planning. Merchants who dealt in a particular ingredient would know which street they could best serve.

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It wasn't long before they arrived above the vegetable and soup street. All the buildings were at least four stories. They were narrowly shaped and had a tiny distance between each other. However, despite the compact nature, the buildings were all meticulously arranged and their designs were impeccable, one would think they were transformed out of a painting.

They all had different designs and colors to them that helped maintain their own individuality but still melded well with each other. The roads were narrow and virtually no carriages could be seen on the roads. Swarms of cultivators all over the street could be seen walking to and from the buildings.

To maximize space usage and minimize congestion, the use of carriages and terrestrial spirit beasts was forbidden within the streets of the White Baobab Kingdom, but the use of avian spirit beasts was allowed. The rules applied to everyone within the kingdom, even the king himself, who was the young man accompanying Yang Qing to the vegetable and soup square.

Despite having to walk from street to street, the swarms of crowds below didn't seem to mind it. They all had joyous excited faces to them, while others had looks of contentment. Most of those who came to White Baobab Kingdom, did so because of their desire and passion for food. Everything else was immaterial compared to it.

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"There they are," the young man on the yellow vine crane said as he pointed toward a well-arranged party by the square.

"This guy, he really arranged it like a food judging competition," thought Yang Qing as he wryly smiled at the arrangement he was seeing.

The organizations he was to evaluate were split into two sides each standing behind a long table that was partitioned with a small board that separated one organization from the next, and above them were banners with their organization's name.

The arrangement looked like the table was partitioned into small stalls. On the table were various dishes. There was a small group of four people within those tables that didn't have a dish on their makeshift stalls. Yang Qing guessed they were merchant organizations based on the awkward looks they kept exchanging because of the arrangement that made them stick out like a sore thumb.

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"Did you have to put them like that?" Yang Qing asked in exasperation. The young man carelessly shrugged in response.

Yang Qing sighed as he decided to get on with it. He jumped off Ellie's back and gently landed at the center of the square, the young man landed with him.

Even though he was the king of the White Baobab Kingdom, the gasps of awe along with other expected reactions one would expect when a king suddenly made an appearance, were completely absent, either from those walking by or the members of the organizations about to be evaluated. They all seemed rather casual to his presence, in a more genial sense. In fact, it was Yang Qing who made them a bit tense, compared to their king.

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Yang Qing immediately started with his explanation of the evaluation procedures like usual, before he officially began with the evaluations. He started off with the merchant organizations much to their relief, who couldn't wait to get this over and done with.

Once he finished with them, he moved on to the chefs where he took his sweet time evaluating, while thoroughly sampling their dishes. He along with the king, cleaned out every dish and pot they passed by. The evaluation which should have taken him four hours to complete, took him six hours.

In that time, Ma Yuan had already woken up at some point and joined them in their sampling evaluations.

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"Longwei, thanks for your help," said Yang Qing as he handed the young man to his left a basket with five snow peaches, a gourd filled with the hundred-leaf sugarcane wine, Yi Jie had made the other day.

"No problem, Qing," Longwei replied as he excitedly stored away the wine and snow peaches in his storage ring.

"Your ceremony should be in a few days, right?" asked Longwei.

"Mmmh, it'll be in two days to be exact," said Yang Qing as he did a mental calculation on the remaining time till his palace court promotion ceremony.

"You better bring something decent as a congratulatory gift by the way," he added.

"You think I'm as stingy as you, who gifted me a rock in celebration of the 350th anniversary of the kingdom," said Longwei in displeasure.

"It was meant to be symbolic, besides that rock cost me over 100 high-grade spirit stones and is not as useless as it seems. It affects the luck of an area, the scale is small but the effect is very much real. But If you don't want it, you can always return it back to me. With the way things are shaping up for me, I feel I'll need all the luck I can get," said Yang Qing with a hint of worry in his tone.

"Even though I don't believe you, I think I'll hold onto it. Well Qing, I won't be seeing you off as I have stately matters to attend to," said Longwei as he took a greedy sniff in the air.

"Sure, sure, I'll leave you to it," Yang Qing mockingly said.

"See you in three days Qing, I can't wait to sample Master Jiang Fu's oolong tea again. I wonder how much improvement he has made since last I was there."

"Sorry to disappoint, but Jiang Fu went into closed-door cultivation a few days ago in preparation to break through to the palace realm. It may be quite some time before he comes back," Yang Qing somberly said as he remembered there were still certain matters tied to him that involved Meng Chao.

"Whaaat?!!!! There goes my whole reason for coming," Longwei dispiritedly said. His shoulders even slumped as his eyes turned lifeless.

"Even though Jiang Fu won't be there, there's still Qi Shan who has made tremendous improvements in her dishes, it won't be long before she reaches Jiang Fu's level,"

"Really?!!" Longmei hurriedly grabbed Yang Qing by his shoulders in all the excitement.

"Yes," Yang Qing said as he forcibly pried Longmei's hands from his shoulders in displeasure.

"Also, I'll have you know, Feng Xin brought back something from the green fog region, a green flowered babirusa.

We barbecued a piece of it a few days ago and Longmei, the taste was beyond any pork I've ever tasted. If you want to have a taste, make sure you bring something of 'equal value'." Yang Qing smugly said as a cunning glint flashed in his eyes.

He left with Ellie and Ma Yuan immediately after making that statement leaving Longmei in a mumbling stupor. He kept mumbling 'green flowered babirusa' over and over as he walked aimlessly. Those around him ignored him as it wasn't the first time he acted like that.

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Skies above the White Baobab Kingdom.

"That will teach you to extort me all the time. I'll make sure you pay it all back, in kind. Hehe my good friend Longmei, make sure you bring something worthwhile," Yang Qing muttered as he rubbed his palms together with an evil smile appearing on his face.

Ma Yuan who had prepared himself to share the backstory of his circumstances found himself flinching and hesitating when he saw Yang Qing's expression.

"He looks like a bandit's bandit," Ma Yuan thought.

Chapter 219 Ma Yuan's Past (1)

"What's wrong?" asked Yang Qing when he noticed the weird look Ma Yuan was giving him.

"Nothing," said Ma Yuan who cleared his throat awkwardly immediately after.

"Okay.....So about this shard."

Yang Qing not giving Ma Yuan's odd behavior too much thought, took out the shard he had gotten from him.

"While the shard isn't enough by itself to shed a complete light on the matter, it does provide some useful insights nonetheless," said Yang Qing as his whole visage turned into the pure white look he had when he confronted the member Dark Helminth Ghost sect.

"Based on the energy waves, the art used on you is atleast at the blue grade tier. As for the strength of the perpetrator, while I can't tell much due to the degradation it has suffered over the years, I can still detect tiny hints of Dao markings on it.

Your attacker at the very least must be someone at the quasi-palace realm or even if they are not, they have enough foundations to make that leap.

In terms of nature, while it's a yin-based technique, I don't know why, but I feel something a tad bit sinister in its intrinsic nature, It has a firm rigidity to it, which is something not typically seen in Yin-based arts. They are usually fluid and soft.

Its lethality is pretty decent. You're lucky to have kept your life, Ma Yuan. If your assailant wanted to, they'd have killed you within ten breaths if they wanted to.

I wonder why they kept you alive though considering it doesn't seem like you know their identities?" Yang Qing asked with a quizzical expression as he continued on with his scan of the shard.

Ma Yuan's expression turned dark at Yang Qing's question. Even if he had already resolved to open up, he still found himself struggling with it. He would rather drown himself in the cold yin lake again rather than relive the day he lost his wife and daughter.

Since their disappearance, he wished he could forget that dreadful day, but no matter how much he wished so, he couldn't do it. The event had left an indelible impression on him. That day was a source of his greatest torment, but it was also his only tether to his wife and daughter. If he was to ever find them,

he needed to vividly remember the clues of that day with extreme clarity no matter how much it broke him to do so.

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"I was spared on account of my wife," Ma Yuan bitterly said as he ruefully smiled.

"Down to the last minute, she was still looking out for me "

Ma Yuan's gaze turned unclear as he seemed to zone out.

Luckily, unlike before, it didn't take him long to recollect himself.

"Judge Yang Qing, could I have a cup of the spring water rice wine, if you don't mind?" Ma Yuan gently asked.

Yang Qing silently took out the wine gourd and poured him a cup. Ma Yuan downed the wine immediately as Yang Qing poured him another.

It was only after he had three cups, did Ma Yuan continue on with his tale.

"I met my wife, Fei'er about 18 years ago. She found me half dead in some mysterious ruins I stumbled onto in my attempts at searching for opportunities to increase my strength and I was also on the run at the time.

I was born an orphan and had no backing.

I managed to step on the road of cultivation by some stroke of fortune when my friends and I stumbled into the abode of some cultivator who had long passed away and left an inheritance legacy behind, along with some trials for his would-be successor.

After a bitter struggle, only I managed to pass through the trials that were set. It was thanks to the sacrifice of my friends that I was able to reach the end.

I don't know if it's because too much time had passed by and thus degraded some of the functions and materials of the abode, but the inheritance I got after all that was incomplete. It was only able to push me to the peak of the foundation establishment realm.

However, whatever I got I, I'm still thankful for it since I was able to refine a gold body and even create blue-grade pillars because of it. Now that I think about it, I can't help but wonder if I got the complete thing, maybe just maybe I may have had the power to save my wife and daughter..," Ma Yuan dispiritedly said.

Yang Qing couldn't help but have a look of curiosity towards what type of inheritance Ma Yuan got from that abode. If just a portion of it was able to turn someone who had no cultivation or guidance for that matter, into a cultivator with a gold body and blue-grade pillars, what about the complete thing? The owner of that abode may have been some powerhouse.

However, despite his curiosity and interest in different cultivation arts, Yang Qing knew it wasn't the time or place for that.

It looked like it took Ma Yuan all he had to calmly narrate his tale. Yang Qing felt it would be rude of him to interject just to satisfy his own curiosity.

"Once I finished gaining the inheritance, all the protection mechanisms in the abode disappeared. A few cultivators from a sect close by noticed the commotion and came by. A fight soon broke out, but with the inheritance I got, I easily took care of them.

However, that dispute ended up drawing the ire of their entire sect which was a rank 4 sect. For the next 10 years, I lived on the edge of death and it turned out to be a blessing in disguise for me since it helped me internalize more of the Inheritance and make it mine. In the end, I managed to break through to the core formation realm and took care of a few of the pursuers.

When that sect realized I had grown in strength, they sent their stronger elders after me. I was all too glad for it since in my eyes they were nothing more than whetstones to help me hone myself.

I can't believe how arrogant I was back then," Ma Yuan said as he chuckled. Unlike the earlier laughs, this was the only one that seemed light-hearted like he looked fondly at those memories.

"Needless to say my arrogant words and actions back then finally drew the attention of their sect master and two supreme elders who were all in the later stages of the core formation realm.

I run as far as I could in the hopes of increasing my strength and finding a safe haven, which led me to that mysterious realm Fei'er found me in. I came into that realm with serious injuries which only got more severe during my exposure to the dangers in that realm.

When Fei'er found me, I was half dead and unconscious at the time. She nursed me back to health. I remember waking up to this cold-looking jade-faced beauty with a deadpan expression using all sorts of precious herbs on me.

I thought it was an illusion at the time or some form of attack from the realm, which led me to attack her. She swiftly knocked me out," said Ma Yuan as he grinned foolishly, as he carefully patted the back of his head like there was some existing injury there.

"After that, I stubbornly stuck close to her in my attempts at trying to pay her back for saving my life. I didn't know it at the time but she was multiple levels stronger than me, so whatever help I could give her was little. But that didn't deter me one bit as I had resolved myself to pay her back and it also didn't hurt that she was the most beautiful woman I ever saw.

She was averse to my presence at first and I ended up suffering a few beatings for it, which she'd later nurse. But after three years the cold-faced woman with no other facial expressions other than furrowed brows, and horrible conversational skills, finally warmed up to me and we got married.

In the third year since our meeting, we had a beautiful daughter whom we named Ma Ling. She had her mother's beauty but luckily she got my sense of interpersonal skills, otherwise, I'd worry for her.

I got happiness from something I never knew I could get or needed, a family. The next eight years that followed were honestly the happiest years of my life, even breaking through cultivation realms didn't come close to what I felt and experienced in those eight years.

But all that changed during a certain night when a certain lady bashed into our home and took my wife and daughter, leaving me there helpless to stop it," said Ma Yuan as he clenched his fists so hard that his finger bones started creaking.

"I don't know why, no matter how many times I try, that woman's face is a blur to me. I only remember her voice and actions. When she barged in, I thought she was some random intruder but her interaction with my wife led me to believe that they knew each other.

She asked my wife to leave with her, which I don't know why, but the violent wife I knew turned docile at that moment and agreed to leave with her. Of course, I rejected the whole thing no matter how much Fei'er tried to convince me otherwise.

I attacked that woman without a second thought, only to find myself on the floor a second later with a shattered dantian and an overbearing chillness that seemed to suck the life out of me. That woman was well on her way to deliver a killing blow, but my wife pleaded for my life. Not once have I ever seen her shaken or in tears but at that moment she was, as she was begging for my life.

The woman agreed but she forcibly took my daughter in return. My wife tried to stop her but some weird script appeared on her body and she collapsed immediately after.

I could only helplessly watch on as they were whisked away. I vowed to find them, but finding them turned out to be harder than I expected. I spent everything I had, to dig out any information on the woman, but in seven years I haven't come close. She's still a mystery today as she was when she barged into our home and took my wife and daughter.

When you found me, I had already lost all hope of ever finding them, thus I decided to end the suffering by taking my life in that lake.

I have nothing to offer other than my life, please Judge Yang Qing I'm willing to trade it if you can help me find my wife and daughter," said Ma Yuan as he performed a double genuflection on Ellie's back.

Chapter 220 Ma Yuan's Past (2)

"You don't need to do that," Yang Qing said as he helped Ma Yuan whose body was mildly convulsing because of his current agitated state. Yang Qing used some of his qi along with a soul cultivation art, to help calm Ma Yuan's nerves as he was lifting him.

"The Order was founded for exactly these types of cases, so there's no need for you to do all these nor do we need an oath of servitude from you. Since you have presented your case, it's our responsibility from this moment forth to bring the case to a successful conclusion.

If you want to help us, there are various areas you can do so, the primary one being on the case itself.

As a matter of fact, there are a few areas that you could help shed a light on," said Yang Qing as he poured Ma Yuan another cup of the spring water rice wine.

"Thanks," Ma Yuan softly said as he grabbed the wine urn. His hands were trembling as he picked up the urn.

"If there's anything you need, please feel free to ask Judge Yang Qing. I'm willing to do anything that I can, to help find my wife and daughter," said Ma Yuan.

"There are a few areas I'll need clarification on, first it's the woman who barged into your home and took your wife and daughter. You said she was blurry, the blurriness, did it seem to appear suddenly out of the blue or did it seem like it was ever present?" asked Yang Qing as he took a few light brown incense sticks from his storage ring.

"I'm not too sure because I was too agitated at the time that I barely concentrated on it. Let me see..." Ma Yuan closed furrowed his brow as he closed his eyes trying to remember the details Yang Qing was asking about.

"You can start the recollection from what you did that day all the way leading to that point. It will be easier on your mind that way. I'll also be using incense sticks from a 20,000-year-old spirit-strengthening morning dew Yew wood. It will help in strengthening your spiritual consciousness especially if it was forcibly tampered with," said Yang Qing as he lit four of the seven light brown incense sticks, he had taken out of the storage ring.

"So what happened that day?" Yang Qing's voice had a bit of ethereal mystical quality to it. He had strengthened his voice with his soul to help Ma Yuan in his recollection.

If his memories were forcibly tampered with, Ma Yuan's attempt at remembering those events carried an inherent risk to them which would result in an injury to his mental sea. Yang Qing's voice had a special soul art attached to it, which acted as a buffer in Ma Yuan's mental sea.

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The impact of Yang Qing's voice seemed to have dragged Ma Yuan into the memory of that day. The memory appeared in his mind like a scene from a recording talisman and he was watching the events in the third person.

"We started the day like usual; Fei'er guided our daughter in her cultivation, as per the morning routine while I was working on the garden.

She may have zero people skills, but she had talent when it came to comprehension, which made her a better tutor than I.

I on the other hand worked in the garden since the inheritance I got, did give me a bit of knowledge and skill in the growth and care of spiritual plants and alchemy.

After the training, we had a meal together, then went to the town's market to offload some of the herbs I had, while we bought a few things for our cultivation.

We came back home late in the afternoon. My wife and I both went to our respective cultivation chambers to cultivate and we left Ling'er to watch the house.

We finished our cultivation session in the early stages of the night. I prepared a quick meal for us after that.

We then went on to set the table after everything had been prepared, huh, Fei'er seems shocked," said Ma Yuan.

The spectating version of himself moved closer to his wife as he scrutinized her face with sorrow and surprise in his eye. In that scene, Fei'er had her pupils shrink in surprise and then she hurriedly masked it.

The spectating Ma Yuan wasn't too sure, but he saw a look of melancholy and regret flash in her eyes during that brief second as her gaze fell on both Ma Yuan and their daughter who were trading laughs at the time.

"It looks like she detected it before it all happened. But how?" wondered Ma Yuan with a lost look as his gaze fell on his wife. It was then that he noticed something that made his pupils shrink.

His wife, Fei, was holding onto something, it was a small octagon-shaped object that looked like it was made out of ice crystal. Even at a glance, Ma Yuan knew exactly what it was, it was the controlling disc for the formation array of their house.

He didn't know much about formation arrays and the one in their house had been set by his wife and he and his daughter were each given a similar-looking disc to help control the formation. From what he could remember when his wife set the whole thing up, she said it was strong enough to defend against a 10th-stage core formation expert.

Ma Yuan remembered how amazed he was when she said that since his wife was just at the seventh stage of the core formation realm at the time. Creating a formation that could stop a cultivator a few minor levels above her, showed how skilled she was in formation arrays. Ma Yuan didn't suspect she was lying or bragging because the woman had zero social skills to pull either. He even wondered at times, if she had even ever told a lie.

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"Fei'er, why did you let her in?" Ma Yuan wondered as he saw her use the disc to shut off the arrays protecting the house. He was also confused about why he couldn't remember some of the things that happened that day. Some of the things he saw right now felt completely new to him.

He may have had his cultivation crippled, but he still had the body and senses of a core formation expert including the mental sea and spiritual sense of one. He could remember things that happened 30 years

ago with so much detail as if it had happened at that exact moment, however, he seemed to have memory gaps from something that happened just 7 years ago.

He couldn't understand why since the woman who attacked them, hadn't even shown up yet.

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"Ma Yuan, what happened next?" Yang Qing's gentle-sounding voice appeared in Ma Yuan's mind. He had gone silent in his narration from the moment he saw the shocked look in his wife's eyes.

"It looks like my wife may have detected the intruder much earlier than I thought and she even let her in by deactivating the formation array laid around the house," Ma Yuan said in disbelief.

"Why can't I remember any of it, despite being there," said Ma Yuan as he furrowed his brows.

"After the table was set we went on to share a meal together like we always did. If I had known this would be the last time together, I would have savored it more," Ma Yuan painfully said.

"Ten minutes passed like that, then Fei'er did something out of the norm. She kissed me on the forehead. She's come so far." Ma Yuan's spectating body and the real body that was seated in front of Yang Qing with closed eyes, both smiled at the same time.

"This?!!!!!"

Seconds later the smile turned to an O-shaped mouth of shock.

In the flashback, the spectating Ma Yuan saw a small rune appear on the forehead of the memory Ma Yuan. It appeared on the exact spot where his wife had just kissed him.

"Fei'er what's happening? What are you doing?" the spectating Ma Yuan couldn't help but ask the wife in his memory even though he wouldn't be able to get any response from her. His question echoed out in the real world too.

Fei'er looked at the memory Ma Yuan with a loving look before her earlier calm look returned and she went back to her sit leaving a silly grinning Ma Yuan who was boasting to his daughter, who giggled in return.

"This is when she barged in," Ma Yuan lifelessly said. At this point with how many surprising things had happened in the flashback, he wasn't even sure that memory was his or if it was even real. He couldn't make sense of it at all, especially where his wife was involved.

Just like he said, a lady in a pure white robe that had a crystal shine to it, barged into their house through the roof. However, something was different now, he could clearly see her image but none of that brought him any comfort because, in addition to seeing the barging lady's face, he also saw the rune in his forehead shine the moment the lady appeared. From what Ma Yuan could see, it had been triggered by his wife when she mumbled a silent incantation a few microseconds before the lady in white robes barged in.