

## Daily life 621

### Chapter 621 Piecing clues

Yang Qing took out the map in the study of the branch chief and correlated it with the information Meifeng shared with him on the locations that the fire adler bear frequented with the daughter of the obsidian serpents when she was young.

Yang Qing marked out those locations and tried to see if there was anything of note written about them in some of the previous branch chief's notes on the locations around the Deer Mountain Range.

The locations didn't have any information recorded. Yang Qing decided he would visit those locations the following day and even if there were notes made, he still would have had to visit those locations in case there were any clues to be found there.

After he was done, he closed his eyes to replay all the information he had acquired on the attack.

Whether it was the information Meifeng shared or the information he dug at the battleground with the help of the crystal spring tree.

"I still have to make time to see Spring too over the next few days and help it lay its foundations on the golden earth luminescence resurgence art.." Yang Qing muttered with a sigh as he pictured how packed his schedule had become.

He thought he would get to kick back as a branch chief but the list of things he should do seemed to be growing by the second.

He hurriedly pushed away those ominous thoughts otherwise he would have to face the grim reality that the Order had already successfully converted him into a pious worker bee.

His current growing workload was something he had done to himself and that thought was too scary for him to indulge. His only solution right now was to avoid thinking about it by engrossing himself in said work and eating every hour of every chance he got at the Order's dime as his consolation that there was still a defiant bee in him who hadn't yet fallen to the wily charms of the Order.

His plan of burying the thought in his work went perfectly as within seconds he was completely enthralled in it to think about anything else.

He correlated and checked every single piece of information that came to mind, from the spread-out of the organizations within Deer Mountain Range with special attention to those who lived close to the areas the daughter of the obsidian serpent frequented with the fire adler bear, and the area she resided at.

He looked into the records of their background, who they had alliances or close relationships with, who they did not, how long they had settled in the Deer Mountain Range; and their history before they settled moved into the Deer Mountain Range. Was there a special reason they moved there? their relations before moving to the Deer Mountain Range; did they have a close relationship with anyone from the Deer Mountain Kingdom? If so who?

The Deer Mountain Kingdom received the same level of attention.

Yang Qing still operated on the notion that the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate had to have some help to track the habits or know of the daughter of the obsidian couple and discover whatever special thing the fire adler bear did to her.

Those who could share that information the primary culprit would be the Deer Mountain Kingdom, followed by the other organizations or a collusion of both.

Of course, he also entertained another train of thought which was that maybe there was no traitor and this was something the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate had discovered either coincidentally or something they had put in the works for quite some time, waiting for the opportune time to harvest it.

Either of these options was entirely feasible. Heinous organizations like theirs were the best at subterfuge and blending in otherwise they wouldn't have survived as long as they did.

The Dark Helminth Ghost Sect already had its fangs in the territory of the Spiritual Temperance Sect which was just a few kilometers over (a couple of tens of thousands) from the Deer Mountain Range, so it wouldn't be that strange that one of the allied factions would be close by, especially in a place that had a branch of the Order, and maybe in the course of keeping an eye on the branch's movements they

stumbled onto the daughter of the obsidian serpent and discovered what was special about her and lay out the plan to ambush her.

The other was that the Blue Soul Flame Soul Syndicate discovered something special with the daughter back when the fire adler bear did whatever he did to her and have been keeping tabs on her ever since, waiting for her to ripen until she was ready to be harvested, which in this case as per what the evidence showed was her transformation into a flood dragon.

"If things happened this way, then they would have likely been watching her for years on end, which would give them enough time to create a foolproof measure of how to effortlessly subdue her and harvest her.

"I'll need to ask Meifeng how far back the fire adler bear bragged about helping the couple and their daughter," said Yang Qing as he rubbed his chin while poring through other information with the hopes that the foggy mist would start parting revealing bit by bit of what lay underneath.

Organizations such as the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate knew how to cover their tracks well, and if he hoped to catch traces of them he needed to go through this laborious and circuitous process that led to him going through reports and rumors that dated back almost 1,000 years in the hopes there would be something there.

Hours quickly flew by with the constant mutterings of Yang Qing and the shuffling of paper and talismans being the only sounds that echoed in the room.

But soon another sound came by, a roaring sound like that of a starved primordial beast. Yang Qing's stomach grumbled alerting him of his famished state which could not be ignored.

Mysteries and foggy clues be damned, Yang Qing heeded his true calling and quickly went to the kitchen for his scheduled meal.

After he had his fill Yang Qing was in no mood to return back to the study and thus went on a little excursion to the former territory of the now-defunct Clear River Sword Sect territory to pick up the three would-be comrades and roommates of Meifeng.

## Chapter 622 Changes at the Clear Sword River Sect

When Yang Qing arrived, the scene that greeted him was completely different from the one he had left when he was last there.

The amount of vegetation had overgrown and the scant buildings that had been barely hanging on by a thread were completely overrun by the vegetation. They looked like deformed hills filled with all manner of vines and flowers.

The people that had been living in the area had already moved on. Yang Qing figured they more than likely left the area when they discovered the sect master of the Clear Sword River Sect had died and could no longer offer them a protective halo, they, therefore, moved on to another area in the hopes of gaining the protection of another organization.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh at this. In their absence, wild animals had made the place their own.

Yang Qing silently took everything in as he moved to the area where the sect master's courtyard if it could even be called that, had been.

The area had the densest vegetation. Their leaves were broader and greener, while the trees were taller and had more girth.

The deeper he walked, the denser, lusher, and taller the trees and the other vegetation became. The air was richer, the temperatures cooler as the sunlight couldn't penetrate too deeply because of the dense canopy.

The region was filled with a sense of mystique and grandeur to it. The sense of desolation that had been here before was replaced with a sense of refreshing vitality that was shrouded with a celestial magnificence.

Yang Qing's eyes shined when he sensed the spiritual qi in the area that contained slight traces of his universal qi. The traces were too tiny but to someone whose body was filled with universal qi because of his cultivation light, the traces may have well have been as noticeable as an ocean.

"They're growing.." Yang Qing said with a smile as his eyes fell on the six living things that carried that aura.

There was the oak tree of rejuvenation with leaves filled with crystalline blue-green dew drops,

The gold-flamed sparrow with graceful movements surrounded by an aura of purity,

The skylark whose melodious voice created this beautiful river that brought tranquility and calmness to all whose gaze fell on it,

The firefly whose verdant green light was enriching the plants within the area. If one listened closely, one could hear cheerful screams coming out from every plant the light fell on,

The diamond beetle that radiated with the aura of a stalwart impenetrable shield and sentinel,

The crescent-winged moth that flew with a sense of delicate elegance spreading a refreshing coolness with every flap of its wings that seemed to bring with it the descent of the moon's glow,

Lastly was the aurora azalea which carried the densest aura of the universal qi that Yang Qing had detected among the six. A dawn-colored fog filled with spiritual lights surrounded the azalea.

Faint lines of spiritual qi were drawn toward the fog and then one tiny blue streak would be released for every hundred faint lines that were absorbed.

The blue streak was a condensed and purer spiritual qi built from the spiritual qi surrounding the area.

Yang Qing estimated it wouldn't be long before the azalea improved the spiritual qi quality of the area to be like that of a high-grade spirit mine.

"So considerate.." muttered Yang Qing in amusement when he saw that the area around the courtyard and where he had buried the sect master of the Clear Sword River Sect remained untouched almost like a hallowed ground.

He knew this was by design by the six of them.

"Thank you.." Yang Qing said with a smile which elicited an excited response from the six like children receiving praise from their father.

They had not completely awakened their spiritual senses yet or even officially embarked on their journey on cultivation but because of their intrinsic connection to Yang Qing, they could understand him perfectly, same as they did each other.

They had a connection with Yang Qing and each other because of the universal qi within them that seemed to bind them together. This made it easy for Yang Qing to share his plans with them. The three; the skylark, the moth, and the beetle seemed a little bit reluctant to part with the rest but agreed to go to Meifeng's territory.

Yang Qing did promise them they could return when they were strong enough to travel freely between the two territories or when he came back to visit. Considering they evolved by chance from his universal qi, him cultivating around them could help them improve and who knows he may end up deepening his understanding of his cultivation art as a result.

Yang Qing couldn't help but snicker when a certain thought came to his mind.

If they grew more powerful maybe he could use them to give Ellie a beating whenever she stole from him. The starlight crab didn't give him too much confidence in fulfilling that role but with the addition of a few that we here for example the diamond beetle and the golden flamed sparrow, maybe they might humble that greedy incorrigible bird.

However, that was a matter for another day. After getting their agreement, Yang Qing set up a small protective and illusory formation around the courtyard to shield the remaining creatures from others. They were still too weak to defend themselves and with the abilities they were showing, it wouldn't be too long before roaming cultivators noticed.

Yang Qing set up a formation capable of defending against peak core formation experts and left a spiritual imprint trigger that would notify him in case someone stronger barged in. The imprint had

enough power to buy a few seconds against a first-stage palace realm cultivator whose foundations were significantly weaker than Yang Qing's.

After he felt the preparations were sufficient he left with the skylark, moth, and beetle for Meifeng's cavern who was practically skipping with joy when she saw them, especially the crescent moth whom she felt a closeness to, which Yang Qing guessed maybe had something to do with both of them being creatures of yin energy as the crescent moon seemed drawn to her too though not more than it was to Yang Qing.

With everything in place, Yang Qing left the four to familiarize themselves which was Meifeng jumping all over in excitement as she showed them around which wasn't much considering she only had the pond and her main body in the cavern.

That fact didn't seem to bother either party. Meifeng was too excited with her words and thoughts scattered everywhere to notice it while the three new roommates didn't have much spiritual awareness to care much about the decor of their new place and one couldn't deny the main body of Meifeng had enough majesty by itself to drown out the need for anything else and that was even without taking into account the pond that had been improved tremendously by the middle-aged man.

The serenity melody skylark and the crescent-winged moth were already drawn towards it while the diamond beetle was drawn to one of the parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree's flowers.

Yang Qing made a stopover at the battleground to check on the crystal spring larch and its progress in familiarizing itself with the cultivation art he left it before finally going back to the branch where he found Imperial Secretary He Shan waiting for him with slightly nervous expression.

Chapter 623 The Imperial Secretary's plea

"Imperial Secretary He Shan, have I kept you long?" asked Yang Qing as he made his way to where the Imperial Secretary moved.

Imperial Secretary He Shan who seemed to be in the middle of mumbling things to himself hurriedly looked up with a surprised look on his face as he said,

"No, Not at all, Branch Chief Yang Qing..."

Yang Qing made an inviting gesture toward the forest-filled illusory array.

"We can talk inside if you don't mind.."

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Branch Chief Study

"So what is it, Imperial Secretary?" Yang Qing said as he poured himself and the imperial secretary a cup of ginkgo tea to help calm his nerves.

The Imperial Secretary seemed a bit hesitant at first, however, since the matter he had to ask could not be avoided, he steeled himself as he made the request.

"I sent your message to the king and the head of the Zhang family and they both agreed to your request to meet you personally,

but.."

The Imperial Secretary paused as a difficult look appeared on his face. He seemed to be wrestling heavily with something.

"But..?"

The Imperial Secretary clutched the cup of his tea tightly before he finally gently placed the cup on the table with a resigned sigh.

"It's not something I should share, but I feel I should, considering the gravity of the situation.." he said as he sipped the ginkgo tea.



"I don't know how much you know about our present circumstance but you must know how delicate of a situation we are in....

Surrounded by wolves out there and surrounded by wolves within the kingdom. The royal family is beset on both sides and the reason for that has to do with the king's grandfather.."

The Imperial Secretary looked like he had aged a few years when he made that statement.

Yang Qing could finally understand why he seemed conflicted. More than likely he felt he was betraying his liege by revealing what he was revealing.

Yang Qing didn't interrupt as he let the Imperial Secretary reveal what he wanted to reveal at his own pace.

"The king's grandfather has been a shining light to all within the kingdom for countless years.

He was a dazzling genius in his youth both in terms of cultivation and matters of the state. One of the greatest kings the Deer Mountain Kingdom has ever had, his fame even rivaled that of the third king.." said the Imperial Secretary with a complicated light flashing in his eyes.

Seeing his look, Yang Qing could understand his mixed feelings about the third king. The third king's era could be considered the golden age of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, however, it was also their darkest period because that was the time they were almost driven to extinction when they triggered a massive war with other spirit beasts in the area in their bid to bring all the territory within the range under their control.

The devastation it brought could be felt to this day. Most didn't know what to feel about the third king. He ushered in a golden era, but he also invited calamity and brought in the dark era which he even paid for with his life.

Yang Qing quickly pulled his thoughts back when he saw the Imperial Secretary continue with his narration.

"The King's grandfather held up the kingdom singlehandedly when it didn't have any other support and was able to guide us forward to where we are today though he paid a price for that.

The price was his cultivation..."

The Imperial Secretary paused before he continued,

"I may not know how it was during the golden age of our kingdom but I am certain his talent would have shone back then as it did during his era.

An unparalleled cultivator whose sword singlehandedly ensured no enemies took advantage of us at our weakest.

No one dared stand against him. He invoked fear and awe in all, whether human or spirit beast.

The guardian sword of the kingdom they call him. The commoners loved him, even those nobles who have forgotten their place revered him and never dared to put a foot out of place when he was king.

But now.."

The Imperial Secretary clenched his fists in frustration till one could see the whites of his eyes.

"Sorry.." he said as he tried to compose himself.

"Because of how damaged our foundations were back then, he never had a chance to wholly devote himself to cultivation so it lagged than it was meant to despite having been one of the youngest people in the kingdom to ever achieve sword intent.

He did so at 16 years. He sacrificed what he could have been so he could help the kingdom wade through the darkness it was in, and when we were finally at a place where he could finally focus on himself, he was plagued with serious internal injuries that hindered his improvement.

He had already lost a lot of years, and he lost more to focus on healing those wounds. About 10 years ago, he was left with one, which if he successfully dealt with it he would finally be able to move on to be a seventh-stage palace realm cultivator.

However, a problem occurred and the remaining injury seemed to flare up as he was dealing with it which put him in a precarious position.

I don't know the exact details but the king said it was pretty dangerous and despite what resources they supplied, his state doesn't seem to improve.

Over the past fifty years, rumors have been floating around that the King's grandfather had succumbed to his injuries and those rumors have been gaining momentum every year that has passed since then.

And with him never making an appearance over the past 1,000 years at least, most are inclined to believe said rumors which is why they now have the guts to openly be at odds with the royal family and openly lay bare their greedy ambitions for the throne.

In their minds, the king's grandfather isn't there to hold their reigns while they still have predecessors from the same era as the king's grandfather which has given them the gall to push us around.

Those bastards don't have a shroud of dignity left!!" Imperial Secretary He Shan said as he gritted his teeth together in boiling anger.

His voice then turned low with a deflated and resigned spirit.

"After everything he has done. This is not the kingdom I love.."

"Despite the rumors, they are still uncertain so they dare not act too much out of line for fear that he may be alive and well.

But the same restriction is on the king too. He can't bring in outside help to advise and possibly help with his grandfather's situation for fear of alerting them.

Every movement he makes is closely monitored, so he can only handle it all by himself because even within the royal family he doesn't know who can trust. If the situation of his grandfather broke out, then we won't even have to wait for the fire adler bear to act, we would destroy ourselves..."

The Imperial Secretary's gaze turned solemn as he said,

"I know you said the Order can't involve itself in certain matters to maintain its neutrality, but I am afraid our kingdom's destruction is all but nigh if you don't step in.

I know it's shameless of me to ask this, but please help us. I am not asking for you to quell the unrest within our kingdom but please help the King's grandfather....Please.." the Imperial Secretary agitatedly said as he bowed his head.

Chapter 624 Yang Qing's suggestion

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh when he saw the shaking body of the Imperial Secretary.

If anyone were to see this, no one would believe he was a palace realm cultivator, a cultivator considered to be a god among millions because of how majestic their abilities were.

"Please get up Imperial Secretary.." Yang Qing said as he helped the Imperial Secretary up.

As the Imperial Secretary raised his head, Yang Qing could see the anxiety and desperation within those eyes, he could even feel it within his body as he helped him up.

"Does the king know about this?" Yang Qing said as he refilled Imperial Secretary He Shan's cup.

"He doesn't, but I can't let him shoulder that burden alone. I am too incompetent to offer him any aid and this is the best that I can do..." said the Imperial Secretary with a tone that was filled with frustration and dejection.

"The king still has good people by his side.." thought Yang Qing as he saw the Imperial Secretary's look which was a mixture of sorrow and staunch determination.

Yang Qing intercrossed his fingers in deep contemplation on how to handle the situation. From the moment Imperial Secretary He Shan told him of the situation he already had a decision, the only thing that remained was the Order's stance on it.

After a brief pause, with a tense somber silence between the two, Yang Qing spoke up,

"Imperial Secretary, if it were me I would be willing to help you even right at this moment if possible.." said Yang Qing.

He wasn't blowing smoke, with the Improvements to his physique, Yang Qing had been looking for countless chances to see it in work and the situation of the king's grandfather would provide him the perfect opportunity to test it out. In addition, he had suspicions of his own he wanted to confirm, and his physique's innate attributes could help with that.

"But ultimately the decision doesn't fall on me, Imperial Secretary..." added Yang Qing which seemed to shatter the dimming light of hope in Imperial Secretary He Shan's eyes.

"Don't lose hope yet though. I will share my thoughts with my superiors which is we should step in, even if it's in an advisory way.

We can now only hope that my words hold sway with them.." gently said Yang Qing.

"You'll do that?!" excitedly said the Imperial Secretary.

Truth be told even as he was coming here he wasn't expecting much. He remembered when the King told him of his grandfather's situation, he absentmindedly suggested they ask Branch Chief Li Wan, Yang Qing's predecessor for help.

He assumed with how close they were he would help but the refuse sighed as he said it was impossible. Despite the friendship, the Order's stance took precedence over anything else, and the king knew well enough it would be difficult for them to act, which was why he never asked.

The Imperial Secretary would have kept silent about the situation had the news about the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate, the loss of their guards, and the fire adler bear not reached the Kingdom.

With all this news combined with the tense situation with the nobles, he couldn't hold back anymore otherwise just as he told Yang Qing, the Deer Mountain Kingdom would likely fall to ruin.

His request was a last-ditch effort he didn't hold much hope for but Yang Qing's response even if wasn't an outright agreement, at least was something. It was more than what they had at the moment.

He hurriedly thanked Yang Qing with some relief and tonnes of excitement washing over his body with Yang Qing continuously emphasizing that this wasn't a guarantee that they would help.

He didn't care, as long as Yang Qing spoke on their behalf, it was more than enough and though cultivation wasn't his strongest suit and only made his achievements thanks to the King spending countless resources on him, he was good at reading people and extrapolating things.

With the catastrophe that happened to the previous branch members, whoever stepped in those shoes immediately had to be someone capable, someone the Order highly valued. Yang Qing being the one chosen for this job meant within the Order, he was highly thought of and his potential must be off the charts.

The Imperial Secretary could tell by bone age, that the youth before him really was a 20-year-old youth and not some old monster wearing a youthful face.

A 20-year-old palace realm cultivator whose foundations were even able to draw the ire of the Zhang family head, someone thought to be a genius of the current era of the Kingdom.

Imperial Secretary He Shan knew the Order was likely to have a lot of talents but even then, someone like Yang Qing couldn't be that many, at least he never felt the same presence he felt from Yang Qing as he did the previous branch chief, despite the previous branch chief having a higher cultivation base than Yang Qing.

Yang Qing saying he would speak up for them, more or less improved the odds of the Order helping them. He couldn't wait to share the news with the king.

However, he was immediately pulled out of his celebration by Yang Qing's words.

"From what you've told me, can the king really make it here safely without arousing suspicions?" asked Yang Qing.

The Fire Adler news had the same level of danger as the situation within the Kingdom, he was now contemplating switching his tactics and just giving Imperial Secretary He Shan the information.

However, he immediately shook his head as he needed to look both the king and the Zhang family head in the eye as he delivered the news and in his judgment, doing so at the Order would draw fewer eyes than if he visited the Deer Mountain Kingdom and met solely with those two.

"It will be difficult, but he said he will find a way, it's just that it will take a few days to execute it.." said the Imperial Secretary.

He couldn't hide the worry in his eyes, as he too was worried about this.

"Let's do this, let me ask someone, and if they agree to help, we can bring both of them here without anyone knowing.." said Yang Qing as he used a voiceless incantation to call Ye Xun and see if she was in the area.

She had mentioned the whole area was covered with her domain sense, so even if physically she wasn't around, her domain sense could inform her.

His guess proved to be correct as immediately after he heard Ye Xun's voice in his mind.

"What is it, Yang Qing?"

"Senior, sorry for interrupting you, but I need your help with something.."

Yang Qing went on and explained the situation of the Deer Mountain Kingdom as told by the Imperial Secretary along with what his request was.

He wanted her to bring the king and the Zhang family head covertly. With her speed and abilities, no one would be any wiser of their absence and he also could have her look at what exactly was the situation with the King's grandfather, without the awareness of the king, of course.

He felt odd making the request as she was his senior and a domain expert to boot, yet he was here making her do Ellie's job of transportation and an inquisitor's job despite her more than likely having her hands full with the kingdom-wide array being laid around the range and the matter concerning the middle-aged man from the other day.

Luckily for him, she didn't seem to mind as she readily agreed instantly appearing in the office startling Imperial Secretary He Shan.

Yang Qing made a shortened introduction which was she was a domain expert who would bring the king and the Zhang family here covertly without alerting the rest and take them right back after they were done, with none being the wiser.

The Imperial Secretary broke into another fit of endless gratitude which Ye Xun didn't seem to appreciate very much as she enveloped him with her domain sense without a word, disappearing from the study as she headed to the Kingdom.

"Is senior embarrassed by compliments?" wondered Yang Qing.

The answer to this could potentially alter his tact and how he dealt with her. With how many favors the taciturn senior had done for him thus far, he wanted to return it in some way.

Eventually, Yang Qing's thoughts drifted back to what Imperial Secretary He Shan had revealed.

"The flaring up, was it a coincidence, or was it because of something else?" he muttered as he leaned back on his seat with his gaze fixed on the ceiling and countless thoughts running through his mind.



## Chapter 625 Same look

Yang Qing didn't have long to get lost in his thoughts before Ye Xun appeared in his office ten minutes later or less with two people in tow.

Yang Qing saw the same look in them that he had when he and Mao Yunru had when they were being carried by Lei Weiyuan to the dark valley.

The look was a mixture of shock and humility. You hear stories of how mighty domain experts are but it's one thing to experience it personally, especially, as a 'mighty' palace realm expert yourself.

Yang Qing felt if Lei Weiyuan had carried him when he was at the core formation realm he wouldn't have been as heavily impacted as he was when he did when he was at the palace realm.

When you breakthrough to the palace realm it's like stepping into another life and you're reborn. The changes one experiences from the core formation realm to the palace realm are greater than if one leaped from the qi refinement realm directly to the peak of the core formation realm.

In the palace realm, you can intrinsically feel it, you officially entirely become a new being one that is capable of calling the force of the rain, the stars, split oceans, and shatter mountains, being invulnerable and impenetrable to a lot of things. The sense of connection to a greater world that you were not worthy of seeing before.

Seeing, feeling, and experiencing the grandness of Dao for the first time, there was nothing like it. One could easily lose themselves to that rush of power and seismic transformation. You think to yourself with my abilities, maybe just maybe I could even stand toe to toe with a domain expert unaware if the palace realm was a flaming spark, then the domain realm was an unquenchable inferno covering millions of hectares in comparison.

Being in Lei Weiyuan's domain space, Yang Qing realized how paltry his palace realm cultivation was in comparison. He was only but a sapling that just peaked its head out of the earth, while Lei Weiyuan was a mature tree already reaching for the stars.

You realize your smallness and the two people before him had the same look to them.

Yang Qing nodded and smiled in gratitude to Ye Xun who disappeared swiftly after.

"Thank you for coming, King Zhou Luan, Zhang family head Zhang Qishan..Please.." Yang Qing said as he welcomed them to the seats by the table with him coming over to take the seat at the opposite side.

It took a brief second before the two came out of their stupor and thanked Yang Qing for his hospitality.

Their gaze seemed to inadvertently move to the location Ye Xun had just stood at. Clearly the shocking experience that her domain space did to them had not abated.

Yang Qing poured them the leftover ginkgo tea to help calm their nerves. It did not have the greatest of tastes but it was good nonetheless, especially its calming properties.

The duo accepted as they quickly regained their composure. Their display was worthy of the two topmost figures within the kingdom.

Yang Qing closed his fingers together as he leaned forward slightly.

"The reason I called you here so urgently has to do with the fire adler bear and a few things I managed to dig up over the past few days.." said Yang Qing.

His words instantly drew a somber attention from the two.

"You should know that the fire adler bear had a close relationship with the two obsidian serpents, more so with their daughter, the one who died in the attack. He took care of her when she was young..."

Both the king and the Zhang family head, instantly froze when they heard that realizing the implications.

If the fire adler bear was led to believe that they had a hand in the death of the obsidian serpent as the parents did, then they did not doubt in their hearts it would attack them to the death.

Spirit beasts were fiercely loyal to their relationships and would honor them to their death. A potentially enraged domain-level spirit beast wasn't something they could handle, even in their heyday, and after their experience in the domain space of Ye Xun, they now knew how terrifying the domain realm was.

If the fire adler bear targeted them, they were as good as dead. The King wasn't even sure if the Twilight Sanctuary Array would be able to defend them for an hour, after what he experienced.

The Zhang family head seemed to have come to the same conclusion, as he too had a grim expression on his face in reaction to the news.

"Then.."

The king opened his mouth to say something but Yang Qing lifted his hand to motion to him to let him finish first, which the king heeded as he closed his mouth.

"The fire adler bear is also close to the parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree and their relationship is even closer than the one he has with the obsidian serpents. They could even be considered siblings considering they knew each other since he was a cub.

She is the one who told me of the fire adler bear's relationship with the two obsidian serpents.

The reason I mention this is because of several reasons.."

Yang Qing's demeanor turned serious as he rested his chin on his clasped fingers.

"First is a warning for you not to try anything untoward on the parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree.

She is not only connected to the fire adler bear but to his master too, and another spirit beast she called the badger, and I consider her a friend.."

"The fire adler bear has a master?!" asked the king with widened eyes.

"Pardon me, Branch Chief Yang Qing, the badger you mentioned, do you have any more description about it?" asked the Zhang family head as his brows contoured.

"Yes, the fire adler bear has a master and that master considers the sycamore tree a daughter based on how she described their interactions. There are shreds of evidence I saw here and that seems to support it.

The badger also shares the same master as the fire adler bear, and that badger from what the sycamore tree told me has been having yearly duels with someone from the Zhang family but it has been quite some time since it has done so.."

"So he is still alive.." said the Zhang family head with a sigh.

"Qishan, you know the badger?" asked the king when he saw the Zhang family head's reaction.

"Yes, the badger used to spar with my grandfather until he disappeared a few hundred years ago.

They used to battle every year at the Forsaken Drought Valley before its disappearance.." answered the Zhang family head as his gaze turned distant.

"2,990 draws, and one narrow win.." he added with his mind seemingly elsewhere.

"In all their duels, my grandfather won only once and it was a pyrrhic victory at that. He passed out immediately after their battle.

From what Grandfather said, the badger recovered from the wounds earlier than him and kept watch over him when he was unconscious.

If the badger had wanted to kill him, it could have, but it didn't and just left after he regained consciousness.

That was the last time he saw it. He went to the Forsaken Drought Valley yearly after that but the badger never showed.

They fought like bitter enemies leaving each other at death's door each time, but every year, Grandfather would be busting with joy whenever the day of the duel was close and I'm sure it was the same for the Badger.

Grandfather took me to a few of their fights, and they both had the same look during the fight. Even when their bodies were covered in all kinds of gory wounds, labored breaths, and barely maintaining their consciousness, they had this pure blissful joyful look that never left them from the moment the fight started to when they both passed out.

Even now, despite not seeing the badger, Grandfather still has that same look every year whenever the day of their duel arrives.

An eagerness of when they would clash again.

Wherever the badger is, I bet he has the same look as Grandfather.."

Chapter 626 King Zhou Luan's despair

The Zhang family head let out a sigh accompanied by an envious look. As a sword cultivator, nothing excited him more than a thrilling battle.

He remembered the first time his grandfather took him to one of the duels. To say it was impactful was an understatement.

Even as a spectator who was kilometers away from the battlefield, he could feel his blood boil and his spirit surging from their battle.

Those within the Deer Mountain Kingdom labeled the Zhang family a noble family of heroes but they never saw it that way.

The reason they plunged themselves headfirst into dangerous situations, always at the frontlines whenever danger appeared was because they were a family that loved combat. They never felt more alive than at the battlefield.

Almost every member had that same feeling, which was why when the period of peace set into the kingdom, the Zhang family seemed silent and forgotten. They barely concern themselves with anything other than combat. Even the struggle the royal family had with the other aristocratic families wasn't enough to draw their attention.

To them, it didn't matter who was king, they would continue to do what the Zhang family liked to do, which was to battle, and that feeling was something the current family head agreed with, especially as a sword cultivator who refined their abilities and grew in battle.

He too, as he grew stronger constantly fantasized about battling the badger but alas by the time he felt himself worthy of being a fighting partner, the badger had already disappeared. But now hearing that the badger was likely alive and well, he couldn't help but clench his fists in excitement.

However, he quickly reigned in his excitement but not quick enough because Yang Qing managed to detect the faint battle lust that he had let out.

"A family of combat fanatics.." muttered Yang Qing.

From personal experience, Yang Qing could instantly recognize the embers of a fanatical look. His grandfather and his cohorts of vipers all wore the same look when they tormented him with their experiments, his brother had that same look slowly growing within him not that the person himself noticed it, and now he could see that same look in the Zhang family head.

Those who would push all logic away, all for their interests. Their interest mattered more to them than even their life.

Seeing his look Yang Qing had this strange feeling that maybe in this whole mess and chaos surrounding the Deer Mountain Kingdom, especially potential attacks from the obsidian serpents or the fire adler bear, or retaliation from the surviving spirit beasts of the war back then, that maybe the Zhang family, unlike the rest of the kingdom, might actually be looking forward to it with blissful anticipation.

It was not too farfetched, especially, with the things he had seen his grandfather and the rest of the Yang clansmen do in the pursuit of the body refinement realm. There were no lengths that they would not go to.

He felt that the Zhang family might just be the same. Just as insane. The fact that Zhang Qishan's grandfather dared to duel the badger at the Forsaken Drought Valley already served as proof of the lengths they would go to, to enjoy a good fight.

Even if Yang Qing wasn't a local he knew about the valley due to its peculiar features. The area was bereft of any spiritual qi and not only that one could not even use the spiritual qi stored within their bodies.

The area had an increasing gravity. All who stepped into the area felt like they were being pressed on by a mountain.

The area also released traceless baleful energy that distorted the use of spiritual sense.

Few people went there because of its disadvantages that would leave someone vulnerable to countless dangers yet despite all that, Zhang Qishan's grandfather and the badger saw it as the perfect place to hold their duels and have continuously done so for at least 1,000 years.

No one would do that unless they had a screw loose somewhere.

King Zhou Luan had a look of surprise when he heard the Zhang family head mention the tally count of the fight between the two.

While his grandfather had been touted as a dazzling genius within his era, there was another person who had managed to closely follow his grandfather despite others falling to his brilliance, and that was Zhang Qishan's grandfather.

He was never that far behind his grandfather. An expert at fist techniques, and had a powerful body that made one feel like they were staring at a blazing inferno capable of incinerating the mountains and the rivers to ash in an instant.

Even spirit beasts lauded for their strong physique and being unafraid would tremble at his presence yet now Zhang Qishan just revealed that there was a spirit beast capable of going toe to toe with him.

He could feel his insides churning, his lungs turned hotter and his head fainter.

He was already stressed to the point of insanity with the presence of the obsidian serpents, the syndicate, the remnants of the war, the nobles within his territory, his grandfather's well-being, and now he had to worry about a potential domain expert fire adler bear, its unknown master maybe and now a badger that can fight to a draw presumably the current strongest fighter in the whole kingdom with his grandfather out of commission.

Worse was the latter three threats had a relationship with each other. For the first time in his life, he felt lost. There was nothing he could do.

"King Zhou Luan? King Zhou Luan? King Zhou Luan?"

Yang Qing worriedly called out to the king a few times when he saw his increasingly pale face and the lost look he had on him.

It took him infusing his call with his soul essence for the King to finally come out of his stupor.

Some semblance of awareness seemed to return to him however the sense of despondency and tiredness born out of despair could still be seen in him.

"Sorry.." the king weakly said completely lacking the calm regal presence he had when Yang Qing met him.

"You said the fire adler bear has a master?" he asked his tone going lower almost as if he was afraid of uttering those words out loud.

"Yes.." answered Yang Qing, reading where the king was going with this.



"Did the sycamore tree reveal the strength of his master?"

Both he and Zhang Qishan waited for Yang Qing's response with held breaths.

"The sycamore tree doesn't know the exact strength but considering she could transform into a human, with us assuming his master is a spirit beast then we can only assume at the very least, she has reached the palace realm.

But .."

Yang Qing paused as his gaze turned solemn.

"This is my personal opinion which I strongly believe has extremely high chances of being true, assume she is in the domain realm.

Before she left, she could effortlessly defeat the fire adler bear with a single hit.."

Yang Qing's words shattered whatever hopes King Zhou Luan had left as he muttered,

"The Deer Mountain Kingdom is finished.."

Chapter 627 Yang Qing's exhortation to the king

One domain realm spirit beast already guaranteed their destruction, and adding another only ensured they would all be completely annihilated.

Even Zhang Qishan despite being a combat fanatic couldn't help but have a grim appearance. No matter how high his or his family's attainments in combat, they would not be able to hold a candle against a single domain expert let alone two. They would be like eggs pitting themselves against a steel wall if they fought. If it could even be called that.

"I said there were a few reasons I brought up the parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree.

One is to make you aware of her relationships. She not only has a relationship with them but with me too, which should be something good for you.." said Yang Qing.

He decided to hide the connection to the middle-aged man. It would only add more panic to the King, who was barely holding it together as it was.

The king on hearing Yang Qing's words looked up as he asked,

"What do you mean, Branch Chief.."

"I explained the whole matter with the obsidian serpents to her and clarified that it was the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate that had murdered the obsidian serpent's daughter.

When the fire adler bear comes out of his seclusion whenever that may be, she will likely be the first stop he makes.."

Yang Qing paused for a second and said with emphasis,

"As my friend, she will explain the whole matter to him should the time come. The fire adler bear may find it more palatable and process it better if it comes from someone he knows.

Just in case he doesn't and comes to make trouble for you, the Order will involve itself as the matter also concerns us.

However, we will only involve ourselves if the grudge he has against you concerns the obsidian serpents.." Yang Qing said as he narrowed his eyes.

The duo didn't miss the implications behind his words and why he brought up the sycamore tree and his next words more than drove the point home for them.

"Nothing can happen to the parasitic purple flower spore sycamore tree if you wish to maintain your safety.

This is one of the main reasons I asked you both over. You are in charge of your kingdom,?as for you, the sycamore tree told me the badger thinks highly of your grandfather.

Even without our involvement, you both are uniquely placed to prevent the worst from happening, provided you handle it well.

One can be the mediator and the other can ensure he has a complete grasp of the happenings of his territory.." said Yang Qing as his gaze fell on the two.

The two looked at each other before they nodded in agreement and turned to face Yang Qing.

"We will do what we must to ensure the safety of our kingdom.." said the King with some renewed vigor.

Yang Qing nodded in return as he added a few words of his own.

"I know the bad blood between you and the spirit beasts in this region runs too deep to be forgotten on either side but try that the burden of that hate is not carried forward by those that follow you.

Don't let the specters of your past grab hold of your present, otherwise, you will find yourself dead as the ghosts that hold you.

Your kingdom is at a precipice and it has been even back then when it was at the peak of its power.

You don't know how dangerous your neighbors are, but when your kingdom was starting up it never noticed them and was able to establish itself and it only caught a glimpse of the true terror of this place when it tried to conquer it.

There is something the sycamore tree told me, something that got me thinking, something that you should be thinking about.." Yang Qing said as his gaze paused briefly on the Zhang family head.

"The badger and the fire adler bear's master left the mountain range to explore the rest of the continent.

The Question I keep asking myself is this, how many more like them left this place to temper themselves out there?

Back then, when your kingdom tried to conquer this range, the spirit beasts that attacked you, was that the true picture of the horror of this place?

Or were there others that were missing?"

Yang Qing's words sent shivers down the two, especially the king.

"Before last week did you even know there were spirit beasts as powerful as the obsidian serpents, or the fire adler bear?

How many fire adler bears, and obsidian serpents do you think are roaming out there?

One day they will come back home.

Your kingdom cannot afford to make more enemies, King Zhou Luan.

Right now it isn't just your neighbors you have to worry about because a fiendish organization like the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate left its prints here.

How long before others get the same idea as them?

With all that I have shared, you need to decide the next steps for your kingdom. What kind of kingdom do you want?

At the Institute we were always told, think think think think for months if you have to, and when the time comes to make your move, don't hesitate, look ahead and strike with relentless intensity. Don't waiver, don't doubt yourself, move wholly..."?Yang Qing somberly said as he remembered the speech they had given before the death duel matches or when they were thrown into the purple grade tests.

"I will and thank you for your kind words.." said King Zhou Luan as he cupped his fists in gratitude.

"Also you need to know the reason the spirit beasts around here didn't retaliate against your kingdom back then after the fight, despite wanting to is because of the interference of the fire adler bear's master.

She kept them at bay all this time. It's something worth pondering. I won't keep you long. I know your absence will be noticed if you stay here long..." Yang Qing said as he stood up.

Due to the shocking information Yang Qing just shared, the two had a slight delay in getting up as they processed the reveal.

"You should all be insightful people to realize why I just called you two. So I don't need to add more.." Yang Qin meaningfully said.

"We do.." the two answered with complex looks in their eyes.

"Good. I wish you two all the best in your endeavors. I'll have my senior send you back. Thank you for your time.." Yang Qing said as he cupped his fists toward them, who then reciprocated back as they gave their thanks too.

Immediately after Yang Qing used his palace sense to secretly communicate with the King.

"Imperial secretary He Shan told me about your grandfather. I promised to try and get the Order's help on the matter.

I will tell him of the results once I receive it.."

The King's body shook as his pupils constricted. Zhang Qishan noticed something was off as his gaze meaningfully fell on the king and Yang Qing.

He had detected slight fluctuations coming from Yang Qing and guessed there must have been something told to the king secretly.

The interest in his eyes was quickly shortlived as he too had a lot of information to process especially the matter with the badger which would likely excite his grandfather.

Ye Xun appeared an instant later and in typical fashion covered them in her domain space before they had a chance to finish on their goodbyes leaving Yang Qing with a wry smile.

Chapter 628 Ye Xun acts out of character

As Ye Xun transported King Zhou Luan and Zhang Qishan back to their kingdom, Yang Qing decided to remain in the office. The purpose was to wait for Ye Xun. He had asked her to check on the condition of King Zhou Luan's grandfather, but when she brought them over she did not bring up the matter.

Yang Qing figured she opted to do it when she was taking them back where she would have time to do a thorough check or maybe she couldn't find out.

The Twilight Sanctuary Array may have wilted down over the years however, it was still a top tier gold grade array, who knows maybe certain parts of it were still fully functional, and if they were, concealing someone from even the eyes of a domain expert should be something a gold grade array should be capable of.

With how sensitive the grandfather's condition was, it stood to reason that both the king and his grandfather would go to great lengths to prevent such information from getting out and the best means that Yang Qing could think of was through the use of the array.

Yang Qing stewed in silence as time slowly passed him by before finally Ye Xun appeared in his office about half an hour later taking more time than she did the first time when she brought the duo over.

"They have something that can shield them from the spiritual sense of a domain expert.." said Ye Xun the moment she appeared.

"I figured as much..Is it the work of the array?"

Ye Xun shook her head sideways as she said,

"No, it seems to be an artifact, but it doesn't seem to be fully functional because despite its presence I was still able to detect its location and when I concentrated further I was able to capture the aura of the king's grandfather, albeit slightly.

What the Imperial Secretary told you is the truth. Even if I could only capture a trace of his aura, I can tell that his vitality seems to be weakening, and a sense of erraticness to it, the kind you'd find on someone fighting against mental demons.."

Yang Qing's brow creased together when he heard that.

"Senior Ye Xun how much do you know about the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate?" asked Yang Qing as he drummed his finger on his desk with a pensive look on his face.

"You think they may have something to do with his condition?" asked Ye Xun reading his train of thought.

"I do.."

"I haven't dealt with them much but I could have Xiang He send you all the relevant information.

What he has is bound to prove useful if you're looking to confirm something..."

Ye Xun paused briefly before her usually calm taciturn look blossomed into a smile. It was like the welcoming sun that was announcing the end of the cold winter.

Her gaze fell on Yang Qing who with no rhyme or reason thought Ye Xun was about to confess to him which made his heart race mercilessly. Every time a fair maiden smiled at him or even had a gaze that lingered on him a millisecond too long, his mind instantly assumed his handsome looks had ensnared them.

"You know if you keep going like this, the special inquisitors might decide to take you under their fold.

Xiang He did say that Assistant Director Feng Lei had his eye on you since your graduation ceremony when you intercepted that member from the Scarlet Blood Ghost Hands Syndicate.

With the way you're going, it's only a matter of time. The black-red robe rather suits you.." she said with a meaningful smile.

Yang Qing's heart instantly sped up for another reason entirely.

Seeing his palish features and trembling body, Ye Xun let out another chuckle as she disappeared from the room, but not without leaving a few words for Yang Qing.

"I will tell Xiang He to send you the information, I am sure he will appreciate the help as he is chasing other leads of his own on the case.

Also, don't worry about the Special Inquisitor snatching you up, I doubt Lei would let you go so easily, and the committee too..."

Yang Qing stood frozen for a short while before his knees finally gave out and he dropped to one of the seats next to him.

"What did she mean by that? From her tone, it seems she and old fiend Lei are friends. Was she tormenting me on his behalf, or was this her way of getting back at me for all the favors I've had her do for me.." muttered Yang Qing in defeat.



The thought of joining the Special Inquisitors gave him a level of fear he did not know even existed within him.

He would rather go without eating for years than become a Special Inquisitor. Despite the favorable remunerations they get from cultivation resources, to access to special cultivation sites under the control of the Order, the job itself was the most terrifying.

They dealt only with the most heinous of organizations or criminals. Yang Qing felt his stomach churn when he imagined day in and day out dealing with dangerous people like the figure behind the red abyssal thorn tree.

That was the last place he would ever think of joining. He couldn't help but reevaluate his actions on whether he should be less overzealous in his investigation and just pace himself.

Whatever he could think of, the special inquisitors could think of it too, and they already knew who the major culprit of the incident was.

If they found the hiding ground of the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate, that was it, justice would be delivered swiftly with their complete eradication.

Other things like why they targetted the daughter of the obsidian serpents, and how they managed to infiltrate the Deer Mountain Range, all of it would be moot if they discovered their lair which was what Yang Qing suspected Special Inquisitor Xiang He was doing instead of following this little bread crumbs Yang Qing was following up and about.

A second later Yang Qing shook his head to dismiss the thought. He was already on this boat and he would see it through to the end.

Though he knew part of the reason he was this invested in the case was because of Hao Da. Had it been a different person Yang Qing wasn't sure he would have exerted himself as he did.

He would have dug around because people from the Order did die and get hurt, but Hao Da being one of them, a close friend, that aspect made him push himself even further than he usually would.

"Maybe I can take this as me training up my inquisitor skills. With Yi Jie and the others unable to handle the palace court cases yet, I will have to do some of the leg work myself before they join me.

Those bastards, always so selfish.." muttered Yang Qing in frustration.

After the scare he got from Ye Xun, Yang Qing was in no mood than to do anything else other than eat.

He picked a few meals from the kitchen and moved to one of the peaks within the branch that Luo Meili had told him had a great view and ambient atmosphere.

A good meal and view was just what he needed to cleanse his mind. In the process, he even met Haishi and Bolin who he grabbed along to join him for a meal.

Even though the cultivation of the two was still where it was when they first joined, they had made significant progress.

Bolin's wood rejuvenation element was finally showing signs of balancing out the different toxins within his body, while Haishi's control of her mirage was getting stronger.

Yang Qing could sense with her current mastery she could hide herself from a seventh-stage core formation expert despite being at the fourth stage.

This seemed to suit her perfectly, as she didn't seem the combative type. Yang Qing made a mental note to bring them along during his investigations to help them test their abilities.

The Deer Mountain Range wasn't as expansive as the Green Fog Swamp but it was close somewhat, especially when one considered the spirit beasts roaming about and the countless untamed regions.

Yang Qing didn't want the instincts that they had honed in the Green Fog Swamp to dull out and their current abilities were too weak for them to be thrown into the dangerous zones of the Insitute.

With a plan in place, Yang Qing smiled ever so brightly at the two unsuspecting duo who were blissfully enjoying the meals Yang Qing had brought along.

#### Chapter 629 Just as dangerous

After his meal just as he was about to leave for another excursion, Special Inquisitor Xiang He appeared in front of him and gave him all the information the Special Inquisitors had on the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate.

Seeing how large the information was, Yang Qing changed his plans and made a beeline for one of the ponds that had a lotus platform carved with spirit rejuvenation runes.

Considering the scale of information Yang Qing brought with him rice wine and a charcoal stove to warm it over.

The scale of information Xiang He had shared with him was as expansive as it could get. It went from how the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate started, to its hierarchy.

Information concerning the hierarchy was loosely based on the accounts of the members captured over the years, which was that they had one leader rumored to be at the late stages of the domain realm, the exact rank was unknown only that it was a female. Below her were three vice leaders, each a domain expert and a head of the three divisions of the syndicate.

The Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate could be considered an alchemy organization that had expertise in herbology, alchemy, and spirit beast zoology and each of the three vice leaders was head of one of those divisions.

Below the vice leaders were the branch masters also known as the deacons to the outside world and there were seven of them each at the palace realm. Two of them had already died at the Order's hands which left their current number at five, though from the report shared with him by Xiang He, Yang Qing read that they had already shored up their ranks and filled in the missing numbers and even added more increasing the number to eight.

Yang Qing easily parsed through the countless information on the syndicate with his eye crisscrossing over all the reports looking for something specific. He was looking for their techniques.

They may be considered an organization of herbologists, alchemists, and zoologists but even while donning those roles this was an organization of ruthless killers that had slaughtered hundreds of thousands, some for selfish reasons but others in the pursuit of their field of study.

It was often assumed alchemists and the like were bookworms with little combat abilities other than their potions, but those from the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate subverted this notion considering the amount of blood on their hands.

Yang Qing's interest was specifically in this, the means with which they attacked and the report didn't disappoint. There were thousands and thousands of in-depth accounts of the attacks they made. Seeing the information Yang Qing had a small tug on his lips. It seemed like Xiang He had anticipated what exactly he was looking for.

Yang Qing went through each of the accounts with apt attention and as to what he expected of the attacks, the syndicate's main form of attack was through poison-based arts, and other arts that targetted the soul.

With a name like theirs, it stood to reason they would be skilled with soul-based attacks. He had already detected some evidence of it at the battleground where he felt the dense yin energy attacks that still flooded the area along with a corrupting miasma that was different from the one released by the obsidian serpents.

The more he read, the more Yang Qing realized how truly dangerous the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate was. They were considered to be subordinate to the Dark Helminth Sect but the more he read, the more he felt the level of danger posed by the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate was just as high as the Dark Helminth Sect.

They were meticulous. From what Yang Qing read, in some of the attacks, the syndicate took decades to plan before they executed, and when they did, the level of casualty was high and they always managed to cover their tracks well and it would only be discovered long after they had left and sometimes their fingerprints would not be discovered at all.

For example, Yang Qing read that they had once manipulated the spiritual air of a particular area which reacted negatively with the spirit beasts in the area and made them frenzied and delirious.

Said spirit beasts wantonly attacked a village that bordered them, as they made their way inwards into the territory of a rank 3 kingdom known as the Snow Glaze Kingdom. The chaos and destruction caused by the spirit beasts alerted the higher-ups of the kingdom to spring into action, which was what the syndicate wanted all along and they were using the spirit beasts to do it.

The chaos managed to buy them enough time to sneak into the kingdom's secret vault and rob them of a wisdom pearl belonging to the snow glaze swan, which was their founding kingdom guardian spirit beast which was rumored to have been close to reaching the domain realm before it died.

After stealing the pearl they replaced it with a fake pearl that had been inscribed with a killing curse. The killing curse was powerful enough to kill a middle-stage palace realm cultivator instantly having their body and soul destroyed along with the pearl.

One of the ancestors of the Kingdom did die to the insidious trap left by them. The Snow Glaze Kingdom had thought the particular ancestor had absconded with the pearl and it was only much later that they discovered it was a ruse and that the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate had stolen it.

The source of that information had been the Order who only managed to discover it from the confession of one of the branch masters they had captured and killed at the time, who had been part of said operation.

From his account, they spent fifteen years planning it. There were a lot of things to consider such as finding the right concoction to muddle the minds of spirit beasts and within them, there had to be one that was at the palace realm for them to be able to draw the attention of the royal family of the Snow Glaze Kingdom.

This all required a lot of skill and resources as they had to do it without the palace realm spirit beast noticing it. After that, they used esoteric arts to control the souls of a few servants and guards in the royal palace as they studied it from top to bottom to locate the secret vault and they had to do all these under the noses of the palace realm figures within the palace.

The level of cunning and obscurity they went through to achieve their goals made them extremely dangerous in Yang Qing's mind.

This left him wondering if they went to such an extent, then how long have they been planning their move in Deer Mountain Range?

Yang Qing continued reading all their recorded attacks silently noting down every means they used. After three hours he had gone over the recorded attacks a few times to confirm a theory he had in mind.

Yang Qing put down the last talisman as he rubbed his chin in contemplation.

"From what I've read it is within their means to curse someone even under the protection of their array without anyone being the wiser even the person themselves.

His injuries may have had their hand in it.." muttered Yang Qing

Chapter 630 Blood brewing in the clouds

Yang Qing carefully sorted all he had read about the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate and correlated it to the information he had gathered over the past few days.

After he heard from the Imperial Secretary that the King's grandfather had suffered some sort of relapse just as he was about to deal with his final injury, Yang Qing instantly assumed foul play considering his existing suspicions about the kingdom.

Part of his theory operated under the fact that there had to be someone from the Deer Mountain Kingdom working with the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate to ambush the obsidian serpents' daughter.

However, that theory had a few holes in it such as what the collaborator from the Deer Mountain Kingdom stood to gain and the exacerbated injuries to the King's grandfather answered that question.

Had he read about the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate before finding out about the grandfather's situation, then his suspicions of there being a traitor within the kingdom would have lessened.

The Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate was very thorough and meticulous in its conduct. They could have known about the daughter centuries in advance and may have been lying in wait for the perfect opportunity to harvest her.

But now the grandfather's sickness created a layer of suspicion of there being a traitor in the Deer Mountain Kingdom.

They stood to gain a lot from collaborating with the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate, especially the nobles who had ambitions of usurping the throne of the Kingdom.

With the syndicate's help, they injured one of the most powerful cultivators in the kingdom, and as a bonus, they also got to set a trap and whittle down their forces.

The only thing they didn't plan was for the daughter to call for her parents on her deathbed and for them to be that powerful.

This was what made Yang Qing believe the Syndicate may have not known about the daughter for long because if they did, then they would have known she had parents who were both at the seventh stage of the palace realm.

With their skills, they could effortlessly handle the royal guards of the Deer Mountain Kingdom, and with a lot of preparations and resources maybe just maybe they could ensure their escape from Hao Da and the rest provided they didn't engage directly with them which was what most from this infamous organizations opted to do even when the odds were in their favor.

But on that particular day they not only had to face Hao Da and the rest but they also had to face the wrath of the two enraged obsidian serpents.

They only managed to luck out because the couple decided to attack both them, the team from Deer Mountain Kingdom and Hao Da's team. That chaos gave them a little room to maneuver but even then, one of them suffered fatal injuries that would likely end their life.

Yang Qing had doubts about whether the Syndicate would be willing to sacrifice a palace realm expert all for whatever it was they got from the daughter of the obsidian serpents.

If his train of thought was correct then the appearance of the obsidian couple had a chance of being a surprise to them or..

Yang Qing's pupils suddenly constricted as he remembered his entrance exam so he could be admitted to the Institute.

He was thrown into a forest so dangerous it seemed to have existed in the primordial era. He ended up teaming up with Kang Huilang, Xia Boqin, and Luo Ran. No one could survive that place alone and despite two peerless jade physique users and three people with mastered intents, they survived only by the skin of their teeth.

They ended with battered bodies that were completely mangled up and had they been anywhere else other than the Order, they would have succumbed to those injuries

To this day, Yang Qing still believes the Instructors were trying to kill them with the test but the part that came to his mind as he was processing the information at hand was during the test the only reason they managed to reach the finish line was through the assistance of chaos.

They dragged their enemies to other enemies triggering every trap in between. They made it as chaotic as possible and put their all into weaseling through that mess, which was how they were able to push through even against enemies that would have easily slapped them unconscious even whilst the four worked together.

He couldn't help but wonder if the two branch masters did the same thing that day. The records of their attacks did show that using a borrowed hand to achieve their goal wasn't beneath them.

What if they left the daughter with enough breath to cry out loud so she could call her parents because they didn't want to face Hao Da and the rest head-on and hoped to borrow the force of the obsidian couple to escape?

"If they did that, then whatever they took must have been extremely valuable for them to go that far.." muttered Yang Qing as he stood up to leave.

Yang Qing had a frown on his face as he stood up.



"If there is indeed a traitor from the Deer Mountain Kingdom, is the throne really worth risking drawing the ire of the Order if they are caught?" muttered Yang Qing.

"Not unless they believe they won't be caught or that we would not be in a position to punish them even if we did find out they were involved.

But what would give them such confidence?" Yang Qing said as he held his chin before his eyes lit up.

"The increasing attacks.." he ominously said with a somber expression.

He couldn't help but stare at the clouds above him peacefully floating about but within it, he could somehow smell the rain of blood brewing within them.

"I hope it's me just overthinking.." Yang Qing said as he dismissively shook his head.

Everything he had was purely conjecture with not enough meat and the bones were still weak to make anything out of them.

Yang Qing decided to pay a visit to the locations Meifeng had mentioned. It was the areas the fire adler bear took the obsidian serpent's daughter to when she was young.

Yang Qing passed by the kitchen as was customary before he made his way to administrator Mo Gualing's office to inform him of his departure.

Luo Meili and Su Jinjing were still not back from the branch post and from what he heard from Mo Gualing, they would be staying there for a bit because of a potential case. A few people had passed by the branch post and the two were following up on their claims.

Yang Qing couldn't help but wince when he heard that. With how his luck had been over the past month, every potential case sent shivers down his spine.

Not willing to give the matter further thought he picked up Haishi and Bolin and made his way to the mentioned locations.