

## Daily life 281

### Chapter 281 Penalties, Again!!!

It took a couple of minutes before Yang Qing finally managed to reign his thoughts and mind from the brink of collapse. Seeing all those zeros in the discretionary funds section sent his unprepared heart into a frenzy.

Ever since Yang Qing broke through and gained the peerless jade body, he has never perspired, but right now his palms were sweaty and if it wasn't for the self-clean feature of his robe along with its internal regulation mechanism, he would have been completely drenched.

He still couldn't believe the Order was just going to hand out 40 million high-grade spirit stones, to spend however he wanted.

Yang Qing in his stupor didn't hear Shi Tian's explanation of what the funds were for. Yang Qing's brain automatically filled it in with what suited him best.

"With such funds, why is Zhang Qingge always broke?" wondered Yang Qing as he gave the numbers a once over with a broad grin and saliva almost dripping out.

Zhang Qingge seemed to have the same woes as him every time they meant. Other than Kang Huilang who never seemed to have any spirit stones on him, and Yang Qing who had fines and a bottomless mouth to feed, in the celestial nesting weaver, Zhang Qingge was another person within their group who had money troubles. Though hers were not extreme as Yang Qing's and Kang Huilang's. She always had barely enough to get by and the reason for that was she racked up high fines even more than Yang Qing due to her violent shy side.

Yang Qing even wondered at times why she chose to be a judge when she struggled so much in dealing with people. But with 40 million high-grade spirit stones, she shouldn't have been living like a pauper like them.

"Judge, judge..."

Yang Qing's mind got pulled back by Shi Tian's call.

"Sorry about that, I was overwhelmed by the weight of my duties," said Yang Qing as he scratched the back of his head in embarrassment.

Although Shi Tian suspected the veracity of Yang Qing's statement, especially after seeing the greedy grin he still had on, he decided to continue on with the explanation.

"As is was saying, you will receive 40,000,000 high-grade spirit stones as your discretionary funds. You will use it as payment for the commissions undertaken for your cases by external parties.

Some of the commissions will be issued by the Mission's hall department of the judicial committee for the cases that they will be assigned to your docket, while others you can issue them yourself as you see fit.

As you very well know, in the completion of a commission, the party or persons who have completed said mission may ask for something else other than spirit stones. In the event that they ask for a treasure or artifact of equivalent value, the amount required to get that treasure will be deducted from your discretionary fund by the external logistics department.

If they decide it's training they want, the same amount will still be deducted from your discretionary fund either by the institute or any other department that offers the services that the party wants.

I think that is all," said Shi Tian.

"Oh, I almost forgot, sorry, there were some amendments made to the disbursement of the discretionary funds," said Shi Tian

"What amendments?" Yang Qing warily asked with dread sinking into his heart.

"I did say 40,000,000 high-grade spirit stones will be given to you annually, well that is essentially true but there's a tweak now. Before, you used to receive that exact sum every year regardless of whether you finished the amount in the previous year, however, there's a change now..."

"I knew it," thought Yang Qing as his face darkened in woeful fear of Shi Tian's next words.

"Every year, the amount you will be given will depend on the balance you have from the previous year. If by the end of the year, you have a reserve of 10,000,000 high-grade spirit stones, then the next year the Order will disburse 30,000,000, to make up the difference..."

"Then I just need to make sure I use up the whole amount. No way I'm letting them save up," Yang Qing smugly thought with a vindictive glare flashing deep within the recess of his eyes.

However, that plan was put on a damper by Shi Tian's next words.

"The lower the amount you spend in a year, the higher your limits get, but this is based on the prerequisite that by spending low, you have in no way compromised your abilities to meet your set targets and maintain quality towards the completion of your cases.

In addition, because we are dealing with large sums here, an auditor will be attached to you. At the end of the year, they will send a detailed report to both the administration and the internal logistics department.

While the Order won't care about a few discrepancies here and there of a few hundred to a thousand high-grade spirit stones, they will show concern if that discrepancy reaches 100,000.

If misappropriation is found in your spending to an amount that exceeds that number you will face a 10% penalty charge. The 10% is charged on the amount given within that year. If you receive 40,000,000 then you will pay 4,000,000 in fines.

But I know Judge Yang Qing has nothing to worry about, as a judge of the Order, you are the picture of integrity and above-reproach character," said Shi Tian.

"Is he mocking me?" thought Yang Qing as he struggled to restrain the twitches on his face.

He finally understood why Zhang Qingge was always broke just like them despite having access to 40,000,000 high-grade spirit stones every year.

That revelation left Yang Qing in a sour mood, cursing the Order's 'threats' towards maintaining integrity.

Where was the trust between Employer and employee? Was nothing sacred anymore?

Yang Qing grumbled a few more times before he focused on the positives. His salary increase was significant, to the point he was mildly surprised at the Order's generosity.

As a superior core court judge, he received a monthly income of 5,000 high-grade spirit stones as opposed to what he was getting now which was 20,000 high-grade spirit stones. His income had shot by 4 times and that was even without taking the bonuses into account.

When it came to pills and potions, as a superior core court judge he received an amount that was worth 100,000 high-grade spirit stones in value while right now the amount he would be receiving was equivalent to 500,000 high-grade spirit stones.

The allotted herbs and treasures also had a significant increase from 100 monarch-grade herbs and treasures to 2,000.

All in all, things were looking good, however, the 40,000,000 high-grade spirit stones had ruined the exhilaration he should have felt. Now all he could think about were the potential fines.

Chapter 282 The Burden Of A Palace Court Judge

"Now that we are done with the payments let's get to the base of it, your roles and responsibility," said Shi Tian as his demeanor turned a little bit more solemn.

Yang Qing despite himself, felt his throat dry up. Yang Qing couldn't help but worry, the reason the Order paid handsomely which was totally out of character for them, was that they had every intention of getting their spirit stones worth out of him down to the last stone.

Yang Qing shuddered at the thought of how bad it would get.

"Some duties you had at the superior core court still remain in the outer palace court albeit maybe the rank has changed.

You will still handle cases as per usual and the amount is significantly lower which will be between 50-100 a month. You will mostly be dealing with cases involving palace realm experts that are in stages 1-4, other than that, on as need basis cases involving those in the late stages of the core formation will be placed under your docket in case there is an overload in the core court.

As a superior core court judge, you've handled the promotion of unranked organizations to rank 5 and their demotions. In the outer palace court, the same role will be maintained, where you will be handling the promotion of rank 5 organizations into rank 4 and the demotion of rank 4 organizations.

However, under demotions, there is a special provision where you can also demote a rank 3 organization. This provision falls under one of your new roles as a palace court judge and only comes into effect under a forced demotion.

I take it you already know about them?" asked Shi Tian.

"Yes, I do," Yang Qing somberly answered as he nodded.

Part of the reason the Order was hated in some parts of the continent was because of it.

There existed two types of demotions; natural demotion and forced demotion. Natural demotion was a demotion that occurred without the Order's hand in it. An example of it was what happened to the Clear sword river sect during Yang Qing's evaluation.

Their only remaining foundation establishment member had less than three months to live and no successor in sight. In such a case the demotion of the sect was all but nigh. Another example would be the Yellow Lotus sect which had lost all contact with the three palace realm experts from their sect in over 200 years hence their demotion from rank 3 to rank 4.

In both instances, the Order had no hand in it, but when it came to Forced demotion, the Order was the cause.

What happened to the Star collapsing sword sect was an example of a forced demotion. They were originally a rank 1 sect but they drew the ire of the Order and got forcibly demoted to a rank 2 sect. The sect had seven soul formation experts and they all got killed as a result of the forced demotion and they were not the only casualty. The sect was left with a third of what they once had. The domain experts who numbered in the thirties, were reduced to just five and the five that remained was because of the Order's mercy and the intervention of the Radiant sword sect.

If it had not gone that way, the Star collapsing sword sect would have another statistic of a fallen sect or their rank would have been much lower than it was.

A forced demotion wasn't done lightly because it could end in the decimation of the entire organization. For a forced demotion to be issued, a panel of seven judges would be created and they would judge the case whether it warranted a demotion or not. If the votes end up on the side of a forced demotion, they would be in charge of enacting the ruling.

It was this ruling that has always made Yang Qing suspect there was a court for soul formation experts within the Order, because if there was not, then who enacted the justice on the Star collapsing sword sect? This was an orthodox sect, unlike the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect which did not need much regulations since it was a dark organization.

As an Orthodox sect, its destruction was sure to cause waves. Therefore, there needed to be an ironclad reason for its destruction, and who better to give it than Soul formation judges or 'Spirit judges' as they were eluded to be called and their court was called the Spirit court. The name was derived from the Spirit Council.

Even though being a judge he had passed on harsh sentences including immediate execution, the thought of handling a forced demotion made him uneasy because he would not be dealing with a single person but an entire organization.

But since he was an outer palace court judge now, he had to face the reality that maybe at some point in time he may be dealt that hand, and maybe it may not even be once. Yang Qing could only hope when the time came, he would be ready.

The only comfort he had in the matter was that the primary judge could choose the panel he wanted. In his case, he could choose Dai Chen and Zhang Qingge to be on the panel with him. Their presence during

the enactment of the ruling would be oddly comforting, and having other five colleagues share the weight wouldn't be bad either. Yang Qing couldn't help but feel that maybe that was one of the reasons there a panel had to be involved in a forced demotion. Sharing the burden among colleagues rather than bearing the weight of it by yourself.

Yang Qing lifted his palms and stared at them with an austere look. At this moment he could feel it; the heaviness of wearing the title of a palace court judge.

"Maybe that moment will never come," Yang Qing said with a weak smile that had lingering hope attached to it.

Chapter 283 Yang Qing's Greed Surfaces

Yang Qing quickly shook his head free of those ominous thoughts and focused back on Shi Tian's explanation.

"Now that we are done with the roles that overlap with what you did as a superior core court judge we can move to the palace court-specific roles.

As I mentioned earlier you will be receiving 40 million high-grade spirit stones every year in the fulfillment of your duties as an outer palace court judge.

As such one of your new roles and duties as a palace court judge will be the issuing, grading, and approval of contracts and commissions.

Due to the few cases in the palace courts, palace judges will be in charge of their own cases the moment they're allotted to them. You will be given 100 cases every month, though that figure isn't exactly fixed, in addition, the impromptu cases will be considered in end month tabulation.

The moment those 100 cases are assigned to you, the order in which you focus on them, your schedule, and your follow-up on them, will all be up to you.

You will have full autonomy on the cases, among which deciding on which cases you will give to your inquisitors, which cases will be contracted or commissioned is all up to you including who will get the contract, the duration of the contract, and the payment terms after even what you decide as payment will be up to you since you will be the one in charge of paying them.."

Yang Qing flinched in pain when he heard the last part.

"However, even though the payment will be up to you, the payment standard of the Order has to be maintained.

Any case involving a palace realm expert has an upfront fee of 45,000 high-grade spirit stones and the maximum payout you can give on a commission involving someone of this level is 750,000 high-grade spirit stones.

As you well know but just in case you don't, you can only pay out 750,000 high-grade spirit stones if, during the course of the investigation, someone at the late stages of the palace realm is proven to have involvement in the matter you're investigating, either directly or indirectly.

I took the liberty of making a copy for you. Here," Shi Tian said as he handed Yang Qing another scroll.

"In here you'll find a rough estimate and direction on how to payout your commissions and what parameters to look at and the rough payment associated with those parameters. However, at the end of the day, the amount you decide on will be up to you, however, you will need to make a detailed note of your judgment, which will be used by the auditor assigned to you.

Also, in there you will also find the name of the external logistics department employee assigned to you," added Shi Tian.

Yang Qing scrolled down to the bottom of the scroll and saw the name 'Lu Mei, outer palace court logistics'

"When we are done here, you can go meet with her to familiarize yourself since you will be working in close contact, especially when the remuneration packages aren't spirit stones but something else, she will be the person in charge of all the conversion and disbursement," said Shi Tian.



"Let's move on. Other than contract and commissions, there are other duties that you will need to do that don't exactly fall under the purview of what a judge does.." said Shi Tian as he took a well-measured pause to draw Yang Qing's attention, which seemed to have worked perfectly.

"Some of those duties are;

Serving as a witness to various auction houses during their events. It goes without saying that those houses will be at rank 3.

The Order loans out its services for a fee to these auction houses, to have the judges serve as authenticators. All the goods being auctioned at that particular moment will have been checked by our appraisers, so you don't have to do anything other than sit there, as a show of face.

For your services you will receive 50% of the fee the Order charges and any amount you may be given by the proprietors of the auction houses will be all yours..."

"Seriously?!!!" Yang Qing inadvertently yelled the question out loud from excitement and agitation about the money he could make.

"Yes, 50% of the fee will be yours, and any other thing you may get in the conduct of your duties will be yours to keep," said Shi Tian with an amused smile at the rapid changes happening to Yang Qing.

Yang Qing's mind immediately wandered to all sorts of scenarios in which he ended up gaining all sorts of weird treasures from these auction houses and the 50% fee.

"50%....."

A calmness returned to Yang Qing as his excited expression suddenly turned serious.

"Administrator Shi Tian, it's not that I'm greedy or anything, but is there a way the split percentage can be changed? Or is it stuck in a 50-50 split?" asked Yang Qing.

His greedy side had surfaced along with the vindictive side that he had against the Order gaining one over him all the time.

"Well, it's not exactly fixed. In a sense, you could get 100% of the commission but for that to happen, the Order will not provide its appraisal services for free and or negotiate for the commission.

In simpler terms if you manage to find auction houses that want to hire your services directly, you're free to take them, the Order won't stop you but it has its own risks, one of which is you will have to do the appraisal yourself and any issues that arise from it, will be solved by you alone," said Shi Tian.

On hearing the response, Yang Qing slumped back into his seat with a defeated expression.

He knew enough about treasures to not get scammed, well six out of ten times because he has ended up with some duds from the open markets. However, the skill he had was only enough to label him an okay appraiser. There was a lot he didn't know.

Chapter 284 End Of Induction

Appraisers and competent ones at that, could be considered jacks of all trades and could be considered geniuses in their own right because of the wide array of knowledge and skills they had. One appraiser could have knowledge about beast taming, alchemy, weapon refinement, geomancy, and spirit stone survey and mining. The knowledge they had on the subject would not be rudimentary either but would be deep and vast even extending to lost techniques.

Almost every competent appraiser would have knowledge in different subjects at base value and then specialize in certain subjects. Yang Qing was confident in his knowledge of certain subjects such as medicine, formation arrays, and the deciphering of the grade of broken cultivation arts.

That knowledge and skill left him barely passable when it came to being an appraiser. If he wanted to be an independent witness then he would have to buy the services of a skilled appraiser and they would have to be very skilled since he would essentially be tying his name and reputation to every treasure being sold. Gaining the services of a skilled appraiser would likely consume 70% of the amount he would get paid for the commission. If that was the case, it was better to accept the Order's terms.

"In that same vein, you will also need to represent the Order in various ceremonies around the continent, from the sects, clans, kingdoms, empires, and other organizations, to keep up appearances. In some of these ceremonies, you may go as the main representative while in others you will go as a tag along.

The former is if the ceremony is from a rank 3 organization and below, while the latter would be for rank 2 organizations and above.

The gift you will offer in these ceremonies will be provided for by the Order and you will be given a one-week notice in advance to help amend your schedule.

When it comes to the events, to avoid adding more burden to you, you will only be required to attend a maximum of 12 a year, which is one event per month, though it may not come in exactly that order," said Shi Tian.

He had an incredulous look on his face because he wasn't sure if he had Yang Qing click when he said the events would be 12 a year. However, when he saw Yang Qing's attentive look, he assumed he misheard it, so he went on with his explanation.

"The auction events and the ceremonies are our way of maintaining a connection with the organizations around the continent, so even though they're not technically your main duties, please give the same seriousness and attention as you would your cases.

You will be the face of the Order when you're out there," said Shi Tian.

"I will," Yang Qing solemnly said.

"Now for the last two duties while I will give you an overview of them, however, you will need to visit the respective places for further clarification due to the sensitivity of their nature..."

The atmosphere within the room turned heavier and somber.

"One of the duties is the supervision of the prisoner release and rehabilitation programme. Certain prisoners on the recommendation of the Requiem officials get approved for the programme. Those prisoners can be repurposed to support various works of the Order such as restoration and reclamation efforts around the continent, and temporary guards for some of the victims.

The duty depends on what is urgent and the shortages of a particular role. Every outer palace court judge will be assigned a certain number of prisoners to closely monitor along with members of the review committee. You are to continuously judge the progress of the prisoner and eventually after a certain set period, you will make a ruling if they continue with the programme or be sent back to Requiem, or in some cases their execution.

When you visit Requiem later, they will fill you in on further details.

And as for your final duty, you will be assigned your information network. I am afraid I can't explain much more than that. Someone from the Shadow Hawks should already be on standby to guide you through.

With that, I think we are done with your induction. Your assigned courtroom is number 24. You can access it using your gold eagle medallion..."

Shi Tian paused to confirm a few things in one of the scrolls he had next to him.

"I can see none of your inquisitors has reached the palace realm yet and thus would not be able to handle some of the cases you get, as such you have been assigned two roaming inquisitors.

I think they should already be waiting for you in your courtroom. You can meet up with them the moment we are done here, which I think we already have, not unless you have questions, which I'd be more than happy to answer?" asked Shi Tian with an amiable smile.

"For now, I do not," said Yang Qing.

He was already familiar with most of the duties due to his interaction with Dai Chen and Zhang Qingge. The only thing that caught him by surprise was the discretionary fund which the two conveniently

decided not to disclose. Other than that, he more or less knew what was waiting for him when he got into the palace courts.

"If you don't have any questions, then I wish you all the best in your journey ahead and it's been my pleasure serving you," said Shi Tian as he offered Yang Qing a Daoist salute.

"Thank you for your assistance and succinct explanation of my new role. It's been most informative. For that, I'm thankful," said Yang Qing as he offered back a Daoist salute of his own.

They exchanged a few pleasantries and Yang Qing left after, heading in the direction of his courtroom. There were three things he had to complete today; he had to meet with the two roaming inquisitors to plan for the cases ahead, of which Ma Yuan's case would be a priority, meet with the Shadow Hawk representative to gain further explanation on his network along with a few things and finally finish with a visit to the Requiem.

After he was done with the three things, he could start planning for the entrance examinations to the Institute and there was also the meeting with Meng Chao which he knew was bound to happen in the next few days.

#### Chapter 285 Liquidating Assets

Yang Qing slowly made his way to the palace courts. The mechanism of transport was still the same. He still needed the mimicry chaos sky metal to access the courtrooms, however unlike before, he now went to the side that had the plaque with the words 'palace' on top of it.

The hallways of the palace courts were still in the same design as the ones from the core formation courts. From the materials used on the floor and doors, down to the aesthetics.

Yang Qing clicked his tongue in disdain at another reminder of the Order's stingy ways. His opinion was of course tainted and jaded from all the experience he has had with the Order over the years which left him on the losing end. This was why he conveniently chose to ignore the part that every single material used whether it was at the core formation courts or the palace courts, were all ascendant grade materials, which was something that most organizations wouldn't use freely like the Order.

Yang Qing decided to use the public hallway rather than the employees-only route. He wanted to personally see for himself if the number of cases were similar to the core formation courts or were things in the palace courts much better.

What he saw made him inadvertently smile as he nodded to himself in gratification. Even though the hallway was swamped with cultivators from different organizations, Yang Qing could tell the number was much lower than the one at the core formation courts. Just on a rough estimate, the number present was half of what he saw at the core formation courts on a slow day.

Because of the good mood he was in, Yang Qing even went around offering greetings to the cultivators he came across the hallway. His actions drew a lot of curious gazes, especially from the nervous crowds that were more than likely defendants about to receive harsh sentencing.

Some even took Yang Qing's greeting as a cue to try and plead their innocence before they were heard. It happened four or five times before Yang Qing decided to reign in his enthusiasm, otherwise, if things turned chaotic from the pleas, he may end up having those cases thrown into his docket.

Luckily it didn't take him long before he saw a courtroom door with the number 24 on it. This would be his new home for the foreseeable future until he gained the qualifications to be promoted to the domain courts.

Even though the palace courts had the outer palace courts, the inner palace courts, and the core palace courts, the judges would still retain the same courtroom even as they got promoted along the palace courts. The only changes they'd get would be in terms of salary and duties, however, the courtroom and their chambers would not change.

"I almost forgot about it," thought Yang Qing as he paused his footsteps at the door of his courtroom.

"No, I'll need to get it sorted out the moment I'm done here. I can't give them enough time to weasel their way out of it and try to force that abode on me," anxiously thought Yang Qing.

Thoughts about his new chambers made him realize he had forgotten an important thing. As a palace realm cultivator, he should enjoy all rights offered by the Order to someone of that realm, and one of those rights was being given an abode in the gold valley of the Glowing respite valley.

Regardless of his promotion, he was already entitled to the abode three months ago, the moment it was confirmed he was in the palace realm. However due to unavoidable circumstances tied to old fiend Lei Weiyuan, Yang Qing ended up postponing the matter, and then he forgot about the matter altogether somewhere in between those three months.

But now that he had recalled it, it was time to settle it. He had no intention of moving, not after all he spent on the dream cloud abode in the blue valley and the nest of the celestial nesting weaver. Yang Qing had doubts about whether the abode in the gold valley would be able to match his current accommodations. He was sure whatever abode he got, would have the bare minimum and would require him to spend countless resources to improve on it. The Order was still the same stingy monster it always was.

Yang Qing would rather not undertake that thankless task that was sure to put a dent in his resources. He had already decided he would redeem the value of his abode, which was a common thing around the Order. Those who didn't want the abode for any reason had the option to 'sell back' the abode to the Order.

The Order would compensate them the value of the abode in whatever form of payment they deem fit. It could be in spirit stones, artifacts, and natural treasures, or redeeming the services of certain departments of the Order such as the formation hall, and alchemy hall or even gaining access to certain special training areas that required merit points to access.

Yang Qing had a lot of choices on what he could choose as the equivalent value for the liquidation of his abode. He had zeroed his options to two; he would either have the formation arrays in his abode improved, or he would use it to redeem something from the Orders open vault.

The open vault was the only treasury within the Order that one could access through merit points or spirit stones or trade-in for something of value. It was like the Order's open market. If you had anything of value, you could use it for trade at the open vault. The rest of the treasuries within the Order were special access. You couldn't get to them unless under very specific conditions, however, the open vault was much laxer, but the items contained there were all of great quality and the high price to match.

The purple lightning bamboo was something he had gotten from the vault and had cost him close to a hundred thousand merit points which in terms of purchasing power and value was greater than 10 million high-grade spirit stones.

Yang Qing wanted to redeem his abode for a natural treasure or artifact. The symbiotic relationship he saw at Summerfield kingdom, of the blue grade formation, the quasi monarch grade tree, and the artifact anchoring the formation gave him ideas of promoting spirit development on two different objects just like he detected at the farm in Summerfield kingdom.

If the results of his experiment proved to be fruitful, he could try it on the green flame tree and the duality tree which despite being at the monarch grade, still had not developed their spirituality. The undeveloped spirituality wasn't because of a lack of talent but rather the high requirements imposed on both trees because of their lineage. One of them was intrinsically tied to the Life Dao and the other to the Space Dao. This meant their growth and maturity were slow compared to other trees.

Yang Qing decided to push the matter to the back of his mind as he pushed open the doors to his courtroom.

#### Chapter 286 Meeting The Two Inquisitors

The courtroom unsurprisingly was just the same as the one he had in the superior core courts. The podium was made of 50,000-year-old red dragon wood and the floor was made of blossom citrine black marble.

If Yang Qing were to point out a few things that seemed different, it would be maybe the size and the two people currently standing at the center of the courtroom with their backs facing Yang Qing.

One of them was a male with a roguish brown hair. He had on a fading grey robe that had a lot of patchworks done in different colors. On top of the grey robe, he had a plain black cloak that was just as worn out. He was slightly tall and had a medium build.

Next to him was a lady with silver hair tied in a ponytail. She had light yellow robes and a brown scarf on her neck.

The moment Yang Qing stepped into the courtroom, they simultaneously turned in his direction.



The male looked to be in his late thirties and had a scruffy beard and a devilish charm and smile to him, while the silver-haired lady had big eyes that seemed to hide a swirling whirlpool, a petite oval face and a beauty that matched her radiant silver hair.

They were both sizing Yang Qing just as he was doing to them. He wasn't too surprised to find that they both had a higher cultivation base than him. Since they were all in the early stages of the cultivation realm, Yang Qing could more or less tell their realms. The male was in the fourth stage of the palace realm while the silver-haired lady was in the third stage.

"You must be Dai Chen's friend and our new boss, I'm Yu Gen and she is Xia Ting, we will be working together from today until two members of your team reach the palace realm.

Ah, nice to meet you by the way. With how many cases we work, it leaves me in a hurried state even in my conversations, sorry for that," said Yu Gen as he sheepishly laughed.

"Nice to meet you, Judge Yang Qing, I'm Xia Ting," said the silver-haired lady as she offered Yang Qing a courteous Daoist salute. Her face was taciturn and her tone calm.

Yang Qing couldn't help but notice the contrasting personalities between the two.

"Nice to meet you all, I'm Yang Qing and I'll be in your care from now on," said Yang Qing as he offered a Daoist salute of his own in return.

"Here, we were told to give you this," said Yu Gen as he tossed over a white jade talisman which perfectly fell into Yang Qing's palms.

"In there, you will find the list of cases assigned to you for the month. We've already started on the first three cases and we should be able to give you our detailed findings on them by the end of the week.

Luckily, we have been told you'll be preparing for and supervising the Institute's examinations first, which gives us a little more breathing room to conduct our investigations on the cases. Also, I think I should tell you this, later there will be some cases where you will have to do the groundwork yourself or you could assign some of them to your inquisitors.

There should be some that involve some rank 4 sects which they can handle while Xia Ting, I, and now you, will handle ones that involve rank 3 organizations. But don't worry as your seniors we will take the bulk of it, only when we feel overwhelmed will we request your assistance, I hope you don't mind," said Yu Gen with an apologetic look on his face.

"No, No, I don't mind. I'm the one who should be thankful to have your assistance and hope I'm not a burden to you all. I'm more than happy to do my part to help lighten it," said Yang Qing with deep sincerity in his tone.

Roaming inquisitors had one of the best employment packages and had free access to training sites that would require someone like Yang Qing to spend merit points to gain access. However, despite the presumably good scheme they had, they also had one of the worst and most dangerous working schedules.

Due to the shortage of manpower around the Order and the cases that never end, roaming inquisitors are spread thin and they are always out, shuttling between cases across different courtrooms. Their service wasn't restricted just to the headquarters. In case someone at the branches got injured, died, or was incapacitated, someone from the roaming inquisitor would fill in that role either as an inquisitor or the branch chief.

They were constantly moving around hence the name 'roaming inquisitors.' The constant moving about the continent in the conduct of their duties earns them no small number of enemies, which is why they have one of the highest fatalities and also one of the strictest of training.

They never handle cases alone; they always do it in a group of two or a maximum of four, depending on the severity of the case. The teams formed are carefully chosen to complement each other in terms of combat.

Yang Qing could feel that Xia Ting had a stronger soul compared to Yu Gen, while Yu Gen's body felt like it was boiling magma that was about to erupt.

Also due to the nature of their work, they couldn't have any official wear. They always dressed like itinerant cultivators out there to blend in and all had to practice the gold-grade art, 'The Ten thousand droplets transformation of the white veiled tree' to the blooming level.

The Ten thousand droplet transformation of the white veiled tree was a transmorphing cultivation art that would let them transform their bodies, down to the nature of their qi signature, and the degree of change wasn't restricted to humans, it extended even to spirit beasts. At its perfection, even an early-stage soul formation expert would find it hard to tell someone or something apart.

Yang Qing wasn't even sure if these were the true faces of Yu Gen and Xia Ting. The names were probably true but the rest, from the face down to their habits, may probably be an act that has been ingrained to them that it has become second nature. It was because of this that after a certain period of time, every roaming inquisitor had to spend some time in the heart soul tree, a saint-grade tree that the Order had. Its purpose was to help one polish their heart and in times of doubt, provide clarity. Without it, the roaming inquisitors would be constant victims of internal demons.

You can only pretend to be something for so long before you become it. Such was one of the struggles of being a roaming inquisitor.

Chapter 287 Handing Over Ma Yuan's Case

"I know you have a lot to get through, it being your first day and all, we will leave you to it, but in case of anything you can reach us via the communication talisman or at the Herb garden soup restaurant, we are always there most of the time in between cases. Though occasionally we do pass by at the Thousand Flavors restaurant, Dai Chen told me you are regulars there, so that can do as well," said Yu Gen.

"The Herb garden can work as well, I happen to like the soup there, it's just that Thousand Flavors restaurant has a wide variety..." Yang Qing despite himself found himself going on for a full three minutes on the pros of both restaurants.

He only came to himself when he saw the weird looks he got from Xia Ting who finally showed some emotion on her taciturn face with her eyes wide open.

"You really like your food, don't you?" she said with interest in her eyes.

"Sorry about that," said Yang Qing as he scratched the back of his head in embarrassment.

"Yang Qing we will leave you to it, it's been a pleasure meeting you and I hope for a successful cooperation," said Yu Gen as he prepared to leave with Xia Ting in tow, who nodded her head in goodbye.

"Actually seniors, there was something I needed your help with," Yang Qing suddenly said causing the duo to halt their steps.

"What is it?" asked Xia Ting, beating Yu Gen to the punch.

"There was an impromptu case I stumbled onto during my evaluations last week. I have already done a bit of the groundwork and even had my inquisitor Zheng Hu help with a bit of the details. I was hoping for your assistance on the case and if need be, it could be among the priority cases along with the three you have already started on, if it's not too much trouble," Yang Qing hesitantly asked.

"What's the case about?" asked Yu Gen.

"It's about a father who lost his wife and daughter, seven years ago. The father's name is Ma Yuan and he was a cultivator in the core formation realm however his cultivation got crippled on the day his wife and daughter got taken.

Based on my personal observations and also his account, Ma Yuan had reached the gold body in the body refining realm and also had a blue-grade core because of some fortuitous encounter. The attacker had been able to subdue and cleanly shatter his dantian despite him being at the fifth stage of the core formation real, which shows at the very least the attacker seemed to be someone either at the peak of the core formation realm with a superior core or she was in the palace realm.

Ma Yuan was well on his way to getting killed, but his wife intervened on his behalf and had his life spared. From the version of events, it seems like the wife knew the attacker and purposely let herself be caught.

She was more than likely deeply afraid of the attacker which was why she put a seal on her husband that blurred the image of the attacker.

I did manage to get an image of her which should roughly look like this based on Ma Yuan's description," said Yang Qing as he used a cultivation spell to conjure a rough image of the woman based on Ma Yuan's description.

"She's pretty," Yu Gen carelessly said and shrunk back when he saw the looks of mockery Xia Ting was throwing his way.

"In addition, he also handed me an ice shard that was produced when that lady attacked them," added Yang Qing as he handed over the shard to Xia Ting who shook her head and pointed to Yu Gen.

"He is better at this kind of stuff," she said.

Yang Qing had a baffled look as he handed the shard over to Yu Gen. He had automatically made the assumption that Xia Ting would have more insights since she had a stronger soul, thus her sense towards Yin-related matter would be stronger than Yu Gen whose body was like boiling magma, which more than likely meant he had a high affinity towards Yang related techniques.

"The fact that we managed to fool your eyes must mean our proficiency with the Ten thousand droplet transformation of the white veiled tree is getting better," Yu Gen cheekily said as his whole body transformed except his voice.

His brown hair was replaced with silver hair and silver eyes, and his build got slender and taller. The boiling sensation Yang Qing sensed from him, changed to a mellow coolness.

Almost at the same time as Yu Gen's transformation, Xia Ting also changed. Her silver hair changed into red-brown, and her body now seemed like a volcano that would erupt. The transformation wasn't only physical, Yang Qing detected a liveliness about her.

"You didn't do too bad Xia Ting, I didn't expect you to last that long," said Yu Gen.

His tone was no longer excitable but had a calmness to it like the one Yang Qing detected in Xia Ting when they first met.

"What do you mean!? Of course, I'd try to outdo you, especially with the urn of merry soup on the line, I'd give my best and since our new boss couldn't tell our nature apart, I count that as a win. Don't welch later, Yu Gen, like you did last time," said Xia Ting.

The change in personality came as a shock to Yang Qing, especially from Xia Ting's end. He found it hard to reconcile the reserved taciturn Xia Ting from a few minutes ago and the fiery person he saw before him.

"Is this your true self?" Yang Qing absentmindedly asked.

"Who knows," answered Xia Ting with a cheeky grin.

"Mmmh, the attacker seemed to have a fine grasp over the cold yin element and the grade should be no lesser than blue grade, but something feels off with it..." Yu Gen said as he rolled the shard around in between his fingers. Every time he rolled the shard; a blue flame would be produced from his fingertips with a seal attached to it.

"Can I hold on to it for a while?" asked Yu Gen as he handed the shard over to Xia Ting who had stretched her palms over for it.

"You can. I have already analyzed it enough to remember its structure and characteristics. As you well know I will also be busy in the next few days. It would be better in your hands than mine," said Yang Qing.

Chapter 288 Unexpected Visitor

"What were your thoughts?" asked Yu Gen.

"While the art is high grade, it has a rigid and tyrannical side to it that is absent in yin-related art, also there was a bit of insidiousness to it.," said Yang Qing.

"It felt like it had the venom of a snake and the ferociousness of a bear," added Yang Qing after some thought.

Yu Gen's eyes had a nigh imperceptible freeze from shock and then he smiled.

"It looks like we are the ones who will be depending on you more often than not, Judge Yang Qing," said Yu Gen.

"Surely you jest," said Yang Qing with a smile.

"Also in regards to the case, there were a few other things that I uncovered with Ma Yuan's help.

He did say his wife said the name 'Yao' when addressing their attacker, however, she paused halfway, so the name might be incomplete but it definitely has those characters.

Also, Ma Yuan and his family had been moving from place to place over the past 7 years before their abduction at the behest of his wife. I have those places listed here and I had Zheng Hu research organizations that have a bad relationship with the powers of the area they lived in.

The result may help us narrow down a list of suspects and I also enlisted the help of the Wind gliding mercenaries to search for all organizations known for their skills in yin-based cultivation arts. Should the result bring up anything, I'll make sure to pass it along to you," said Yang Qing as he handed over a jade talisman that had his insights and all the information Ma Yuan shared with him.

"Also, Ma Yuan is around the grounds in one of the pavilions, I'll have Zheng Hu inform you which it is later," added Yang Qing.

"Thanks, it seems like you have done the bulk of the leg work, the part we are left with is rather easy to follow. I think we will start on it, concurrently with the three cases. In case of any major progress, I'll be sure to inform you.

Once again, it was a pleasure meeting you Yang Qing, and do have a nice day ahead," said Yu Gen.

"The pleasure was all mine," said Yang Qing as he cupped his fists at the departing Yu Gen and Xia Ting.

"I'll be seeing you around kid, and make sure to buy me some soup later," said Xia Ting.

Yang Qing flinched at her words. The Herb garden soup restaurant had one of the best soups among the restaurants within the Order, however, their price was on the steep side, which was why Yang Qing rarely went there except once a month immediately after getting paid or towards the third week of the month when he had nothing.

The restaurant was steep in its prices but it also had the cheapest meal; the cold leek soup which went for one silver coin. It was bland, but it could fill the stomach when one didn't have much in their storage rings. It has saved Yang Qing a few times.

Yang Qing couldn't very well buy cold leek soup for Xia Ting, not when he wanted to make a good impression, especially if he needed the two inquisitors to apply themselves to his cases. Therefore, he would have to go all out, which would definitely cost a few high-grade spirit stones.

"Wait, I'm not the same as I was a week ago. My storage ring is no longer empty and decrepit, surely I can afford a soup or a million," Yang Qing smugly thought when he remembered the gifts burning a hole in his storage ring.

"Maybe I'll even have their famous hundred-fold treasure soup," Yang Qing greedily thought with his grumbling stomach.

Seemingly coming to a decision, he swaggered on outside where he almost knocked over a 12-year-old boy as he was walking out.

"Sorry about that," Yang Qing hurriedly said as he used shadow-void steps to avoid the boy.

"Nice movement, Yang Qing," said the boy whose voice was anything but young.

He had short black hair, deep black eyes, and a matching black robe. He was currently smiling while eyeing Yang Qing with interest.



"Do I know him?" wondered Yang Qing with furrowed brows. He scrutinized the young boy but his face, his robe, down to his qi signature, none of it seemed familiar to Yang Qing.

Yang Qing looked around and noticed something odd, none of the people around him seemed to notice the young boy before him, and the more Yang Qing observed them, it didn't seem like they saw him either.

"A domain expert," thought Yang Qing as his gaze fell on the young boy before him.

"I take it Senior is from the Shadow Hawks?" Yang Qing tentatively asked.

"Correct, could we talk in your chambers," said the young boy as he made his way into Yang Qing's courtroom.

Yang Qing followed behind and took out his gold eagle medallion when they were at the center of the courtroom.

He inserted his qi into the medallion which let out a gentle glow that ignited a rune beneath them and they were immediately transported to a different area.

Yang Qing and the young boy appeared in an office that was about half the size of his courtroom. In it were a red dragon wood desk, cultivation futons, a shelf filled with scrolls, and a pot that had a young five-colored birch tree.

Yang Qing couldn't help but suck in cold air. Everything within the room was at the ascendant grade, and he could even detect the formations within the room were all in the gold grade, which was why the spiritual qi was so dense.

The five-colored birch tree was the icing on the top. This was a genuine ascendant grade tree that had a passive effect of calming, strengthening, and restoring a cultivator's mind and mental sea. However, its true strength lay in helping a cultivator gain have an easy time interacting with the water, wood, earth, fire, and metal Dao.

Yang Qing was even a little bit tempted to permanently move here, however, luckily he was 'wise' enough to know that was the Order's intention.

"Would you like some vermilion fruit wine, Senior?" asked Yang Qing as he took out an orange-colored gourd from his storage ring.

"Rather conscientious, aren't you? Thanks, I wouldn't mind," said the 12-year-old boy as he carelessly took a seat on one of the futons.

#### Chapter 289 Intelligence Network (1)

Yang Qing gently poured a cup for the member of the Shadow Hawks department and then poured himself some. He seemed to hesitate about something but eventually came to a decision.

He took out bamboo leaves that were wrapping something. He unwrapped them and inside was smoked pork crisply burnt. He managed to store away a few dishes from last night's party and this was one of them. The pork used in the dish was from the green flowered babirusa. He had intended to save it and eat it on a special occasion but he decided this was a good time as any.

"Mmh, the flavor isn't bad," said the 12-year-old boy as he took a bite of the pork and drank a bit of the vermilion wine to go along with it.

Yang Qing didn't stand on ceremony and immediately began eating and drinking his part of the share too as he waited for the 12-year-old boy from the Shadow Hawks division to introduce himself.

The division itself was cloaked in mystery even to the people of the Order. Even for someone like Yang Qing, he didn't know much about them other than they were the intelligence branch of the Order. Every information they had on their cases, within the libraries of the Order or even the dossiers they received during their ceremonies, all came from the hands of the Shadow Hawks Division.

Their primary purpose was essentially to be the eyes and the ears of the Order so it doesn't get blindsided and also shed light on the current state of the continent for the Order.

Yang Qing didn't know where they stayed, if they even had a floor or a building within the Order as for the identities of their members, he couldn't say that he knew them. He did know a few people from his year at the Institute who may have gotten into the Shadow Hawks after their training at the Institute, but that was just about it, an unconfirmed rumor.

However, even if he didn't know about their members, he did know a few things about them such as their recruitment criteria. Their recruitment focused more on the adaptability of a cultivator rather than cultivation talent, however, despite not having any strict demands in cultivation, due to the nature of their occupation, their training was extremely strict and dangerous.

It was one of the few departments where dying in training was a common occurrence whereas in other departments it was almost nonexistent.

Yang Qing felt the two siblings would do well in the Shadow Hawks, however, the dangers of the place made him a little hesitant.

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"My name is Shi, just Shi and I'm the assistant to the chief of staff of the Shadow Hawks, since she is a busy person, I'm the one who handles this particular handover and induction," said the 12-year-old boy as he placed his chopsticks down.

"Did the person who did your induction tell you what your duties in regard to the Shadow Hawks, are?" asked Shi.

"He didn't go into much detail other than it involved an intelligence network and that someone from the Shadow Hawks would tell me more," said Yang Qing as he put his dish to the side and sat upright.

"Mmh, that's good..." said Shi as he paused for a few seconds with his gaze locked on Yang Qing.

Yang Qing was okay at first but when it hit the one-minute mark he started getting uncomfortable. He felt like all his secrets were being laid bare for Assistant Shi with every passing minute. Luckily he didn't have to bear the discomfort for long when Assistant Shi broke the silence.

"We have been monitoring you for a while.."

Yang Qing who had just taken a sip of the vermilion wine to calm his nerves found himself spitting it all out the moment he heard that statement.

"What?!!!!!" he asked wide-eyed.

"I thought you knew?" answered Assistant Shi with an innocent expression.

"With how many things you have done over the years, of course, the Order will place a close eye on one of their most active employees," said Assistant Shi with a light chuckle.

"Since when?" Yang Qing nervously asked.

"It's been a few years now."

Assistant Shi peeled off another smoked pork immediately after and proceeded to eat it with relish.

Yang Qing sat there frozen as he tried to make sense of the response that practically told him nothing.

"No wonder they caught me easily," thought Yang Qing as his face turned paler.

"The reason I told you that wasn't to scare you but rather because I happen to admire something you said a week ago to a colleague of yours, her name was Mao Yunru, another promising talent though she does use a lot of white jade talismans, even more than normal. I think the logistics department will start charging her, so you could warn her after this to reduce on her extracurriculars," said Assistant Shi.

"I will," answered Yang Qing solemnly but inwardly things were different.

"About time someone else suffered the Order's wrath. I'm sorry Mao Mao," thought Yang Qing.

He was inwardly gleeful much more than he even expected, which helped reduce the fear of being spied on by the Shadow Hawks. He even went as far as to mirror Assistant Shi's actions and picked smoked pork of his own.

Assistant Shi smiled a bit as he took in Yang Qing's actions and continued,

"As I was saying, something you said happened to resonate with the ideals of the Shadow Hawks.

What was it you said?" Assistant Shi took a pause as he adjusted himself.

"You wanted to cause as much chaos as possible in the continent so the organizations around the continent would be much more wary of each other than the Order.

In some sense, your thoughts happen to align with some of our undertakings and one of them happens to now fall under your purview as a palace court judge.

Once you become a palace court judge, you gain the authority to supervise and manage your own intelligence network. However, that statement in and of itself is rather misleading since the network you'll be managing may not necessarily help you in the conduct of your duties.

I think it would be more apt to say, you will be managing an intelligence network on behalf of the Shadow Hawks and the Order as a whole," said Assistant Shi in an unhurried tone.

At this point, Yang Qing was already drawn in.

Chapter 290 Intelligence Network (2)

"Every palace court judge is given a group of informants. These informants are individuals placed in unique positions across different organizations around the continent. Some are from sects, clans, merchant organizations, alchemy, kingdoms, empires, and the like. Some are even bandits and members of other shady organizations.

Your job is to be the connection of the Order to them. You will meet with them at your discretion to source any information that they may have on them, and evaluate their mental well-being and you will also be their lifeline and source of help.

Whatever help they need; you will be the one to provide it. Of course, you could consult with us if it's something complicated but I think it would be more prudent for you to handle it yourself.

The discretionary fund you receive from the Order is meant to help with that along with a few other things I will tell you shortly..." Assistant Shi paused when he saw Yang Qing's look turn gloomy.

"Is something wrong?" asked Assistant Shi.

"I'm sorry Senior Shi but I can't help but wonder if the funds I receive will be enough since its supposed to cater also for the payment of commissions done for my cases throughout the year.

With the caseloads I'll be getting and the remuneration scheme I was given, I can't help but feel the amount may not be enough to cater for both my duties as a judge and in the maintenance of the intelligence network," said Yang Qing.

He didn't know what troubles may arise in the network but whatever the case, they were sure to cost a tidy sum.

"You don't have to worry about that, even if the discretionary funds won't be enough, there are other sources to make up the difference, which was what I was going to get to later, but other than that I feel you have other reservations. Go on, no need to be shy here," said Assistant Shi.

Yang Qing on seeing Assistant Shi's look put on a serious expression as he asked,

"The informants, can they all be trusted?"

Since he would be meeting personally with them, there was an inherent risk a trap may be set for him during one of those meetings, and with the recent surge in attacks on personnel from the Order, there was a very real chance of that happening.

"They can, after all, they are all from the Order," Assistant Shi leisurely answered which drew a confused look from Yang Qing.

He could understand Order employees infiltrating a sect, an empire, a kingdom, or some large-scale merchant organization, but for something like a clan and how close-knit it was, it would prove difficult to infiltrate one.

Even some kingdoms and empires never allowed outsiders within their sphere of ruling, it was always kept within and around the topmost ruling families of which the royal family was one of them.

"The southern continent is a really big place and the wars that have happened over the years, though they are a tragedy but, in some regard, they could be considered opportunities.

Over the years, even just the last century, do you know how many low-ranked organizations have disappeared?" asked Assistant Shi

"A quarter of a million?" answered Yang Qing in an unsure tone.

"I wish it was that low because then it would be proof that we have an impact," said Assistant with a rueful smile.

"It's no less than ten million. As we are speaking, a hundred of them have likely fallen," said Assistant Shi.

Yang Qing knew even with the presence of the Order, the state of things around the continent was still hard but he never thought they were still that bad, he thought that they'd made a difference even if by a tiny margin. But ten million made it seem like they hadn't made a dent at all.

"Don't be disheartened, even though that number is high, it isn't as it once was a millennium ago and at least now even though those low ranked organizations find it hard to grow, their destruction isn't an entire annihilation," said Assistant Shi seemingly reading through Yang Qing's thoughts.

"Some get lost through mergers and alliances, others disband and the like while the bulk sadly is through slaughter, either by rivals or fiendish organizations like the scarlet blood ghost hand syndicate or the Crimson wave, well remnants of it...

But enough with the gloomy topic. Now because of how many organizations are lost, this makes it easier for someone to plant someone in the ruins of those organizations.

With the information we have collected over the years and the multitude of lost cultivation arts we have, it's easier to plant someone from the Order in the background of some destroyed organization in other instances we can even make up one and no one would be the wiser.

We'd pick someone from the Order and give him/her enough support to start a clan, or a sect, or other different types of organization depending on the skill set of that member.

The direction and growth of the organization is entirely up to them. Our part is to ensure their smooth integration into the locations they would be situated at. We fabricate everything about them including their karma. You've met Veiled Destiny, part of it is done with its help.

That project has been going on for the past 700 years and finally, its fruits are starting to show, however, the workload of maintaining it is too much for only the Shadow Hawks to manage, so we need help, and who better to do it than our very own judges.

None of the organizations within that network are powerful. Most range between rank 4 and rank 5, with a handful reaching rank 3 but the latter don't number more than 10. There's none at rank 2."

Yang Qing had an incredulous look. With the talent of the Order surely, they would have been able to have at least one person reach the domain realm in the past 700 years, not unless it was by design and the Order made those members slow their progress so as not to draw suspicious eyes.



"Those selected for the program are those who failed their entrance examinations but showed some talent in some aspect. The lack of rank 2 organizations wasn't by design, in fact, the rank 3 organizations we have, some of them appeared as a total surprise.

Hiding a talent in plain sight would draw much more eyes than revealing it, especially to a trained eye. It's safer to use people with normal aptitude in this regard and the Order would not risk their highest talents for such a venture, and it's not like they had or have enough of them as it stands," Assistant Shi carefully explained.