

Daily life 61

Chapter 61 The Drumming Execution

Yang Qing still maintained his lazy posture with his head resting on his left palm with his right hand placed on the podium.

"The ten-second test starts now...ONE," Yang drummed his index finger once on the podium when he started the count. A sonic wave was produced from the collision and spread toward where the Shen brothers were.

The wolf embedded in their pavise shield transformed almost lifelike as it growled producing a black cloud that was part flame and part ashes as a white glow was produced that siphoned huge pools of qi from the surrounding. However, once the sonic wave clashed against the black ashed flame it was easily parted apart as it slammed itself against the shield.

The explosion that was expected to happen didn't happen. The attack seemed muffled or as if it had been absorbed by some spongy substance but what the Shen brothers experienced seemed to paint a different picture. There was nothing soft in that attack.

The moment the wave collided and disappeared into the shield they felt each of their bodies being bashed in by a massive force that carried the weight of a whole mountain with it. Worse was the force seemed to be evenly spread throughout their whole body. No body part was spared even down to their fingernails and even eyelashes.

CRACK

Part of the shield started creaking as a crack formed from the bottom spreading itself upwards. The Shen brothers were not far off from following the shield's footsteps as cracks started forming from their palms extending to their elbows. They madly roared and tried to block all the pain out as they pumped in more qi to the shield causing it to swell up and fill up the cracks formed on it. The dark cinder white wolf's head also increased in size to almost a meter in length with the dark ash flame it produced doubling in size and intensity. However, despite how big the flame was it couldn't even burn through the courtroom floor or even remotely affect the furniture in the courtroom. The furniture was made of 50,000-year-old red dragon wood which was a monarch-grade material one that was at the very top level as for the floor it was made of storm-devouring rock which could have no other properties other than its capacity to take a beating from an attack of any element as long as it doesn't exceed a peak palace realm cultivator's threshold of attack.

It was for this reason that Yang Qing didn't mind the Shen brothers using whatever means they had at their disposal. This was even without taking into account the various powerful arrays inscribed all over the courtroom just its base strength alone was capable enough to handle whatever attacks and effects that would be produced in those 10 seconds.

"TWO," Yang Qing softly said as he drummed his index finger once more. Just like before it easily parted the humungous dark ash flame and added fresh new cracks to the shield that were even deeper than before. The Shen brothers had their whole hands shredded with blood spraying out like a geyser. However this time the effects didn't just stop there as they soon started bleeding from their eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.

The sonic wave attack didn't just ravage their outside but their innards were also in disarray. Their bones were vibrating and they could feel cracks forming in them too just like the shield. Their organs kept being violently shaken out of position. Their dantian had visible cracks in them which was even more painful than all the other things that were going around their body combined.

The weirdest part was despite how terrifying and powerful the attack was, the Shen brothers had not moved a single inch from the position they had anchored themselves in. It wasn't that they forcefully maintained their position but it seemed like the attack was precisely controlled to destroy them inside and outside while rooting them in place. The force in the attack created some sort of tug-of-war balance in their bodies. They were ravaged back and forth, up and down, side to side which formed a perfect balance of rooting them in place whilst suffering the full brunt of the attack with no energy in the attack being wasted.

When cultivators fought there were several things that determined the winner of the fight. Other than cultivation realms, grade of the cultivation art there was another component that played an equally effective role when the two cultivators had the same realm and their cultivation arts were of a similar grade. This was the proficiency level of the cultivator with their cultivation arts. The higher their proficiency level the better the effects they can draw from their cultivation arts by ensuring no qi and no movements are wasted.

Those with a good level of proficiency can exhibit 70% of the might of a cultivation art and what counted as good proficiency wasn't only calculated from the execution of the attack but how much of the executed attack successfully attack the opponent and to what degree. If one executes 80% of the power of their cultivation art but only half of that power manages to strike the enemy his/her proficiency will only be at 40% despite their skill with cultivation art.

It's for this reason that the institute of the Order regularly arranges life-and-death duels between its students and the convicts who are serving a long sentences. Of course, they intervene whenever a student's life is in extreme peril but the experience from those fights still achieve their intended purpose. As for those with long sentences, they get to shave time off their sentences with the victories they get under their belts but it also comes with the risk of dying in those fights. Though the instructors do take care of all their injuries no matter how severe should they survive till the end of the fight.

"THREE," Yang Qing's soft voice echoed again which now sounded like the grim reaper's voice to the Shen brothers. Zhong Quan who was at the side in view of all this couldn't help but nervously gulp.

"Is this the power of just a single finger," he thought warily as he scooted a few steps away afraid some remnant of the attack would spill over to him.

The flame that was almost 3 meters in height and 4 meters in width had been reduced to a quarter of its earlier size.

The cracks over the shield were evenly spread all over and even some were wide enough to see the Shen brothers through them who were a bloody mess. They had disheveled appearances with blood-soaked robes that had spread all over their bodies even their hair was not spared the blood bath. No single part of them wasn't covered in blood as they heaved with labored breaths. Their earlier determined looks had been broken down into unveiled fear and deep wrenching pain. Their hands were even trembling though one couldn't tell if it was from fear or pain.

Just as Yang Qing was about to continue with his count someone fell over. It was Shen Ding the yellow-robed shifty-looking brother.

"It seems like I can't keep on any longer," he whispered as he passed out the moment his face hit the ground. Shen Shi glanced at him briefly as he bitterly smiled to himself as for Shen Tian he had a listless look in his eyes.

"FOUR," Yang Qing drummed his finger again. This time the moment the attack landed Shen Tian coughed out blood and dropped instantly to the floor unconscious without even a word leaving his lips. Shen Shi was the last brother standing. Just as Yang Qing was about to count again he paused midway.

"It seems he has passed out standing. What an interesting fella it almost seems like he was waiting for his brothers to pass out first so he could too," Yang Qing thought to himself with an amused smile as he stared at Shen Shi whose head was on the shield as his legs buckled into a kneeling position.

"Four seconds, they are much sturdier than I expected. I had them at 2 seconds what about you Yi Jie?" Mao Yunru suddenly asked with shining interest in her eyes just like a seasoned gambler.

"I had them at 3 they would have reached 5 seconds if they decided to use the tenfold cedar to strengthen their bodies instead of powering the dark cinder white wolf," Yi Jie said after some thought.

"I had them at 2 seconds just like sister Mao. They are pretty impressive for surviving without their dantians and meridians shattering. Their arrogance isn't completely unfounded, they must have had some fortuitous encounters to further temper their bodies because I don't see how they would have survived otherwise even with that sky rank shield," Zheng Hu added as he eyed the three brothers like some fascinating specimens

"Why did I end up with troublesome cases today? even the one I thought would be easy had twists. Did that old demon Lei Weiyuan have something to do with it?" Yang Qing held up his chin suspiciously increasingly believing his guess to be true as he flashed to where the three brothers were.

Chapter 62 62: Fingers Crossed Technique

Yang Qing injected a few streams of green colored into the three brothers. Minutes later they started groaning as the cracks on their skin healed at a visible speed to the naked eye. Once Yang Qing saw they were regaining consciousness and no longer in any mortal danger he stopped and just stood at the side.

Shen Tian was the first to regain consciousness followed by Shen Shi and finally Shen Ding. They were all groggy at first and could barely speak. Their bodies felt like they weighed a tonne and their innards were madly roaring in pain. Yang Qing may have healed but he only did enough to ensure their lives were not at risk and their dantians would not be crippled. As for the rest, the three Shen brothers would have to heal them naturally using the vitality accorded to core formation experts or using other means they had at their disposal.

As rogue cultivators who spent most of their lives flirting with danger and death, they must have measures in place to deal with the critical injuries they suffer such as potions, pills, or life-saving herbs and treasures. Yang Qing was still dissatisfied with them, he wasn't going to go out of his way and let the Shen brothers save up on their resources.

"Now that you're all awake your sentence begins from today," Yang Qing's cold voice sounded above the three brothers who were trying to get their bearing together while still in shock that they were alive. But when they remembered they barely survived four seconds their moods instantly plummeted.

Hearing Yang Qing's voice sent tremors all over their bodies as they nervously looked at him. Shen Tian couldn't help but lower his head in shame and fear. He had walked in here today believing his talent and experience would make him worthy to match up with anyone from the Order whose cultivators in his eyes were like sheltered birds. But the experience from seconds ago had given the three brothers a rude awakening. Whatever pride they had was smashed mercilessly by just a single finger.

"We couldn't even measure up to a single finger," Shen Tian thought as he shook his head in depreciation.

"Shen Shi, Shen Ding, and Shen Tian as agreed since you failed to remain conscious for 10 seconds during my attack 2 years has been added to your sentence and you will now be serving a 12-year sentence of hard labor.

As I mentioned earlier please ensure your work is of the highest quality. You will be regularly monitored and graded on the quality of your work and if you get anything less than 7/10 in your evaluations you will be penalized by having six more months added to your sentence.

Zheng Hu please take them to the penalties and rehabilitation offices and ask the chief administrator to decide the order of the labor they will start with and also the disbursement of personnel to monitor and evaluate them throughout their sentence.

Mao give Zheng Hu a copy of the proceedings so he can give it to the administrator.

Zhong Quan, Zheng Hu will guide you to the restitution and reclamation offices to get your owed dues. You can go with him as he heads to the penalties and rehabilitation office since they are just adjacent to each other.

With this I declare the case of Zhong Quan the owner and proprietor of the earthvine restaurant vs the Shen brothers in regards to the damage and compensation of the earthvine table closed," Yang said in quick succession as he brought the gavel down.

"Thank you judge Yang Qing," Zhong Quan said as he gave a respectful bow. Things had gone differently than he anticipated especially toward the end. Truly only those who had passed through the doors of the Order could know how fearsome this lurking beast is. He may have not looked down on the Order like the Shen brothers but he wasn't as wary of it as he was now.

"Truly this is a place packed to the brim with crouching tigers and hidden dragons," Zhong Quan thought.

The Shen brothers on the other hand looked pitiful. Their legs were wobbly like newborn calves. They had to support each other to have some semblance of balance. Mentally they were also shaken as they now had to serve hard labor for 12 years and they were not too sure if they would be alive till the end of the sentence. About the safest job for them was being miners but their sentencing schedule had them working in the mines for only 6 months.

"We can only do our best and take it a day at a time," Shen Shi said to his brothers who nodded agreeingly in return.

"Thank you judge Yang Qing for your favor of sparing our lives and even healing us despite our lack of manners. We will strive to work our sentence to the best of our abilities," Shen Shi said as he tried to bow that almost sent him and his brothers tumbling down.

"I sincerely hope at the end of your sentence you will be different people with a developed sense of prudence and alertness. Not everything you see is as you see it, and not everyone you see is as you see. Exercising an abundance of caution and prudence is sometimes a necessary tool if you want to live and grow to your fullest potential instead of being another could have been. Hopefully, your time at the Order during your sentencing will help expand your horizons and perspective," said Yang Qing as he sighed. Complacency and arrogance were dangers he had to warn himself against every single day and it was one of the high do not's of the institute. A lot of young inquisitors at the start when the Order was making strides and rising in power had their heads swollen in pride treating themselves as the special ones looking down on everyone else. The highest inquisitor mortality and even judges was during that period. It was one of the dark periods for the Order that the older cultivators had to undertake those roles to fill in the manpower gaps as the institute came up with a way to address that issue.

One of the methods was the life-and-death duels with the convicts. The convicts chosen for this role were among the best at combat and deviousness. Students that suffered at their hands couldn't help but be grounded by the experience. And the other method was the work programme where the students get to work in inns, and restaurants as servants and have their characters be secretly judged by

the judges during their time there. Even though the sense of conceitedness wasn't completely removed it had been drastically reduced as compared to before.

Zheng Hu escorted Zhong Quan and the Shen brothers out with the golden eagle phantasm still parched on his shoulder. Mao Yunru had also handed him a white jade talisman that had the recording of the court proceedings as the other copy was given to Yang Qing who sent it to the higher-ups using the array attached to his podium.

"Which case should I handle next? This day has just been one thing after another. Yi Jie cross your fingers with me so the next case becomes an easier one," Yang Qing said with a serious expression as he crossed his fingers in an attempt to break today's curse that he was still convinced was Lei Weiyuan's doing. He would not put it past him doing something that would result in him expending every last drop of qi for the Order.

Yi Jie ignored Yang Qing as he snorted in contempt. Though Yang Qing managed to notice a strange gleam in his eyes like that of someone gloating at another person's misfortune.

"Yi Jie you?!! Are you sure this is how you want to do things? blatantly mocking your boss. Fine if you cross your fingers I promise I'll diligently do $\frac{3}{4}$ of what Lei Weiyuan has in store for us later," Yang Qing said in concession.

"Three-quarters, you? The same conniving person I know," Yi Jie said derisively not buying it at all.

'Fine half I'll do half," Yang Qing said in embarrassment at being obviously called out in his lie. Yi Jie stared at him for a while seemingly trying to see through him,

"You better," Yi Jie said as he reluctantly crossed his fingers too.

"Mao Mao you too and before you say no remember you owe me," Yang Qing said as he gave a mercantile smile. Mao Yunru who was just about to refuse glared back at him before she too joined the curse-breaking bandwagon using the time-tested finger-crossing technique.

Chapter 63 63: Potential Of A Soft Life Case

Once Yang Qing was sufficiently satisfied they had used the technique for an appropriate duration he quickly started reading through the details for the next case he had decided upon. It was the case

between Wen Yingjie a rogue cultivator who was suing Tan Ping the owner of the falling meteor blacksmith shop. Tan Ping was accused of selling a defective top-grade sky rank weapon to Wen Yingjie.

"Wen Yingjie a peak core formation expert requisitioned a custom-made saber from the falling meteor blacksmith shop which is run by Tan Ping who is also a peak core formation expert though from the investigation of Luo Meili she had heard the owner was at the quasi palace stage.

The falling meteor blacksmith shop has been around for almost 10,000 years being passed down from father to son each generation. It has gained enormous popularity in the Thundercrane kingdom which is a rank 3 kingdom.

I can see that the royal family has been trying to get the Tan family to be their official royal blacksmith but have been turned down each generation. The only reason the royal family never retaliated for the rejection which may have seemed like a slap to the face was the pact made between the 5th generation king and the 4th generational head of the falling meteor shop at that time.

The details of the pact was the falling meteor blacksmith shop would give priority to the royal family when they made new creations and they would help arm the royal family with a certain quota of weapons every year however the royal family would provide the ingredients and the cost would be at market price. The falling meteor blacksmith shop in exchange would enjoy autonomy even from the royal family itself and should they face a disaster that they can't handle themselves the royal family would step in.

This pact has been in place for the past 4,000 years and has been faithfully upheld by each king and Tan family head.

With this kind of reputation, I find it hard that they would sell a faulty weapon. Being in existence for almost 10,000 years must mean they have been honing and improving their blacksmith skills for them to still be relevant and famous to this day. Luo Meili has even heard that the current generation owner Tan Ping may be one of the best among the masters who have headed the shop. His skills and talent far outshine the previous generational head.

Could there really be a problem with the saber or does the problem lie with the saber's owner Wen Yingjie but I can see Luo Meili note from her interactions with him that he seems like a relatively straightforward person with a sense of uprightness to him. Before he became a rogue cultivator he was a young general in a rank 3 kingdom however a problem occurred in his station that led to the death of a prince from that kingdom. Their family has been loyal to the crown for generations so the king in respect

to the service of the family spared his life but he was banished from that kingdom forever never to return. He has been living as a rogue cultivator ever since then and despite his great talent, he has never joined any sect, kingdom, or clan. Living in solitude seems to be some sort of penance and atonement for him.

That's quite some sense of responsibility he is carrying. From what I can tell this case might just be straightforward and easy to conclude," Yang Qing thought to himself as hope grew in his heart.

Yi Jie was already by the door calling in Wen Yingjie and the owner of the falling meteor blacksmith shop. Moments later Yi Jie walked in followed by a young man who seemed to be in his late 20s. He had a medium height and build with amber eyes and brown hair. His skin was deeply tanned. He had on black robes with the emblem of a falling blue meteor embroidered on it. His footsteps were steady like someone who had complete control of every single part of his body. Yang Qing could also detect that the qi flowing through the young man's body was like a boiling furnace. He assumed it was a result of the cultivation mantra the young man cultivated.

"He must have a unique physique to handle such tyrannical qi flowing around him. But who is he? From his robe, I can tell he is a member of the falling meteor blacksmith shop but his cultivation realm is only at the 10th stage of the foundation realm so he definitely isn't the owner," Yang Qing had a puzzled expression as he stared at the young man before looking over to the end of the entourage.

His eyesight fell on a lady who had dark green hair tied in a bun. Her hair was darker than Yang Qing's as it had hints of black to it. This color scheme translated even to her eyes as she had green-black eyes. She had a mature and gentle charm to her almost like an older sister to 5 younger brothers. Her beauty was breathtaking like spring water. Everything about her screamed gentleness and nurturing which was why the three well-polished bones which she used to hold her hair together in a bun really stood out. in direct contrast to her demeanor She had on robes that were half red and half blue.

Her name was Luo Meili and she was an inquisitor and the one in charge of this case. She noticed Yang Qing's gaze but responded with a gentle smile as she shook her head sideways as she pointed toward the young man.

"A stand-in huh?" Yang Qing thought to himself as he read Luo Meili's nonverbal cue. He quickly shook his head free of questions that were about to bubble on where the owner Tan Ping was but he decided to focus on the other party in this case.

There was a middle-aged man in his early forties right behind the young man. His hair was tied in a topknot with a few strands of greying white hair on his sides but they added a charm to him. His eyes were dark, deep, and tranquil but they hid a sense of sharpness and fluidity to them. He was slender and tall and had on grey robes that seemed they had just been worn today because of how straight and fitting they were. As for his aura, he seemed like a ramrod spear stabbed into a stone. He had the sharpness of a spear and the stability of a rock.

The entourage was soon in front of Yang Qing as Yi Jie made his way to his side.

Luo Meili calmly stepped forward as she gave a respectful bow with a grace that made the young man at the side gulp inadvertently with his ears reddening in embarrassment and shyness.

"Inquisitor Luo Meili presents rogue cultivator Wen Yingjie who has filed a suit against the falling meteor blacksmith shop for selling him a defective sky rank saber. However the owner Tan Ping is unable to avail himself for the proceedings due to extenuating circumstances and has thus his son Tan Delun will step in his place as his proxy," Luo Meili softly said

"What are the circumstances that made Owner Tan Ping unable to avail himself?" asked Yang Qing.

"He has been in secluded cultivation for the past 4 months and is at a critical juncture. I confirmed it myself and can attest it to be true. It is the reason this case has been brought to the Order. When Wen Yingjie went to the shop to forward his query Tan Ping was already in secluded cultivation and since his son, Tan Delun wasn't confident to resolve the matter and he doesn't know when his father will come out of seclusion he opted to bring the matter to the Order. Both parties willingly agreed to this and will submit fully to the deciding of the court," Luo Meili patiently explained as she stepped back.

"Thank you, Meili. Well then Wen Yingjie and owner Tan Delun I know Luo Meili has informed you both of what penalties you would suffer should you act in violation of the ruling or act in a conduct that breaches the articles guiding the whole court process. Are you sure you want to go through with it? There is still time for you to change your minds and decide to handle it yourselves?" Yang Qing gently asked. From what Yang Qing had experienced earlier with the Shen brothers he couldn't help but be prudent.

"On behalf of the falling meteor blacksmith shop and its 17th generation master I Tan Delun on the honor of the Tan name will abide by the ruling of the court," Tan Delun solemnly said with a booming voice that reverberated around the courtroom.

"I just like my young friend here do promise I will abide by the court rulings and proceedings whichever end it comes to I will gladly accept it. My name may not mean much but I Wen Yingjie value promises made as much as my own life," Wen Yingjie softly said. Even though his voice was soft everyone could feel the conviction in his voice.

Yang Qing nodded to them as inwardly he was extremely pleased.

"This may be a sail through soft life case. Finger crossing technique you have saved your faithful practitioner once again,"

Chapter 64 64: Tan Delun Takes The Stage

"Thank you both for your trust in the Order, I will do my best as the judge in this case to bring the case to a resolution that you both can find acceptable.

As I inform everyone who comes before me each of you will take turns presenting their side of things for me to get a clearer picture of the situation. I may also invite experts on the matter to provide additional information for my sake but also for yours.

When I have deemed I have gathered sufficient information I will then pass my ruling which will take immediate effect unless stated otherwise.

Well then, Tan Delun I think we should start with you first before we end with Wen Yingjie's testimony.

The floor is now yours," Yang gently said as he motioned for Tan Delun to begin.

"Thank.... You.... Judge... Yang Qing," Tan Delun said as his voice trembled. He had spent all his life behind the forge holding conversation with the refining materials but when it came to talking to people other than the regulars of the shop he usually struggled with new customers. It has been this way ever since he was a young kid and him being here in an unfamiliar setting set those feelings of nervousness into overdrive. The otherworldly beauties Mao Yunru and Luo Meili didn't make the situation any easier either in fact, one might argue they added fire into the easily nervous Tan Delun.

Yang Qing and the rest noticed all this and couldn't help but find Tan Delun's current state amusing. Mao Yunru tried to offer a comforting smile to him which only turned his skin redder than the furnace he was around in day in and day out.

"Ahem," Yang Qing gently coughed to force Tan Delun out of his stupor.

"Hehehe," Tan Delun nervously laughed as he rubbed his sweaty palms on his robes.

"As I said earlier my name is Tan Delun the 17th generation master of the falling meteors blacksmith shop however the shop is still under the leadership of my father Tan Ping the 16th generational master.

From our records, Master Wen Yingjie commissioned a custom-made saber from our shop. The order was made 9 months ago and it was my father who took up that commission. I already handed a copy of that record to elder sister Luo Meili.

As you can see from the record Master Wen Yingjie provided the materials he wanted for the saber to be made of. From the record, my dad also accepted some of those materials as payment for the commission of the job. The materials were; violet dusk metal, faceted oak, baleful jewel, orange frost deer horn, obsidian wyrms scale, a dangkang's tusk, and lastly falling aurora jade which was to be the main body of the saber.

All these are top grade sky rank ingredients and it was the reason my father accepted payment in the form of ingredients instead of spirit stones. After 3 months which is 6 months ago from today, my dad successfully crafted the saber which adopted the look of a willow leaf saber as you can see," Tan Delun explained. The moment he started talking shop all his earlier nervousness seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Luo Meili had handed the saber to Yang Qing for his examination as Tan Delun was explaining the details of the records which had been stored in the white jade talisman with the case details.

Yang Qing couldn't help but admire the saber in his hand. It was 44 inches long. It was sheathed in a black scabbard that had been decorated with images of golden vines with tiny leaves. Just from the workmanship of the blade's hilt which was pure white with some hint of orange most likely made from the orange frost deer horn and the scabbard he could tell the person who did this work poured his heart and soul into it.

He gently unsheathed the saber and was greeted with a smoothened, slender gently curving blade. It looked to be made of pure glass rather than metal. The blade was cloudy white with golden flashes of light flowing around the blade like something swimming from cloud to cloud. The blade's edge seemed blunt but a faint almost imperceptible thin violet coating wrapped itself onto the edge of the blade.

Yang Qing slid his slender finger across the blade as if to taste its sharpness which drew shocked looks from Wen Yingjie and Tan Delun. They both had seen firsthand how sharp that blade was. It could tear through low-grade sky rank metals or even an early-stage core formation expert as though it was cutting through butter. That was without even taking into account the violet coating that was as a result of the violet dusk metal used in the forging. It had deeply corrosive and destructive properties. If an early-stage core formation expert was cut by a weapon made from that metal even without considering the attacker's qi they would be left with an injury that would require months of seclusion to heal.

Even Wen Yingjie a peak core formation expert wasn't confident of passing his hand through the edge of the blade without risk of injury. The torn flesh they expected to see happen to Yang Qing never happened but what greeted them was a sight they wouldn't forget. Everywhere Yang Qing's finger passed sparks would be produced. It seemed like his finger was sharpening the blade with every movement.

"What an excellent blade even I'm tempted to have it in my arsenal. Yi Jie, here. I will be needing your expertise on this case." Yang Qing said as he sheathed the blade and tossed it to Yi Jie whose face briefly lit up when he caught sight of the saber before it went back to normal.

"Continue Owner Tan Delun," said Yang Qing.

It took a moment before Tan Delun collected his thoughts together and broke free from the waves of thoughts he was in from Yang Qing's brief display.

"Yes, as I said my dad finished the saber in three months and master Wen Yingjie was called to pick it up. He examined it with my dad and found it to have no issues and was more than pleased with it as he even gave my dad a few more materials as a token of thanks. He went his way after that and my dad went into closed-door cultivation that very day. He had reaped an enormous harvest from crafting that saber which gave him enough insights that he felt the barriers leading to the palace realm thin. My father has been stuck at the peak of core formation realm for almost a century that he almost gave up ever touching the palace realm in his lifetime. So when the opportunity came knocking he dropped everything else to the back burner and focused on breaking through.

He didn't give even the Thundercrane royal family a notice that he will be in seclusion and left all these troubles to me," Tan Delun said in an aggrieved expression towards the end.

"He has been in seclusion ever since then and this is the sixth month running. Master Wen Yingjie came back three months ago saying there was a problem with the saber but my father wasn't available to address the issue. The shop is handled by the two of us and he is the only one capable of making sky-rank weapons. So solving an issue affecting a sky-rank weapon is out of my pay grade.

I informed Wen Yingjie about my father's current situation which he was kind enough to understand and decided to wait for him to come out of his seclusion but we never expected even after three months he would still be shut in and we can't very well interrupt him as he is at a critical stage. Wen Yingjie was rather pressed on time with his matters and I couldn't help in as much as I wanted to so we decided to use an intermediary we could trust which was when we settled on the Order.

Judge Yang Qing we therefore humbly seek your guidance and help in this matter as I have nowhere to turn to with my dad out of commission and me being too inexperienced to handle the matter on my own," Tan Delun said as he bowed in humility.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sympathize with the young lad. He was thrown into the fire without time to even prepare or legs to stand on. Striving to ensure the legacy your predecessors spent their blood, sweat, and tears building doesn't collapse with you isn't an easy thing especially on someone as young as Tang Delun who was just a foundation realm expert now standing in at the helm of what is basically a top rank 4 organization with a widespread reputation especially among the core formation experts and other big shots and no one to turn to for help other than yourself. It would not be an easy burden to bear.

Wen Yingjie at the side couldn't help but sigh at this. If it was any other time he would have patiently waited even a year but he had a time-sensitive matter that he had to deal with at all costs and to increase his odds of success he needed a top-grade sky rank weapon at the very least.

Chapter 65 65: Grading System Of Craftsmen

"Don't worry Owner Tan Delun we will do all we can to assist both you and cultivator Wen Yingjie to bring this matter to a successful close. Cultivator Wen Yingjie if you may," Yang Qing said as he left the floor to Wen Yingjie to give his testimony.

Wen Yingjie cupped his fist in acknowledgment before he continued.

"I won't waste the court's precious by repeating some of the details as I can attest to the veracity of my little brother Tan Delun's statement in regards to the materials and also the arrangement I had with his father and everything that happened in between.

I have known the falling meteor blacksmith shop for quite a while now though I'm not a regular I've had a few pieces of equipment made by the owner of the shop Tan Ping. So I've personally experienced the quality of their work and it was the reason I was willing to entrust the commission of refining a customized saber for me to them.

After hashing out the details with Tan Ping which Tan Delun has elaborated on, Tan Ping called me three months later to come and inspect the saber and see if it was to my satisfaction. I had left him with additional ingredients so if there was a problem with the weapon, Tan Ping would work on it without charging me anything else.

The saber had more than exceeded my expectations from the craftsmanship to its quality. I've seen my fair share of high-grade sky rank weapons and I can confidently say the saber Tan Ping made is capable enough to stand with the best of them.

Pleased with the effort he put into making the saber I left the additional ingredients with him as a token of my thanks and left.

It was a few days almost a week in that I noticed a problem with the saber though I can't necessarily say it's a common problem. For some reason, the saber kept attracting lightning over. At first, I thought nothing of it and just chalked it up to a freak accident or the whims of mother nature.

However, this problem didn't go away and only continued to increase in intensity. I didn't notice it at first but after being almost struck a few times I realized it was the saber's doing. It would produce this humming sound every time there was a cloud overhead and lightning bolts would charge soon after. If it was regular lightning I would have ignored it but this lightning was different. For one it could hurt me though not as much but enough to leave some minor injuries.

Things got worse one time when I was trying to run away from the lightning that was trying to strike me when I felt the saber I don't know how but it anchored itself on the ground and refused to budge an inch no matter how much I tried to pull it. It kept drawing more lightning strikes to it for almost ten minutes before it cleared up. I honestly expected it to be destroyed in the bombardment but there it was still

standing and intact. I don't know why but I intuitively felt it had become different after being bathed in that lightning. Everything seemed normal but my instincts were telling me there was something different about though I could not tell what.

When I tried to pick it up once more this time it finally budged and I could easily pick it up. It was then that I decided to hurry back to the falling meteors blacksmith shop and inform Tan Ping of the weirdness of the saber. As a rogue cultivator, I'm often in perilous situations when sourcing for cultivation resources, and having the saber bring out unstable components such as the lightning or the weapon dislodging itself were things I couldn't afford happen to me on a job where a second of distraction or weakness could very well lead to my death.

When the saber behaved normally it was the perfect weapon the only issue I have is the weirdness surrounding it which I have no idea whether it will disappear on its own or will it get worse. I decided to err on the side of caution rather than find out.

But when I visited Tan Ping I found out he had already gone into seclusion to breakthrough. As for little brother Tan Delun, he tried to help but even he was stumped by the bizarre characteristics the saber was exhibiting so I decided to wait for his father to come out of seclusion. But despite staying for three months he never came out. If it was any other time I would have been willing to wait for even a year but I have a time-sensitive mission that I cannot postpone and I need as much firepower as I can get such as a high-grade sky rank weapon.

I would have traded the saber for another weapon as long as it was a high-grade sky rank weapon of a similar caliber to the saber but I felt it would be irresponsible of me to leave the saber with Tan Delun. If it invoked another lightning strike whilst in Tan Delun's possession in the best case he will be crippled in the worst case he would instantly die. The odds of the latter happening were much higher since those strikes have been increasing in power they are close to matching the attack of someone at the later stages of the core formation realm.

It was then we decided the best option was to settle the matter here as I didn't have the capital to buy another high-grade weapon and Tan Delun doesn't know any other person competent and trustworthy enough to consult on the matter.

Judge Yang Qing, it is my sincere hope you can help us with this. If possible I'd rather retain the saber, I'd hate to part with it. I humbly ask for your guidance," Wen Yingjie solemnly said with deep sincerity showing in his eyes.

"Hahahahahahaha well, Wen Yingjie you may be in luck one more than you could have ever imagined. Luckily you brought this matter to us rather than go someplace else especially other blacksmith shops or merchants with a keen eye for detail and who know their weapons well.

"Yi Jie you've detected it too right? I'm afraid without my monarch sense it would have gone unnoticed but from a seasoned blacksmith like yourself it would be as clear as day," Yang Qing said as his eyes glittered as he eyed the saber in Yi Jie's hands. Yi Jie was the same too as he even brought it close to his ears for further inspection.

"Mmmh...Explains why the owner went into seclusion immediately after. Successfully making something like this in just three months and it seems like he succeeded on the first try. It is the culmination of all he has learnt erupting in a single work. I'd like to exchange pointers with him. It's a nice saber," Yi Jie said as he eyed the saber with deep admiration which went opposite to his normal deadpan face or the occasional frustrated frowning face riddled with throbbing veins all courtesy of a certain green-haired judge.

Yang Qing's and Yi Jie's conversation drew in puzzled looks from both Wen Yingjie and Tan Delun who couldn't keep track of what was going on and why the duo looked at the saber like it was some sort of treasure.

"Before I fill you in on what you are wondering about I'd like first to introduce Yi Jie over here. He is an inquisitor well the head inquisitor of this court but he also has another title too and that is a blue-grade blacksmith. You should know what that means right? He can make monarch-rank weapons or equipment with the potential to reach that level," as Yang Qing explained this it drew shocked looks from Wen Yingjie and Tan Delun more so the latter. As a blacksmith, he knew how difficult it was to become a blue-grade blacksmith. How old was the guy? His father had been stuck at the orange grade even though he was touted as one of the best at that grade it was still no blue grade.

In the blue origin world blacksmiths, alchemists, and any other craftsman even beast trainers or formation array masters were classified into the following grade in ascending order: White, Red, Orange, Blue, Gold, and lastly Purple. Their grading followed the exact rankings followed by the types of pillars one formed in the foundation stage. With white being the lowest and purple being the highest though there have been rumors there is a level above a purple-grade craftsman as for what it is no one knows except people at that level.

In Yi Jie's case being a blue-grade blacksmith meant he could create weapons that had monarch-rank potential or were at that level. A monarch rank potential was direct equivalent to palace stage cultivation potential.

Craftsmanship followed a different evaluation as opposed to cultivation realms. Sometimes their grades as a craftsman never equated to their cultivation realm though in most cases those two went hand in hand but in special cases where skilled individuals were concerned it never did. For example, a core formation array master could build a formation array that could exhibit the power of a palace stage expert or a blacksmith that is able to create a weapon that is capable of exhibiting the attack of a palace realm expert even if it was just once. Yi Jie fell in this category he was a quasi-palace stage expert but he could craft weapons that either had palace rank power or one that were at that level though they would be low-grade.

However, there was another special class where people like Song Chuanli the chief craftsman fell. Their expertise was so profound that they could raise the ranks of artifacts solely on their dao alone as long as the necessary materials were there. Chief Chuanli was a gold-grade craftsman despite being in the same cultivation realm as Yi Jie. It was because of skilled craftsmen like them that the term artifact potential was born.

Chapter 66 66: Two Kinds Of Artifact Potential

"I told you his grade as a blacksmith in the spirit of transparency and also for your sakes so you will not doubt what he says next. And if doubt still exists after you hear his report, I am willing to write you an introductory note to some of the independent blacksmith shops we sometimes deal with.

With my referral, the consultation fee will most likely be waived or it will be given at a discounted rate. The shops have skilled craftsmen with most being at the blue grade so they too would be able to tell the issue with the saber in case you want a second opinion after this.

It's all up to you cultivator Wen Yingjie," said Yang Qing as he gently smiled.

"It's okay judge Yang Qing me coming here means I trust in the Order's judgment though I wouldn't mind the contacts of the blacksmith shops. Having the contacts of a few shops that the Order deems trustworthy wouldn't be a bad thing to have especially in my line where every bit of information matters," Wen Yingjie said as he awkwardly smiled. He had decided to thicken his face and ask for that letter. He knew for those shops to catch the eye of the Order they had to be at the top of their game and it would take someone like him an astronomical amount of luck and power just to get through the door. Yang Qing's letter would be some sort of cheat for him which he would gladly thicken his face to get.

"Hahahaha sure that can work too," Yang Qing said in amusement.

"Yi Jie if you would please," Yang Qing said disrupting Yi Jie in his more than 'normal' examination of the saber.

It took a minute before Yi Jie pulled himself back to reality and start sharing his insights.

"From the craftsmanship, I can tell the blacksmith did a great job to achieve a material balance. Every material used in making this saber was meshed together seamlessly to achieve a subtle balance to ensure their individual characteristics improve each other instead of one or two outshining and drowning the others.

One of the primary goals of a great craftsman is to bring the best out of all the ingredients used in making an artifact despite how insignificant the ingredient is to the whole artifact. A well-made artifact is when all the ingredient attributes are well represented and melding together and not overshadowing or restraining each other.

From the craftsmanship quality of this saber, I can tell the blacksmith managed to achieve it even if only barely. But achieving just this means he has taken a step towards a path that millions of craftsmen may never get the chance to tread on their whole lives.

Truly a piece of beauty. I remember when I made my first step on this journey how the world seemed to change...."

"Ahem, Yi Jie we are not here to hear you regal us on your journey as a blacksmith. Focus on the matter at hand. Tsk what a slimy hypocrite. Whenever I want to talk about my heroic tales he is the first one to interrupt me, and here he is trying to do the same thing. How thick must one's face be to do something like that after endlessly mocking someone for doing the exact same thing? Some people.." Yang Qing said derisively as he threw a mocking look at Yi Jie which left him embarrassed and gritting his teeth as he threw a vengeful look toward Yang Qing.

"Fine," He muttered forcefully under his breath.

"Umm cultivator Wen Yingjie I don't know how to say this but the judgement of your situation depends on how one looks at it. From my end, I take it as a positive but to others, you either have the worst luck or the best luck out there," Yi Jie said as he eyed Wen Yingjie as an intriguing specimen.

"Huh, what?" Wen Yingjie said as he couldn't quite follow Yi Jie's words.

"How do I explain this?....as you know to be a blue-grade craftsman one has to be capable of making a monarch-rank artifact the other way which actually relates to your saber is to make an artifact with the potential to be a monarch-rank artifact.

When refining an artifact despite using subpar materials, a craftsman can be so gifted in his/her field that they are able to elevate the potential of that artifact based on their pure skill alone. Such an artifact usually needs just a single high-grade material to elevate that artifact to realize its potential. The craftsman will have already crafted the artifact with this idea in place. The artifact in simpler terms is usually an unfinished product with designs and accommodations already in place to elevate its rank. All that is missing is the high-grade material to make it complete.

Then there is another special kind of artifact potential which is the one your saber currently falls under. It doesn't need a higher-grade material to elevate it.

Your saber is at the absolute peak of high-grade sky rank weapons. However, it is different from other sky-rank weapons and that difference is what gave it a monarch rank potential. Your saber has birthed a pseudo sentience. It's trying to break its cocoon as a still weapon and birth a natal spirit.

The reason I said you either had the worst luck or the best luck is for some weird work of fate you kept moving to areas where people were about to undergo their tribulations.

Every artifact that bears sentience undergoes a lightning tribulation however your saber is in a special state where it is existent and isn't. It's in some sort of limbo not sure how to move forward. Normally an artifact can birth a spirit right off the bat the moment it's completed but this usually only happens when the artifacts are made by gold-grade and purple-grade craftsmen. Then there are those artifacts that have the potential of awakening but it requires time and it's a long and arduous journey at that. Most artifacts end up awakening their sentience this way. However, you moving around places with tribulation may have 'woken' your weapon from slumber before it understood what is happening. Those tribulations were like loud rumblings to it that breached the door that should have taken years to just nudge.

However, the spirit was not completely awake or even a complete spirit. It is why the tribulations were not that powerful in the beginning because it's in a pseudo spirit state. If you moved in areas with no one undergoing their tribulation it would have gone to sleep but in every single place you passed through there seemed to be someone passing through their tribulation which kept triggering the pseudo

spirit more and more till it mushroomed to the situation you experienced last where it forcefully anchored itself to the ground.

Wen Yingjie you must have crazy luck," Yi Jie said as he chuckled before continuing on.

"Through the strikes, it intuitively realized the lightning is making it stronger which is why it forcefully anchored itself before. It doesn't know any better and is doing things in pure intuition like a baby crawling. However, those were not its true tribulation trial and it was just leeching off others so its lethality wasn't that high, and the benefits that come along with a true tribulation. Even though there was a gradual change it still hasn't awoken completely yet which is a real danger. It was your luck that you managed to awaken a part of its sentience prematurely but it's also your misfortune because when it attracts another tribulation from someone else it will trigger its real tribulation because of the excitable state it is in currently.

The real strike in its current state will obliterate it completely before it has a chance to grow. It's not strong enough to withstand a real tribulation trial, not as a pseudo spirit with less than a year since its creation," Yi Jie said as he sighed towards the end.

Wen Yingjie had his eyes wide open as he couldn't believe what he just heard. He never expected all the things he had been experiencing was the awakening of his weapon. He thought it was one of the ingredients used in the weapon that was a natural lightning attractor. He was elated when he heard Yi Jie mention it was awakening but then he was plunged into the pits of despair from learning of its impending doom.

"So dad was able to..." tears were building up in Tan Delun's eyes as he repeated what he had heard over and over. It has been the lifelong ambition of the Tan generational masters to one day create a weapon that birthed a spirit. In over 10,000 years there wasn't a single success. But today...

In his excitement, he had even blanked out everything else Yi Jie said after mentioning the weapon his father had crafted awakening its spirit which was a blessing in disguise. He couldn't help but feel the 15 generational masters laughing in celebration as they patted his dad's back. This has been one of the lifelong dreams that he and his dad shared and every other falling meteor shop head before that. His dad was so consumed by it that he never had a family and only came to have Tan Delun when he was a core formation expert and over 1,000 years old.

He ran a risk of not having a descendant since the further along your cultivation you are the harder it is to conceive. It's the only reason all this time Tan Delun was the only child. Tan Ping wasn't able to have another kid.

"Is there anything we can do to save it?" Wen Yingjie at the side asked pleadingly as he kept his last embers of hope in the Order for having a solution.

Chapter 67 67: Option One, Two Or Three

"Well, off top of my head I can only think of three ways. There may be others who may have more to add on or they may more or less match up to what I'm thinking," Yi Jie said with his eyes still trained on the saber.

Wen Yingjie's eyes lit up in excitement once he heard there was a chance and it wasn't just one but three.

"The first option would be to trade the weapon with someone for another weapon that has already shown signs that it may awaken its spirit. Since you are not a blacksmith and not a palace stage cultivator who can use their monarch sense to detect budding spirits, I'd suggest you conduct the trade with a reputable organization. I hope you'd choose the Order as first in your considerations.

Should you decide to go with us I'd be more than willing to do the trade with you and Judge Yang Qing or a different judge and an additional party of your choosing can act as witnesses to the deal," Yi Jie patiently explained as he raised his eyes and caught Wen Yingjie's budding smile freeze over midway.

"And the other two options?" Wen Yingjie stiffly asked. Option 1 would have worked for him had he not known his saber had awakened its spirit partially. With option 1 he would have to wait for a long time for the new saber to awaken its spirit completely or worse if his streak of luck continued and he ended up stumbling in areas with cultivators breaking through wouldn't the new saber end up in the same spot as the old saber?

But fundamentally the real reason was he was averse to the very idea of swapping out his saber. The saber was made literally from his blood and sweat when he sourced for those materials. He felt like he was a part of its creation. Even if the new saber had better craftsmanship it just wouldn't feel the same to him kind of like how kids never liked sharing the wooden sword they started cultivating with no matter how beat up it gets. Wen Yingjie felt exactly the same way. If the saber didn't invoke lightning he would have never considered trading it even for another better-crafted weapon.

Yi Jie as if reading up on his thoughts swiftly continued,

"The second option is to seal your saber in dark lunar ice preferably one that is at least 10,000 years old. Your saber will need to be sealed into it for at least 10 years however the older the dark lunar ice the less time you will need to seal it. The ice will force the pseudo spirit of your saber into deep slumber thus calming down its current excited and agitated state that will eventually draw a real tribulation to itself.

Sealing it will calm it down and quiet that temptation by making it forget the sensation the tribulation lightning caused. However, using this method comes with its downsides. For one there will be no qualitative change to your saber's spirit in that time. It won't suddenly transform into a full spirit from its pseudo-state. The other downside is for the sealing to work the saber needs to be under for a long or be sealed in a very old block of dark lunar ice. Either will put that saber in a sleep so deep that it may take even years for it to reawaken even after being unsealed from the ice. The effort and time you will need to expend on it will be no different than trying to awaken a new weapon.

Then the last option it's the simplest but also the deadliest. Just risk your life with it," Yi Jie offhandedly said as he even shrugged his shoulders with a nonchalant look like the topic of risking lives carried the same weight as talking about the weather or whether you need to pee before you head out for a long journey.

"Risk my life?" Wen Yingjie asked with a blank look. He looked like he was at the end of the rope. From Yi Jie's first option he already had this nagging feeling the rest wouldn't be all that good or simple but part of him couldn't help but have a sliver of hope that in between those gut-wrenching, spirit-breaking, wish I didn't hear options surely there'd be one that would be doable.

But here he was being told that even the simplest option had him risking his life and he was too afraid to ask how. Then as for the other two options the first one was now looking like a bed of roses instead of the thorns it was before and option two he didn't know how much a block of dark lunar ice cost but he guessed for something with spirit sealing capabilities it had to cost a hefty sum much beyond the capabilities of a rogue peak core formation expert. Then there was the fact of the spirit not awakening for years. With his 'enormous luck,' he had a feeling for him it may end up taking centuries. If he could wait that long he wouldn't have come to the Order and would have just continued waiting for Tan Ping to come out from his seclusion.

"It seems like my hope of washing away the stain on my honor is now turning into an impossibility with how things are panning out," Wen Yingjie muttered to himself with a forlorn look as his wide broad shoulders seemed narrower and slumped than before.

"Wen Yingjie if it was any other person I would not have suggested the third option but for you, I think it's the best option. I don't know what it is that drove you into such an urgent state and in a desperate need to have a top-grade sky rank weapon when being a peak core formation expert should serve as protection enough but it must be something dangerous and also important that you want to increase your odds of success as much as possible?" Yi Jie asked

"Yes, it is. If my life were enough to ensure success I'd give it a hundred times over," Wen Yingjie firmly said as he clenched his fists with a battling fire in his eyes. The fire seemed pure not one borne out of a need for vengeance but one out of being duty bound to fulfill no matter what come may the task must be done. Yi Jie recognized that look all too well and any other inquisitor and judge with experience on the job would recognize that look too as they develop that sense of obligation the more they work their jobs and Wen Yingjie had that same look.

Yi Jie, Yang Qing, and the rest could already tell that the matter had something to do with the kingdom Wen Yingjie belonged to and the reason behind why he was exiled and the death of the prince of that kingdom. Yi Jie didn't want to pry and neither did Yang Qing those were the internal matters of their kingdom but if Wen Yingjie decided to divulge they wouldn't mind hearing the story either and offering their two cents.

But from Wen Yingjie's cues both verbal and nonverbal he didn't seem like the type to say more than what was needed especially on matters concerning the royal family. He may not be a general anymore but being a descendant of a military family, silence and fealty must have been ingrained in him from childhood. He'd rather die than mention things he shouldn't be mentioning. Someone like that wouldn't spill any juicy details and would be tight-lipped mincing their words.

Mao Yunru was fidgety as she stared at Wen Yingjie with a calculative look. Her lips parted and closed repetitively almost as if in debate whether to ask something or not. Yang Qing saw all this as he shook his head.

"It seems Mao Mao's nosey nature is eating at her again. With such a juicy story in front of her it's a wonder she has held out for so long. Sometimes I can't help but wonder about her real motivations for being a judge," Yang Qing silently wondered to himself as he brought his gaze back to Wen Yingjie.

Mao Yunru as if feeling something off quickly turned her head back missing Yang Qing's stare by seconds.

"Then if you have already resolved to risk your life for whatever it is then the third option is definitely for you.

You may have heard of natal-bound artifacts but just in case you haven't these are artifacts bound to someone from birth. A part of the child's soul is nourished by the artifact and vice versa. Most of the powerful noble families and clans use this method as a measure of protecting their most gifted seeds. For great effects, the artifact needs to at least be in the ascendant state which as you well know is able to exert the might of a domain-level expert.

From the moment the binding is complete that artifact is inseparable from the child it is bound to and any attempt to separate the two would be met with its swift retaliation and upon the owner's death, the artifact becomes destroyed too. The life of the artifact and the person become tied together literally. Anything that happens to one affects the other not only in terms of danger but also in other regards too like their cultivation realms. From the moment the child's soul is bound to the ascendant level artifact or treasure they already have an insight into the doors of the domain realm. They only need sufficient time and resources to reach that level experiencing little to no bottleneck on that journey as all the detours they would have taken have been removed.

However, it also comes with some risks though to some those risks maybe gains. The child bound to the artifact will be heavily influenced by the dao of the artifact. They will never get the chance to figure out what dao suits them as that choice would have already been made for them the moment their soul is bound by the artifact. If they are not gifted in the artifact's dao they usually cap at the same level the artifact is in and their only chance of them growing past that limit is if the artifact improves itself. But there are those who have the talent and are gifted enough to be highly compatible with the dao of the artifact they are bound to so they can elevate themselves past the limit of their artifact and push their artifact to grow with them.

Cui Liang the clan leader of the rank 1 family the Cui family in charge of the west pine breeze valley is one such example who went past the limits of the rank of his life-bound artifact.

The reason I mention all this is that the third option involves doing something similar. You will bind half of your soul and spiritual essence to the saber's pseudo-spirit. In addition, I can tell you have already touched saber intent. You will keep feeding your intent to the pseudo spirit nurturing it and tempering it until it can learn to release a sliver of that intent by itself. Since your saber's pseudo spirit is immature and incomplete the intent and your spiritual essence will be used to fill that gap and strengthen its foundations so it can hasten its development.

Losing half your soul and spiritual essence will be one of the most painful things you will have to endure and it will leave your body in a weakened state and your potential hollowed out not to mention it will be next to impossible for you to recover it. If it was just a tiny amount, after a few years of cultivating soul-nurturing techniques it would be easily mended but losing half for a core formation expert to boot will be impossible not without using some treasures and soul-mending techniques that are atleast at the gold grade. Feeding your saber intent in this state will be even more demanding than usual and you'll have to be careful not to accidentally damage the pseudo spirit with your intent. It's a delicate balance that will require a certain level of finesse to maintain.

The goal will be to let the pseudo spirit learn from you as much as it can to prepare it for when the tribulation hits. Its path from that moment forth will be based off of you and all you know.

However, it's not all bad because if you successfully nurture your saber's pseudo spirit to completion it will automatically mend your incomplete soul and spiritual essence and since it will have been nurtured by your essence there will be no issues with incompatibility when it becomes your life-bound weapon. Your life and the saber will be inextricably linked from that moment forth. If it gets destroyed facing the tribulation you will die too however if it survives and its spirit evolves from that baptism your path to the palace realm will open up as you will harvest the boost from the spiritual growth too. Whatever the saber gains you gain and whatever you gain so will it. The good and the bad.

So Wen Yingjie are you willing to risk it all with this saber to the very end even if it means there's a chance you may not make it out alive to do what it is that you want to do or do you want to reconsider the other options," Yi Jie solemnly asked.

Chapter 68 68: Act With A Clear Heart

Wen Yingjie felt his mind and throat dry up once he heard all Yi Jie had to say. He was no coward but the risk of dying before he could even do what he had set out to do left his mind in tatters.

He sighed as he looked upwards his gaze turning blurry.

"How many years has it been? 50,60,70 or more since I had mom's cooking, getting that cold stare from the old man, and hearing grandpa's regaling tales of how he got his nickname as the golden spear of the blue oak kingdom.

Who would have thought I who was lauded as the youngest general with the highest chance of making it to the palace stage would one day end up as a vagabond roaming the earth with no place to call home, destroying the Wen family name that has been synonymous with honor and duty.

Maybe death would be a release from the hell I've lived through from that day.

Fourth prince why, why, just why would you get in bed with the black jade syndicate and serve as their spy against your own kingdom?

You had a life and all the power that most can only dream of but you decided to collude against your own kingdom with a criminal syndicate known to have at least five palace stage experts and are unscrupulous and merciless in their ways.

Just what were you after by colluding with them? Why did the syndicate decide to kill you? Was it to just get at my family who are the only other family other than the royal family to have a palace stage expert to be on the wrong side of the king or was something else at play?

I thought I'd get an answer to some of these questions after decades of tracking down the grey weasel one of the executives from the black jade syndicate who was one of the parties involved with the prince but if I die before even getting to question him then....

I can't even risk getting close to him without a top-grade sky rank weapon as he has late-stage core formation experts surrounding him and being an executive his strength should be at that level too or stronger.

Am I really unfated to resolve my family's shame and help the kingdom I once called home?

This is frustrating. Grandpa what would you do if you were in my place?" Wen Yingjie stood in silent contemplation as his mind drifted off to simpler days.

.....

Two people were riding horses side by side. One seemed to be an old man in pristine white robes who was fairly built and could be seen riding a red feather-tailed horse accompanied by a youth around 9 years old who was riding a smaller but similar red feather-tailed horse. He too had pristine white robes, eyes glowing as his head kept darting around with an excited smile on his face. The young boy and the

older man had some features resembling each other such as their eyes and cheekbones. One could tell at a glance they were related.

"Grandpa thank you for bringing me to the red glaive forest. I kept asking dad to bring me but all he does is make me practice my shield and sword routines every single day and beat me up repetitively. That stinky old man.." The young youth clenched his fists in fury before his look shifted once more to one of excitement when he looked at the forest which looked normal at a glance if one didn't look at the crown of the trees that formed broad sword shapes at the top. This was why the forest was named the red glaive forest. It was rumored there was a sword cultivator who improved his sword dao in the forest that when his dao manifested it transformed the trees into red glaive trees. Whether there was truth to that rumor nobody knows but what is known is that the forest was home to some of the most ferocious spirit beasts in the blue oak kingdom.

"Heheheh do you want me to knock him around a few times for you Yingjie'er," the old man asked with a gentle smile as he looked dotingly at his grandson who at hearing about the prospects of his father getting a beating made his eyes glow brighter than he was a few moments. However, a few breaths later as he held his smooth chin in a contemplative posture he shook his head sideways as he sighed.

"Thanks, grandpa but for some reason I feel dad will be even more ruthless towards me in training if you give him a beating. He isn't the best at handling losses. I remember beating him in rock paper scissors once and out of anger and embarrassment he made me go try and cut a boulder with a thin slice of paper. I was four at the time and when I failed he made me clean the stables of his spirit beasts knowing full well I was afraid of them and they beat me up on occasion. What kind of person does that to their child," the young boy fumed in righteous indignation.

The old man who was listening to the story had his eyes freeze for a moment seemingly remembering something before he awkwardly laughed.

"Why don't you let grandpa tell you about the time I led a solo charge through the famed white stone cavalry of the Rockwhale kingdom and leveled a whole battalion, encampment and a few fortress strongholds while I was at it," The old man said as he stroked his beard with a smug smile and puffed up gait following.

"Really," The young boy said as his eyes glittered like the stars as he stared piously at his grandfather.

With this, the duo of the old and young made their way to the red glaive forest. The former was animatingly telling his story with spittle and passion flying everywhere as the latter soaked up everything with a fervent expression.

30 minutes later

Swoosh

An arrow punctured through a grey deer that had hooves that had metallic shin to them and looked more like daggers than hooves.

"Great shot Yingjie'er. We may make a fine hunter out of you yet. Now quick start processing it and make sure no part of the iron hoofed deer is left unattended down to its pelt," the old man said at the side as Yingjie started processing the kill with practiced precision.

It was when Yingjie was halfway done that an unexpected situation occurred. A loud roar that sent the trees shaking and some even creaking on the verge of breaking echoed around the area they were in. The ground soon started shaking as if something was madly dashing destroying everything in its wake with sheer unadulterated force.

Yingjie didn't have to wait for long to know what that fearsome thing was as he saw a mountain size object rapidly rushing his way as it mowed down the trees in its path as if they were young grass.

"Yingjie'er don't take a step from my side," the old man calmly said as he moved in front of his grandson with a golden spear appearing in his hand. It had the symbol of a roaring dragon embedded into it with a tinge of dark red color coating the edge of the spear. He stood stalwart and calm facing the behemoth that was making its way.

Yingjie finally got a clear look. It was a massive red tiger with a baleful murderous aura surrounding it. Yingjie recognized that aura as he had seen it on his father, his colleagues, and the other relatives from his family who were in the army. The only person who didn't seem to have that aura surrounding him was his grandfather which he had always wondered why.

The gaze of the tiger fell on the tiny Yingjie who was cautiously eyeing it. Yingjie froze immediately under the gaze as he soon started vomiting over and wheezing. He felt like he was buried in a sea of blood and carnage. When he breathed in he felt he was being drowned in blood as everything within him was being grinded and compressed. His grandfather snorted as he waved his sleeves which broke Yingjie free of the torment he had been in. He coughed repetitively immediately after before he got a hold of himself however he didn't dare stare at the tiger again.

"Yingjie'er don't look down. Stare ahead and don't shy away from what you are feeling. You feel weak, timid, and afraid. There's nothing wrong with that. Accepting those feelings and facing them won't automatically make you stronger but it will give you a clear heart one that is accepting of yourself and the situation you are in. There is strength in that and freedom in it. Don't let that oversized cat take that away from you. Face it head-on and the feelings that you feel accept them and decide what is it you can do. This will help you act with a clear intent whether it's to attack, hide, run, or ask for help. Whatever you do your actions will be guided with a clear intent that isn't held back. There is a difference in the actions of someone acting with intensity and one on the fences. Surviving dangerous situations depends on those little subtleties. Whatever step you take you do it with your whole mind and body carved into it. No matter what happens next all that matters is you did it facing your true self.

That's how I've always lived, I faced the storms of my life with my eyes wide open when I fought I fought without holding anything back, when I ran I did it decisively. Every action I take I face with a clear heart. Find your clear heart Yingjie'er like my heart is telling me to obliterate this massive cat for scaring my grandson," the old man smiled a bit at Yingjie who had a dumfounded look before his gaze became clear and stared at the beast.

"I'm weak so I can't run away or fight but I won't always be weak but for now since I'm incapable of anything I'll rely on you grandpa," Yingjie said as he clenched his fist.

The old man nodded his head in appreciation before he valiantly charged at the beast. The moment he swung his spear forward the head of a massive golden dragon materialized as it let out a deafening roar as it charged toward the tiger which whimpered in fear as it tried to turn tail and run. However, it was too late as it was punctured through with a massive hole running through its chest with its front legs being obliterated in the attack. It fell down with a huge thud. It tried making a sound but nothing came out other than gulps of blood and strained breath.

Yingjie couldn't believe what he saw as that massive beast that towered over them lay dead after just one strike.

"Grandpa is so cooooooooool," Yingjie yelled as he stared worshipingly at his grandfather.

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"Act with a clear heart huh grandpa," Wen Yingjie said as he smiled to himself with his eyes clearer. He seemed like a different person like he had let go of a burden that shackled everything within him.

"I'll do it, I'll take the third option," Wen Yingjie calmly said as he bowed.

"If I fail well that will be that but there are many people in the kingdom more talented than I am to take my place with the black jade syndicate. If it can't be me then someone else can take over. Relying on someone else is also a strength right grandpa" Wen Yingjie thought as he smiled gently with his face easing up.

Chapter 69 69: 6,000 High Grade Stones!!

Yang Qing also noted the sudden change in Wen Yingjie. He could even detect his spiritual essence seemed purer, calmer, and denser than before. This would serve as a good foundation when finding his own dao.

"Good, Yang Qing may I?" Yi Jie asked at the side.

"It's your show to see to the end. I'll go by your judgment and suggestion on this since it's more in your wheelhouse than mine and the case is basically resolved now," Yang Qing lazily said seeming all too glad to throw this whole thing on Yi Jie's shoulders.

"Cultivator Wen I don't know if you have any soul-binding techniques of your own and if you do for greater success they need to be atleast at the Orange grade and above," Yi Jie asked.

"Uuum I don't have any. My family may have some but it's difficult for me to get them with my current situation," Wen Yingjie said as he smiled in embarrassment.

"The order can lend you one if you want. Though full disclosure it's an incomplete technique but even in its incomplete state it's solidly a top tier blue grade technique," said Yi Jie.

"Blue grade!!!! and a top one at that? I don't think I can afford that and I don't want to impose on the Order more than I have already. I'm already deeply indebted for the clarification and advice you gave me concerning the saber which is more than I could ever repay," Wen Yingjie bitterly said. Since becoming a rogue cultivator, resources had been tight unlike when he was the youngest scion of the Wen family where he was drowned in resources more than he knew what to do with.

He could get whatever he set his eyes on, but now he had to decide what was a priority and what wasn't. He had used most of his reserves in crafting the saber and also digging up information and tracking the whereabouts of the grey weasel the executive of the black jade syndicate. In fact he had spent more on the latter than the former as the grey weasel was an overtly cautious person whose whereabouts were next to impossible to track. It had taken Wen Yingjie decades of false leads and astronomical resources to even get an inkling of his routes and all he got for all his efforts and time was a short window in a location that was heavily fortified.

With all that Wen Yingjie didn't know how he could afford a blue-grade technique. He had an inkling how astronomically priced they were and even their family that has been standing for over 10,000 years had less than four in their treasure vault and were treated as the most prized possession surrounded by numerous arrays with its location so secretly guarded that only the family head and the supreme elders had access to it. His current cultivation mantra the golden soaring dragon was one of the four blue-grade cultivation arts they had.

"Let me finish first then you can decide whether you want it or not. You will have four months at most to master that soul-binding technique. The reason for that is after those four months lapse you will forget everything concerning that technique. Everything including the insights you make tied to that technique will be wiped clean from your memory but the physical harvests of it will remain. Since we are only lending the technique to you there is a mechanism in place to wipe itself off from the user after a set period of time.

The price we will charge you for lending you the technique will be a third of its original prize. The going rate of a top tier blue grade art is around 18,000 high-grade spirit stones so you will only need to pay 6,000. If you can not afford it you can pay using other means such as selling your services and doing contract jobs for the Order. We have a whole list of the jobs, requirements, their accompanying remuneration, and degree of difficulty. You can decide which jobs to take and you don't have to choose solely from here you can get them from any of our branches all over the continent. We will deduct the amount from the jobs you complete successfully and we can also accept any treasures or materials you have as a form of payment. We will use an independent appraiser to decide on the price of your material should you decide to use it as payment.

In addition, we also have a cultivation abode available for rent that you can use during this period of time. It has arrays and treasures in place that will ease your concentration and increase your odds of success and it is also secure. You will be in a weakened state so finding a secure place is a necessity and a place that will help improve your concentrate despite the enormous pain you will be in. The rental charges for the abode will be 1,000 middle-grade stones a month.

That is all, you can now make your decision," Yi Jie calmly said as he placed back the saber on Yang Qing's podium.

Wen Yingjie had his jaws wide open once he heard all those astronomical figures. 6,000 high-grade spirit stones!!!! The closest he had come to that figure was 100 high-grade spirit stones and that was what he had managed to save up for 3 years from going on dangerous excursions that left him half dead on a daily and now he was meant to give 60 times. He couldn't help but worry about how long that would even take or whether he would even be alive long enough to clear that debt.

"We may not pay as much as the rich merchant organizations but it's decent pay, we never run out of jobs and their range is an abyssal pit so you will never lack choices in what kind of jobs you want to take. At your current skill level, I'm sure you could get jobs that pay as much as 50,000 middle-grade stones just for a single job and they are not few in number either though they come with an equal measure of risk," Yang Qing softly said seemingly reading Wen Yingjie's thoughts.

The apprehension Wen Yingjie had seemed to have been worn out by Yang Qing's words as his creased forehead eased a bit.

"Do I have a deadline on when I'm supposed to clear the debt," Wen Yingjie asked.

"Ideally no you don't. However, an annual 1% interest is charged on your remaining balance. That is to keep you honest and diligent in clearing your debt. Other than that the rest is up to you to decide the jobs you take, and the amount you repay each month or year.

Oh yeah, Yi Jie didn't mention it but after every job, you can decide to either have your whole pay deducted to service your debt or give a percentage of it. The minimum you can give is 30%. Other than that there is nothing else," Yang Qing patiently explained.

Wen Yingjie went silent for a moment before he exhaled and he formed a carefree smile.

"It's just 6,000 high-grade stones for the chance to learn a top grade blue grade cultivation art. Most people can only dream of such an opportunity," Wen Yingjie told himself in an effort to lift his spirits under the enormous weight of that potential debt.

"I agree to the conditions. I accept the blue-grade cultivation art and also the rental services of the cultivation abode."

He decided to go with the latter as his cultivation abode only had the barest of minimums. He had skimmed out on using formidable arrays as he thought his cultivation realm was sufficient and he didn't have the surplus of spirit stones to power such powerful arrays or even the resources to hire a skilled formation array master. Wen Yingjie thus didn't dare risk it especially if he was going to be in a weakened state. Who knew he may end up with the worst luck where some scavengers broke into his abode and caught him in his weakened state.

This was a common occurrence in the cultivation world, especially among rogue cultivators. Since their abodes had the worst securities in place they were often targeted by scavenging groups. These groups would track down injured rogue cultivators to their abodes, break into them and loot everything in there and the rogue cultivator too after they finish them off. It's the reason why some of the veteran rogue cultivators liked to maintain privileged membership in certain powerful inns and pavilions that ensure the protection of their customers' wellbeing as long as they are within their establishment.

"Okay then. I'm happy to declare the case of Wen Yingjie vs the fallen meteor blacksmith shop closed. Yi Jie you'll handle settling down Wen Yingjie and everything he will need," Yang Qing brought his gavel down signaling the end of the case. The noise of the bang finally managed to pull back Tan Delun from his celebration party with the other Tan generational masters.

"Huh is it over?" Tan Delun asked as he laughed sheepishly scratching the back of his head. In his reverie and jubilation, he had completely forgotten himself.

"Yes, it is. You can go home now everything is resolved," Yang Qing said as he smiled.

Tan Delun nodded as he stared longingly at the saber that was being handed back to Wen Yingjie by Luo Meili. In his eyes, this was just as much a treasure to Wen Yingjie as it was their shop. The culmination of the dream of 17 generation Tan masters finally realized. He couldn't help but feel emotional when he saw it and moreso he wanted to rush back and tell his father of the news.

"I'll make sure to pass by the shop later after I am done with my issues and let your dad see it," Wen Yingjie said as he smiled at Tan Delun's gaze.

"Thank you," Tan Delun said as he laughed trying his best not to tear up. The duo made their way out as Yi Jie followed them giving a few instructions to Wen Yingjie on where he would wait for him to meet after his shift.

Chapter 70 70: You Are One Of Us

Yang Qing threw himself backward on his chair in a dramatic fashion as he stretched his back and neck.

"Now we are only left with one case for the day before we can close for the day. These cases always leave me drained more than cultivating at times. I can't wait to move to the palace courts, life should be freer there." Yang Qing grumbled as he closed his eyes while laying back lazily on his chair.

"The days are getting that much closer to your ceremony. Are you nervous about it? A lot of bigshots around will be presented both from within the Order and guests from outside. It will be a whole fan fair and you will be at the center of it. You will also be expected to give this deep touching speech too," Mao Yunru said as she shook her head at Yang Qing's despondent look. She had never seen anyone who took every chance he got to turn the courtroom into his bedroom.

"Nope, I'm not worried at all. It's a great opportunity for people out there to soak my radiant personality and stellar character. Who knows the Order might just reward me handsomely for highlighting how it never lacks astonishing world-defying talents.

I hope they reward me with shorter work hours, fewer cases, better pay and benefits, a high-grade seat that can serve as a bed, and improvements on the formation array carved in my residence and carriage.

The time-altering arrays....It's been a dream of mine to gain the skill to craft it. Time is not known as one of the supreme daos for nothing. All these years of experimentation and study and I still haven't scratched the surface.

How I wish I could make the world a better place with those arrays," Yang Qing sighed as he gave the look of a hero troubled by his inability to save the world.

Mao Yunru was left twitching at Yang Qing's display and words.

"Make the world a better place? How can this guy say all that with a straight face when we all know and he even admitted it himself on more than one occasion? The only reason he is interested in those arrays is to slow down time in his abode and carriage so he could sleep more. Some world-saving ambition this is," Mao Yunru snidely thought.

"Mao Mao how does it feel to be close to reuniting with your inquisitors again after spending the last few months apart as my judicial assistant," Yang Qing lazily asked.

"I don't feel any different. We see each other every day after work or during lunch ..it's not like they got transferred anywhere but I do miss having them in the courtroom with me.

It'd be nice to be around a normal courtroom with normal people for a change," Mao Yunru innocently said.

"What do you mean normal are you trying to say we are not normal Mao Mao!!?" Yang Qing suddenly got up from his lazy posture and bashed his hands on his podium as he stared at Mao Yunru with an aggrieved look of someone falsely accused.

"Yes, that is what I'm trying to say. We have one person who spends almost all his time and effort scheming how to do less work which ironically ends up with him doing more work and he never learns. Then we have the head inquisitor who I thought was the only normal one of the bunch only to discover he wasn't. Just like his boss, he schemes all day trying to get his boss caught in his troublemaking schemes only for him to get punished along with his boss. Despite how much he suffers alongside him he still does the same thing over and over in trying to get his boss in trouble and that is without even mentioning how he would put everything aside at the drop of a hat all for the sake of making wine including missing work.

Then there is another guy who puts his appetite above everything else. There's nothing he won't do for food as it even has a higher priority than his own well-being.

There is the lady who looks gentle but deep down she has a scary sadistic side that is in stark contrast with her gentle side. Sometimes I can't even tell which part is the real her and which one is the impostor.

Then there is the young battle fanatic. It would be one thing if he just purely loved fighting but the person in question for some reason enjoys fights in which he is soundly defeated more than ones in which he wins in fact he is usually in a depressed mood if he wins overwhelmingly in a fight.

And now the last member in this party of weirdoes who spends all her days talking to her spear like it's a close relative of hers and she even tries to feed it.

Yes, Yang Qing you and your team are a bunch of weirdoes. I can never track your thinking and it's always just a hurdle just to keep up. The Order needs to pay me hazard pay for all I've endured, I'll be lucky if I don't develop mental demons of you all.

How did a team end up purely of odd people like yours?" Mao Yunru couldn't help but curiously ask.

"Mmph odd people? What do you know? We are just a group of talented individuals with unique interests who are not afraid to show it and be true to ourselves. Besides we are among the few teams known to have two gold cores in the same team and 2 quasi gold cores. There aren't many teams as powerful as ours or a record such as ours where a gold core cultivator defeated a purple core cultivator. You've personally experienced Yi Jie's battle proficiency, haven't you?

As for the things you mentioned Yi Jie is one of the finest wine brewers that even the higher-ups book his collection, Feng Xin can sniff quality ingredients anywhere. There is a reason those restaurants put him on their blacklists on and off. There are certain ingredients they can only get through him.

Luo Meili is one of the finest beast tamers around who in a few years may very well become a gold-grade tamer. You know how many times those sneaky tamers have tried to poach her.

Zheng Hu may only have a quasi-gold core but he can go toe to toe with any gold core and taking those beatings has made him the person who has the highest survival adaptability, especially against stronger opponents. It's the reason he is a part-time instructor plus I think that kid has already found his dao and it's only a matter of time till he breakthrough to the palace stage once his accumulations are enough and he is satisfied with it

As for the last member of our team well I can't defend her she is an oddity but she is the only one whose spiritual sea can almost match mine despite being in the late stages of the core formation realm. Chief Song said she has a special affinity with artifacts which might explain her behavior.

But who doesn't talk with their weapon every now and then? I find myself sharing a deep conversation with the purple glow bamboo growing in my backyard. They are the best listeners. I always feel better after sharing my day with them.

But you know Mao Mao you shouldn't throw stones. Not like you're the picture of normalcy either you nosey hound. You think I don't know you spend half your income in information organizations to dig up any weird rumors or juicy stories floating around the continent.

Hehehehe you have to know there must have been a reason you were made my judicial assistant other than me being a gifted mentor unparalleled in the conduct of my duties there had to be other factors too like YOU ARE ONE OF US," Yang Qing said as he smiled ominously.

"You, how did you know?" Mao Yunru asked with a dumbfounded expression as her voice raised a few levels in shock and apprehension.

"You work in a place full of judges and inquisitors, it's not hard to find certain things out. Oh yeah and one of the information brokers you deal with among the more than dozen information organizations you patron is a friend of Kang Huilang. They let it slip when they were drinking together and later Kang like a dutiful friend and gossipier let it slip to us. I can't say I was surprised though when I heard. Someone who is around you a lot would see the signs," Yang Qing mischievously laughed especially when he saw Mao Yunru's face redden in embarrassment.

"Can we move on to the next case," Mao Yunru said through her gritted teeth as she turned her face away from Yang Qing's victorious laughter.

"This guy truly has a gift for riling people up and making them want to punch him," Mao Yunru thought as a dangerous glint flashed through her eyes.

Yang Qing didn't try to tempt fate by teasing her some more as he decided to swiftly focus on the matter at hand which was the last case of the day.