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Paragon of Sin Chapter 11 - 20

Chapter 11: Second Heart of Qi

"Haven Heart Qi Method..." Wei Wuyin muttered silently in his heart, while it trembled with an immense amount of shock. To produce an additional Heart of Qi? The concept was exceptional!

A Heart of Qi was condensed from one's mind, matter, spirit, and essence. Mind related to thoughts, beliefs, memories and things of the mind. It was strictly an internal aspect and required one to have a full understanding of self.

Matter was both external and internal, condensing one's essence of flesh and external world. The essence of flesh is born when the body reaches an appropriate point in maturity. It was the first achievement on one's cultivation journey at the Foundation Establishment Realm, Physique Tempering Phase.

Spirit was a very lofty aspect and required one to touch upon their soul and mix it into the soul of the world to create a spirit. The soul of the world was everywhere, but finding your own was difficult. While everyone had a soul, many would find it difficult to sense. However, once sensed, with cultivation methods, directing the intermixing of internal and external, one establishes a unique spirit that they can control.

The last was essence and was strictly external, the exact opposite of mind. It referred to the Essence of Heaven and Earth absorbed using one's meridians and stored in one's Dantian.

The core focus of Foundation Establishment was two of the four requirements and why they existed before one could condense Metaphysical Qi, energy capable of acting as an extremity and under complete control of its wielder. It was completely different than blood.

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The Heart of Qi held about ninety percent of one's energy, the rest flowed through the body in a consistent pattern along one's awakened meridians and flesh. It also acted autonomously like a normal heart and absorbed Essence of Heaven and Heart without needing direction to restore itself to full, and refined foreign energies to strengthen itself. Creating a second would essentially double a person's reserves, double their recovery rate, and cultivation speed.

The natural advantage was incredibly obvious.

Godlord Lin continued despite everyone's shock, "The Haven Heart Monolith describes seven levels. You'll be graded by your progression three months from now. For those three months, this hall will be your cultivation room. You can begin." Her words were succinct and explained simply.

Wei Wuyin calmed his heart as he stared at the Haven Heart Monolith. While he did, the others were surprised because of Godlord Lin's words. They were to cultivate here for three months? With everyone else?!

Usually, cultivation requires quiet and isolation to ensure that no one interferes. If they cultivated a method that could cause them to experience qi deviation, then doesn't that make things difficult?

The vigilance in their eyes was heavy.

While they dwelled on that, Wei Wuyin never had any doubts towards the situation. The moment it was said, he understood the reasoning. Because there's a chance for qi deviation, those who truly reach it first would show signs of where and how, and the others could learn from this to be more cautious. Essentially, it may seem like Godlord Lin was promoting rushing and conflict, but in fact, she was promoting patience and observation.

Wei Wuyin walked up to the Monolith and looked at the characters. There was a heading in enlarged text, his eyes focused on that line. It said: Haven Heart, 1st Level - Mind Dissolution & Clone.

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He didn't read the contents but moved to the area with the second heading and all the rest. He wanted to gain an understanding of the levels before moving forward. The levels were as such:

2nd Level - Matter Rebirth & Fusion.

3rd Level - Pure Essence & True Essence.

4th Level - Spirit Severing & Spirit Transformation.

5th Level - Haven of Heaven.

6th Level - Myriad Hearts.

7th Level - *.

The seventh level didn't have a name, but he could see the basic idea of the method now. It resolved around creating a fresh state of mind, matter, essence, and spirit and congealing them using something called the Haven of Heaven and creating another Heart of Qi.

This answered a few questions of his, but this was just a conjecture he made based on the titles alone. There were still things he hadn't understood.

If he wanted to create another Heart of Qi as he was, it was impossible. His mind, spirit, and matter was deeply connected to his Heart of Qi. In fact, if his Heart of Qi was destroyed, he would become a cripple, riddled with mental deficiencies, soul damage, and his body would be weaker than a child's.

The grand power he possessed would collapse, and he would be unable to cultivate again. It would be like severing his legs. He had no more flesh or ability to create a second pair. Unless...he went back into his mother's womb and restarted his birth.

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"No wonder qi deviation was incredibly likely...if those aspects were damaged, you'd lose control over your qi. In fact, the first and fourth levels are the hardest." He recalled that Elder Bai said someone had reached the fourth level, but not the fifth.

The Mind and Spirit.

Without those, controlling one's qi was a dream. You might even explode. If you can't consciously control your Heart of Qi and the metaphysical qi it contains, it could go awry in a blink.

Gulp.

He swallowed a wad of saliva. This did test intelligence and comprehension, a single mistake and...

Han Yu self-destruction could happen.

He looked towards Godlord Lin and felt his heart calm. It wasn't because of her beauty, but her power. She may be able to stop them from exploding at least, and if she acted, perhaps qi deviation could be handled.

He wasn't the only one who thought that, and many felt relieved in their hearts. Even if they suffered a little, at least they had a powerful Godlord to save them. There were already a few who had read the first level completely and went into deep contemplation and meditation.

Wei Wuyin nearly patted his chest as his breathing had relaxed, but abruptly stopped. "No...thinking like that is suicidal. Even if she could, would she? Relying on someone to save you is like hoping Elder Ji would protect your life in the Outer and Inner Competitions." As he recalled Elder Ji blatant favoritism and inaction as sect members were killed, he came to a realization.

She had no reason to help.

Everyone here was by choice and were warned earlier. If they die, why did she, someone who likely wasn't from the sect, need to save them?

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It's not like she said she would. That was even more telling.

He looked towards He Long and Shu Yang who were seated in a lotus position while meditating on the method's mnemonic. They were competing against each other and felt confident. They had to.

He didn't do anything like rush to cultivate. Instead, he read the contents of each level three times over and if he couldn't remember a part in his mind, capable of completely reciting it word for word, he would read it again. His slow and cautious actions were noticed by the others, but they didn't interfere. Everyone tactfully agreed with silence that they wouldn't interfere with others.

Because if you did, that made you a target for the other seven.

"Wei Wuyin, how about we help each other?" A soft voice filled with attraction sounded. Wei Wuyin noticed it belonged to Lang Yi. She waltz over and smiled sweetly towards him.

"If you get on your knees and decide to use that tongue and cheek of yours, I'll consider it." He indifferently replied. His words were vulgar and attracted the gazes of Yan Zhu, Jiu Lang, Shu Yin, and Qu Gui. They weren't as rash as the boys who were already fully immersed. The caution within them wasn't much different from Wei Wuyin.

Lang Yi's expression froze. Her eyes flashed mysteriously. She knew that out of all the men here, Wei Wuyin was definitely the most talented and intelligent. He had safely ascended from an honorary disciple to core disciple in less than a decade of time without anyone's support. He was also one who had an incredible amount of self-restraint, not proposing to Godlord Lin like the other useless men here.

To her, Wei Wuyin would likely obtain a top three spot as long as his qi didn't deviate.

It wasn't just her, Jiu Lang thought the same. It was why she wanted to kill Wei Wuyin from an early stage, but he grew so suddenly and explosively. With his status as a core disciple, it became an infinite amount of times harder. The worst part of it was that the enmity had been set.

If one day Wei Wuyin became a sixth phase expert before her, that'll be the day of her death. If not, the pen would etch it into the stone.

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His words did catch them all by surprise, but shockingly, Lang Yi smiled, "If you want, I can..." her eyes turned shy and started to exude sexual energy. Most men would see this and lose control, but not Wei Wuyin. He coldly snorted and ignored her.

He went into a far off corner and sat down. He was really far, unlike everyone else who tried to stay close to the golden monolith and Godlord Lin. Not only did the monolith exude an area of pure Essence of Heaven and Earth, Godlord Lin was probably nearby so she could easily interfere if one experienced qi deviation, leaving them more confident.

However, Wei Wuyin chose a very distant corner. This caused everyone to wake up and look at him in confusion, even Godlord Lin glanced over.

Wei Wuyin ignored them all, "If you cultivate with a failsafe, then you'll be willing to take any risk. Also, I can't guarantee one of you won't explode. If you do, what if Godlord Lin doesn't do anything? You'll all end up like Mei Mei or worse." Those words of caution echoed in his heart and thoughts.

If Godlord Lin wanted to save him, this distance was irrelevant, so he didn't place that much importance on it.

He closed his eyes and mediated on the mnemonic of the first level, Mind Dissolution and Clone. The first level required one to disconnect their mind from their body and melt it. The term 'melt' isn't in a literal sense, but if it was described literally, Wei Wuyin's mind could be considered a wad of different materials and minerals inside, like ore, and he needed to melt that ore.

Then, he needed to create two casting moulds. One that was his original mind, and the other would be its clone.

As he pondered this, he truly felt that this method was devised by metalworkers of the mortal world. It may even allow the mind to benefit just from the dissolving and purify itself from the excess. However, what he didn't understand was the crux of the issue. There were two problems: solidification and segregation.

Since one had to 'melt' their minds, they would need to resolidify it as well. However, there was barely any clue on how to do this.

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As for segregation, that, while before resolidification, was the hardest obstacle. If he sliced his mind in two, then it'll just be two halves of one whole? That didn't seem like a clone, but like a coin sliced in two. You could only use it if its put together, and if it is, it's considered one coin - not two.

Let alone a clone...they wouldn't even be similar. He couldn't segregate his memories and all his mental functions, could he? The very thought of doing that felt like a bait lured out for the idiotic. If bitten, instant mental crippling or qi deviation.

As he thought longer on it, he felt the appropriate way was to use blade forging methods on one's mind. The method was more so a general guideline, so he decided to use his own comprehension. Segregating seemed destined to fail. The very concept was an impossibility, anyone taking that route was likely going to fail, in his opinion, or end up with serious mental deficiencies.

The safer yet also the most appropriate to him seemed to be creating two swords merged into one, and then separate them after creation. If possible, he would empty one side and completely fill the other, leaving a hollow shell of one - a clone. This path was decided by him after an entire week of deliberation.

After deciding on his path, he smiled with relaxation. Then, his ears perked.

"Gargh! Help!!" A distorted voice filled with shock, disbelief, and fear resounded. Wei Wuyin turned his gaze to see Tao Gui, whose body was slowly growing bigger and bigger like a stuffed doll or puffer fish expanding. His muscular form looked hilarious as he grew and bulged in weird areas.

Wei Wuyin instinctively shrouded himself with a metal qi ward. He placed his hands forward, ready to erect a defensive barrier at any time.

Godlord Lin watched calmly despite Tao Gui's exceedingly pitiful gaze focused on her. He continued to expand.

"Plehduze, haulpnnmme!" His eyes seemed to lose its light of intelligence as his mind seemed to have slowly collapsed on itself. His body trembled as if he was undergoing a seizure but the qi in his body continued to grow wild.

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Jiu Lang was the first to react among the core disciples as she leapt away, her body enshrouded by an emerald qi. The others seemed to have realized something and instinctively placed up their wards. However, He Long was nearby and in deep cultivation, likely executing his deduced method to dissolve his mind. He still hadn't awakened despite the few seconds of commotion.

BOOM!

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Chapter 12: Mind Over Death

A tempest of crimson blood, loose organs, and fragments of bone roared into chaotic existence. A storm of violent qi battered the environment and all those around.

Wei Wuyin was seated at a far off corner, but the raging wind and violent qi smashed into his silver qi ward. His qi circulated to strengthen his body and hold his position. A heavily crashing thud resounded next to him.

He turned instinctively amidst the distorted area and saw a sword embedded into the wall. It was cracked and nearly in pieces, but what was shocking was the blood that drenched it.

"That's...He Long's sword?" If it wasn't for the fact that his mind had already calculated the possibility, he would've gasped in shock. Instead, his gaze turned calm. He Long was dead.

His eyes searching the area and trying to find the figure to verify his belief. Then he looked at a detached finger nearby that rolled with the sword in a much quieter fashion. That was He Long's delicate finger.

He realized that finding a body, or at least an intact one, was highly unlikely. He Long hadn't fashioned a defense or retreated and his identity as a sword cultivator meant his body was a lot weaker than other cultivators his level. His qi was used to temper his sword rather than his body. He wasn't like Mei Mei with nearly fifty years of time to do both. Being vaporized was a possibility.

Soon, the dust settled. As it did, he faintly gasped in wonder. Godlord Lin was standing next to the Heaven Heart Monolith without batting an eye. Despite being so close, not a hint of blood or flesh was ten feet from her. It was an area of absolute cleanliness.

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He saw a pale faced Shu Yang bleeding from his lips, a fresh wound on his face from the explosion, and holding his chest while heaving heavily. Shu Yin held him tightly and established a ward of protective qi. He could see faint traces of tears at the corner of her eyes.

Yan Zhu and Li Yang's cultivation was higher than the rest, and they weren't as close as Shu Yang. Not to mention, they had noticed Tao Gui's chaotic expansion. They had retreated with the utmost swiftness, remaining untouched.

Jiu Lang noticed first and was relatively unharmed, but Qu Gui was nearly a figure of blood. Her cultivation base and body was the weakest, and so her reaction was the slowest. She staggered as her eyes showed signs of lapsing into unconsciousness, but she hastily circulated her qi to accelerate her healing.

Godlord Lin ignored all this and calmly said in her soft, uplifting voice, "You only have fifty-three days left. All those who don't reach the first level at minimum will be unable to claim any placement. Not only that, you'll lose your status as a Core Disciple from henceforth."

Her words caused all their hearts to grow cold.

So heartless!

Two were injured, two were dead, and the others were filled with fear, but she still wished for them to continue. And, if they didn't, she was going to have their status revoked?

However, no one doubted her words. In fact, they knew that if she said it was so, it was so. As a Godlord, there was no way the sect would offend her for them. If she killed them this very moment, they'll likely pin the victims with all sorts of justifiable crimes, and the world would move on.

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Wei Wuyin swept his gaze over the surroundings and frowned. However, he was confident in his own comprehension and intelligence. Not to mention, the path he was taking was a lot safer than using just the vague method's description.

He calmed his mind and entered a cultivation state. Even with the dense smell of death and blood, his mind still entered such a profound state.

His mind's eye seemed to be birthed, linked to his metaphysical qi. By manipulating the spirit formed in his Heart of Qi with his mind, he could influence that very mind. This was incredibly dangerous, but the entire purpose of one's formed spirit was to give commands to the four aspects of qi. It was linked to the soul and acted as the brain center for one's qi.

Normally, one would use their mind's thoughts to drive the spirit which would relay commands to the metaphysical qi. It was like the spine and nervous system of one's motor functions.

The profoundness of this was why spiritual sense existed and how qi could be directly controlled. With the four systems of mind, matter, spirit, and essence connected into one, they can influence and interact with each other. If Wei Wuyin wanted, he could use his Heart of Qi to accelerate his own healing like Qu Gui or block off memories within his mind.

"First, create the cast." He whispered to himself, slowly forming a cast construct in his mind. It was shaped in a very large rectangular block. He started to carve into the mental construct to form a single double-edged arming sword with perfect symmetrical portions kept in mind.

If it was split in half, he wanted both swords to be a perfect match for each other. He also wanted it to be that, if combined, they would form a perfect construct. His intentions were not to create a clone right off the bat, but something with a failsafe to it.

There were also two more details in mind. He needed it so that the size of the sword was capable of containing exactly double of his mind's size. Normally, to measure 'size' of one's mind was nearly impossible, but thanks to his spirit's intimate connection to his mind, he had a good grasp on it.

The last detail is that he needed the split halves to function completely as an independent sword. Otherwise...

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After forming the cast according to those exact details, he started to initiate the most dangerous aspect, the dissolution of one's mind. This was the same as melting his memories, thoughts, and sense of self-control. This could lead to an explosive rebound or render him retarded in an instant.

However, he wasn't an idiot. He couldn't avoid the risk of mental damage, but he could avoid an explosive rebound caused by qi deviation.

He took a deep breath and started to expel his qi. Without any hesitation, his body was like a steam producing machine as qi was sent outwards wildly. He may have drawn the notice of others, but he couldn't pay attention to them.

He expelled all of his qi in a surgical and quiet manner. He also forcefully stopped the rotation of his Heart of Qi, preventing it from refining more qi from the essence of the world.

"Gurgle!" A wad of blood sprayed out from his mouth, staining his teeth crimson. However, as if expecting this, he spat out more and wiped his mouth. Even slowly and surgically removing his qi would cause all sorts of damage to his flesh and organs. It was like when Mei Mei attempted to redirect her qi outside of its intended nature and nearly spat out blood, but much worse.

The accumulated damage left him feeling weak. Any cultivator could kill him at this moment as he was no different than a mortal. While his body was strong, he had no strength to resist.

"Dissolve!" His memories of his life flashed through his mind, every thought he had ever mustered flowed through him, and his ability to focus was slowly deteriorating.

Bang!!

He suddenly heard an explosion and a heart-wrenching scream filled with unwillingness and hatred, yet he didn't stop at this moment. He was wholeheartedly focused on one thing. It was the most difficult part and if he failed, his entirety would vanish.

His memories flowed into the cast like molten metal. However, the cast was half-filled. Luckily, the 'mind' portion connected to his spirit still had a trace of his consciousness. Using his spiritual sense, he connected with that portion of the mind and started to create a thin, hollow layer over the cast.

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Now, the sword looked filled, but wasn't. Only half was.

"Cool!" He used his spirit and portion of his mind to restart his Heart of Qi, slowly it absorbed the Essence of Heaven and Earth, producing metaphysical qi. He hadn't known how much time had passed.

Only when a drop of qi was birthed did he use that qi as a coolant, dripping it over the forged sword. A refreshing feeling washed over him and he felt his sense of thought and memories return.

He took a sudden gasp of air, greedily breathing in all he could to ensure he was alive. His body was covered in thin sweat, and his vision swam wildly.

He saw six figures. They were all looking towards him.

Wait...six?

As he tried to account for his memories, he realized there should've been seven. There was Jiu Lang, Ling Ya, Yan Zhu, Shu Yang, Shu Yin, Qu Gui, and Godlord Lin. He Long and Tao Gui died.

So...why was there six?

As he slowly regained his mental ability, he realized that Qu Gui wasn't there. Qu Gui had taken Mei Mei's core disciple rank and thus should've been here.

As everyone looked at him, he looked at Godlord Lin. She said, "You're close. In your current state, your mind wandering is dangerous." Her words seemed to have doused his desires.

Right.

His current mind may be whole, but in truth, it was half-filled. He can't be careless and if the balance breaks, then he may very well lose his mind still.

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He closed his eyes and started to initiate the cloning method. Now that he had an appropriate mould for his clone, he just needed to fill it in and ensure a divider existed between both halves.

He saw that the shape of his mind's eye had changed, becoming a half-filled sword. The thin layer around and through it seemed to vaguely reveal a second sword connected but also independent from the first.

He just needed to fill it with raw, untainted thoughts. He decided to do so. The unfilled half started to rapidly fill with fluid from nowhere. This was his essence, his yin essence giving form from nothingness.

He didn't derive it from his cultivation base, his Heart of Qi, but from himself. It didn't describe how one should clone or what one should use, but he felt this was the most appropriate.

His own yin essence was little as he was a man, but he had dual cultivated with a Three-Point Yin Body and wildly strengthened his own yin as a result. By using the excess left, that which was unneeded for his cultivation, he filled the second half.

Now, his sword was completed with one filled with his memories, and the other ready to accept new thoughts and memories, to once more give form from nothing. When the sword solidifies from its liquid state, it would become a second mind.

If he uses it right, he could split the two and execute them to do different things, such as form a second Heart of Qi.

He calmed himself down as he felt his breadth of mind expand rapidly. He felt his thoughts were a lot less occupied and far more free. "Was this how a newborn baby felt? A child can naturally learn things, even full languages, but an adult has its difficulties. If I wished to fill this mind with knowledge, will I become like those prodigies?"

This thought and feeling left him in awe.

Only then did he open his eyes, revealing a silver eyes that contained deep, fresh intelligence. As he looked around, he saw Godlord Lin looking at him and the others in deep cultivation.

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"How...long?" He asked.

"You have forty-five days left," Godlord Lin replied.

Forty-Five days meant only fifteen days passed, so he cultivated for five days. He felt a painful wave of hunger. Luckily, he was a cultivator who birthed elements, otherwise he would die from natural dehydration.

"What happened to Qu Gui?" He couldn't help but ask. Did she undergo qi deviation? In fact, he felt that talented females shouldn't have any issues with this portion, so he was naturally curious. With their innate yin energy, they could easily finish all the steps. Of course, as long as their method was appropriate.

"She was killed."

However, Godlord Lin didn't speak. It was Jiu Lang who did. She had already cloned her mind, her eyes revealing a freshness similar to his. He didn't know what method she used, but it had obviously worked.

"Killed?" Wei Wuyin was inwardly shocked. Killed? Not qi deviation?

Jiu Lang looked at Ling Ya and smiled. That smile looked like it wanted to watch the world burn, but her beauty made it hard to resist the temptation to watch it with her.

Ling Ya was meditating, obviously cultivating as well.

"Qu Gui tried to kill you the moment your mind slipped," Jiu Lang stated.

Wei Wuyin frowned. Qu Gui tried to kill him for what? He had barely any dealings with this woman, so why would she? And how did she not succeed? He was vulnerable beyond belief and couldn't take action. If she wanted to kill him, and no one acted to protect him, how did he survive?

"Godlord Lin interfered, directly killing her." Jiu Lang cleared up his questions.

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He got up with a struggle and bowed deeply to Godlord Lin in thanks. While Qu Gui would eventually be executed because she would've killed him in the end, he wouldn't be alive in that case.

"She feigned her cultivation state and waited for you to reveal weakness or die, like her entire purpose in life was to kill you with her. Like a certain someone did...for love," Jiu Lang added. Han Yu had died in a suicidal attack in much the same fashion.

"..." Wei Wuyin's gaze flashed to Ling Ya, the light of killing intent flashing within.

"No need to dwell on this. You all have forty-five days left. Those who focus fully on cultivating the method will have no worries of dying prematurely. Continue." Godlord Lin ordered. It seemed her entire intent was for them to cultivate the technique, since Wei Wuyin was earnestly cultivating it while Qu Gui wasn't, she acted.

Grateful, he once more bowed before readjusting his state. His Heart of Qi absorbed the Essence of Heaven and Earth before converting it into metaphysical qi with elemental and yin energies. He was ready to continue.

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Chapter 13: Rewards

As the remaining disciples focused their efforts, several events took place. Firstly, Shu Yang had recovered and restarted more cautiously and with renewed gusto. Unfortunately for him, at day thirty-six, he lost his mind and nearly underwent qi deviation. Luckily, Shu Yin acted to ensure he didn't completely go haywire at the last moment. He survived in the end.

His Heart of Qi, however...

While it hadn't detonated, it had fractured and nearly crippled him. He no longer had control over his qi. While he wouldn't experience the soul-draining weakness that came with complete crippling, without control over his Heart of Qi, refining energies or essence at will was an impossibility.

Unless he repaired his Heart of Qi, his realm would no longer progress and he would be incapable of using any qi arts. The only thing left was a strong body and spiritual spells.

He was essentially useless and his potential ruined.

The next development was Yan Zhu, Ling Ya, and Shu Yin successfully cultivating the first level of the Haven Heart Method.

It seemed what Wei Wuyin deduced had been true; females held a greater advantage in this level due to their innate yin energies. It was more prominent for virgins who had intact primal yin, as Yan Zhu and Jiu Lang had completed their first level ten whole days before Ling Ya and Shu Yin.

The next event was the success of Jiu Lang as she completed the second level, Matter Rebirth and Fusion. Her physical body seemed to burn with new physical energies. The most shocking aspect of the level was her shedding skin.

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She had to hide away behind a qi veil when she underwent the process. She was a whole week ahead of Wei Wuyin in this aspect. When he succeeded, he didn't hide himself as he just stripped naked right then and there, and let the process occur while he patiently examined the changes. He obtained quite a few stares from the women in the room.

It wasn't just his skin that was being born anew, his cells were changing too. He even felt his DNA seemed to have been copied, edited, and then re-corrected. His body after the fact had an all new physical aura signature. That being said, it was still connected to his Heart of Qi.

This discovery left him deeply shocked. With this newfound fresh physique, he could once more exhaust his physical essence to form a new Heart of Qi while maintaining compatibility with his current one.

The more he cultivated this ancient qi method, the more he grew curious about how it was invented.

Unfortunately, besides him and Jiu Lang, no one else reached the second level by the sixtieth day. However, Jiu Lang had reached the third level, surpassing him at the last moment. He didn't think the third level was difficult, but he was caught off-guard by the requisite need of essence. Jiu Lang's third level was reached with incredible speed, like she had access to a vast quantity of pure essence.

While his talent wasn't bad, he still would need months before absorbing enough external essence from the world before being able to transform his meridians.

In the end, the trial ended with him taking second place, Jiu Lang taking first, and Yan Zhu placing third. Since she reached the first level before the non-virgins, Ling Ya and Shu Yin.

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Godlord Lin looked at them and only gave a slight nod before declaring the winners. She informed them that they could cultivate the ancient qi method as much as they desired, they could even spread it. In fact, she encouraged it.

That being said, she crippled Shu Yang completely. His luck ended because of his aggressively hopeful words from before. Having survived with his qi intact and then being stripped away from it was heart-crushing to watch. He even begged on his knees. Shu Yin begged too, her tears were quite moving. Unfortunately, it did no good.

Godlord Lin was decisively vicious despite her fairy-like appearance.

Wei Wuyin couldn't help but shake his head. Truly unlucky. He decided to use this as a further lesson to be learned: Don't act careless and overconfident.

With that, the nine core disciples were lowered to five, four women and one man. With three dead and one crippled with their status stripped from them, the sect will definitely enter a very chaotic period in the upcoming days.

Wei Wuyin decided not to engage in those matters and swiftly returned to his residence. He would likely receive the elemental stones, scarlet qi stones, and cultivation grounds days within a few days, so he needed to think carefully on how to maximize his rewards.

After all the disciples departed, the Scarlet Dao Temple hall became silent as only Godlord Lin and the golden monolith remained. She had her eyes lowered, her delicate fingers placed on her lips in contemplation, and struck a beautiful figure.

"Any of them satisfy you?" A voice sounded in the shadows. From thin air appeared a young, handsome man. He was dressed in scarlet-colored robes befitting an emperor and a crown with a ruby embedded within. This ruby was like a neon object, shining ever brighter, effusing all sorts of light like a red sun. A dense aura of scarlet qi flowed around him naturally.

Godlord Lin frowned but didn't speak.

The man didn't mind as he walked softly next to the golden monolith and marveled at the etchings. His hands twitched as if he wished to reach out and touch it, but he held himself back. "I didn't think my sect was so useless, I must apologize."

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He turned his scarlet gaze away from the monolith and spoke apologetically.

"They weren't useless. The other so-called Five Great Sects results weren't much better." Godlord Lin said, facing the scarlet dressed man known as the Scarlet Solaris Sect's Ancestral Elder. The only Godlord within the sect.

"There is one that interests me," she suddenly said as if recalling something.

The Scarlet Solaris Sect's Ancestral Elder knowingly smiled, "That boy Wei Wuyin? He is extraordinary for reaching the first level. I heard that only one out of a hundred men could even reach it. I wonder if that's true."

Wei Wuyin was talented, far more than the other three male disciples. One could tell how difficult it was for men to cultivate the first level from the display just now. Out of the four men that arrived, only one walked away unscathed. The other two are dead and one crippled. Of course, He Long died an unjust death before being able to prove himself.

"You mean the little boy you saved?" Godlord Lin inquired. Her words indicated that Wei Wuyin wasn't the one she mentioned, she hadn't even known his name.

The Ancestral Elder, Wu Xinghong, tipped his head a little in curiosity. "Yes. He's only in his mid-twenties and reached the Fourth Stage of Qi Condensation. The fact he successfully cultivated the Haven Heart Method's first level only proves his talent."

Godlord Lin only slightly smiled at his words. Wu Xinghong had acted earlier, protecting Wei Wuyin, not her. She never had any intention of interfering with their cultivation, squabbles, or accidents. Otherwise, she would've saved He Long or Tao Gui. Wei Wuyin wasn't anything special to her.

"Are you saying he's not talented enough?" Wu Xinghong frowned slightly in displeasure. Wei Wuyin was the most talented core disciple of this generation's set in his opinion. He even believed he had some cultivation treasure to help him. However, without intelligence and talent, most treasures were useless and only brought damnation.

"He's not. He took a safer method when cultivating it, and used the remnant forces of others within his body to accomplish the task. In my eyes, he was no different than a woman, so his

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talent could be considered equal or less than the rest. His entire cultivation base may seem solid, but that's only because he had fortuitous encounters and found rare cultivation treasures to do so. Luck never lasts, only true talent." Her words were soft but filled with certainty.

She was right, of course.

Because of the Steel Essence Source and Three-Point Yin Body, he was capable of reaching his current cultivation and cultivating the first level as if he was a woman.

"In my eyes, that girl with the seed of spear qi forming is far better," Godlord Lin plainly stated.

"Spear qi? Is it Yan Zhu?" Wu Xinghong grew somewhat shocked by the news. Spear qi was a weapon qi in the ethereal category, making it incredibly difficult to cultivate and profoundly powerful.

"Is she the one that interests you?" He asked.

She shook her head, "That woman with wood qi and incredibly powerful innate yin and essence reminds me of someone. If my thoughts are correct, she may have an incredible opportunity at hand. If she's careful, perhaps she'll become a Godlord one day."

"Oh? Jiu Lang? If she's careful...that's a very high evaluation. What if she's not?" Wu Xinghong found her words quite interesting.

Godlord Lin looked at Wu Xinghong in the eyes and slowly said, "then I fear the Scarlet Solaris Sect will become a distant memory." With that, she waved her hand and the monolith shrunk until it reached the size of a chicken egg. It was placed within her sleeve before she turned around and left, leaving Wu Xinghong speechless.

"..." Wu Xinglong stayed silent and wore a look of contemplation. It seemed he was considering Godlord Lin's words heavily. Only after a long while did he move, his eyes shining like two scarlet suns as they seemed to pierce through all forms of obstacles.

In his scarlet eyes, Jiu Lang's figure could be seen reflected clearly.

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"We'll see."

Three days later, Wei Wuyin's residence.

Wei Wuyin stood next to a table. The table had a variety of glowing objects on it. The various energies emitted by these objects truly inspired the spirits.

"Could I do it?" Wei Wuyin's expression was deeply conflicted. After several days of thinking, he realized that the choices before him were numerous and the results of many of them were unable to be defined. In the end, his plans could fail.

He reached out and touched an oval stone the size of a chicken egg. Its surface was smooth and emitted a faint scarlet glow, while being deeply red in color. This was the Scarlet Qi Stone, an object formed from centuries of nourishment from the Scarlet Mountain's inherent traits.

Scarlet Qi was a material-type qi, and held very aggressive properties. If he could convert his Heart of Qi into a Heart of Scarlet Qi, every one of his qi arts would gain an additional power-up, especially his offensive arts. His flames, raging water, winds, and earth created would have a scarlet influence.

However, he wasn't sure if he wanted that. In fact, Scarlet Qi was incredible, but not many would go for it unless they decided it suited them. Instead, he intended to use it to refine his yang energy as the Scarlet Qi had a deep connection with the yang attribute.

"I'll use the scarlet qi stone for my cultivation, but it won't allow me to ascend to the Fifth Phase in one go. Should I go for immediate gains and focus purely on yang energy cultivation or on establishing a qi-type for my Heart of Qi."

As he tried to decide, he looked towards the three violet-colored elemental stones that quietly laid there. They weren't kidding when they said one could choose 'any' elemental stone. These stones were lightning stones. They were stored in translucent boxes made from non-conductive materials, the surface of which was incredibly hot.

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"Not only did they give me lightning stones, they even gave me the hottest and most volatile lightning stone."

In the cultivation and mortal world, the color of lightning determined its characteristics with red being the coolest and gentlest of lightning while violet was the hottest and most volatile. As a bonus, violet lightning stone had ten times more lightning energy than a single red lightning stone.

"With one or two of these stones, I'm confident in birthing lightning qi, and likely even violet lightning. To think they would give me such benefits. In that case, Jiu Lang must be enjoying even greater treatment." A slight frown tugged at his lips when he thought this.

In truth, Wu Xinghong had given Wei Wuyin these stones out of his personal wealth because he favored him. Those three stones alone were worth more than three months in the Scarlet Qi Pond. In fact, they could cause great bloodshed if brought out in the cultivation world.

"If I can birth metal, lightning, wood, ice, and magma qi, I could try to condense a Heart of Elemental Qi. With this, my strength would reach an insane level." The four natural elements and five advanced elements were extraordinary, and if combined, you can tap into the most origin-like elemental energy called Elemental Origin Energy.

However, to even give birth to such a Heart of Qi, one had to first birth all nine elements. The difficulty was immense, as just having the elemental energies only helps, but isn't a certainty.

"I'll avoid establishing a Heart of Scarlet Qi, and go long-term with the Heart of Elemental Qi." Deciding thus, he also decided to have a two-fold plan, one long and one short.

"I'll cultivate in the Yang Yore Field for six months and use the scarlet qi stone to nourish my yang energy. If I don't ascend, I'll at least be closer. I won't get a second opportunity like this, but having a higher cultivation base will increase my options in the future."

He carefully stored the materials before walking out of his room. As he left, a woman dressed in a well-fitted maidservant outfit stood outside the door in diligent wait. This young woman was Li Yin, the former Violet Moon Sect's outer disciple. Wei Wuyin had spared her life.

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She wasn't the only life spared, as women and young children were also spared as long as they didn't resist too strongly. However, their fates were similar yet very different. She became the maidservant to a core disciple of one of the Great Five Sects, but they likely became slaves for manual labour or sexual duties.

Unlike them, she had no spiritual spell restrictions and were provided resources for her cultivation. She even ate well, was dressed in clean clothes, wasn't abused sexually, and lived in an area filled with dense Essence of Heaven and Earth. The other servants were nice to her and greeted her properly, only because Wei Wuyin had brought her in personally.

She couldn't believe it, but her status and treatment now was far, far better than before. As an outer disciple of the Violet Moon Sect, her days weren't nearly as peaceful or enjoyable. Having to avoid lustful men, jealous women, well-connected cultivators, and fighting for resources was by no means easy.

As she respectfully bowed to this handsome, young man, her eyes flashed with ardent desire. If she could become his woman, no one would care about her past, and her future would be limitless. Unfortunately, Wei Wuyin hadn't made any sort of move leaving her disappointed.

She later learned that Wei Wuyin had an unspoken code of honor that he did not partake in things like that with his subordinates, whether they wanted to or not. It disappointed her, but didn't dissuade her from ensuring her cleavage was alluring and her make-up was on point.

Wei Wuyin smiled at her, "Has Du Leng returned?"

Du Leng was sent to check in on Mei Mei. Luckily, she still had allies and back-up plans in place. With a safety net that allowed her to recuperate from her injuries, she was doing well. While she did suffer severe injuries, she had retained her life and her Heart of Qi was undamaged.

The only real issue was the damage to her muscles and meridians. As long as she received the right medicinal pills and cocktails, she could heal that damage in a few years. However, he was curious about her state, so he sent Du Leng to check on her.

"Mister Du Leng has not returned," she answered.

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Wei Wuyin frowned slightly but didn't ask anything else. He wanted to see Mei Mei, but it seemed she had developed some distrust towards him and prohibited him from seeing her. He understood, as Han Yu was his subordinate, but it left an itch in his heart. After all, Mei Mei and him had a relationship that wasn't just defined by their factions.

"When he returns, tell him I'll be gone for six months. He'll know what to do." After saying this, he left. He didn't have time to spare in relaxing or indulging other desires. Jiu Lang was given the same resources as him, and that put some pressure onto his shoulders.

He needed to be ready for anything.

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Chapter 14: Yang Yore Grounds

In the Scarlet Solaris Mountain, a large double-doored gate was embedded into its existence. This door was grand, golden, and gave off a strong, forceful aura.

Standing beside it was a male, nearly seven feet in height, and looked like they were made of muscles. His arm was larger than a grown man's thigh, while his legs were thick and powerful. As he stood there, he revealed a dense and powerful yang aura.

He was dressed in casual sweatpants and no shirt. His feet were bare, but his toenails were painted black. There was a thick display of veins protruding beneath his skin. With bead-like eyes and a bald head so shining and waxed that it reflected the sun's rays, he could intimidate the toughest of warriors.

Wei Wuyin flew to this gate with his crane. He jumped off and landed right in front of this man. His eyes were calm and indifferent, but a powerful aura quietly stirred within his body.

A pair of beady eyes met a pair of silver eyes. A spark was ignited!

Without a word, the beef of a male exploded forth with a kick. The rock beneath his feet cracked and splattered everywhere. With a heaving roar, he launched his large, nearly basketball sized fist, towards Wei Wuyin. A trace of qi flowing through his body.

Wei Wuyin clenched his fist, a thin silver qi emerging around his fist. He shot it forward to meet that giant fist.

Bang!

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A cataclysmic explosive sound erupted. The surrounding ground looked like it was ripped off and sent behind them. The middle ground seemed to have been impacted as nothing but a myriad of cracks was there.

A figure flew backwards like a cannonball. That large figure smashed into the side of the mountain, causing a roaring tremble of the area.

Wei Wuyin walked forward, massaging his neck with a icy-cold smile on his face.

"Gahh!" A breathy exclamation sounded before the humanoid beast of muscle escaped from the surface of the mountain. A heavy thud echoed as he touched the ground.

The beady-eyed male looked up with surprise clear in his gaze, "You've birthed metal qi?! You've given form to qi?!?" A very gentle and soft voice sounded, like a small-sized boy who'd yet to go through puberty. It originated from the beady-eyed man.

"Wei Si, didn't I tell you to stop being so aggressive? The only reason you're a guard here is because of your huge body being a good meat shield, haha." Wei Wuyin laughed freely, his icy-cold smile replaced with a jubilant one.

"Come, come give your cousin a proper hug," Wei Wuyin gestured with his hands for Wei Si to come.

This oaf of a man was Wei Si's cousin. He was the son of his father's little brother and was five years younger. He was the guardian of the Yang Yore Fields, and only received the position because of Wei Wuyin's recommendation.

His cultivation base was only at the First Stage of Qi Condensation, Qi Creation, but he was born with a divine strength that made him as physically strong as someone who birthed elements and tempered their bodies with them. This is why he was given this position. However, his unique body had its issues.

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Because of this physique, he needed an enormous amount of yang energy and his food intake was incredibly high. There was also an issue with his qi cultivation, so the sect gave him this special position and the status of an inner disciple.

The Yang Yore Fields emitted dense yang energy everyday, so it fit his needs. If not for those factors, he could've tried to become a core disciple. Despite that, he was still a part of Wei Wuyin's faction.

Wei Si gave a dumb smile, losing any intimidating aura, and rushed up with wide arms. As he wrapped those thick arms around Wei Wuyin, he was shocked to find that he couldn't squeeze this cousin of his like when they were younger.

Wei Wuyin knew his intent, so he squeezed in return. A panicked series of squealing happened.

"I give! I give!" Wei Si felt his bones nearly break from Wei Wuyin's hug.

Wei Wuyin let go and confidently smiled, looking at this younger cousin of his up and down. "You've grown."

Wei Si chuckled in embarrassment, "Yo-you too." Then, as if he had just thought of something, "When did you reach the fourth phase?"

"During my mission," he casually replied.

"Oh? I heard there was a rumor you've reached the fourth phase, but I thought it was fake because I knew you were only in the second phase." Wei Si was confused by this matter, knowing how difficult cultivation was. Despite Wei Wuyin being talented, to take three years to ascend from the second to fourth phase was definitely some sort of record.

"The person who started that rumor blessed me," he laughingly said. However, his expression changed slightly as he thought of something. A formless pressure once more descended on his shoulders.

"Anyways, I'm going to be in the Yang Yore Fields for six months," he handed a badge to Wei Si. Wei Si was shocked for a moment, then smacked his forehead.

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"Right! You placed second in the Core Disciple Competition. I can't believe Tao Gui, He Long, Mei Mei, Qu Gui, and Shu Yang all suffered this year, with three dead, one recovering, and one crippled." He emotionally sighed.

The Nine Core Disciples of this generation were extraordinary but with twist and turns, they suffered immense calamities. The sect would later hold a formal selection ceremony to pick four new core disciples. That selection will definitely be filled with bloodshed and plots.

Wei Wuyin had no intention of swimming through such crap. Instead, he gave orders to anyone in his faction to be careful and that Elder Ji will help as much as he could if they needed it. His generosity was tremendous, but in fact, it didn't cost him anything to have Elder Ji, who already stated allegiance, help them.

He left Su Mei with the recruitment of new disciples and the vetting process. He wanted to give her more responsibilities, and with the void of four faction leaders, and the dissolution of Mei Mei's faction, she can show her potential.

He didn't care if he obtained more members for his faction. The strength of an army can only do so much in the cultivation world. A single Godlord could level the entirety of the Scarlet Solaris Mountain as long as the Ancestral Elder didn't act, so he didn't care much for group strength.

It was convenient and what he already had was more than enough to meet his needs.

"I'm entering," Wei Wuyin informed. He walked past Wei Si and touched the doors. However, when he did, he felt Wei Si's meaty hands grip his shoulder.

"What?" He didn't want to waste too much time.

"...Lady Yan Zhu has entered." Wei Si had a fearful expression on his face as he responded.

Wei Wuyin frowned. Yan Zhu? How did she get in? According to his knowledge, the cost for a single hour was immense.

"How long?" He didn't mind waiting a few hours to avoid any conflict. Yan Zhu may not be his match, but he respected the publicly recognized number one disciple of the sect.

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"...this..." Wei Si's expression turned awkward.

"How long?" Wei Wuyin asked again, his voice deeper.

"Six...months."

"..."

"..."

The silence was stifling. Wei Wuyin was frowning deeply, his mind in thought. Then, he recalled his three violet-colored lightning stones that were like thirty elemental stones. His eyebrow twitched.

Someone had given them rewards beyond what was publicly described. Could it be due to the three deaths? He knew that the Scarlet Solaris Mountain was shrouded by Scarlet Qi, an aggressive qi that geared towards yang energy, that's why there's no yin equivalent on the mountain.

"Using yang to nourish yin. She's trying to tackle the fourth phase of Qi Condensation...this method is...risky." As he thought of this, his frown turned deeper. If Yan Zhu was currently in the Yang Yore Fields, her body would be heavily influenced by the yang energy, causing her to go into a constant state of heat.

Even Wei Wuyin would find it difficult to offset the yin energy if he cultivated in an area of yin. He would find himself experiencing all sorts of changes. This was why he was willing to wait a few hours despite no number of members restrictions being officially placed.

Wei Si had stopped him for this reason as well.

"She gave you orders not to allow anyone to pass?" Wei Wuyin asked. Wei Si silently nodded.

Wei Wuyin sighed. He took a minute to think. If it was anyone else, telling them that Yan Zhu was cultivating would have them just back off, to avoid offending someone monstrously powerful. However, some may be wanting to take advantage of her current state.

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Wei Si was his cousin so he didn't lie. Perhaps if Wei Wuyin was weaker, Wei Si would've halted him despite being his subordinate without saying anything. However, with Wei Wuyin being stronger than him, it left Wei Si in a bad position, so he had to tell the truth.

"I understand, but I have to cultivate. I can't give her six months. Don't worry, she can't do anything to me, and I don't intend to do anything to her." After reassuring Wei Si, Wei Wuyin walked in.

The gate opened and he was washed by the dense aura of yang. His heart pumped heavily and his blood felt like it was boiling. As he walked in, his keen senses heard sounds of heavy breathing.

He facepalmed and bit his lips. That was the sound of moaning.

He looked around. This Yang Yore Fields was just a cavern carved out of this location, a myriad of formations were inscribed on the walls that filtered out the scarlet qi specifically for yang energy and kept it sealed. This would build up the yang energy within.

The reason it was given the title of 'fields' was because of the ground. He saw wisps of golden strands that looked like unharvested barley. The strands were thick, visible, and swayed from left to right as if a wind was pushing it.

It truly resembled a well-maintained barley field. He breathed in, the strands of yang energy flowed into his body. It entered his meridians and were filtered until it became refined yang energy which entered his dantian.

With a thought, the qi within him acted like hands that gripped the refined yang energies and dragged them into his Heart of Qi. Like a farm waste shredder, all of it was turned into bits and became a part of his Heart of Qi.

A slightly stronger yang aura emerged in his Heart of Qi. "This place is far better than I ever thought!" Wei Wuyin couldn't help but grow excited. As a man, it was far easier to process yang energy than women and the effects only benefited his natural body.

He could feel his innate yang absorb the surrounding yang energy without his will as well. With this, various aspects of himself would be improved.

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This was his first time stepping here, as it was usually restricted as a luxury for Inner Elders and Core Elders, those at the Third and Fourth Phase. Now that he had six months to cultivate here as he wished, he felt certain that ascending to the Fifth Phase was incredibly likely.

"Aaahhh!" Suddenly, a very loud exclamation sounded and the heavy breathing subsided. It seemed that someone had reached their climax. Chuckling softly to himself, he went to find an area far away from the moans.

He had no wish to offend someone for no reason, and his natural curiosity wasn't that strong. There wasn't really much to be curious about.

In a lotus position, he started breathing exercises as his Heart of Qi circulated, pulling in more strands of yang energy. He processed all the bits he pulled in and absorbed them thoroughly. After several hours, he felt adjusted to the aura of the fields.

After eating a little bit of prepared rations for the six month long seclusion, he took out the violet-colored lightning stones. "I'll birth lightning qi first and foremost. If I use the yang energy to help subdue the lightning energy, it'll be much easier to absorb it into my Heart of Qi."

Lightning was a naturally aggressive element, but violet-colored lightning contained an affinity with yang energy. This was why he didn't just absorb them, but waited to arrive here.

Just as he took out a box with a single violet-colored stone, the moans from earlier continued. "Wow, she's that devoted." Wei Wuyin was shocked that she had already restarted her cultivation and finished it so soon, it had only been a few hours.

With her body constantly absorbing yang energies, she would be in a state of arousal every time. To alleviate that state and concentrate on cultivation, she would need to satisfy herself beforehand.

"..." His mind wandered for a bit, a hint of temptation eating away at his heart. He sighed deeply. He'll need to find a partner after these six months are finished. Those moans were just far too stimulating.

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He refocused and removed the stone from the box, his qi enshrouded his hand as he grabbed the stone. The stone's energy was volatile and violent, before he could even absorb it, it had already responded to the yang energy in the surroundings and the energy of his body as it abruptly flowed into him.

"What?!" Shocked, he panicked. The energy numbed his entire arm in a split second, and the entire right side of his body felt like it was being electrified. He clenched his teeth, traces of violet electricity surging through his body and even flashing through his silver eyes.

He executed his spiritual spell, Iron Core Eyes, as he analyzed the stone with his spiritual sense with haste. He could see that his body was acting as a lightning rod to its energy.

"Metal qi?!" He cried internally before he realized his vision had turned violet-colored as if he was seeing the world in the ultraviolet spectrum. A wave of panic surged in his mind as he nearly lost himself.

A flicker of coolness flowed from his mind, calming his emotions. He felt a wave of calmness. "My mind's eye?" As he felt calm and his emotions were suppressed, he realized his mind's eye had aided in it.

"Right!" As if someone had told him what to do, he agreed. With a wave, he brought out the scarlet qi stone. With the lightning stone in one hand and the scarlet qi stone in the other, he started to draw in both of their energies.

He then drummed up his own innate yang energies to direct both energies to clash. With their battle, his body felt like it was going to explode, but it had direction and thus was less destructive. He was pitting two beasts together instead of handling one.

With each smashing clash, bits of lightning energy and scarlet qi escaped from the main source. He drew in the surrounding yang energy, refined it, mixed it in with the three forms of energy, and sent them to his Heart of Qi to be crushed and absorbed.

Soon, a delicate yet explosive balance was reached. After several hours, Wei Wuyin felt the scarlet qi be rapidly absorbed by the refined yin, yang, water, earth, fire, and wind energies and strengthened them with miraculous means.

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"Scarlet Qi truly is a blessing!" As he recalled his mind's eye, he couldn't help but congratulate himself for swift thinking. He hadn't realized it before, but this clone of his mind held the ability to access his other mind's memories without the influence of emotions. That's why he felt a wave of calmness. His primary mind had gone haywire with fear of the unknown, but his cloned mind was like a machine working methodically.

It had found out a path of survival.

As he was thinking about his next actions, the wild moaning once more echoed in the fields. He turned his head to look and smiled.

"If I can keep this up, in six months I can ascend!" He felt more confident than ever. He hurriedly went back into his cultivation state, keeping the continuous balance.

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Chapter 15: Six Months

Six months flew by seamlessly.

In the Yang Yore Fields was a figure surrounded by gold-colored energies. In his right palm, violet lightning and silver mist flowed endlessly. They danced like companions of the night in perfect balance.

In his left palm was red, blue, brown, and green energy. They were the four natural elements of the world: fire, water, earth, and wind. They existed in an even greater balance and flow.

Wei Wuyin took a deep breath and exhaled. The gold energy rippled and the strands of golden yang energy beneath his feet wiggled wildly. He opened his eyes to reveal various images flashing within. Each image was illusory, but contained a powerful source of vitality.

He had ascended to the Fifth Stage of Qi Condensation, Yang Growth Phase. His qi now had innate vitality, capable of exhibiting far more power and influence over the elemental energies birthed. This was a defining moment for cultivators and allowed them to actively control the forms of their qi as if they were truly alive and sentient.

If before, Wei Wuyin was a stationary faucet, then now he had obtained a firehose, where he could redirect and control the output of his qi. The intricate level of control enabled all of his qi arts to reach a new level.

Soon, the various energies and vitality started to subside until it was completely reined in, being concealed deeply within Wei Wuyin's body. He had reached the Fifth Stage of Qi Condensation four months in, and the remaining two months were mostly used to solidify his cultivation base, train in some qi arts, and spiritual spells.

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"I had never thought that the Yore Yang Fields would be so beneficial to me," Wei Wuyin grinned. He now possessed the strength to fight top-tier Core Elders, and his cultivation base was short from reaching the 'God' level. If he could take that step, his chances of becoming a Godlord were close.

That being said, the two words 'sixth phase' were like an endlessly stretching chasm for many, unable to be reached in their entire lives. It wasn't just the untalented, but those who had greater talent than him before and the full support of an entire sect had failed to cross this chasm.

Wei Wuyin once heard the story of a beautiful and talented daughter of the former sect leader of the Aqua Echo Sect, one of the Five Great Sects, had reached the fifth phase at sixteen. Even to this day, a full eighty-odd years later, she still remained at the fifth phase. This illustrated its difficulties perfectly.

Therefore, Wei Wuyin wouldn't be overconfident. His goal wasn't to reach the sixth phase at the moment, but to transform his Heart of Qi into a Heart of Elemental Qi. That's his far, long term goal for himself. If the opportunity to reach the sixth phase happens along the way, he'll definitely seize it, but until then, he had other things to achieve.

Such as the Haven Heart Qi Method. Within these six months, he had absorbed enough essence to allow his meridians to be reborn, transforming and giving his essence a higher purity grade. While it may be a miniscule difference, the change in purity grade related to one's cultivation speed and talent. The fact he enhanced it, even by one percent, was enough for him to celebrate.

The change in purity also meant he had new innate essence to draw from. He now had a freshly cloned mind, a renewed body, and purer essence. All he lacked was a spirit. According to the Haven Heart Qi Method, the fourth level was titled Spirit Severing and Spirit Transformation.

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He knew it was similar to the other levels, but far more dangerous. It required one to split their current Heart of Qi spirit, that which acts as the brain center, to create another one. It was cloning, but more direct and had far less leeway in methods capable of being deployed.

In truth, he had a deep level of fear and natural aversion towards this level. If he messed up even a tiny bit, qi deviation was a certainty, and there wouldn't be a way to stop it. Without his spirit, his Heart of Qi would just be a volatile bomb filled with elemental, yin, and yang energies.

A silhouette of a finger rolled next to him, causing him to shiver.

"He Long..."

He didn't explode, but his fate was horrific. Tao Gui, however, didn't even have a piece remaining. That terrified him greatly. While he had a strong willpower and strength to press forward despite risk, the logistics of the Spirit Severing wasn't something he could safely direct like Mind Dissolution.

Shaking his head, he got up and looked around. The moans had long since ceased. It seemed Yan Zhu had left around a month in, unable to stay the entire six months. It made sense. She was going at it every few hours, that had to be exhausting.

He was actually surprised she lasted a full month. He felt admiration for someone who's willing to do such a thing. While her self-intimate actions weren't out of the ordinary for women in general, he heard yang energy refinement for women were like having your body controlled by a ghost creating an itch you can't scratch.

That sounded very uncomfortable.

He decided to leave. He had already run out of time anyways, so he had to leave. As he looked around, he couldn't help but feel emotional. If he had full access to something like this 24/7, his cultivation would reach untold levels.

He looked at the golden strands and noticed that they had shrunk an entire forty percent in height. With just him and Yan Zhu, they had consumed forty percent of the yang energy within. This was the reason why the sect limited the numbers within and required

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contribution points to enter, for both disciples and elders. The limited amount of top quality resource grounds like this was far too few, and never everlasting.

If he spent two years here alone, there would be no more energy for others.

After exiting, he saw Wei Si's bulky body. He stood like a quiet guardian, absorbing the remnant yang energy emitted by the gate. When the gate opened, Wei Si's eyes opened along with them and he turned around. When he saw his cousin, there was a dense light of joy within his eyes.

"You've finally left!" Wei Si happily exclaimed.

Wei Wuyin smiled, "Mn. I've finished my six months, so I had to leave." After saying that, he looked around. There was something strange about the environment but he couldn't quite pinpoint the oddity.

"Oh yeah! I nearly forgot," Wei Si pulled out Wei Wuyin's entry badge and handed it over. On the badge, what originally said 'six months' had now said 'one day'. Seems like he was cutting it quite close.

These badges were designed so that the guardians can activate a formation on them to measure time.

As he kept the badge, he still had this odd sensation in the back of his mind. He frowned, once more looking around.

Wei Si seemed to notice Wei Wuyin's actions and his beady-eyes flashed. "A spiritual formation was set up here about a month ago."

"Oh?" Wei Wuyin's eyes lit up as he inspected the surroundings. His eyes shone a faint silver light as he executed the Iron Core Eyes. The ground no longer looked ordinary, but seemed to be linked by some profound means. A faint trace of energy was exuded, nearly miniscule, but it was being directed by a spiritual sense.

"This is an alert formation? They are commonly used as an early warning system, why did someone establish one here?" He inquired but Wei Si only shrugged his broad shoulders. As the formation was harmless, he didn't feel the need to delve too deeply.

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Just as Wei Wuyin was wondering why, a figure was riding over on a crane. This crane was black, not white like the ones given to core disciples. It was also nearly three times larger in size than the white cranes and gave off a powerful aura.

They were the aerial partners of Core Elders.

"Elder Ji?" Wei Wuyin looked at the white haired old man without wrinkles on the crane. He cut a powerful figure as he stood upright on its back. He had a flat expression, one devoid of happiness or sadness.

Elder Ji arrived swiftly. His aura faint yet filled with vitality. When Wei Si saw Elder Ji, he greeted him respectfully. Wei Wuyin, however, only gave a perfunctory greetings.

"Had something happened?" Wei Wuyin was concerned why Elder Ji had arrived, but it confirmed that he had set up an alert formation for when he left seclusion.

Elder Ji looked at Wei Wuyin, his eyes measuring him up deeply. "Did you reach the fifth phase?" Despite asking, his heart couldn't help but tremble at the possibility. Such talent!

If resources were all anyone needed to reach the fifth phase, there wouldn't be any fourth phase experts. However, the time it takes to refine and mobilize energy effectively to progress one's cultivation base was incredibly long. After all, it took him decades to reach the fifth phase from the fourth phase, and he definitely used far more yang resources than Wei Wuyin.

Wei Wuyin smiled, but he didn't answer.

Elder Ji's eyes narrowed, but then he smiled and his flat expression became one of faint happiness. "I've come to inform you that the sect has given you a mission. Luckily, it fits your timeline, as you leave today."

"Today? Mission..." Wei Wuyin furrowed his brows in thought. The Scarlet Solaris Sect would often give missions out to inner and core disciples, especially if they don't take the initiative. It was this way of action that left him vulnerable to Jiu Lang's schemes. He was sent to kill the Violet Moon Sect's remnants knowing there was a talented Third Stage of Qi Condensation expert amongst them.

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In the information report, that bit had been scrubbed out. It was also removed from the sect's intelligence report, causing the mission to go down in difficulty from requiring a group of Inner Elders to requiring just one Core Disciple. If Wei Wuyin hadn't reached the Fourth Stage of Qi Condensation during, he would've been killed.

Elder Nie, Jiu Lang's aunt, definitely had a hand in such corrupt practices.

Elder Ji explained, "It's a joint mission with two other sects. A task force of sorts. You'll be joining members of the Aqua Echo Sect and Sky Sword Sect. You're assigned to go with Yan Zhu, Shu Yin, Xing Fu, and Elder Bing."

"Elder Bing? Xing Fu?" He frowned, knowing the former, but not the latter. Elder Bing was a Core Elder who's aligned with Yan Zhu's faction. She had a cultivation base at the Fourth Phase of Qi Condensation, Yin Form, and had birthed an advanced elemental qi - Ice.

She could be considered to be top-tier amongst core elders. As Xing Fu, he had never heard that name before.

"Xing Fu is Elder Bing's disciple and took one of the vacant core disciple spots," Elder Ji cleared up. Wei Wuyin pouted his lips slightly. So, why was he asked for this mission?

"Why was I assigned to this mission? Shu Yin is allied with Yan Zhu, so I understand, but I've kept a distance from both of them. Wouldn't anyone else be better, probably a fifth female?" He felt somewhat annoyed. It felt out-of-place for him to be assigned to such a mission.

Elder Ji smiled in response, one could see that he wasn't worried about Wei Wuyin. "It was Elder Bing herself who asked for you. I don't know why, but she insisted." Yan Zhu and Jiu Lang were not allies, so there weren't any obvious schemes afoot.

Massaging his temples, he deeply sighed. "Fine, what's the mission?"

Elder Ji suddenly turned serious, his expression becoming somewhat gloomy, "There's been a string of disappearances, a total of several tens of thousands of people, male and female, have been vanishing. It wasn't all at once, which has brought about deep panic from the public and surrounding powers. Even several Second Stage of the Qi Condensation experts have gone missing."

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"The areas and people affected have already touched all three sects, so they've established an agreement to handle it together, establishing a task force. They're taking this seriously." Elder Ji's solemn tone caused Wei Wuyin to take this seriously as well.

Seeing how the sect was sending a core elder and four core disciples, he knew the severity of this matter was great. He expected the other sects to take this just as seriously.

"Alright. When do we leave?" He decided to handle this matter first and then focus on his other goals.

"Now. Let's go." Elder Ji leapt onto the black crane and it prepared to fly. Wei Wuyin said his goodbyes to Wei Si before following suit.

Woosh!

They took to the skies.

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Chapter 16: Task Force

While they soared through the skies, Elder Ji informed him that the others within the sect were still ignorant of his exact cultivation base. There were quite a few speculations, but no one had any real, concrete idea.

This brought him some comfort. If there was a scheme being laid out with him as a target, he would be underestimated and thus more likely to overcome the threat.

However, Elder Ji also stated that the mission was legitimate, and no one had doctored any information within. After all, three of the Five Great Sects were working in concert. It was best not to throw in junior rivalry or petty schemes that could lead to all sorts of unwanted conclusions.

Elder Ji similarly explained to him the various changes within the sect since he went into seclusion. "There had been a few new developments. Firstly, Mei Mei had healed her injuries sustained during the competition and regained her spot as a Core Disciple. Not many are aware as to how she recovered so quickly, but she did and her strength seemed to have surged, ascending to the third phase."

"Jiu Lang and Lang Yi have also ascended to the third phase as well. Shu Yin absorbed Shu Yang's faction into her own and has been looking for a way to help him repair his cultivation. She requested to be a part of the task force because of the great amount of rewards for its completion. I don't know how likely she's to succeed at her goal, but she's relentless and determined."

"Xing Fu, Jiang Wei, and Jiang Bai were elected as the new core disciples, replacing Tao Gui, He Long, and Shu Yang."

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Wei Wuyin's eyebrow rose slightly, "the Jiang Brothers?" Wei Wuyin had known these two deeply as they were elite members of Mei Mei's faction, like him. In fact, they had fought, partied, and cultivated together when he was a part of her faction as well.

"Yes, in a round of blood and pain, they earned their spots." Elder Ji seemed to recall something and said, "They've both transformed their Heart of Qi, and have immense potential now."

"Oh?" Wei Wuyin felt somewhat curious, but mostly excited. He was happy that two of his comrades from his inner disciple days made it to a higher rank. Now, they stood on equal footing with him - status-wide.

It wasn't long before they arrived at the Scarlet Solaris Mountain's eastern gate at the base of the mountain. There was a steady flow of entry and exit from the mortal members and cultivating families who lived there.

His eyes swept over these people and a deep melancholic feeling emerged in the depths of his heart. Memories entered his mind as his heart felt constricted by a giant hand.

"There they are," a voice broke him out of his emotions, a feeling washed over him that cleansed his mind, and he looked at the area Elder Ji directed him to. There, four women stood.

Shu Yin, with her brown-skin and light-brown eyes, was looking at them approach. Wei Wuyin saw this beautiful woman and saw a deep level of exhaustion suffused within her eyes. She stood with energy and had a determined expression, but her eyes, they reminded him of his own.

She must have a world on her shoulders. Her brother's world.

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Yan Zhu still stood as straight as a spear, her body exuding a heroic and valiant aura, like a general's spear. Everytime he looked at her, she reminded him of a grand spear willing to cleave through the winds and rain. Her short black hair and tight-fitted light armor suited for battle cut a powerful figure.

However, as his eyes roamed briefly around her physique, a series of moans couldn't help but resound in his mind. His blood increased in temperature a little before he smiled.

Xing Fu was a young girl that had nothing particularly outstanding about her. She was a little shorter than average-sized women, and her eyes were sharper, but besides that, she simply did not leave a decent impression.

Even her long, black hair felt common, as there was no sheen or luster to it. Her female assets were also below average, which made him recall Su Mei.

Elder Bing, however, was different. Her icy-blue hair that emitted faint traces of frost left a definite impression. She had mature features, beautifully appropriate attire and assets that couldn't be ignored or missed. While she didn't dress in a revealing fashion, her body's curves were clear. Her slim and long legs may be hidden beneath her long skirt, but they were definitely satisfactory.

They all wore scarlet colors with unique dressings, but each had the Scarlet Solaris Sect's symbol embroidered somewhere visible.

When Elder Ji sent the crane down, the four women all glanced upwards. They landed nearby and Wei Wuyin immediately leapt off. His silver eyes, handsome visage, and unfathomable aura was quite attractive and eye-catching, unable to be ignored .

All of them were looking at Wei Wuyin with an intense gaze of observation. He could even see Xing Fu wildly using a Spiritual Spell to observe him. However, he wasn't concerned that his cultivation base was revealed. He had long since familiarized himself with his new cultivation base to suppress its innate vitality and yin manifestations.

Unless he wished for it, they would at most see his body suffused with elemental energy, placing him at the Third Stage of Qi Condensation, Elemental Birth Phase. They wouldn't even be able to tell that he possessed metal qi or lightning qi unless he exhibited his strength.

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"You're finally here, huh?" Xing Fu said begrudgingly. Her tone was filled with annoyance. This shocked Wei Wuyin as he hadn't recalled what he did to receive such a reception. After all, it was her master who requested him.

"Alright, let's get going. We'll be late if we continue to delay," Yan Zhu said. It seemed that despite Elder Bing being the elder of the group, Yan Zhu was in charge as they all listened.

A black crane was already waiting for them nearby. Before Wei Wuyin could even offer greetings, all four of them jumped on the black crane and readied themselves, with Elder Bing acting as its navigator.

Wei Wuyin frowned. He turned to Elder Ji, who had a frown on his face as well. They had requested him to participate, but they didn't seem to care about him. It felt out-of-place.

Wei Wuyin sighed, muttering lightly to himself, "I hope this is just a mission." With that, he kicked off and landed on the black crane's wide back.

Just as he was about to take a seat next to Xing Fu, she coldly spat, "Who gave you permission to sit next to me? I sure didn't." Her eyes reflected disdain and contempt.

His expression changed. However, seeing that no one seemed to care, he just sat alone and avoided conflict.

They took flight.

"According to Elder Ji, we're supposed to meet the Aqua Echo Sect and Sky Sword Sect at Lake Muu. That's in the central area where the most disappearances took place. This task force..."

Elder Ji had given him all the information about this mission, including a jade inscribed with spiritual markings, a dossier that could only be read through spiritual sense. In it, he learned that many subordinate powers and cities in control of the three sects had been struck with abnormal disappearances.

At first, many believed it was just evil cultivators practicing a dark art, but it became different when, after several hundred people vanished, no evidence of dark arts were performed.

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Dark arts were qi methods that used blood, souls, and lifeforce for its execution. They could even siphon energies from others.

However, it corrupts one's mind and can even cause all sorts of horrendous mutations in the body. However, for those who are untalented or seeking swift revenge, they would sometimes have no choice but to resort to that. With people as cultivation resources, they rise.

With the absence of evidence in that avenue, they believed it was a concerted effort done by normal cultivators. In fact, this was still the prevailing theory.

That being said, Wei Wuyin felt that the incident was surrounded with the scent of demons. Demons were strange existences, while many attached the title of being malicious and evil to them, Wei Wuyin didn't. Demons had unique abilities and cultivated differently than humans, so the vanishing people felt more in line with one of them.

While they all might not be evil, there were quite a few who were detestable, enough to establish the stereotype. However, the Wu Country treated demons like the plague. They would hunt down at the first sign and eliminate them with the strongest of prejudice, including all those involved.

As he thought of this, a wave of sadness battered his heart.

He shook his head, pushing those thoughts back, as he started to cultivate. He breathed in the Essence of Heaven and Earth and entered it into his Heart of Qi. While cultivation like this would no longer progress his cultivation base, it still could increase his strength, no matter how small.

The sixth phase, the False Reality Phase, was known as the gateway to godhood, and relied on mixing one's yang and yin energy in a perfect cohesive whole, creating yin-yang energy. With this, one's qi could become real, integrating with the natural order of the world. While it may not be able to gain permanence, the fact one gains the ability of 'creation' was extraordinary.

It was the first watershed of cultivation that required only comprehension rather than the accumulation of the appropriate energy and a hint of understanding. To understand yin and yang and perform a fusion.

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It's this bit that can cause others to forever be unable to move forward. The worst of it all was that the help of others did very little. Even if a Sixth Phase expert were to give you their experiences, it wouldn't help much. In fact, it could even hurt you.

Wei Wuyin knew that this phase was the true defining moment of a cultivator and moved them from being just a cultivator to being a powerhouse in Wu Country. Luckily, he had nearly one hundred and eighty years to delve into this.

After several hours of continuous flight, a beautiful, clear lake entered his view. It was surrounded by forestry, natural and pure. He felt a dense aura of water energy from within the lake.

The Muu Lake was within the area of the Aqua Echo Sect. It was a cultivation ground for them, where many disciples practiced water-type qi arts. In the jade, it noted that the Aqua Echo Sect was the first hit and their forces suffered some losses. In fact, the majority of people missing originated from their territory.

Then, the Sky Sword Sect and Scarlet Solaris Sect decided to act after receiving the request from them. Wei Wuyin smiled as he thought that the two sects were like boys trying to gain the attention of a pretty girl.

The Aqua Echo Sect was a female-only sect. This wasn't always the case, but due to a tragedy that had happened that nearly crippled the sect, it became that way. With all their cultivators being female, they had their share of difficulties, but one thing couldn't be ignored.

They had the highest number of Fourth Stage of Qi Condensation, Yin Form, experts out of all the Five Great Sects. In fact, they were the second strongest sect in the entire Five Great Sects, hands down. The Sky Sword Sect being the first, as they had two Godlord's upholding their banner.

However, in terms of expert cultivators outside of Godlord's, the Aqua Echo Sect had the highest number, be it Fourth or Sixth Phase experts.

While the Scarlet Solaris Sect had the highest number of Fifth Phase experts. This dynamic was formed because of innate resources. The Scarlet Solaris Mountain exuded Scarlet Qi, which carried inherent yang properties.

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"You better behave when we get there," Xing Fu said. Wei Wuyin realized she was talking to him. A twitch occurred at his eyebrow. He felt a sudden desire to send this girl flying with a slap.

As if ignoring Wei Wuyin's face, she scoldingly continued without pause, "the Aqua Echo Sect has countless beauties, and if you say or act in an improper way, it'll be very disadvantageous to us and the sect, so I hope you keep that in mind and control your urges."

"..." What type of person did she take Wei Wuyin as?

Elder Bing directed the crane to descend near the lake. As they approached, they saw two groups of people. The first group were dressed in blue robes that seemed to ripple like water. They were all female and all had beautiful countenances. There were a total of six.

The second group was a mix of male and females. Two males and two females, with the way they stood and their aura, it seemed that they were masters and disciples.

The middle-aged gentleman wearing white robes and a sword strapped to his waist, gave off a scholarly aura. A young woman with black hair and white robes stood behind him. Her eyes were clear and effused intelligence and will. She also had a sword strapped on her waist.

A beautiful woman that looked no less than twenty years old also wore white, but her sword was strapped onto her back. She looked young, but her aura and stance demanded respect and her eyes revealed aged wisdom. Behind her was a young man with his eyes closed, his body emitted a sharp aura unlike the other three. It was like he was an unsheathed sword.

They had the insignia of the Sky Sword Sect, an upright golden longsword, embroidered onto their robes.

When they arrived, the gazes of all, except the young man, were drawn over. They landed and walked forward.

Elder Bing halted them with a gesture and continued. The middle-aged man and young woman from the Sky Sword Sect and two female members of the Aqua Echo Sect walked forward. As they gathered, they seemed to be discussing something.

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As all of that happened, Wei Wuyin inspected everyone here. The Aqua Echo Sect truly lived up to their reputation that all of their disciples were beautiful. As for the Sky Sword Sect, he couldn't make any judgment. Supposedly, they were all like sharp swords, arrogant and fierce.

However, rumors weren't always true.

"There's ten disciples and four elders..." As he counted, he couldn't help but be inwardly shocked. They were taking this mission very seriously.

Each of the elders were in the Yin Form Phase, and all the disciples were at least at the Second Stage of Qi Condensation. They must all be core disciples of their sects.

Just as he was looking around, his gaze fell on a particular woman from the Aqua Echo Sect. She had strawberry blonde hair, bright eyes, long legs, and a strong and prideful chest. Her eyes contained a strong strength and confidence that left one impressed. That coupled with her beauty left one intrigued and wanting to know more.

Her body had a heavy aura of water, likely having transformed her Heart of Qi into a Heart of Water Qi. With that, her water-type qi arts would increase three-fold at the very least.

"Control yourself, you're drooling," Xing Fu called out loudly. Wei Wuyin turned towards her and saw the disgusted expression on her face while she pointed.

This...girl...

Before he could say anything, he felt the gazes of everyone reach him. While he wasn't drooling, it was still embarrassing to be singled out for such a reason. However, he quickly calmed himself and smiled.

"Jealous?" His tone was teasing and filled with insinuation.

Xing Fu was caught off-guard and huffed, "As if!" She turned away. Her leg twitched slightly as if she wished to stomp the ground and leave.

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Shaking his head, he felt this girl was only slightly bothersome. Now he understood why she took the initiative to engage him. She had a crush on him, and was just immature in how she was approaching it.

As she was unremarkable in many areas, there weren't many ways she could make herself known to Wei Wuyin who had his pick of women. Doing whatever she could to leave an impression. It was cute, but he didn't have time to deal with such matters.

Shu Yin looked at him, her brows furrowed. She seemed as if she wanted to say something, but Elder Bing was already returning.

When she arrived, she directly spoke, "I'll give you all flares as we'll be splitting up in groups." She handed out red orbs the size of baseballs. If crushed, a brilliant red light would be released that'll be visible in a five hundred mile radius.

She explained that there would be three groups, one covering about sixty percent of the area, and the other two handling twenty percent each. Supposedly, they figured out how to find the culprit or clues to them. However, they just didn't know where.

So they decided to split up to hasten the search.

The Elders will be in one, and the disciples will be split into two composed of five people.

She also gave them crystal balls. Supposedly, these were Dead Spirit Crystals. If they approached an area where an enormous amount of people had died recently, it'll shine with light. As they were assuming it was a mass murder done by conventional cultivators, these were excellent tools to find the site of the killings.

From there, they can investigate further.

If nothing comes up, they'll move to the next suspected area. This was only a preliminary method deployed, and they had several other methods to find the culprits.

"Shu Yin and Xing Fu, you'll be in the first group. Yan Zhu and Wei Wuyin, you'll be in the second group. Any objections?" Elder Bing asked.

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"Master, isn't this inappropriate? Yan Zhu and Wei Wuyin have the highest cultivation amongst us four, they should be split, no?" Xing Fu immediately raised an objection. Her words weren't without merit, but the response she received shocked her.

"Shu Yin has reached the Elemental Birth Phase, so her cultivation base is similar to Wei Wuyin. You'll also be with Dao Shin. It's appropriate." Elder Bing explained.

Dao Shin? As she said that, Wei Wuyin glanced towards the Sky Sword Sect's members. That young man was like an unsheathed sword.

"Sword Qi?" His brows furrowed. If that was the case, that young man was definitely strong. Those who comprehended the Ethereal-Type Sword Qi had one of the highest combat abilities known to modern cultivators.

He also didn't forget Shu Yin. To think she had ascended to the third phase. It seems the sect had placed deep importance on those who successfully cultivated the Haven Heart Qi Method. He had received violet lightning stones, Yan Zhu received six months of cultivation ground training, and Shu Yin likely had support as well.

Shu Yin smiled as he looked towards her, a hint of pride within. He replied with his own smile that said, "You're extraordinary, I'm impressed."

Soon, the disciples were divided into two groups of five. Wei Wuyin, Yan Zhu, the female disciple from the Sky Sword Sect, and two disciples from the Aqua Echo Sect.

Wei Wuyin noticed that the woman with a dense watery aura had been assigned to their group. His silver eyes couldn't help but appreciate her serene beauty and calm elegance as she arrived.

Yan Zhu stood out with a map in hand, her expression commanding and charismatic, "Our assignment is to sweep the southeastern section of the Muu Lake's forest. We each have a dead spirit crystal, so we can split up further into two groups and divide the section into two areas." She pointed at an area and cut down, dividing their area into two.

Wei Wuyin realized that Yan Zhu had the bearing of a natural leader. Even though he also possessed that inherent quality, the degree was several times lower than Yan Zhu. However, while he was praising her in his heart, others found the sight unsatisfying.

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"Hold it! Who gave you the title of leader?" The Aqua Echo Sect member coldly asked. She obviously didn't like that Yan Zhu had abruptly taken the leadership role.

"Hm? Then, what do you think we should do?" Yan Zhu calmly countered, her eyes narrowing dangerously. It seemed that she didn't like her momentum being broken. The other two girls, who were obviously extraordinary, hadn't said anything.

"I think we should vote and decide the appropriate leader," the Aqua Echo Sect's disciple offered.

Yan Zhu shook her head, "Impossible. If we voted, then the Sky Sword Sect will be at a disadvantage, and a tie could form." Yan Zhu highlighted how the method was ineffective.

Suddenly, a sharp voice interjected, "You're right. The best and most fair choice is to allow the strongest to lead." It was the Sky Sword Sect's female disciple, Ming Yu. She stepped forward, her eyes containing a powerful battle intent.

Yan Zhu nodded without hesitation, her courageous demeanour and firm stance agreeing without a word. The Aqua Echo Sect's, Zhou Gao, was taken aback for a moment, but then coldly smiled. "Agreed."

Wei Wuyin saw the intense atmosphere formed and couldn't help but be intrigued at this development. Of course he wouldn't participate. His cultivation exceeded everyone present and he birthed metal and lightning qi. He didn't believe anyone here was his match, and he cared even less about who led.

Instead, he looked at the only one who hadn't said a single thing. The serene beauty with an unshakeable aura. She was aloof and proud.

"Shui Wuhen, what do you think?" Zhou Gao asked.

Shui Wuhen smiled mildly and replied, "You three can decide." With that, she slowly walked away as if she had no intention to get caught in the crosshairs of their little competition.

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Yan Zhu furrowed her eyebrows slightly. This woman was powerful, she knew this much. There was little fear and vigilance in her heart facing Ming Yu or Zhou Gao, but Shui Wuhen gave her a frightening sensation of danger.

"Wei Wuyin, do you-" Yan Zhu was going to ask something, but was interrupted by Zhou Gao.

"You want a man to fight your battles?" Zhou Gao coldly mocked with a sneer. She had the expression as if Yan Zhu was afraid of handling her own mess. Yan Zhu's frown deepened, her eyes flashing with anger as she was obviously provoked. When did she ever need to rely on a man?!

Her rage had missed the vigilance that both Zhou Gao and Ming Yu had when Wei Wuyin was mentioned. If she knew their elders told them to not offend Wei Wuyin, who knew what she would think? In fact, Zhou Gao's Elders told her to avoid conflict with Wei Wuyin under any and all circumstances.

"I need no man to fight my battles, do you? Let's do this. The strongest will be the leader!" Yan Zhu heroically declared. She withdrew her spear. It was nine feet and nine inches longer, slender, and scarlet colored. It exuded a faint scarlet qi.

This was the Scarlet Hell Spear, a spear she constructed using the Scarlet Qi Stone gained from the Core Competition rewards and other materials. It seemed as if it was pulled from hell as she pointed the bladed portion emitting scarlet wisps of smoke at Zhou Gao.

"Good! It seems you're not so useless!" Zhou Gao waved her hand, a folding fan emerging in her hand. She unfurled it. When it did, ripples surged around it as if the air had turned liquid.

Ming Yu excitedly smiled, pulling out her sword from its sheath. A bursting flow of metal qi pervaded her surroundings and formed the faint silhouette of a sword behind her. This was a sign that her cultivation was incredibly close to reaching the Yin Form Phase. When this image formed, the other two's expressions turned serious.

Metal Qi was one of the Five Advanced Elemental Qi, which included ice, wood, lightning and magma. Formed from the extreme of the four natural elements in various combinations. They were powerful and fierce. With this, they had to take her far more seriously.

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This was bound to be an interesting battle.

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Chapter 17: Triple Threat

"A one versus one versus one? That makes things more interesting." Wei Wuyin was mostly ignored, but he was okay with it. With a kick, he quietly retreated. The Elders had already left and the second group was leaving with Dao Shin as the lead.

There was no one to stop this battle for supremacy amongst these strong-willed women. The surrounding atmospheric aura grew tense as qi manifested around their bodies. It was a beautiful sight as the three women stared intently at each other, battle intent surging about and radiating for their eyes.

Wei Wuyin decided to watch Ming Yu intently. She used a sword and metal qi, similar to him who used a saber and metal qi. Perhaps he'll be able to pick up some battle tactics or strategy from her. While the sword and saber had their differences, in the end, they were bladed weapons meant to kill.

Shui Wuhen looked as if the battle didn't concern her, her gaze passive as if enjoying a televised event. From time to time, she would discreetly glance at Wei Wuyin. Earlier, her Elders had specifically warned her against entering any conflict with this man.

To her, he didn't seem special at all. She even knew who he was, how talented he was regarded, and his background. Her information network was definitely solid and extensive. Other than being handsome, a little cunning, and slightly talented, there wasn't much else to regard as noteworthy.

"Wei Wuyin, twenty-six years old this year, born to the late Wei Clan from Starlight City. His current cultivation base is a relative unknown, but looking at him, he seems to be at the Elemental Birth Phase." She wasn't impressed by any of this. In fact, twenty-six years was rather old for core disciples of their status.

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Yan Zhu and Jiu Lang were younger by quite a bit. As for her? She was only twenty this year, a full six years behind Wei Wuyin. If it wasn't for the fact that he worked his way up from an honorary disciple to a core disciple of one of the Five Great Sects, there would be no need to pay attention to him.

Before she could think more, the battle began!

Scarlet Solaris Art: Raging Thrust!

Turbulent winds surged wildly about as Yan Zhu made the first move. She roared, her spear held in both hands as she dashed forth with valiant and peerless momentum. Her spear stabbed towards Ming Yu, not Zhou Gao. The spear was true and fierce, enshrouded by scarlet qi infused with elemental energies.

Sky Sword Art: Sky Sword Wall!

"Hmph!" Ming Yu retaliated swiftly. She swiped her sword forward, a slicing maelstrom of silver mist formed before her and swiftly shot towards Yan Zhu. The surrounding ground was shredded and the air resonated with a piercing sound. Within that storm of metal qi, images of swords emerged. They were faint, but there.

"Ha!" Yan Zhu didn't yield in the face of this counterattack, thrusting even harsher than before. A wall of scarlet wind was birthed from the tip of her spear and met the storm head on.

Boom!

An explosion erupted with a wall of scarlet wind and metal swords as its epicenter. A raging wind sent the surrounding loose rocks and grass flying about. The folds of everyone's clothes fluttered, pressing tightly against their bodies. The outlines of these women's exquisite figures were faintly revealed.

Wei Wuyin's eyes flashed a silver radiance. He firmly steadied his stance as he withstood the wind. The wind smashed against his body sending his robes into a flutter, but he remained without taking even a half-step back.

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Around Shui Wuhen, a faint ward of water qi emerged. It was like a secondary skin, mere inches from her body, and formed a watery outline. The wind was blocked effortlessly by this protective ward.

Water Elemental Art: Maw of the Depths!

The colors of scarlet and silver changed the surroundings, but before the collision could come to a conclusion, an oceanic wave of water wide and high enough to engulf Yan Zhu, Ming Yu, and their conjured qi whole was created. It was ferocious like the gaping mouth of an apex predator, hungry and ferocious.

Zhou Gao had launched her first attack, and it was impressive. Her timing was impeccable as she struck.

"You!" Yan Zhu hastily reacted, taking a step back as her feet were infused with wind qi. She executed a movement-type qi art. Swiftly, she exited the attack range of the oceanic wave of qi.

Ming Yu, however, didn't retreat. Unlike Yan Zhu, she was a sword cultivator with unprecedented courage. Her eyes flashed crazily as she decisively conjured a silver ward of qi and fearlessly dashed towards the monstrous wave of water qi. With a sharp exclamation, she proceeded to slice her sword upwards in a vertical angle. The metal qi conjured seemed to gain a subtle form as a sword image pierced into the wave.

Metal Elemental Art: Slicing Force!

The wave was cut into two. Its gathered force collapsed as its center mass no longer existed. Ming Yu dashed through the gaping hole created and slashed mercilessly forward. Her eyes contained deep killing intent.

As a sword cultivator, she was truly courageous and fearless in battle. If you're not willing to lay down your life in battle, then you shouldn't have one. That was her mantra, and it was clearly reflected in her determined gaze.

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Zhou Gao wasn't surprised by the killing intent displayed, as she was familiar with the methodology of the Sky Sword Sect. Her eyes flashed with contempt as her folding fan unfurled further and swung lightly outwards. She used her previous elemental art once more.

However, she didn't use it just once, but flapped her fan three full times! The three waves were formed at different times, but like a snap of a finger, they merged into one and grew three times in size and force. The truly dangerous aspect of water qi arts were its many layering and merging capabilities. This was one of them.

Ming Yu's eyes grew sharper, her body erupting fiercely with silver qi. She became like a silver sword goddess as she roared and held her sword with two hands. Without hesitation, she brandished it horizontally.

Sky Sword Art: One Line, World's End!

A condensed line of compressed qi an inch thick and three feet wide was sent forth, slicing and concentrated in its intent. This attack was absolutely powerful and held an intense degree of killing intent within. The three waves combined didn't stop its momentum as it was sliced through like a hot knife through butter.

"What?!" Zhou Gao was shocked as she witnessed her qi art be rendered useless in the face of this assault. She immediately shrouded herself in several layers of qi wards as she tried to commence her retreat. However, as she did, a scarlet light flashed in her peripheral vision. Her eyes widened as she felt the sensation of death.

Scarlet Solaris Art: Crushing Thrust!

Yan Zhu had also struck at this opportune moment. A wall of scarlet was formed and smashed downwards with fierce, unyielding momentum. She had taken to the sky above and used gravity to increase the force of her attack.

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Zhou Gao's surprise attack had earned her the target of both cultivators, but it was too late to realize her mistake as those two attacks seemed intent on ending her life.

"No!" She shouted with unwillingness. Her multi-layered water qi ward expanded and became further fueled by her qi. It grew thicker and thicker, but it wasn't fast enough as the silver line of qi pierced through the wards and approached her body. If this hit, she would be directly bisected!

A crushing collision also occurred as her ward rippled from Yan Zhu's attack. Shockingly, the ward held. Water was a defensive-oriented attribute after all, and while Yan Zhu was channeling the scarlet qi of her spear to use Scarlet Solaris Sect's core arts, she hadn't formed a Heart of Scarlet Qi, so its power wasn't at its highest.

That being said, the exerted pressure had heavily deformed the ward and seemed unforgiving in its exertion of force. Zhao Gao's retreat was halted as the ward was connected to her body and forced her in place. Her eyes widened when she realized this disadvantageous outcome.

Wei Wuyin knew that this moment was Zhou Gao's defeat. She had been pushed into a corner, shocked by Yan Zhu's decisive attack locking her down, and Ming Yu's absolute resolve to not hold an ounce of strength back. Even Wei Wuyin found her move merciless as it could truly kill Zhou Gao if it connected. Perhaps it wouldn't be so horrible if Yan Zhu hadn't pushed down on her ward, forcing her in place.

The battle between cultivators was often decided by the first few moves, and if not, then it could become a battle of attrition. The only issue is that Yan Zhu, as a spear cultivator, and Ming Yu, as a sword cultivator, were offensively-oriented and struck with everything. They wouldn't hold back or allow the battle to reach a point where attrition would happen. Whereas Zhao Gao, as a water cultivator, hoped for it.

That fierce aggressiveness was much like his own combat style. As a saber cultivator, how could he not strike to kill?

"Help me, Shui Wuhen!" Zhou Gao screamed in panic. As if her prayers were answered, a swirling whirlpool formed beneath her feet and expanded in the blink of an eye. It crashed into the silver line of qi and shredded it into nothing while pushing back Yan Zhu's attack.

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Both Yan Zhu and Ming Yu retreated calmly. Their eyes were dark and solemn. To form a whirlpool with one's qi or any construct required the Yin Form Phase. As they saw the stability within the whirlpool, their eyes constricted!

They were only cultivators at the Third Phase, Elemental Birth, and their attacks consisted mostly of walls, wild storms, or condensed and compressed attacks. This was the same with Zhou Gao. However, forming a whirlpool of water was far more powerful than any of their attacks.

If they were trapped in that whirlpool, its continuous rotations and stability would wear down their attacks, preventing escape. They would be left at the mercy of their attacker. That was the clear difference between just birthing elements and giving elements form.

The whirlpool vanished as the scarlet and metal qi disappeared along with it. In the middle, Zhou Gao was breathing heavily as she looked at the two. She angrily cried, "You bitches! You almost killed me!!!"

Wei Wuyin looked at Shui Wuhen as she had a helpless expression on her face. She had to reveal her cultivation base because of her sect mate.

He smiled. "I think if you're deciding on the strongest, the winner has been decided."

"..." Yan Zhu and Ming Yu were silent. Their attacks were dealt with so easily. Not to mention, they even suspected that Shui Wuhen had a Heart of Water Qi. If that was the case, they were definitely not her match. Yan Zhu was the first to break the silence, "If you're willing to be the leader of our group, I have no objections."

Her open-minded words and stern manner were clearly displayed. However, Shui Wuhen felt a headache coming. With a heavy sigh in her heart, she decided to nod, accepting the role in the end. If she gave Zhou Gao the leadership role, knowing her, she may think that she had her backing and cause all sorts of issues amongst the team.

In actuality, Zhou Gao wasn't her ally in the sect. Their relationship could be said to be like Yan Zhu and Wei Wuyin's, filled with neutrality and avoidance.

Ming Yu sheathed her sword, "Okay."

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Zhou Gao felt indignant at nearly being killed, but what could she do? They all had similar statuses and it was an agreed battle. She only glared hatefully at Yan Zhu and Ming Yu. When her gaze met Wei Wuyin who was off to the side smiling, she felt a surge of anger due to his affiliation with Yan Zhu.

"What are you smiling for? You're so dickless, you're not even man enough to try to battle for leadership. Never have I met a coward like you. Disgusting!" Her words were sharp and without retreat. An angered woman's words were often sharp and merciless.

Wei Wuyin furrowed his brows, but he thought of something, and shook his head. "If you're done venting, can we go on with the mission?"

"You!" Zhao Gao raged, her eyes turning red with anger. Wei Wuyin's indifference at her insult was an insult itself, as if she was unworthy to argue with or talk to. She gripped her fan and her qi erupted. She unfurled her fan and sent a wave of water towards Wei Wuyin.

Yan Zhu and Ming Yu backed off instantly.

Shui Wuhen was curious about Wei Wuyin and thus didn't interfere.

Wei Wuyin's eyes locked down on the wave. His silver eyes pierced through it and landed on Zhou Gao. He had his own limits in patience. First there was Xing Fu and now it was this Zhou Gao. He wasn't willing to reveal his cultivation base because it wasn't necessary, but the underestimation and disrespect was approaching his limits.

Elemental Lightning Art: Thunder Step!

Boom!!

A tremendous boom of thunder roared! The ground beneath Wei Wuyin's feet was crushed explosively! A crater as large as half a meter deep was created, with flickering traces of electricity at its depths. A large, gaping hole was left within the wave of water as it directly collapsed from the sheer force it met.

Wei Wuyin appeared in front of Zhou Gao with lightning-like speed, his eyes flickering with violet lightning, the most volatile and hottest lightning! It was like his eyes contained the most dangerous beast of the lightning realm.

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He stood before her with those eyes.

"Ha!" She gasped and shrieked. The booming sound had caused her heart to feel like it was going to explode, but the sudden appearance of Wei Wuyin's handsome visage and fearsome eyes caused it to nearly stop instead.

There was absolute silence for five seconds. Wei Wuyin was mere inches away from her face, his breath on hers. Only now did she realize that Wei Wuyin was rather tall and his body held a fair amount of muscle.

"Kiss me." His voice was soft but was like resounding claps in her mind. Without a thought, she leaned forward and pressed her soft, red lips on Wei Wuyin's lips. Her eyes closed as if she was enjoying the sensation of intimacy to its utmost limit.

She had even opened her mouth and allowed Wei Wuyin's tongue to meet her own in battle, their lips pushing against each other without end. She was ravenous, as if trying to eat his lips.

"..." Yan Zhu.

"..." Ming Yu.

"..." Shui Wuhen.

After a few seconds, their lips separated and Zhou Gao's breathing was labored as if she had just walked a mile. Her eyes looked dreamy. She pressed her fingers to her lips and slowly caressed it, as if recalling the feeling she just had.

"Is that man enough for you?"

Wei Wuyin grinned triumphantly. He turned towards Shui Wuhen as he walked away, the violet lightning in his eyes gone, "Shall we get going?"

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Chapter 18: Search

They traveled through Muu Lake's forest swiftly. On foot, the five carried dead spirit crystals and spread out with a fifty meter distance between them.

Wei Wuyin was calmly looking at his surroundings, finding the fascinating flora and fauna of the Muu Lake's forest as he did. The flowers were lively and shone with faint traces of water and wood energies. The mystical lake was somehow transforming the inherent properties of the water that enters the soil, and thereby affecting the inhabitants who live from it.

The animals were incredibly peaceful, as if the calming qualities of water had been instilled into their primal instincts. He found that many of them were herbivores, living off the lush greenery within the area. The forest was like a wealth of food for them.

Off to the side, Zhou Gao fumed from time to time. Her eyes shifting out of focus and muttering all sorts of indistinct comments. As she did, a faint blush would surface on her face before swiftly fading.

Wei Wuyin had taken her first kiss, and he had done it so 'forcefully' that she felt aggrieved. However, while she had her grievances, whenever she recalled his eyes filled with power, that visage of handsomeness, and tall figure looming over her. She'd feel all sorts of emotions and heat within her heart.

Her gaze would then shift over to Wei Wuyin, causing her heart to beat faster than before. Two words and she had fallen into his claws like a helpless butterfly. At first, she assumed Wei Wuyin had used some sort of spiritual spell to influence her mind, but there's no way he could do something like that; only Godlords had mind-affecting abilities, as their qi held its own spirituality. Not to mention, even if he did, there would be some traces of manipulation.

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She knew it was done in the spur of the moment, and while her emotions and senses may have been overwhelmed at that particular instant, instinctually and deep within her heart, she wanted to do it. The only issue was that she didn't know why.

Yan Zhu and Ming Yu were silent most of the way. Shui Wuhen was the only one talking actively as she gave directions on where and how to sweep their assigned area. This search lasted for an entire sixteen hours.

They had combed through the entire section of their forest and came up empty.

"We've finished our assignment. For now, let's return to the lake and set up camp by the lakeside," Shui Wuhen said. They unanimously agreed as it took them roughly fifteen minutes to arrive back at the lake. Now that they weren't moving with caution, the time to return was considerably less.

When they arrived, Wei Wuyin noticed a campsite had already been established. A fire was lit and a spiritual formation was set up as an early alarm system. It was similar in structure as the one Elder Ji had established. However, it was a little lacking in flexibility.

With the appropriate spiritual spell, Wei Wuyin felt that he could bypass it.

"Hm?" As they walked deeper, his eyes shone with a silver light. Another formation was layered beneath the alarm formation. It was intricately done, and even he had nearly missed it. It could be an assault formation, but he wasn't sure.

"Nothing?" An Aqua Echo Sect's Elder approached. Shui Wuhen shook her head helplessly. Wei Wuyin noticed this short exchange and realized the importance of finding the culprit responsible for the mysterious disappearances to their sect.

In fact, they were plagued by the disappearances and had to ask others for help.

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Elder Bing arrived to meet Yan Zhu and Wei Wuyin. Her hair that gave off traces of frost seemed to have dimmed in luster. Wei Wuyin could notice some exhaustion in her eyes, but also a hint of frustration. It was somewhat concealed, but her mood was clearly not good.

"We're set up over here," she gestured towards a location where Shu Yin and Xing Fu were located. He couldn't visibly see them as a rather large tent had been set up.

While Wei Wuyin had followed, a pair of eyes was watching him. It was Shui Wuhen. She hadn't said anything about Wei Wuyin's actions towards Zhou Gao, but only because of her wariness and unwillingness to broach the subject which could compromise their mission.

However, now that she had returned to her elders, she had given a full report, including Wei Wuyin's actions.

The Aqua Echo Sect Elders had solemn expressions as they sat in their own unique tent. Zhou Gao and the other two Aqua Echo Sect members also had various expressions, mostly filled with anger.

"He has birthed Metal Qi and Lightning Qi, and seems to be hiding his cultivation base. I can't say for sure, but he could be at the Fourth Stage of Qi Condensation," Shu Wuhen voiced her assumption. The expressions of everyone changed the moment those words were said.

The Fourth Stage of Qi Condensation was the Yin Form Phase, and the difficulty of reaching this phase for men was immensely difficult. It was equally difficult for women to reach the Yang Growth Phase. For Wei Wuyin, a young man in his mid-twenties to reach this level would say much about his potential.

There was a possibility he could ascend into godhood or even become a Godlord in the future.

The other issue was birthing two advanced elemental qi's. Many people spent decades trying and failing. Even if you absorbed an enormous amount of elemental energy, it was by no means a guarantee that you could birth that element.

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However, if you do, the benefits were astonishing. Those who birth the four elements have tempered their bodies and qi to be tougher, more fluid, easier to control, and resilient to high temperatures.

Metal Qi would increase durability, allowing the qi and body to reach an exceptionally high level of hardness and its ability to withstand pressure.

Lightning Qi affected one's reflexes, speed of movement, and explosive power.

With six elements, Wei Wuyin's body and qi would receive this level of tempering that would jump his combat strength to another level.

The Aqua Echo Sect members couldn't use any methods to deal with him because, frankly speaking, they weren't strong enough if Shui Wuhen's words were true. They could only swallow the humiliation for now.

Zhou Gao was of similar mind, her heart enraged by Wei Wuyin's actions. The fact that she had kissed him could even ruin her status and chances of becoming the Sect Leader in the future. How could she not be furious?

Within the Aqua Echo Sect, those upheld to the highest standards in the sect had to withdraw from men and women relations. As a core disciple of the sect, she was one of the few who had to uphold that standard. Now, her entire status could be jeopardized because of him.

As for going to war? That was a pipe dream. Neither Wei Wuyin nor her was important enough to go to war over a mutual exchange of contact. That would be ridiculous to the cultivation world if it actually happened. Perhaps if it was a forced sexual event which would result in a humiliation to the sect and the destruction of their core disciple's future potential.

Only then would it result in war.

Wei Wuyin was capable of relaxing in his tent because he knew this, and thus felt comfortable placing his mind elsewhere. The current elsewhere was Elder Bing.

"We've searched through the entire forestry area with dead spirit crystals, the four of us even tried to use various spiritual scrying methods, but we couldn't find a single clue. In fact, we

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can be certain that no human has died within this forest in the last six months since the disappearances began." Elder Bing said with exhaustion.

The search they had deployed clearly heavily taxed her spiritual sense and mental energy.

"The entire forest?" Wei Wuyin softly muttered. It seems that the four elders didn't want to rely on the disciples not making a mistake and scryed areas they had already searched with their spiritual spells.

"Not a single clue?" Wei Wuyin asked.

"Not one," Elder Bing said.

"Odd. Then, is it possible the people are still alive? But if that's the case, where are they being kept and how can someone hide tens of thousands of people without a single trace?" Wei Wuyin asked, confused. This wasn't possible.

Xing Fu interjected, "Maybe with Spatial Rings? They have their own space to store things."

"..." Everyone was silent as they simultaneously turned their gazes towards Xing Fu.

"What?" Xing Fu was confused by everyone's silence.

Elder Bing broke the silence, "Spatial Rings don't store things into their own space. Cultivators don't have the ability to actually create an independent dimension, keep it stabilized, and allow passage into and out without any inconsistency or constant maintenance."

"They don't?" Xing Fu truly thought those at the False Reality Phase could create independent spaces and store them into spatial rings. She looked at the spatial ring on her finger given to her by the sect when she became a core disciple. They had told her its function, but never the mechanics behind it.

Yan Zhu answered, "Spatial Rings are temporary gateways from one physical point to another. It's a tunnel that allows travel both ways, not a container. The gate leads to a storage container stored by the sect, private and safe that only Seventh Phase experts could enter forcefully. You place and pull objects from this container. It is called a spatial ring

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because it contains a small amount of spatial energy that enables this tunnel to open and close."

"Oh?!" Xing Fu was shocked. She had no idea that was the case. Then doesn't that mean that as long as one goes to her container, they could take everything from her ring? Thinking this, she turned slightly pale.

"As Yan Zhu said, because its only a gate to a tunnel, it can't store past its limit and transporting life takes far too much energy. As you know, the larger or stronger the object in terms of qi or energy, the more qi it takes to extract or enter the object. Even if the Sect Leader herself wanted to store a newborn child, she'd exhaust herself to death before she could get it through. The child would probably remain unharmed as well, so it's not an effective weapon." Elder Bing informed.

Wei Wuyin had long since known these specifics, otherwise there would be no reason for a vault in sects or cultivation clans. They could just store things in spatial rings, these small objects, and hide them away. There would be no fear of being robbed.

However, life wasn't so simple.

"What's our next move?" Yan Zhu asked.

"We'll recover our strength and try other ways. We'll likely employ your cultivation bases to help." Elder Bing took a deep breath and closed her eyes. The icy frost on her hair seemed to recede somewhat. She looked like she was conserving energy and attempting to speed up her recovery.

"We'll do so in two days. For now, rest, cultivate, mingle with the other disciples." Elder Bing left these words before going to a corner and sitting in the lotus position. The surrounding Essence of Heaven and Earth was absorbed rapidly by her.

Wei Wuyin decided to see the Muu Lake up close. He left and walked the lakeshore while his spiritual sense swept the lake's surface. It contained a high concentration of water energy, which was far higher than natural lakes. If he was cultivating here at the second phase, he could've birthed his water qi far easier.

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In the Elemental Birth Phase, one could only be said to have reached completion when they've birthed all four natural elements, but birthing one was sufficient to reach the phase. Only with elemental energy can one enable the intermixing of yin, and with yin comes yang, hence the order at which cultivation was set.

As he walked and pondered cultivation, he grimaced. His knees nearly buckled as he fiercely gripped his neck. A crushing sound could be heard as he pressed heavily. His teeth clenched as he stifled a shout of pain.

"What is this?!" He had just felt an absolutely inconceivable amount of pain in his neck and shoulder area out of nowhere. His body became wrapped around by a ward of elemental qi, within this qi was yin and yang energies. The ward nearly looked like a perfect silhouette of himself.

His actions definitely elicited many inspections from the elders and disciples nearby, but Wei Wuyin couldn't care about this. Even if his cultivation base was revealed, this pain was too intense! He circulated his qi to the area in hopes of easing the pain.

"This pain?" His face paled as he recalled the injury from before. While on his mission to eliminate the Violet Moon Sect's remnant forces, he met a crazed, nonsensical prisoner who bit him. The injury had long since healed, with not even a scar left behind.

This prisoner had clearly gone insane, and because of his mission to eliminate the force, he had killed him regardless of his identity or status.

"Gawh!" A bit of spit escaped his lips as he shouted with clenched teeth.

"Wei Wuyin?" Elder Bing had noticed, arriving with a trace of frost qi to her steps. When she looked at Wei Wuyin's ward infused with elemental energy, yin, and yang as well as its nearly perfect encasing, and her eyes widened in shock.

"Fifth Phase?" She found this inconceivable. This junior of hers was nearly seventy years behind her in age, but exceeded her in cultivation base.

The middle-aged Elder from the Sky Sword Sect arrived as well. His gaze was sharp as he inspected Wei Wuyin. Even his expression changed as he saw the traces of elemental energy, "Violet Lightning and Steel Metal energy?!" He became stunned.

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Elements had various origins and weren't always the same. For example, fire could be gold, blue, or even green. It denoted various chemical differences and thus affects the qi itself. However, condensing them was incomparably difficult.

Violet Lightning was one of the most volatile lightning known, not to mention the hottest, yet to birth it was incredibly difficult. However, if one used violet lightning crystals, it would be easier to birth standard lightning. To actually birth violet lightning...

As for the Steel Metal, it was one of the most difficult forms of metal to establish. Its inherent properties take metal characteristics and drive it to a generalized extreme. It was, simply put, the Jack of All Trades of Metal Qi. This meant any and all metal qi arts could be used by it, and it was stronger than normal metal qi.

These two were exceptionally difficult to birth, high-level elemental energy that many could only hope to have!

"Such talent!" One of the Aqua Echo Sect elders arrived, she was immediately shocked by Wei Wuyin's display.

While the numbers of people grew, Wei Wuyin felt paralyzed by the pain. His nails had already dug into his skin, causing blood to flow. His qi ward was infused with more energy, as it repelled his own fingers, preventing further self-harm. However, his hand still gripped his ward harshly.

"What is happening to me?!" His mind spiraled, unable to remain clear because of the pain.

A voice suddenly entered his mind.

"Sin, come. Sin, run."

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Chapter 19: Sin

"Argh!" Wei Wuyin shouted the moment this voice entered his mind. The shout was bestial and filled with desperation and unwillingness, like the last throes of a dying animal.

By this point, all the elders had gathered. Elder Bing had a grave, solemn expression. She was considering if Wei Wuyin was going through a backlash or qi deviation. No one approached because of the latter.

If his qi deviated from standard paths, he could detonate suddenly. As he was in the Fifth Phase, the destruction would take her with him. She didn't believe she could outrun it if she was close.

The elders were also using their spiritual sense to investigate, but couldn't determine what was wrong. No one dared to get close.

Dao Shin, with his eyes closed, arrived beside the other members of the Sky Sword Sect. Despite not having his eyes opened, his 'eyes' were pointed towards Wei Wuyin. "He's birthed metal and lightning qi? And from two high-level sources." His words were calmer than others.

The middle-aged man turned towards Dao Shin and asked, "Is he undergoing qi deviation or suffering a backlash from a qi method?" With his cultivation base at the Fourth Phase, he didn't have the spiritual strength to penetrate a Fifth Phase cultivator's defensive ward.

Dao Shin, however, was different. He had cultivated a unique spiritual spell that made his perception exceptionally piercing.

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Dao Shin frowned, "His entire body is going haywire, like he's simultaneously undergoing a backlash and qi deviation, but no obvious sign of either."

The middle-aged man was shocked after hearing this. That made no sense to him. As he looked at Wei Wuyin, he couldn't help but think that this boy had a secret.

As if Dao Shin heard his thoughts, he said, "it seems that a treasure inside his body is causing the effect."

When those words were said, everyone became silent. Shu Yin's eyes grew sharp as she looked at Wei Wuyin.

Jiu Lang had been trying to kill Wei Wuyin for this treasure, but there was never any confirmation if he had one. No one could tell, and everyone just called him talented and an underdog who rose from hardwork and dedication. However, how could that be true?

That treasure had allowed a nobody like Wei Wuyin, who could only start as an honorary disciple, become a core disciple. Now, he was at the Fifth Phase and birthed two high-level elemental qi? If she could obtain it, she had a chance to save her brother's cultivation future. A faint killing intent emerged in her eyes.

Unfortunately for her, Wei Wuyin did not have any cultivation treasure. He simply had intelligence, willpower, and luck. There was no trick or shortcut that took him from zero to hero.

Gnashing his teeth fiercely, his eyes had already turned bloodshot. Beneath his feet, violet lightning qi formed.

Elemental Lightning Art: Thunder Step!

Boom!!

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He took off!

He took off towards that voice echoing in his mind telling him to come, telling him to run. It grew louder and louder, but as it did, the pain became worse. He continuously executed Thunder Step despite its fierce consumption.

Before the others could react, Wei Wuyin was out of sight and spiritual sense range.

Dao Shin looked at the direction Wei Wuyin took off, and his frown deepened.

The middle-aged man took out a transmission crystal and sent a message. Dao Shin stealthily withdrew his transmission crystal and read the message. His frown ceased, and he shook his head.

The middle-aged man sighed inwardly, but didn't show it on his face.

"We'll rest, if he doesn't come back in two days, we'll continue without him." An Aqua Echo Sect elder said. To her, the mission was more important. Wei Wuyin may be a genius, but he wasn't their genius. If anything, she wished he'd fall down a pit and die.

If he didn't have a treasure, then his talent meant he was truly going to become a future Godlord. If that happened, the Scarlet Solaris Sect and Sky Sword Sect may get various ideas towards their Aqua Echo Sect.

Xing Fu went to Elder Bing and cried, "Let's go after him!" She looked ready to take off, but a cold energy entered her body and sobered her erratic emotions.

"I know you have taken a liking to him, but the current situation he's going through is volatile. He could explode. If you're around him when that happens, you'll die." Elder Bing calmly explained.

Xing Fu paled.

Suddenly, she regretted getting her teacher to invite Wei Wuyin.

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An hour later, an exhausted figure covered in dirt and tree leaves stepped into a clearing within the Muu Lake's forest. This figure was Wei Wuyin.

He tumbled into the clearing and fell to his knees. His qi ward had fizzled out not too long ago as his qi had been reduced to nothing. Besides his powerful body, he had no other means of protection.

The voice had vanished suddenly and so had the pain. He felt relieved as he wanted to just lay down and fall asleep, but his mind knew better. If someone decided to take action against him, he could never wake up.

Pow!

He slapped himself to bring his mind back to an alert state. "Stay awake!" As he told himself this over and over again, he got up and started to slowly trudge forward in hope of a safe location to rest.

"Finally, you're here." A voice that was incredibly familiar to Wei Wuyin, a voice he'd recognize his entire life at this point! It was the voice in his head. The voice that told him to come and run!

He had come while running.

With blurred vision, he looked towards the origin of the voice. His eyes widened and subconsciously took a step forward. Wait, forward? He meant to take a step backwards!

He tried to step backwards again in retreat, but he took two steps forward. His eyes widened in shock as he witnessed this. With swift thinking, he decided to take a step forward. When he did, he took three steps forward.

Before he could figure out what was happening to his body, a white robe appeared in his vision.

A skeleton.

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A pure black skeleton was wearing a white robe. It had a hood and stood with its arms crossed over its chest. Wei Wuyin could even see each tooth clearly.

This was a female skeleton.

He could tell by its bone structure. He had learned a lot about death and killing, including what happens to the body after death and how it decomposes into a skeletal state in certain environments.

There wasn't an ounce of flesh on this black skeleton, but it gave a physical aura that left him breathless.

"Good. Your mind is telling you to run, but your soul is pushing you forward. Nice soul-body compatibility." The skeleton spoke, but its lips didn't move. However, the sound definitely came from it.

Wei Wuyin was stunned by her words. Soul? He knew that to establish a Heart of Qi, one needed to merge mind, matter, spirit, and essence. Spirit related to the soul!

"Mhm. Your soul is definitely compatible with your body, even exceeding your mind in authority. Good. Good." The voice was neither male or female, rather ambiguous, but it gave one an exceptionally odd feeling like they were listening to a million year old sage.

Wei Wuyin desperately tried to calm himself down. He stopped moving just a few feet away and looked at the black skeleton.

"What do you want?" He asked. Since he was either going to die or going to live, he may as well act as if he was already safe. He had a feeling that this skeleton could take his life away with a flick.

"Good mental stability. A solid mind, a good soul-body compatibility, but your body is still too garbage." The skeleton appraised, ignoring Wei Wuyin.

"..."

"That's fine, since you're one of the forty-nine!" The black skeleton said.

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Forty-nine? One of them?

"I can't stay too long, so I'll make this quick," The skeleton said.

Wei Wuyin nodded. He didn't know what was happening, so he followed the flow.

The black skeleton pulled out a clear crystal ball the size of a basketball from nowhere. It was as if it had just appeared into existence. Wei Wuyin hadn't even sensed a hint of spatial energy used.

"Wei Wuyin, Thief of Sin. You killed an Inheritor of Sin. In the end, he bestowed it to you instead of cursing you. Therefore, you're now the Inheritor of Sin." As the black skeleton said these confusing words, the crystal ball started to surge with white mist. Soon, images appeared that retold the story of his meeting with the prisoner of the Violet Moon Sect.

At the end, it showed Wei Wuyin beheading him.

The images faded away.

"However, Karmic Luck is not in your worldly path. Your heavenly fate was decided by the actions of others. They accumulated the Sin of Greed with their actions, and the complicit willingness to watch and wait, the Sin of Sloth, produced a rank two calamity."

The images of the crystal ball flashed once again. This time, Wei Wuyin became shocked. The image was of Jiu Lang. She was fighting in the war against the Violet Moon Sect, but she suddenly received a message, broke away, and met a beautiful woman with emerald hair and eyes.

The images flashed quickly. The woman with emerald hair and eyes had been imprisoned and Jiu Lang had stabbed a deep syringe into her heart. She extracted a fluid that looked like liquid emeralds.

"The Sin of Greed," the black skeleton said.

Then, the images flashed into others. Wei Wuyin saw the Ancestral Elder of the Sect, the only Godlord figure of the sect. He was standing near Godlord Lin beside the Haven Heart

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Monolith. Godlord Lin seemed to have said something that sent the Ancestral Elder into silence.

"The Sin of Sloth," the black skeleton said.

Wei Wuyin felt that, based on the skeleton's words, the Ancestral Elder was warned of Jiu Lang's actions but did nothing about it. Which would lead to...

As if reading his mind, the crystal ball shifted images. This time, the images were clearer than before. Wei Wuyin's eyes widened.

An army of warriors dressed in emerald armor had besieged the Scarlet Solaris Mountain. They encircled it, a giant green dome of energy prevented anything from escaping. The images sped up and Wei Wuyin saw himself.

He was facing a young man wielding a black-colored sword who didn't wear emerald armor, but a black martial robe. Beside him was Jiu Lang, who looked severely injured and clutched at Wei Wuyin's sleeve in desperation. Wei Wuyin could see the struggle in his own eyes, but then firm determination replaced it.

He faced this young man with his saber out. With a shout, he released scarlet qi infused with metal and lightning energy. It seemed to be some fascinating and powerful qi art, but Wei Wuyin was shocked.

"I formed a Heart of Scarlet Qi?!" While he was shocked, a grand battle took place.

He clashed with the young man, but in the end, he was bested. The young man came to a severely injured him, and swung his sword. Wei Wuyin grimaced as he almost felt the sword slice through his throat mercilessly.

He died.

The images ended.

"Because of your worldly fate, I had to lure you out of that sect. I abducted tens of thousands to change it, ever so slightly without the Heavenly Daos noticing." The black skeleton said somewhat aggrieved.

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"Changed my fate? Lured me? You! You took those people?" He couldn't help but feel a deep throbbing of his heart, the shock cascading his mind like a violent waterfall.

The black skeleton calmly nodded, "I had to change the blessed fate of tens of thousands to move the fate of one in silence. After I'm done, they'll be returned."

"You, in the face of a rank two calamity, can not survive. You do not have sufficient karmic luck. You did, but not anymore."

"I did?" Wei Wuyin was confused. The prisoner had talked about karmic luck and karmic sin before, but he found it to be gibberish and nonsense.

The crystal ball flashed once more. It was an image of a younger Wei Wuyin. He had Du Ling in tow as he arrived at the Scarlet Solaris Mountain and was inducted into the sect.

"Karmic Luck expended: 0.1."

Then, he found an essence stone that enabled him to break into the Qi Condensation Realm.

Next, he helped an old retired man on a whim and he turned out to be a blacksmith. The blacksmith decided to put his all into a legacy weapon as a gift, the last weapon he'd ever craft in life. His saber was made and given to him.

Next, he found the Steel Essence Source.

Then, the Three-Point Yin female.

"Karmic Luck expended: 0.3, 0.2, 0.5, 0.8."

"You were born with a 2.2 karmic value. Your current karmic value: 0.3. Requirement to have a chance to survive a rank two calamity: 1.5. To avoid, and have a chance to benefit: 2.2." The black skeleton was nearly mechanical in its words.

Wei Wuyin was dazed. Could things really be quantified as such? Was it that simple? This felt too fake, too unreal.

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"Do you understand?" The black skeleton asked.

He had to take several deep breaths. This could all be fake, but for some reason, he knew in his heart that it was true. Even...even his future.

In the end, he nodded.

He became the Inheritor of Sin, forcing this black skeleton to intervene and arrive in the face of an impending calamity. If that was the case, then he can accept it. He didn't fully understand, but he knew enough.

"What now?" He asked.

The black skeleton looked at him with its hollow eyes. A strange atmospheric change occurred in the air.

"Now, you steal sin from Hell and luck from the Heavens."

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Chapter 20: Inheritance

Before Wei Wuyin could react, his vision experienced an abrupt collapse as his world became dark. The darkness was cold, sinister, and gloomy. The only sound he could hear was the declining throbbing of his heartbeat.

He felt death.

It tasted like iron grinding on one's tongue, and felt icy like a frozen tundra. However, the fear that he had expected to overwhelm him did not come. It was instead a feeling of calm indifference that entered his heart and mind.

He sent out his spiritual sense in an attempt to gain an understanding of his current state, but all that he sensed was darkness, cold and lonely darkness. A bottomless pit that never met an end. It didn't fall, but simply kept one in a state of stasis.

Wei Wuyin felt cold. A sense of existential dread surged into his mind.

Was this death?

Is this how it felt to be dead?

Time flowed on.

A minute.

An hour.

A day.

A week.

A month.

It continued for years.

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At some point, he lost the will to calculate time. It could've been decades or centuries...maybe even millennia. He was alone with his thoughts. This period of isolation could provoke insanity, but Wei Wuyin felt clear-headed.

Many questions he had in life were answered. While he did recall his past, that was merely a brief moment before his mind shifted elsewhere.

"The spirit is the soul and the soul is the spirit. When I created my spirit, I used my soul as its source!" He felt like he touched upon something simple yet incredibly profound.

"If I sever my spirit, I'll have an imperfect spirit. No amount of nourishment would make two halves whole, but if I could condense a new spirit from my soul. This...normally, it would be impossible, but I already have a new mind, a fresh physical aura, and purer essence! The Haven Heart Qi Method is flawed!"

As he pondered those countless years, he figured out an issue with this ancient qi method. He couldn't feel his body or life, but he knew it was there. He had to believe it was.

Slowly, he meditated.

It took an unknown period of time before he connected with his soul on an enlightened level. Normally, contact with the soul was beyond difficult. However, during Qi Condensation, one catches a glimpse of their soul within their soul sea. They would take a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of spirituality from the soul, and condense their Metaphysical Qi.

However, one must reach the requirement of mind, matter, and essence before that could be achieved. Now that Wei Wuyin had established all new versions of those, he once again started the process.

Poof!

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Without warning, without any suspense, his four qualities merged in perfect unison as if they were a practiced quartet. Having gone through this transformation before, Wei Wuyin knew how difficult it was to condense qi, but the second time around was as easy as breathing.

In truth, if he had severed his spirit, he would've required the fifth and sixth level of the Qi Method, especially the Haven of Heaven level. That was a protective barrier that made up for the inadequacies of a severed spirit. The sixth level is nourishing the two spirits until completion and creating a myriad of hearts.

While it may sound grand, it left many issues behind that could affect a person's future cultivation. Particularly, breaking through the Qi Condensation to the Realm beyond.

Now, Wei Wuyin felt that his body had two, perfectly synchronized and compatible Heart of Qi.

"I can feel it?" He had now realized that he could feel his qi in this black void. He felt the rotation of his qi, the absorption of essence from the outside, and the return of strength in his body.

"I'm not dead...I'm NOT dead! I'M NOT DEAD!!!" An intense emotion of relief and excitement erupted from his very soul. Now, all he needed to do was wake up!

Just wake up!

WAKE UP, GODDAMNIT!!!

"Gasp!!!"

A pair of silver eyes opened as Wei Wuyin's body exhaled deeply, his body lurched into a sit-up position. He grabbed the grass and ground to steady himself. His breathing was long and powerful, as if every breath of air was precious beyond belief.

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"The..." he tried to look for the black skeleton, but found nothing. Looking to the skies, he realized it was night as the astral stars shone brilliantly. A grin, one of happiness, crept to his lips.

"What was that all about?" As he said that, a black color caught his eye. He looked towards his right arm and realized that it was now entirely covered with tattoos. These tattoos were beautiful, and looked similar to mystical runes or divine letters.

As he held his arm up to get a better look, a burning pain erupted in the back of his head. He grasped his head slightly. A fear emerged in his heart as he did not wish to experience that pain or isolation again.

Luckily, the burning pain lasted for a mere few seconds before he felt a gush of new information enter his mind. There were three scriptures in his mind now.

The first was the Scripture of Karmic Sin & Karmic Luck. It denoted the teachings of sin and luck, how it is obtained, how it is avoided, how it is changed, and how it can be stolen.

It was systematic in structure and ranks for calamities and benefits. The first part of the scripture answered a question he had from the beginning: "Birth."

When the black skeleton informed him of his fate, she had said his karmic luck had been too little to survive the upcoming calamity, and he was born with a numerical designation of 2.2. He had expended his luck starting from when he entered the Scarlet Solaris Sect.

Everything he'd experienced as a fortuitous encounter, as dumb luck, seemed to have been geared for him to benefit. Even the Three-Point Yin Body female he found.

In the scripture, it said that the concept of rebirth and reincarnation was true. When one is reborn, their karmic value is reset and they can gain or lose karmic value during their life. If one is reincarnated, they retain their karmic luck to pass into the next life.

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"To think there truly is an afterlife," was what he took from this. If someone had just told him these things randomly, he would've told them to piss off, but now...

According to the scripture, anyone who earns enough karmic value in their life, can live amongst the Heavenly Daos in peace until a certain point of time, where they'll be reborn. Those who gain enough karmic value relating to sin, they'll be sent into Hell.

A place where there was only one description, a single word in the scripture: Suffer.

The very thought sent shivers as his imagination went wild. "So, a person can live according to the Heavenly Daos concept of good in their life but they can't obtain karmic luck until the next life, only karmic value? However, they can gain karmic sin?" As he read this part, his expression turned ugly. Then, he sighed.

Supposedly, there were three thousand commandments of the Heavenly Daos. If you break one, you receive a negative karmic value or karmic sin, and if you follow one, then you gain a positive karmic value or karmic luck. As he read these three thousand commandments, he flipped out and became enraged.

He didn't even want to read more.

He felt like these things shouldn't be read by mortals. They could scar one's will or perception of the world's sense of morality. Some of these commandments were straight evil. For example, there was a commandment that had to do with killing and the judging of it.

As long as one kills another who has karmic relations with them, it was fine and dandy. And 'karmic relations' was a very loose terminology. It simply meant, as long as you killed people you knew for more than a few minutes of casual engagement or had a connected history with, you're okay. However, if you kill someone you never interacted with on any connected level, it's a negative karmic value.

This was a complex, ambiguous concept. This meant that as long as someone from a clan, sect, or force offended you, you can slaughter their family and power without accruing a hint of karmic sin. However, let's say you saw a stranger being taken advantage of or possibly close to being raped, if you interfered and killed the culprit, you sinned. After all, that stranger and perpetrator held karmic links to you.

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However, there was another one that says if you're fighting on the orders of another, as long as your actions are aligned with their will, you'll be free of sin, and all of it will pile on them. Soldiers were given a pass, but all general's likely went to Hell.

Another one, which was beyond ambiguous was the concept of theft. You can steal, but you can't steal more than you need. This was so ambiguous he didn't even want to delve into it.

The commandments overlapped too, so you can break ten and follow two, and your value would be scored as such. It wasn't possible to follow this. It was arbitrarily structured and lacked any cohesive belief or understanding of general morality.

Recalling the words of that madman prisoner, he said that he had done nothing 'wrong' yet he suffered. It seems by the heavens, he was deemed a sinner, but morally speaking - the human moral sense, he may have been an upright person. Then, he suffered a calamity that he could not avoid.

Incredible.

The next scripture was the Bloodline of Sin.

"Wait..." as he read through the information in his mind, his eyes widened as he looked at his right arm. Those symbols were physical manifestations, like birthmarks, that identified those who held the Bloodline of Sin.

"The Bloodline of Sin originates from the First Sinner. It allows the absorption of Karmic Sin. However, it can evade the eye of heaven. According to it, 'Whoever is the wielder of the Bloodline of Sin, shall not be judged by the Daos of Heaven.' That's..."

As he recalled how karmic sin can be accumulated and provoke a calamity, while karmic luck can only be gained for the next life, he felt some relief. At least his actions can not provoke calamities.

"This? Those who wield the power of Sin will have to undergo the Eighteen Calamities of Hell after obtaining the Rights of a Sinner? What type of bullshit is this? So I can avoid the calamities brought by the heavens but not by Hell?" He felt like crushing something.

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He really didn't even want to sift through this anymore. All he knew was that the Eighteen Calamities of Hell were random and can not be divined by those who can see worldly fate. So, he'll have to go through these calamities randomly and without warning. Not to mention, he had to overcome them or die.

Moreover, he had to pass a trial against heaven, earn the Rite of a Sinner, before he could awaken the Eighteen Calamities of Hell?!

What type of inheritance was that?!

"Hm...the third scripture...Soul of True Sin. A soul cultivation art? By absorbing karmic sin through the Bloodline of Sin, I can temper my soul?" As he read through this, he frowned. The soul was a concept he had barely come into contact with, and even still, it was too little.

"The black skeleton said that if it wasn't for this calamity, she would've waited until I reached the Realm of Sages...does that have something to do with the soul? Is this the true inheritance?" As he pondered more on the subject, he felt that that was indeed the case. Not to mention, the black skeleton kept saying things relating to his soul in the beginning.

He had obtained the technique prematurely and thus, he had no use for it. Again, he sighed.

All three of these scriptures left him sighing with all sorts of emotions. He gained pretty much nothing from this, just a rather dreary understanding of the world.

"Hm?" His eyebrows furrowed as he looked at his tattoos. "This!!" A wave of shock battered his mind.

He saw a number on the tattoos. It was a very simple number but it hit three digits: "176."

The number didn't shock him, but what it represented! It was his Karmic Luck Value!!!

In the scripture - Bloodline of Sin, it mentioned using positive karmic value to gain immediate karmic luck via the bloodline. However, your own actions and sin can not be counted as the Heavenly Daos can not judge you, but the karmic value of others, and the main way to obtain it was through...an exchange. This was why he didn't take much notice of it. The willing exchange was essentially asking someone to give you the luck they would have in their next life, or their ticket to literal heaven.

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Who would agree to anything like that willingly?

Not even a saint would be willing to give you everything they've worked their life towards, even if it would save your own.

"How did I?!" His mind raced like rapid winds as he tried to figure out a reasoning. "Wait...the tens of thousands of people..."

As he thought of the black skeleton snatching those people, the more likely it seemed. They were mentioned as 'Blessed' briefly by the skeleton. Could it be?

Ohn!

As he thought of that, he felt his arm sting a little. He looked at it and saw the number dwindle as it went from 176 to 171.2. His eyes twitched slightly.

Wuung~

An odd sound whirled into being. It felt like the whistling of grass. Wei Wuyin looked towards the grass and his eyes widened in disbelief. A pure, emerald color glowed around him originating from the grass in the clearing. He looked upwards towards the sky and saw a brilliant full moon. It was beautifully silver and left one's heart filled with serenity.

This emerald glow became lights as emerald motes like fireflies started to rise from the grass. His eyes shrunk in disbelief. The motes of light contained a vibrant lifeforce unlike any he'd ever seen before.

"Life Meadow Wood Essence?!" The disbelief turned to shock which turned into a sense of surrealism. The Life Meadow Wood Essence was one of the top three recorded wood essences known to cultivators. However, it would only appear randomly, and sometimes, reports of it appearing can be hundreds of years apart.

It contained a lifeforce that was beyond miraculous, could be used to heal the most horrendous of wounds, or even restore one from a state of near death, possessed a unique resistance against a myriad of poisons, and was powerful to boot. If someone could condense wood qi from this fully, they would gain all of these traits.

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The last person to condense it left a legend that reached even today, lasting thousands of years. The Wood King of Everlore. A figure who united the surrounding countries under his name. When he ascended to the stars, it was said that his empire collapsed and created what became the Seven Countries of the Myriad Yore Continent.

The Wu Country was merely one of them.

He reached out and touched the emerald notes. They entered his body without the slightest resilience.

"I lost 4.8 Karmic Luck for this...is this an opportunity?" Wei Wuyin knew that finding the Steel Essence Source was considered worth a 0.5 while his discovery of the Three-Point Yin Body female was 0.8. Now, for it to take an entire 4.8...

He did not want to waste this opportunity. It was one that could only be chanced upon, a blessing from the heavens themselves.

He sat down and started to circulate his Heart of Qi. "Oh!" He had nearly forgotten, he had two Heart of Qi! As he inspected them, they were like carbon copies. The second Heart of Qi seemed to have wildly absorbed the first Heart of Qi's energies while he was out and reached completion. They were both at the standard of the Fifth Phase!

He started to circulate his Hearts of Qi, absorbing the Life Meadow Wood Essence! With two, he found that they complemented each other, devouring nearly four-times what he could do with just one. It was as if he had four Heart of Qi working in conjunction!

"It seems achievements I make myself with opportunities presented normally don't consume Karmic Luck, only the opportunities discovered with its support. I condensed Violet Lightning Qi, cultivated the Haven Heart Qi Method to completion, and used the rewards of the sect to enter the Yang Yore Fields, but the Black Skeleton hadn't mentioned it, nor did I lose Karmic Luck..."

As he came to this realization, he also realized that the benefits obtained from these lucky chances was still what you can take from it, rather than receiving automatic benefits. So, even if someone else was given this lucky chance, they may not condense their wood qi or the Meadow Life Wood Qi.

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He would not waste this opportunity!

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