

Daily life 541

Chapter 541 Seven helminths

Yang Qing, Lai Lei, and the family, relatives, and loved ones of the employees of the Deer Mountain Range waited on the second floor of the Crystal Jade Pavilion for a few hours before one of the experts of the pavilion came out.

Yang Qing received a message from Ren Shu to meet him in his office. It was on the highest floor of the pavilion and was usually reserved for discussions among the senior figures of the Medical Valley.

Yang Qing and Lai Lei left the second floor where the rest were currently being segregated, probably for the privacy in the delivery of news and potentially the viewing of the body, for those who had a relation with the two dead inquisitors.

"How is Hao Da?" Yang Qing immediately asked when he made his way into Ren Shu's office.

He had caught Ren Shu in the middle of inputting something into a white jade talisman. Yang Qing knew it was a recording of the medical procedure they had just conducted. It will be reviewed and also form a basis of study for the healers of the Medical Valley, both the seniors and juniors.

It was a habit the Valley had developed at the insistence of the Valley Master. Every procedure would be repetitively studied no matter if the procedure had been successful or not. They did so to help in innovating more techniques or find if the ones they had could be improved upon. The strides the Valley had made were in part thanks to that.

After Ren Shu finished filing away the recording to various facilities not only around the Valley but even the Institute and the Main Library, was when he had the room to answer Yang Qing's question.

He waved his hand forward as a welcome gesture for Yang Qing and Lai Lei to have a seat.

"Hao Da and the branch chief Lai Wan are okay, though they're currently unconscious and submerged in a green sunrise mist cocoon. They will remain that way for the next month or so.."

Yang Qing heaved a sigh of relief when he heard that, Lai Lei looked visibly relieved too, as his clenched fists relaxed.

Just as Yang Qing was about to ask what happened to the Deer Mountain Branch and the damage they incurred, Ren Shu beat him to it, seemingly anticipating the question.

"Hao Da and Inquisitor Yi An had been conscious when help was sent for their rescue, so they were able to fill in a bit of the details before they both passed out.

From what they said, the Deer Mountain Branch had received information from the royal family of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, that members of the Blue Soul flame crow syndicate had been seen around one of the perilous zones of the kingdom by one of their special royal guard unit, the Stalking oriole.

Therefore after receiving the information, the king thought it wise to inform the Deer Mountain branch, so they could work together to route them out.

Considering the circumstances, informing the branch was the right choice, given the circumstances.."

Both Yang Qing and Lai Lei nodded in agreement. The Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate was one of the four subsidiary organizations of the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect. In its heyday, the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect was pretty renowned, especially with the amount of wealth they had plundered before and after their formulation.

They were able to use that wealth, resources, and their own power to expand their influences around the continent by absorbing other infamous organizations around and making them their underlings. Some joined voluntarily, while others did so through coercive means.

At the peak of their power, they had over a hundred subsidiary organizations spread about the continent acting as their eyes, ears, arms, and legs. Of those hundreds, only seven were worth noting because of their power and prior notoriety.

The seven were; the Black Skulls Pilgrimage Sect, the Poisonous Jade Scorpion Manor, the Sanguine Blade Sect, the Venomous Shadow Pavilion, The Grey Mistwalker, The Carp's Retribution Society, and finally the Blue Flame Soul Crow Syndicate.

Each and every one of these seven organizations was already infamous and renowned for their nefarious crimes around the continent, and they had enough power individually to send fear to rank 3 organizations since each was rumored to be headed by a cultivator at the late stages of the palace realm.

But despite how much fame they had, they all went under the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect, either willingly or by force but despite the means with which they joined, they all became even more terrifying when they came under the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect who were generous with their resources, and it wasn't long before two of them manage to have domain experts, thanks to the sect's support.

However, during the demise of the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect, in which the main figures got destroyed by the Order, leaving only a few survivors, three of the seven fell with them. They were eliminated root and stem. The three were the Carp Retribution Society which was one of the seven that had a domain expert and also one of the few that wasn't coerced into joining them, and the other two were the Sanguine Blade Sect, and the Black Skulls Pilgrimage Sect.

The Carp Retribution Society had been a must-target for the Order because of the seven, other than having a domain expert, they were the most dangerous, and in some regard,, they were graded to be potentially more dangerous than even the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect if they were given time. The reason for that was the wave of their propaganda and the charisma of their leader.

The Carp Retribution Society on paper was a society built up of the rejected, the undervalued, and the oppressed.

That outer disciple sect who showed promise but was constantly bullied and discriminated against by one of the 'geniuses' because they had a background, but he/she didn't, so their talents ended up buried in the dirt, and they never get to realize the heights they could have reached.

The commoner who was denied an opportunity he/she was above qualified for, all because their lineage was considered unworthy.

The loyal soldier who gave their all for the kingdom and was used till they were broken, and when they were not useful anymore, they were quickly cast aside.

The Carp Retribution Society was made up of people like this, and the reason for the society was to right those wrongs, to be emissaries for the carp that had their dragon's gate robbed.

With such a theme, the Carp Retribution Society grew in fame and repute. Cultivators and even mortals were clamoring to join them.

With the unfairness of the world, it wasn't hard to understand why a lot of people would be drawn to them. They served as a beacon of light to the disenfranchised, the broken, those with a vendetta but helpless to do anything about it.

Chapter 542 Battle at the mountain range

The Carp Retribution Society quickly grew from the support it received, every time it righted a wrong, by meting out justice or giving a fair shake and opportunity for the rejected. Its numbers mushroomed, and it blew up when they joined the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect, they even managed to use their good repute they had to subvert the image of the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect to the public, they touted them as righteous guards who held onto their oaths even after their liege had died. The embodiment of what true loyalty was.

The Dark Helminth Ghost Sect was able to operate smoothly and even grow its numbers thanks to the abilities of the Carp Retribution Society to sway public opinion. However, while the Society was outwardly known as a beacon of society, the Order knew their true face, they were harbingers of death who sold their skills for the highest bidders while also satisfying their lust for power and murder.

Countless sects, clans, and organizations had fallen by their hands. While the public thought they did it on behalf of a victim, they did it because an important client had made the request and when they acted, they obliterated everyone. If it was a sect, every man, woman, and child associated with it, whether they had cultivation or not, would be destroyed, and then they would fabricate the story and lay blame on the leaders of said organizations by saying they were the ones who laid waste to their own members despite the Carp Retribution Society leaving them a path to life.

At the speed they were growing, the Order judged them to be following the same trajectory of the Crimson Wave, thus when the opportunity presented itself, they reacted swiftly and thoroughly as they rooted every member out. They were more thorough with the Carp Retribution Society than they were with the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect, which earned them no small amount of hate from the public.

Even with the organization completely destroyed, the seeds it planted still exist to date, and who knew how long till those embers flamed up and Carp Retribution Society was revived from the dead.

As for the remaining two organizations i.e. the Sanguine Blade Sect and the Black Skulls Pilgrimage Sect, the former was sold out by a captured senior member of the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect, while the latter were combat fanatics who fought to the last member, the cultivation art they practiced had a binding oath that made it impossible for them to run from a battle, no matter how unfavorable it was to them.

With those three, destroyed, only four subsidiary organizations were left. The Order has tried to root them out over the years, however, these four knew how to hide in the shadows well, and it remained true even when the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect was at the peak of its power. They were also the reason the sect has been able to subsist even after the majority of its power force was decimated.

It was still a mystery how the sect despite being on its dying legs was still able to keep the four organizations in line, but the investigations showed the four subsidiary organizations were still in contact with the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect and the prior relation was still maintained and now in Deer Mountain Range, one of those subsidiary organizations made an appearance.

The royal family immediately calling the Deer Mountain Branch for help was perfectly understandable despite them having palace realm cultivators, the Blue Flame Soul Crow Syndicate was known to have destroyed a number of rank 3 organizations over the years, and some even slightly more powerful than the Deer Mountain Kingdom. So the wariness of the royal family was understandable and this was without even putting the dangerous locations around Deer Mountain Kingdom into account.

"Branch Chief Lai Wan on receiving the report, met with the king to confirm the details, after which he relayed the findings to the Special Inquisitors as per protocol on these matters.

After that, because it was unknown how long the members of the Blue Flame Soul Crow Syndicate would be around or what they were up to, the Branch Chief agreed to cooperate with the king and his party, to root them out.

They investigated from where they were last seen and eventually managed to follow their trails to one of the unexplored mountain ranges within the Kingdom.

Once there, the Branch Chief detected a massive miasma array being inlaid on the better parts of the mountain range, and it seemed to be trying to connect to something.

Because of the urgency the royal guards, a few of the princes, and Branch Chief Lai Wan and his team all charged in.

Once inside they engaged in a battle with a few members of the Blue Flame Soul Crow Syndicate as they made their way up where they found what the Branch chief assumed to be two of their deacons, taking out a treasure bone and wisdom pearl of an obsidian serpent that had been inhabiting the mountain.

Said serpent was thought to have just reached the palace stage and was just about to die, however, before its death, it let out a shrill cry and that was when things went wrong because two more obsidian serpents appeared and one of them seemed to be in its evolutionary stages of morphing into a flood dragon.

The two serpents seemed to have had a relationship with the butchered serpent, because the moment they saw its lifeless body, they went berserk and attacked the deacons, the Branch Chief, his team, and the princes and royal guards. Every human present became the subject of their fury.

Of the dead inquisitors, one was swallowed by one of the serpents while the other was killed by one of the deacons as he was trying to escape. As for Branch Chief Lai Wan, Hao Da, and the rest, they got swallowed in that chaotic mess, which ended in the death of three of the four princes who went with them and all of their guards who sacrificed themselves to buy enough time for the Branch Chief, Hao Da, the surviving inquisitor and prince to make their escape to the branch grounds.

They managed to make it, but they got poisoned and injured heavily by the obsidian serpent that was mutating. Its poison was toxic enough to damage their souls and almost corrode their dantian, as it contaminated their qi and every part of their body.

They were lucky that the anchoring treasure of their branch had detoxification properties but even then it only kept it at bay long enough for them to report their status and be saved..."

Chapter 543 Fate of the assailants

"What happened to the deacons of the Blue Flame Soul Crow?" asked Yang Qing as he tried to take his mind away from the torment the Branch Chief, Hao Da, and the rest went through from tussling with two obsidian serpents, with one of them already being in its evolutionary stages to a flood dragon, and two deacons to deal with.

The obsidian serpent had a sturdy defense with their nigh impenetrable defenses from the obsidian scales that granted them immunity to most elemental-based attacks while also having a reflective ability to them, in addition, they had extreme agility. Still, their most dangerous attribute was their poison.

They had an almost dragon-like attack regarding how they attacked, which was called 'poison breath'. The poison breath had two forms, one form was an area-wide attack where they would produce a mushroom poison explosive fog from their mouth. A single breath could cover a 5km radius within ten seconds.

The poison produced had powerful corrosive, paralytic, and hypnotic properties that worked rapidly on someone once infected. In addition, it spread easily, and widely and was extremely difficult to purge from an area because it had properties that made it easy for it to blend in within the surrounding spiritual qi, and the fact that it was odorless and traceless, made it hard to track.

Other than the poison mushroom explosion, there was the poisonous ray light attack which was a single targetted attack, that made up for what it lacked in wide-range attacks by being fast and with condensed destructive energy.

By all accounts, it was a thorny spirit beast to deal with and that was without putting into account that one of them was about to evolve into a flood dragon, which increased the danger level to astronomical levels.

It was a wonder to Yang Qing that they even managed to make it out alive, seeing as how their line-up did not have someone like him who had natural restraining abilities on various toxins.

Other than maybe the artifacts they had, the only reason Yang Qing could think of for their survival was the royal guards likely triggered a forbidden art that was powerful enough to restrain the two obsidian serpents to a point where the two spirit beasts could not chase after Hao Da and the rest as they were making their getaway.

"One of the deacons was killed by the mutating obsidian serpent, while the other managed to trigger some talisman he had to make an escape, however, he was injured heavily by Branch Chief Lai Wen. It's in doubt whether that deacon will live for long not unless they have a skilled gold grade physician on their hands, and ascendant grade ingredients to burn..."

"What about the serpents? Based on what you said, the dead obsidian serpent was likely their offspring, it's the only thing that makes sense based on their reaction. I doubt whatever means the royal guards used was strong enough to cripple or kill them.

Isn't the capital of the Deer Mountain Kingdom in danger?" asked Lai Lei with furrowed brows.

"The deacons seemed to have come with some way of specifically suppressing the abilities of the obsidian serpent, which is probably how they were able to fatally injure the first serpent.

They had an artifact made of heaven's dust granite which they used to bind one of the weaker serpents during the fight which opened it up to heavy injuries during the chaotic battle.

There have been no reports of any attack on the capital or any movements from the mountain range where the three obsidian serpents were found.

My guess is that they're hibernating to heal the injuries they suffered in the clash. Obsidian serpents of their level, considering they seem to be partners instead of competitors, are likely mates, and as you all know they only have one mate for life.

If there is one thing capable of pulling them out of their frenzy, is an endangering threat to the other. They have more than likely gone into hiding to recuperate for now.." said Ren Shu.

"And when they heal, it will be time for their retaliation. They've been known to be vindictive.." whispered Yang Qing lost in his thoughts.

Ren Shu stared at him for a brief moment, which drew a curious look from Lai Lei as he alternated his gaze between the duo wondering why Ren Shu looked at Yang Qing which seemed to suggest there was more to the look.

"There's no reason to worry about the two obsidian serpents, by now, they should have already been found.." said Ren Shu as he leaned back on his seat.

"Already found?" asked Yang Qing in confusion before a look of realization hit him.

"By the special inquisitors, I take it.." he added.

"Mmmh.." nodded Ren Shu.

"What will happen to them?" asked Yang Qing with a sigh as complicated emotions flashed through his eyes.

The fate of the two obsidian serpents was a complicated one. On one hand, what was possibly their child had been killed and they reacted accordingly, but as a result of that action, they ended up killing one member of the Order and injuring others.

Because of that, death was very much a possibility for them, for doing what any one of them would have done in the same situation.

Yang Qing couldn't help but lament the situation, and feel glad that he wouldn't be the one to make a ruling on such a situation.

"The Judicial Review Committee will be the ones to decide what will happen to them. They are making their deliberations as we speak, and.."

Ren Shu's gaze fell on Yang Qing as he reached this part.

"They would like to meet with you. Long Enlai asked for you to go see them the moment we are done here.."

"Why?" Yang Qing asked in surprise.

As much as he tried, he couldn't think of a reason as to why the Judicial Review Committee would look for him. He wasn't working and was still dealing with the lingering trauma from the last case.

What could the Judicial Review Committee possibly want with him when they had their hands full with the matter concerning the Judicial Review Committee?

It wasn't like he could offer any insight into the matter. He could feel his stomach churning when he imagined those retired judges smiling kindly at him as they used some cunning and guilt-tripping way to get him to deliberate the case despite him being a puny second-stage palace realm cultivator, and the matter involving heinous long-standing organizations, and late stage palace realm spirit beasts, and a whole branch office.

"No, surely they can't be that cruel.." Yang Qing fearfully thought as the tragic memories from his past came flooding into his mind, more specifically when his grandfather hoodwinked him over and over as a child into his many experiments.

Fear crept over his whole body when he thought the members of the Judicial Review Committee, were bound to be more wily than his grandfather. He stood no chance against them.

Wasn't that the reason why his tally against Old fiend Lei was 377 wins to Lei Weiyuan to a staggering 0 wins for Yang Qing?

Yang Qing's face grew increasingly pale the more he thought about it as he went down a rabbit hole of the different ways he would be exploited.

"Yang Qing? Yang Qing? Yang Qing? Lai Lei can you check if he's okay?"

"Yang Qing? Yang Qing?" Lai Lei patted Yang Qing on the shoulders a few times before Yang Qing finally regained his senses.

"Huh, Oh sorry about that.." Yang Qing said with a nervous smile.

His instinct of years of being exploited and suffering defeats at the hands of the Order was screaming that he was about to face something similar.

Yang Qing remained absent-minded throughout the rest of the conversation with the exchange being mostly Lai Lei and Ren Shu.

He didn't even realize when they left his office. It was only when they were out of the Medical Valley and Lai Lei was about to head to his abode did Yang Qing realize they had left Ren Shu's office.

"Yang Qing I'll see you later, and I will take you up on the offer of the Green Flame Tree, and also if you don't mind, could I use the nest too so I can prepare as much as I can before I head to the mountain?"

"When do plan to head over?"

"In about three months, by then some of the shackles I have will have been cleared...."

"That's good, then I need to properly prepare a good congratulatory gift.." Yang Qing cheerfully said which drew a doubtful look from Lai Lei who quickly tried to hide it.

"Just because I've been known to be stingy and done a few things in the past, doesn't mean I can't turn over a new leaf. I'm a palace court judge now.." Yang Qing grievously muttered as he rubbed his nose in embarrassment.

"I look forward to it, Palace court judge Yang Qing.." Lai Lei said as he waved goodbye leaving the lone Yang Qing who dragged his heavy steps in the direction of the Judicial Review Committee.

Chapter 544 Meeting with the wily old foxes (1)

Yang Qing's heartbeat pounded faster and harder when the distance between him and the courtyard of the Judicial Review Committee closed. He could feel his body grow hotter and his neck had an itchy sensation start to develop that slowly spread to his scalp.

Countless thoughts, scenarios, and hypotheticals went through his mind as the list got narrower the closer he got to the courtyard.

By the time he was just at the entrance to the courtyard, a smile of defeat appeared on his face, as he pushed open the bamboo pole door to the rustic quaint courtyard.

After coming up with countless reasons why the old judges of the Judicial Review Committee would want to see him, of the reasons he came up with, there was only one reason that seemed to make sense and check all the boxes.

Of the worst possible scenarios he could get, it was pretty up there considering it was something that he had avoided like a poisonous miasma ever since he got into the Order and decided to be a judge.

"Hao Da, did you curse me.." he thought as he recalled the last conversation he had with Hao Da after the decimation of the Ice Emerald Sect.

lightsNovel com Once inside the courtyard, the scene was pretty much the same as always, with three old men enjoying the comfort of their homes doing their hobbies.

Jia Bohai and Jiang Chen were playing go while Long Enlai was still working on his bonzai plant but unlike before there was another person with them. It was the female elder with light purple hair and a purple gem on her forehead and a genial calming aura to her. She had been one of the Judicial Committee Members present when they were deliberating on the fate of the Ice Emerald Sect. Her name was Xi Si.

"Greetings senior, junior Yang Qing presents himself.." Yang Qing said as he respectfully cupped his fists in greeting.

"Would you like some tea and dumplings, dear?" asked Xi Si with the same gentle grandmotherly welcoming demeanor.

"I would dare not refuse the hospitality.." Yang Qing humbly said as he took a seat next to the rectangular table that was next to Xi Si.

While it seemed like he had accepted the offer out of deference or respect, in the real sense, only known to him, his accepting the tea and dumplings was his way of exploiting as many benefits as he could from them if they were about to do what he thought they were about to do. He had every intention to profit and take everything he could get from them to try and minimize the loss he was about to suffer.

Yang Qing's eyes lit up when he bit into the hot dumpling. It was soft to the touch, like taking a bite out of the clouds, however, immediately after penetrating the first soft layer, an explosive symphony of different flavors coming from the different herbs, spices, and meats immediately combined in his tongue.

Yang Qing was gobsmacked as his eyes widened. This had to be the best dumpling he had ever come across, and there were about fourteen of them, piping hot waiting for him.

He looked at Xi Si with an emotional and thankful look that also seemed to have a question in it and the question was, where did the dumplings come from?

"I made them myself.." Xi Si gently said seemingly reading in between the lines.

The response shocked Yang Qing since he didn't exactly expect a retired judge to be such an exquisite cook. But then again, when he thought about it, it sort of made sense.

Most of the members of the Judicial Review Committee were mostly retired judges and other than extenuating circumstances that required their input, they barely had anything to do all day. It was why they were playing go all the time, or trimming a bonsai plant which seemed a little too high-maintenance from the amount of trimming it got.

So other than cultivating, what did these seniors do? it was obvious, that they indulged in their hobbies, and maybe the senior before he liked to cook, and if she did...

Yang Qing's self-serving gears immediately started spinning at high speed which was further agitated by Long Enlai's statement which supported his guess.

"Looks like Xi Si's dumplings have enslaved another victim. Do you ever wish you started chef alchemy earlier instead of being a judge?" asked Long Enlai as he came to take a seat next to them while taking one dumpling for himself which drew a grievous look from Yang Qing that he quickly masked.

"Not really. Doing it now is better. The environment and the state suit me better for it now, back then, I am afraid I would not have enjoyed it as I do now.." Xi Si said as she poured him a cup of tea.

"That is true.." Jia Bohai said with a nostalgic sigh as he and Jiang Chen came over and took a few dumplings for themselves which made Yang Qing feel like vomiting blood. In his mind from the moment he was offered those dumplings, they were all his.

Why are they all having a go at my dumplings? couldn't they just continue what they were doing? I just can't enjoy nice things to myself...

"I'll give you more to take back.." Xi Si said with a light chuckle when she saw Yang Qing's mild spasms that he was trying to mask.

Yang Qing's eyes immediately lit up as he said,

"Thank you senior Xi Si. These dumplings are fit for an immortal feast festival, and for a nobody like me to have a taste, is a blessing for a thousand lifetimes.."

Yang Qing's bootlicking persona immediately took over when the opportune moment presented itself.

"Quite the talker.." Xi Si said with a smile.

Internally Yang Qing was dancing shamelessly in mad joy, the smile to him was a stamp that his bootlicking had succeeded, and now all that was left was to capitalize on it.

"I think I will have to be a regular visitor here, but I need to come up with a legitimate reason for doing so. Though wily old foxes like them will definitely see through it and discover my true motives. I can't shamelessly be direct about it. Sometimes, I wish I had Feng Xin's shamelessness when it came to these matters..." Yang Qing thought with a sigh.

Chapter 545 Meeting with the wily old foxes (2)

"Judge Yang Qing now that you're here, it's about time we tell you why we called for you.."

The casual air from before instantly turned solemn when Long Enlai started speaking.

"Here it comes.." thought Yang Qing as he straightened his back, with a slowly perspiring back as he awaited his sentence.

"As you may have guessed the reason we called you here has most to do with what happened to those from the Deer Mountain Branch. I don't know if Ren Shu informed you on this, but the deliberation of the matter fell on us as it involves the death of a member of the Order.

Before all this happened, you had sent a report requesting for a branch to be built in the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect, right?"

"Yes, I did.." answered Yang Qing.

"Reasons?"

"It was because a member of the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect managed to sneak in and attack me during the evaluations.

The only reason the attack failed was because of an anomaly, meaning me. Someone in the core formation realm should have been the one to handle those evaluations, but I happened to be the one to do them, which was something they had not prepared for.

Such a level of preparation could only mean they had a base close by right in the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect, by my guess and they had been there for quite some time.

Considering the ascetic nature of the Spiritual Temperance Sect, and how nonchalant they are about the happenings of their territory, the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect may not be the only one to have a presence there.

That territory has the potential to be a hotbed of heinous organizations because of that neglected oversight and free reign given by the Spiritual Temperance Sect.

As far as I know, the branch in Deer Mountain Kingdom which is the closest, was the one that also handled cases and surveillance of that region.

But the Deer Mountain Kingdom is just as complicated as the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect, even more so, since the territory is enormous and the perilous and uninhabited regions are too many to count.

Giving that branch supervision of both the Deer Mountain Range and the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect is burdening them too much, it's more prudent for another branch to be built in the Spiritual Temperance Sect's territory and have the two branches support each other, in case of emergencies.."

Yang Qing's voice turned lower once he reached this part. He couldn't help but think that maybe if there was another branch close by, things would not have ended up as they did.

But that was a huge maybe because the Order rarely built their branches within the territories of rank 2 organizations because of how wary those organizations were of the Order infringing on their territories but the other was usually those organizations had a firm grasp of their territories, since their face was tied to it. Dark underworld organizations would show minimal activities because of it, so the Spiritual Temperance Sect was thought to be the same.

It was assumed that even though it was known that the sect had a rather lax and indifferent attitude toward anything outside its sect grounds, surely it was not to the point where infamous organizations like the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect would set up a base within their territory. That attack at the Summerfield Kingdom was a shocker.

"I wonder if they acted.." thought Yang Qing as he thought back to the message he had left with them.

"That's an astute and excellent analysis, Yang Qing.." said Long Enlai with an endearing smile.

"The Deer Mountain Branch is temporarily out of commission with all its members either injured or deceased.

From the report we have received Branch Chief Lai Wen and Chief Inquisitor Hao Da will recover after a month or so but they will still need to remain back for rehabilitation especially where mental demons are concerned, so the earliest they can go back is in two months and that is if they even want to go back.."

Long Enlai's response elicited sighs from all present.

There was a chance that the survivors of the incident may choose to go another route instead of returning to their prior roles. There have been those over the years after going through an extreme ordeal, who opted to go for safer roles that would not leave them exposed, that was even after they had dealt with the mental demons associated with the incident.

The Order didn't allow it before when it started when it could not afford to, but over the years, at least in the past four hundred or so years, they changed their stance on the matter. Those who have gone through what Hao Da or even what Lai Lei has gone through could choose to serve the Order in a different capacity and over the years they were those who had taken up the offer for one reason or the other.

"The Deer Mountain Branch can not remain unmanned for that long, so our request for you Judge Yang Qing is this, we need you to head the branch until the branch chief is back or we find a suitable replacement..."

lightsnovel.com "I knew it.." Yang Qing thought in defeat.

"Why me?" Yang Qing weakly asked still hoping there was a way he could weasel out of this, even if he knew it was already set in stone, he knew it, and they knew it.

"Well because you happen to fit all the criteria for it. The Deer Mountain Branch chief even a temporary one needs to be at the palace realm, and while the role doesn't matter it's preferable to us that whoever fills in that role is either a judge or inquisitor.

With those requirements, only you fit the bill right now because you don't have any pending cases, a newly promoted judge, and your inquisitor team can join you, so we don't have to provide additional manpower or go through the trouble of shifting people over and considering the nature of your jade physique, you would be like a fish in the water there.." answered Long Enlai.

After hearing the well-thought-out explanation, a defeated sigh escaped Yang Qing's lips as he knew, he was truly done. There was no way he could avoid this.

"It won't be all gloom, we know we are putting you there after coming from another storm, but the circumstances dictate it at the moment. So please bear with it. You will also be generously compensated for it and the compensation is specially geared for you.."

Yang Qing who looked like a deflated corpse, instantly perked up.

"I knew it, these old foxes are just like Grandpa."

Chapter 546 Yang Qing breaks

After dropping the bombshell on him they were now using little advantages here and there to reel in Yang Qing completely.

It was the same thing his grandfather used on him back then and despite knowing the trick, he still fell for it every single time. His grandfather knew him too well, and the advantages he offered were things Yang Qing couldn't refuse, in addition to using guilt trips, and sound logic.

lightsNovel com The old seniors before him had already used sound logic which left Yang Qing with no option but to agree, but they didn't just stop there. They wanted to exploit Yang Qing thoroughly to make sure he would do his role well and not just the bare minimum.

Looking at their confident looks, Yang Qing felt slightly conflicted. On the one hand, he was terrified because it meant whatever they had in hand they were sure was enough to tempt him to the point he would abandon his fears and go above and beyond in his duties as a branch chief.

That thought terrified him but on the other hand, he was excited because whatever he got was bound to be something he would like.

He was both eager and terrified at the cards they held.

"First things first, you will be getting the same salary and remuneration package of a branch chief, which is a big step up from what you are currently earning.

Your current pay is 20,000 high-grade spirit stones but for a branch chief is three times that. You will be receiving 60,000 high-grade spirit stones, but because this is an emergency and ideally this role was just hoisted on you, you will receive 80,000 high-grade spirit stones every month..."

Yang Qing's mind went blank when he heard the figures.

"80,000? 80,000? for me?" he asked with a trembling voice, shaky hands, and red-eyed eyes.

"Yes, in addition.."

Just with the opening offer alone, he was already sold. They had already bought his unwavering servitude.

"You bastards, fearsome as I thought.." murmured Yang Qing as he sucked in cold air and the drool that was dripping from his face.

80,000 high-grade spirit stones. So many things he could do with that money.

"Too bad it will only be for a month if only...No! No! Yang Qing this is what they want, don't fall into their trap, hold strong remember your dream.."

Yang Qing quickly wiped the cold sweat from his forehead as clarity and wariness shone in his eyes.

"The amount you receive in terms of monarch-grade herbs will be tripled from 2,000 to 6,000, In addition, there is a set amount that is given to the branches. The Branch Chief is allowed to use a third of it for his/her own discretion..."

"Do these bastards want me to permanently become a branch chief?!"

"You will be allowed to keep ten copies of middle tier blue grade art for you to do with as you will. In addition, every branch has a library with over 1,000 cultivation arts and techniques, along with scrolls and information of a wide variety. As the branch chief, you have access to all content within that Library.

While the library doesn't match what we have here, each branch has a few cultivation arts that are not at the main library and are considered to be rare even when we consider the continent as a whole.

I heard you like researching incomplete cultivation arts, well the Deer Mountain branch happens to have one. It's contained within a broken wind chime, it is called the Ethereal root vine charm.

From what I heard, it has a lot of varied benefits and uses. On more than one occasion it has even been deliberated on whether it should be relocated back to the headquarters.. Though you won't be allowed free reign over it like the ten blue-grade arts since its considered property of the Order, you are allowed to learn it, research it and play with it as you will.." Long Enlai said with a meaningful smile.

Yang Qing was already gone at this point. His eyes were starry and any hesitation he held, the staunch conviction he had held over the years, was broken this moment.

The long-standing fear he held of working in branches had all been eroded with just a few words from Long Enlai.

"I stood no chance against these foxes.." he thought as tears started forming in his eyes.

Deep down he always told himself that he had a bottom line which no amount of bribery would make him betray, that if it came down to between his life or his interests, he would choose his life, but at this moment, with how easy he broke, he couldn't help but have a sour taste in his mouth.

He was ashamed of himself, though only slightly, and that slight shame was immediately destroyed by Long Enlai's next announcement.

"All your meals will be catered for by us during your stay at the branch and there we also managed to acquire the services of one of the chefs from the White Baobab Kingdom during the time you will be there..."

Yang Qing stared blankly at the four members before he weakly said,

"Do you have to be so thorough?"

"I, Yang Qing accept the task entrusted to me and I will do my utmost to do my duties as the Branch Chief and to not sully the reputation of the Order.." Yang Qing solemnly said as he cupped his fists.

"We thank you for this.." Long Enlai and the rest said.

"It seems like you still have something on your mind?" asked Xi Si when she saw the slightly hesitant look on Yang Qing's face.

"If it's not too much to ask, what decision did you make on the Obsidian serpents?"

Long Enlai and the rest sighed when he asked this. It was Jiang Chen who stepped in to answer this one.

"One of our own was killed, and while we want to maintain a face of impartiality on this and be fair, we just can't because, at the end of the day, it's the Order against everyone and everything else.." said Jiang Chen as he took a sip.

Chapter 547 Strange looks

"It's the reason despite knowing what Dai Chen did back then, there were no repercussions for him. We understood it and even agreed to it on some level, and should the day come when we uncover those who harmed Lai Lei, however, it ends up getting handled, we will not stop it.

The two obsidian serpents were victims in this, and their reaction was completely within their rights to do so, but it still doesn't deny the fact that an inquisitor died in their hands. We can overlook the injuries it caused to the Branch Chief and the rest since it's treatable, but a death, that complicates matters.

This is why we have decided that the moment they're caught, while we will not take their lives, they will be indentured to the service of the Order for the entirety of their lives via a soul contract.

It's a little harsh but it has to be done. Though they will not be stationed here, but will instead remain in the Deer Mountain Range for now, until we find a suitable place to send them. Probably one of the branches or maybe even the new branch that you suggested.."

"Will they be okay with it?" asked Yang Qing in wonder.

Though the judgment seemed harsh, in terms of balance it was what made sense. The two serpents took lives from the Order's and the Deer Mountain Kingdom's side. It was a blood debt that either of these sides would collect if they were allowed to roam freely.

Rather than leave room for the bud of a cycle of hatred to flourish, it was better to nip it in the bud through forced indenture, which even though wouldn't restore the lost lives, was slightly palatable to all parties involved. The only problem was the obsidian serpent. They were known to be vindictive and hold on to grudges. It won't be a stretch for them to violate the soul contract and induce the deathly punishment inscribed on it, or even choose destruction by suicide.

"Well, we will give them the one thing they want desperately at this moment....vengeance.." said Jia Bohai with a cold tone.

Yang Qing nodded in understanding before another question came to his mind as he recalled the statement made by Jiang Chen.

"Did the Spiritual Temperance Sect already agree for us to build a branch in their territory?"

Despite being ascetic, Yang Qing did not expect it would easily allow the Order to build a branch within their territory.

If they were so amenable or indifferent, then the territory would already have rank 3 sects making their homes, but as it stood there wasn't. Currently, the Summerfield Kingdom was among the strongest entities within that territory which made Yang Qing curious, should they become a rank 3 kingdom, would the Spiritual Temperance Sect kick them out?

"Maybe the story about the previous king who received a beating for seeking guidance, he may have not gone there to seek guidance but may be to sound them out and test their attitude.."

"After the attack on you, specifically by a member of the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect, at this point we don't need their approval to build a branch there.

They should be grateful we are not taking them into account for their negligence since it could be considered a violation of the treaty signed by all these organizations during the founding of the Order.

One of the guiding precepts of the treaty was the provision of measures that would allow us to conduct our affairs easily without hindrance. Monitoring their territory of fiendish organizations is one such measure and they broke it.

Building a branch in a territory they allowed to rot could be considered letting them off easy and in some account we are even doing them a favor since they liked staying holed up in their sect so much.." Long Enlai calmly said.

Yang Qing could detect a cold frightening sensation behind that calm remark and when he looked around, it was something shared by the rest, even Xi Si who seemed the gentlest of the four had a coldness to her.

He felt like he was staring at an executioner's blade when he looked at her eyes.

lightsNovel.com Yang Qing couldn't help but be bewildered at their reactions. It was just a little oversight, that's all, it's not like it was not known that the Spiritual Temperance Sect cared so little about their large territory which was why many organizations swarmed up there.

The reaction from the four that made it seem they wanted to raze the sect to the ground felt a little extreme to him.

However, what he didn't know was that during the dark ages of the Order, orthodox organizations would team up with fiendish organizations to lay traps for the members of the Order.

The Order lost countless of its members back then, and with recent happenings, there were recordings of a similar resurgence, like in Lai Lei's case.

Their livid reaction to the Spiritual Temperance Sect was understandable especially when the search for the member of the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect that Yang Qing had marked with a gold-grade karmic spell and a piece of thin wood from a saint-grade tree by the name of treading cicada peach wood ended in failure. That marked member erased the marking before the Special Inquisitors closed in on his location.

The branch was being established in the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect in part to maintain some semblance of order in the area, but the other was to monitor the sect itself in secret.

The markings were not something just anyone could do. It could only be done by a domain expert and above, and it had to be one skilled in alchemy or one with skills in obfuscation. The Spiritual Temperance Sect happened to be known to have top-tier spells and arts in obscurity, which extended to even isolation in karma.

Despite how unlikely it was for them to be considered as suspects in the matter, the marking had been erased too fast for them to not be a suspect, when considering the last known location was within their territory.

"Have you decided on the rank?" asked Yang Qing.

On paper, the Spiritual Temperance Sect was a rank 3 sect, but the Order knew for a fact they had a domain expert already and it was not just one. Yang Qing wondered if the branch would be a rank 2 or will the Order uphold the ruse and build a rank 3 branch. Though with the Order's way of doing things, he felt like the latter was likely to happen.

"It will be rank 3, which will be working in tandem with the Deer Mountain Branch.."

"Oh.." nodded Yang Qing which was what he expected.

"Now that all that is out of the way, Xi Si would you please.." Long Enlai said as he motioned for her to take over.

"Well, Judge Yang Qing, I handle the deployment procedures of branch chiefs including an explanation of your duties and a few little bits here and there that will help your transition to your post be smooth.

But before that, I'd like to clarify a few things, well it's just one. What happened to the Deer Mountain Branch was a wake-up call to us.

Before, when we set up the branch we didn't completely scout the region other than a few key areas and where we ended up building the branch.

At the time our rationale was, as long as the defenses of the branch were good, the rest was negligible and with two palace realm cultivators from the Order holding the helm, we didn't think much would happen.

We would maintain order within our territory without interfering with the rest of the inhabitants of the range.

We are not conquerors, so there is no need for us to interfere with the various spirit beasts and dangers lurking in there. As long as it doesn't infringe upon our guidelines we remain spectators, but with what happened we thought it prudent to send a special inquisitor, a gold eagle guard, and a resource specialist to do a deep and thorough survey of the whole range.

By the time you head there, you will be given a document containing the full survey of everything within it, the map and distribution.."

Yang Qing's eyes immediately lit up when he heard that.

Chapter 548 A month passes by (1)

The obsidian serpents and one of them even beginning the evolution process to a flood dragon, who knew how many other dangers the Deer Mountain Range hid?

The territory was as large as a rank 2 empire and in certain areas, it was just as rich. But even then it was filled with countless dangers which was why despite the Deer Mountain Kingdom calling themselves lords over the territory for tens of thousands of years, they never had full control of it.

They did try it once, but it ended in their complete loss, and their foundations got fractured so they dared not try it again.

Yang Qing was slightly worried about what dangers lurked in the area. Xi Si's report gave him much-needed relief and as for why they didn't do it earlier, Yang Qing could more or less guess it had to do with manpower and also the nature of the Deer Mountain Range, more specifically its inhabitants.

The Order as long as there was no imminent threat would not pour countless resources and manpower to map out an area outside their jurisdiction completely. It would take too much time and resources, which they had a limited supply of, especially labor. They had the whole continent to monitor which usually left them little room for deep excursions and surveys. They would rather use those resources to make the branch as impenetrable as possible.

The other reason was the spirit beasts. If the branch had been in an area known to be a hub for a lot of human activity, then a deeper study would have been done by the Order, but in a wilderness range like the Deer Mountain Range, it was better not to spend too much time on it. Spirit beasts are extremely territorial and would rarely live in their sphere of influence, they therefore usually kept to themselves the more powerful they were not unless there was a sudden birth of a precious resource that would trigger a war amongst themselves.

But with the death of an inquisitor and the presence of members of the Blue Flame Soul Crow Syndicate, things had changed. An in-depth study was needed, especially to know why the Blue Flame Soul Syndicate needed the wisdom pearl of an obsidian serpent in the first place, and how they even knew it was there.

From its death, clearly, the syndicate must have scouted it for quite some time for them to be able to heavily injure it without creating so much commotion.

The Order therefore needed to know what else lurked within those ranges in case some other fiendish organization was drawn to it.

"After everything has been mapped out, the occupants will not be subjugated, except for volatile elements, but even then, considering that there have not been records of them acting out, what we will do for now is place monitoring and alerting seals and arrays around their regions in case of any movement.

Though we will try to form a friendly or accommodative pact with them if we can, in case we don't, the Spirit Council has signed off on inlaying containment and suppression arrays to cover the whole Deer Mountain Range.

It will lay dormant most of the time, and the only way to trigger it is through a token that would be handed to the Branch chief. With that, they should be able to avoid any surprise attacks.

lightsNovel.com But because of the scale of such an array, I'm afraid by the time you take the post it will not be done yet.." said Xi Si.

"It's okay, having a clear picture of the whole range is more than enough.." answered Yang Qing in understanding, while inwardly he marveled at the Order's abilities.

Despite being here and seeing all they could do, they always had a way of subverting his imagination now and then.

He could hardly imagine the skills and the resources that would be required to lay a kingdom-wide array especially one the size of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, which was like the size of two rank 3 kingdoms combined.

The scale of such an array was enormous, to say the least. Other than the coverage, there were multitudes of other variables to consider.

Just laying down an array that covered the abode one had to consider the resource makeup of the area to determine the flow of their signature waves and their effects on the properties of the surrounding spiritual qi, then there was geomancy, which elements were most prevalent in the area, before one finally decided the type of array to lay down and the anchoring treasures to use, which will have to meld with the surroundings to not cause an imbalance and the last part, was it had to be adaptive.

The array needed to have enough strength and adaptability in its makeup to be able to respond to any changes that may happen to the surrounding makeup. This was why the best-laid arrays had a moniker to them, they were usually referred to as worlds within a world. A good array made good use of its surroundings to amplify its abilities, but it also needed to be independent of it. It needed to be strong enough to blend its surroundings into its framework, forcibly if need be.

Those considerations amplified the larger the scope of the area covered by the array became with an increasing number of variables to consider and blend. The probably of an array lay up failing as it was very high the larger the area it covered, and if it was laid it faced another problem of potentially imploding or malfunctioning due to adaptability issues.

For something of this scope, Yang Qing was certain it required the combined skills of at least ten gold-grade formation masters, though the number would be half that if a purple-grade formation master was

involved. Other than skills, to cover something this large, the main anchoring artifact or treasure of the array would have to be at the saint grade for it to operate fully throughout the kingdom while the secondary treasures by Yang Qing conservative estimates needed to be at least four, and their grade needed to be top tier ascendant grade artifacts.

The costs and the skills required were the reasons why most rank 2 organizations even rank 1 rarely covered the entirety of their territory in one all-encompassing array. It was too demanding and costly to the point that some could hardly afford it, which is why they mostly opted to only cover the core regions of their territories.

Only organizations like the Order had the resources and skills to pull off something like this. Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh at the opulence showed by them.

They were willing to spend this much in a territory that wasn't even their own. Then how much guarded was the headquarters?

Despite himself, a small satisfied smile couldn't help but creep up on Yang Qing's face. The four elders all had bewildered looks on their faces on the sudden smile but they chose to ignore it as Xi Si continued with her explanations.

Chapter 549 A month passes by (2)

"There will be a gold eagle guard maintaining handling the security of the branch during the duration of your stay there, so even though the array will not be there by the time you start, your safety and that of your team will be guaranteed. You can rest easy on that.."

"Thank you.." said Yang Qing with heartfelt sincerity.

"Speaking of your team, you can inform us now or later, who you want to bring along so they have their inductions too.."

"I will need to confirm with them first if they don't have any cases pending, but in my team, I would like to bring the three spirit beasts attached to us. That is the rainbow mist toad, the cloud-swallowing kite, and the mirage dragonfly, if it's not too much trouble.."

"It's okay, we will have someone from the beast tamer hall bring them over after this.."

Yang Qing nodded in gratitude. Of the three spirit beasts he mentioned, he wanted Bolin and Haishi with him mostly to look at their progress thus far and build camaraderie if he could, as for Ellie, it was a no-brainer, he didn't trust her at all. Feng Xin wasn't there to hold her leash, and the starlight crab wasn't her match yet. She would ransack his pond clean if she discovered he wasn't around.

Xi Si guided him on a few more things before she handed him a finger-sized artifact that looked like a deer's antler. The artifact was the controlling artifact of the entire branch. It controlled all the formation arrays within the branch, while also serving as the entrance key to all the restricted facilities within the branch that only the branch chief would have access to.

Yang Qing came in he was absolutely terrified but when he was leaving he was absolutely chipper. He looked like he couldn't wait to get started as he made outlandish promises which only grew when Xi Si handed him a basket of dumplings.

It was only when he was at the auspicious grove did some sanity and clarity returned to him. He had cold sweats all over when he remembered all of the things he was mouthing off toward the end.

"I hope they don't take me at my word..."

Over the next few weeks, he still maintained his schedule with the six-hour visits at the auspicious grove while still making trips to the Medical Valley to refine his healing arts and also check on Hao Da and the rest.

The three surviving members made rapid recovery though they remained unconscious. The poisoning, the petrification, curses, and other extensive damages they had suffered on their bodies had all been mended, the only remaining part was purging the miasma that had invaded their souls down to their mental seas.

The purging required them to be unconscious to avoid it spreading deeper into their soul and mental sea.

Ma Yuan's daughter, Ma Ling was also showing some improvements albeit it was mild but it was still progress which brought endless joy to Ma Yuan even though he was still basically a stranger to his daughter.

Yang Qing was relieved to see Ma Yuan start to live rather than the dreadful state he found him in. He now seemed like he genuinely looked forward to each day, and when he was not visiting Ma Ling, he was excitedly working in Yang Qing's backyard.

Ma Yuan's state was a huge boon for Yang Qing as it sort of freed his mind and some of the shackles he had inadvertently placed on himself which increased the speed with which he conquered his mental demons via the brook of clarity.

The vivid flashbacks did not have as much of a mental burden on him as they did at the start and he was finally starting to make sense of what the auspicious wood grove tree had told him before he started the treatment. Seeing things from his true self would free him from whatever plagued him, as he would be able to see it clearly, and closer to the end of the month he finally did. He came to terms with the events of the Ice Emerald Sect, as only Yang Qing would.

Yang Qing's eyes fluttered with clarity as his gaze fell on the image playing out on the waters of the brook of clarity. The scene was that of the young disciples before his attack fell on them.

This was the true root of his internal demons, the part that he struggled with, those faces so full of life. Faces of those who lived and expected to live. Faces of hope faces of expectation.

"Some of you would have grown to be looked up to by others, some of you would have grown to lead your sect into greater heights, some of you would have given hope and a chance to someone out there suffering, some of you would have remained the same, some of you would have inspired others, some of you would have been the strong trees to shelter the saplings underneath you, but all of that was cut short by me...." Yang Qing said as his gaze fell on each of those faces.

"You will never get to live the lives you envisioned or affect those around you if you had lived because you are now...dead.

I wish you weren't, which was something I struggled to come to terms with. Thinking that my hands affected me so much. I felt like a robber, no different from those fiendish cultivators who use the lives of others to grow their strength like cauldrons.

I was so consumed by the guilt that the future and the destiny that I robbed you was all I could see.

But you see, this is uncharacteristic of me, the arrogance of it all. I can't see the future, who's to say you would have grown up to be what I imagined you to be?

lightsNovel.com Here I was carrying the burden of a future that I couldn't predict and condemning myself because of it when the only thing I can control is the here and now, and the only actions I can guide are my own.

I gave you all something that the Shu clan, the Chu clan, the Sunflame kingdom, and countless others like Ma Yuan's wife and daughter and even Ma Yuan himself didn't get, which was a choice.

A chance to choose your next steps and maybe even your fate. Choice is a gift that not many get to have in this world and at the very least you got that.

A chance to choose whether to leave or stay with the sect to the end. You made your choice, and despite how it ended, you lived, as choice is a privilege of the living. Your lives are your own to decide, just as mine is my own to decide.

I accept and respect your choice, as for me, there is so much for me to do than get lost in endless loops of what-ifs. Life is for the living and I intend to spend mine laughing; eating, and trying to weasel every free meal that I can from my friends, the Order, and anyone that I can think; try to exploit the Order as often as I can; exploring the free open-air cultivation market for some buried treasure, deciphering broken cultivation arts and weird artifacts; maybe eventually confessing to this oddball girl that I like, hopefully, she does it first, otherwise she may end up secretly recording me with over a dozen talismans if I end up doing it first.." A goofy smile appeared on his face as he said that.

"Keep my word, honor my commitments and relationships, and help those I can, but if it risks my life doing it, then I may choose not to, and so many more things that I hope are waiting for me. So you see.."

"I will continue living, and it's time to say goodbye. I hope in your next lives you will see it to all you hope for and if by chance you want to come seek vengeance, I will be here at the Order, with powerful seniors waiting to welcome you. Farewell specters of the Ice Emerald Sect," a shackle seemed to break from within Yang Qing's mind as a cooling warm sensation enveloped his whole body.

Chapter 550 Final session

Yang Qing wasn't sure but he could vividly feel some threads untangle themselves from his body, which made him feel like he had been released from something.

"That kid has managed to rip the nether karma strings, that's some resolve, now all that's left is one karma string, but even it seems faint and looks well on its way to full resolution.." thought the saint grade tree, the auspicious wood grove tree.

"His soul has grown stronger and purer.." it added.

In its gaze, Yang Qing was surrounded by countless glowing threads but moments earlier before his resolution, amongst those threads, there had been about a hundred grey threads that released a purple-black energy that was slowly tainting his body and mind.

When he came, half his mental sea and inner soul body had been tainted to the point there was something almost humanoid manifesting from the infested pool. However, the sessions at the brook of clarity suppressed the spreading of that infestation and the corrosion caused by those black threads.

lightsNovel com Each and every day that Yang Qing came for treatment and was exposed to the measures of the brook of clarity, the brook's abilities moved from suppression to cleansing. The black threads were slowly being purified so Yang Qing would sever them for himself.

Now all that was left was one, but based on the faintness of that thread and its transformation, it looked like Yang Qing would not need the brook's help to deal with it.

"Congratulations, young judge.." said the auspicious grove wood tree.

"I could not have done this without your help senior, thank you truly for this.." answered Yang Qing as he performed a deep respectful bow to the auspicious grove wood tree.

It was only now that he realized how much dire straits he had been in. He had no idea how deep in the cesspool he had been in until he was released from it.

An unbearable weight had been slowly suffocating him and he had no idea, how bad it was until this very moment.

He felt a sense of lightness to him that brought him relief, comfort, and a sense of strength that he didn't have even before the events of the Ice Emerald Sect. He felt like he had just unearthed another part of him that had been locked away which gave him a sense of clarity and assuredness.

"My connection to my Dao seems to have grown.." he muttered as he felt an ephemeral connection with the vitality Dao thicken.

His skin immediately started letting out a gentle aurora glow which made Yang Qing's eyes light up in excitement.

His physique, the dormancy he experienced from it was slowly being alleviated, and his peerless jade physique was reactivating once more, which was a week in advance of the prediction the valley master and Ren Shu had made, which Yang Qing agreed with.

"I might as well see this through to the end since it is his final session. The faster he grows, the better it is for me. With his help, I should be able to find them..." muttered the auspicious wood grove tree as one of the pebbles transformed into his humanoid clone.

The humanoid clone waved his sleeves as a ball-sized water bubble was pulled from the brook of clarity.

The clone molded the water bubble like it was kneading dough as mystical air and an ancient-looking light were produced within it.

If one looked at the light closely, one would notice it bore a faint resemblance to the light Yang Qing released every time he executed his core cultivation art, the purple grade art, the universal duality light of myriad worlds.

The light being produced in the water bubble and the one Yang Qing produced bore some semblance of similarity to each other, except that the one produced from the water bubble felt vaster and more ethereal.

The water bubble turned into a radiant light and the elderly clone of the auspicious wood grove tree gently pushed forward to Yang Qing and watched it disappear into his forehead.

Yang Qing felt a cool sensation envelop his mind, which was similar to what he felt in the two-hour restorative session he had with the brook of clarity, except this one had been amplified ten times.

His physique which seemed to be restored at a gradual pace felt like it had been given a powerful jolt of energy, rapidly regained life in an instant.

Yang Qing froze as he could feel it, it was finally back. The subtle emptiness he had been feeling ever since his physique went dormant, instantly disappeared.

Just as Yang Qing was about to thank the auspicious wood grove tree for its help, he felt his vision suddenly change as he experienced an out-of-body experience.

"This!?!"

Yang Qing was in a once familiar route and sensation that brought him an endless shock. He was within the deeper recess of the palace realm his body being guided within an enclosed radiant glowing current and in an instant he was standing before the crystal jade tree that he didn't know lurked within his palace realm.

It was his second time here, and despite the prior interaction, he still felt awed by the jade tree like he was seeing it the first time.

It stood there gently, silently with an ethereal mist surrounding it with countless leaves though were the size of his thumb, they looked like they could contain an entire world within it.

Yang Qing tried to walk towards it, however, his body seemed frozen in place.

On seeing his movement frozen, Yang Qing decided to observe the tree and see if he could glean any clue from it.

"The sound from before is not there.." he muttered as his gaze fell on the ethereal mist and then moved to the leaves.

The leaves were light green and looked like they had been sculptured from green smooth crystal. Yang Qing's focus was on the runes inscribed on them. They gave Yang Qing the sensation of something primordial, something beyond ancient, but that was all he could get from them. He couldn't understand them no matter how deeply he looked at them, his mind drew a blank on them and there was also no reaction coming from them.

Everything from the mist to the tree seemed shielded from his mind somehow. It was like there was a veil in his eyes and mind that stopped him from seeing more than what he saw right now. He couldn't decipher anything other than there was a crystal jade tree before him surrounded by ethereal mist and leaves with ancient primal runes inscribed on them.

Yang Qing was hoping that there would be some sort of reaction triggered from his presence here, but there was nothing.