

The Mirror Legacy (Vol. 8: Illumination upon the Ru Lands)

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Figure 1: Cover

Chapter 1310: Three Divisions and Five Virtues

Ruuuush.

The rain was torrential.

A bleak, gray qi of Pit Water surged between heaven and earth; the multicolored light had long since vanished. The sundered grotto-heaven issued an overburdened roar as the water's surface trembled restlessly, gushing out from countless fissures.

The radiance in the sky faded, the Pristine Water grew calm, and the baleful star hung motionless. The figure imprisoned beneath the twofold radiance stood with hands clasped behind his back. That demonic, vertical pupil trembled incessantly, showing no joy, only a quiet suppressed to its absolute limit.

His lips were pursed tightly, feeling not the slightest joy at the perishing of the person before him.

Amidst this roiling gloom, the black-robed Judge remained standing with his hands clasped behind him, his shadowy eyes searchingly sweeping over the brilliant river in the sky, silent.

Xiao Chuting was obliterated, body and soul. Those twelve points of Heavenly Glow and the Valley Water had already withdrawn, and reverberating within the Great Void, there was only a deathly silence.

Yang Jinxin was expressionless.

In this great battle, the Underworld of course hadn't suffered the slightest damage and had even gained a significant advantage, yet his face held no look of joy, only a deep, heavy gloom, thick as water.

Rumble!

Distant thunder lurked within the clouds. The radiance of the lightning momentarily illuminated the world. In this brilliant flash, all the hues suspended in the air had already vanished. Even the spirit cultivator imprisoned beneath the two radiances was gone without a trace.

They departed in silence.

The world was in upheaval.

The endless, bizarre darkness shrouding the sky receded. The surging currents, as if divinely aided, rushed back in to submerge the pitch-black mire, parting between the gorges to reveal the bare rock of the mountains.

And the northern deluge poured back into the great chasm. Vast swathes of land were exposed. The wailing people were borne upon the water's surface, and as the riverbed was revealed, the dazed commoners who had been swept away clumsily found their footing back on dry land.

Consciousness returned bit by bit from the darkness. The divine abilities that had congealed upon the grotto-heaven's waters like painting began to waver.

A profound mystery stirred within the Heavenly Light. The gaze of the ink-robed, golden-eyed youth, which had been fixed on the horizon, finally rippled with color. He looked at the Pit Water congealing in the air, at the cascades rising like mountain peaks from the surface, and uttered a few words.

"A divine ability master has fallen."

The fall of a Great Daoist Master who had perfected their divine abilities would be an earth-shattering event anywhere, and yet, here in this broken grotto-heaven, it was overshadowed and fragmented by the lingering traces of a True Monarch's presence, surfacing dimly in the eyes of the other Great Daoist Masters.

'Just a master of divine abilities.'

Confusion also flickered in their eyes.

'A True Monarch has acted...'

Li Zhouwei slowly turned his head. Dongfang Heyun, who had been beside him, was long gone. There seemed to be confusion in his eyes, but the hand behind his back and the coldness in the depths of his heart was perfectly clear.

'Thunder...'

‘Killed by thunder...’

‘Attaining the Dao Embryo...’

Li Zhouwei had not seen this great battle very clearly, but [Spirit Probe] had recorded it clearly—the inspiration this gave him was simply immense.

‘So... this was also part of the deal struck between the master behind me and Xuan’nu, to help Her achieve Dao-accomplishment...’

‘So... this is the origin of the rumors in the Jiangnan cultivation world about attaining Gold through self-cultivation and self-nature, and also one of the reasons I have always restrained myself... from using blood-qi?’

‘The thunder drum of the old world...’

“Rumble!”

Thunder still flashed in the clouds. The masters of divine abilities had already retreated in silence. Only streams of Buddhist radiance were contending in the distance, as layer after layer of gold surged rapidly forward.

The radiance of the divine ability masters was continuously retreating. Li Zhouwei turned his head and saw streams of golden qi spreading. A dashing young man approached from the distance, just as he had back then, and bowed very politely.

“King Wei..”

Su Yan’s divine ability presence had already dissipated from the world. The situation having reached this point, and with Li Zhouwei now a Great Daoist Master, Tianhuo showed not the slightest displeasure upon seeing him. His expression was extremely natural. While Tianque in the sky still felt some regret, Tianhuo himself didn’t feel even a trace of it.

It was just as Li Zhouwei had said back then.

‘Offend you? Not in the slightest.’

“Senior Tianhuo...”

Li Zhouwei’s attention was similarly undivided; he stared at him.

“Who made a move.”

Tianhuo's gaze was complicated and uncertain. He looked at him blankly and said in a low voice,

"I do not know... King Wei."

Bright lightning flashed across his face. This direct descendant of Golden Oneness finally lost his casual nonchalance. He pondered for a moment, then looked up and said,

"There may have been many variables, but the final result was just as my Azure Revolution Heaven predicted—it was the Divine Thunder Profound-Sound Drum."

"Whose Dharma Treasure is it?"

"It doesn't belong to any one person."

Tianhuo looked up, a light flowing in his eyes, and said,

"It is a relic of the Encompassing Profoundity. Now... it's said to be used specifically to handle those unorthodox paths from Beyond the Profound."

Rather than Li Zhouwei questioning Tianhuo, it was Tianhuo who was anxious to hear the truth from Li Zhouwei. He believed this King Wei definitely knew something. Tianhuo's eyes were fixed firmly on him as he spoke,

"King Wei."

His lips trembled, but in the end, he didn't speak. All his confusion and probing questions were hidden in the depths of his heart, unvoiced. Instead, he said,

"We should also be going."

Li Zhouwei looked at him, listening as Tianhuo continued,

"Next, it is the great game of the Dharma Masters."

He turned his head, looking toward the layers of Buddhist radiance on the horizon. One enormous golden body after another was revealing itself, appearing exceptionally vast within the broken grotto-heaven.

They were fighting for the Golden Land!

...

The Great Void was vast and empty.

A dark gloom filled the world as myriad cracks spread. Magnificent Pit Water was released from the cracked-open profound world. Waterfalls large and small descended from the Great Void, winding through it, some sinking into the mortal world, others into the Exiled Qi, rising and falling, difficult to perceive.

‘Xiao Chuting has fallen.’

Beneath a distant grotto-heaven, a man in white slowly revealed his form, his eyes filled with infinite profundity.

Lu Jiangxian was not particularly surprised. His eyes gazed for a long time, watching that point of golden-white light as it sped far away, vanishing into the boundless distance.

‘Encompassing Profoundity... Divine Thunder Profound-Sound Drum...’

A spark of realization began to dawn in his eyes.

If even Tianhuo knew of the Divine Thunder Profound-Sound Drum, how could Lu Jiangxian not?

This Dharma Treasure was well-understood by several direct descendants of the Golden Core lineages, which is why it was factored into the calculations of the Heaven-Governing. In the deductions back then, almost all of Li Zhouwei’s paths of reincarnation... were intercepted by this drum, resulting in the annihilation of his body and spirit—just like Xiao Chuting today!

But it was only amid this great upheaval, with numerous True Monarchs making their moves and revealing their schemes, that Lu Jiangxian was able to see the Dharma Treasure’s true form. Watching it fade into the remote distance, feeling that infinitely distant summoning aura, clarity gradually dawned in his heart.

‘Chuyi Heaven.’

This item did not come from the mountain, nor was it from the Great Tomb River; it was summoned from Chuyi Heaven in the Eastern Sea!

‘Chuyi Heaven, the mountain of Encompassing Profoundity!’

‘That grotto-heaven of Encompassing Profoundity that has been preserved to this day... opening year after year, completely undamaged!’

Several threads of connection linked together, and Lu Jiangxian’s mind finally achieved clarity.

‘So that’s how it is...’

Why could only cultivators of the Encompassing Profoundity path who nourish their nature by consuming qi enter Chuyi Heaven? Why did the Earth Bamboo Gate of the Purple Mansion Realm Golden Core Dao, and the Pang family, all perish when they tried to enter?

It was precisely because of the Divine Thunder Profound-Sound Drum!

This divine thunder Dharma Treasure that blasted Xiao Chuting didn’t come from the mountain, nor was it in anyone’s possession; it sat enshrined within the Encompassing Profoundity mountain in Chuyi Heaven!

When the Earth Bamboo Gate of the Purple Mansion Realm Golden Core Dao and the Pang family tried to enter, it was equivalent to trespassing directly upon the Dharma Treasure. They were all seen as demonic practitioners by this Dharma Treasure, and its power is terrifying! Even Xiao Chuting’s Metallic Essence was stripped away layer by layer; how could those two not have perished?

‘So... unless one holds a token to bypass the connection to the Dharma Treasure, one has to be a cultivator who has nourished their nature by consuming qi to enter! It was merely to avoid attracting the Dharma Treasure’s attention!’

His gaze burned as he raised his head, looking toward the distant east.

‘This is a remnant of the Encompassing Profoundity’s order. As long as there are cultivators in the world on the Quest for Gold, this treasure, once placed in the thunder palace, will answer the call, descending with divine thunder to test their virtue!’

‘This is precisely why the rumors of attaining Gold through self-cultivation and self-nature have persisted to this day!’

The heavy, gray Exiled Qi flowed in the sky, bringing even more clarity to Lu Jiangxian’s mind.

‘The reason cultivators in Jiangnan haven’t heard of it or been affected is because of the Underworld.’

‘Whenever a Purple Mansion cultivator undertakes the Quest for Gold, an emissary from the Underworld inevitably arrives, not just to capture the Metallic Essence, but also to mask the qi mechanisms, preventing the Divine Thunder Profound-Sound Drum from detecting it...’

‘Because the Divine Thunder Profound-Sound Drum will destroy the Metallic Essence—the Underworld, in its harvesting of ‘gold’, might not care if the cultivator succeeds, but it cares about the Metallic Essence itself, so it naturally can’t allow this item to appear... Now that a Dao Embryo has acted, suppressing all True Monarchs and letting events take their course, this item naturally answered the summons...’

A realization struck him.

‘So that’s why, when so many grotto-heavens fell one by one, this one could be preserved... It is Luoxia, and by extension all the True Monarchs, protecting it. What an open and above-board threshold... As long as a person on the Quest for Gold lacks the support and protection of a True Monarch, the difficulty of their breakthrough will be astronomically high! This is why the Golden Oneness said it ‘specifically handles those unorthodox paths from Beyond the Profound’, and for Luoxia, which has a Dao Embryo overseeing it, this drum is an excellent treasure, open and justifiable, for escaping karmic entanglement...’

‘The Underworld, the Golden Oneness... the reason so many powers didn’t bet on Xiao Chuting was also due to the influence of this decisive Dharma Treasure...’

This insight was no small gain for Lu Jiangxian. His gaze slowly shifted back, his mind growing ever brighter.

‘What a scheme... Valley Water...’

Xuan Cang made a probing move under false pretenses.

Xiao Chuting made veiled accusations.

Valley Water schemed before acting.

This affair at the Great Tomb River seemed calm on the surface, but it was a wrestling match between the world’s great powers. The upheaval in the sky exceeded most people’s expectations, including even Lu Jiangxian, who had made preparations—he knew this Xuan’nu had made arrangements, but he never knew Her ambition was this vast!

‘Attaining the Dao Embryo!’

Throughout the long river of history, recorded instances of attaining the Dao Embryo are few and far between. This Xuan’nu was audacious to the extreme; not even the Underworld imagined She would dare such a thing.

‘Using Xiao Chuting as a pawn, hiding the Boundless Ocean, She brazenly acted by borrowing the intent of multiple powers—or perhaps their desire to suppress the Dragon-kin. Then, She precisely took it a step further, borrowing the desire of all the True Monarchs to probe Luoxia’s intentions, turning the entire scheme into an overt, undeniable plot!’

‘Until the very last moment, even the Hornless Dragon scion whose authority had been infringed upon fell silent. That Heavenly Glow Dao Embryo was left with only one path: to personally intervene and stop Her!’

His eyes shone.

‘Rather than say this Profound Matriarch defied a great universal taboo, it’s better to say She borrowed the world’s momentum, causing all the world’s honored cultivators to join hands in a united plot against Luoxia!’

Yes, Xiao Chuting had indeed fallen, and Valley Water’s scheme was stillborn—but had Luoxia truly won? The very fact that this immortal was willing to act had already satisfied the probing intentions of ninety-nine percent of the True Monarchs involved!

‘Most importantly... She is strong enough.’

The Valley Water True Monarch acted in but an instant, yet it was earth-shattering. When She placed Her pawn on Xiao Chuting, Lu Jiangxian had already sensed Her exceedingly profound Dao-Profundity in the Valley Water, and now it was revealed beyond all doubt!

‘Having hidden Her true depths for many years, Her strength is likely second only to a Dao Embryo. No one has ever been able to simultaneously offend the Dragon-kin and so easily plot against the leader of the world’s Immortal Dao...’

Yet it was precisely this ease that caused a shadow of doubt to surface in Lu Jiangxian’s heart.

He pondered that word.

‘Master’s command...’

Who was His master?

Luoxia claimed to be a disciple of Dongwu, the fourth disciple of the Lord of Comprehending Profoundity, a peerless cultivator who had ascended to the Wu

Earth position. And according to the records of the Numinous Treasure Daoist tradition, this person had long since passed away or left the world.

‘One could certainly regard Him highly. Whether a direct disciple of Dongwu... or a grand-disciple, it’s highly likely He is a second-generation disciple.’

‘This seems to span three generations, but the early splendor of the Three Profoundities is hard to imagine. Today’s Buddhist Dao Ancestor, Can Yan, was merely a second-generation disciple of Encompassing Profoundity. The Spiritual Treasure Dao Lineage’s Ancestor, Xu Xiang, and the once world-shaking Zhidu, were even third-generation disciples!’

‘The attitude of the Wu Light is clear to the whole world. He has always been extremely detached. Having a second-generation disciple remaining in the mortal world, one who might have even personally seen the Lord of the Three Profoundities... of course Mount Luoxia can proclaim itself the head of all Daoist traditions!’

‘He is content, or rather, indifferent to the world’s greater situation. Aside from a few untouchable bottom lines, His actions are almost entirely without inhibition..’

He strolled leisurely. As the darkness receded from his surroundings, a world of fluttering white snow emerged, filling his vision with glittering crystal.

‘Xuan’nu’s scheme was unexpected, but as for the plot by Pit Water and Xiao Chuting... if the mountain had just been willing to wait, the situation would have changed dramatically. Du Qing would absolutely have defected, and Cultivation Transcendence, fearing the world wasn’t chaotic enough, unable to provoke Luoxia into acting, would certainly have gone to stir up the True Dragons’ situation...’

‘The wolves were fighting while the fierce tiger feigned sleep. Waiting just one moment longer to act would have been immensely helpful for controlling the world’s situation and shattering the tacit understanding between the various powers. Yet Luoxia acted, just like that, so easily.’

‘This being the case, it went without saying for the Underworld, but also Pristine Water, Cultivation Transcendence, and the Golden Oneness, or Xuan Cang—all of them gained something from witnessing this event..’

‘But it was not a good harvest.’

Lu Jiangxian, hidden among the Golden Core cultivators, had seen it very clearly.

Those twelve points of Heavenly Glow had not just suppressed Valley Water!

It was also Pristine Water, Baleful Star, Exiled Qi, Converging Water, Overflowing Pit... This Dao Embryo, as if with the strength of a single finger, had mercilessly and simultaneously suppressed all the True Monarchs who had appeared in the sky to openly probe Him!

He was cold and impartial, restraining every honored personage. With just a fraction of extra strength, He rendered their spent forces incapable of piercing silk or moving a feather. This tiny bit of extra strength was like a light slap to Their faces, clearly conveying two messages.

Even if They had hidden for many years, cultivating in secret, He still understood the strength of these True Monarchs perfectly. He was even perfectly clear on how much power Dongfang Heyun had borrowed from Beijia. Aside from the Valley Water before Him, who was seeking the Dao, no one else was worthy of His notice.

'He was imposing and unmoved; He had everything under control.'

Yet the one who acted was not His true self, but merely a portion of His divine ability, projected over.

This was Dao Embryo Heavenly Glow.

'He expelled and interrupted Xuan'nu, but did not personally harm or pursue Him. It wasn't like strangling a danger in its cradle, unwilling to let Xuan'nu touch upon the Dao Embryo... It was more like He was simply observing His duty, paying no mind to these probes at all, supremely confident in His own strength...'

Precisely because of this, in the instant Xiao Chuting was obliterated, only an endless silence filled the sky. Lu Jiangxian understood.

'Whether it was Taiqing, Taiyue, the Underworld, or even the Dragon-kin! They were all filled with dread at the results of this probe—His divine ability was vaster, and He had unhesitatingly displayed exactly how terrifying He was.'

He sat upright within the Heaven of Sun and Moon's Shared Radiance, the emotion in his eyes growing stronger.

‘He only said... Xuan’nu... had overstepped.’

‘What was this boundary? What was the ’red dust’ Luoxia spoke of?’

Lu Jiangxian absolutely refused to believe this ‘red dust’ merely referred to the worldly affairs of common mortals—when Bright Yang walked the mortal realm, how much ‘red dust’ did he attract?

‘Is Luoxia’s so-called ’red dust’... True Monarchs interfering in the breakthroughs of divine ability masters?’

This was all, of course, about Valley Water seeking the Dao, but the act of hiding the Boundless Ocean was also Valley Water influencing Xiao Chuting’s Dao-accomplishment. Luoxia Mountain’s reason for acting most likely stemmed from this.

‘Valley Water interfered with a lesser cultivator’s quest for the Dao, so He acted to suppress Valley Water.’

Lu Jiangxian’s expression flickered.

This Nine Heavens Profound Matriarch was injured, true, but could Her scheme truly end here?

‘In this scheme, everyone else was just going with the flow; only Her! Only Valley Water was the one who stood up to confront Heavenly Glow. From any angle, Xiao Chuting was utterly annihilated, and yet...’

Lu Jiangxian’s gaze was inscrutable. He raised his head, and a white light blossomed in his palm, its color gentle yet tyrannical, seeming to connect myriad mysteries, stretching into the infinite distance.

The Name Ascending Stone.

Even if Xiao Chuting’s True Spirit was reflected on the Name Ascending Stone, his Metallic Essence struck by lightning, and his breakthrough failed, resulting in his death, he should have been completely and utterly gone by now. But the roiling white light swirling around his fingers constantly reminded him that this was not the case.

Lu Jiangxian’s mind was filled with light.

‘Valley Water herself has the ability to hide the Boundless Ocean. She hinted to Xiao Chuting that the ’hiding’ he sought from me was not for the sake of Pit Water, but for one final hiding place after his fall. Even if She has already

touched upon the Dao Embryo in the dao of water-virtue concealment, She still wasn't completely confident She could make a move in the single instant Heavenly Glow's projection arrived—unless She had me.'

'Assistance from the Supreme Yin.'

His gaze grew brighter as he stared into the Great Void.

'Xiao Chuting... She hid him.'

Although Lu Jiangxian only had the faintest sensation, he was certain that the Nine Heavens Profound Matriarch had hidden Xiao Chuting away!

'Contending with Heavenly Glow for the Dao Embryo was just the surface. She... has other plans, and what's more...'

Lu Jiangxian could feel the connection between the Name Ascending Stone and Xiao Chuting growing ever weaker. Even if he wanted to ruin Valley Water's scheme and pull him forth, it was already impossible!

The tyranny of the Name Ascending Stone was unparalleled here, as Lu Jiangxian knew well. Only two possibilities could cause this result.

'First... interference from an honored personage. Xiao Chuting is hidden within a Golden Attainment.'

'Second... Xuan'nu's divine ability is even vaster than before.'

And the current situation very likely meant both were true at the same time!

Lu Jiangxian could understand the former. After all, for Xuan'nu to hide Xiao Chuting right in front of Heavenly Glow, it would be impossible not to use her Valley Water Fruition Attainment. But the latter possibility made him fall silent.

'She was clearly heavily injured.'

What silenced him further was that this power, which made Her divine mystery even more abundant, seemed to faintly point toward the Supreme Yin.

For a long moment, Lu Jiangxian sat within his world, countless Dao scriptures flowing through his vast, boundless spiritual sense as he calculated every possibility. The train of thought in his eyes gradually clarified.

With Xiao Chuting on the Name Ascending Stone, he had used it to experience far too many profound mysteries. Whether it was the immensity of the True

Monarchs being suppressed by Luoxia, or the unique and ingenious Dao-Profundity of this Profound Matriarch, it all converged in his heart, leading to a sudden, striking enlightenment.

‘Xuan’nu is an Azure Profoundity cultivator.’

‘Although Her position is within the Five Virtues, She should be viewed from the perspective of an Azure Profoundity cultivator.’

‘I honor the Dao of Sun and Moon, and tread the intercalary paths of the Five Virtues Heaven.’

‘I do not need to view the Five Virtues through their five manifestations.’

‘Instead, I will use Yin and Yang.’

Lu Jiangxian hadn’t obtained much of the Azure Profoundity Daoist tradition, but he had acquired a part of the Nine Mounds Daoist tradition and already had some understanding. Having personally seen True Monarchs from an Azure Profoundity background, and having witnessed that Valley Water’s method for verifying the Dao, great enlightenment had dawned in his heart.

‘Loss, concealment, deficiency — hidden within the Yin. Expansion, engulfing, growth — manifested in the Yang. Those undercurrents, silent yet nurturing, follow the rise of Yin. Those transformations, broadening and ripening, all turn toward the worship of Yang.’

Viewed this way, the Five Virtues can actually be divided into three parts!

‘Valley Water and Mansion Water should be Yin Water. Converging Water and Pristine Water should be Yang water. What remains... the one remaining cardinal position, is the intersection of Yin and Yang!’

‘This is the Yin-Yang Cardinal Position Theory!’

‘The saying ’Dried Mansion Water resembles Valley Water, Overflowing Pit resembles Converging Water’ can be perfectly explained using the Yin-Yang Cardinal Position Theory. Diminishment and cessation belong to Yin. The deficient Mansion Water has traveled further down the path of Yin Water, thus it approaches Valley Water. The broadening Overflowing Pit approaches Yang, thus it leans more toward the Yang Water, Converging Water...’

His eyes were bright, having gained a deeper understanding of his own past schemes.

‘The intercalation between Pristine Water and Valley Water, that faint connection between the two daos, is not without reason. It is precisely because Pristine Water is damaged! That lost ‘Overturning of All Under Heaven’, that damage, caused the Pristine Water that should have inclined toward Yang Water to instead incline toward yin. Coupled with all the subsequent changes, this created the intercalary path—otherwise, it would be absolutely impossible for Pristine Water to have four paths of intercalation with Valley Water!’

‘This all reflects upon itself... My previous and current research on Pristine Water is itself the connection between effect and cause!’

Understanding one point clarified everything. In that instant, three Daoist scriptures appeared before him, golden text shining brightly on the left and right—they were two of the Six Elucidations, the [Elucidating Removal of Yang Fire’s Dwelling Art] and the [Elucidating Transformation of Chongyuan’s Intercalary Art] currently in his possession!

And the one in the center, its colors vivid, was one of the Six Elucidations he had just investigated back in the Great Tomb River.

The [Elucidating Removal of Yin Water’s Dwelling Art]!

The wondrous art governing the transformations of Mansion, Pit, and Valley!

This was Chi Buzi’s fundamental art for the ‘borrowed manor’ and ‘intercalated valey’, and it was the supreme harvest from this grotto-heaven!

And in Lu Jiangxian’s view, he now had an even deeper understanding of this wondrous art.

‘To comprehend the Six Elucidations and Eight Seekings, one must view them through Yin and Yang.’

‘Setting aside the cardinal positions, the dao of the Elucidating Removal of Yin Water’s Dwelling Art governs the changes of Mansion and Valley—is that not the change of Yin Water? The Li family’s Intercalary Sun Art governs True and Virile—is that not the change of Yin Fire? And the [Elucidating Removal of Yang Fire’s Dwelling Art], with Blazing as its core, is truly Yang Fire!’

‘Yin Water, Yang Fire... it was written in the names of the Six Elucidations all along. These four daos are, in fact, the transformations of water and fire between Yin and Yang!’

His mind grew ever brighter.

‘This is precisely honoring the Great Dao of Azure Profoundity!’

And his gains did not stop there. Once he divided the Five Virtues by Yin and Yang, he could clearly see how Xuan’nu was able to seize an even stronger water-virtue ability of concealment at the very moment She was injured.

‘Diminishment and cessation, containment and loss, absence and vacancy, concealment in Yin—these were not empty words. Xuan’nu has already transcended the limits of Valley Water that ordinary cultivators can reach. As long as She has even a sliver of Supreme Yin as a fulcrum, these four aspects are highly unified in the hands of a True Monarch like Her, who specializes in this dao.’

‘For Xuan’nu, injury and concealment are one. To be injured is to be concealed. Being heavily injured by Heavenly Glow... is precisely what allowed Her to advance a step further in this aspect of the Supreme Yin!’

‘Only then could She hide Xiao Chuting right under Heavenly Glow’s nose, using my sliver of Supreme Yin as a fulcrum. Even... ‘being injured’... was one of the conditions She required for seeking the Dao!’

‘What skill...’

...

The storm of colors had receded. Pinpricks of gray dotted the pitch-black Great Void, resembling droplets of blood, or perhaps countless stars reflected from the heavens, hidden within the void.

This was Valley Water.

This boundless, thick current of Valley Water hung suspended in the Great Void, transforming into a spectacular marvel that spanned the world. At every moment, it shifted into various forms, slowly falling to become all kinds of resources in the mortal realm.

Amidst this shattered darkness, a speck of azure light shuttled continuously.

Chi Buzi.

He was travel-worn, his pair of jade-green eyes slightly narrowed, galloping recklessly through the Great Void, moving further and further away from everything.

The instant that congealed stream of light vanished, Chi Buzi had torn through space and fled without the slightest hesitation. He was moving as fast as he possibly could, but a fatal sense of danger still hovered over his heart, making him tremble silently.

He was coming...

That azure shadow.

That sheet of rain that pierced the heavens.

Pristine Water.

He had never faced this aura directly, but he had sensed it long ago from the Pristine Pool. While every other divine ability master was still savoring the endlessly changing celestial phenomena, he felt not a shred of peace or calm. There was only one thought in his mind.

'Flee!'

That was Pristine Water!

Faces flashed before his eyes—Chi Wei's old face, Ning Tiaoxiao's face, full of cold mockery. All expression on Chi Buzi's face froze like stone as he pushed his divine ability faster and faster—even knowing it was useless.

His eyes remained fixed forward, never daring to look down, as if a single glance would transform the space beneath his feet into that undulating, shadow-sinking, jade-like Pristine Pool.

A speck of azure flickered in the darkness.

The instant this shadow reflected in his eyes, his jade-green divine ability surged, and Chi Buzi's figure simultaneously sank into that vast power, intending to flee.

'Chou-Gui Hidden Form!'

The azure light swallowed him. The divine ability that had let him hide and overcome his enemies for so many years, the very foundation of his security, the infallible power, could no longer bring him the slightest sense of safety; instead, it was filled with a terrifying chill.

Another face, also adorned with azure pupils, emerged from within the divine ability, a face where cunning and malice intertwined. Its gaze was ice-cold as it slowly blocked his path.

Chi Buzi's movements stopped dead.

His jade-green eyes stared at the rippling water as he slowly took a step back, bowed, and said,

"So it is Lord Suiguan."

The azure-robed man smiled.

"It's rare to run into Daoist Master Chi."

Chi Buzi stared at him. The Great Void around him had already transformed into the endless Pristine Pool, as if he were in another world entirely, where everything was shifting from illusion to reality. He remained calm and said respectfully,

"My lord is too polite."

"I waited for you at the Middle Vast Jade Mountain for twenty-seven years."

Suiguan stepped forward, closing the distance between them, his eyes fixed firmly on Chi Buzi, as if examining him.

"Daoist Master Chi, can you tell me..."

His voice was soft and slow.

"Why didn't you go."

In that instant, a thick killing intent pierced through all his divine abilities. Chi Buzi was a genius, true, but he was facing Suiguan! This was a sliver of the Pristine Water True Monarch's authority!

All his Pristine Water divine abilities froze at that moment, yet a faint smile touched Chi Buzi's lips.

"So my lord was at Xingyu Palace. Dongfang Fengchi wished to transform toward Mansion Water; truly a profound path for a humble cultivator... But the position of Mansion Water is, I fear, not something this Chi can covet."

Suiguan laughed, his voice light and drifting, echoing in this jade-green world. He said,

“Chi, the whole world knows what kind of person you are, yet you still put on an act in front of me!”

Chi Buzi’s expression did not change.

Suiguan turned slightly, looking at the long river in the sky, where endless Valley Water surged, transforming through the Great Void into all kinds of resources and falling to the mortal realm. He said,

“You know I won’t kill you. Just like with today’s Pit Water, we also need that Feathered Serpent’s Metallic Essence to fall. You should be glad Valley Water did not succeed today, glad that Moongaze Lake and Her scheme came to nothing.”

Suiguan’s tone gradually grew cold.

“She wanted to attain the Dao Embryo, using the Boundless Ocean as Her great achievement. If Xiao Chuting had truly achieved Dao-accomplishment, did you think there would be anything left for you?”

“Chi Buzi, think it over carefully.”

He turned his head back to look at him.

“Right now, you’re waiting for the True Dragons to achieve Dao-accomplishment, for the water virtue to stop its excess, so you can attain the Mansion. But you’re hardly the only one waiting for that moment!”

Chi Buzi’s smile faded. He suddenly said.

“My lord’s meaning is...”

Suiguan glanced at him and said,

“Seek a Surplus Position in Pristine Water.”

His voice dropped lower.

“What’s connected within the Xinyou Pristine Marsh Seal is the Feathered Serpent’s Pristine Water Metallic Essence. They want you to use this item to verify the Dao, but you’re seeking Mansion Water. How can that help? You must seek Pristine Water; you can only seek Pristine Water.”

“Chi Buzi, you have already proven yourself. Pristine Water is a position of change. You now cultivate four parts Pristine Water and one part Mansion Water; seeking a Surplus Position isn’t out of the question. That Du wants to

scheme for Mansion Water; it doesn't matter if you succeed or not. If you do succeed, your 'four Pristine, one Mansion' can even help Him a bit. Thus, this move was made in passing."

In that instant, Chi Buzi's head snapped up. He stared at the speck of azure in the sky, and the Great Daoist Master laughed, saying,

"The great Pristine Pool... finally has a use for me—and I had to wait until today for it."

"It's nothing more than being a dog."

Suiguan was also laughing. He said,

"Don't blame me for being blunt. In the eyes of the Dragon-kin, you're nothing but a dog that's going to die sooner or later. To Moongaze Lake, you're even worse. A vicious dog circling the sickbed, one they failed to kill earlier and are now reluctantly using. Did you really think you'd ever see the day you attain the Mansion?"

"If not for me, if not for Du, you would have died on that lake long ago! Would you still be here today? Tell me, am I wrong?"

His smile widened as he said,

"Du asked me to pass on a message."

"No matter how strict our family is, we treat you as our own dog. You, who commit every evil, dripping with filth and blood, naturally must follow a master who also commits every evil. If you follow someone else, you might have a moment of glory, but wait until He recovers and His hands are free... He'll probably make an example of you first!"

Chi Buzi's expression froze. The muscles in his face twitched slightly, and his hands clenched tightly within his sleeves.

"Taiqing has gone to seek Mansion Water, so this position of change will definitely be empty. You have plenty of room to maneuver. Since you can be your own master, why suffer under someone else, letting them treat you as they please?"

The azure-robed man stood in the air. At some unknown point, a small, azure-colored jade slip had appeared in his hand.

The jade slip lay quietly in his palm. It was a warm, gentle azure, like the color of the sky after a rain. Golden light flowed across it, and one could faintly see an illusion of shifting clouds and sparkling water, profound and unfathomable.

This speck of azure was reflected in Chi Buzi's gaze, and a trace of hesitation finally entered his assessing stare.

"This is a method for the Quest for Gold. You can show it to the Dragon-kin or any other group; there is no mistake in it. You are also a Great Daoist Master; you can judge for yourself."

His tone was smiling.

"Daoist Master Chi, I will be waiting for you in the Pristine Pool."

Chapter 1311: An Opportune Time for War

The rain was torrential.

Above the mountains and rivers, Pit Water overflowed. One divine ability after another manifested, racing away in all directions, while that enormous golden body also faintly projected into reality. The multicolored light at the horizon drew closer, bit by bit.

This multicolored light hung in the sky: perhaps bursts of song and waves of laughter; perhaps golden light like a waterfall, with lotus flowers blanketing the ground; perhaps glazed radiance rolling, with specks of multicolored light. It was guided in from all directions, only to collide thunderously in the sky, remaining perfectly distinct.

The Buddhist Lands of every Dao!

“Kongshu!”

Amidst the interplay of countless multicolored lights, the black-robed monk held two hands with fingers together before him, while another hand was held respectfully at his chest, cupping that small, sparkling golden light, his expression solemn.

But a shout like thunder echoed from the sky,

“Kongshu! You have already obtained a great opportunity! Why must you contend with us... why....”

Boom!

Within the Great Void, the contest of Dharma Masters caused the Buddhist Lands to collide ceaselessly, emitting a profound sound that pierced heaven and earth, as if a fiery prison had shattered, crisp and clear.

Yet, the black-robed monk's calm and resolute voice was heard.

"How can an object of the ancient cultivators be defiled by your myriad desires!"

The already-tormented Great Void trembled once more. Spiritual qi surged restlessly throughout the entire Jin region, transforming into countless gales and clouds, only to be blocked by the majestic Taihang Mountains to the east.

"Boom!"

Multicolored light illuminated heaven and earth, revealing a divine ability not far away.

The person in the lead appeared quite elderly, stroking his beard with a smile on his face. He received two people as they emerged from the grotto-heaven and offered a distant salute. The woman of exceptional beauty hurriedly returned the gesture, saying,

"Greetings, Senior Chunshuo! Inside the grotto-heaven, we were greatly indebted to Senior's assistance... This junior will engrave it in my heart."

"Unnecessary!"

The smile on Chunshuo's old face deepened.

"Even without this old fellow, there were figures from your noble clan watching. It was merely a matter of being at the right place at the right time."

The siblings Li Que'wan and her brother were led forward by him. They saw Heavenly Light flickering atop the mountain peak and golden light flowing. Their own King Wei and Tianhuo were already waiting not far away. To one side stood another person wreathed in blazing flames. It was Dantai Jin, who had come to receive them.

Beside them, Li Jiangqian's gaze shifted slightly. He raised his head and met Li Zhouwei's eyes, saying nothing. Everything was already understood.

'Father is nearby; he must see things far more clearly than I... The scheming here... runs far too deep...'

His gaze lowered slightly. At his side, Tianhuo glanced at Li Jiangqian, listening as Li Zhouwei spoke,

“We were waiting inside. I wonder, has there been conflict in the outside world?”

Dantai Jin replied,

“No great waves were stirred. Yuyang fought a battle and lost a piece or two of land to Western Shu. Fortunately, it didn’t shake their foundation, and they retreated early.”

Li Zhouwei raised an eyebrow slightly.

Li Zhouwei had anticipated that there would be no major battle at Luoxia. After all, the Netherworld and the Yang Clan had no intention of advancing, and the divine abilities left guarding Luoxia were more than sufficient. The Northern Buddhists had all been drawn to the Great Tomb River. With Yehui and Changyun present, it was unlikely any trouble would stir.

‘And since Qing Jifang did not come, he naturally should have moved some troops to probe the lake... or perhaps to carve off a piece or two of flesh from the Great Song...’

After all, Western Shu had many Great Daoist Masters, and the Great Song’s top-tier combat strength was almost entirely gathered at the Great Tomb River. This was precisely the time to make a move.

Tianhuo, at the side, smiled and said,

“King Wei may not know, but that fellow surnamed Qing has been in seclusion ever since the great defeat at Guyan, seeking to become a Great Daoist Master. There’s still no definite news! This is hardly his achievement.”

Hearing this, Li Que’wan shook her head wordlessly. The crimson-robed youth smiled even more broadly, saying,

“So that’s how it is—it truly wasn’t easy. Only when our Great General Qing is absent can Western Shu finally claim some achievements.”

Tianhuo laughed boisterously without any reservations. After catching his breath, he said,

“King Wei still has arrangements to attend to, so I shall not disturb you further.”

Li Zhouwei smiled.

“Many thanks, Senior.”

The two exchanged a smile, and the two cultivators from the Golden Oneness Daoist Tradition departed on the wind. Li Jiangqian hurriedly stepped forward and briefly recounted their affairs,

“Father, an elder made a move that helped us. Younger Sister seized a Spiritual Treasure, and in doing so, happened to disperse that batch of divine abilities. We followed along the palace hall and our harvest was abundant...”

Hearing news of Li Qinghong, a trace of a smile flashed through Li Zhouwei’s eyes. His expression remained quite calm.

“Que’wan.”

“This junior is here.”

Li Zhouwei said in a low voice,

“You have a Spiritual Treasure for protection. Depart immediately for the lake. From now on, remain on the lake. Refine the Spiritual Treasure and distribute the spiritual items... Have your great-granduncle come out of seclusion. It would be best if he can cross the river. Have those few head north, and cultivate at Tangdao Mountain.”

As soon as he spoke, Li Jiangqian’s expression showed understanding. Li Que’wan also nodded inwardly, replying,

“This junior understands!”

A cold sneer finally appeared in the King Wei’s golden eyes.

“This time... I caught the Way of Great Desire red-handed. That Dharma Protector, Maha Renshijia, I heard he is Tian Langzhi’s most capable general. He underestimated his me too greatly, and being in the grotto-heaven, he could not connect to his Buddhist Land. Thus, I shattered his Dharma Body... If not for a Xiaodisa protecting a wisp of his True Spirit, he would have perished on the spot in the grotto-heaven!”

Renshijia was a renowned Buddhist cultivator of Great Virtue. Unfortunately for him, he ran into Li Zhouwei. Not only were his methods greatly diminished inside the grotto-heaven, but the small Buddhist Land he had cultivated was even broken by the Crimson Severing Arrowhead. Naturally, his end was not a pleasant one.

He took a storage bag from his sleeve, tossed it to Li Que'wan, and changed the subject,

"Fortunately, he lost a good portion of his wealth. I didn't make any major moves in the grotto-heaven, just casually picked up a few resources. Take them back with you."

Li Que'wan respectfully complied, then bade farewell and departed. Li Jiangqian, however, said in a low voice,

"Father... we are now..."

"We wait."

Li Zhouwei raised his head, watching a speck of white light in the Great Void rapidly approach. It manifested before him, instantly transforming into a gaunt-faced man carrying a sword, his eyes bright. It was Tao Shidao!

Before he could speak, the King Wei had already flipped his hand to reveal an item.

This object was merely a palm high, yet it was a small, white-jade tower with carved railings and jade masonry, exquisitely beautiful. Its colors were misty, and tiny curtains fluttered.

White Curtain Old Dream Tower!

"The Tao Clan's treasure. I have already reclaimed it for you."

The clan-guarding treasure, lost for many years, reappeared before his very eyes. Tao Shidao's face flushed for a moment. He had no time to marvel at the other's divine ability. He subconsciously raised his hands, yet did not accept it. Instead, he bowed deeply, saying,

"Many thanks... King Wei!"

Li Zhouwei accepted his bow calmly.

"Now... the White Curtain Old Dream Tower and the Lacquer Cloud Branch are both in your hands. A full two Three-Yin cardinal treasures..."

"Tao Shidao!"

King Wei turned his head, his gaze fixed upon him.

"I am charging you to guard Luoxia. There must be no failures!"

Tao Shidao instantly raised his head and nodded with grim solemnity:

"Shidao accepts the command."

...

The Great Void was dark and gloomy. The great bronze doors of the Netherworld Hall were tightly shut, floating lightly within the Exiled Qi. A long, long time passed before a tiny sound was heard.

"Creeaak..."

Streaks of Buddhist light still shuttled along the border between the Great Void and the mortal world. Amidst them, a grotto-heaven collapsed. A pink, lotus-like radiance soared into the sky, and a golden body burst forth from the earth. The very trees of the mountain forest seemed to weep with joy, emitting low, murmuring sounds.

'The Way of Compassion.'

Sima Yuanli waited for a long time, feeling increasingly restless. He looked at the ever-densening Buddhist light, his heart sinking.

'I have no idea what happened... It seems a fight broke out on the river as well...'

Sima Yuanli had been rescued by Li Zhouwei and had naturally fled far away. He hid secretly in a corner of the Great Tomb River for a time, waiting until the heavens collapsed and the earth split before finding an opening to emerge. But the moment he stepped out of the grotto-heaven, the radiance of Valley Water filling the entire Great Void left him utterly shaken.

'Valley Water? Murong Weidian has fallen?'

But with just one glance, Sima Yuanli immediately sensed something was wrong.

'The Great Void is like a mountain gorge, with Pure Origin flowing like a babbling brook... How can such a phenomenon be created by a mere divine ability!'

Terror gripped his heart, and he dared not think on it further. He just flef. Only from a great distance did he spot the Exiled Qi.

He waited for a long while before seeing the great hall dissipate like smoke, leaving only a black-robed man standing alone.

Yang Ruiyi.

Sima Yuanli hurried forward and looked up, the expression in his eyes freezing.

This Great General Yang, though he never claimed to be a peerless prodigy, had always acted with the steadiness of Mount Tai. Now, however, he seemed to have lost all his composure. His face was a shade paler than usual, and he stood utterly crestfallen, his expression dark.

“Great General... Great General?”

Sima Yuanli called out twice before the man before him startled awake. Yang Ruiyi lifted his eyelids, saw the inquiry on Sima Yuanli’s face, and said hoarsely,

“Xiao... Daoist Master Xiao has fallen.”

Mentioning Xiao Chuting again, Yang Ruiyi’s words were faintly indistinct, as if from respect, or perhaps taboo. He heaved a soft sigh and strode forward.

Sima Yuanli sensed a peculiar undertone in this, and his heart hung in suspense. Yet, he couldn’t grasp a single clue, so he could only follow closely behind him, saying,

“Just now, when I exited the grotto-heaven, I saw Lord Han... She said... there was thunder.”

These words made Yang Ruiyi turn sideways. He opened his mouth, then pressed the words back down, forging ahead sullenly.

“This is not an affair of the mortal realm,” he said. “It is not for you and me to recklessly discuss.”

Sima Yuanli’s heart sank. He quickly lowered his head, apologizing repeatedly, and spoke no more. He just followed with quick steps out of the Great Void. He saw that light still lingered in the mountain forest, rainbows drifted at the horizon, and a single person stood at the fore.

This person commanded the Bright Yang, his divine ability at its absolute peak. Simply by standing there, he gathered all the myriad colors of the sky. The

Sun-Surging Governing Stars between his brows flickered faintly, like a celestial god.

“So it is King Wei!”

Yang Ruiyi had run straight into him. Even now, astonishment and disbelief filled his eyes. He said softly,

“King Wei’s execution of that divine ability was truly a stroke of genius!”

Li Zhouwei’s golden eyes shifted slightly.

“The Great General overpraises me. It was merely a humble effort.”

His words were not false modesty. At this moment, bringing up the affair of the Great Tomb River, he felt little enthusiasm.

The contest between Purple Mansion Realms at the Great Tomb River had certainly been fraught with twists, and he had indeed played the decisive role. He had joined forces with Chi Buzi to plot against Changxiao, and Su Yan had ultimately fallen by his hand, allowing him to seize the phenomenon.

But no one could have expected the situation to develop to such a degree. Having seen True Monarchs take action one after another, looking back on that great battle now, it truly paled in comparison. What was truly reflected in his heart, demanding his vigilance and scrutiny, were those venerable positions that strode across heaven and earth.

Seeing him gently shake his head, Yang Ruiyi seemed to have an inkling as well. He gave him a deep look and said,

“I wonder... does King Wei have any other important matters to discuss?”

To his surprise, the King Wei before him nodded quite naturally.

Yang Ruiyi was taken aback. He heard Li Zhouwei say,

“This King has come to borrow men from the Great General.”

“Borrow men?”

Yang Ruiyi paused, saying instinctively,

“The Great Tomb River has collapsed, a great war of divine abilities. The Daoist Masters are either injured... or their souls are still shaken...”

But as his words reached this point, he abruptly stopped. His eyes narrowed slightly, revealing a pensive look, as he listened to Li Zhouwei continue.

“The Great General is correct.”

This King Wei took a step forward.

“In the Great Tomb River, Tuoba Ci perished in the dragon’s maw, and Profound Qi soaring to the heavens. Tuoba Qiye will inevitably grieve and look north. The northern cultivators fought to excess over the spiritual items, to the point that the likes of Danyin and Zhuo Kui used every killing move they had to seize resources, showing no mercy. The subordinates of the other Daoist Masters mostly fought within the grotto-heaven and suffered many injuries.”

His golden eyes were calm, yet surged with a fierce light as he gazed at the streaks of Buddhist light illuminating the sky, one after another.

“The various Mahas are seizing the Golden Land, not hesitating to risk their very life-mandates. Now that the Great Tomb River has collapsed and Dharma Masters have intervened, they are even less able to attend to other matters. Even if the outcome is decided in a moment or two, they will inevitably be piled with more injuries—and the various Buddhists are fighting beside their Daoist Tradition. Chiguang and Qian Yan also cannot spare the attention to stray.”

Li Zhouwei had stopped and not left, and Tianhuo had long known his intentions. A dignified disciple of Changhuai, the Great General of Western Shu in charge of a whole region—how could his movements be known to others at will? Li Zhouwei had specially asked him, and he, in turn, had specially mentioned Qing Jifang’s seclusion, all to relieve Li Zhouwei of his worries!

“Great General, this is a heaven-sent opportunity. We can take Xiangyu and seize Qilu, bringing our armies to the borders of Yan. It cannot be lightly dismissed.”

Yang Ruiyi’s mind cleared in an instant, a look of shock crossing his face.

‘He waited for me here... he isn’t even returning to the lake to regroup. He means to press the advantage...’

Yet, this Great General felt no great stir in his heart. He hesitated a moment, then shook his head, saying,

“I am afraid I must still wait for the Emperor’s command!”

There was no other reason; the benefits were simply not substantial enough.

The Great Song had already recovered its former territory, retaken Jianghuai, and even captured Luoxia. Those few factions to the north, what Daoist Traditions were they? Lotus Temple and Cultivation Transcendence!

The Great Song naturally would not touch Cultivation Transcendence. To continue north from Jianghuai, there was only Lotus Temple... That was one of the Seven Aspects, an extremely tough bone to chew. Taking Luoxia back then had allowed them to relocate the great clans, but Lotus Temple? Even if they could seize some land from this great Daoist Tradition, it would hardly count as a major achievement.

The only way out was to head northeast from Luoxia, to aim for the Central Plains behind Lotus Temple, territory that had never belonged to the former Ning State to begin with....

‘That’s nearly at White Horse Monastery and Gu Prefecture! How much turmoil will that stir up?’

To Yang Ruiyi, this was truly a thankless task that would offend many, yet offered little reward. Naturally, his heart was not moved.

But the King Wei before him was not surprised. He just stared at Yang Ruiyi, a smile slowly spreading across his lips as he said,

“Command?”

“Precisely...”

Li Zhouwei was, after all, a White Qilin, and a four-divine-ability White Qilin at that. This light and clever retort immediately made Yang Ruiyi turn solemn.

“This Yang commands the cultivators. My duty is to Jianghuai. To cross the river and head north, I cannot act without an imperial edict.”

King Wei just chuckled and shook his head.

“Then I must trouble the Great General to wait a moment.”

Yang Ruiyi swiftly raised his head, as if understanding something. He immediately turned to the south, and sure enough, he saw layers of Exiled Qi enveloping a streak of brilliant white light as it spread toward them, manifesting in the air.

It was precisely an imperial edict of True Qi, with a golden base and white patterns, shining with dazzling splendor!

Translator's Note:

In this chapter, Li Zhouwei plans to attack Xiangyu (项羽) and seize Qilu (齐鲁). Here is a breakdown of these two key regions:

- Xiangyu (项羽): This is a compound name for a large, strategic area.
 - Xiang (项) refers to the vital city of Xiangyang (襄阳).
 - Yu (豫) refers to the Yu Province (Yuzhou / 沂州), an ancient name for the region around Luoying.
- Qilu (齐鲁): This name refers to the geographical territory of the Qi and Lu States. Both are powerful and influential vassal states under the Great Zhou dynasty.

Chapter 1312: Musings

The rolling light of True Qi illuminated the man's simple, unadorned face, making his eyes shine brilliantly, while Yang Ruiyi composed his expression and retreated a step, as if sinking into boundless Exiled Qi, before darkness descended and the bronze hall boomed shut, sealing off the outside world entirely.

The golden scroll unfurled with a rustle, platinum-colored characters flowing forth from it as a grand and majestic voice sounded out.

"An edict from the True Yang of Martial Cultivation... I, the sovereign, have inherited these martial achievements and received the lands of immortals. The Profound Chamber has been established, and its people are my subjects. Amidst the clash of steel, they are my loyal spiritual ministers. Wei is a kingdom that serves as my own arm, wielding my authority to suppress and settle turmoil... Now, relying on hidden merits, I dare deploy the retribution of divine martial might. This edict is hereby proclaimed as testament... I decree the use of Sanjiang and the two territories... Employ both conventional and unconventional means, united in one purpose..."

Yang Ruiyi listened with utmost respect, and upon receiving the command, he sighed inwardly.

'It's true... It's really true...'

This edict from the Song Emperor wasn't to appoint a general or bestow any Spiritual Treasure. It meant only one thing—that he, Yang Ruiyi, was to personally station himself in Sanjiang, deploy his divine abilities, and provide his full support.

Yang Ruiyi had been deeply moved when Yang Zhuo moved the capital all those years ago, and while this current development was sudden, it was not entirely unexpected; what could he do but obey?

This great general bowed and said,

“I ask for King Wei’s guidance.”

“I wouldn’t dare.”

Yang Ruiyi’s support was a crucial condition for Li Zhouwei’s northern campaign, so the King of Wei merely nodded slightly, wasting no time as he said,

“Lotus Temple has been rather quiet these past few years, their head disciple is occupied with the war in Jin and currently has no time for other matters, so I wish to ask the great general to lead his men a hundred *li* east, establish a garrison, and watch my back.”

These words did not surprise Yang Ruiyi. If Luoxia was the Song’s current foothold in the north, its location was undeniably awkward—to the north, it bordered the Great Tomb River’s Huan Prefecture, where the Buddhists contended. To the west, it abutted Guanlong, the heartland of Zhao; and to the south lay the Song’s Tangdao Mountain, leaving only the northeast as an exit.

‘We must pass north of Lotus Temple, following the Taihang Mountains northeast...’

Li Zhouwei was keenly aware of the hidden danger that if they went this route, they risked having their retreat cut off by Lotus Temple or the Great Adoration Dharma Realm, trapping the northbound forces deep in enemy territory, so he unhesitatingly left Yang Ruiyi behind to stand guard!

Yang Ruiyi understood his meaning and said,

“Daoist Friend Cheng is in Jianghuai, so we can set that matter aside for now; I shall guard the rear path for Your Majesty.”

Li Zhouwei’s gaze flickered slightly as he looked up at him and said,

“First, we will follow the Taihang Mountains, crossing the prefectures to the north; at the foot of Mount Xiang lie the two prefectures of Dangyin and Guangping, and if we conquer them and continue north, we will reach the Wei Prefecture.”

His words echoed in the dark hall, and upon hearing the words ‘Wei Prefecture,’ Yang Ruiyi’s expression subtly changed. He paused for the briefest moment, a dark map already having unfurled between them, and he immediately said,

“East of Wei Prefecture, surrounding Gu Prefecture, starting from Juancheng and extending to the foot of Mount Dayang in the Dongping Great Desert of ancient Qi, lies the last immortal land of Northern Zhao. Back then, the Zhao Emperor fought his way to this place and established a Daoist tradition, calling it the East Yan Dao.”

He lowered his voice.

“In those days, the East Yan Dao was much larger than it is now. Later, the Yan Kingdom recovered its strength, and with the Imperial Edict of Central Xuan—a cooperation between Emperor Xuan of Yan and the Compassion Dao—it flourished once more, and after several southern invasions, the border was pushed from Bazhou to Liaocheng, until the Way of Great Desire established a foothold in the Dongping Great Desert, at which point the situation finally stabilized.”

Yang Ruiyi finished his brief explanation and asked,

“Your Majesty... which territory do you intend to seize?”

Before Li Zhouwei could reply, he had already raised his head, his expression grave.

“Things seem peaceful between Yan and Zhao, but if you look closely... Great Zhao does not control its own long borders: Jin is blocked by the Great Adoration Dharma Realm; Northern Qi and Yan have the Way of Great Desire and the Gao family; and the Central Plains have the aristocratic families of Gu Prefecture...”

“Wei Prefecture is already within sight of the Yan Kingdom, so if Your Majesty pushes north from Wei Prefecture, you will be punching straight through Northern Zhao to lodge yourself between the two kingdoms, which is a great taboo... furthermore, all of these are major Daoist Traditions...”

Li Zhouwei smiled and said,

“Great General, you worry too much. While punching through Northern Zhao would be impressive, the time is not yet right to conquer Wei Prefecture.”

Li Zhouwei was a veteran of a hundred battles; how could he fight his way between Yan and Zhao, only to trap himself in the crossfire between the Compassion Dao, the Way of Great Desire, and Gu Prefecture? Though he disdained Yan cultivators, he did not underestimate them—the image of that figure who had perfected the Valley Water divine ability still flashed in his mind.

‘Murong Weidian truly is the leader of the Yan Kingdom’s Immortal Dao, and extremely capable. The Compassion Dao runs deep and hidden. Now is absolutely not the time to cross them.’

He said softly,

“This king will only take the prefectures of Dangyin and Guangping, then turn sharply east to seize the gateway city of Juancheng.”

Yang Ruiyi certainly had his own concerns and did not want to stir up trouble, but how could Li Zhouwei not have his own?

The countless changes in the current world truly weighed on his mind.

‘Luoxia alone is not enough. Whether it’s for accumulating destiny, plundering resources, or achieving the Bright Yang enterprise, I must go further... But, just as Yang Ruiyi said, all that remains are the great Daoist Traditions...’

Northern Zhao’s scattered state, a result of being carved up by major powers, had once been a great boon that allowed him to maneuver, but as he pushed deeper into the north, all of that changed.

Luoxia, the only territory that had been easy to seize, was already carved up, and even though Li Zhouwei’s destiny was established, the remaining powers—be it the Way of Great Desire, the Compassion Dao, or even White Horse Monastery and Mount Dayang—would never bow to him.

He couldn’t just shatter mountains and invade temples in the presence of a Dharma Master. The help from the Song was limited, the Yang family was already showing signs of withdrawal, and even if he could suppress the enemy leaders, he would be left all alone; how could he possibly defend a territory on four fronts?

Viewed this way, the aristocratic families of Gu Prefecture, with their extremely complex backgrounds, became absolutely critical!

‘Gu Prefecture’s factions may be complex and deeply entrenched, but they have submitted to every dynasty, serving various Imperial Monarchs. In the end, they are just a larger version of the Luoxia families, and if the Tao clan could be persuaded to help me, then these families will certainly bow when the time comes...’

If Li Zhouwei wanted to establish a foothold in the Central Plains, he absolutely could not allow himself to be isolated and unsupported, nor could he conjure

so many Purple Mansion Realm experts out of thin air. The support of these great families represented the support of the northern Immortal Dao, and he absolutely could not let this opportunity pass.

It was precisely for this reason that he had allowed both Jiang Fuwang and Lu Fang to escape during the Luoxia campaign.

‘One is Gu Prefecture, the other is the Gao family; these are two powers that can be won over, and once I break through the East Yan Dao’s sphere of influence, I will be qualified to join the Great Song in pressuring Lotus Temple, allowing me to claim most of Zhao’s lands beyond the pass. Only with Jianghuai at my back can I truly be secure!’

‘During this process, the Seven Aspects will not just sit idly by; once they have a free hand, they will surely intervene, and every minute and every second is precious right now, so I cannot afford to be complacent.’

Li Zhouwei was reluctant to return even to Moongaze Lake, precisely because he understood that this opportunity was fleeting.

‘Moreover...’

He lowered his head, his gaze falling upon the dark map spread across the table, specifically at the two purple-black characters for “Juancheng” and the winding river channel depicted beneath them.

The Ji River.

‘Perfect. It’s on the Ji River...’

.....

A brilliant golden light shone, and the radiance between heaven and earth was warm and gentle. Although the sun was not visible, layer upon layer of soft light sprinkled down, drowning the entire sky in a soft, golden hue that was pleasing to the eye.

Beneath this gentle light, mountains of varying sizes undulated across the land, a brilliant, glittering mist permeated the peaks, and faintly visible, pale azure steps wound their way between the mountains, ascending straight into the clouds.

Atop the highest, most majestic peak stood a vast Dao platform. By its steps stood two profound bluestone steles, one to the left and one to the right, flanking the platform.

Their placement was profound and noble, emanating an air of supreme immortal detachment.

One read:

Today, We Drive the Twin Profundities Dao

The other read:

Once More, We Shall Remake the Azure-Golden Heaven

An azure plaque hung in the sky:

The Profound Origin Abides in Change

Wisps of True Fire found their way here, converging before the mountain. A man in golden robes ascended the steps, performed a deep bow before the azure plaque, followed by the grand ritual of nine kowtows, and only then did he speak.

“Zhang Jiaoyi of Tianque, before the Golden Oneness.”

This person was none other than Tianque!

He had come from Great Tomb Heaven, covered in dust from his travels. It seemed he hadn’t rested for even a moment, rushing directly to this grotto-heaven, and the roiling divine ability within him only now subsided, returning to calm.

His voice echoed within the ethereal white mist, resounding for a moment. On the profound stele reading *Once More, We Shall Remake the Azure-Golden Heaven*, the character for ‘Golden’ flashed, and Tianque performed another grand ritual before entering the Profound Platform.

The platform still bore the likeness of mountains and rivers, where one could faintly see undulating bluestone, and surprisingly, several Green Pine trees were planted there, their needles shimmering, flecked with gold and snow, whistling in the mountain wind.

The Azure Step wound upwards into the hazy white mist, and one by one, Dao platforms began to appear, the divine abilities upon them shimmering with uneven colors, some azure or red, others gold or white.

Tianque stepped forward and scanned his surroundings, whereupon the silence upon the Profound Platform immediately wavered. Someone above finally could not hold back, their voice low and deep.

“Tianque...”

Tianque’s expression flickered slightly as he said softly,

“The True Monarch came to the Great Tomb River.”

Instantly, the various auras in the mountain condensed and divine abilities flared. There was a moment of silence, as if a rumor had just been confirmed, and someone said,

“I heard Judge Yang also made a move, and rain clouds are stirring again over the Eastern Sea... I’m afraid...”

Instantly, the atmosphere in the mountains grew turbulent as a sheet of golden light descended, treading on air and carrying the mist with it as it came down the steps, which caused the other divine abilities to shift, and one by one, their owners moved aside, saying respectfully,

“Greetings, Dao Son!”

But in the air was only a golden body, flashing with profound light and wearing fluttering golden robes. Even though its face was blank, it still revealed an irrepressible aura as it stopped in mid-air, looked toward Tianque, and said softly,

“Jiaoyi, how is King Wei?”

Tianque’s expression was complex.

He finally bowed, prostrating himself as he said respectfully,

“Four divine abilities.”

As soon as these words were spoken, many of the divine abilities present fell silent, but the golden body did not find it strange, its tone holding a trace of pity as it said,

“He is the White Qilin, after all. What did you observe of his strength?”

Tianque pondered for a moment.

“He has already achieved the ☐ Imperial Observation of the Origin ☐ and possesses the unique bearing of a Bright Yang sovereign. He has numerous Spiritual Treasures, and if he and I were to fight, I fear I could not defeat him easily.”

The golden body’s blank face gazed at him for a moment. It said softly:

“If the fight dragged on, you would likely not be his match.”

Tianque looked as if he wanted to speak but held his tongue, while the golden body had already turned away, its voice fading.

“His divine abilities are already established; he passed the Purple Mystery stage far too early, which puts us in a difficult position.”

Tianque replied,

“With such a prime opportunity, he will definitely try to take the Central Plains first... the Dharma Master of Lotus Temple hasn’t emerged in a long time, so they certainly won’t interfere with him. Li Zhouwei is wildly ambitious and won’t rest until he has tested Gu Prefecture.”

The golden body paused slightly and replied,

“The situation now, I’m afraid, is different from before.”

These words plunged the mountain into silence. All eyes focused on the Dao Son’s external incarnation, the divine abilities stilled, and they listened as he said faintly:

“Heavenly Glow is even closer to the Golden Immortal realm.”

The words landed with heavy finality, causing even the mountain winds to stagnate; even though they were within a grotto-heaven, everyone present shuddered with a cold chill, rendered speechless, and even Tianque lowered his head, staring at the ground in silence.

“In truth, when one thinks about it, it isn’t surprising...”

But the external incarnation only paced slowly, its blank face gazing at the horizon.

“Back then, the Heavenly Dao was a primordial whole, and the Dao Embryo was the immortal standard, yet even that was not considered first-rate in the world,

as there were still Profound Masters and Immortal Lords above them. After came seeking the Dao and verifying the Dao, until there was no further progress to be made, and so one by one, they fell..."

"Later, the Heavenly Dao ceased to exist, and subsequent generations achieved the substance of an Immortal Lord but not the name. Thus, the immortals took the concept of 'Grand Culmination' from schools like Liangzhi and Taihua, and only then coined the name 'Golden Immortal'. He, too, was a figure who listened to the Dao before the honored ones and personally witnessed the profound, and He also attained the Empty Attestation of Fruition, so it is not strange that this day has truly come."

He lowered his head, his words laced with a trace of sorrow.

"I am afraid... the day the Bright Yang falls will be the day He is hailed as supreme."

Thus, the meaning behind his words seemed ambiguous.

'Li Zhouwei's situation... will likely cause many people to reconsider their positions.'

Only then did an aged, bitter voice emerge from the mist,

"It being 'not strange' is one thing, but for it to actually happen is another matter entirely. Back then, that other one at least walked the Azure Profoundity Dao, and he was also constrained and did not interfere in the heavens, but now... now..."

But then another voice chimed in, persuasively,

"That lord may be dom... aloof, but his is the path of Comprehending Profoundity, or at least it is not Encompassing Profoundity... Xue Linqing said the Wei Emperor seeks to Scourge the Mainland and Conquer the Cosmos, to become an Immortal Emperor... why does no one in the world dare to help Him. He is the Sovereign Treading Peril, and if He truly breaks free one day... do you think he would stop at being a mere new Dao Embryo? And what terrifying consequences would follow...?"

But the mountain was silent, and a bleak feeling seemed to spread as everyone felt themselves in danger. Then, from the mountainside, Tianque suddenly spoke,

"I fear it is unwise to let him cultivate so quickly!"

He did not mention anyone by name, but all the cultivators in the mountain understood his meaning, and a flurry of whispers instantly broke out.

“This White Qilin—if he truly decides to be ruthless, how could it be a simple matter of ‘cultivating too quickly’. I think the world already intends to eliminate him.”

“But he has already passed the Purple Mystery stage! What if... he truly succeeds? Heavenly Glow would never place the opportunity for Golden Immortal upon him, so whether we eliminate him or not, what’s the point. He is destined for Dao-accomplishment sooner or later, and one more Bright Yang True Monarch... that should be a good thing...”

“Was Heavenly Glow’s immortal might displayed unintentionally?”

The whispers echoed through the sky, finally causing the golden body to turn its head.

“This matter is not to be discussed further!”

His tone suddenly turned icy.

“The Bright Yang Imperial Monarch shall be executed. This is the Immortal Mandate that my Lord received—whispered and bestowed personally by the Ancestral Master—so how could it be wrong! In this world... anyone who wishes to eliminate Li Zhouwei must first get past me, Golden Oneness.”

“As for cultivating too quickly.”

He stepped forward, his featureless face scanning the surroundings as he spoke:

“Whether it is three divine abilities or four, it is, in fact, the same. Li Zhouwei is not stupid, so how could he fail to grasp the proper limits?”

The cultivators all agreed in unison, and only then did they hear the Dao Son give his command.

“You need not concern yourselves with the affairs of your superiors; just watch your own pieces on the board—Zhong Qian has been at two divine abilities for some time now, and although the medicine has been prepared for him and he need not worry about his Dao path, he shouldn’t be this slow... should he miss the opportune moment, it is not a consequence any of you can bear.”

Chapter 1313: Setting Off

Gardenia Scenery Mountain.

Flames roared within the mountain, and the pill furnace radiated vibrant colors. A man with red lips and white teeth sat cross-legged before the furnace, his hands forming seals as he retracted his divine ability and dharma power, though his expression carried a trace of worry.

After an unknown amount of time, he rose abruptly, striding forward. He watched as a streak of radiance descended from the heavens, drifting lightly to land before him. He immediately rejoiced.

“Wan’er!”

The illusionary colors manifested instantly, vermillion and mercury blending into a dazzling display. It revealed the woman’s appearance; her brows and eyes were gentle, her gaze bright. Although she looked somewhat travel-worn, she possessed a unique charm.

Li Ximing looked her up and down, breathing a sigh of relief in secret, and said,

“How is the situation? King Wei...”

The woman pursed her lips in a smile and replied,

“King Wei naturally requires no worry. That Dharma Protector Maha, who cultivated for six lifetimes, was nearly beaten to death. With his current divine ability, the number of people in this world who can suppress him likely does not exceed ten!”

“He also harbored thoughts of using this opportunity to seek further achievements, so he did not return yet. He took my elder brother north with him. However, seeing that I had reached the time to cultivate my divine ability and that the family’s secret realm was about to be established, he specially sent me back!”

The worry on Li Ximing's face lessened slightly.

"That is for the best... He has the capability. If he can seek further achievements, that is ideal. But watching from here in the south, I heard the scenes in that place were truly terrifying... Daoist Master Xiao..."

"Has fallen!"

Li Que'wan's gaze dimmed. She gave a rough explanation of events, leaving Li Ximing stunned, his expression changing repeatedly. Finally, he sat down dejectedly, sighed, and said,

"Things do not go as one wishes! I..."

He sighed.

"Master is still on the lake; I still must speak with him..."

Seeing his low spirits, Li Que'wan forced a smile and said,

"Great-Uncle... Although Senior Xiao has fallen, True Monarchs emerged one after another this time, revealing quite a bit of news. Perhaps it will be inspiring for King Wei as well... We also had some gains within the grotto-heaven!"

Li Ximing temporarily put away his mood. Li Que'wan straightened her expression and asked the question that had weighed on her throughout the journey.

"The secret realm... how does it fare? And Cheng Qian?"

Li Que'wan had entrusted the Secret Realm Profound Foundation to his hands. In her heart, she was both anxious and fearful, terrified that some issue might arise. This was one of the reasons she had rushed back. She had actually already been to the lake prefecture and used the Spirit Probe to investigate. Seeing no signs of instability, she had breathed a sigh of relief and doubled back.

At this question, Li Ximing nodded silently and said,

"It is fine... It is just that there was a great tremor in the north some days ago. There were too many changes between heaven and earth, and there was a period of instability. He did not hesitate to use his dharma blood to stabilize it, and fearing disturbance from others, he even sealed the great hall with mystical means..."

He answered solemnly.

"We owe him a favor for this."

“This junior understands.”

The woman nodded in agreement. Setting that matter aside for the moment, she turned her hand over, and a pitch-black Mystic Pill painted with silver patterns floated in her palm!

She smiled.

“Hidden Profundity Five Edicts!”

Li Ximing was startled, his eyes shining brightly. He gazed at it in amazement for a good while. Although he could not discern its depths, he still rejoiced.

“I anticipated good things, but I did not expect something this good!”

Holding the treasure, Li Que’wan truly could not bear to put it down. She recounted the encounter with Li Qinghong, causing Li Ximing to pause, shaking his head with considerable guilt as he said:

“Regarding the events of those years, I still haven’t had time to thank Aunt...”

She did not say much more, only smiling:

“This one is the Profound Zhu Edict Pill. Paired with the ‘Merging Owl’, leaving aside the Hidden Profundity and Material Derivation, the most prominent spirituality, Edict Spirit, is naturally present as usual!”

She flicked her sleeve, and a patch of water light immediately drifted to the ground. It twisted and manifested, revealing the figure of a black-robed man. His pair of slightly narrow eyes swept over Li Ximing, and he hurriedly bowed, rejoicing.

“Daoist Master! Daoist Master! The old Demon has seen the Young Miss...”

“I know, I know...”

Li Ximing laughed heartily, helping Li Wushao up. He examined him carefully and said,

“Now you can go a step further!”

When Li Que’wan had obtained the Profound Heng Edict Pill years ago, she had felt a resonance. Now that she had obtained this second one, those guesses were instantly verified—at this moment, Li Wushao’s aura was undulating; he had indeed received the Edict Spirit blessing from the Profound Zhu Edict Pill simultaneously!

Li Wushao hurriedly said,

“What the Daoist Master says is true... Now I have a path for cultivation. Although I have no cultivation method to speak of and can only rely on resonance with this Spiritual Treasure to gather divine ability dharma power, it is finally a path to walk.”

He, Li Wushao, had thought his path of divine ability ended here, which he considered sufficient satisfaction. He never expected an opportunity to advance further. He looked at the woman beside him and rejoiced.

“I have measured it. The good thing about this Edict Spirit is that there is no threshold to speak of. If I cultivate on my own, I should be able to fill this divine ability dharma power within twenty years... I will be a two-divine-ability Purple Mansion, albeit without a divine ability.”

Li Ximing shook his head with a laugh and said,

“You cannot calculate it like that... Every divine ability is a qualitative change. Before, you struggled fighting a single divine ability. Even now, lacking a divine ability yourself, you will still appear frail before a two-divine-ability opponent... The Pit Water spell arts I told you to practice previously...”

Demon beasts were already a step inferior to humans in cultivating spells, and Li Wushao’s Dao-comprehension was truly not high, so naturally, he had made no progress. He lowered his head awkwardly. Li Ximing understood and took out a jade bottle from his sleeve, sighing.

“The family does not lack Mansion Water spiritual resources, and I have a stock of pills. Take these and cultivate well. You must not forget the matter of spell arts—if you do not practice diligently, there will come a day of regret...”

Li Wushao accepted it with a thousand thanks and bid farewell, returning into the Spiritual Treasure. Li Que’wan smiled,

“The spirituality of this treasure is called River Qu. It possesses the marvel of bearing the divine way and dissolving profound mysteries. Once this Spiritual Treasure is activated on the body, it can dissolve profound mysteries, using one’s life-mandate to bear the attacks of others...”

Seeing Li Ximing frown, she explained,

“When this spirituality operates, it can distribute a portion of the damage from another’s divine ability onto the life-mandate, transforming it into rolling ominous disasters or evil qi and wicked birds that surround the body. It turns the immediate injury into a calamity that stretches over many years... waiting to be resolved after escaping with one’s life...”

She spoke softly.

“This spirituality is very useful. It actually has unexpected effects during combat. Just like that Hengzhu Edict Pill from before, it was also evolved from a certain Merging Owl divine ability... It is just that one must absolutely not be careless with this thing. Once used too much in a great battle, the calamity will accumulate to a terrifying degree.”

“King Wei once faced the disaster of Crystalline Wu Earth. If a Merging Owl cultivator uses this divine ability to avoid fatal injury, the backlash calamity would likely rival that Crystalline Wu Earth disaster, possessing all kinds of strange phenomena...”

Li Ximing pondered for a moment. Not knowing what he recalled, the expression in his eyes actually dimmed. He tucked his slightly urgent hands into his sleeves and said,

“I understand...”

Li Que’wan did not know the thoughts in his heart, only smiling.

“However, this spirituality is not as formidable as that actual divine ability. The damage it can share is less, and the resulting calamity is also less. Combined with that Hengzhu’s Profound Heng, they can be considered mutually distinct supports.”

Li Ximing nodded silently.

“I see that these Hidden Profundity Five Edicts are all from the same mold. A Hidden Profundity enhancement, and each possesses a spirituality that is a Great Dao for preserving life. If one truly collected them all, who knows how survivable that person would be.”

Li Que’wan pursed her lips in a smile, listening as Li Ximing said solemnly,

“For this Profound Zhu Edict Pill and Hidden Profundity, you will use Heavenly One Pure Origin!”

Before Li Que'wan could say more, Li Ximing already said,

"This item is inherently a first-class Purple Mansion spiritual item in the world... It is of great help whether for cultivation or condensing divine abilities. If there comes a time when it is truly needed, taking it out then will not be too late. Who else but you deserves it?"

He gave Li Que'wan no chance to say more, settling the matter. Li Que'wan had no choice but to bring up other matters, saying,

"Many treasures were obtained in the grotto-heaven. There is a Valley Water treasure in my elder brother's hands, and also a Pit Water one, which is quite peculiar and can serve as a reference for my Dao lineage. This junior has kept it with me."

She spread her fair hand upward, and specks of light flew from her sleeve, landing in her palm.

"There are not many of the spiritual resource category, all are of Water Virtue. King Wei also has many spiritual items on hand. I only have a copper lamp here, which I haven't had time to refine. As for spiritual items, there are two: one is the Converging Water Heavenly Sea White Sand, and the other is the Mansion Water Hundred Lake Stone. Both are rare items. There are also several cultivation methods. My elder brother and I picked and chose, and they have all been categorized here. Aside from this, there is a pot treasure."

She smiled faintly, and a jade pot abruptly appeared in her palm. Its curves were graceful, blooming with a cheerful light. Even separated by the pot, one could feel the fragrance rushing toward the face.

Four words were inscribed on it, shimmering with ink-black light:

Confused Renewing Form Replacement

"This item was seized by my elder brother in a water palace after we separated from His Majesty. It is an extremely rare Renewing Wood ancient spiritual essence!"

Li Ximing only sensed it briefly before joy instantly appeared on his face. He exclaimed,

"Renewing Wood?"

In the current era, Wood Virtue was at the extreme of decline among the Five Virtues. Only Horn Wood was prevalent in the world. As the orthodox position, Upright Wood followed closely behind. Gathering Wood was already scarce, while Renewing Wood and Protecting Wood were practically impossible to find even a shadow of.

'Only these ancient grotto-heavens still preserve items of Renewing Wood, let alone a portion of Renewing Wood spiritual essence!'

Li Ximing merely sniffed it lightly, and his heart was already pounding. A sense of strangeness suddenly assailed him. He flicked his sleeve, and another 'Li Ximing' revealed its form, sitting cross-legged, staring straight at the jade pot with both eyes.

Spirit-Splitting Alternate Body!

The Hundred-Heart Soul-Union used to refine this item back then was a Renewing Wood object, and the carving's main body, Soul-Hearing Mulberry Wood, was also related to Renewing Wood...

Li Ximing had been ritually refining this object for many years. This alternate body had consumed an unknown amount of his dharma power, and even dharma body and dharma blood. It possessed considerable intelligence but lacked a true object of spirituality to nourish the alternate body.

His eyes shone brightly for a moment as he said,

"With this item to nourish it, the Spirit-Splitting Alternate Body will surely gain great benefits and ascend to a higher level..."

Li Que'wan had obviously known this long ago. She nodded with a smile.

"Great-Uncle's Spirit-Splitting Alternate Body is already formidable. It could already practice kung fu and meditate long ago. Now that it can handle fire and refine pills, and having obtained this item, perhaps the next step is that it will be able to cast spells!"

Li Ximing put the thing away filled with anticipation. His mood was excellent as he heard the junior say,

"King Wei sent this junior back... there are other arrangements..."

She mentioned Li Zhouwei's instructions. Li Ximing immediately nodded in understanding and said,

"This matter is easily settled. Since Western Shu is behaving, I will leave Cheng Qian behind to assist you, and I will take the rest of the people along with me. Also, preparations were made long ago for your next divine ability, Nurturing of Perfect Harmony, and this is the perfect time to cultivate."

He took out a jade box from his sleeve and said:

"Back then, I exchanged for the Clarity-Truth Spirit-Union Pill. This is the last one, just right for you to consume—no need to say more. Your elder brother has one, so naturally, you have one too. You certainly won't be left out."

As a Purple Mansion, it was naturally impossible for Li Que'wan not to want this precious pill. After a slight pause, she finally accepted it. Li Ximing then said,

"I will set off immediately—you go to the lake prefecture to check on Cheng Qian. Arrange matters well and cultivate diligently. By the time King Wei returns in triumph, your second divine ability should be ready!"

.....

Mount Liangchuan.

Wind and clouds rolled, and distant Buddhist light still flickered incessantly. A swaying golden color swept over, lingering in the air for a moment before manifesting as a man with hands clasped behind his back. His eyes, flashing with dharma light, swept the surroundings as he said softly,

"Fellow Daoist Bai!"

Movements stirred in the Great Void elsewhere. A youth draped in purple water responded and emerged, bowing to him.

"Greetings, Fellow Daoist Chang Yun."

Chang Yun nodded to him, his eyes full of contemplation.

"So Fellow Daoist Bai has also come."

The two exchanged a glance; many words remained unspoken. Everyone here was an outstanding hero; how could they not see the intention behind the White Qilin and the Great General mobilizing personnel at this time? Chang Yun sighed inwardly.

'This is going to offend people!'

Yehui held a smile on his lips, his gaze sequestered. After waiting a moment, a streak of azure light emerged and paused in mid-air. It was an azure-green carriage, extremely luxurious and blazing with color, enveloping two people within.

The person on the carriage lifted the curtain and stepped out. It was Sima Yuanli. Now that he had become a second-divine-ability cultivator, his bearing had become imposing. He bowed to each of the two and said softly,

“Fellow Daoists, the opportunities of war are tense. The Great General has already led men eastward, entering the Lotus Temple territory. King Wei left orders with me to specially wait for the two of you here...”

Chang Yun only nodded slightly, but Yehui looked as if he did not think much of him, smiling as he turned his face to the side. Sima Yuanli did not take offense and said solemnly,

“Daoist Master Chang Yun is to go north, entering the eastern foothills of the Taihang Mountains, bypassing Guangping, and awaiting changes in divine abilities to prepare to block reinforcements from Wei Prefecture... Daoist Master Yehui is to go east, passing from the edge of Dangyin, crossing over quietly to wait north of Juancheng. Be on guard against Compassion and Gu Prefecture, and act according to the situation.”

His expression was grave. He swept a glance at the two, and seeing Yehui’s demeanor, he simply said,

“There must be no negligence or error.”

“I wondered who it was; so it is Fellow Daoist Sima...”

Yehui swept a glance at him and smiled.

“I, Yehui, am alone in the world. Naturally, I am not afraid of offending anyone. King Wei mobilizing the two of us naturally has his considerations—but Fellow Daoist Sima, this is a rare opportunity for war. I wonder what duty Fellow Daoist holds?”

Sima Yuanli’s expression changed slightly. Knowing Yehui’s attitude was poor, he could only say,

“I naturally wait here. Once all Fellow Daoists gather and head north, I will assist the two of you!”

Yehui deliberately let out a cold laugh and replied,

“Fellow Daoist has picked a good assignment... Counting the days... Taixi’s new Dharma Body is also complete. On this trip... perhaps you might even run into him. We will have to trouble Fellow Daoist again!”

Sima Yuanli naturally knew what he was talking about. In the great battle on the lake back then, it was precisely his hesitation that led to Li Zhouwei letting Taixi escape. Although Yehui was in the north, he had obviously heard of it. This Daoist Master’s sarcasm was extremely biting:

‘You couldn’t even provoke the Great Desire, let alone face the Aristocratic Families of Gu Prefecture? Pulling any one of them out, they are more illustrious than your Sima Family’s ancestors. You have that cowardly heart, but we do not have King Wei’s tolerant spirit!’

He was a man skilled in satire. Back in the north, he had provoked Vast Cicada into a fury that attacked the heart. Now, intentionally testing him, a single sentence caused Sima Yuanli’s face to turn ugly. Yet this Daoist Master, who had always had a good temper, did not tolerate it. He sneered,

“Do not trouble yourself with worry, Fellow Daoist. Daoist Master Zhaojing assisted me greatly, and King Wei saved my life from the hands of the Great Desire within the grotto-heaven, gifting me the Spring Carriage. This True Master goes east today to repay King Wei’s kindness. I have no intention of showing mercy. If there is battle, I will fight; if there is killing, I will kill. If I show even a bit of cowardice...”

That face of his became serious, actually giving birth to a few degrees of ruthlessness soaked in a cold sneer.

“Then let the Luminous Martial Cultivation take the head from my neck.”

Chapter 1314 Dangyin

The Great Void was dim.

Heavenly Light flowed amidst the layers of shadows. Yang Ruizao held a pure black profound talisman in hand, maintaining his Qi at the forefront, while the man behind him looked down, his vision piercing through the Great Void to gaze upon the myriad scenes on the vast earth below.

The prefectures were boiling with the clamor of human voices, the ground covered in figures great and small. Masses of commoners had been refused entry to the cities. They stood barefoot in the slowly receding river water, most cradling infants in their arms, the air thick with an atmosphere of bewildered helplessness.

Seeing Li Zhouwei gaze in silence, Yang Ruizao paused for a moment before speaking,

“King Wei may not be aware, but while the battle raged within the Grotto-Heaven—though I know not which lord took action—the outside world has already been turned upside down... The Great River has changed its course nearby, swallowing up countless fields...”

“However, this river water possesses the Valley essence; the millions of commoners swept away suffered little harm. The men have had their old injuries healed, while every woman who has ever given birth emerged from the river cradling a baby...”

Li Zhouwei could see it clearly as well: the abdomens of these children were completely smooth, lacking navels—an appearance rarely seen on the mainland, yet quite common in the Eastern Sea.

He raised a brow.

“Earth-nurtured children.”

“Precisely!”

Yang Ruizao let out a long sigh and said,

"I fear that with this sweep of the river, the eastern borders beyond the pass, both up and downstream, will suddenly have nearly a million more mouths to feed..."

Li Zhouwei lowered his head, seemingly in thought, and looked at the crowds gathered outside the city walls before raising his eyes to speak.

"Dangyin... such a vast place, yet it lacks even a single Purple Mansion Grand Formation, and still hosts two Daoist Masters?"

Yang Ruizao hurriedly began to explain.

As it turned out, Dangyin Prefecture was situated beneath the Taihang Mountains and possessed fertile soil. Legend had it that the Bright Yang Imperial Monarch once slew a Dao enemy here, hence the name—though the truth of the rumor was unknown. However, during the Wei dynasty, Dangyin had always been a fief for princes; the Bright Yang Qi here was so vigorous that even the Dang water flowing through the land was warm to the touch.

With the fall of Great Wei, the divine marvels of this land gradually faded. For a thousand years, it remained obscure to the mortal world, so no aristocratic families settled here for long. Furthermore, Dangyin had no natural defenses and its spiritual opportunities were not abundant, barely enough to support the cultivation of one or two Purple Mansion masters. Although nominally under the administration of Great Zhao's East Yan, it had in practice always been left to the care of Gu Prefecture...

"Unless it is a famous mountain or great river, usually only a rising Purple Mansion power would establish a grand formation. The talents of this place have all been taken away by the cultivators of Gu Prefecture. Without a major aristocratic family, there is naturally no Purple Mansion Grand Formation..."

A trace of surprise flashed through his eyes as he said:

"In previous years, this place was left unguarded, visited only by Purple Mansion masters from Gu Prefecture heading to Taihang for cultivation. It seems Jiang Fuwang must have left specific orders some years ago to transfer two Daoist Masters from the east... there is even one at the middle stage of the Purple Mansion Realm!"

Li Zhouwei had met Jiang Fuwang and knew that this Daoist Master was a man of ability who could read the situation clearly. It was not surprising that he had made arrangements in advance, though the current changes were so extraordinary that he likely had no room left to maneuver.

Pressed for time, Li Zhouwei did not dwell on thoughts. He first formed the hand seal for the [Spirit Probe] to scout the enemy. At the foot of the Taihang Mountains, he found a resplendent temporary palace. Inside, where the Purple Mansion masters resided, the light was dazzling; two old men sat upon high seats at a jade table.

Yet, in contrast to the brilliant splendor of the palace, the two sat in silence facing one another, not speaking a word. They turned to look at the person kneeling below and asked,

“What is the state of the river?”

The person below cried out straight away,

“Reporting to the Daoist Master... it is... that river water flowed north, then retreated. It swept away countless households, but fortunately, the water possessed the Valley essence and did not harm the common people. Instead, it has left behind many infants...”

“At present, everyone is massed outside the city. It may be manageable for a short while, but if they wait too long, I fear they will trample one another... Moreover, once they are displaced, food will likely become a major issue.”

His answer did not satisfy the two. These were Daoist Masters sent to garrison the place; they might leave at any moment and cared nothing for the livelihood of the people. The man in the main seat frowned, while the one in the secondary seat slapped the table and said coldly,

“I asked you about the divine ability, why are you blathering about the common people? I am asking you, which path did it take?”

The man below did not dare wipe his sweat and hurriedly replied,

“It was the Yu River to the far north... it retreated very quickly. Our people were watching by the riverbank. It likely did not last more than half the time it takes for an incense stick to burn...”

The man in the secondary seat began to sigh, while the one in the main seat waved his hand, shooing the subordinate away like a fly, and said,

“Keep the formations fully active. No one is allowed into the city!”

The subordinate hurriedly retreated, and only then was the Daoist Master in the secondary seat heard saying,

“Lord Tang, how could such a major event occur... it is just the Great Tomb River... Days like this, where we hide within the formation and dare not show our heads, are things only written about in books...”

“Hmph!”

Both men hailed from aristocratic families in Gu Prefecture. For such families to have survived until now, they naturally had their own philosophy of survival. Whenever a celestial phenomenon of this magnitude occurred, these Purple Mansion masters would never look outside, choosing instead to hide in the mountains and whisper amongst themselves.

The man in the main seat spoke,

“It is said that whenever there is a river upheaval, it must be Dragon-kin verifying their Dao. But what I simply don’t understand is, in this current situation, what is there to verify? It can’t possibly be that one has become a True...”

These aristocratic families had always been in the midst of the world’s storms and rarely lacked inside information. But suddenly hearing a commotion outside the formation, both men looked up at the same time, seeing the wind and clouds rolling in the sky, and the man from before had actually returned.

Daoist Master Tang raised his head and said coldly,

“What has happened!”

The man was trembling as he said,

“My Lord... at the foot of the mountain... there is a Lord...”

At these words, Daoist Master Tang finally furrowed his brows. Although Dangyin lacked a Purple Mansion Grand Formation, over the years, various Purple Mansion masters had garrisoned this temporary palace and modified it, imbuing it with some measure of Purple Mansion wonder—how could someone have arrived at the foot of the mountain without anyone knowing?

The two exchanged a glance, their expressions changing abruptly.

‘Exiled Qi?’

“Boom!”

In the next instant, the temporary palace nestled within the mountain range rumbled loudly. Every hall door burst open simultaneously, plunging everything into a dim darkness as doors and windows slammed against their frames. The two Daoist Masters looked up in unison.

A young man had appeared before the hall doors.

He was tall and broad, standing alone in the darkness, yet surrounded by a halo of Heavenly Light that outlined his form. His eyes were fixed on the two men. Though he emitted no killing intent, he resembled a tiger or leopard emerging from the dark, sending a chill down their spines.

A peculiar smile played at the corners of his mouth.

“Fellow Daoists... you were truly hard to find.”

Finally, a tremor of horror rushed into Daoist Master Tang’s mind.

‘The White Qilin, Li Zhouwei!’

‘Shouldn’t he have just emerged from the Grotto-Heaven...’

Doubt and horror flickered in his heart, only to be resolved in an instant, replaced by a sudden, crystal-clear realization.

‘So that is how it is!’

It could not be said that the two had been careless—the Great Void was trembling, Valley Water flowed unchecked, and a great battle between Dharma Bodies raged on the horizon. Every single sign pointed to the grand spectacle of a True Monarch-level figure verifying their Dao. Before a True Monarch, Purple Mansion masters like them were mere ants; they could hardly hide in the corners fast enough... How could anyone dare to step forward with such burning ambition at a time like this?

Did one not see that he, Tang Jiyu, and Zhou Feng, who garrisoned this place—two dignified Daoist Masters—had retracted even their spiritual consciousness to their immediate vicinity, not daring to cast a single glance outward!

‘What audacity!’

As this thought arose, his spiritual consciousness finally surged forth, shrouding the entire sky. Yet, aside from Li Zhouwei standing amidst the Exiled Qi

and the Yang clan Holder of the Profound behind him, there was no one else present.

Thus, following the horror, a heavy gravity settled upon his mind.

“Such confidence.”

This King Wei had come alone; he must intend to suppress the two of them with his power alone!

Both men were old ancestors of their respective families. Having lost hope for further cultivation, they had come out to guard Dangyin. Tang Jiyu was at the middle stage of the Purple Mansion Realm, and although Zhou Feng’s cultivation was slightly lower, he possessed two divine abilities. Both were seasoned masters of divine abilities with high Dao-Profundity and broad experience...

Tang Jiyu steadied his spirit, looking at King Wei standing amidst the Exiled Qi, his aura obscure and indistinct, and said softly,

“I, Tang, am under orders to garrison Dangyin. Forgive my offense!”

In an instant, the great hall trembled. A thick, earthy yellow halo spread out, and the rolling color of Earth Virtue climbed up his Dharma Body. Colors converged in his eyes, and his aged body, moving like a nimble Demon beast, took a step back.

Guileful Desolate Plain!

Tang Jiyu naturally would not underestimate him. Facing this King Wei, his first reaction was to widen the distance between them, and this divine ability, Guileful Desolate Plain, was the perfect choice!

Under the illumination of this divine ability, the distance between them stretched instantly, as if they were separated by a vast, distant plain. Receding with him was Zhou Feng at his side; the old man had already formed seals with his hands in front of his chest, summoning another divine ability:

Cave Spring’s Echo!

Neither of their divine abilities was simple; their foundations and Dao-Profundity were undeniably high. Otherwise, how could they have the confidence to hold out against him until reinforcements arrived!

Yet, unexpectedly, the King Wei before them was neither anxious nor angry. His voice seemed to shuttle across the vast plain, a boundless light resonating in their ears.

“Fellow Daoists.”

“There is no need to be in such a hurry to act.”

In an instant, vast and mighty Heavenly Light filled their vision. The Purple Mansion temporary palace had long since collapsed within the divine ability, but now, layer upon layer of palace towers parted before them, and the doors of great halls swung open!

Imperial Observation of the Origin.

And what surged forth from those doors... was shockingly a bright golden bracelet.

Pure Yang Bracelets.

Tang Jiyu's aged face lifted instantly. This Spiritual Treasure had a singular function, yet from the beginning, it was domineering to the extreme. It caused this old Daoist Master from Gu Prefecture to lose all judgment in an instant; colors flashed and intermingled before his eyes, leaving him in a state of utter confusion.

Behind him, Zhou Feng stood frozen in place.

King Wei had already bypassed Tang Jiyu and appeared right before him. The golden long halberd was blocked by the Spiritual Artifact in Zhou Feng's hand, yet from within the illusion, a glimmer of crystalline white pierced through.

“Squelch!”

In his vision, he could only see the long halberd suppressing his Spiritual Artifact like a phantom, while its true form leaped from it, stabbing straight towards his chest and piercing through without obstruction.

And behind King Wei, a Celestial Gate descended from the heavens.

With the achievement of Li Zhouwei's Imperial Observation of the Origin, his three divine abilities were linked as one. The clumsy and sluggish nature of Heavenly Audience Gate was finally broken, becoming as easy to wield as his

own fingers. The bright base of the gate suppressed the old Daoist Master—whom he had easily bypassed and who was now trapped in the awe of the Spiritual Treasure—almost at the same instant!

Boom!

With the simultaneous empowerment of Imperial Observation of the Origin and Heavenly Audience Gate, Tang Jiyu spat out a mouthful of blood cleanly and crisply. The blood shot out like a sharp arrow, only to be smashed to smithereens by the burning Heavenly Light. As if waking from a dream, a voice of shock and horror erupted from his throat,

“Great Daoist Master!”

‘No wonder... no wonder... this is the source of his confidence!’

But he was not the one in the deepest despair.

It was Zhou Feng, standing before Li Zhouwei.

Cave Spring’s Echo was formidable after all. The long halberd piercing his chest did not cause much harm to this Pristine Water Daoist Master, only forcing his form to retreat like the wind. Yet, there was not a trace of relief on Zhou Feng’s face, only a look of terror so concentrated it bordered on stupor.

‘The White Qilin has four divine abilities!’

Whether it was Tang Jiyu or Zhou Feng, their mindset had been prepared to deal with a Li Zhouwei possessing three divine abilities—but what was the meaning of this sudden appearance of Imperial Observation of the Origin?

Even an ordinary Daoist Master crossing the Purple Mystery threshold would experience a qualitative leap, so what of the White Qilin?

Even though the long halberd had been withdrawn, Zhou Feng could still feel a bone-chilling emptiness spreading from his chest to his back. This battle-hardened old Daoist Master did not hesitate in the slightest; he bent his knees and lunged forward, his stature suddenly shortening, barely dodging the golden long halberd sweeping towards him like a meteor!

He felt a scorching pain between his brows.

True, the exchange had only just begun. He, Zhou Feng, still had divine abilities he had not displayed, along with many trump cards. As a member of a Gu Prefecture aristocratic family, he even possessed the family’s ultimate Spiritual

Treasure, the Wenshui Danye Stone... Tang Jiyu, too, likely had many cards left to play and might not fear a Great Daoist Master...

But to ask him, Zhou Feng, an old man at the early stage of Purple Mansion, to fight a damnable White Qilin at the late stage of Purple Mansion with four divine abilities?

He knelt on the ground and, surprisingly, did not rise. Instead, he lowered his head with lightning speed and shouted with full vigor,

“King Wei!”

“This humble cultivator is willing to be a vanguard for the King!”

In that instant, he felt a scorching brilliance graze his cheek, exploding with an earth-shattering noise on the hall steps and ground beside him. Blazing Radiant Fire swept past him, fluttering his robes, and the suffocating sense of danger finally dissipated.

Immediately, Tang Jiyu, suppressed beneath Heavenly Audience Gate, cursed loudly,

“Zhou! Where is your Wenshui Danye Stone?!”

Zhou Feng looked slightly ashamed and could only cover his face as he said,

“Do not trouble yourself.”

Only now did Tang Jiyu manage to stand up within the violently shaking Heavenly Audience Gate. Streaks of Heavenly Light slashed across his body but were blocked by an overflowing, illusory brownish-yellow light, emitting a piercing grinding sound.

Tang Jiyu’s heart had already sunk to rock bottom.

His Dao lineage was not simple. If Tang Jiyu had recognized that the other was a Great Daoist Master the moment they met, he would surely have had a chance to escape. But Li Zhouwei had deliberately used the Exiled Qi to approach and conceal his aura—he had obviously planned this to entrap him!

Now that things had reached this point, he was already trapped within the divine ability Imperial Observation of the Origin, with Heavenly Audience Gate bearing down from above—how could he simply leave just because he wanted to!

His gaze was filled with apprehension, yet he still hesitated, gritting his teeth as he said,

“King Wei... I...”

But his words froze in his mouth as he realized the young man before him had already turned around. Those glittering golden eyes seemed to bore straight into the depths of his heart, and only then did he hear the cold, ruthless voice,

“This King said there was no need to be in such a hurry to act, yet you two stubbornly refused to listen... But that is fine. This King has plenty of time, and I happen to be in need of an opportunity to establish my authority...”

This King Wei gave him no chance to negotiate. A faint smile appeared on his mighty, masculine face, looking extremely domineering within this world that resembled an imperial Profound Palace.

“Daoist Master Tang, if you do not kneel immediately, This King shall use you to proclaim to the world and tell the fellow Daoists of Gu Prefecture—that the White Qilin has crossed the Purple Mystery!”

Chapter 1315: Three Doubts

Although the Tang clan was obscure in the present day, their ancestors were once high-level cultivators of the Comprehending Profoundity, qualified to serve alongside the Xu Xiang of the Numinous Treasure Daoist tradition. Unlike the Zhou clan and other aristocratic families that had only risen to prominence during the Liang dynasty, Tang Jiyu naturally possessed a certain pride.

This was the very reason he had not surrendered immediately and had instead chosen to fight; he had long harbored a plan in his heart.

'The White Qilin approaches with menacing power, yet he does not know the true trend of affairs in the world. One should fight if able, and flee if not, but one must absolutely not surrender at the first beat of the drum... instead, one should attack one's own homeland...'

Tang Jiyu was, after all, a great cultivator in the middle stage of the Purple Mansion Realm. If he could not win the fight, could it be that he could not even flee?

But Li Zhouwei's divine ability was truly terrifying. Those words still echoed in Tang Jiyu's ears, causing his expression to change drastically, and all the various considerations he had been brewing in his gut were instantly exhausted.

Li Zhouwei had breached Luoxia like a cyclone. When the news reached the prefecture, the various aristocratic families had long since discussed the matter, and every single one of them had made preparations.

There was bound to be great chaos in the Central Plains. The chaos lay with this King Wei; let him create chaos for his own sake and ascend early. After he perished, would the land not ultimately return to their governance?

Wasn't the Liang Emperor of old, or the Zhao Emperor, also just a King-Marquis along the way? Li Zhouwei might not even compare to the Zhao Emperor. The various aristocratic families would continue to be passed down regardless. If

he slaughtered all of them who had ascended to divine abilities, who would be left to shepherd the cattle and sheep for him?

But for the Tang clan, it was best to remain obscure and unknown. They absolutely could not stick their necks out into King Wei's hands. While he couldn't kill everyone, catching one or two was all too easy—if they were caught and used to "kill the chicken to warn the monkey," that would be a greater injustice than any other family could suffer!

He knew full well that the man before him might be bluffing, yet he still could not take that risk.

'If it were another Dao lineage, it might be fine, but this is the Bright Yang that removes crowns and clips wings; they are completely unreasonable when they strike to kill!'

Benefiting from the illustrious notoriety of the Wei Emperor of old, this Daoist Master truly paused for a moment. He glanced at Zhou Xian beside him, then turned back to look at King Wei. Finally, he took a step back, bowed, and said,

"Should the day come when the city falls... I ask that Your Majesty sees that I turned to the good early, and grants me leniency..."

These words fell abruptly, causing Zhou Xian to heave a sigh of relief while simultaneously looking up with a sense of helplessness. The old man turned to stare at him, and Zhou Xian slandered him inwardly,

'Turned to the good early... you should have just said so... yet you still had to make me ask anxiously with a flushed face...'

Li Zhouwei, however, only raised his eyebrows and looked at him.

Tang Jiyu felt a chill rush to his brow. He ultimately swallowed the rest of his words, silently took a step back, bowed all the way to the ground, and said,

"Greetings, Your Majesty!"

In an instant, the brilliance of all divine abilities dissipated together. The three men stood once again amidst the collapsed palace. Zhou Xian had already risen and stood to the side, appearing quite familiar and at ease. Tang Jiyu still felt somewhat uncomfortable; he rose silently and stood amidst the mountains.

Li Zhouwei had a majestic physique, naturally standing a head taller than them. Even with his divine ability receded, he still possessed an oppressive presence. As King Wei looked up, someone naturally stepped out from his side.

“I am Yang Ruizao—a humble cultivator from the south. Greetings to the two Lords!”

This Holder of the Profound was considered a direct descendant of the Yang family, though he was merely “a tall man among dwarves” who had managed to become a Holder of the Profound. He could not be mentioned in the same breath as Yang Ruiyi. His status was somewhat similar to Li Zhouluo’s in Great Song, but precisely because of this, he knew little of the overall situation and relied somewhat on the Li family for his glory and support. As a result, he was much friendlier. At this moment, he wore a narrow smile, bowing to the two men, clearly having enjoyed the show.

His appearance greatly alleviated the awkwardness between the two. After all, bowing to the Underworld was not entirely shameful. The two responded one by one, and only then did Li Zhouwei speak.

“I will trouble Marquis Ping’an and the two Fellow Daoists to garrison this place and receive the divine abilities from the south...”

He paused slightly.

‘Tang Jiyu and Zhou Xian have already bowed their heads. For these Daoist Masters, surrendering to me, Li Zhouwei, is not actually a great shame. The shame lies in surrendering without a single struggle. Fortunately, I am now a Great Daoist Master; this shame is barely swallowable... But since they have swallowed it, they will certainly not change their banners again at a whim.’

After all, this was a humiliating affair no matter how one looked at it. Changing sides a second time would not only bring no benefits but would also offend him, King Wei, to the extreme, cutting off all retreat!

Yet Li Zhouwei still could not hand Dangyin, which served as his route of retreat, back into their hands. He spoke softly,

“Wait for the two Daoist Masters, Yehui and Chang Yun, to arrive together. I am counting on the two of them to enter Liangchuan and relieve Daoist Masters Yu Xi and Yuanbian.”

Yang Ruizao’s eyes lit up, and he bowed in assent.

This Holder of the Profound was surnamed Yang, after all, and carried some of the Underworld's face, which would give the two surrenderers some extra misgivings. He was currently the most suitable candidate. As for the protection of the Exiled Qi... it was of little use now.

'To the east, Juancheng has a Purple Mansion grand array, and its power is not weak. By this point, hiding our tracks is of no avail; there is bound to be a battle.'

Li Zhouwei finished his instructions, which caused the two surrenderers to secretly breathe a sigh of relief. After all, they didn't have to turn around and attack Juancheng, at least sparing them the embarrassment of facing many old acquaintances in Gu Prefecture for the time being.

As for the future...

Tang Jiyu consoled himself:

'The future? Who's to say we won't be colleagues in the future!'

With a shift in perspective, the world seemed wider. He took the lead in stepping forward and said,

"Many thanks to King Wei for his mercy..."

Only then did King Wei cast his gaze upon the two. His tone was level, and that air of slaughter had long since dissipated into nothingness, yet he possessed a natural majesty,

"Daoist Tang, who guards Juancheng?"

Li Zhouwei's intent was obvious, but Tang Jiyu's expression remained unchanged. He thought for a moment and said,

"Reporting to King Wei, Juancheng is guarded by the Qiao family's Daoist Master Sanyi, Qiao Wenliu. He cultivates Lesser Yin and is a native of the city. He can barely be considered connected to Gu Prefecture. Although his temperament is perverse and he is arrogant and conceited, he is a man of ability and is extremely skilled in the Dao of water and fire. In the competition among peers back then, he only lost to Wei Xuanyin alone. The Heavenly Wood Supporting Fire Spirit Array is also fierce; I hope you will be careful!"

'Lesser Yin...'

Hearing him praise the opponent to the heavens, Li Zhouwei paid a bit more attention and asked,

“Is he alone?”

“When we came, he was alone. Now that the world has changed, I do not know if anyone has gone out...”

Li Zhouwei understood his meaning and asked softly,

“The Heavenly Wood Supporting Fire Spirit Array... which wood is it?”

Tang Jiyu pondered for an instant and said,

“It is the extremely famous Protecting Wood spirit array. Rare in this world. It can shroud all four directions and monitor various changes within a hundred miles. King Wei... if you can take this array, it will certainly be of great benefit.”

Li Zhouwei heard the words he left unspoken and said,

“Do you have a plan?”

Tang Jiyu folded his sleeves and hurriedly said,

“I dare not call it a plan... just one or two foolish thoughts...”

He masked his voice with a divine ability and whispered,

“I should let King Wei know, this Qiao Wenliu has both talent and intellect, but his pride is high and his ambitions great. He is fond of wealth and acts as impetuously as fire. Once a thought takes hold, nine oxen couldn’t pull him back. I know he deeply desires a certain cultivation method that requires two paths of water and two of fire. Currently, he lacks only one True Fire...”

A trace of emotion flashed through the old Daoist Master’s eyes. He raised his head and sighed,

“To be clear with King Wei, those divine ability users of Gu Prefecture will not believe that anyone is stirring up wind and clouds at this moment. I did not, and neither will Qiao Wenliu!”

When Li Zhouwei heard this, he immediately understood.

Tang Jiyu's performance confirmed what he had suspected. Two dignified Purple Mansion cultivators huddled in a palace at the foot of a mountain like two giant rats—they simply did not believe anyone would come. Just as much as they feared the celestial phenomena of the outside world, they equally disbelieved that anyone would come to attack the city at this time!

'Perfect. I already have Jiangqian watching...'

This was an unexpected joy!

He nodded and said,

"The old Daoist Master's method is good, but a bit too shallow. It is a good strategy, but whether the fire is true or not is of no great consequence. I will make a slight modification, and he will surely take the bait."

Since this Daoist Master knew his place, Li Zhouwei gave him a second look. He said,

"Daoist Tang speaks well. Since you submitted early, you naturally have merit!"

Having spoken, his figure flew off like light, speeding toward the east, leaving the two standing on the ruins as if a lifetime had passed. They looked at Yang Ruizao, who stood smiling with his hands behind his back in front of them, and glanced at each other helplessly.

Zhou Xian fell silent, pinching a divine ability, and said,

"Surrendering so suddenly, I fear there will be suffering for your family and mine..."

Tang Jiyu was much calmer than him. A distinct color appeared in those old eyes; this old thing switched roles much faster. He sneered and answered secretly:

"Did you not see Vast Cicada and Yangfeng? Furthermore, what sudden surrender? It was clearly the Exiled Qi confusing the senses, indistinguishable between yin and exile, possessing unpredictable divine might... Drag a few more down into the water, and you and I will have it easier, right?"

Zhou Xian could only nod in agreement. He turned to look at Yang Ruizao beside them and heard this Holder of the Profound say,

“King Wei values the livelihood of the people. Please open the city and let the people outside in first.”

The two Daoist Masters suddenly realized and said,

“Quite right!”

.....

Juancheng.

Light shimmered above the city. The tall city walls stood by the river waters. At the high vantage point, a figure was visible; he had manifested his divine ability in the void and sat upright within a pavilion of blazing True Fire, his posture otherworldly.

Beside the pavilion stood a figure resembling a Daoist priest, frowning and appearing somewhat impatient.

The person in the pavilion was pinching a stick of thin incense. He twisted his fingers to light it, sniffed it carefully, and a look of satisfaction floated onto his face. He then passed it forward. The person beside the pavilion could not refuse, so he took it and sniffed it as well.

The person in the pavilion laughed.

“Fellow Daoist Jiang, this is a fine scent. It has Xuandie Flower added to it; the wood Qi is very heavy.”

Jiang Dai sighed and said,

“Daoist Qiao, it is better to be careful. The celestial phenomena have changed so terrifyingly. My grand-uncle specially sent me here because he fears there might be some changes...”

This Qiao Wenliu appeared hale and hearty, with a long face and no beard, possessing the look of an elder. He wore green robes, held a wine pot in his hand, and was surrounded by layers of profound light—unexpectedly dashing and elegant.

Light flowed in his eyes as he laughed,

“There will be no changes. You juniors do not recognize the changes in destiny. The heavens manifest Valley Water, and the River is in flux—this constitutes the ‘Union of the Valley.’ The changes lie within the Great Tomb, and there is

the birth of Pit, implying vastness. If successful, heaven and earth will be dim, and the dragon will have supreme rage...

Such thunder with scarce rain, and the river channel returning to its place—it must be a plot that failed. It will not harm the world!"

Jiang Dai naturally knew that the man before him was a master of the two paths of water and fire. Otherwise, why would his family specially send him here? Seeing that he had gathered information, Jiang Dai nodded secretly, though he still said,

"I think it is better to be careful."

Qiao Wenliu shook his head with a laugh, but the movement on his face suddenly froze. He straightened his back, leaned forward, narrowed his eyes, and pinched his fingers. Immediately, a look of joy burst forth as he said,

"Good, good, good..."

Jiang Dai hurriedly looked at him, only to see this Daoist Master clap his hands. The formation before them sensed something, and a scene emerged.

Within the Great Void, shadows were indistinct, as if some hidden object were leaping forward, yet it was detected by the array, revealing a scalding glimpse of a scale or claw. Brilliance flashed, causing Jiang Dai to freeze and exclaim in shock,

"Spiritual Fire!"

"Correct."

Qiao Wenliu's eyes were burning. He had already risen abruptly, pacing quickly with his hands behind his back, saying,

"This is Blazing Fire! A good opportunity!"

Although he said it was a good opportunity, he did not take a step. Instead, he watched the flame wander in the Great Void, slowly approaching along the edge of the grand array. Jiang Dai's face was full of suspicion as he said,

"Where did this come from!"

Qiao Wenliu rested one hand on his sleeve, tapping lightly as he thought meticulously, and said,

"Does this even need thinking? The Great Tomb River!"

Jiang Dai shook his head.

"The Great Tomb River did indeed shatter just now, and many treasures have been displaced. But that is a Grotto-Heaven of Water Virtue; how could a wisp of spiritual fire wander here? It is quite a distance away; how could no one have discovered it?"

Qiao Wenliu laughed loudly and said,

"This is where you are ignorant! This fire is called Profound Rhombus Flowing Flame. It is a type of Blazing Fire. I saw a portion of it back in Western Long years ago. This fire hides in the Great Void and is extremely difficult to discover. If not for this array, and my own Lesser Yin divine ability sensing it, I would have missed this fire too!"

"As for why it is a spiritual fire—there are many possibilities. Perhaps some cultivator ventured into the Grotto-Heaven and was beaten to death, and this fire escaped on its own."

"Escaped on its own?"

Jiang Dai's expression changed, and he said,

"My Lord, wait!"

"I know your thoughts!"

Qiao Wenliu stood with his hands behind his back, chin held high, and laughed,

"You are merely worrying about King Wei."

"Correct. Luoxia long ago defected to the Li clan and ran over to the Great Song side. Their military force already threatens the north. But the Great Tomb River just fell; he wouldn't even have time to heal his wounds, so how could he launch a long-distance expedition to the north? This is the first doubt."

"Even if Luoxia clans came here, they would have to pass through Dangyin. Tang Jiyu and Zhou Xian are guarding it!"

He smiled faintly:

"Those two are men of short-sighted vision, but one has to admit that the one surnamed Tang has ability. Yang Ruiyi has no position to help Li Zhouwei! King

Wei, bringing those few Daoist Masters, might not necessarily be able to win quickly in a frontal confrontation...

“This is the second doubt.”

“Furthermore, even if two pig demons were guarding Dangyin, they would grunt twice if beaten. How could it be completely silent? This is the third doubt.”

Multicolored light shimmered in his eyes as he looked at the thoughtful junior beside him, his words sounding like earnest teachings.

“I will take a step back ten thousand miles and say that this time Yang Ruiyi and Cheng Xunzhi lost their minds and attacked together, effectively subduing the two of them silently. With such a grand array of forces, Zhou Xian is cowardly and Jiyu is greedy; they would inevitably aid Song. Those two know I urgently need True Fire. To claim credit, they would certainly inform Yang Ruiyi!”

Qiao Wenliu laughed involuntarily.

“Why would they not take the True Fire and not take the Lesser Yin, but instead throw out a Blazing Fire?”

“This is the fourth doubt.”

He smiled, interrupting Jiang Dai’s thoughts, and said,

“In my actions, I, Qiao, do not doubt past three. To doubt past three is to lose one’s edge. No need to discuss it further!”

“This fire must have been lost by someone in the Great Tomb River, but was interrupted by a Dharma Master’s battle. Seeing the inexplicable celestial phenomena, they dared not come to seek it, failing to collect it, and thus it wandered here.”

This analysis was penetrating, combining courage with strategy and measured advancement. It made Jiang Dai feel a sudden respect, and he sighed with emotion in his heart.

‘He is indeed a senior who once went west into Xiang, straight into Guanlong, and competed in skill with the descendants of immortals in Western Long. Leaving aside his profound Dao-Profundity, his gaze is burning like a torch... If not for his ancestors being insufficiently illustrious... perhaps he could have cultivated in a Grotto-Heaven!’

Having finished laughing, Qiao Wenliu stepped out into the void. His divine abilities gathered, and he sped out a hundred miles. His large hand transformed into a pure white halo that shrouded heaven and earth, striking into the Great Void to firmly grasp that flame!

Jiang Dai stood on the city wall, within the array, looking from afar. However, he realized that the color seemed like white jade frozen in profound ice. In the instant it stretched to its limit, it solidified and ceased to move.

The look of admiration on his face froze in an instant.

He raised his head somewhat sluggishly and saw the boundless pitch-black sky outside the array, as well as the massive setting sun dormant beyond the horizon.

“Crimson Severing Arrowhead?”

Horror and astonishment collided with the admiration that had not yet dissipated from his face, causing him to freeze in a daze. But he possessed a divine ability after all, and he reacted within an extremely short time. The martial youth did not even think; he immediately stepped out. But after taking only half a step, his movement came to an abrupt halt. His face turned pale in an instant, leaving only a thick, bottomless terror.

“Great... Daoist Master?”

In the sky, four inconceivable beams of light, like pillars, broke through his reason, leaving his mind blank. There was no time to wonder, no time to question. Only two words echoed:

“Doomed!”

Chapter 1316: Taichong Observation

The darkness between heaven and earth enshrouded everything with extreme speed, like a layer of dark mist covering Qiao Wenliu's face. His face, which was rather mature yet retained an air of romantic elegance, stiffened for an instant. His heart beat like a drum, trembling ceaselessly.

'Not good!'

Crimson Severing Arrowhead!

Even Vast Cicada could not cultivate this Bright Yang divine ability; who else under the heavens possessed it?

Li Zhouwei!

But as that Bright Yang divine ability lit up, towering between heaven and earth with its four pillars, the shock filling his eyes was pierced by a flash of realization, and his heart pounded.

'Great Daoist Master...!'

This Li Zhouwei was already a Great Daoist Master!

'Had he not just finished healing his injuries... How much time did he spend crossing the Purple Mystery? Two years? Or perhaps three? Preposterous!'

Qiao Wenliu only had time to gaze upward and witness those menacing golden eyes. Previously, he had made quite a show of boasting before his junior, yet now that he had fallen into a trap in the blink of an eye, yet he felt not a shred of embarrassment. In an instant, he sorted through all the changes, and could only let out a long sigh in his heart.

'It is not that I miscalculated, but that this is truly beyond the measure of human power... This is a tribulation!'

After a moment of astonishment, he stood within the boundless setting sun, his expression unchanging, and merely raised his hands in a bow, saying,

“Qiao greets King Wei!”

As his voice fell, the man’s figure had already vanished.

The youth in the distance watched him with keen interest—it was rare for Li Zhouwei to see such a Lesser Yin great cultivator. Sensing the layers of changes on the other party’s body, rising like soaring smoke and clouds, he turned his long halberd. The golden edge pointed straight forward, like a bright star shining in the pitch-black night sky.

Clang!

A white jade-like profound sword had already parried against the crescent moon blade of the halberd, erupting with a burst of firelight that illuminated Qiao Wenliu’s solemn face, which was now close at hand. The thoughts in this Daoist Master’s mind were clear.

‘He must be cultivating the Imperial Observation of the Origin; I absolutely must not follow his train of thought...’

Thus, this person advanced instead of retreating, unexpectedly taking the initiative to attack!

Facing such a heavy and powerful strike, Li Zhouwei held the halberd with a single hand. With just a slight tremble and a raise of his long eyebrows, his five fingers exerted force together. The crescent-like halberd immediately spun, flipping like a phoenix, and parried the white jade profound sword four times in succession, beating its divine light into nothingness. Only then did he move his arm and turn his waist, the long halberd rising with terrifying speed, swinging a full circle, and crashing down!

Qiao Wenliu retreated five steps in succession. He felt his hand loosen as a bright golden halo lit up from his side. Before he could even react, the long halberd had already smashed into his face with the momentum of a meteor.

Taichong Observation.

Lesser Yin radiance flickered.

“Boom!”

A storm of Heavenly Light rose into the sky. Qiao Wenliu’s upper body collapsed like a crumbling statue, smashing into a sky full of incense ash. The remnant body remained in place like a clay figure of mud and stone.

Meanwhile, his true self had already taken a step back. A single golden blood-stain appeared on his face as he put three feet of distance between them, holding out a green shrine in his hands.

“Lesser Yin divine ability...”

The youth’s voice rang out in the air. The crumbling lower body exploded with a bang, and a golden afterimage surged out from within it, flickering for an instant. As if possessing foresight, it smashed into Qiao Wenliu’s chest with extreme precision!

Pure Yang Bracelets.

Thud!

This domineering Spiritual Treasure unreasonably knocked away the profound sword that had leaped over to block it. Under the astonished gaze of the Daoist Master, it crashed down. All of Qiao Wenliu’s methods were interrupted in an instant; he was forced to turn into a clay figure and explode once more. His true self retreated again, but this time to a distance of thirty feet!

Lesser Yin divine ability, Taichong Observation!

This Lesser Yin divine ability responded for the second time within a short period, yet its power had not diminished in the slightest; it was even superior to before. Just moments ago, the distance was three feet, but now, one retreat carried him thirty feet away!

‘He truly has skill; no wonder he dares to fight me.’

A trace of surprise flashed through the youth’s eyes, but the Huai River Map unfolded mercilessly, suppressing the green shrine left behind as the opponent made his escape, rendering it immobile.

Having miscalculated in the initial clash and with his Spiritual Treasure suppressed, Qiao Wenliu could only sigh secretly. He calmed the fluctuating divine ability within his body and formed a seal at his chest. The chest, which had caved in from the shockwaves, slowly recovered. His eyes shone with extremely brilliant divine light as he assumed a breathing posture.

With this single inhalation, all the darkness between heaven and earth faded in an instant. The heavy setting sun on the horizon vanished, and the radiance of Crimson Severing Arrowhead was wiped away from the skies above the city, revealing the great array fluttering with greenery.

Qiao Wenliu held his breath and concentrated. A hint of a smile flashed in his eyes as his figure shifted backward, intending to escape.

“Good skill!”

The youth’s praise resounded through the skies. Qiao Wenliu suddenly looked up to see the youth standing in the sky holding his halberd. His other hand rested on his waist, pressing on the hilt of an unknown spiritual sword, and he drew it instantly!

Heavenly Scenery!

Black-gold radiance gushed forth.

The sky turned boundless, and blood fell like rain!

Qiao Wenliu’s movements froze in mid-air for an instant. Within this brief moment of stagnation, a beam of Radiant Fire descended from the heavens—appearing like fire yet not fire—and smashed toward the Daoist Master cloaked in Lesser Yin.

Southern Imperial Profound Snare.

Qiao Wenliu had no choice but to open his mouth and release that pitch-black light.

Crimson Severing Arrowhead!

This pitch-black divine ability surged forth once more, shrouding the horizon. The massive setting sun lay dormant at the edge of the sky, and darkness crawled back onto his face. The situation had taken a sharp turn for the worse, yet even at this moment, this man remained fearless in the face of danger. His eyes held neither joy nor anger, appearing to have entered a state where both self and object were forgotten.

He ignored the terrifying radiance of the Southern Imperial Profound Snare and suspended himself in the air, pinching hand seals. The Great Void immediately responded, and six white, light-like reflections surged out, moving from a distance to obstruct Li Zhouwei on the horizon!

Having completed all this, the fire-like Southern Imperial Profound Snare had already fallen. Qiao Wenliu continued to circulate his divine ability:

Taichong Observation.

The technique of the Southern Imperial Profound Snare possessed a twofold divine effect: like a golden net, it had the power to bind; like Radiant Fire, it had the effect of killing. Years ago, Zhelu had been injured by this very technique; its power was absolutely not weak!

Even though this Lesser Yin divine ability was responding for the third time and its radiance was even more intense than the previous two times, the sound of vomiting blood still rang out as the incense ash shattered. Qiao Wenliu's figure appeared over sixty feet away, his body already covered in brilliant Radiant Fire.

His complexion was slightly pale, yet there was no panic. In the split second of time he had bought for himself, he raised his hand and pulled a sheet of yellow paper from his mouth.

This paper was merely two feet wide and looked like a talisman. It was full of spirituality, flickering with burning Radiant Fire. It detached itself from his lips and teeth on its own accord, immediately suspending itself behind his head, its colors vivid.

This precious time of respite passed in a flash. He raised his head again, and his eyes already reflected the layers of palace doors opening, as if falling from afar into an abyss enclosed by infinite palace towers.

Imperial Observation of the Origin!

The vast sky of the imperial palace immediately spread out. Heavenly Light was mighty and boundless. The ink-clothed youth's figure seemed to grow several degrees taller without reason, looking down from high above. In his hand, he grasped that long sword speckled with gold, pointing straight at Qiao Wenliu's brow!

Thud!

Following its descent was that massive Celestial Gate, burning with Heavenly Light!

Heavenly Audience Gate!

A trace of astonishment flashed across Qiao Wenliu's face.

'Imperial Observation established immediately, controlled freely... Has his Imperial Observation of the Origin reached perfection? Impossible!'

‘No, he is the White Qilin!’

Heavenly Audience Gate was the most well-known among Bright Yang divine abilities, and also the most underestimated. Its suppression power was indeed extremely strong, but its movement was clumsy, and it could not advance or retreat freely. The divine abilities under the heavens changed in ten thousand ways, not to mention those with wealthy backgrounds; who didn’t have a means of evasion?

Yet the speed at which this divine ability now emerged was like lightning, shockingly fast. It crashed down with a boom, instantly smashing this Lesser Yin Daoist Master to the ground. He rolled amidst the burning purple fire, spitting out another mouthful of blood. One hand supported him against the ground formed of condensed purple fire, while the other lifted upward, using a single palm to block that Celestial Gate.

His expression finally turned grim.

‘This is going to be a problem.’

“Creak...”

A tooth-aching sound of friction emerged. Qiao Wenliu gritted his bloody teeth. As the burning purple fire scorched his body, he spat out another mouthful of blood, which unexpectedly contained another sheet of yellow paper.

This paper was similarly two feet wide but contained purple light. Following the pattern, it suspended itself behind him, shining in concert with the previous Radiant Fire paper. In that instant, the scorching purple fire dancing on his body actually dimmed, avoiding his body as it moved.

This allowed Qiao Wenliu to catch his breath. Only then did he have time to raise his head and see the long halberd rapidly magnifying in his pupils.

Boom!

Qiao Wenliu’s figure was smashed to pieces with a loud bang. Amidst the rippling blood light, incense ash fell like a waterfall. His figure rolled away wretchedly; the colors of Taichong Observation permeated like smoke, allowing him to escape disaster. Only then was he seen turning over and vomiting blood in a sorry state, clinging closely to the edge of the Celestial Gate.

The golden net flickered, and the Radiant Fire burned fiercely, having waited for a long time!

Southern Imperial Profound Snare sensed the life-mandate and was simple to cast; it was an extremely useful spell art. Li Zhouwei had just used the Radiant Fire, and now with the enhancement of Imperial Observation of the Origin, his divine ability surged, casting the spell to trap him without a hair's breadth of delay!

Yet the two sheets of yellow paper behind this person flickered once more. He walked out of that Radiant Fire with ease, shook his sleeves, pinched his fingers to form a seal, and with Valley light flickering in his hands, intended to escape.

Thud!

Yet landing on his body at the same time was that small and exquisite golden bracelet.

The colors of Taichong Observation finally ceased to be bright. This Lesser Yin divine ability, which had saved him countless times in combat, did not respond. Multicolored light exploded before Qiao Wenliu's eyes, and his mind became a blur of chaos.

Within the chaos, he was like a man sinking into deep water who was suddenly pulled up by a tremendous force, causing him to shudder as if waking from a nightmare.

That golden halberd had already pierced through his scapula. The pain was bone-deep. The crescent-shaped small blade was wedged right against his throat, transmitting a deadly, scorching aura. The golden shaft extended upwards, held in the youth's hand.

What was peculiar was that the magnificent Celestial Gate was behind him. The pure white profound bricks were pressed against his back. Heavenly Audience Gate was not suppressing the top of his head, but was pressed tightly against his back, cooperating with the long halberd to pin him high up in the air.

Like a prisoner undergoing punishment.

'Such Dao-Profundity... I, a dignified Lesser Yin Daoist Master, lasted only a moment in his hands...'

Astonishment and loss intertwined in Qiao Wenliu's heart. His hands, which had just clenched, relaxed once more. He let out a heavy sigh, seemingly

unconcerned by the sharp halberd blade cutting a rift in his neck, and spoke hoarsely:

“King Wei... is powerful... Qiao was arrogant...”

Clang!

The sharp blade was gently pulled out from his scapula, emitting the ear-piercing sound of metal friction. Qiao Wenliu heard the youth’s voice,

“Daoist Friend Qiao possesses good skill.”

Li Zhouwei meant these words sincerely.

Contrary to Qiao Wenliu’s thoughts, Li Zhouwei had not used Imperial Observation of the Origin at the very beginning due to multiple considerations.

‘Juancheng is the gateway to Gu Prefecture; the possibility of reinforcements is extremely high. Without seeing the situation clearly, if I were to easily use Imperial Observation of the Origin and fail to achieve a quick victory over the person before me, I would inevitably be surrounded.’

And while Imperial Observation of the Origin was tyrannical, it also had flaws. Once this divine ability was fully unleashed to trap someone within, there could be no killing or capturing; if the enemy were rescued, the damage would be to the divine ability itself, and there was even the danger of being unable to use it for a long time...

Thus, Li Zhouwei tried to suppress him with three divine abilities while secretly using Spirit Probe to observe the situation in the north. Only after confirming that the forces arranged in advance to go to Yehui had arrived and stalled the reinforcements did he make his move.

But one does not know until one fights—Tang Jiyu’s words were correct; this Daoist Master Qiao had true skill!

This person’s Dao-Profundity was extremely high, and his skill with Lesser Yin divine abilities was superb. Although Li Zhouwei had the disadvantage of not knowing his divine abilities, he had still missed several times and almost let him escape...

‘He said he was arrogant, but that was not the truth. If not for his proud dharma artifact being suppressed by my Huai River Map, costing him an arm, and Heavenly Audience Gate catching him off guard—plus the fact that I am a

Great Daoist Master suppressing a lesser cultivator—I might not have been able to capture him quickly!"

Looking at all the Three Divine Abilities cultivators Li Zhouwei had seen, there were likely few who could say they could overpower Qiao Wenliu, let alone defeat him in battle—even Qi Lanyan, whose Horn Wood was not adept at combat, might not necessarily defeat him if stripped of his Comprehending Profoundity treasures!

'Especially that Taichong Observation... among the divine abilities I have seen, it is absolutely of the first class in the world...'

Qiao Wenliu raised his head and saw those golden eyes. There was no annoyance or urgency in this King Wei's eyes, only contemplation and praise. His voice even carried a hint of a smile,

"Daoist Friend Qiao... since you have already been defeated by my hand, are you willing to open Juancheng for me?"

Qiao Wenliu let out a laugh.

What else could he say?

'I swear not to open it, please kill me, King Wei?'

Gu Prefecture was a place name, but it was hard to strictly call it a unified entity. Was Qiao Wenliu loyal to anyone? The reason he fought was that Juancheng behind him was his foundation; he could not retreat!

He reached into his sleeve and took out an emerald-green wooden talisman seal. He seemed to have no hesitation, as if he had been waiting for a long time. He offered it up with both hands and sighed,

"I am willing to serve King Wei!"

He heard the other party's laughter. This King Wei helped him up, his gaze brilliant, and praised him unreservedly,

"Such skill. To have Daoist Friend Qiao's assistance is our good fortune."

Thus, the Heavenly Light melted away like snow, and the magnificent city revealed itself before their eyes. A streak of Radiant Fire leaped over, manifesting into a figure in crimson robes. Li Jiangqian bowed with cupped hands, holding a gourd. He was not surprised by Qiao Wenliu's well-behaved appearance and smiled,

“Greetings King Wei, Senior. Just now, a person came out of the city intending to approach but was blocked by me. Later, seeing Senior enter the Imperial Observation of the Origin, he used a Treasured Earth treasure and fled to save his own life...”

Li Zhouwei nodded slightly. Qiao Wenliu, however, was tactful. While circulating his divine ability and brushing over his chest to heal the residual injuries caused by the battle, he said,

“He is a member of the Jiang family. His treasure is powerful, so he is difficult to stop.”

Li Zhouwei turned his head, looked at him, and said,

“I do not know this Daoist Master’s name.”

At this moment, Qiao Wenliu had recovered his calm bearing. He took out a pill from his sleeve and consumed it to nurse his divine ability, smiling,

“This humble one is Qiao Wenliu, a native of Juancheng. My ancestors rose during the Wei era, so there is a connection. My nickname is Sanyi; the Daoist friends in the prefecture are familiar with me and address me directly as Qiao Sanyi...”

(TL: Sanyi means ‘Three Doubts’)

Li Zhouwei had previously been using Spirit Probe, so the situation in the prefecture was clear to him. Naturally, he also knew about those remarks. Feeling a rare sense of playfulness, he feigned doubt,

“Oh? A nickname? Does it have an origin?”

Qiao Wenliu’s face stiffened, but he stubbornly held onto his dignity, maintaining his posture as he smiled,

“It was purely made up for the sound of it; it is not worth mentioning...”

The three of them descended on the wind and entered the array. Looking out, they saw the city was vast with traces of great bustle, yet at this moment, every house was closed up. People were hiding in their homes one by one, and large groups huddled in the alleys, burying their heads in their sleeves, afraid that looking out would bring death upon them.

In the empty city, only the occasional cry of an infant could be heard.

One look at the scene below, and Li Zhouwei knew that Qiao Wenliu had already accepted the refugees outside. Although his expression remained unchanged, he felt a bit more approval in his heart.

Qiao Wenliu immediately selected people and ordered them to go down and appease the populace, then led the two to the center of the prefecture, landing on the celestial mountain that backed it. Li Zhouwei's gaze remained on him, watching the colors of the two sheets of yellow paper suspended behind him slowly dissipate, and said softly,

"Lesser Yin divine ability, truly lives up to its reputation."

Qiao Wenliu turned sideways to look at him and sighed,

"King Wei need not mock me... Taichong Observation is the supreme method of my Lesser Yin path for preserving one's nature and life. As long as there is room to maneuver behind me, and the killing blow comes from the front without violating the Yin Lord, I can reduce its power and evade calmly..."

"This divine ability is listed as one of the Five Palaces and Six Universes, yet it was broken by King Wei in an instant..."

There was a genuine look of loss on his face,

"It is because my Dao-Profundity is not refined."

"Taichong Observation ranks among the top of the divine abilities I have seen; it is already extremely powerful. Daoist Master need not belittle yourself."

Qiao Wenliu only shook his head; clearly, the blow he received was not small. Beside them, Li Jiangqian asked in confusion,

"Five Palaces and Six Universes?"

Qiao Wenliu raised his head and said casually,

"It is a title for several types of famous divine abilities. For instance, the Five Virtues' Palace of Retracted Killing and Palace of Concealed Storage are both among the Five Palaces. As for the Six Universes... King Wei also possesses one; in Bright Yang, it is the Imperial Observation of the Origin!"

"So that is how it is."

Li Jiangqian nodded. Li Zhouwei, however, had the mind to inquire for the sake of his own junior, and asked softly,

“During the magical combat just now, there was another ingenious method that dodged my Radiant Fire.”

Qiao Wenliu did not hold back and smiled,

“In my Lesser Yin, it is called Tuning the Loom. It is the Great Dao of my Lesser Yin for controlling water and fire. Combined with my spell arts, be it water clouds or fire light, as long as their destination lies within the Five Virtues, if they harm me, my divine talisman will record it. If they come again after a while, as long as they cannot break my divine ability, they will be immediately whittled down completely and blocked by me.”

Li Jiangqian was horrified upon hearing this. He fell silent for a moment before uncontrollably asking,

“With this being the case, water and fire cultivators are greatly restrained by Senior Qiao!”

His words could even be considered conservative. One had to know that water and fire were flourishing; many powerful methods in this world could not do without spiritual water and spiritual fire. With this, Qiao Wenliu would be like a fish in water during dharma battles.

But Qiao Wenliu merely shook his head and sneered, a trace of mockery flashing in his eyes as he said,

“I control water and fire, not metal and earth; what is so restrained about me! Furthermore, during combats, there are many variables. If the strength is equal, who will slowly test you? If they smash down in one breath, they will bypass this divine ability of mine.”

“However...”

He seemed to recall something and sneered,

“At least suppressing that group of people in Gu Prefecture is easy. Back then, I achieved the Dao with Taichong Observation, the most difficult of the Lesser Yin path. Among my peers in the Central Plains, no one dared to contend with me. Aside from the likes of Jiang and Lu, the rest are not even fit to carry my shoes...”

Just as Tang Jiyu had said, this person was intelligent but domineering and arrogant, lacking any humility. After walking a few steps, they saw pavilions

standing tall and flowing water murmuring. High above was a palace with a profound plaque inscribed with three characters:

Rising Yang Palace.

The middle-aged Daoist Master did not say another word. He focused on guiding the two inside. Upon reaching the main hall, he pinched a spell seal to summon something and took out a small disk from within.

This disk was small and exquisite, merely three inches large with a brown base. Its patterns were yellowish-white like rice, flickering with emerald light like breathing. Qiao Wenliu bowed deeply and said,

“The array disk is here; please inspect it, King Wei.”

This man named Qiao was truly decisive. As a local aristocratic family member, he did not hesitate in the slightest to take out the Purple Mansion array disk—which was like his own life and fortune—sweep away the residual divine ability and dharma power inside, and hand it over to Li Zhouwei.

Li Zhouwei turned his hand and accepted it.

The object felt heavy in his hand, yet in his palm, it was as light as if it were truly made of wood. As his thoughts moved, the Bright Yang dharma power surged into it rapidly, causing the colors to be slowly shrouded by Heavenly Light. This array disk swiftly changed owners.

From this moment on, Juancheng belonged to Li Zhouwei. The Qiao Wenliu before him and the Qiao family would all need to obtain talismans for entry and exit from his hands. As long as he wished, even if enemies fought to the front of the array, there was no possibility for Qiao Wenliu to privately let a Purple Mansion cultivator inside!

It was not until this moment that Li Zhouwei truly set his mind at ease. His gaze toward this person also held a bit more approval as he smiled,

“Daoist Master Qiao truly had courage.”

Qiao Wenliu raised his head, a brilliant smile on his face, and said,

“Reporting to King Wei, it is not that your subordinate has great courage. On the contrary, it is truly that your subordinate has small courage.”

He raised his head, his expression showing a bit more thoughtfulness, and bowed with cupped hands,

“Since Qiao is now a King’s subject, I naturally should exhaust my life. However, Wenliu is different from the likes of Tang and Zhou; those two are sojourners abroad with no roots or stems. My Qiao family, however, is in Juancheng and has no backing; we especially fear the chaos of war...”

His gaze was burning as he said,

“King Wei can come and go as you please, but your subordinate cannot. To say something unpleasant, if the overall situation changes and King Wei abandons me, you can discard me like a worn-out shoe. If I return to the north overnight, the next time we meet...”

Qiao Wenliu’s gaze was calm as he looked directly at the father and son, smiling,

“King Wei would certainly want to kill me, and my desperate resistance would be of no benefit.”

He raised his head and said,

“Entrusting this array disk is to show my sincerity to my Lord. I earnestly hope King Wei treats me with sincerity. As long as Juancheng is safe, I, Qiao Wenliu, am willing to follow the King’s orders and conquer wherever directed. I can also... satisfy some private desires...”

His courage was truly great. He did not hesitate to poke out all the things hidden beneath the surface and pour them out frankly. A smile appeared on the middle-aged man’s face, and his eyes held a strange palpitation,

“Especially that crowd in Gu Prefecture; they have quite a few good things.”

“Oh?”

The youth merely raised his eyebrows and looked at him, eyes brimming with a smile. Seeing Li Zhouwei look over, Qiao Wenliu sneered.

“King Wei has seen it too. Although this skill of mine cannot compare to King Wei’s, it is still first-class in the mortal world. Back then, when I became a Purple Mansion, according to the rules of previous years, the various families would hold a contest to divide the spoils, accepting defeat willingly. But those people, stuck in their old ways and relying on the prestige of Gu Prefecture, refused to count me as a Gu Prefecture Daoist Master back then and would not compete with me...”

He continued,

“That would have been fine; I couldn’t be bothered to calculate it either. From then on, I hid in my Juancheng and didn’t go to see them. Usually, only a few families came to visit me—but I, Qiao, still hold a grudge. I only hope King Wei gives me a chance...”

The middle-aged man seemed to think of something, and a smile of pure satisfaction appeared on his face as he said,

“I want to see, once the fighting starts, just what kind of things these people count as!”