

Daily life 221

Chapter 221 Sudden Realization

None of what Ma Yuan saw made any sense to him. If his wife detected the intruder before she stepped into their house, why didn't she trigger the formation array? Even if it didn't work, it may have bought them enough time to run away together.

Also, there was the matter of the seal. All this time he thought it was the intruding lady who did something to him that made him unable to remember her face, but it turned out, it was his wife.

Why didn't she want him to remember the face of the perpetrator who split their family apart?

Why did it seem like she gave in way too easily almost as if she was capitulating to the enemy?

However, he pushed all these doubts and questions to the back of his mind as he focused on his true goal, the rest he could mull over with time or ask his wife if they had the good luck of reuniting, but for now, his sole focus was the lady in the white robe.

She had frost-white hair that was hanging loosely on her back. It was as smooth as silk. She looked to be in her mid-thirties. Just like his wife, the lady in white robes had a nation-toppling beauty with a face that looked like it had been carved from white jade and the carver was seeking absolute perfection.

The more Ma Yuan examined her the more he felt she had an odd familiarity to his wife. It was not in terms of looks but more in their aura and the way they seemed emotionless. There was neither joy nor sorrow, neither delight nor anger, there was nothing in them other than indifference to everything and anything.

When he met his wife, Fei, she had a similar expression to the lady in white in some regards, except she had a few emotions that would show themselves here and there like, curiosity or displeasure when Ma Yuan would bug her. But the more they interacted, the more expressions and emotions she showed, almost like she was thawing out.

If earlier he had slight suspicions that his wife and the lady knew each other, that similar-looking expression was the final nail he needed to confirm without a doubt that his wife and the woman shared similar origins.

Ma Yuan continued with his narrations to Yang Qing on what happened next including a vivid description of the lady in white robes.

There were no surprises this time and everything progressed as he had said earlier when he first told Yang Qing about the matter. The lady in the white robe ignored everyone else and just communicated with his wife, then Ma Yuan charged in and got beaten within a second of his attack, and had his dantian shattered and cultivation base crippled.

Because he was seeing things in a third-person view, he got a close-up view of his wife begging the lady for his life. It was then that he heard something that he couldn't last time, due to the injuries he had from the blow he received and the agitation caused by the reality he may lose his wife.

In the midst of her plea, he heard his wife mention a name in passing. He saw her mention the name 'Yao' before she hurriedly stopped herself and continued on with the plea.

"Is her name Yao?" Ma Yuan wondered as his gaze fell on the lady in white robes. Ma Yuan went on to relay that discovery to Yang Qing.

Things proceeded as he had mentioned. The lady acquiesced but not before asking for their daughter in exchange for sparing Ma Yuan. Fei'er attacked the woman once she made that request, however, a glyph appeared on her chest and eyes for a few seconds, and then passed out milliseconds later.

Ma Yuan got a clear look at the glyph. The glyph that appeared on her chest and eyes were one and the same. It was an icy white glyph that was in the shape of a spider. The lady then proceeded to pick his wife up and her daughter who had been seated in her chair, rooted in fear. The lady jabbed one of her acupoints to knock her out and grabbed her too, leaving without sparing the half-dead Ma Yuan a single glance. The image cut off at that point since Ma Yuan passed out immediately after the lady in white left.

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When he was done with his narration, Ma Yuan stewed in silence with deeply furrowed brows. Recollecting the events of that day wasn't easy, but adding all the other details he had overlooked the first time around, added further weight and confusion to his mental state.

Yang Qing was in silence too, sorting out the information Ma Yuan shared. He then took out a recording talisman and a scroll from his storage ring.

"Judge Yang Qing, initiating preliminary findings on the case of Ma Yuan and the disappearance and potential kidnapping of his family.

The victim Ma Yuan had his wife and daughter kidnapped seven years ago by an unknown assailant. His wife Fei," Yang Qing paused his recording to address Ma Yuan.

"What's the name of your wife and child, oh, and also the place where you lived?"

Yang Qing's question pulled Ma Yuan out of his confused and foggy state.

"My wife's name is Shun Fei and my daughter is Ma Ling. We used to live in a town called Leek Valley in Mandrill province of the Qian Kingdom," answered Ma Yuan.

"Thanks," said Yang Qing as he switched on the recording talisman in preparation for continuing with his report.

"There's sufficient evidence that points in the direction that Shun Fei knew her assailant. Ma Yuan's wife and daughter Shun Fei and Ma Ling respectively, got kidnapped in their home within the Qian kingdom.

Ma Yuan ended up with a completely shattered dantian from the attack and had his cultivation base crippled. The source of the attack seems to be a Yin-based technique which by my estimates should be from a blue-grade cultivation art at the very least. The residue left by the attack has led me to believe that the attacker may be someone in the quasi-palace realm at least, as there was evidence of remnant dao markings on the shard left behind from the attack and also on Ma Yuan's shattered dantian. I saw evidence of it during my examination.

The assailant is female, with white hair, white jade skin, and looks to be in her mid-thirties. The victim, Shun Fei mentioned Yao as she was addressing her, however, based on Ma Yuan's testimony, it seems like she stopped herself.

It is my guess that the assailant's name has Yao in it, the investigation is to be made with this assumption in mind.

In my capacity as a judge of the Order, I have accepted the case on an Ad hoc basis having judged the case to have passed the threshold and met the criteria under the articles and guidelines of impromptu cases.

I accept full responsibility and liability for the case up to its completion. Should the matter exceed my capacity and station to bring it to a successful conclusion, Succession of the case article is to take effect immediately and the case is to be transferred to the appropriate party within the Order, to which i will continue on with the case in the capacity of a judicial assistant.

I, Yang Qing officially declare Ma Yuan's case and all that it entails is under the purview and judgment of the Order and all the resources and regulations afforded to it," Yang Qing solemnly said.

He turned off the recording the moment he completed his statement. The same words he had uttered were also written on the scroll. He ratified the statement with his seal. The scroll disappeared moments later and a toneless voice sounded seconds later with the words 'received, approved, accepted and in effect'

Even though there was no one there, Yang Qing stood up and cupped his fist in an almost ceremonial manner. His robes had even transformed from the grey casual look to his judge's robes when he performed that daoist salute.

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"Ma Yuan your case can now be officially considered to be the Order's problem now and we will do everything we can to give you justice.

I still have evaluations going on for the next two days, so I may not be able to get on it immediately but with the record officially placed at the Order, there will be inquisitors attached to your case to do preliminary investigations in the meantime. When I get back I will follow up with them.

I would also like you to be placed in our custody within the duration of the case. Your room and board will be taken care of by the Order. The reason for that is your own safety and also it will be easier for me to fill you in on the case's progression if you're close by.

But if you do not want to be under the Order's grounds, it's okay too, I can still find a way to get the information to you on time.

So which would you prefer will you go back with me or do you have someplace else you'd prefer?" asked Yang Qing.

"I don't have a particular place in mind since even the home we lived at, we had only been living there for eight months or so since for a time there we kept moving from place to place at Fei'er's request.

If the Order will have me, I'd like to shamelessly accept the offer of accommodation within the Order's grounds,' Ma Yuan said as cupped his fists in gratitude.

Yang Qing nodded his head in acknowledgment however, his mind seemed like it was elsewhere.

"You said you moved from place to place at your wife's request, right?"

"Yes, I have. Fei'er was very picky about the areas we lived in. One minute it would be perfect the next she would ask us to pack and leave. Before her disappearance, we did that for almost fo.." Ma Yuan's voice trailed off as a look of shock and realization hit his mind.

Chapter 222 Potential Clue?

Things suddenly clicked for him when he made that statement and when he looked at Yang Qing, he realized Yang Qing seemed to have come to the same realization as him.

"Do you remember when you started moving from place to place or has it always been like that since the first moment you met?" asked Yang Qing.

Ma Yuan paused as he tried to recollect the timeline and details since he met his wife. The missing details in the memory that came to the surface seemed to have triggered other things that he had overlooked over the years.

"When we met, we moved from place to place for the first three years. I didn't think much of it at the time since I assumed she was a rogue cultivator like myself, where moving from place to place is part of the norm. I used to move from place to place, especially with the infamous reputation I had built with the Rapid Spears sect. To evade their sect master and elders I had to move from place to place.

I assumed Fei'er may have been in the same circumstance or she just liked traveling from place to place. However, all that stopped when she got pregnant with Ma Ling.

The year she was born we decided to settle down in a little town in Gemini kingdom. We stayed there until she was three, then we moved, but at that time it was because the Gemini kingdom was too remote and barren. The resources available could not satisfy our requirements, so we moved.

We ended up settling at..." Ma Yuan paused as he tried to recall the name of the place.

"It was Monk's Birch town, one of the towns under the rule of the Wild Birch sect. We stayed there for a year and things were going well, however, the higher-ups of the Wild Birch Sect got wary about having two core formation experts of unknown origins settling within their territory, especially when they were just a rank 4 sect themselves.

To avoid any unnecessary confrontations we moved again to Fairymoss County of the Green Hollow Kingdom. The area was remote, filled with resources and the kingdom had a loose policy in regards to those who wanted to settle there.

We made that our home for six months until Fei'er asked us to leave out of the blue. She never gave any reason for it, we just upped and left in the middle of the night.

Come to think of it, a few days before that she had been behaving funny, and I just chalked it up to her quirky social awkwardness.." Ma Yuan said with a pensive look.

"What happened?"

"We went to the market one day to buy a few things and out of the blue I saw her freeze and then she suddenly dragged me and Ma Ling to a nearby restaurant.

I had thought she was just overwhelmed by the crowd since she wasn't used to large crowds. But for the next few days, she'd leave for the market alone, and when she came back a few times, she'd have this lost look to her.

I never pried too much about it in respect for her privacy and it didn't seem like a big deal at the time. A couple of days later, she came back and asked us to move.

After that, for the next four years everywhere we lived was on a short-term basis. We never stayed one place for more than three months. Even if the sudden movements were strange, i didn't mind it that much as long as I had her and our daughter.

Actually, Leek Valley is the only place in the last four years that we have managed to stay at for so long." said Ma Yuan.

Even though his wife wasn't much of a talker, based on their interactions and how she was, he knew she had a complicated past that still affected her to the present day. He never asked her about it since people were entitled to their own secrets. So even with the strange habits and behaviors, he never asked or thought too much about it.

But now, he couldn't help but wonder if he should have tried to get her to open up more rather than let things be and move at their own pace.

During those few years they moved from place to place, it was very likely that his wife seemed to be running away from something.

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Yang Qing had pulled out his map at some point and started marking certain points from it. Those points were the areas Ma Yuan and his family had lived in.

He started with Gemini kingdom, then moved to Monk's Birch and then Fairymoss in Green Hollow Sect, and then traced the line up to Mandrake province in Qian kingdom, which was the last place they settled at.

He filled in other places after consulting Ma Yuan on them. There was Flowing Boar town of the Bandicoot kingdom, Yellow Flame County under the Burning Flames sect, Rapid twin of the Lunar Bug sect, and the list continued. In those 4 years, they had settled and resettled in 14 different places with their last place in Leek Valley being taken into account.

There seemed to be no rhyme or pattern in the movement, as all these locations were in completely different directions from each other.

"Did you decide the places you settled at or did your wife do it?" asked Yang Qing as he scrutinized the map and the locations he had marked to see if he could dig any clue from them.

"She was the one who chose those locations. Other than where I grew up, I didn't know much about other places but Fei'er was a walking trove of information," Ma Yuan answered.

"Mmmh," Yang Qing offhandedly answered as his eyes bored deep into the map.

"This might actually be something," Yang Qing said as he smiled. Ma Yuan had no idea what Yang Qing was hinting at but for some reason, he felt excited and mildly hopeful from seeing Yang Qing's reaction.

"Ma Yuan, when you were running away from the Rapid Spears sect, how did you choose the location you fled to?" asked Yang Qing with a glint flashing in his eyes.

"At first I didn't have any clear direction, I just ran randomly in any direction but the moment their sect master and elders set their eyes on me, I chose areas they'd less likely track me to, like dangerous ruins, mysterious realms or territories of powerful organizations or those that had a terrible relationship with the Rapid Spears sect." Ma Yuan answered as he helplessly chuckled at how he lived his early years.

"Bingo," Yang Qing said with a triumphant smile.

"Look at these," Yang Qing said as he excitedly guided Ma Yuan's view to the map.

"All the locations you lived at are evidence that your wife subconsciously created. By the way, did she ever tell you about her past?" Yang Qing suddenly asked.

"No she didn't, and I felt awkward asking about it when it clearly seemed like she never wanted to talk about it much," Ma Yuan said as he sighed.

Chapter 223 [Bonus]Concluding The Evaluations

"Mmmh, if she didn't, then her actions back then track. Based on my guess, your wife may have been on the run when you met her and the seal she placed on you the day she got taken along with your daughter, was to save your life.

Her capitulation and the running seem to suggest that she viewed the lady in white and the sect behind her, as too powerful to fight against and doing so would likely end in death.

She knew you well enough to know you would likely chase after her, so she decided to proactively hinder your plans by destroying the one thing you needed for the search, the visual image of that lady. Without it, it would be hard for you to track them. I think she hid all information about her past from you, for the very same reason.

Her plan may have very well been flawless but the locations she chose sold her out.

If we go by your earlier judgment from your escaping experience, then all the places you settled at, were places she deemed the sect she was running from would never think to look.

With this we can narrow down the area and who we are searching for," said Yang Qing as he drew a few things on the map.

Ma Yuan wasn't all too surprised about Yang Qing's deduction on the reason for the seal on his forehead, since he had come to the same conclusion too after he thought on it a bit.

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"First, we can eliminate every area in between or close to the places you lived in , and also the area around the mysterious realm she found you in. If I'm running, I'd make sure it's as far away from the

headquarters of those I'm running from and their sphere of influence. Therefore any area around the mysterious realm and the places you lived in, can be eliminated.

Next is the relationship between these areas and who she is running from. Some of these areas are either too secluded from that sect or they have a terrible relationship with it, so she deemed those places suitable.

We will look for the commonality in all these places and the organizations they have a horrible relationship with and see if they overlap, and from there we will see which of those resulting organizations use a yin-based blue-grade cultivation art.

This should reduce the area and the organizations that will be placed under investigation by a significant number and since we also have the name your wife mentioned, 'Yao' Though it may not contribute much, it doesn't hurt to use it," Yang Qing said as he circled a few areas on the map, marking them as 'obsolete areas' and circled other areas and marked it as 'potential zone'.

"Judge Yang Qing...", Ma Yuan's voice turned shaky as he got overwhelmed that he didn't even know how to continue.

How long has he been searching, for seven years it has been nothing but dead ends, few clues, and even more pitiful resources to work with. As years went by, the more desperate he became, which then evolved into a cup of despair that kept growing in size till it reached a point he had chosen to take his life rather than continue drinking from that cup.

Yang Qing's deduction had given him something he feared more than anything, 'Hope'.

"My deductions are not definite but it's a place to start. We will take it a step at a time and see where it leads," Yang Qing said as he gently patted Ma Yuan's back which was shaking. He looked to be struggling to hold back his tears as he gave a muffled okay response.

Yang Qing didn't say much after that and just poured himself and Ma Yuan another drink. Today's events must have shaken Ma Yuan, he needed time to process everything and his emotions.

As for Yang Qing, after making a few notes and plans on how to proceed with the case, he refocused back on his evaluations.

They were now traveling back to the Southern quadrant of the area of his evaluations. He had already done 1120 evaluations and was left with 280 of them. Of that number, 120 organizations would be evaluated within the Chain Gate sect's territory which was a rank 3 sect, while the remaining 160 were spread about between a few rank 4 organizations and the Blue carp sky sect which was a rank 3 sect.

By his count, he had about 19 hours left to complete everything. The time was tight but doable.

About an hour later they passed over the Purple City of the Red Maple Empire. There were battle cries all around the city with most of the residents indoors.

The battle seemed to be concentrated in a particular area that Yang Qing detected was the Noble's district.

"Mmmh, so it's them?" Yang Qing muttered as he detected two familiar auras in the midst of that chaos leading the charge in one of the buildings.

Those two auras were rapidly moving around the building. Everywhere they moved, a core formation expert would disappear.

Ma Yuan was shocked at what was happening below him. He could detect more than a dozen auras of cultivators who were stronger than him even when he had his cultivation base. There were even some whom he detected were stronger than his wife. He cautiously looked at Yang Qing almost as if to ask 'You're not intervening', but the man in question had a lackadaisical look to him, as he took out sunflower seeds to munch. He didn't seem to have any intention of stepping in.

"The Order does interfere in certain matters, but not all.

While we maintain some semblance of peace, this is a cultivation world after all, we can't intervene in everything nor should we, otherwise we would bear more infamy than we do.

Besides we are cultivators, battles are to be expected, the southern continent would grow weaker without it. As long as it doesn't pull in the innocents and those too weak to defend themselves, the Order will turn a blind eye to it.

We are not the continent's babysitters. The rules of the cultivation world will always be in effect, even with us around." Yang Qing offhandedly said.

In a few minutes with Ellie's speed, Purple City was left in the rear and was nothing more than a tiny dot.

Almost half an hour later they reached the Chain Gate sect's territory, where Yang Qing immediately resumed his evaluations with the assistance of a core elder from the sect.

From there he followed a set trajectory as he moved in a lateral line clearing the remaining 160 evaluations. Relief washed over him when he completed the last evaluation with 10 minutes to spare.

He left the place immediately after and flew back to the Order with much eagerness. All that was on his mind was sleep and food. It had been an exhaustive three days.

Chapter 224 Another Object Of Yang Qing's Nightmares

After one and a half hours, the Order was already in sight. After long draining evaluations, every time Yang Qing came back, the black building that was a constant source of his nightmares would turn into a source of relief to him.

He could remember that after his first-ever evaluation session, the day he came back he almost wept in joy at being back at the Order's compound, then a week later he was back at it, bemoaning his circumstances and ruthlessness of the Order.

Ellie lowered her altitude and speed as the gold eagle bracelet on one of her legs lit up when she was flying over. Other than acting as a tracker, the bracelet acted as a key to the invisible formation array that surrounded the Order's grounds. The bracelet was also synced with her qi and soul signature to prevent its use by anyone else.

Once she went through the formation barrier, she flew in the direction of the beast tamer hall. Just at the entrance of the hall, there was someone casually waving over, it was Zheng Hu, one of the inquisitors from Yang Qing's team.

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Ellie dropped down and gently landed beside Zheng Hu. Yang Qing and Ma Yuan alighted from her back.

The starlight crab had already woken up during the journey back and was perched over Yang Qing's shoulders with the wisdom pearl of the cyclone arc prawn clatched between its claws.

Unlike before, the pearl had a gentle glow to it now. The starlight crab had managed to penetrate its defenses and begin the assimilation process which would take a very long time considering the disparity in strength between the starlight crab and the wisdom pearl of the cyclone arc prawn that was at the palace realm when it was alive.

"Boss, how were the evaluations? Did you meet anything interesting out there like Feng Xin?" Zheng Hu excitedly asked.

"Not good, I hope I won't have these many evaluations to do when I get to the palace courts. Old Lei really did me in, especially considering the troubles that found me along the way..." Yang Qing faintly sighed when he reached the end of his sentence. The events that happened in those three days flashed through his mind when he made that statement.

He stumbled onto a blood fiend cultivator in the first place he stopped at, then he ended up in a fight against three palace realm experts with one of them being the child of a domain-level expert with considerable means. As if that wasn't enough, he ended up getting attacked by a member of the Dark Helminth Ghost sect.

It was too much, now all he wanted was to enjoy the comfort and peace of a courtroom. However, he still had over a million things to get through before he enjoyed the comforts of a courtroom, one of which was to settle Ma Yuan first. He had called over Zheng Hu for that purpose.

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"Were the opponents any good?" Zheng Hu pestered on.

He was a battle fanatic and had managed to sniff out something based on Yang Qing's body language. He had sparred with Yang Qing over a thousand times, though calling it spars was an understatement since it was always a one-sided beating. However, that exposure was enough for him to be able to tell if Yang Qing had been in a battle or not. He could detect a faint battle intent leaking from Yang Qing. It was something that only someone who had fought him frequently could detect.

"Mmmh, not really. Though if the attacker from the Dark Helminth Ghost sect was close to my realm, he would have been a thorny opponent to deal with. But other than that, the rest were pretty easy," Yang Qing lazily said as he raised his arms to stretch his back.

Zheng Hu lost any interest in digging any further once he heard Yang Qing's response.

Ma Yuan was silent in the background, taking everything in. He seemed a bit nervous as he tried to meld into the background.

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"Zheng Hu, this is Ma Yuan who I told you about earlier, I'll need you to arrange a place for him to stay within the compound.

You'll also be his guide for the next few days, teaching him the do's and the don'ts of the place and you'll be attached to the case on a preliminary basis. So you will need to find someone from the Administration department, to get the particulars in order and also have a liaison from there meet with Ma Yuan," Yang Qing said as he added a few more instructions.

"Ma Yuan, this is Zheng Hu, he is an inquisitor and is part of my team. He is very capable and good at his job. Whatever assistance you need, please don't hesitate to ask him.

There will be a liaison from the Order who will come to meet you once you're settled in. They will be in charge of filling you in on the details of the case when I'm not around or Zheng Hu.

It may take a few days before we can meet again since the coming few days will be a tad bit hectic for me. I have a ceremony to prepare for, among other things that will keep me swamped for a bit. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to consult Zheng Hu if you have any queries," said Yang Qing.

"Many thanks, Judge Yang Qing for all the help and support that support that you have given including saving my life." Ma Yuan said as he gave a deep solemn bow.

"Inquisitor Zheng Hu, my name is Ma Yuan and I thank you in advance for your hospitality and help," Ma Yuan said as he gave another bow to Zheng Hu.

"Don't worry about it and the like the boss said, if you have any questions feel free to ask. Have you eaten?" Zheng Hu asked. His carefree and cheery personality made it easy for Ma Yuan to relax around him.

"Yes, I have. Judge Yang Qing was kind enough to share his meal with me," Ma Yuan politely answered.

"HIM?" Zheng Hu who had been smiling suddenly asked in shock as he pointed his finger at Yang Qing.

"Yes,' Ma Yuan answered, slightly confused at Zheng Hu's stupefied reaction.

"Zheng Hu please have Ma Yuan settled, he has had a long day," said Yang Qing as he cast a cold and mildly threatening look toward Zheng Hu.

"Ma Yuan let's go," said Zheng Hu as he laughed sheepishly. Ma Yuan bowed once more in gratitude toward Yang Qing before he followed Zheng Hu who was headed in the direction of the inns, restaurants, pavilions, and courtyards.

In a situation like the one Ma Yuan was in, where there was a risk to his safety, the Order would host them within their grounds. However, even if the Order would technically be considered the host, they didn't use their own facilities to host them. Ma Yuan and those like him would be given shelter and accommodation in the pavilions and courtyards that were owned by the different businesses inside their compound.

As part of the agreement to start a business within the Order's premises, these organizations had to agree they would lend their services to the Order should they need it. Part of those services was providing room and board to those under the protection of the Order, for example, Ma Yuan. Zheng Hu was guiding Ma Yuan to some of those facilities.

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Once they separated, Yang Qing left Ellie at the beast tamer hall but not before he gave out a few instructions to the personnel of the hall, one of which was the reeducation of Ellie when it came to sensibilities. He hadn't forgotten about the cheap blow she struck against the son of one of the founders of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion when he was unconscious. Yang Qing wanted to nip that petty vindictive personality of hers in the bud before she invited more trouble and disaster to his doorstep. For good measure he even decided to use his trump card, Luo Meili, to take care of Ellie.

Next Yang Qing visited the deployment subdivision of the administration department. It was already late into the night, but the hall of the administration department was still flooded with people and lively as ever with cultivators moving to and from different sections of the department.

The deployment sector had a few comings and goings, Yang Qing had to wait for a few minutes before his turn came up. Lai Han who had served him before he left wasn't around, neither were the other members he had found before. The team present was completely different.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh at the disparity of treatment between those from the administration department in comparison to his station. The Admin department worked on 12-hour shifts, while judges as long as you had a case going on, you would remain there till it was done, however long it took. Judges could fill in for each other but that was only after three months, when they were allowed to take leave and focus on their cultivation. But before then, they would work dog hours if need be, with no alternating shifts like the ones those from the administration department had.

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The completion procedure wasn't as cumbersome as before when he was being deployed. All he had to do was stamp a few scrolls with his medallion and then ended with the removal of the protection of the spirit calling bell from his body. The spirit calling bell had a limit on the number of people it could support, so the moment someone completed their mission, before anything else they had to hurry back and finish their completion procedures at the deployment sector, so the spirit calling belling could have an empty slot for another person.

Once everything was completed, Yang Qing went back out with a tired look longing for some much-needed rest in his abode before the events of the next day swarmed him. He didn't have a case the next day because he would be having rehearsals for his upcoming ceremony that would be happening the day after tomorrow. In addition, he had been invited over to someplace that terrified him even more than the Order. He wasn't looking forward to going to that place at all.

When he was completing his deployment procedures, he received a call from his brother telling him that their mother asked him to come over for dinner tomorrow at the Yang family's grounds, in the Glowing respite valley.

Before the Order, the Yang family had been the sole object of his nightmares. When he came to the Order, even if it also became a nightmare of its own, it still paled in comparison to the dread he felt every time he saw some of his family members, especially his grandfather and some of his friends.

"Does mom want me to get killed, I hope she doesn't tell them I'm coming," Yang Qing fearfully thought as he made his way to his abode.

Chapter 225 Standard Regulatory Committee

Yang Qing didn't waste any time getting back to his abode, leaving tomorrow's problem for the future Yang Qing. Present Yang Qing needed a rest from it all, for the moment.

Once he arrived at the dream cloud abode he dropped the starlight crab off at his pond.

"Starlight, remember in the future your job will be to protect the fish in this pond from the greedy bird we came with." Yang Qing harped on as he explained to Starlight his new duties. He mixed a few threats and incentives in there as a good boss should. It was one of the few things he was grateful to the Order for. How to efficiently exploit those under you.

Starlight casually waved one of its claws in understanding and agreement. Its eyes were narrowed in pleasure at the moment as it soaked itself in the pond's water. The pond had water with dense spiritual qi that was even denser than the cold Yin Lake it called home for the past 100 years. It also had a unique gentleness and balance to it that seemed to be nourishing its body.

A few seconds later it was shocked to find that not only was its body being restored and strengthened, but the feeling also started permeating to its soul too. The mental fatigue it had from trying to assimilate the wisdom pearl from the cyclone arc prawn, was being washed away by the second.

Starlight couldn't help but look at its new owner with a profound look of respect. It had only agreed to join Yang Qing only because of the wisdom pearl it was given. Other than that, it had no expectations, but now it was starting to feel like maybe it had lucked out with its new owner.

Yang Qing noticed every reaction of the Starlight crab from the moment it was inside the pond. He had a smug look to him when he saw how enamored the starlight crab was, with the place. Such a reaction was to be expected because other than contributing his funds to the nesting project of the celestial nesting weaver, a bit of his income and merit points went into that pond.

At surface value, it seemed simple, but it was inlaid with a blue grade formation array called the 'fifth binding seasons array' which regulated every minute condition of the water from its temperature, down to its Yin-Yang energy balance. It created an uncountable number of variations that helped in the growth and survival of a wide number of species thus adding diversity to the pond. In addition to the formation array, there were a few spiritual herbs that were at the monarch rank whose job was to purify the water in the pond in addition to increasing the spiritual qi of the water. Yang Qing had even procured the services of a geomancy specialist in the Order to find the perfect position to build the pond.

The starlight crab's reaction was to be expected considering the sheer amount of resources Yang Qing had poured into it. The pond in and of itself could rival the blessed grounds of some newly established rank 3 organization. The place the starlight crab lived prior might as well have been a dung heap in comparison.

"Please don't eat the fish here, you can have one every three months but no more," said Yang Qing, but he immediately realized he was just being a worrywart for nothing when he saw the look the Starlight crab gave. It was similar to the one it gave him when he offered it some of the fish he had roasted. It was a look of derision and disdain. The starlight crab even pulled the wisdom pearl closer to himself, to ensure its point was driven across well.

Do you think I'd care about some fish when I have this? I'm not like that stupid bird that just sets its sights on anything. You may have given me a solid beating but you and that bird are clearly lacking in sensibilities when compared to me. But don't worry since you gave me the wisdom pearl, I'll help you with that, as it's only right and proper I do so.

Yang Qing had a mildly puzzled look to him when he noticed the concerned and reaffirming gaze Starlight was giving him.

"What's with that look? Do I have something on my face?" Yang Qing wondered as he checked himself using the reflection from the pond. When he didn't find anything strange, he decided to ignore the matter and make his way to his courtyard.

"Starlight take care of yourself, oh and you can use this to communicate though don't make a habit of using it very much," Yang Qing said as he tossed a voice transmission pearl into the pond.

He didn't even bother explaining the pearl's mechanism of operation to Starlight as he yawned leaving the confused Starlight behind.

"What I'm I supposed to do with this? Do I eat it, why does he keep insisting on feeding me stuff? Can it even be eaten?" Starlight wondered as it used the tip of one of its claws to cautiously probe the pearl.

"Forget it," It tossed the matter aside as its gaze fell on the wisdom pearl. The preliminary insights it had gotten from the first attempt had left it intoxicated for more. With its soul being refreshed by the pond's water, it decided to continue on with the assimilation.

...

"Seems like Yi Jie is still reinforcing his realm," Yang Qing muttered once he detected Yi Jie's aura in the celestial nesting weaver's nest.

"All the best old friend," said Yang Qing as he went into his courtyard whilst sighing. Ever since he had a taste of the comfort of the celestial nesting weaver's nest, resting in any other place never felt quite the same to him. They always fell a little short.

Early the next morning someone from the administration department was already at his door. The person was from the Standard Regulatory Committee. This was a branch of the administrative department that mostly handled induction training and ceremonies. They guided the members of the Order on what they were supposed to do and what was expected of them, whenever they went to a new station or were promoted.

For example, Yang Qing underwent induction when he graduated from the institute and became an outer core court judge, he had another when he moved to the inner core courts and the last he went through was when he moved to the superior core courts.

During those inductions, he was given a thorough guideline of his new duties, the privileges he enjoyed including remunerations, the clearance level, and the areas within the Order he had access to, among other things. Every jump in level came with its own roles and responsibilities and the Standard Regulatory Committee was in charge of guiding all Order employees in that regard, including filling in all members of the Order on any changes to the operating protocols and guidelines of the Order.

Their members were an erudite and meticulous sort. The person who had come to see Yang Qing was a young man who looked to be about 20 years old. Even though he looked young, he had an old person's sternness and seriousness to him. Yang Qing almost flinched when he saw him because he got the same vibes from that member as he did from Lei Weiyuan.

He had short hair meticulously combed with not a strand out of place and had on black and white robes that were perfectly straightened. Even his posture seemed measured to perfection along with his calm gaze and expression.

He had a fifth-stage core formation cultivation base which Yang Qing could tell had been given the same amount of meticulousness as he did to other areas of himself. It was perfectly polished to the extremes of what one could reach at the fifth level.

....

"Judge Yang Qing, my name is Song Guozhi and I'm the inductor attached to you during the duration of your ceremony up to the point you will officially begin your duties as an outer palace court judge.

In here you will find the schedule for tomorrow's programme, along with the guest list of the different organizations that will be coming by," Song Guozhi said as he handed over a white jade talisman to Yang Qing.

Yang Qing used his spiritual qi to gain access to the contents stored there. The sheer volume of the information stored in there made his pupils constrict in shock.

"Do I have to master all these?" Yang Qing cautiously asked as he laughed dryly.

The organizations listed in there were in the thousands. In addition to their names, in-depth information on their background was also provided.

How many years have they been in existence, the minor and major changes that have affected them since they were founded, and the different leaders they have had over the years, which included their short bios, of which some were already deceased but their bio was provided nonetheless including their likes and dislikes.

Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder what he would need the information about the likes and dislikes of a deceased person for, during his ceremony. This was a little too overboard.

"One can never be too prepared, Judge Yang Qing, since you will be personally welcoming some of those guests. Having such in-depth information will be of benefit to you when you exchange greetings with them," Song Guozhi said without batting an eye.

"How would small talk reach the point of us discussing their long-dead ancestors?" Yang Qing inwardly wondered. But he kept all those doubts to himself because he had a feeling Song Guozhi wouldn't accommodate them.

They soon got on a carriage Song Guozhi had stationed outside his abode. They were making their way to the Order's main building where Yang Qing would be picking up his ceremonial robe along with a few other artifacts he would need to put on during the ceremony.

After that, he would visit the grounds where the ceremony would be held. It was a 10,000-acre valley that had been specifically set aside for promotion ceremonies and graduation ceremonies. For the former, outside forces would be invited but for the latter, it was restricted to Order employees and the family of the students graduating.

Yang Qing couldn't wait to get the next two days over with. Getting gifts was about the only thing he was looking forward to.

Chapter 226 Potential Leads

Inside the carriage, Yang Qing was given a few more talismans by Song Guozhi. They contained other relevant details that Yang Qing may need for his upcoming ceremony. Of course, the relevant part was only relative to Song Guozhi. In Yang Qing's case, he found all of it to be too tedious and cumbersome. He had doubts if he would even be able to use a third of what was stored in there.

Even though he felt it would be useless, he still gave it a read as the information stored there could be considered a good pass time read. If Mao Yunru had those talismans, the inner gossip hunter in her would have had a field day with it.

Yang Qing's pupils had a sudden flash of insight as he was going through the information.

"Maybe I could use this to cut on the list of suspects. The amount of details stored in here could be used as reference points." Thought Yang Qing as he pulled out the first talisman he was given that had the guest list and their background.

The more he read it, the more his eyes lit up.

"Administrator Guozhi, thank you very much for all this information," Yang Qing suddenly said in excitement.

"I'm only doing my job," Song Guozhi curtly said showing no ripples in his emotion but Yang Qing being as intuitive as he was, detected a mild glint of pride flash in his eyes.

"This will definitely help cut down the time needed to search for Ma Yuan's wife and daughter," thought Yang Qing as he increasingly admired the never-ending pile of information stored in the white jade talisman.

A few minutes ago it was a torturous object, but now, it was a priceless treasure. Yang Qing didn't waste any time as he began closely analyzing the information stored in it, unlike the cursory glance he had taken earlier.

The more he read, the wider his smile grew. Song Guozhi who was seated next to him had a small smile tug on his lips once he saw the enthusiastic and excited appearance Yang Qing had when he read the information from the talisman.

"He's not one of the youngest palace realm judges for nothing. His slovenly look sure can be misleading. I thought he was just another Lazy employee mooching off the Order's graces but I'm glad I was wrong.

Maybe I can enlist his support in one of my campaign reforms of increasing efficiency within the Order by increasing the range of duties of the judges that are stationed within the main headquarters. They can conduct investigations on existing cases whenever they are doing their evaluations thus freeing up the inquisitors to handle more cases, and when they are not in the field they can double up as instructors in the institute thus enabling the Institute to increase their intake capacity whilst also ensuring the quality of training is maintained.

All these will go a long way to helping the Order combat its manpower issues. I already have enough support but adding an up-and-coming palace court judge wouldn't hurt. But all that will have to wait till later. For now, I need to do my job as meticulously as I can," thought Song Guozhi.

Yang Qing who had been joyously swallowing the information in the white jade talisman, froze suddenly. He felt a faint shiver in his spine almost as if some looming threat was upon him. He paused what he was doing and quickly deployed his palace sense around the carriage as he extended its range outwards. When he didn't spot anything off, he opted to use his eyes as he stretched his head outside the carriage windows.

"Is old man Lei close by?" Yang Qing wondered. Usually, whenever he got that feeling, the old geezer was never far behind. He looked around for a minute and when he didn't spot him, he decided to push the matter to the back of his mind.

"Maybe the ceremony is getting me paranoid?" thought Yang Qing as he dryly chuckled.

"Judge Yang Qing is something wrong?" asked Song Guozhi with a slightly raised brow.

"No, it's nothing. I thought I detected something but it must be my imagination. I've had a few tense days when I was out, I think my body is still in a heightened state," said Yang Qing as he politely smiled in apology for his sudden reaction.

"Mmmh." Song Guozhi merely nodded in response as a look of determination and affirmation flashed in his eyes briefly.

Yang Qing didn't seem to have noticed Song Guozhi's strange look as he quickly went back to reviewing the information he was given. In that list, among the information stored on the background of the different organizations was a description of the cultivation art they practiced in addition to their geographical locations.

When it came to cultivation arts, the information was a bit vague only containing the briefest of explanations but when it came to the geographical information, it was a bit more in-depth. If an organization moved, it listed all the places they had settled at and among the likes and dislikes listed on some of their members, personal relationships were one of them.

Using the information he had gotten from Ma Yuan about the places they lived at, he could use that information and correlate it with the list he had on hand and see if there were organizations that had alliances or bad relationships with the organizations that ruled the places Ma Yuan's wife chose to live in. The list was pretty long along with the huge level of details, it would take him some time, but if he found anything, it would be a massive boost to the case.

...

"Judge Yang Qing, Judge Yang Qing? We are already here."

Song Guozhi called Yang Qing a few times to alert him of their arrival at the courtroom grounds. It took them ten minutes to arrive, and by that time, Yang Qing was too deeply engrossed in the information to spare any thoughts on anything else including his surroundings. He had even forgotten he was in a carriage or where he was even headed at.

"Oh?" Yang Qing hazily acknowledged Song Guozhi's call as he reluctantly put the talisman away.

They then proceeded to the internal logistics department. Its hall was just as massive as the one from the administration department. However, unlike the administration department, the internal logistics department was calmer and much more silent since the area was restricted to Order employees only.

There were employees from different departments walking around to different sections of the internal logistics department. There were no guides or even guards in the area. Even though the floor's security

seemed lax, Yang Qing knew for a fact there was a purple-grade killing array in the hall that would kill 10 soul formation experts within a second of each other.

The reason for such an exaggerated and heightened security was simple; the area could be considered the Order's treasury vault. All sorts of materials and artifacts across different grades were stored in the internal logistics department from spirit stones of all grades to spiritual herbs, metals, and other materials that ranged from the mortal rank up to the saint grade.

The sheer quantity and quality of what was stored in there were enough to fund over a dozen rank 1 organizations several times over. The area could be considered one of the main hubs that contributed to the operation of the Order.

Song Guozhi led Yang Qing to one of the sections named the 'ceremonial apparel section'. This was the location Yang Qing would be picking his robe. Inside was a gentle-looking lady who had black hair rolled into a bun with a few grey and white strands mixed in. She had a few wrinkles here and there but it did not take away from her beauty and rather added some wizened maturity to it.

Chapter 227 : Treasure Or Curse?

Both Yang Qing and Song Guozhi cupped their fists in greeting the moment they stepped through the doors of that section.

"Greetings, Assistant Director Jun Pei," they both said with respect in their tone.

The woman before them may look like any other kind-looking elder you may meet on the street who will buy you buns for greeting her with a smile, but she was a bonafide soul formation expert and one with significant weight within the Order at that.

Before being the Assistant Director of internal logistics, she had held different other posts. She was co-chair of the spirit council for some time, before that she was chief supervisor of the special inquisitors, and the time before that she was a chief trainer of the guards at the requiem who had the strictest training and standards when it came to their members. None of the posts she held were light, highlighting her strength and quality.

"Would you two like something to drink?" Assistant Director Jun Pei politely asked with a gentle smile as she pointed to the pot of tea on the table next to her.

Just from the quality of the steam it produced, Yang Qing knew it was quality stuff. If he came alone he would have gladly accepted, but he was here with Song Guozhi, he had doubts about whether the person would choose to indulge but based on his strict meticulous personality he didn't think it was possible, and it turned out he was right as Song Guozhi politely declined soon after.

"Assistant Director Jun Pei we would like your assistance in getting Judge Yang Qing's ceremonial robe along with the accompanying artifacts for tomorrow's palace court promotion ceremony.

Please find here the seal of approval," Song Guozhi said as he solemnly handed over a sealed scroll.

The assistant director waved her sleeves and the scroll unsealed itself revealing strange glyphs circling around the scroll which later settled to form words.

"So you're Yang Qing?" Assistant Director Jun Pei meaningfully said as she lightly chuckled.

Yang Qing awkwardly smiled at the connotation behind the question. No matter how soft and polite it sounded, he had a feeling there was nothing good behind the question. He couldn't help but worry about what news of him has been spreading around the Order. He had caused a few righteous-driven actions over the years but he didn't think those actions were enough to reach the ears of a renowned expert like Assistant Director Jun Pei.

"Is it old man Lei's doing?" Yang Qing couldn't help but worry.

"Congratulations on your promotion to the outer palace court judge Yang Qing. The Order has big expectations of you.

Give me a second as I get your robe and artifacts," Assistant Director Jun Pei said as she turned to face the grey plain wall at her back.

"What does she mean by that? What expectations? I don't want to be greatly expected, nothing good ever comes of it." Yang Qing's countenance became increasingly worried. He didn't even have the mood to admire the transformation that was happening to the wall behind Assistant Director Jun Pei.

The wall behind her transformed into some swirling gateway filled with grey mist that had small dazzling scripts floating around it. Within the grey mist, one could see a glimpse of a small silver-colored mountain. The grey mist was a transmission portal that led to a special grotto used by the internal logistics department. Only senior members, the assistant director and above could gain entry to that place.

Assistant Director Jun Pei disappeared into the mist and came back a few minutes later holding a folded dark blue robe with white linings, above it was a small white eagle medallion, a small needle-shaped artifact that was made of some sort of crystal and a green necklace that looked like it was made of green vines intertwined together.

Yang Qing's eyes flashed with greed the moment his eyes fell on the things Assistant Director Jun Pei came out with. A faint auspicious mist seemed to be leaking from them.

"All of them, saint grade," Yang Qing muttered in a greedy daze. His eyes were wide open, his jaws hanging loose, and his tongue slurping all over the place.

His fingers were itching to grab them but he held them back since they were in the hands of a former trainer of the guards of Requiem and chief supervisor of special inquisitors. Both these places were filled with dangerous people who had special expertise that made evil cultivators seem like saints. There was no way he would risk grabbing something from someone who trained those monsters and was even their head at some point in time.

"This is the blue universe enclave robe. It's filled with arrays that will defend against the full-blown attack of a soul master cultivator at the soul formation realm. The protection will last for a full hour.

The crystal needle on top of it is the veiled destiny void domain crystal. It will isolate your karma and protect you from having your karma probed or interfered with. It also doubles as a protection for your soul especially in regards to karmic spells and will heighten your senses to that of a peak domain realm, however, don't use that aspect lightly since it takes its toll on the soul and mental sea. The safe duration of use is thirty minutes.

The necklace is made from a 500,000-year-old green silkworm vine and will boost the regeneration of your body instantly should it be obliterated in an attack. It will also react to ghost and corpse qi and also to faint murderous intent directed at you.

As for the medallion, it will be used to temporarily raise the level of your own medallion so you can control the arrays and other protection mechanisms that will be on the platform you will be standing at." Assistant director Jun Lei patiently explained.

"Please take out your medallion so I can merge it with this one," she added.

Yang Qing took out his medallion as asked and gave it to Assistant Director Jun Lei. The Assistant Director formed a few seals and the medallion she had, turned into a grey translucent corporeal form that surrounded Yang Qing's medallion and seamlessly merged into it.

Yang Qing's medallion was still gold colored, however, it had a faint silver luster to it, around the eyes of the eagle in the medallion.

"I can take them now?" Yang Qing eagerly asked. He couldn't wait to try them on.

"You can, oh I almost forgot, pardon my forgetful mind," Assistant Director Jun Lei said as she lightly chuckled.

"You will need to hand these items back exactly one hour after your ceremony ends. Every minute you delay returning it, you will be fined 1,000 high-grade spirit stones. If one hour passes and you still haven't returned it, at the sixty-first-minute mark, the fine you owe will double to 120,000 high-grade spirit stones with increments of 20,000 high-grade spirit stones every five minutes.

If it crosses the three-hour mark, special inquisitors will be sent after you for repossession of the items and all treasures and wealth under your name will be confiscated as reparations for the delay. So do make sure you bring it on time," Assistant Director Jun Lei said with the kindest and gentlest smile ever.

Yang Qing who was eager to grab the items, flinched midway as his skin grew pale in an instant.

"Dir..rr...rr....r...rrr..r...rr..ector what you said?" Yang Qing stammered as he asked to confirm what he had just heard.

"It's all true,"

"Can I not take them?"

"You could, but you do know there is a huge risk of being assassinated during your ceremony right? Even with experts of the Order being present, an attack can still get to you before they react, as you well know it has happened before, but if you are that confident in yourself, I'd be happy to take them back," Assistant Director Jun Lei said in a teasing tone.

"I'll take it," Yang Qing weakly said as he took the items. His hands trembled slightly as he picked them up. What had been a treasure had now turned into a cursed object that had the ability to destroy him.

"Order is really ruthless, these are just saint-grade treasures. How many do they have? Do they need to be this strict about it? If I got those fines how many years would I have to work for free? Could it be....?" Yang Qing had a bold scary thought that made him flinch and turn in time to see a cunning glint flash in Assistant Director Yun Lei's eyes.

"Assistant Director Yun Lei thank you for your assistance, I wish you a nice day, we have a lot to do please don't see us out," Yang Qing nervously said as he quickly dragged Song Guozhi on his way out.

"We sure have been getting a lot of interesting kids of late," Assistant Director Yun Lei muttered to herself as she resumed drinking her tea with a cheeky smile hanging on her face.

Chapter 228 Test Of The Domain Realm

"Judge Yang Qing, why did you do that? I get that you're excited about your day tomorrow, but haste is an act of impropriety."

Song Guozhi chastised Yang Qing as he straightened his robes showing clear displeasure on his face as he did it.

"Sorry about that, " Yang Qing awkwardly said as he smiled foolishly with remorse in his eyes, especially when he saw Song Guozhi use a bunch of spells to straighten his robes over and over again.

"Isn't this a bit too much? I didn't even drag him for that long," thought Yang Qing as he saw three minutes in, Song Guozhi was still not done with straightening his robes.

Yang Qing used that brief pause to stare at the hot potato in his hands. After the generous explanation from Assistant Director Jun Lei, those saint-grade treasures had lost their allure to him. Right now they were nothing more than dangers that had the potential to sink him further into poverty and a resultant slave of the Order, which he suspected was the Order's long-term plan. Yang Qing the inciter may need to come out of retirement and make the noble sacrifice of revealing the Order's intentions to the public before it was too late.

However, all that would be left for later as he had present predicaments to deal with in the form of the three saint-grade treasures. Despite wishing he could leave them behind and have absolutely nothing to do with them, he had to bring them with him.

The Order along with its meteoric rise in power and fame, also had enemies that grew in direct correlation to their power. Those enemies would target them in all sorts of locations including their own backyard.

The Order has always held a public ceremony in the promotion of its judges. This was done with a number of reasons in mind. For one; it was to bridge the gap between the judges and the public since they dealt with them all the time in their courtrooms and for another it was a show of force to the outside world.

Of course, the Order still hid a bulk of its power by not disclosing some of its members or power distribution of its forces like the inquisitors or guards of requiem among other branches whose identities needed as much secrecy as possible, but when it came to their judges they were all too glad to show them off and make a spectacle out of it, so as to buildup their own prestige.

However, that didn't always go so well for the Order. Since its founding, there have been a few judges who have died during their ceremony and some severely injured, especially those in the lower realms like the core formation realm or the palace realm.

However, despite these dangers surrounding the ceremony, the Order has firmly maintained the ceremony, never once have they considered postponing it. The ceremony could be considered a battle of sorts. It was the Order vs everyone else, and for the Order to remain truly effective in their duties that was a battle they could not shy away from.

Though even if they were determined to raise their prestige at all costs, the Order wasn't reckless about it. Every judge was a talent that they have spent considerable effort and resources to nurture. Their death and injury despite their cultivation realm, was a loss the Order would not want to swallow if they could help it. Thus over the years, they have fine-tuned their protective mechanism to ensure the increase of survivability of the judge at the center of the ceremony, and in the past 50 years, there has not been a single death or injury, all thanks to their continuous efforts and also the sacrifice of those who died or got injured.

...

Yang Qing sighed lightly as he tightly held the three saint-grade items. With them in hand, it was starting to sink in he was finally moving to the palace courts.

It took him seven bitter years, but he finally made it up to a new stage with different challenges and the most important part, better pay, hopefully, fewer working hours and he was a tiny bit closer to getting out of the thumbs of Lei Weiyuan and becoming his boss.

Of course, the latter part of the equation was impossible since he would need to at least be in the soul formation realm and may be a member of the spirit council or Judicial review committee before he could be considered his boss, but getting out of Lei Weiyuan's command was a real possibility since all he needed to do was graduate to the domain courts.

"I wonder how long that will take." Yang Qing inwardly wondered. While breaking through to the palace realm was fairly easy with respect to the monsters from the Order, the holy lands, or some of the top tier rank 1 or 2 organizations but when it came to the domain realm it was a different matter.

Geniuses, monsters, and the top average, who had some chance to break through to the domain realm would all need considerable time and preparation to break through to the domain realm despite their considerable resources and level of talent. While one could be considered a true cultivator the moment one stepped into the palace realm, one would be considered a different being the moment one stepped into the domain realm.

The power to level an entire nation, flatten the mountains, render the sky asunder, split the rivers, and destroy space, all this power within a single being. This was the power of a domain expert, but it came at a cost and that cost was trading your life and surviving the tribulation that came in the advancement to the domain realm. The moment that tribulation fell, it fell with everything it had, subjecting the cultivator facing it, to judgment.

Are you worthy of the power and the title 'Domain'? Will your foundational dao survive the mettle? Is your will able to surmount a tribulation that makes the whole world quake?

The tribulation judged everything about the person facing it and if your heart flinched for even a second while facing it, your death was all but guaranteed, no matter how sturdy or powerful your dao foundations were.

When breaking through to the domain realm, it's either you will be a domain expert at the end of it, or you will be a cautionary tale of the has been genius who came this close to glory but fell short in the end.

Cultivators could survive failing their tribulations in the core formation realm or palace realm but breaking through to the domain realm, was either success or death, there was no middle ground. Every domain expert no matter their background or the quality of the domains, was worthy of respect because having that cultivation base was not only a title but proof that they risked their lives without flinching and made it through.

In some circles, breaking through to the domain realm was considered more dangerous than even breaking through to the soul formation realm because for the latter there have been a few survivors though pitifully few who survived failure in breaking through to the soul formation realm, but when it came to the domain realm, since time immemorial no one has ever survived after failing their tribulation. There have been some who had their bodies remain intact, but that was it.

This is why there are countless palace realm experts who are at the peak of their realm and have the qualifications of breaking through to the domain realm, but they never do it. They never trigger their tribulation to undergo the test because they know whatever awaits them is either death or success and the chances of the latter were slim at that. Those odds deterred most, which was why some, would rather spend their whole lives in the peak of the palace realm and maybe extend their lives using some treasures when they hit their life expectancy limits, rather than risk losing their lives to the domain tribulation.

The Order continuously warns its members to take their time and not be in haste to reach the domain realm. Strengthening and polishing one's dao is easy but preparing the will was the part that required time. Only experience and being tried over time could ensure your will was strong enough since willpower was not a talent but something borne out of experience. This is why you could find even a 17-

year-old palace realm expert but you would be hard-pressed to find a 35-year-old domain expert. The palace realm could be considered as nothing but a bridge.

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Yang Qing decided to push the matter to the back of his mind. He still had a few hurdles to go through before he could even consider sniffing the domain realm. One of them was the ceremony tomorrow which he hoped would pass by without a hitch and the other was realizing the gift of the purple core that would bloom when he was in the later stages of the palace realm.

From what he was told by some of the instructors from the institute, when he realizes that gift, his chances of breaking through to the domain realm would be significantly higher. The purple core despite the enormous efforts and requirements needed to attain it, had no difference from the gold core when one was in the core formation realm, however the moment one stepped into the later stages of the palace realm, the true brilliance of a purple core reveals itself then.

Yang Qing still had no clue what it was but he was told it was well worth the effort it took to get the purple core and more. Yang Qing hoped it was true since gaining the peerless jade body which was one of the prerequisites of forming a purple core, had come almost at the cost of his life, and worse if he died it would have been at the hands of his crazy experimental family's hands. It was why he was so fearful of them.

Chapter 229 Yang Family (1)

Every peerless jade physique had its own way of being cultivated, and there was no sure way of doing it. It was the only stage of the body refining realm where there was no clear-cut way of achieving it, unlike the rest where various means had been devised.

Those means may deviate from person to person or organization to organization but despite the differences, the results could always be replicated from one person to the next and from every generation to the next.

But when it came to the peerless jade physique, things run a little differently. For one, almost every peerless jade physique was unique to the owner, it was rare to find two people with the exact same peerless jade physique. The next was the results of gaining that physique could not be replicated. You could do everything down to the minutiae of details but that did not guarantee you gaining a peerless jade physique.

To date, it's unknown what exactly is the requirement of gaining a peerless jade physique since the methods of getting it couldn't be replicated, it meant there was another intangible factor at play that the cultivation world was unaware of.

For Yang Qing to break through from the diamond body to the peerless jade physique his family had sealed him in a hole that was lined with strange seals that isolated and blinded all his senses except one, the sense of touch, which was amplified a couple of notches. He couldn't see, hear, smell, or taste anything when he was in there, but his sense of touch was the only one that remained untouched and had its sensitivity amplified a couple of levels higher.

In addition to the seals, the hole was also filled with a strange brew that reached the midway point of the hole. The hole was about 100 meters tall and the brew was filled up to the 50-meter mark. So when Yang Qing was thrown in there, he was basically fully submerged in the liquid.

To date, Yang Qing could still smell the stench of that brew as though it was right there on his skin. It looked benign with its light green in color and had an alternating viscosity. Sometimes it would be sticky and the next second it had the viscosity of melted snow. The same alternation came to its smell. It smelled like spring in one moment, the next it was dry like the cold winds of a desert, it carried a hot scalding scent in one second and the next it had a freezing effect to it.

It had alternating properties and about the only thing that was constant, was the light green color. Yang Qing could remember how vehemently he had refused to go in that hole. Everything within him was screaming he would surely die if he fell in there to the strange concoction, but his family would hear none of it, even when he said he was okay with having a diamond body. But his complaints fell on deaf ears and to the wrong audience at that.

When he fell in, he lost all his senses in an instant with the exception of touch. Everything he dreaded came to reality. He got subjected to the most gruesome pain he had ever endured. With extreme touch sensitivity, he felt as if the brew was made of a billion fire ants gnawing at his skin, then magma got poured in the gaps they created. A few seconds later he felt as if every innard, every cell was being subjected to extreme cold that pierced everything. He couldn't see, smell, or hear anything but his skin's senses painted a vivid picture.

There was no doubt in his mind, he would have died in that hole had he not broken through to the peerless jade physique. When he regained his senses, his body was slowly repairing itself as most of the muscles had been eaten away by the brew. He had even lost all the skin in his left arm and was nothing but bone, that was half red and half white. It would have dissolved too had he not broken through.

At the time, Yang Qing wanted to give his clan members a beating especially his grandfather who was the ringleader behind the whole thing, but seeing their fervent eyes at the time he knew it was a lost cause.

Those lunatics would have gladly accepted the beating with zero remorse and he had no doubts that maybe they may have even created some crazy hypothesis from it like giving someone a beating after breaking through solidifies the body's foundations or those receiving a beating from someone with a higher body refining stage would get deep insights from that beating. He couldn't put anything past them since their devotion to the body-refining realm was greater than even their own lives. Just like how they were ruthless to him, they were just as ruthless to themselves. A few members have died in that pursuit. This was just who the Yang family was.

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The Yang family despite being a rank 5 clan or a rankless clan during certain eras, has remained in existence for atleast 1,000 years which was rare for a clan of its power level.

There were a number of factors behind that, some of them being that they had built a few connections here and there to guarantee their survival but they also kept to themselves.

The Yang family's base was at the peak of some mountain that had nothing of importance around it for kilometers. Other than a few spiritual herbs here and there in which there was none that had reached the sky rank, there was nothing of value in their home base or the immediate surroundings.

This barrenness became a barrier of protection for them and they also had a reputation for being lunatics more specifically body refining lunatics. This reputation ensured there were few groups or people that wanted anything to do with them and the source of this reputation originated from their founder, Yang Wu.

Their founder was someone who wasn't blessed with much talent for sensing qi thus even stepping into the qi refinement realm proved to be a daunting task.

For some reason unbeknownst to future generations, that founder was unresigned to his fate of never cultivating thus he devised to find an alternate route to his predicament. If his body was the reason he

couldn't sense qi properly maybe he could fix it using body refining techniques. Thus his journey in body foundation began.

Chapter 230 [Bonus]Yang Family (2)

With a direction and a goal in mind, the founder poured himself wholly into refining his body. He used every available resource he had in that venture. Yang Qing never thought of it at the time when he was a baby listening to the stories of their founder from his parents, but later when he was recalling the stories of the person he blamed for his misery, he couldn't help but suspect their founder may have been part of a family or organization with significant wealth.

While the body refining stage could be considered the lowest realm of cultivation, it was by no means a cheap endeavor, especially if you wanted to break through different stages. You needed enormous volumes of herbs and special natural treasures working in tandem to refine the body, which also meant you needed to either be good in alchemy and herbology or have the services of a good alchemist. In addition, you also needed a good diet as fuel for the body to support its growth. If one were to do the numbers, you'd find you would spend more improving in the body refining stage than you did in the foundation establishment realm despite both realms being two major levels apart.

Yang Qing had no idea how someone with no backing and no cultivation base was able to experiment with the body refining stage as their founder did.

Years went by as he poured resources and time into improving his body. He may have not had talent in sensing qi but when it came to being determined and ruthless to himself, he had it in spades. He had passable skills in alchemy and the willingness to experiment on anything of which Yang Qing never knew why he was so insistent, especially considering what happened next.

The founder damaged and healed his body over the years and did make some progress in the early phases of body refining stages. He had evolved from someone who didn't know much, to someone who had created countless methods to achieve an iron body, bronze body, and silver body. However, despite the progress he made, time run out for him since the body refining stages never added any life expectancy of a person except for the diamond body or the peerless jade body. With time running out he started a family and poured his obsession into his children. To his dying breath, he made them share the same fanaticism he had with the body refining stage and slowly it became a thing.

Every generation of the Yang family would pour all they had into discovering the mysteries of the body refining stage. It was to the point that some had even foregone cultivating to the qi refinement realm despite having a talent for cultivation. They instead poured all their resources and time into the body refining realm and then they would spread that same ideology to the next generation even embellishing some details.

It spiraled to the point that the Yang family created their own ethos. They believed that body refining held countless mysteries which if continuously discovered could help a cultivator directly jump levels and there was no limit to how many levels one could skip. The only limit was the person's understanding of their own body. They even said that the current cultivation trend was living proof that the body was the door and qi was just one of the world's many keys to unlocking it.

Where is the dantian produced? the body

What senses and absorbs qi? The body

Where do pillars and cores come from? The body.

Could a cultivator form these things if they didn't have a body?

To them, if they explored the body enough, they surmised one could even jump to the palace realm in a single leap with the firmest of foundations and they could even have a higher lifespan than what a normal palace realm cultivator would have.

With such thoughts in mind, the Yang family members would rarely actively move past the body-refining stage. The only times they did breakthrough to higher cultivation realms was to further their research into the body refining stage to see if improvements could be made if one was in the qi refinement or foundation establishment realm. They made a few hypotheses that there could be certain conditions that were required to unlock even more levels of the body refining stage.

Their dedication wasn't without its fruits. Their skills in alchemy in relation to the human body were exhaustive, which was why when they decided to join Yang Qing after he passed his examinations at the Order, the Medical Valley recruited them, along with other divisions like the alchemy division and also the Institute.

In the 1,000 years since the family was started, while they have never had anyone with the peerless jade physique except Yang Qing, they have had two or three members with the Diamond body physique and over a dozen gold body physique and countless silver body physique.

Their insights, especially in the first three stages i.e. iron body, bronze body, and silver body could be considered to be the most extensive that even the Order incorporated their insights as part of the curriculum at the institute. The Yang family was all too glad to share its findings with the Order at almost zero cost in exchange for having a slew of students which Yang Qing called unwitting subjects in their body refinement endeavors.

The Order was the perfect haven for them, endless supply of resources and countless people with enormous talent to test their findings on. Yang Qing could remember how his grandfather and his cohorts had eyes reddened with excitement at how much their research would grow at the Order. In all his life, he has never seen his grandfather and the other elders cry, but on that day a bunch of old men with sturdy odd looking bodies wept as they hugged each other outside the gates of the Order after which they proceeded to enthusiastically greet the young kids with no cultivation who passed them by.

...

"Judge Yang Qing? Judge Yang Qing? We are already at the Star blooming mist valley."

Yang Qing who had been in a daze all this while was pulled back to his senses by Song Guozhi's call.

They had arrived at the venue for his ceremony tomorrow, the Star blooming mist valley, a place that exhibited the true grandeur of the Order. It was nothing short of a dreamscape.