

Daily life 761

Chapter 761 What Are Your Thoughts

After what he had read these past two days, some part of him wished he didn't. It wasn't that the things he read were graphic but the little they did reveal left a lot of room for guided imagination, and what it revealed was enough for Yang Qing to be thankful he was born in this era and not then.

The physiques were terrifying, the cultivation arts were terrifying, the artifacts were terrifying, the natural treasures were terrifying, the spirit beasts were terrifying, the spiritual plants were terrifying, and the sects, clans, and other organizations were terrifying.

He already expected that anything associated with an attribute that can submerge someone into an ocean filled with the tormented wails of the dead that continually corrupts and breaks the spirit of the one trapped in there was not going to be anything pretty, but he had underestimated how bad it could get.

The information he had managed to read through in those two days was but a tiny portion of what was stored in the library, but even that tiny portion had left him apprehensive. He still hadn't narrowed down anything that could tie to the mysterious figure from the range, but out of the session a newfound fear grew in him as he wondered what if all the things he read about the physiques, the cultivation arts, artifacts, and sects, clans and the like, what if they had inheritors who survived to the present.

The majority of everything he read entailed things he knew next to nothing about, so it stood to reason that whoever or whatever they were about did not survive to the current era, however, some part of him couldn't help but worry what if they survived, if they did, they could plunge the world into a horrifying darkness that made him shudder at the mere thought of it.

For example, when it came to physiques, though they were all equally horrifying there was one that stood out to him which belonged to an elder called Zhang Fei. He had been an elder of a reputable sect called the Azure Sword Sky Sect.

Yang Qing knew nothing about the sect, from which era it was, or how powerful it was. What he did know was constrained to the elder's physique. Zhang Fei had a physique called the eldritch woe nexus physique and if what was written on the jade slip was to be believed, with just his physique alone, he destroyed an entire clan by himself. Said clan was said to have the bloodline of a phoenix coursing through them. The clan was also known to have breathtaking beauties owing to their phoenix bloodline and Zhang Fei had grown infatuated with one of them, however, he was rejected by her, which he accepted.

But he spiraled into anger when the lady who had rejected him ended up marrying whom he judged to be inferior to him and in that fury, he revealed his physique which the report suggested he had hidden even against his sect. He slaughtered that lady and her dao companion in the most gruesome manner which drew ire and retaliation from that clan. His sect rather than go to war with them, opted to compromise with the clan and sacrifice Zhang Fei. But things didn't end as either expected. He slaughtered his entire sect first before he finished with the clan with the Phoenix bloodline.

In both places, one could see unspeakable horrors that made it seem like the abyss had descended in the area. The souls of his sect and that clan were twisted into playthings of the Eldritch horrors that had invaded the area, with their tormented screams echoing all around. Those regions turned into forbidden regions as those wails were capable of breaking the souls of domain experts.

The jade slip didn't mention what happened to Zhang Wei after, Yang Qing could only assume he met his end at the hands of some formidable expert, or he was ganged on and destroyed, or the phoenix associated with that clan he massacred delivered its retribution on him. His end was uncertain, but his strength wasn't.

Even if there was little information provided about the Azure Sword Sky Sword Sect or the clan with the phoenix bloodline, by virtue of having a phoenix bloodline, Yang Qing felt that clan must have been pretty powerful. Fang Wen had a smidge of taotie bloodline and it gave her terrifying abilities, then it stood to reason that the clan with the phoenix bloodline at the very least had people that were as capable as Fang Wen, and if there were, the fact that Zhang Wei singlehandedly destroyed and tormented them, spoke of his terrifying abilities.

Worse was, in those two days, he had read of terrifying figures and objects that were just as terrifying as Zhang Wei if not more, like the dark eclipse soul blade, a blade created by the surviving members of a blacksmithing clan for vengeance.

When the blade was completed, it swallowed their life force and any living being within a 1,000-kilometer radius of it. It corrupted and consumed every cultivator who has ever owned it, though it was more apt to say, the blade was the one who wielded the cultivators instead of the other way round as it used them as furnaces to strengthen itself before finally it found its way into the hands of an infamous soul formation expert known for his bloodthirsty nature.

The blade and the soul formation expert tried to consume each other, and a monstrous hybrid of the two was created. The duo slaughtered their way through the planet for almost a thousand years before

they were finally destroyed. During that period the number they had slaughtered had reached millions, with a couple of those victims being soul formation experts.

Then there was the shadow soul forge dahlia, a flower that would cause all who gaze on it to have their souls forcibly removed from their bodies and absorbed by the flowers and subjected to unspeakable torment when absorbed as the dahlia strengthened itself using the negative energy produced. The dahlia ended up being an infamous villain called the Dark Empress who had consumed countless soul formation experts, and sacred beasts in her wake.

In those two days, he got a clear look at how truly harrowing the world he lived in was, who knew how many dahlias, cursed blades, destructive physiques, and shadowy organizations were lurking in the dark?

He couldn't help but be reminded of Gu Xing's words of a dark undercurrent brewing. He wondered if it was because of what was in Deer Mountain Range, or it touched on the southern continent as a whole. Feeling stifled by the thought, Yang Qing left the library, heading to the Thousand Flavors restaurant hoping it would lift his spirit, completely unaware that two figures, one old, one very young, had been secretly monitoring him ever since he stepped onto the gold floor.

"What do you think?"

"I think he handled it well.."

"I still feel it was too soon.."

"It can't be helped with the way things are moving, besides, it was his fate to tread upon those waters this early. At the end of the day, it would still have happened, whether today or when he unlocked his sanctum.."

"I know, I just feel guilty leaving of them having to carry something that was ours in the first place.."

"Me too, but it can't be helped, the continent needs it.."

"I know.. See you, En Sang.."

"Take care, Lai Ning.."

Chapter 762 Listening To An Old Friend

On his way to the Thousand Flavors Restaurant, Yang Qing's mind unlike the usual where he would be wholesomely absorbed in what he would be eating, was focused on something else entirely, which was out of the norm for him. Even after leaving the library, he couldn't escape the contents he had consumed while he was there. Every thought he had was held captive by the strings of information and revelation he got from there.

He was not any closer to the thread that shined a light on the mastermind of the sacred graveyard scheme, and in fact he felt he had more questions than answers, and in certain aspects, he felt less sure of himself than he was at the beginning, owing to the information he was exposed to.

He still didn't have definite motives of that mastermind and what they were truly after, though he still believed a massacre was a key goal for them, but to what end, he had no idea. He still wasn't sure if the ghosts of the White Mulberry Kingdom were hunting the present or if he was reading too much into it.

But despite how many unanswered questions he had, at least, he did confirm a few things here and there, which though inconsequential at the moment, were still important as they parted the fog on some things albeit slightly. One of those things was confirming the entirety of the Deer Mountain Range had indeed been part of a prosperous Empire known to have soul formation experts and said Empire rivaled even the likes of the present-day Jade Leaf Empire.

Knowing the Deer Mountain Range was formerly the Bi Xie Empire may not help much at the moment but in terms of guiding motives for the mastermind, Yang Qing felt he at least had different avenues to work on as to their goals. Knowing the place was the territory of a rank 1 Empire famed for its prosperity in its heyday gave him a lot of thread to follow.

"Blessings in misfortune.." muttered Yang Qing with a complicated look flashing in his eyes as he felt some guilt for the thought he had.

As a result of the attack Hao Da and the rest suffered at the hands of the obsidian serpents and the deacons of the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate, the Order was prompted to do an expansive survey of the entire range as a result of it, and with it, they discovered so many things. It was no longer a half-

filled canvas. They knew every nook and cranny of it, probably even better than the Deer Mountain Kingdom itself, and with the array being laid out, they would know even more, as laying out arrays, especially one that large needed as many details as possible for it to function smoothly.

If the mastermind's plan had something to do with what was in that range, sooner or later they would be able to find what it was, and with some luck maybe even catch them in the act. Yang Qing could only hope.

The matter concerning the mastermind aside, the Yang Qing that went into the library and the one that came out were different. Wisdom and knowledge change what you see, and what he read inevitably changed what he saw around him. He felt a heaviness within him which was also translated to around him.

Beneath the calmness he saw around, he could sense a storm within it, hiding countless eras' worth of secrets, but every time he tried to peer through it, he was denied entry, along with a calamitous aura that threatened to drown him. With every step he took, his heart would beat faster like a guillotine was hanging above him, and his steps felt heavier.

Sensing the changes happening within him, Yang Qing couldn't help but smile bitterly. He knew exactly what he was feeling, and it was a feeling he had grown intimately familiar with during his childhood. A constant companion that held his hand in his darkest moments and spurred him on to keep trying, to keep digging in and improving, in the hopes that at the end of the line lay a better life. Even after he grew up, the companion never left him, though its presence reduced a little its effect on Yang Qing still persisted, a kind sage continually whispering clarity into a young junior so he doesn't stray. His achievements to date were in part thanks to its consistent efforts.

"Thank you, old friend.." Yang Qing whispered as he brought his left palm over his racing heart, the voice through which his old friend, fear, spoke.

From the moment he stepped out of the library, his old friend, whose voice had gotten fainter over the years, was now speaking louder and clearer than before, and Yang Qing would do as he always did whenever it spoke, which was listen obediently and act.

Long-lost powerful organizations like the Bi Xie Empire and the Sky Rendering Sword Sect whose ends were unknown, terrifying organizations like the 12 Beasts of calamity, physiques that could summon eldritch horrors, dahlias that consumed soul formation experts like appetizers.. He did not know how many specters of the past still affected the present, and what he had learned about them, more than

unnerved him, it downright petrified him. But he lived in this world now, and just like how he survived his crazy clan, he would do his damnest to survive this crazy world too.

If those ghosts came, he had to ensure he terrified them as much they terrified him, he was vindictive that way, and if he couldn't, he would at the very least ensure he was strong enough to take a swing and outrun them till he was strong enough to bury them.

"Luckily I am in the best hiding place.." thought Yang Qing, before his smile slowly turned worried.

Before today, he thought it was indomitable, but who knows how many calamities it could shelter him from. For a long time, he felt the urgency of wanting to improve his abilities, but no matter how urgent it was, he still had to live, life was for the living, pursuing strength just for the sake of pursuing strength was hardly a life.

Still haunted, he made his way to the Thousand Flavors Restaurant, even if the earth collapsed, and the skies fell, he wasn't about to miss a meal.

Chapter 763 Knowing One's Enemy

It was a little after sunset and the Thousand Flavors Restaurant was bustling with activity as always. By the time Yang Qing arrived, almost all the tables were taken, his favorite spot notwithstanding. There were a few young outer core court judges who had already made themselves comfortable at the table as they enthusiastically exchanged laughs and conversation over an array of flavorful dishes and wine.

"Maybe I should just have it to go. Dai, Qingge, and Huifeng are not here too.." Yang Qing thought to himself as he surveyed the floor for any familiar figures.

The Thousands Flavor Restaurant had four floors, but Yang Qing, Dai Chen, and their group of judges had made it a habit to eat on the ground floor since their days as students, which was mostly at Yang Qing's insistence as he liked to see the kitchen and be drowned in the tantalizing aromas of the dishes, and when they struck a deep friendship with Jiang Fu, it made sense for them to continue sitting in the ground floor which was adjacent to the kitchen to make it easier to have conversations with him during his breaks.

It, therefore, became a habit for them to always eat on the ground floor, and if there wasn't space, they'd take the dishes and eat in their abodes, or visit each other's abodes and have the meals there. Yang Qing on not seeing them made his way to the counter to make his order and leave for his abode.

Some part of him was even glad that the seats were all full and Dai Chen and the rest were missing as it gave him an excuse to head straight for his abode. He was antsy about going back to his abode. He had spent almost an entire month without stepping a foot in there which was the longest he had ever spent away from his abode if he didn't count the time he was at the tribulation mountain.

There was a longing within him to head back like that of a bird returning to its nest, and some part of him was afraid the celestial nesting weaver would get rebellious ideas with his longstanding absence.

The last time he was away for his breakthrough to the palace realm when he came back, he had found the celestial nesting weaver had messed with the protective arrays and locked him out of his abode, and when he finally got in, he found signs of his treasure vault being tampered with and a few treasures missing which the greedy celestial nesting claimed to have no clue who took them, laying the blame on Ellie. While Ellie was a thieving bird herself, she never had any interest in things outside of food, she cared little for natural treasures if they were not in food form, the only one who did was the celestial nesting weaver that had the appetite that would put even the greediest dragon to shame.

Luckily for Yang Qing, he had known the celestial nesting weaver ever since it was a chick, and even as a freshly hatched chick, the first thing it did was try to rob him of his spiritual ring and it has continued that habit growing it in sophistication. Yang Qing did try to beat it up back then to straighten it up but even as a young chick, its puffy feathers were sturdy even against the attacks of a core formation expert, and then its talents as a mythical creature came to bear, and in two years it reached the palace realm, and after growing around Yang Qing there was one thing it learned from him, how to be vindictive, and repaying it with interest.

Yang Qing suffered a few righteous beatings for some time before he compromised with the bird and he only stopped when he could hold his own and force a bitter draw with the bird. Realizing its unhinged greedy nature, he created dummy treasure vaults all around his courtyard, losing countless spirit stones and merit stones in the process all to hide his true vault. He wasn't sure how long it would be before it finally sniffed out his true vault and took him for all his worth, and knowing it, it would definitely gloat after, even at the risk of a beating.

He could not afford to leave it alone unsupervised for long periods of time, Yang Qing had already noticed signs of tampering in some of his vaults, and knowing how devious the bird was, maybe it had left those signs intentionally to lull him into a false sense of security that it had not found the true vault. If Yang Qing were in its shoes, that was what he would have done, and if he thought about it, he was sure that the thieving bird thought about it too.

Who knew how much inroads it had made during the period he was at the Deer Mountain Range?

With a sense of urgency, Yang Qing quickly asked what was readily available, and ordered a few dishes of what was available, hastily making the payments immediately after. With all the dishes stored instantly stored in his storage ring, Yang Qing exited the restaurant only to stumble upon two familiar figures once he was outside the restaurant.

"Dai, Qingge.." Yang Qing excitedly said when he saw them.

"Qing.. Where have you been? We heard you were back and had gone to see you at your abode, but Ma Yuan told us you hadn't been there in a few days...Where were you? How was the range?" asked Dai Chen with a cheery smile.

"Nice to see you're okay, Qing.." Zhang Qingge softly said her voice almost disappearing in the end when she noticed a few cultivators staring at her which triggered her shy reflexes.

"How about we take this to my abode?" Yang Qing suggested when he saw Zhang Qingge slowly clench her fist with a mixed look of slightly flustered and slightly enraged with the source of her change being three cultivators who looked to have come from the same sect, staring lasciviously at her. They thought they had hidden it well, but Zhang Qingge was highly sensitive to those looks even when done a few hundred meters away she would still be able to pinpoint it, and if it continued... well she was not called the berserker for nothing or the damages princess.

To save Zhang Qingge from having to pay more fines for having pummelled a few cultivators half to death, deservedly so, Yang Qing and Dai Chen nodded to each other as they hurriedly grabbed Zhang Qingge by her arms and sped from the location.

Chapter 764 Ma Yuan's Pillars

"I can't believe this is still the same place.." said Zhang Qingge as she looked around her.

"Will you put me down now.." she added in a slightly embarrassed tone.

"Sorry.." simultaneously answered Dai Chen and Yang Qing with awkward smiles as they put Zhang Qingge gently down.

"I wonder if Ma Yuan can do the same thing in my place.." Zhang Qingge said with an envious sigh as she saw the lushness and beauty of the landscape in Yang Qing's compound.

When she and Dai Chen visited a few days ago, they were just as surprised as Yang Qing was when he first laid his eyes on the work Ma Yuan had done to the place, and one could argue it was even more so for Dai Chen and Zhang Qingge who unlike Yang Qing did not have prior knowledge that Ma Yuan would be working on the compound.

"I could ask him for you. I am sure he would not mind and would be excited at the prospect even.." said Yang Qing.

"Really?!" Zhang Qingge said with an excited expression before she quickly deflated a moment later.

"But I don't have the funds.." she added in a low tone as she lowered her head in shame.

Yang Qing and Dai Chen couldn't help but exchange glances as they struggled to hold back their laughs.

Yang Qing looked at Dai Chen with a gaze that seemed to be asking,

"Was she fined again?"

While Dai Chen with an equally responsive gaze answered back,

"A couple of times.."

Yang Qing smiling said,

"You don't have to worry about the funds Qingge, besides I don't think Ma Yuan would agree to be paid for his work. I tried to, but he outrightly refused. Just provide him with the general idea of how you'd like your place to look like, a couple of seedlings and resources for your garden, and leave the rest to him..."

Yang Qing paused as he turned his gaze toward Ma Yuan who was not alone. His daughter Ma Ling was with him which left him too preoccupied to even notice their presence. He was excitedly walking Ma Ling around the garden showing her the different kinds of flowers, colorful spiritual plants, and the dazzling insects that were buzzing around.

Although he was slightly nervous as he showed her around, Yang Qing could tell he was more at ease with her here than he was at the Coalescing tranquility rivers of healing pavilion. He seemed freer here than there, and that atmosphere seemed to have affected Ma Ling who seemed slightly less distant than she was whenever he visited her.

Even though she wasn't speaking a lot whenever Ma Yuan was introducing the different plants, their effects, and how to properly nurture them while encouraging her to ask questions if she had any, even with her words being less, she was engaging with him much more freely, and it was evident to anyone who could see that learning about the plants seemed to excite her, in the same manner, Ma Yuan was excitedly talking about them.

Even with her memory loss, it couldn't be denied they were father and daughter. Ma Yuan a couple of times had to restrain his hands from reaching over to Ma Ling and cuddling her as he did when she was small. It was hard, but when he saw her unconcealed smile and interest as she looked at the plants with the same enthusiasm that she did whenever they were on the farm together as a child, his hands relaxed as he smiled dotingly with gratitude in his eyes for what he had now.

"For him, he has two pillars that keep him going to try and live, his daughter, and being a spiritual herb farmer, with the latter being the one constant that survived the seven-year hell he has been through. Asking him to work at your place is the best payment you can give him.." Yang Qing gently said.

"Mmh.." Zhang Qingge nodded as her sympathetic gaze fell on the two.

"She seems to be improving.." added Dai Chen.

"It's only to be expected since Tang Wen is the one handling her treatment.." answered Yang Qing as he made his way to where Ma Yuan and Ma Ling were.

Ma Yuan on sensing Yang Qing's presence, hurriedly turned around as he excitedly,

"Ma... i mean Yang Qing!!" Ma Yuan stopped himself from calling Master Yang Qing, with Yang Qing insisting on being called just Yang Qing.

"Ma Yuan, Ma Ling, how are you both? Seems you have made more improvements.." Yang Qing said with a smile as his gaze fell on the twilight sky locust sapling that Ma Yuan had been working tirelessly to prepare for planting. It was still a sapling reaching his calves, but with his sensitivity to the aura of life, Yang Qing could feel the vibrant life force growing within it, and the sensory messages it released revealing how content and satisfied it was.

Even those without the same attunement as Yang Qing toward nature could tell the twilight sky locust tree was as healthy as it could be with the dark blue leaves that twinkled with golden dots that made the leaves seem like it was the colorful sky above during night time colored with stars. Yang Qing could even feel one of its inherent qualities bubbling forth, which was promoting relaxation of the mind to those close to it, though because of its growth stage, it was restricted to within spitting distance of it. Even so, the fact that it exhibited such a quality in the early stages of its development was a testament to Ma Yuan's skills and tireless efforts toward nurturing it.

Ma Yuan smiled bashfully as he scratched the back of his head as he replied,

"It's only because of the nature of this place. In all my life I have never seen an area whose every component is this perfectly suited to the multitudinous growth of spiritual plants even including those with contrasting attributes to one another.

This place seems to universally support them all and even removes the need for using special solutions and materials to promote their growth. I doubt I'd be able to replicate what I've done here in another place with the same ease...."

"Don't sell yourself short Ma Yuan. It still takes considerable effort and vision to bring out the results you have brought forth in this place. Isn't that right, Ma Ling.." Yang Qing said with a smile trying to show Ma Yuan up.

Ma Yuan's demeanor instantly turned anxious and anticipatory as his gaze fell on his daughter who was slightly startled by Yang Qing's sudden question.

After a slight hesitation, while lowering her head, she answered,

"Mmh, it's beautiful.."

Chapter 765 Change In Sight

Ma Yuan couldn't hide the joy on his face when he heard Ma Ling's response as he grinned ear to ear, with the rims of his eyes reddening with emotion.

Yang Qing went ahead and introduced Ma Yuan and Ma Ling to Dai Chen and Zhang Qingge.

"Ma Yuan, if you have the time, would you mind helping my friend Qingge with her place? You can even bring Ma Ling there to help you with it if you want. It's not a problem, is it, Qingge?"

"Mmh, it's not.." answered Zhang Qingge mumbling her words in a low tone when she became the center of attention.

"So pretty.." Ma Ling absentmindedly muttered before she heard herself talk and couldn't help but yelp when she realized she had spoken her thoughts out loud.

"S.s.sorry.." she meekly said as she cast a furtive glance at Zhang Qingge. She couldn't help but heave a sigh of relief when she saw her smiling.

As shy as Zhang Qingge was toward receiving attention, she only reacted excessively to attention that was directed with impure motives, however, when the reaction was similar to the one Ma Ling had, she warmed up to it and even grew slightly confident when the person was more flustered than she was. It usually gave her an odd sense of comfort, and little by little she gets used to them.

"Treat her like you would your daughter, Ma Yuan. Don't be as stiff. Even if she is a palace realm expert, you are her senior several times over, me too, and she becomes uncomfortable when people older than her treat her like a senior.."

Yang Qing used the little interlude to telepathically transmit his thoughts to Ma Yuan on how he should act around Zhang Qingge in case he accepted the job.

Ma Yuan covertly nodded understandingly to him as he turned to face Zhang Qingge.

"If you don't find it beneath you, I would be happy to work on your abode, just like I did here. Though I am not sure I can replicate it, but I will try my best.."

"No, no, it is I who should be thanking you, after all..." Zhang Qingge's voice went lower as she mumbled .. after all, I won't be able to pay you.

Ma Yuan couldn't help but smile slightly as he watched her reaction which reminded him of the face Ma Ling made whenever she wanted to join him on his expeditions to dangerous areas when he was looking for specific herbs and resources for his garden. She always wore a similar look to the one Zhang Qingge was wearing at the moment, which was a mixture of guilt and hope.

Something seemed to have shifted within as his gaze turned warmer when he looked at Yang Qing, Zhang Qingge, Dai Chen, and then Ma Ling. Their high cultivation bases had led him to overlook their ages. He had already lived close to 400 years, even if the three added their ages together, it would not reach a quarter of the years he had spent walking the planet.

In a certain aspect, they were no different than his daughter. Once his thoughts reached there, he could feel the pressure he had imposed on himself because of their cultivation wither away, replaced by a warm feeling of endearment that a grandfather would feel whenever they would see their grandkids growing.

The fact that three were palace realm cultivators wasn't lost on him and he still held reverence for what they had achieved, seeing them for who they were made him less reserved and stiff around them.

Yang Qing smiled as he noticed the change in him, Dai Chen nodded with a smile, while Zhang Qingge slowly maintained her eye contact with him, her shyness slowly receding. With her nervousness reduced she was able to plan the schedule with Ma Yuan, with Dai Chen deciding to request his services too, but unlike Yang Qing and Zhang Qingge, his was not a complete transformation of his abode, he just needed help with growing a few fruits, which came not as a surprise to Yang Qing or Zhang Qingge that the fruit trees he requested were known for their wine brewing qualities.

After they were done, Yang Qing took out a few dishes from his storage ring which he left with Ma Yuan to share with his daughter. He would have liked for all of them to share the meal together, but Ma Yuan needed the time with his daughter which was easier done when there was less of a crowd. Nodding

appreciatively toward Yang Qing, Ma Yuan continued the grand tour with Ma Ling, while Yang Qing and the rest headed to the back of his courtyard.

"So where have you been?" asked Dai Chen as he arranged a few of the futons moving them closer to a fire pit, where he briskly started a fire with a snap of his finger.

Yang Qing removed the dishes he had ordered from the restaurant, along with a wine jar that he was hesitant about producing, warily glancing at Dai Chen, before finally shrugging his shoulders, as if to say, "Whatever happens happens.."

Dai Chen couldn't help but raise his eyebrows as he looked curiously at the wine jar, alternating a questioning gaze between the jar and Yang Qing on noticing his strange reaction. Zhang Qingge had already started nibbling on some of the dishes with a gleeful expression.

Yang Qing pulled a futon next to the fire Dai Chen had started, he picked up a branch that was lying next to him and poked the fire creating sparks that floated above the colorful azure flame.

"I was at the library..." Yang Qing said with a heavy tone, which prompted his two companions to look at him with incredulous gazes as his reaction was completely opposite to how he usually was like whenever he left the library.

"I was on the low-tier gold floor.." Yang Qing added after a pause.

"Dai, Qingge, have you ever felt that the world is hiding something from you? Some massive secret that only a select few no, while the rest live either oblivious of its existence, or just go off the nagging feeling that something is not right here..'

Chapter 766 Discussion By The Flames

Yang Qing poked at the flames once more but instead of sparks being produced from it, a part of the flame split off and transformed into a blue veil that covered the flames.

"I wonder how long it would have taken me to realize there was a veil there. If the review committee had not allowed me access to the gold floor, would have I remained oblivious?" muttered Yang Qing as he threw the stick he was prodding with, into the flame. The blue veil that had been covering the flames, receded like a curtain as the stick was burning away.

"What happened?" asked Dai Chen.

"A lot... Where do I begin? What happened to Hao Da and the rest is as good as any.." said Yang Qing with a sigh.

He went on to describe the events that happened as he was investigating the case, from his conversation with the obsidian couple and the resulting revelation that their daughter had refined the treasure bone belonging to a flood dragon given to her by the fire adler bear, the foundation circle created thereafter by a former occupant of the range, an eclipsed spirit weaving fox named Jiang Xiang who was purported to be a worker for the White Rose Pavilion which he still needed to confirm his existence with the Shadow Hawks.

From there he moved on to the case that led him to the sacred graveyard torch where he met Gu Xing and the discoveries he made there, along with his doubts about the mastermind being someone from the Deer Mountain Kingdom. He went on to the things he discovered in his three-day period at the library such as the history of the Deer Mountain Range and its history dating back to the Bi Xie Empire and before that, the White Mulberry and its feud with the Purgatory black tiger cult, while touching heavily on their rumored background as being part of the 12 Beasts of calamity, before finishing it off with the terrifying stories he discovered as he was searching for accounts of similarity to the characteristics shown by the figure who had sent both the sacred flame swan, and the lunar fury heron on edge, and now Yang Qing.

"That's quite the mess you stumbled onto, Qing.." Dai Chen said with a sigh.

"I know..."

"If the perpetrator is in the kingdom, with someone from the spirit council there, and a few domain experts, it should have effectively put a stop to whatever they were planning. With their presence, the culprit is unlikely to try anything for the time being.

It's one thing for them to pull schemes with just members of the branch there, and it's another to try it with the lineup presently there.

Considering how well they have been hiding, I highly doubt they would try anything but then again, they were trying to trigger a spirit beast tide immediately after the attack on Hao Da and the rest, maybe they're desperate?" said Dai Chen.

Zhang Qingge who had been silent suddenly spoke,

"But what would they want with the kingdom? If it is lives they are after, isn't it easier to just cause a massacre somewhere that doesn't have our branch? With how tumultuous things are, it's easier to try it someplace else, not unless there is a reason it just has to be the range.."

"That is what I was thinking, maybe it has less even to do with the White Mulberry Kingdom and more to do with the Bi Xie Empire or those two statues.." said Yang Qing as his eyes reflected the wavy flames.

"You didn't detect anything off about them?" asked Dai Chen.

"No, they seemed like your normal statues, about the only thing unique about them was their durability, other than that, there was nothing that stood out. Even if they were beyond my abilities to sense anything, surely senior Ye Xun of the gold guards would have detected something about them, but she did not.. and.." Yang Qing paused as he took out two papers and rapidly drew two different maps on them.

"This map here is for the Bi Xie Empire and this one is for the Deer Mountain Range.." Yang Qing said as he used both his hands to point toward the maps.

His left hand was pointed at the Bi Xie Empire map, while the one on the right was pointed at the map of the Deer Mountain Range.

"Without even looking closely you can notice the resemblance between the two maps, but the Deer Mountain Range looks like a fragmented part of the Bi Xie. Landscapes change over time.. considering how long ago the Bi Xie empire existed, a transformation to its original makeup is expected, but not this way, this level of fragmentation looks like it was struck by a disaster that forcibly altered it.." Yang Qing said as he pointed to parts of the map of the Deer Mountain Range.

"The range seems to have been at the core parts of the Empire, it should not have changed this drastically. The borders, yes, but the center, no... They must have met with an unspeakable disaster for it to end up this way... whatever it was, it was powerful to turn an empire that was on par with the Jade Leaf Empire into this..and as for the statues, I think they bore the brunt of it, which is why the range is relatively intact in comparison to the other parts that were part of the empire.

But protecting against whatever befell them must have come at a price which is why neither I nor senior Ye Xun couldn't detect anything coming from them. Right now they should be nothing more than empty shells...

If it wasn't for me going there, I would have never known that such an illustrious empire existed, but now even knowing about it, I'm still as clueless about it as I was before.."

"So that's what you meant.." Dai Chen said with a sigh.

"You're not alone, over the years I felt the same thing.. our history seems intentionally fragmented. I've found a few ruin pieces here and there, evidence of certain organizations, but whenever I tried to dig up more about them, it's like they never existed.

Though it's not all of them, for the weaker ones I found the information relatively easy, but for the strong ones, I could not find anything no matter how much I tried..."

Chapter 767 Network And Rehabilitation (1)

"It is the same with me.." said Zhang Qingge.

"Some of the cultivation arts I practice like the seismic quaker fist...I know it is not something the Order created based on the spiritual imprint contained within it. The fist art was created by a sect called the Hidden Waves Sect, but other than its name I know next to nothing about it, and when I tried to dig for information about it, I found nothing, i even went to the extent of asking the Instructors, but none of them had anything to say about it and just told me to focus on mastering the art, not its history.

Based on their attitude, they seemed to know something.." she added.

"Dai, have you ever gotten any memories of the past from your Hou bloodline?" asked Yang Qing.

For spirit beasts when they reach the domain realm, they can ingrain their insights and accumulations in their bloodline which can be passed down to their offspring. One could consider this one of the ways they pass down their inheritance and legacies.

The more powerful spirit beast can even pass down memories of their timeline going back hundreds of thousands of years, which its progeny as long as they have high enough talent and a high concentration of its bloodline, can access. Yang Qing thought if normal spirit beasts could achieve that, then it should be a simple matter for mythical creatures.

Dai Chen had the Hou bloodline. The Hou could be considered a dragon of some sort, a dragon that was touted to control the mandate of the heavens. He hoped that maybe Dai Chen had gained access to some memories of a bygone era from his Hou bloodline.

Dai Chen smiling wryly, answered,

"You know very well how thin my bloodline is, even thin is an overstatement. The Hou abilities I'm able to draw out, it's only because of the four cardinal star gates cultivation art that was fashioned after its abilities. Without it, I doubt I'd be able to use the Hou bloodline techniques, and even then it's not the real thing.

I don't think my abilities are inferior to the real thing but ultimately the results I have is because of my comprehension rather than the bloodline itself. With how thin it is, I'm no different than not having it.

I'm sorry Qing, my Hou bloodline would not be able to help us here.."

"I know.." Yang Qing said with a sigh as he had expected as much and was just grasping at straws for the unlikely chance.

"Well, it's not like we will remain in the dark forever, the traces of the past are still embedded on this continent, we just have to stumble on them bit by bit and piece them together and if that proves difficult, we can always ask the Order for answers, we just have to reach the peak stage of the palace realm first.

I can wait till then.." Zhang Qingge said as she took a bite out of a steamy hot dumpling.

"Besides, we still have troubles of the present era to contend with, like the owner of that red abyssal thorn tree.." she added with slightly clenched fists.

At the mention of the tree, Yang Qing's and Dai Chen's looks turned grim. If it wasn't for the power Green Cocoon left in Yang Qing, they would have all died that day the moment the red thorn tree appeared. That was as close to death as Yang Qing had ever gotten.

Deciding to lighten the mood, Yang Qing unpacked several of the dishes and uncorked the jar of wine as he poured both he, Zhang Qingge, and Dai Chen a cup.

"By the way, has Huifeng headed to the mountain?" asked Yang Qing as he was pouring.

"She went about a week ago.."

It was Zhang Qingge who answered. Dai Chen's mind looked completely gone the moment Yang Qing started pouring the wine. He had a fanatical enchanted look on his face that grew with every pour Yang Qing made.

Yang Qing couldn't help but chuckle as he expected such a reaction from the renowned wine fanatic, especially considering the wine he was pouring was the one he had gotten from the mysterious figure, diluted of course, but even then its heavenly quality remained.

Once he was done pouring, Dai Chen solemnly took his cup with both hands, lips quivering, eyes shining, as he gulped over and over with anticipation, his gaze growing wider the closer he brought the wine cup to his face, and when he finally took the sip, it was like a heavenly tribulation had exploded in his mind.

"Yang Qing! Where did you find this?!!" he said with a crazed look of a starving predator that had just spotted a prey.

Ignoring his crazy look, Yang Qing smugly recounted the tale of when he got acquainted with the mysterious figure along with Meifeng. He didn't dare to bring the empyreal jade wine gourd. With the crazy look Dai Chen was giving him, he had no doubt in his mind that Dai Chen would rush him, pry it off

his hands, and escape to parts unknown. In his shoes, Yang Qing would probably do the same, in fact, he had done the same one or seven times.

Hiding the fact that he had another more potent version of the wine they were drinking, Yang Qing promised to give Dai Chen a jar of the diluted version, along with Zhang Qingge who though was not a wine person, could not resist its captivating allure.

The rest of the night was spent with them trading tales of what they had been up to over the past month over wine and drink, with Ma Yuan and Ma Ling joining them after. Once it was close to dawn, Dai Chen and Zhang Qingge left for their abodes, while Ma Yuan took Ma Ling back to the Medical Valley for her treatment with Tang Jue.

Though there was still a line between them, Ma Ling seemed less averse to him than she was before, and Ma Yuan was less impatient than he had been before. By focusing on enjoying the present with her, it had reduced the tenseness and the urgency he had on him to try and make Ma Ling regain her memories of him as fast as she could. Throughout their interaction, not once did he bring up their past, and kept the conversation casual and restricted to things that would not trigger her.

Once he was alone, Yang Qing stretched his back as he went to survey his dummy treasure vaults for traces of tampering by the Celestial Nesting Weaver. Of the twelve vaults, he found two had been tampered with, obvious clues showing, more than likely intentionally left there by the weaver to throw him off. Then he found three more had been sneakily broken through, but it was covered up efficiently with nothing being taken, as for the rest, it showed it had not been broken through, but Yang Qing could not be sure.

With the windfall he had made, he was thinking of improving the protection on all of them, and possibly adding another fake vault and packing it full of the most complex arrays that would draw the celestial nesting weaver's focus. If he offered up a few of the treasures from his ceremony that he still had on hand, he was sure he could get the formation hall to layer seven or eight blue-grade arrays together. That should keep the celestial nesting weaver occupied for a while, and his true vault safe from its greedy talons.

Once he had confirmed everything was okay he made his way to the nest to find a slightly infuriated weaver, no doubt disappointed from not finding the true vault. The infuriating turned into a bickering that turned into a short fight and after the two roommates to their different corners to sleep, each satisfied with annoying each other, and planning several schemes against one another.

With no responsibilities hanging over his head because of his month-long vacation, Yang Qing slept till midday, washing away the month-long fatigue in the process.

Well-rested and in a chipper mood, Yang Qing left for the administration hall to meet with a liaison of the Shadow Hawks. He had some things he needed their assistance with, one of which was the investigation of Jiang Xiang, the eclipsed spirit weave fox who had helped the fire adler in his project of letting the obsidian serpent couple's daughter inherit the treasure bone of the flood dragon.

The agendas of the mysterious figure aside, the daughter of the couple was killed and it was no doubt because of the treasure bone. Someone knew she had it, and the list of suspects was small, with Jiang Xiang being one of them. He needed to find out as much as he could about him and there was no one better for the job than the Shadow Hawks, which was one of the reasons he was looking for them, the other being he wanted to get started on his intelligence network.

Chapter 768 Network And Rehabilitation (2)

Before he went to the Administration Hall to meet with the Shadow Hawks liaison, Yang Qing decided to pass by the abode given to the Wang couple as the guardians of the Zou siblings. The short vacation given to the siblings was already over and had already returned to the Institute to continue their rehabilitation to prepare them for their life there.

Yang Qing found the couple discussing a few things here and there with members of the formation hall and the alchemy department. On seeing Yang Qing they excitedly invited him for a cup of tea. Even if three days had passed by the whole thing seemed so surreal to them. They still couldn't believe that this would be their lives and some part of them even felt a little guilty as they felt they were leeching off the siblings.

The reaction was to be expected as he had the same experience with his family. After he had qualified to join the Institute, some part of him wanted to start over just by himself but a few days in he couldn't stand the solitude.

No matter how crazy his clan was, he still had the best memories with them, and it was even more so with his family. His grandfather as impassioned as he was with body refinement bordering on a crazy fanatic, never exceeded the bounds of what was possible, and no matter how busy he was, he would sit with Yang Qing every night, regaling him with all sorts of tales of which the bulk were centered on the troubles he got into as a youth.

Accompanying the stories would be his famous honey-glazed pork. It was about the only dish he knew how to prepare, but even Yang Qing had to admit to date he had not found anyone who could beat his skills in that dish.

It took him a few days to realize he needed his family with him. It took a lot of effort to convince them to come, as they too, just like the Wang couple felt that they would be leeching off his success and they didn't want to do that. It took Yang Qing vowing to quit the Order and never cultivating for them to agree to come. Once they did, whatever apprehension they had instantly disappeared when the Medical Valley offered to sponsor all their research whilst also sharing some of their research into the body refinement realm.

This was one of the means through which the Order expanded its knowledge trove. It sponsored clans, or families with specialized areas of cultivation. Just like the Yang family that had made its bones through body refinement enough to formulate a complete legacy on the subject, there were others who had managed the same feat and the Order supported them all which was how they created one of the best foundation-laying programs. Regardless of talent, every product of the Institute was guaranteed to have a firm foundation in any subject matter be it their cultivation base or the other schools of cultivation.

To ease their thoughts, Yang Qing decided to share his personal experience with the Wang couple, the doubts, fears, and mental anguish he had when he thought of living alone without his family. For what the siblings had endured, other than each other, the Wang couple was one of the anchors that kept them sane, and even here at the Order, it was more than likely they were more excited with the couple being here than even the abode itself. If the couple were to leave, they would likely never step foot there, and rather opt to stay at the Institute.

After assuaging their guilt, Yang Qing finally left for the Administration hall. Once there, he quickly located the liaison from the Shadow Hawks Division. When he met with the Assistant chief of staff of the Shadow Hawks, among the pieces of information he was provided with, one was how to make contact with them should he ever have a need, and one of the ways was through one of their members stationed in the External Logistics Division.

Yang Qing wasn't given a clear description of who they were or what they looked like, the only thing he was given, was how to notice they were from the Shadow Hawks through a distinct rhythm in their normal movements. If you didn't know what to look for, you would easily miss it even as a palace realm expert, one would hardly notice, but if you did, then the sign was like a shining moon in the night.

Yang Qing managed to find what he was looking for in a middle-aged woman who had a kind motherly face as she courteously handled the disbursement process for the cultivators on her line. She was patient, answering any questions they had, and with some, she was so familiar with them that one would think they were her nieces and nephews. She exchanged laughs and jokes here and there, teasing some, and offering kind elderly advice to others.

She looked no different than regular personnel, but Yang Qing could see a grey thread of starlight drifting from her fingertips which was the sign Yang Qing was told to look for. He didn't know how they did it, but the only way to see the starlight was to follow a set of steps. One of them was to follow the rhythm of her movements in a specific order which would then serve as the key to revealing the starlight, and the other was to circulate the nebular mist grey star art which would help him notice the starlight once he followed the rhythm correctly.

Rather than approach her, Yang Qing decided to wait at the side as he was certain she must have noticed him and knew he was there for her. The nebular mist grey star art was as much a signal checker for Yang Qing as it was for the middle-aged lady. His guess was proven correct when she announced to the cultivators who had lined up that she would be handling the next four before she took a small break, which was met by light-hearted and playful complaints from the cultivators in her line.

Seeing her at work Yang Qing could clearly see why the Shadow Hawks had one of their own stationed at the External Logistics Division. It was the best place to interact with cultivators from all walks of life and different regions around the continent and different stations. The cultivators before him were treasure fruits of information ripe for harvesting, and with the excellent rapport the middle-aged lady had established with them, she could do it so easily in the comfort of her station.

It wasn't too long before she was done with the four cultivators and politely excused herself, which Yang Qing took as a cue to head to a particular room that was hidden in illusory and antiscrying arrays. Though they both seemed to be headed in different directions, a few seconds later they were in the same room.

"Good morning, Senior Mei Cheng, my name is Yang Qing.." Yang Qing politely gestured as he cupped his fists in greeting when they were both in the room.

"Nice to meet you, Yang Qing, and sorry for making you wait.." said the middle-aged lady still wearing the same motherly demeanor which Yang Qing couldn't help but wonder if it was her true nature or part of her cover. He couldn't see through her, then again if he did, then she would not make a competent member of the Shadow Hawks.

"No, No, it is I who should be apologizing for coming without notice.."

"Well, you couldn't well have prepared without knowing who I was in the first place could you?" said Mei Cheng with a teasing smile on her face as she took a seat.

"That is true.." answered Yang Qing as he chuckled, taking a seat himself.

"I take it you're here because of your intelligence network? You have not yet established contact with them, but considering the number of things that you have been dealing with since your promotion, it's understandable why you haven't.."

"As expected.." thought Yang Qing in response to Mei Cheng's statement which implied she knew the ins and outs of his activities since he became an outer palace court judge and it was more than likely she was current with all the information she had on him.

Yang Qing's mind quickly wandered as he wondered if the failures of his previous schemes had anything to do with them considering how thorough they seemed to be.

Pushing the matter to the back of his mind, Yang Qing answered,

"In part yes, but I would also like your assistance on a case I am working on.."

Mei Cheng on hearing this slightly narrowed her eyes whilst still wearing the same smile.

"Does it have to do with what happened at the Range?" she asked.

"Yes.."

As soon as he answered, Yang Qing saw what looked to be regret and self-reproach flash in Mei Cheng's eyes before it went back to normal where she smiled when she caught Yang Qing's slightly surprised look.

"We are not rocks you know. We too feel things.." she lightheartedly said before she sighed.

"What happened there is an oversight on our part. We are meant to notice the things that lurk in the shadows, and cracks, to cover the Order's blindside, but we were completely negligent in our duties and missed a lot of things there and the cost was the lives of our own.."

"The blame is not yours, senior Mei Cheng, the Shadow Hawks do so much already, I doubt even the Holy Lands with all their abilities can claim to know everything that happens around the continent. If they did, there would be no stories of cultivators stumbling onto unique treasures and having miraculous encounters. They would have already swallowed it themselves.." said Yang Qing trying to cheer her up.

continent. If they did, there would be no stories of cultivators stumbling onto unique treasures and having miraculous "Thank you..." said Mei Cheng with a gentle smile.

"What is it that you needed our help with.."

Yang Qing's look turned solemn as he said,

"I need your help investigating someone. His name is Jiang Xiang, an eclipse spiritweave fox from the Deer Mountain Range. From the information I have gathered, he works for the White Rose Pavilion.

I need any and all information that concerns him. How he joined them, his journey since he joined them, and if he still works there.."

Feeling he had not given enough context, Yang Qing went on to mention his suspicions of Jiang Xiang being potentially involved with the Blue Soul Flame Crow Syndicate on how they knew about the treasure bone belonging to a flood dragon, as he was one of the few people who knew who had it.

"White Rose Pavilion.." murmured Mei Feng in a slightly constrained tone before she relaxed it again as she said,

"Merchant organizations especially the well-established ones are the most difficult to pry information out of, especially when it concerns one of their own. We may have to part with a few valuables, hopefully, he isn't someone high up the ladder, if he is, then we may have to involve the Chief of staff.

Give me two days... You can either come here, or I can bring it to your chambers, no, pardon my memory, age is catching up. You're on vacation, and from what I've heard, I doubt you'd step foot in your courtroom during that period.."Mei Cheng said with a meaningful smile.

Yang Qing smiled sheepishly as he said,

"I'll come here... in the afternoon if that is okay.."

"That's okay.."

Chapter 769 Network And Rehabilitation (3)

"When do you intend to meet with members of your network?" asked Mei Cheng once the matter of Jiang Xiang had been settled.

"In the next few days, I hope.." answered Yang Qing.

While he didn't want to leave and hoped to make the most of his month-long vacation, he was already long overdue from meeting with his network which was something that was meant to be handled in the early days after his ceremony, but due to unforeseeable circumstances, a couple of months quickly went by and he still hadn't met with a single member. He could not keep pushing it, especially, with how the waves of the continent seemed to be constantly churning.

The intelligence network was a way for the Order to spread the burden that the Shadow Hawks already had on them. Judges upon reaching the palace court would handle an intricate network of agents who could be considered students and members of the Order who lacked the necessary talent to be fully absorbed in the various departments of the Order but instead chose an alternative route through which they could serve.

Even if their talent was found lacking, the Order still supported them in their current roles, which were collectors and sources of information. Just like Mei Cheng who was a shadow hawk and at the same

time was a diligent member of the external logistics division, each of these agents had a role assigned to them, but unlike Mei Cheng who had a cover, theirs wasn't necessarily a cover.

Before becoming a palace court judge, while Yang Qing knew the intelligence network existed, he did not know much else about it, that was until he became a palace court judge himself and got in-depth guidance on it, and he couldn't help but admire the Order's ingenuity.

With the means the Order had at its disposal, it wasn't hard for them to deduce someone's history going back several thousands of years or even more than that provided their history wasn't obstructed through artificial means for example through treasures and artifacts powerful enough to isolate someone's life from being deduced.

Most top-tier organizations employ several antiscrying measures to prevent such deductions, they either do it through treasures and artifacts, or in the case of clans, if one of their members has reached the peak of the domain realm, by virtue of bloodline association, they can sense if one of their descendants is being deduced and cloak them through bloodline resonance.

The Order considering its line of work, protected its members against having their karma, history, and lifeline deduced even as students. The moment they passed the entrance test, they would be taken to a certain ground that had a natural dao treasure called the Waterfall of Obfuscation. They would soak for three days in the waterfall which would completely isolate their karma, fate, destiny, and their past from all prying eyes, of course with exceptions. They were told peak soul formation experts who had mastered the laws of karma and fate would be able to see through them, and with the way the saint-grade treasure, veiled destiny had acted when he met it for the first time, Yang Qing was inclined to believe so.

But for those without a powerful treasure or expert to shield them, their entire lives worth of history was open to anyone with the means to look through them, which was what the Order did. To all looking to join, they would deduce their entire past either through information already on hand, or through esoteric means that involved karmic deduction, and from it they could trace someone's entire past including their lineage, dating back several thousand to tens of thousands of years.

Candidates suitable for the intelligence network were chosen this way. Whatever hat they would don in the network was usually inextricably linked to their past so that their integration into their roles would not draw a lot of suspicion. It was one thing to throw someone into a completely fabricated story without history, and it was another if the story had a solid history and the person had genuine ties to it. If anyone were to look into it, it would not crumble, no matter the means they used. That person would not draw unnecessary suspicion that would make them seem like plants.

For example, Yang Qing's network had several clan leaders. Some of them when they came to the Order, they were all by themselves so destitute that even a street rat would disdain to be in their company. They had nothing to their name, even their names. Some had been orphans with others slaves, wearing names given to them by their slavers. They knew nothing of their past, but the Order upon deducing their past was able to tie them to clans that had once existed with a couple of them coming from lineages that had ancestors that had reached the palace realm, but none of them knew.

The Order would reveal their lineage to them, and they would be given the choice of whether they wished to serve as one of the agents in the network, with the only requirement being they share what they heard and saw, in exchange the Order would support them in the restoration of their lineages and if later they wished to stop the arrangement, they could freely do so without repercussions, though they would no longer receive the resource support of the Order.

If they agreed to the deal, they would be trained for a bit by the Order as it made arrangements on how to seamlessly integrate them into the continent and once the reintegration was done, how they ran their clans was entirely up to them. Though the Order did tier the amount of resources and support they would give which was correlated to how prosperous those clans were. The better positioned they were, the more information they could provide, and in return the more resources they would receive in kind from the Order.

The whole network was impeccably laid out, with the Order ensuring it would get its money's worth. Yang Qing couldn't help but admire their level of meticulousness.

Chapter 770 Network And Rehabilitation (4)

Mei Cheng took a black jade slip filled with countless silver runes, half that Yang Qing could not recognize but from the complexity and the transcendent fluctuations they released, he could tell they were inscribed by someone whose accomplishments had at the very least reached the gold tier.

Mei Cheng closed her eyes as the runes fluctuated slightly before she finally opened her eyes.

"I can see you have 24 organizations in your network which is a decent amount for a start, but the more you get familiar with your role and handle it well, the number will increase with each increase in your court rank. Of course, it's not a complete guarantee that it will increase.."

Mei Cheng's demeanor turned solemn as she paused, putting away the black jade slip as she stared at Yang Qing, who couldn't help but feel he was being stared down by a hawk.

"Those on your network, on any network, are one of our own, even if they are under a different house, they are still one of our own. Your intelligence network can be taken away from you permanently if it is found that your negligence led to their deaths.

Their roles are already precarious as it is, when it comes to the information they provide, don't ask more of them than they can provide that it forces them to take unnecessary risks that may expose both them and their organizations to countless dangers.

Keep it simple and restrict it to things that you judge they can get easily in their day-to-day operations and established circle. Unproven rumors, gossip, feeling in the air, it doesn't matter if it isn't verified or not, information is information and it has value. Their longevity is more important than any information they can provide, as long as they are there, there is much we stand to gain.

They may wear different robes, call themselves by different titles, and be members of different organizations, but never forget, they are one of our own and we need to treat them as such..."

"I won't.." Yang Qing solemnly said.

"Good.... Sorry for me tarrying about this, it's just that, those who chose to be part of the network, sometimes tend to be overzealous and reckless in their duties to show the Order that they are still loyal and have never wavered. This usually leads them to do a lot of reckless things to prove that point, when in truth, there is no need for them to show it that way.."

Mei Cheng paused as she sighed heavy-heartedly.

"A lot of them died because of it, some I even trained myself...Let's just say there is a reason I prefer my current role to the one I had before," she added as she smiled in dejection.

As someone nursing his regrets and guilt, Yang Qing resonated with Mei Cheng's feelings.

"You are to manage the network, and part of that management is to ensure its survival, and it's the metric by which we judge your success or failure in the matter, not the information we gain from it, but

their survival, and its not that I am asking you to risk your life for theirs, but do what you can to ensure they remain intact, and one way is to control their well-meaning intentions that may put them at risk.

How you do that is ultimately up to you.." Mei Cheng said, once again donning the prior motherly smile she had on.

"I will try.."

"That's all we can ask.." Mei Cheng said with an encouraging smile.

"Now with that out of the way. You must have already decided on who you will be meeting with?"

Yang Qing nodded in response.

"I don't know how much information Assistant Shi provided on how you should go about it, but knowing him, he probably glossed over the details.." Mei Cheng said as she shook her head.

"I might as well just do it since it's not the first time.. must be why he is like that... So, first, you don't have to meet with all 24 at once, you can spread them out, just don't let it go more than five years without you meeting with them or else they may start to wonder..

Secondly, you have the green jade token and the crystal yuan feather, right?"

"Yes, I do.."

"Good, now as Assistant Shi likely covered, the green jade token designates you as the head of the Jade Green Pavilion which is a subsidiary organization under the umbrella of the White Rose Pavilion.

No one within the Jade Green Pavilion knows you're from the Order, and neither is it comprised of anyone associated with us. Be mindful of that. You can consider it an artifact to help you in your station as the overseer of the network.

It has shops spread around the continent thanks to the seal it has of the White Rose Pavilion, and it should come as no surprise to you that those shops could be found within the territory that the 24 members belong to.

You can use those shops as meeting locations with them if you so wish, there is no restriction on the meeting place, the decision is ultimately to you and your contact person. The shop is just a choice. In addition, I am not sure if Assistant Shi told you of the income.."

"He did.."

"He did?" Mei Cheng said showing genuine surprise in her tone.

Yang Qing nodded, making sure to limit his words. He didn't want it to be known that the assistant had only revealed it because he read into his greedy gaze.

"If he did, that's good, but just in case, I'll mention a few things on it. The funds are yours to use as you see fit, but their primary purpose is to ensure you are in a better position to provide safety and growth for the members of your network.

While we encourage them to be self-sustainable, some situations can't be helped. In such instances, you can use the pavilion as a means of assistance. Also, when it comes to transport, you can't use any means provided by the Order, and considering the distances you will have to cover, I doubt it would be convenient to use your cultivation to fly.

Hiring of flying ferries, and transport arrays will be covered by your earnings from the Green Jade Pavilion, and as their subsidiary, the White Rose Pavilion offers discounts for its transport services..."

Yang Qing nodded trying to hide his disappointment that he wouldn't get to spend the earnings as he wished.

"Lastly, the crystal luan feather. Assistant Shi must have mentioned its use which is to establish communication between you and them in case of emergencies and or to plan meetings, but in truth, the feather is primarily an emergency beacon.

Other than arranging the first meeting and establishing first contact, I would advise you to use other means as a form of establishing contact for your meetups, even regular communication talismans are an option, and restrict the feather only for emergencies where every reactionary second counts.

Should you receive an emergency summons for them, ensure to reveal it to the judicial review committee the instant you do. They are in constant contact with a lot of shadow hawks and will provide the most expedient solution for the matter.."

"I will.."

"Good, I don't think there is much to add there, my last advice would be to go in with your eyes and ears open.."

"I will and thank you once again.."

Yang Qing exchanged a few more pleasantries with Mei Cheng before finally parting ways with her as he went to the deployment offices to complete the procedures needed in preparation for his departure to the Gold Earth Bank for a quick withdrawal before finally meeting with six members from his network.