

## Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

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## SDXL Chapter 25



### **Chapter 25 – Domestic Strife, Foreign Aggression**

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*The spiders immediately set to work, climbing up, moving east, dropping low, and approaching west, hanging suspended, until they were able to create a network of webs in just a very short time. Xiao Long Nu and Zhou Bo Tong watched with interest as the spiders spun the web, yet it never occurred to either one of them to stop their progress. Only when the web reached about ten feet in diameter, covering the entire mouth of the cave, and the red-green venomous spiders start to crawl around did they look troubled.*

Zhou Botong raised his head, searching the top of the flag pole, but finding no flag there, he could not help being startled. He'd thought that Jinlun Fawang would be hid-

ing somewhere below, waiting to ambush him, then seize the opportunity to route him completely.

It was a smooth plan but not even ten thousand guesses could prepare him for this: the flag was not there. He looked around. The camp was filled with numerous tents. Yet, he must try to find it before leaving.

Zhao Zhijing was about to move forward to greet him but he changed his mind. He thought, “If I go and tell him now, he’ll be suspicious. I must first let him look everywhere and when he doesn’t succeed, he can’t help feeling dejected. At that time, I’ll go out and tell him where the flag is. Only then will he be able to show his gratitude towards me.”

He crouched behind a tent to watch the motionless Zhou Botong only to see his body shoot upwards towards the top of the flag pole. He leapt several chi (1chi≈11in) high and used one hand to brace himself against the pole. Then he used his other hand to quickly pull himself up until he reached the top.

Zhao Zhijing was secretly astonished. Grand Martial Uncle Zhou must be almost a hundred years old. Even if he practiced the Taoist doctrines, he still should not be able to avoid the slowing effects of old age. Yet, he is still as agile as a youth. So the stories in Wulin are really true.

Once up there, Zhou Botong scanned the whole camp, seeing several flags fluttering in the wind but none of them was the royal flag. He raised his head and shouted: “Jinlun Fawang, where is the royal flag?”

This angry yell was carried far and wide, its faint echoes bouncing off the cordillera to the West. Fawang had already reported the matter to Huo Bi Lie (Khubilai) so even though the whole army heard his shout, they remained silent.

Zhou Botong warned: “Fawang, if you still don’t reply, I might have to scold you.” There was still no response.

Zhou Botong scolded: “Jinlun Fawang, you rotten dog, you call yourself a hero? You’re worse than a turtle that refuses to come out of its shell!”

From the East, someone suddenly called out: “Mischievous Old Urchin, if you want to steal the Prince’s flag, it’s right here.”

Zhou Botong quickly rushed down the pole, shouting: “Where?” But after shouting, that person was silent. Zhou Botong searched countless tents but did not know where to start.

Farther away, the person shouted: “The royal flag is right here! The royal flag is right here!”

Zhou Botong dashed towards that sound but that person’s voice was softer now, growing fainter and fainter. Zhou Botong only took a few steps, but the voice was already fading in and out like gossamer until finally it stopped. In reality, he did not know how far the voice was from camp.

Zhou Botong called out angrily: “Fawang, you rascal, are you playing hide-and-seek with me? Do you want me to burn down this whole camp so you’ll come out?”

Zhao Zhijing thought, “If he sets the camp on fire, that can’t be good. He hurried forward and said in a low voice: “Grand Martial Uncle Zhou, don’t light a fire.”

Grand Martial Uncle Zhou said: “Taoist priest, it’s you! Why can’t I light a fire?”

Zhao Zhijing quickly lied: “They intentionally want you to light a fire because the whole camp is filled with black powder. When you ignite it, the whole place could explode.”

Zhou Botong was shocked. “It’s a clever trick but also mean and cruel.”

Zhao Zhijing was relieved to see that he believed him. He added: “I secretly inquired around and found out about this clever trick. I was afraid that you did not know about it so I had to tell you.”

Grand Martial Uncle Zhou said: “Mmm, your intentions are good. If you hadn’t told me, this Mischievous Old Urchin could have been killed.”

Zhao Zhijing replied: “I also took a great risk by finding out where the royal flag is. Grand Martial Uncle Zhou, please come along with me.”

But Zhou Botong suddenly said: “Don’t tell me, don’t tell me! If I can’t find it, then I must admit defeat.” The bet to find the flag was an amusing game. But if Zhao Zhijing gave him directions, he would feel bad even if he won because this kind of game required stealth.

Zhao Zhijing felt anxious. Then suddenly, he remembered,” He is known as the Mischievous Old Urchin, his mood is not ordinary. I must tempt him first so he can get hooked.” He said: “Grand Martial Uncle, I also want to steal the flag. Let’s have a race to see who finds it first.”

After saying that, he quickly rushed towards the hills. When he got there, he turned to find Zhou Botong following behind. He then darted to the third hill, pondering aloud: “They said that it’s in a cave between two elm trees but where are these two elm trees?”

He rushed around the place but actually did not approach the cave where Fawang hidden the flag. Suddenly, he heard Zhou Botong exclaim; “I found it first!” He was standing between the two elm trees.

Zhao Zhijing smirked, thinking, “He stole the Prince’s flag. He’ll surely favor me now. What’s more, I stopped him from setting the camp on fire. He thinks I saved his life. Everything is going exactly as Fawang planned. Satisfied, he started to step inside the cave. Suddenly, he heard a loud shout, the sound extremely sharp. Zhou Botong cried out: “Poisonous snake...Poisonous snake!”

Shocked, Zhao Zhijing quickly withdrew his foot that was already inside the cave. He asked: “Grand Martial Uncle! There’s a poisonous snake inside the cave?”

Grand Martial Uncle Zhou replied: “It’s not a snake... it’s not a snake...” The voice was already getting weaker.

Zhao Zhijing anxiously gathered some twigs and lit them, using it as a torch so he could see inside the cave. He saw Zhou Botong on the ground, his left hand still clutching the flag. He was brandishing it as though trying to keep him away.

Zhao Zhijing asked: “Grand Martial Uncle, are you all right?”

Zhou Botong replied: “I have been poisoned...venom...venom...was bitten...” But before he could finish his statement, his hand had gradually grown limp.

Zhao Zhijing had seen him enter the cave but despite his high kung fu, he was still seriously injured. That was why he did not want to rush in without knowing what kind of fierce poison it was that afflicted him. What’s more, the flag that Zhou Botong was clutching was not the same color as the king’s flag. He thought, Fawang had connived with me to trick him into entering the cave but it was really his intention to harm him by poisoning him.

He was extremely vexed. He wanted to flee. So, without even bothering to see what it was that harmed Zhou Botong or what kind of poison it was, he just turned around and ran away.

The fire from the torch that he dropped on the way out was beginning to die out. Halfway out, he was stopped by someone who was holding out a hand to him. That person spoke softly: "Are you always this disrespectful to your seniors?"

The voice was distinctly stern but also as pure and as clear as jade. In the darkness, he saw the lithe form of a woman dressed in flowing white clothes. She was none other than Xiao Longnu. The light from the dying torch shone on her, revealing a beautiful face. Though delicate-looking, the face actually bore an angry expression. Zhao Zhijing was taken aback and rendered speechless. He was not expecting her and now that she was here, all he wanted was to run away. But, he could not even take a single step.

In truth, Xiao Longnu had been observing Zhao Zhijing from a distance, watching his every action. When he made Zhou Botong chase him towards the hills, Xiao Longnu followed as well. Zhou Botong knew this but did not pay attention to it. Zhao Zhijing, on the other hand, was completely unaware. Xiao Longnu bent down and picked up the torch, using it to illuminate Zhou Botong's prostrate form. His face was shadowed and green-like in its pallor.

From her bosom, she casually took out her golden silk glove and slipped it on before lifting his arm to inspect him. She was shocked to see three spiders, their fangs firmly attached to Zhou Botong's finger. The spiders looked extremely strange. Their bodies had alternating red and green stripes that were so bright one could get mesmerized watching them. She knew that venomous animals were usually bright in color. The brighter their color the more lethal was their venom. These three spiders were still firmly biting onto Zhou Botong's finger. If she tried to capture them, they would evade her grasp. Finally, she raised her right hand and sent three "Jade Bee Needles" into the air, killing the three spiders immediately.

When sending the "Jade Bee Needles" towards them, she had used just the right amount of force to kill the spiders without injuring Zhou Botong.

This species of spider was called "Cai Xue Zhu" (Multicolored Snow Spider) and they only lived in the snowy mountains of Tibet. Their venom was one of the three most deadly poisons in the world. Jinlun Fawang had brought them with him from the West, intending to use them against famous poison experts in the Central Plains.

That time he tried to kill Guo Jing in Xiangyang, he had not thought of using the venomous Multicolored Snow Spiders. After he was hit by Li Mochou's Bing Po Zhen Zheng (Soul Freezing Silver Needle), he angrily returned to the encampment and took the spiders out of their golden case. He hoped that he would meet Li Mochou again and then have her feel their venom. Thus, it was just Zhou Botong's misfortune to make the bet with him about stealing the flag. After making the deal with Zhao Zhijing, he placed the venomous spiders on the flag and hid it inside the cave.

Once the Snow-Colored Spiders saw flesh and blood, they would immediately leap on it and bite. They were attracted to blood and once someone was bitten, they could never escape. Their venom was so lethal that no one, not even Fawang, knew the antidote. He himself was not willing to keep the spiders too close to his body, afraid of getting bitten. Such a disaster he could ill-afford.

Xiao Longnu's Jade Bee Needles also came from highly venomous insects; the Jade Bees of Mount Zhongnan. Although the lethality of their venom was inferior to that of the Multicolored Snow Spider, the needles managed to enter their bodies, forcing them to produce anti-venom.

The venomous spiders were still biting into their prey when they were hit. Because they were still in the process of producing anti-venom and also sending out their own venom to their prey, they could not fight off the venom from the needles. However, right before they died, their bodily fluids spurted out of their mouths, sending the anti-venom into Zhou Botong's blood stream.

It was extremely fortunate that Xiao Longnu had rushed in to save him and saw the venomous spiders. Not daring to touch them, she instead launched three needles and luckily hit them, thus managing to discover the antidote to the world's most lethal venom.

Xiao Longnu watched the three Multicolored Snow Spider's lifeless forms on the ground, their bright red-green colors still managing to look fearsome. She also saw Zhou Botong lying motionless as though he was dead. In truth, she actually felt quite grateful to Zhou Botong. If not for him, Yang Guo would not have come to the Passionless Valley and she would have been forced to marry Gongsun Zhi. His whole body was covered in a cold sweat and his breathing had grown irregular. Who would have thought he would die like this? In her heart, she was deeply moved. But all of a sudden, Zhou Botong's left hand began to move and she heard him say in a faint voice: "What was it that bit me with such...such fierceness?" He tried to get up but his body was too weak so that he fell back.

Xiao Longnu was overjoyed to find that he was not dead. She lifted the torch closer to his face and saw that the traces of the spider's venom were no longer there. Relieved, she asked: "You did not die?"

Zhou Botong chuckled: "Well, it doesn't look that way. I am right between half-death and half-life...ha-ha..." He wanted to laugh heartily but his hands and feet were still twitching and he was still unable to get up. His smile faded.

Laughter came from outside the cave. The sound was so strong that it resembled the ear-deafening sound of thunder rumbling. That person spoke: "Mischievous Old Urchin, have you stolen the royal flag? In today's wager, who won you or me?" The speaker was Jinlun Fawang.

Using her left hand, Xiao Longnu snuffed out the light. As long as she was wearing her gold silk glove, no sharp objects or raging fires could harm her. Zhou Botong replied: "Whether the Mischievous Old Man has lost in this game is not yet decided. But I'm afraid I've lost my life to you. Fawang, you rascal, what sort of poisonous spider is this, so evil and cruel?" When he spoke these words, his voice sounded soft and thin. Even though he was angry, he was far too weak. Still, his voice was as deep as Fawang's rumbling laughter.

Fawang was secretly amazed. He was bitten by my Cai Xue Zhu (Multicolored Snow Spider) but he didn't die. From his voice, it is clear that his internal strength is profound, and is not below mine. Luckily, he fell for the trap, thus removing a powerful enemy. If he doesn't die soon, he'll only suffer for a short while.

Zhou Botong added: "Young Taoist Zhao Zhijing, you worked with this man to trick me. Go quickly to Qiu Chuji and ask him to kill you!"

Outside the cave, Zhao Zhijing hid behind Fawang, fearing for his life. He thought in terror, "How could I ask that of Martial Senior Qiu?"

Fawang laughingly said: "Taoist Priest Zhao is very good. Once I inform our prince of his great deed, he will refer him as an honorable teacher of the Quanzhen School." But, he thought; "If Zhou Botong dies, Taoist Priest Zhao won't have a way out. From this time on, he is under my control. His level of skill is ordinary. Zhou Botong acts like a crazy person, but Senior generations, like Qiu Chuji and so on, may honor him, but who would take his words seriously? How can the Quanzhen sect depend on the words of the Mischievous Old Urchin?"



Indignant, Zhou Botong let out a snort of contempt. Most of the venom in his body was gone but the Cai Xue Zhu was extremely venomous. Its effects wouldn't vanish that easily. Just as a tiny drop of it could kill several people, so could the slightest anger in Zhou Botong lead to a feeling of dizziness.

Xiao Longnu said: "Jinlun Fawang, you strike some, and then use this kind of venom to injure another. Is that a rule of your school? Quick, give us the antidote to cure Old Gentleman Zhou!"

Seeing Zhou Botong dazed, Fawang was relieved to find that the venom was working. He thought, "How could you depend on this little bit of a girl against me?"

He remembered what Zhao Zhijing said to him earlier in the day, that he was once defeated by her. Making up his mind to get her and show her exactly who was more powerful or stronger, he dashed into the cave, raising his left palm while his right hand moved as though to grab Xiao Longnu.

He said: "Here's the antidote. Take it." Xiao Longnu waved her right hand and a burst of soft tinkling could be heard. A golden bell attached to a silken belt flew out, heading towards his Qi Men Xue point.

Fawang thought, "If I still can't catch you today, how can I teach that Taoist priest Zhao not to laugh at me?" Swaying his body to avoid the golden bell, he reached into his vest to grasp two wheels, beating the two together to produce a loud sound that shook one's eardrums.

Maintaining her position, Xiao Longnu shifted slightly, aiming for his back where his Da Chui Xue point was. The change of moves was extremely fast; Fawang leapt back, exclaiming: "Your level of kung fu is rarely seen in women!"

The two of them fought inside the narrow passage and within the blink of an eye, they had already exchanged ten or so moves. When it came to power, Xiao Longnu was no match for Fawang, however, he was still worried about that day when he entered the cave in the hill and pricked his foot on a Bing Po Zhen Zheng (Soul Freezing Silver Needle), nearly costing him his life.

Although Xiao Longnu and Li Mochou came from the same school, Li Mochou was actually a level higher than her. Still, what he was worried about were the clever tricks that Li Mochou's master must have taught her as well. He was not only unwilling to get inside the cave and make the same mistake again, he also knew that there were poi-

sonous spiders in there. One bite from them would mean sure death for him. So although he was anxious to capture her, he was not bold enough to brave the danger. In the darkness, one could only hear the clang of metals as the lead and silver wheels met the golden bell; the sound almost resembling music made from small gongs.

Standing afar, Zhao Zhijing listened to the sounds of the two fighting while his heart beat wildly. Although it was not his intention to kill Zhou Botong, he knew that he could not escape the blame for his murder. In Wulin, no crime went unpunished. If Fawang killed Xiao Longnu, that would be good. But what if Xiao Longnu won? Even if she withdrew or ran away, the news would still spread. What should he do then? Grasping his sword, he started to pace, listening to the sound of the wheels and the golden bell grow louder as the sweat continued to stream from his body and soak his robes.

Even though Fawang's kung fu was higher than that of Xiao Longnu, his weapon was shorter than hers so he could not enter the cave. Eventually he found it difficult to gain the upper hand. After six or seven more moves, he still could not penetrate her defenses.

Xiao Longnu saw that Zhou Botong was once again motionless on the ground, close to death. Because she wanted to save him, she did not want the fight to last long. As the two of them fought in the darkness, her better vision gave her an advantage. She saw Fawang wield his wheel to the right before slanting and smashing down to create a crack. Immediately, she moved her silken belt to the right, aiming for him while at the same time, her left hand released ten Yu Feng Zhen (Jade Bee Needles), sending them shooting in his direction.

With very little distance between them, the Yu Feng (Jade Bee) needles shot out noiselessly so that Fawang did not realize it until they were only about a foot from his body. However, his wugong (martial arts) were no small matter and in the face of danger, he hurriedly turned over his wheel to block the small golden bells of the coiling silken belt. Bracing himself with both feet he let out a loud shout at the same time. His body raised several zhang or so, allowing the ten or so Yu Feng needles to fly past the soles of his feet.

In his haste, he used a great amount of his force, raising both arms up as his body rose along with his silver and lead wheels, which were still successively blocking the small golden bells of the silken belt, sending them flying from his hands into midair. The wheels made a "wuwu" sound while the small golden bell let out a "ding-ding" noise as both shot straight up to about twenty feet from the ground.

Under the starlight, one could only see circles of gray and silver amidst the fiercely flying strip of belt above.

Xiao Longnu did not wait for him to fall back to the ground before she released another Yu Feng needle in his way. Fawang's body was still in midair and no matter how strong his wugong was, there was no way for him to deflect it. Although the distance between them this time was big, the circumstance was actually quite dire for him. However, when Fawang leapt he had anticipated that the enemy would certainly try to strike again so he immediately grabbed at his chest, using his external force to rip off two strips of cloth from his gown. As the gown tore into pieces, his laughter rang loud.

Just as the Yu Feng needles shot towards him, he waved the strips of cloth, allowing the tiny needles to pierce the cloth only. He gave another laugh as finally both his feet touched the ground, throwing away the strips of cloth as he did so. He then stretched out his hands to catch his two wheels as they fell from the air.

Twice, he was able to get away from danger, both made possible without using his wugong but his shrewd mind. At a crucial moment, he escaped not only with his life but with Xiao Longnu's weapons as well. As soon as his feet touched the ground, he rushed up to the mouth of the cave and sneered: "Long Guniang (Miss Long), you still don't give up?"

He was afraid that Xiao Longnu might ambush him in the cave so he did not dare enter. However, Xiao Longnu did not know this so she hid herself near the entrance to the cave, silently clutching a single golden needle.

Fawang waited for a moment. Seeing nothing move, he formulated a plan. He held his two wheels in his right hand and used his left to pick up the two strips of cloth. He quickly tossed the wheels one after the other into the interior of the cave, using them to shield his feet from the poisoned needles on the ground while at the same time wielding the strips of cloth in the air, blocking his front. The two strips of cloth still bore the Yu Feng needles so they actually served as virulent weapons.

He laughed and said: "The wolf's fang cudgel! Long Guniang, why don't you test the severity of my wolf's fang?" But before he could even finish his sentence, he suddenly felt a tug in his hand. A half section of the cloth was unexpectedly grasped by Xiao Longnu! Ordinarily, she would not have so easily grabbed a wolf's fang cudgel with her bare hands but she was wearing her gold silk gloves, not even a wolf's fang could withstand it.

Taken by surprise, Fawang hurriedly applied strength to snatch it back but in between that space of an instant, Xiao Longnu already shot out the golden needles in her hand.

Fawang shouted in the dark, sensing the life-threatening situation. He then grabbed Zhou Botong's body which was lying on the ground and using his heel to raise him and use him as cover, following the stance of the “\*Dao Cai Qi Xing Bu.”

Afterwards, he hurriedly leapt out of the cave, glad to have escaped with his life. However, the life-and-death situation that he has just been through filled him with fear so that he only stopped when he was well away from the cave, gasping for breath.

Those twenty or so Yu Feng needles pierced Zhou Botong's body. Xiao Longnu gasped, thinking that he was dead. Also, his body was lying still, only serving to increase her guilt. But unexpectedly, Zhou Botong suddenly said: “Good pain, good pain! What in the world bit me?”

Although startled, Xiao Longnu was happy. She said: “Zhou Botong, you are not yet dead?” Knowing nothing about proper addresses, she spoke his name plainly.

Zhou Botong said: “Seems like I'm past death. Can it be that I'm alive again? I didn't know that once you're dead there is still enough life left.”

Xiao Longnu replied: “You're not dead. That's good. That Fawang was frighteningly good. Not even once did I hit him.” She then took out an iron stone (magnetic stone), using it to suck back the Yu Feng needles from his body.

Zhou Botong scolded: “Fawang, that thieving dog, he speaks nothing but lies, taking advantage of me because I'm dying, even using me to block the tiny needles...”

Xiao Longnu never stopped removing the needles and he also did not stop scolding that person. Xiao Longnu smiled faintly, saying: “Zhou Botong, those needles that pricked you are mine.” At that moment, a sudden thought came to her, prompting her to ask: “My Yu Feng needles are steeped in bee venom, does your body feel bad?”

Zhou Botong replied: “I feel very comfortable. Prick me again.”

Xiao Longnu thought that he was joking so she took out a tiny jade bottle from her chest, saying: “This bottle of Jade Bee honey is the antidote to my golden needles. If you drink it, then you'll be all right.”

But Zhou Botong shook his head, saying repeatedly: “No, no! The pricks of your needles make me feel comfortable. It appears to counteract the venom of the spiders.”

Xiao Longnu thought that Lao Wan Tong (Mischievous Old Urchin) was speaking nonsense again, but because he firmly refused to take it, she decided not to force him. Besides, it looked as though this strange old man's neigong (internal strength) was immeasurably deep; he was bitten by the venomous spiders and he did not die. Being hit by the Jade Bee needles was no hindrance.

In truth, the honeybees' sting, although extremely poisonous, could nevertheless treat various illnesses. The mysterious benefits of the Jade Bee included the cure for rheumatism and other such diseases that affected man. However, Xiao Longnu together with Zhou Botong were not familiar with medicine so they did not know that the Yu Feng needles could be used to combat poison with poison and the Cai Xue Zhu (Multicolored Snow Spider) poison was only one of many.

Fawang was listening to Zhou Botong's scolding words from outside the cave and was startled. He thought that this man scolding him must be an immortal god that could not be killed. If he really wanted to kill him, he must do so now while he was off his guard. Otherwise, the opportunity might not present itself again.

He advanced but before he could enter the cave's entrance, he paused. When he successfully used both his silver and lead wheels to see if there was a trap waiting inside, he had also lost them and so now the only weapons he had in his possession was Xiao Longnu's silken belt. He called out: “Long Guniang, I have your weapon with me!”

Then, with one shake, the silken belt unfolded and flew straight inside. His wugong had reached a level where he could wield any weapon without problem. So although Xiao Longnu's silken belt was weird, he thought he could use it like one would use a whip. But its ability was unexpected and not only that, he was able to use it even from where he was standing. He was not afraid anymore that the opponent would suddenly attack him with the golden needles.

With child-like innocence, Xiao Longnu rose to pick up the silver and lead wheels. She struck the two together and spoke: “Good, let's exchange weapons so we can start the fight.” She stretched out her right arm but a quick pain she felt in her hand made her stop and refuse to push forward.

The lead wheel appeared small but it was actually made of very heavy metal. So when Xiao Longnu extended it, she was not prepared for its weight. She quickly pulled back

and clutched the two wheels to her chest.

Fawang saw an advantage and quickly dashed forward, extending his hand to grab the wheels. Xiao Longnu took a step back as her left hand shot up as though to release the silver wheel. But it was only a feint move because she used this chance to release several Yu Feng needles in his direction.

These Jade Bee needles were the same ones she had extracted from Zhou Botong's body so they were no longer as poisonous. Still, they could be used as a weapon. Fawang was prepared, however. When he could not grab the silver wheel, he quickly leapt to the side, allowing the Yu Feng needles to shoot past him, hitting nothing but empty air.

Zhou Botong laughed, saying: "Great, let the bald thief come and then you hit him in the butt with your tiny needles!"

Xiao Longnu said: "Ai! I've used up all my Yu Feng needles!"

Dismayed, Zhou Botong scratched his head and said: "That's one annoying problem."

He had two personalities in him – one old, the other young – but he did not have the ability to balance the two, so whatever it was he thought or felt at the moment, he always said it without misgivings.

Jinlun Fawang had a scheming mind, but he was really unaware of Zhou Botong's or Xiao Longnu's personalities. Believing that no one under the heavens could outsmart him, he thought: "You said that you've used up all your Yu Feng needles. Why should I believe you? It's clear that you want me to believe that to entice me to lower my guard. That old ploy is not going to work on me." Thus, Xiao Longnu's frank speech instead caused Fawang to be even less daring, especially when only days ago in the cave in the hills, Yang Guo had tricked him. He did not want to suffer the same fate as Nimoxing and be crippled in both legs. He would rather wait twelve long hours than go through that.

One hour soon turned to two hours until finally the sky showed first light. Zhou Botong sat in a kneeling position, trying to circulate his chi in order to get rid of the poison still in his body. But the venom of the Cai Xue spiders was very strong. As he tried to move his chi, his chest suddenly tightened and he felt nauseous. There was no spot where he did not experience some problem. He had tried circulating his chi through different paths, but each try had the same result.

Finally, he sighed dejectedly and said: “Ai, Lao Wan Tong! You’ve tried it so many times its no longer amusing!”

Fawang was peeping in from outside, but since he did not wait and stay in his place for long, he did not know of the problem. He thought to himself: “This is not good. The old man is trying to practice nei gong!”

With this new development, he carefully took out a golden box from his bosom, removing the cover to reveal several crawling Cai Xue spiders inside. When exposed to the sun, the light made their variegated red and green colors brighter and even more eye-catching.

Next, Fawang took out a pair of rhinoceros horns and used them to catch the spiders between them and gently lifted them from the sticky web. Gently, he tossed the Cai Xue spiders towards the mouth of the cave where they stuck. He repeated his movements and threw the rest of the venomous spiders from the small box towards the cave. Their sticky web soon covered the entire cave’s entrance. The spiders had been inside the small box for a very long time and they had not been fed so as soon as they were able to get out, they immediately set to work, climbing up, moving east, dropping low, and approaching west, hanging suspended, until they were able to create a network of webs in just a very short time.

Xiao Longnu and Zhou Botong watched with interest as the spiders spun the web, yet it never occurred to either one of them to stop their progress. Only when the web reached about ten feet in diameter, covering the entire mouth of the cave, and the red-green venomous spiders start to crawl around did they look troubled. Xiao Longnu said softly: “What a pity I don’t have any more Yu Feng needles left. I could have used one to remove these nasty spiders.”

Zhou Botong picked up a dried branch, intending to use it to remove the spider web when suddenly a huge butterfly came flitting near the mouth of the cave and ended up caught in the spider web. The species originated from the Kunlun Mountains so when it struck the web, it had enough power in its body to attempt to struggle and escape. However, although the butterfly’s body was huge, one touch of the spider silk and it went straight into paralysis.

Xiao Longnu realized this and quickly said: “Don’t! The web is poisonous!” Alarmed, Zhou Botong leapt away and hastily flung the stick to the ground.

Indeed, when Fawang released the venomous spiders, he not only intended to use it to seal the cave, but he also hoped that they would use their hands to destroy it. One touch would cause the poison to seep into the skin and enter the body.

Sitting cross-legged again, Zhou Botong watched as the spiders crowded around the butterfly and started to eat it. He thought: “My internal flow is still unstable. It will be some time before I recover.”

Xiao Longnu, on the other hand, was thinking: If he is going to remain inactive, how will Lao Wan Tong be able to move the poison up his body in order to remove it completely? So she asked: “How many days and nights will it take for you to recover your internal energy?”

Zhou Botong sighed and said: “I need one hundred days and one hundred evenings before I can manage it.”

Xiao Longnu was surprised to hear this so she asked: “How are we going to survive?”

Zhou Botong chuckled, saying: “Even if that bald thief gives us food to eat, being trapped in this cave for several years is not fun.”

Xiao Longnu replied: “He’ll never give us food.” She let out a sigh. “If it were Guo’Er with me in this cave, I wouldn’t mind spending a lifetime here.”

“What makes you place Yang Guo above me?” Zhou Botong said indignantly. “Is he also stronger than me? You don’t think I’m good company?”

Although his words made no sense, Xiao Longnu did not mind it. She only showed a cold smile and said: “Yang Guo knows the Quanzhen swordplay. Together, we can easily defeat this Buddhist priest and send him running away into the wilderness.”

Zhou Botong snorted: “Humph, the Quanzhen swordplay is not that difficult to understand. Even I can use it. Will Yang Guo be able to beat me?”

“When we combine our swords together in a technique called \*Yunu Suxin swordplay [‘Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden’], it is important that his heart is filled with love for me and my heart is filled with love for him so we become united and are able to subdue the enemy.”



When Zhou Botong heard her speak about the love between a man and a woman, he was filled with apprehension. He immediately waved his hand and said again and again: “Stop, stop – I don’t love you! You also can’t possibly love me. But I’m telling you it’s much better that there’s two of us in this cave. Years ago I was trapped in a cave in Tao Hua Island and had no one to accompany me. I was forced to fight with myself the whole time. But this time, it’s entirely different because I have you. It’s going to be fun!” With such happy thought, he could imagine being in that cave for a long time.

Xiao Longnu asked dubiously: “Fight with oneself? Is there such a method?” Pleased, Zhou Botong immediately launched into a discussion of the “Fen Xin Er Yong Zuo You Hu” [Mutual Hands Combat] method.

Xiao Longnu thought to herself: “If I could learn this method, then I could use the Quanzhen sword play with my left hand and the Yunu sword play with my right. With the two combined, I will be able to complete the Yunu Suxin sword play. But I’m afraid that I won’t be able to learn this kung fu in just one evening. “This kung fu is difficult to learn,” she told him.

Zhou Botong replied: “If you say it’s difficult, then it will really be difficult. If you say it’s easy, then it will be easy. There are people who spend their entire lifetime learning yet never understand a thing; while there are people who only need a few days to understand it. You’ve heard about those two kids, Guo Jing and Huang Rong, right?” Xiao Longnu nodded.

Zhou Botong continued: “Who do you think is more intelligent?”

Xiao Longnu answered: “Madame Guo is a thousand times cleverer. Guo’er told me once that there is no one in this generation who could surpass her intelligence and wisdom. Great Hero Guo is virtuous, but his level is actually ordinary.”

Zhou Botong laughed. “What do you mean “ordinary”? Are you saying he’s stupid? Tell me; am I intelligent, or stupid?”

Xiao Longnu smiled and said: “I look at you and although you’re not young, you act silly. Sometimes, you say weird things and you act a little mad.”

Zhou Botong clapped his hands, saying: “Ah, you’re right. I once taught this Zuo You Hu method to Brother Guo Jing and it only took him a few days to learn it. Afterwards, he tried to teach the same lesson to his wife. You said that this child, Huang Rong is sharp and clever with a mind higher than that of a seventy-eight year old man, but she could

not understand this kung fu. I thought that the little idiot Guo Jing probably did not teach her properly, so Lao Wan Tong decided to come and teach her himself. I repeated the left hand and right strokes with her, but she still didn't understand how to combine the two together. It was then that I realized that some men may learn a method that other men would spend a lifetime learning, yet never understand. You see, intelligence is not the only measure of success."

Xiao Longnu said: "Don't tell me that when stupid people learn this kung fu, they can surpass even the smart ones. I can't believe it."

Zhou Botong grinned and said: "I look at you and see that your intelligence is more or less equal to that of young Huang Rong. Your wugong is not that far from hers either. Since you don't believe, why not try to draw a square on the ground with your left index finger and a circle with your right at the same time?"

Xiao Longnu followed his instructions and extended both her index fingers to the ground, making downward strokes to create the figures. However, it turned out that the square looked like a circle and the circle looked like a square.

Zhou Botong laughingly said: "See? I told you it's not easy."

Smiling faintly, Xiao Longnu emptied her mind before extending her index fingers again. This time, she was able to draw a perfect square and a perfect circle.

In his astonishment, Zhou Botong could only stammer: "You...you...you..." A moment passed before he could speak: "You studied this before?"

"Ah, I haven't," Xiao Longnu replied. "Besides, didn't you say this is difficult?"

Zhou Botong scratched the white hairs on his head and asked: "Then how did you know how to draw?"

Xiao Longnu said: "I don't know. I didn't think. I just held out my fingers and drew the figures."

As she said this, she wrote the three characters "lao wan tong" with her left hand and the three characters "xiao long nu" with her right. The two hand strokes were so neatly written they looked like the ones found in books and the handwriting was also very elegant.

Delighted, Zhou Botong declared: “This shows that you learned this method even when you were still in your mother’s womb! This is so much better!”

Thereupon, he taught her how to attack with her left and defend with her right, strike with her right and block with her left. It was in Tao Hua Island that he first learned this strange kung fu that was unmatched under the heavens so when the old man spoke, she listened.

In truth, the essence of the Zuo You Hu technique was the four characters “Fin Xin Er Yong.” Often, people with high intelligence have complicated thoughts and they always rushed from one thought to another. \*During the Three Kingdoms period, Cao Zi wrote the Qi Bu Shi, which depicted the turbulence of Wu Dynasty. The poem could be likened to that of a person trying to learn the Zuo You Hu kung fu technique, only to have the turbulence that makes it impossible to learn occur inside the person’s mind.

Xiao Longnu’s kung fu was based on suppressing all emotions and desires. Even when she was only eight or nine years old she mastered her feelings, stopping them like one would water. After she fell madly in love with Yang Guo, however, the constant pain in her heart from thinking of him caused her kung fu to gradually decline. But now, this weird technique was introduced, unexpectedly helping her to recover.

After she resumed practicing the Gumu Pai nei gong, she was actually at the same level as Lin Chaoying when she was pining over her lost love. Their mind sets were the same for the most part so they had more or less the same capacity for understanding. As soon as Zhou Botong moved his finger, she understood his meaning quickly. But it was only because Zhou Botong, Guo Jing, and Xiao Longnu shared the same personality, innocence of heart, and that was why people like Huang Rong, Yang Guo, and Zhu Ziliu could not learn it.

Zhou Botong had yet to remove the poison from his body, but he continued to speak and draw with enthusiasm. Xiao Longnu, on the other hand, kept on nodding her head, but in her mind she was secretly trying to figure out how to use the Yunu sword play with her right hand and the Quanzhen sword play with her left. And so after several hours of playing this Chinese finger game with him, she finally grasped the idea.

“I understand completely,” she spoke. To test it out, she moved her hands, making circular and thrusting motions with it.

Zhou Botong’s jaw dropped. He could only shout: “Strange! Strange!”

Guarding the cave outside, Fawang and Zhao Zhijing heard the two of them muttering and laughing with each other so they pressed closer but they could only hear snatches of their conversation, not enough to make the meaning clear.

Xiao Longnu raised her head at that moment and saw them eavesdropping. She straightened and said, "We're getting out of here!"

Zhou Botong looked at her blankly, asking: "How exactly?"

"If we go out and catch that bald thief, we can force him to give you the antidote," Xiao Longnu replied.

Zhou Botong stroked his beard, saying, "You think you can beat him?"

As they spoke, they suddenly heard a buzzing sound. A honeybee got stuck to the spider web and tried to struggle. Earlier when the big butterfly touched the spider's silk, it immediately went into paralysis. This honeybee was small in size, but it seemed unaffected by the poison of the Cai Xue Spiders and even succeeded in splitting the web open.

The venomous spiders zealously eyed it from the side, but dared not go forward and tangle it within their silk. After a long while, the honeybee would weaken and only then would the venomous spiders attack it.

In the Ancient Tomb, Xiao Longnu kept swarms of Jade Bees as pets; being together with honeybees all year long there was no doubt her technique of controlling bees was very good. Moreover, she regarded all bees as friends. When this honeybee was in trouble, she could not stand it. Suddenly changing her mind, she said: "Although these venomous spiders are evil-looking, my bees won't necessarily be afraid of them."

She then took out the jade bottle from her bosom, opened the lid, and used her right hand to fan the air around it, allowing the fragrant aroma to spread and penetrate through the thick spider web.

Surprised, Zhou Botong asked: "What are you doing?"

"Do you want to see an amusing trick?" Xiao Longnu asked.

Zhou Botong was delighted, saying: "Wonderful!" Then, asked: "What trick is that?"

Xiao Longnu only smiled, not responding as she continued moving her palm.

This was the season when the wild flowers in the valley were in full bloom. Wherever the sweet scent of honey could be smelled, the numerous wild bees gathering honey rushed in that direction. When the wild bees rushed to the cave, they got tangled in the spider web, and immediately began to struggle. Some died after being bitten by the venomous spiders while others were able to sting a few spiders. Although the Cai Xue Spiders were considered among the world's most poisonous, too much bee venom in their bodies caused them to become stiff and gradually die.

Zhou Botong was ecstatic as he looked on, while outside the cave, Jinlun Fawang and Zhao Zhijing watched in helpless astonishment.

In the meantime, the Cai Xue Spiders still had the upper hand. Only three poisonous spiders were dead while about forty or so honeybees were killed. However, the wild bees continued to swarm. At first, there were only thirty of them, but fifty more came and got caught in the web. Afterwards, dozens more of them came, numbering up to a hundred so that the spider web covering the mouth of the cave soon began to fill up, and they were stinging the venomous spiders until they died.

Zhao Zhijing had experienced firsthand the honeybee's sting. Seeing them now, with his own eyes, he realized the circumstance were grave. Hastily, he dived into the bushes to avoid them.

Fawang, on the other hand, knew that the Cai Xue Spiders were rare. If they are annihilated, there would be none left who could do their job. Therefore, he and the venomous spiders shared a common hatred of this swarm of wild bees. However, he did not know that it was Xiao Longnu who summoned them. All he thought about was how to force Zhou Botong and Xiao Longnu out of the cave and take their lives.

Young Xiao Longnu dipped a finger into the jade bottle and shot some honey towards Fawang, hitting him on both sides. He howled into the cave's entrance as several wild bees made an about-face and headed towards him.

Fawang was panic-stricken as he realized the dire situation he was in. He dashed forward quickly. Although the wild bees were fast, his lightness kungfu was faster so within moments, he was already ten or so feet away from them. His figure appeared like a wisp of black smoke, rushing further and further away. Failing to catch up, the wild bees merely scattered around.

Xiao Longnu stamped her foot again and again, saying repeatedly: “What a pity! What a pity!”

Zhou Botong asked: “What pity?”

“He ran away before I could snatch the antidote from him,” Xiao Longnu replied.

Indeed, she planned to summon the honeybees so they could cover Fawang’s flank, effectively trapping him within a sphere. However, these wild bees came from different nests and therefore came from different directions. Unlike the tamed Jade Bees of the Ancient Tomb, when she wanted them to pursue, sting the enemy, return, outflank him, or make a circle like in a battle formation, the wild bees were hopeless.

Zhou Botong, however, was full of admiration. He was the sort who liked games and when he played, his spirit usually improved. So when he clapped his hands with enthusiasm, he forgot all about the poison still in his body.

Xiao Longnu saw that due to the weight of the dead and dying bees the spider web had fallen; she leaped out and shouted, “Come!”

Zhou Botong followed, but he fell down as he was about to leap. “I ... I can’t exert my strength!” he said. Suddenly his body shivered and his teeth chattered, like he was plunged into an ocean of ice. His lips turned white and his face turned blue, while his beard could not stop swaying.

Xiao Longnu was startled. “Zhou Botong! What happened?”

“Prick...prick me ... with your needle again,” he said unevenly.

Xiao Lung Nu was surprised, “My needles are poisonous.”

“Then ... the poison ... is good,” the old man responded weakly.

Xiao Longnu remembered the battle between the spiders and wild bees; she thought, “Could it be that the bee’s venom is the antidote to the spiders’?” She quickly picked several needles from the ground and pricked them into his arm. “Good! More! More!” Zhou Botong called out.

Xiao Longnu pricked him some more while keeping her eyes on him. She saw the effect of the spider’s poison had faded from his face. After more than ten pricks, Zhou Botong

stopped shivering. He sighed and said, “It is truly a poison against poison.” He tried to exert his energy but it turned out the poison had not been completely neutralized.

Suddenly he slapped his knee and said, “Miss Long, your bee poison is not strong enough and they are no longer fresh.”

“That case I am going to call some bees to sting you,” she said with a smile.

“Thank you, thank you ...” the old man said, “Hurry up!”

Xiao Longnu then opened the jade bottle to lure a crowd of wild bees. Zhou Botong was grinning from ear to ear; he took off his clothes and let the bees sting him while he exerted his internal energy. First he sucked the bees’ venom to his [dan tian – pubic area, lower stomach] and then spread it out toward all his veins. In approximately the time needed to eat a bowl of rice the spider venom had been completely neutralized. The bee sting started to hurt him. “Enough! Enough!” he cried, putting on his clothes back, “More bee stings and I am dead.” Xiao Longnu smiled and drove the bees away.

She picked her [jin ling ruan so] white silk belt with golden bells from the ground and asked, “I am going to Mount Zhongnan. Are you coming?”

Zhou Botong shook his head, “I have an important matter to deal with. You go ahead.”

“Ah! I almost forget,” said Xiao Longnu. “You are going to Xiangyang to give Hero Guo a hand.” As soon as the word ‘Guo Da Xia’ came out of her mouth, Guo Fu came into her mind. From Guo Fu, she remembered Yang Guo. “Zhou Botong, if you see Yang Guo, please don’t let him know you have seen me,” she sadly said.

Zhou Botong mumbled some incoherent words, like he was thinking really hard. A moment later he looked up and asked, “What did you say?”

“Never mind,” she answered. “Farewell then.”

Zhou Botong was preoccupied; he simply nodded and waved his hand. Xiao Longnu turned around and started walking; but before reaching the plain she heard strange noises from Zhou Botong, similar to her own commands to the bees. She thought it was peculiar and quietly walked back. Hiding behind a tree she saw Zhou Botong – with one hand holding a jade bottle, flailing his hand around and howling noisily. She groped into her pocket and sure enough, her jade honey bottle was gone. The funny thing was, after calling for a while only a handful of wild bees were flying around his jade bottle.

Xiao Longnu could not help chuckling. Coming out from behind the tree she called, “Zhou Botong! Let me teach you!”

Zhou Botong blushed, he was caught red handed with the jade bottle in his hand. He kicked the ground and leaped several meters and quickly ran downhill.

Xiao Longnu laughed heartily. This old man was really strange and interesting. But as the echo of her laughter was fading away, she began to feel lonely and miserable; and her tears flowed without inhibition. She had fought Jinlun Fawang, both with her strength and wisdom and then had the Old Urchin’s company for the rest of the night. Now that the friend and foe were gone, she felt utter loneliness, like an orphan without anybody to care.

In another moment she remembered Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping. Even if she cut their bodies into ten thousand pieces, would her hatred be alleviated? She could easily kill those two, but she thought what good would that be? She stood and stared blankly under a big elm tree for a half a day; then said to herself, “Let me find them first.”

She went down the hill and found her donkey grazing in the foothills. When she arrived at the road fork going to the Mongolian camp, she saw dust flying, flags fluttering, and heard the sound of hoofs moving south toward Xiangyang. Xiao Longnu hesitated, “How could I find those two priests amongst this mighty force?”

Suddenly she saw three horses and riders in the distance. They wore the yellow robe and Taoist hat. “Why three?” she wondered. She strained her eyes and could see Yin Zhiping rode in the back, with Zhao Zhijing and an unknown young Taoist priest in front of him. Xiao Longnu pulled her reins and followed with her donkey. Yin Zhiping heard the donkey and turned his head. His countenance paled.

“Martial Brother Zhao, who is that woman?” the young priest asked.

“Our archenemy,” he answered, “Don’t ask too much.”

The young priest was startled. “The Scarlet Serpent Deity Li Mochou?” he asked, trembling with fear.

“No, but she is her martial sister,” Zhijing explained.

The young priest was Qi Zhicheng, one of Qiu Chuji’s disciples. He knew Li Mochou had fought with the Quanzhen’s masters, and they were troubled by her. Naturally her mar-



tial sister would not be friendly toward the Quanzhen sect.

Zhao Zhijing anxiously whipped his horse and galloped away. Both Yin and Qi did not have any choice but to follow suit, leaving Xiao Longnu far behind. But the donkey had good stamina; it could not run fast, but it ran steadily. After about four or five li the horses panted and slowed down, and Xiao Longnu gradually caught up with them. Again Zhijing lifted his whip and struck his horse, but the horses' strength was already spent; they ran for while, and then slowly trotted.

“Martial Brother Zhao,” Qi Zhicheng said, “Let us block the enemy to give Martial Brother Yin a chance to escape.”

Zhao Zhijing's face turned green with anger. “You talk rubbish!” he snapped. “Aren't you afraid of death?”

“Martial Brother Yin bears the heavy burden of becoming our new Sect Leader [zhang jiao],” answered Qi Zhicheng. “We have the responsibility to protect him.” He was sent by Qiu Chuji to summon Yin Zhiping back to Chongyang Palace to be the new Sect Leader.

Zhijing snorted and ignored him. He thought, “You don't know the height of the heaven, or the depth of the earth; yet you want to block her with your meager skill?”

Qi Zhicheng saw his angry face and did not dare to say anything. He held his reins to wait for Yin Zhiping; then he spoke to him in a low voice, “Martial Brother Yin, you bear a very heavy responsibility, you'd better go first.” Zhibing simply shook his head. “No need,” he said, “She can do anything she wants.”

Qi Zhicheng saw his calmness and could not help but admire him. “No wonder Master wants him to take over,” he thought. “Merely by his calmness, who among the third generation disciples can match him?” Actually, he did not know that Yin Zhiping at this time had no regard for his own safety. If Xiao Longnu wanted to kill him, he would stretch out his neck voluntarily. Zhao Zhijing saw those two were calm, but he was always thinking of ways of escaping. It was good that Xiao Longnu did not seem to plan to attack soon. Even so, he could not help but turn his head in anxiety every now and then.

The four of them proceeded north. By now they were already far away from the Mongolian troops. The wind still carried a muffled sound of horse hoofs and a faint sound of a military bugle, but the area they were traveling in was desolate. The houses

were in ruin and the common people had left to avoid the enemy troops. Before that day Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing could still find a place to eat. But now, not even a house was left standing.

That evening the three of them spent the night in a house ruin without any windows or doors. Zhao Zhijing took a look outside, and saw Xiao Longnu sleeping on a piece of rope strung between two big trees. Qi Zhicheng also saw this amazing skill and was scared. Zhijing did not dare to close his eyes. He was ready to jump and dash out whenever any noise came from the trees. Yin Zhiping was the only one who slept soundly all through the night.

Early the next morning they continued their journey. Zhao Zhijing was tired; he rode his horse in silence. Qi Zhicheng and Yin Zhiping rode together, about two to three meters behind. Qi Zhicheng could not contain himself much longer and said, “Martial Brother Yin, I have seen both you and Martial Brother Zhao’s martial art skills. Each of you has his own strengths and weaknesses, it really is difficult to compare. But speaking of character, there is no comparison between yours and his.”

Yin Zhiping smiled wryly. He asked, “How long will Master and Martial Uncles live in seclusion?”

“Master said at least three months, but it could be as long as a year,” Qi Zhicheng answered. “That was the reason he anxiously summoned Martial Brother Yin to take over.”

Yin Zhiping was lost in thought. “Their skills are already very high, what kind of martial arts are they developing?” he thought aloud.

Qi Zhicheng answered in low voice, “I heard the five Masters want to develop something to defeat the Ancient Tomb Sect.”

Yin Zhiping said, “Oh” and could not help but cast a glance toward Xiao Longnu.

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In the year when Xiao Longnu turned 18, a large group of heretic martial artists gathered at Mount Zhongnan. Da’erba and Huo Du easily entered the Chongyang Temple and Huo Du was able to wound Hao Datong in a few stances. If Guo Jing had not arrived on time, Quanzhen School would have suffered a heavy blow. Nonetheless, the main hall of the Chongyang shrine was burned by Huo Du and his men. Since the time

Master Chongyang's grandeur awed the realm, Quanzhen was known as the orthodox martial arts school. The Seven Masters of Quanzhen had deep and profound martial arts cultivation and retained Quanzhen's reputation. However, the martial arts of the Tibetan Lamaistic Sect proved to be powerful too and when Jinlun Fawang first came to China he shocked the realm with his impressive skills. On their return Hao Datong and Sun Bu'Er expressed their worries and added more frustration for Qiu Chuji and others. At the Heroes' Assembly at Dasheng Guan, Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo were able to repel Jinlun Fawang and his pupils. Hao Datong, Sun Bu'Er, Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping saw the martial arts that were displayed by Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were excellent. Yang Guo was able to mock and overcome Zhao Zhijing without making actual movements in Guo Jing's study. Later on, Xiao Longnu heavily injured Zhao Zhijing within one stance. Although Sun Bu'Er was present, she could not clearly see the movements Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu made. It seemed the martial arts of the Quanzhen School were entirely useless when facing the Ancient Tomb School; this was another frightening thought. Afterwards, they heard that Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo defeated Jinlun Fawang with their combined swordplay; the entire Quanzhen School was shocked.

Only five of the Seven Masters of Quanzhen were still alive at this time, Tan Chuduan died a long time ago. Ma Yu had also passed away by now. Liu Chuxuan assumed leadership of Quanzhen for a short while before passing the leadership onto Qiu Chuji. The five masters were old and their vigour was declining. There were no exceptional talents amongst the third and fourth generation. With the Mongolians trying to invade the south, the country was in peril. The Five Masters of Quanzhen would be able to deal with Jinlun Fawang should he lead his disciples against Quanzhen or the Ancient Tomb Sect should they try to extract vengeance upon Quanzhen. However, if they waited another ten years or so, by that time both internal and external calamity would hit the Quanzhen School. At that point the Quanzhen School would face definite defeat. That is why the Five Masters agreed to contemplate and create a new martial arts skill to protect the reputation of Quanzhen. This skill would not only protect the Quanzhen prestige but also protect the country and save the people. That is why they could be bothered by other duties, and that is why they summoned Yin Zhiping back to become acting leader of the Quanzhen School.

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Yin Zhiping and the others were heading northwest. Xiao Longnu followed them not too far behind. That day they entered Shanxi province. "Martial Brother Yin," said Zhicheng. "We are getting close to Chongyang Palace. Do you think this Miss Long would dare to pursue us?"

Yin Zhiping only mumbled, “Hmmm.” He had no idea what her intentions were. He had pondered this in his heart for a while now. “Would she expose my evil conduct to the Quanzhen Five Masters? Will she attack mercilessly? Perhaps she was only going to the Ancient Tomb and took the same way. Also ... also ... she had shown mercy to me before, would she forgive me?” He couldn’t help blushing, secretly ashamed at his foolish delusion. He had always regarded her as a deity. How could a mortal be compared to an immortal? Though he already showed disregard for his own life or death, honor or disgrace; in reality his heart was filled with fear.

Several days later they arrived at the base of Mount Zhongnan. Qi Zhicheng took out a whistling arrow; and with his arm strength flung it into the sky. It shot up and made a loud whistling noise. Not too long after four priests wearing yellow Taoist hats descended the mountain. Bowing to Yin Zhiping in respect one of them said, “Reverend Chonghe, you’re back. We have been waiting for a long time.”

‘Chonghe’ was Yin Zhiping’s religious title; but apart from his own disciples, nobody had called him by that title before. These four Taoist were the third generation disciples from various Masters; they were the same level as he was and one of them was even older than him. These four suddenly changed their way of addressing him, Yin Zhiping felt uncomfortable. He quickly dismounted his horse and reciprocate their bow and said modestly, “Four Martial Brothers are my seniors, your Younger Martial Brother is not worthy of such a title.”

The oldest priest was Ma Yu’s disciple. He said, “The five Martial Uncles have issued a decree that as soon as Reverend Chonghe arrives, he has to take the Interim Sect Leader position. The official inauguration will have to wait until the Fourth Uncle [that is, Qiu Chuji] finishes his meditation.”

“How long have Master and four Martial Uncles been in seclusion?” Yin Zhiping asked.

“It has been 20 days,” came the answer.

While they were still talking, there came a sweet sound of music from the mountain. Sixteen Taoist priests came near playing either the sheng or qing and arranged themselves on either side of the road. Another set of sixteen Taoist priests came. They carried in their hands some wooden musical instruments, swords, earthen bowls, and other religious articles. They bowed toward Yin Zhiping and surrounded him, acting as human shields, and together they walked back up the mountain, unwittingly leaving Zhao Zhijing behind without paying any respect to him. He was angry and envious at

the same time. “Just wait till the Sect Leader position falls into my hands, I want to see your face then,” he said in his heart.

They arrived at the Chongyang Palace at dusk. There were more than five hundred Taoists arranged in the main hall all the way to the entrance outside the palace. Drums, cymbals and bells were struck simultaneously. The several hundreds Taoists austere bowed to welcome their Sect Leader.

Seeing this grand scene Yin Zhiping's spirits soared. Escorted by the sixteen most senior disciples he entered the Hall of the Three Pure Ones, he walked forward to respectfully kowtowed to the statues of the Taoist Three Pure Ones, Heavenly Deity Worthy of the Primordial Beginning, Heavenly Lord Worthy of the Numinous Treasure and Exalted Supreme Lord Lao. Then, they progressed to the rear hall to pay respects to the painting of Wang Chongyang, the founding grand master of the Quanzhen Sect. Yin Zhiping respectfully kowtowed to the painting. Then, he entered the third hall, this was the hall where the Seven Masters gathered to deliberate. Yin Zhiping kowtowed to the seven empty chairs that were in the hall. After that they returned to the main hall, the Hall of the Three Pure Ones.

Qiu Chuji's second disciple Li Zhichang took out the Sect Leader decree and read it out loud while Yin Zhiping knelt down, listening attentively. The decree assigned Yin Zhiping to take over the Interim Sect Leader position. Yin Zhiping was proud to accept this lofty position; but he was touched and ashamed at the same time. He stole a glance toward Zhao Zhijing who stood to one side. Zhao had a smirk in his face, Yin Zhiping shuddered.

As soon as the decree was read Yin Zhiping stood up to express his humble acceptance. But before he could say anything, a priest suddenly barged in, loudly saying, “Reporting to the Reverend Sect Leader, you have a guest waiting outside!”

Yin Zhiping was startled; he did not expect Xiao Longnu would dare to confront him during that important ceremony. He did not know how to deal with it, and thought that since he could not run away, he might as well brace himself and face her. He simply said, “Please bring the guest in.”

The priest bowed and turned around; and came back with two people. Not only Yin Zhiping, but the others were surprised as well. The guests were a Mongolian officer and another man he had met at Khubilai's camp in Hunan. The Mongolian high-level official spoke with a clear voice, “His Majesty the Emperor has made a decision to grant an Imperial Decree to the Sect Leader of the Quanzhen Sect.” He walked toward the center

of the main hall as he was speaking. Stopping at the center he produced a yellow satin scroll; unrolling the scroll with both hands he read out, “Imperial decree conferred to the Sect Leader of the Quanzhen Sect the special position to act as: shen sian yan dao da zong zhi. [lit. The deity/divine person to develop an excellent model of learning and integrity] He is to be the religious leader of the ‘Great Way’ [dao of Taoism] and to reveal the mystery of respectable and perfect mankind. To be in charge of various sects of Taoism ...”

Reading to this point he saw nobody kneeling down; he was annoyed and said, “Sect Leader, please kneel to accept the imperial decree.”

Yin Zhiping moved forward and bowed in respect. “My Master Sect Leader Qiu Chuji is currently meditating in a closed room. I am the Interim Sect Leader. The Imperial Decree is not bestowed on me; how would I dare to accept it?” he said.

The Mongolian officer smiled and said, “His Majesty the Emperor has said that the Venerable Reverend Qiu – who was well respected by our Great Genghis Khan is old; His Majesty was not sure if he is still in this world. Therefore, His Majesty has bestowed this decree not to the Venerable Reverend Qiu but to the Sect Leader of the Quanzhen Sect. Whoever the Sect Leader is, he is worthy to accept this.”

“This lowly priest does not have competency; how would he dare to accept?” Yin Zhiping insisted on refusing the decree.

The officer laughed and said, “Don’t be bashful; quickly accept this order.”

Yin reluctantly said, “This decree is unexpected, I can’t accept it just like that. I respectfully ask Your Honor to take a rest and have some tea while I discuss this matter with my martial brothers.”

The officer was not happy, but he could not do anything. He tucked the imperial decree away and said, “Very well. But I really do not know what you have to discuss.”

Four priests on duty ushered the guests to the guest chamber and served tea.

In the meantime Yin Zhiping invited sixteen third generation disciples to convene in another room in the courtyard. “This is not a small matter, this junior does not dare to act without Martial Brothers’ approval,” he said, “I will respectfully listen to your valuable suggestions.”

“The Mongolian Emperor has shown us kindness, it is just proper for us to gracefully accept it,” Zhao Zhijing said. “Obviously our Sect is getting more prosperous than ever so that the Mongolian Emperor does not dare to look down upon us.” He was speaking with self-satisfaction in his voice and could not hold in his happy laugh.

“No, I don’t agree!” Li Zhichang shook his head. “Mongolia invaded our country and cruelly massacred our people. How can we accept this decree?”

“Uncle Master Qiu himself had accepted Genghis Khan’s royal invitation and traveled thousands of miles to the west,” Zhao Zhijing countered. “Sect Leader Yin and you, Martial Brother Li, were among those who accompanied him on the journey. Having this precedent, why do we refuse the imperial decree now?”

“It’s different,” Li Zhichang said. “At that time Mongolia was at war with the Jin dynasty and had not invaded our country. They even formed an alliance with our great Song dynasty. How can you compare our present situation to those times?”

“You have a very dangerous opinion,” Zhao Zhijing threatened. “Mount Zhongnan is under Mongolian rule; our Chongyang Palace is within Mongolian territory. If we refuse the decree, wouldn’t that mean we are inviting a great disaster?”

Li Zhichang was offended. “Martial Brother Zhao’s opinion is not right,” he said.

“What do you mean ‘not right?’” Zhao Zhijing said harshly, “Would Martial Brother Li give us direction?”

“Give you direction, I do not dare,” Li Zhichang said. “But let me ask Martial Brother Zhao: what kind of person was Founder Reverend Chongyang? What kind of people are the Quanzhen Seven Masters?”

“Our Founder, Master and all Uncle Masters are religious people who held high position in our Sect,” Zhao Zhijing answered with consternation.

“They were also real men and woman with determined spirits; patriotic citizens who protect suffering people without regard to their own lives. They took up arms fighting the Jin who invaded us,” Li Zhichang added.

“Reverend Chongyang and the Quanzhen Seven Masters are honorable people who have shaken the river and lake region [Jianghu]. Who in the martial arts world doesn’t respect them?” Zhao Zhijing tried to change the subject.

“I am deeply touched by our predecessors,” Li Zhichang boldly said. “Without exception they were fearless people who resolved to save other people through oceans of water and fire. They taught us the meaning of bravery. Our bodies may perish, but our honor will have to stand.”

His speech had touched Yin Zhiping’s heart, as well as more than ten other Martial Brothers’. Zhao Zhijing, on the other hand, kept pushing his agenda. He sneered and said, “Is Martial Brother Li the only one who is fearless about death? Do other people fear death and covet life? Our founder had undertaken great difficulties in founding our Sect. Our Sect has reached a high point today; I wonder how much pain and suffering the Founder and Quanzhen Seven Masters have suffered? If Quanzhen Sect fell due to our inability, how would we face our Founder in the underworld? How would we be accountable to the Five Masters when they finish their meditation?”

His speech sounded reasonable and several martial brothers voiced their support. Zhao Zhijing was encouraged and continued, “The Jin dynasty was our archenemy. Now the Mongolians have destroyed their country, wouldn’t that make them our ally? In the past our Founder was defeated by the Jin which resulted in him living in seclusion inside the Ancient Tomb. If he knew his enemy was defeated, wouldn’t his soul in heaven be comforted?”

After hearing his comments praising the enemy, Wang Zhitan, another of Qiu Chuji’s disciples said, “If after defeating the Jin the Mongolians formed an alliance with our Great Song and lived in peace with our people we certainly would treat them as brothers. However, the Mongolian armed forces have continued their large scale maneuvers to the south fiercely attacking Xiangyang. Our Great Song is in grave danger. You, I and all of us are people of the Great Song. How could we accept the enemy’s decree?” He turned his head to Yin Zhiping and asked, “Martial Brother Sect Leader, if you accept this decree, you are a traitor of China; you will be condemned forever by our Quanzhen Sect. I, Wang Zhitan; even if the blood of my neck splashes to the ground, will not let you disgrace us.” He spoke with a solemn voice and stern countenance.

Zhao Zhijing leaped up and smacked the table. “Martial Brother Wang!” he bellowed, “Do you want to resort to violence? How dare you insolently threaten the Reverend Sect Leader?”

“We stand on justice!” Wang Zhitan harshly shot back. “Fight if you want, do you think I am afraid?”



Both sides looked in each other's eyes, ready to draw their swords to fight. A grey haired Taoist priest quickly intervened, "Hold! The Martial Brothers don't have to fight. We can talk it over."

"What is Senior Martial Brother's opinion?" Wang Zhitan asked, eyes bulging out.

"My opinion," the senior priest said, "We ... we are devout people, we have to have mercy toward the people, and we have to help them. If ... if we accept the Mongolian Emperor's Imperial Decree, we will be able to persuade the Mongolian rulers and the officers not to commit atrocities. Didn't Fourth Martial Uncle Qiu Chuji do the same and was able to save a multitude of lives?" Several of Zhao Zhijing's supporters echoed their agreement.

A terse and forceful Taoist priest shook his head. "The circumstances then and today are beyond comparison. Junior followed Master's journey to the west and had met Genghis Khan himself. I saw with my own eyes how the Mongolian troops destroyed cities and massacred their people, and committed great atrocities. If we accept this decree, it means we fall under Mongolian influence. Wouldn't that mean we are assisting a tyrant to do evil? We might be able to save ten or twenty lives, but as the Mongolian power rises, I wonder how many thousands or tens of thousands people will die." The short and stocky priest who said that was Song Defang, one of nineteen disciples who came with Qiu Chuji to the west.

Zhao Zhijing smirked and said, "You have seen Genghis Khan, so what? I have recently met the Mongolian Fourth Prince, Khubilai. The Prince treats skilled martial artists and scholars with utmost courtesy. He is generous and open-minded; how could someone like him be ruthless?"

"Incredible!" Wang Zhitan shouted, "You have received Khubilai's order to spy on us!"

Zhao Zhijing was enraged, "What did you say?"

Wang Zhitan snapped, "Those who conspire with the Mongolians are traitors to our country!"

Zhao Zhijing made a sudden leap and thrust a palm toward Wang Zhitan's head. But as he started to move, two palms blocked his attack. They belonged to Qiu Chuji's other two disciples, one of them was Qi Zhicheng.

“Shame!” Zhao Zhijing was livid and loudly shouted, “The disciples of Uncle Master Qiu Chuji rely on numbers to bully others.”

Yin Zhiping immediately clapped his palms and loudly said, “Martial Brothers! Please sit quietly. Listen to what Junior has to say.”

The Sect Leader position granted the bearer an enormous authority. They immediately sat down and did not dare to disobey. “Good,” Zhao Zhijing said, “Let us listen to what our Sect Leader has to say. If he wants to accept the decree, then we accept it. If he wants to refuse it, then we follow. The Imperial Decree is his; it’s neither mine nor yours. Why fight?”

He thought he had Yin Zhiping in his hands. Yin Zhiping would not dare to oppose him. On the other hand, Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan and the others have known Yin Zhiping for quite some time. They knew he was loyal and patriotic. They were sure he would not betray the country and die as a traitor. They thought it was wise to leave the matter in his hands and let him to adjudicate.

“Junior does not have the competency and skill to hold the Sect Leader position. It was with a humble and heavy heart I accepted this weighty responsibility,” Yin Zhiping slowly said. “Who could have known that I would have to face this difficult matter on my very first day?” He looked up and stared blankly at the ceiling. Sixteen third generation disciples fixed their gaze on their Sect Leader. The room was quiet. Nobody made any noise.

After a long while Yin Zhiping finally continued, “The Quanzhen Sect was founded by Grand Master Chongyang. After him came honorable Master Ma Yu, followed by Uncle Master Liu Chuxuan and my Master Qiu Chuji who carried forward their legacy. Now Junior has to carry the burden. How could I dare to disobey the basic teachings of my honorable predecessors? Martial Brothers! At present the Mongolian troops attack the city of Xiangyang, invade our land, and massacre our people. If it were any of the four Masters, would they accept, or would they refuse?”

The group listened carefully to his word, they reflected on how the Grand Martial Master Chongyang, Masters Ma Yu, Liu Chuxuan, and Qiu Chuji would usually handle such affairs: Founding Grand Master Chongyang died a long time ago, none of the third generation disciples had ever met him. Master Ma Yu was kind and honest; he would handle any matter quietly without much fanfare. Master Liu Chuxuan had profound insight; the disciples could never easily discern his thoughts. Master Qiu Chuji was like a raging fire. He was loyal and patriotic. The disciples had deep impressions of him, and

without prior agreement they answered almost in unison, “Sect Leader Qiu Chuji would refuse the decree!”

“The Sect Leader now is you, not Uncle Master Qiu!” Zhao Zhijing shouted disrespectfully.

“Junior’s talent is ordinary. I do not dare to violate our Masters’ teaching. Moreover, I have committed a great sin, deserving of harsh punishment.” After saying this Yin Zhiping hung his head. Nobody but Zhao Zhijing knew what he was talking about. They thought he was simply being modest. But ‘a great sin, deserving harsh punishment’ was a little bit too hard, unclear, and had nothing to do with the matter at hand.

Zhao Zhijing snorted; standing up he asked, “So, you have made the decision to refuse, hmm?”

“My insignificant life is worthless,” Yin Zhiping mournfully said. “But I can’t disgrace the Quanzhen name.” He started talking in low voice, but as he spoke the later sentence his voice was actually getting ardent. “Presently the heroes of our country have united themselves to fight the invaders. The Quanzhen Sect is known as an orthodox school of the central plains. How would we face the heroes of this world if we fall under Mongolian feet?”

His speech was applauded by loud cheers from Li Zhichang, Song Defang, Wang Zhitan, Qi Zhicheng and many others. “The Martial Brother Sect Leader’s words are true,” they enthusiastically said.

Zhao Zhijing flicked his sleeve and furiously walked out of the room. He paused at the doorway, sneered and coldly said, “Martial Brother Sect Leader, your words were pleasant to the ear. Heh, heh ... I am sure you know the consequences you can expect.” Then he turned around and walked briskly out.

As soon as he left many Taoists spoke at once. They agreed that Yin Zhiping had made a wise decision and praised him accordingly but about four or five Zhao Zhijing supporters also left the room without saying anything.

Yin Zhiping’s agony was unspeakable. He retreated to his own chamber. He knew that Zhao Zhijing would not take this setback lightly; Zhao would certainly reveal his secret to the public. He realized that he had condemned himself to die by declaring his intention to refuse the decree. He had suffered great anxiety and fear for several months, and now that he knew he was going to die, his mind became clear and his spirit

calmed. With a steady hand he bolted the door of his chamber from inside. With a wry smile on his face he unsheathed his long sword and lifted it toward his throat ...

Just before the sword touched his skin, someone suddenly leaped from behind a book shelf and a hand reached toward the sword. Yin Zhiping did not expect this, he was caught off guard. The long sword suddenly flew from his hand. Startled he quickly turned his head only to see Zhao Zhijing with the long sword in his hand.

As Zhao Zhijing flaunted the sword in his hand he smirked and said “You have ruined the Sect Leader’s reputation and now you think you can easily settle the score by dying? Not that easy! Miss Long is standing guard outside the Chongyang Palace. You tell me how we should answer her if she decides to come.”

“Good!” Yin Zhiping answered, “Then I will come outside and slit my own throat in her presence to apologize.”

“Even if you killed yourself, this matter is not over,” Zhao Zhijing said. “After they finish their meditation, the Five Masters would certainly decide to investigate. You have ruined Quanzhen Sect’s reputation. Surely you will be condemned forever!”

Yin Zhiping’s spirit was crushed. Suddenly a cold sweat poured down his face. He fell into a chair, holding his head with both hands and desperately muttered, “What do you want? Tell me, what do you want me to do? If death is inadequate, then what ...?”

He had spoken to his fellow disciples with confidence, but now that he was alone with Zhao Zhijing, he unexpectedly lost his will to fight.

“Very well,” Zhao Zhijing smiled. “If you leave this matter to me, I guarantee I will help you take care of the Miss Long problem, while at the same time preserving the Sect’s and your own reputation. Definitely you will not have any trouble in the future.”

“Do you want me to accept the Imperial Decree?” asked Yin Zhiping anxiously.

“No! No! I don’t want you to accept the Imperial Decree,” Zhao Zhijing answered.

Yin Zhiping was relieved. “What then? Tell me quickly! I will certainly listen to you,” he anxiously asked.

After an hour, the bell in the hall sounded and everyone assembled there. Li Zhichang instructed all of Qiu Chuji’s disciples to conceal weapons under their gowns in case Yin

Zhiping was coerced into submission by Zhao Zhijing and his supporters. The Taoists filled the hall; their faces grim and filled with anxiety.

Yin Zhiping stepped out slowly from the inner hall and his face was very pale. He stopped in the centre and said, “My fellow Taoist brothers, I have been commanded by Head Priest Qiu to assume the Sect Leader’s position, but unfortunately I have contracted a terminal illness which cannot be cured...” This came like a bolt from the blue and many Taoists involuntarily exclaimed, “Ah!” Yin Zhiping continued, “I cannot undertake such a heavy responsibility, and I hereby appoint Elder Wang’s most senior disciple Zhao Zhijing to assume the Sect Leader position!”

When he said this, the hall was filled with an unnatural silence which only lasted for a moment. Then Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan, Song Defang and company opposed loudly, “Priest Qiu wanted Brother Yin Zhiping to become the Sect Leader, how can you pass it on to others?” “You’re supposed to be fine, how did you contract a terminal illness?” “There must be some huge conspiracy behind this; you must have fallen into a trap.” The Fourth Generation disciples did not dare speak loudly but they were all debating among themselves. The hall was thrown into confusion. Li Zhichang and company glared at Zhao Zhijing but he looked indifferent to the matter and just folded his arms silently.

Yin Zhiping raised his hands and waited for everyone to become silent. He then said, “This is indeed very sudden, you’re not at fault for your reactions. Our sect is facing a great disaster and I have committed a great sin – so great that even death cannot atone for it.” When he said this, he grimaced and continued, “I have thought carefully and I found that only Brother Zhao Zhijing is capable enough to lead our sect through this crisis. Everyone must not look upon him with prejudice but assist him in bringing glory to our sect.”

Li Zhichang said clearly, “It’s human to err. As for your sin, just await the five elders return from their meditation and then report the matter to them. We really cannot acknowledge your abdication.”

Yin Zhiping sighed, “Brother Li Zhichang, we’ve been friends for many years and are as close as brothers. Please just cooperate and don’t make things difficult for me.”

Li Zhichang was full of suspicions and saw that Yin Zhiping looked like he was seriously troubled and his speech had little conviction so he gave up arguing and hung his head in silence. Wang Zhitan said, “If you really wish to abdicate, you should still wait for the five elders to return and investigate carefully to prevent any foolish decisions.”

Yin Zhiping sadly said, “This is too urgent to postpone.”

Wang Zhitan said, “Even so, among our generation of brothers, there are many who surpass Brother Zhao in character and leadership abilities. Brother Li Zhichang is well-versed in the Tao while Brother Song Defang is able at handling other matters. Why, then, do you choose the unpopular Brother Zhao?”

Zhao Zhijing had a hot-tempered character and he tried very hard to restrain himself. Now he could not control himself and he laughed coldly, “Then what about the brave Brother Wang Zhitan?”

Wang Zhitan angrily said, “I’m not very capable and I cannot be compared to our fellow brothers. But compared to Brother Zhao, I’m superior.” He laughed and stared at the ceiling; his manner was extremely arrogant. Wang Zhitan said loudly, “My martial arts and sword skills may not be superior to Brother Zhao’s but at least I wouldn’t be a traitor.”

Zhao Zhijing lost his control and shouted, “If you have the guts then say it clearly, who’s the traitor?” The exchange of words became more intense and heated.

Yin Zhiping said, “Please don’t quarrel and listen to me.” They stopped arguing but still glared at each other. Yin Zhiping said, “Our sect’s constitution decrees that the position of the Sect Leader will be appointed by the previous Sect Leader and not nominated by the Taoist Brothers, is that right?” Everyone unanimously shouted, “Yes!” Yin Zhiping said, “I hereby appoint Zhao Zhijing to succeed me as the new Sect Leader. Do not oppose this. Brother Zhao, please come forward and listen to them.” Zhao Zhijing proudly swaggered forward and bowed.

Wang Zhitan and Song Defang still wanted to speak but Li Zhichang held their sleeves and signaled to them with his eyes. They knew he was apt at handling matters and must have planned something so they remained silent. Li Zhichang whispered, “Zhao Zhijing must have some hold over Brother Yin rendering him incapable of any opposition. We must secretly investigate his devious plan then we can contend with him. Let’s just obey Brother Yin for now. If we oppose him now, it may reflect badly on us.” They nodded their heads in agreement and acknowledged the Sect Leader’s command.

The Quanzhen Sect experienced two change-of-command ceremonies in one day so, of course, many were surprised and found it hard to accept.

Once the ceremony was over, he stood at the centre and bade his own disciples to stand guard at his sides. He said, "Invite in the Mongol Khan's envoy." Wang Zhitan wanted to abuse him verbally when he heard this but Li Zhichang stopped him with his eye signals. Before long, four disciples escorted the Mongolian envoy and Xiaoxiang Zi into the hall.

Zhao Zhijing quickly rushed forward to welcome him and laughed, saying, "Please come in!" The envoy had already waited for a very long time and was getting impatient. Now he saw that Yin Zhiping was absent his face became blacker. One of the escorts knew what was bothering him and said, "Our Sect Leader's position is now undertaken by Master Zhao." The Mongol envoy was surprised and delighted and said, "Oh, I see! Congratulations!" He cupped his hands to salute him. Xiaoxiang Zi was standing two feet behind but his zombie-like face did not display any emotion.

Zhao Zhijing brought the envoy into the main hall and said, "Your Honor, please announce the Edict."

The envoy smiled and thought, "A person like you should have been made the Sect Leader originally and not that previous leader." He took out the Edict and opened it. Zhao Zhijing knelt on the floor and heard the envoy say, "Quanzhen Sect's Leader is hereby conferred..."

Li Zhichang and the others saw Zhao Zhijing kneel down and accept the edict respectfully and exchanged glances. They suddenly drew their swords from under their gowns and the flashes were seen throughout the hall. Wang Zhitan and Song Defang rushed up and pointed their swords at Zhao Zhijing's back. Li Zhichang shouted, "Our sect's most important commandment is loyalty, we'll never surrender to the Mongolians. Zhao Zhijing betrayed our ancestors and abandoned our honour, he shall not remain as the sect's leader." Another four Taoists drew their swords and surrounded the envoy and Xiaoxiang Zi.

This sudden change of events was too abrupt. Although Zhao Zhijing knew Li Zhichang was very unhappy with him, he thought the power and prestige of the Sect Leader's position would prevent anyone from daring to rebel. He assumed that if he became the leader he would be the highest-ranking member of the sect and even the Five Elder Masters could not oppose his orders easily. He obviously never expected the others to take action against the Sect Leader. Now swords were pointed at his back; he was shocked and angry but he did not show it. He shouted, "You rebellious disciples! You dare to create trouble?"

Wang Zhitan shouted, “Traitor! If you move we’ll make two holes right through you!”

Although Zhao Zhijing’s skills were better than theirs, this was unexpected as he was attacked while kneeling down so he had no chance to retaliate. Zhao Zhijing had instructed about ten of his trusted supporters to bring weapons along with them. But Li Zhichang and company were Qiu Chuji’s disciples who were well-respected in the sect and they acted swiftly and suddenly. Many of Zhao Zhijing’s close supporters did not dare make a move. A few did try to draw their weapons but their accupoints were sealed the moment their arms moved. Among them were Zhang Zhiguang whose face was injured by Granny Sun, Jia Zhifan who once fought with Lu Wushuang and Zhao Zhijing’s disciple Lu Qingdu.

Li Zhichang said to the envoy, “Mongolia is now at war with the Song Empire and we are citizens of the Song Empire. How can we accept a Mongolian edict? Please leave; when we meet on the battlefield we shall talk again.” He said this with gusto and many Taoists in the hall cheered when they heard this.

The envoy flashed his sword and did not betray any emotions, laughing coldly, “You people have acted rashly today. You don’t know what’s good for you. The glory of the Quanzhen Sect shall be destroyed soon, what a pity.”

Li Zhichang replied, “Our territories have been leveled by your armies; we are only a small sect, how can we withstand you? But if you don’t leave soon, don’t blame me for being impolite, I can’t control myself much longer.”

Xiaoxiang Zi sneered, “Impolite? How? I want to see it!” He stretched out his long arms and snatched Song Defang and Wang Zhitan’s swords. Zhao Zhijing immediately jumped up and executed the “White Clouds Exiting the Cave” to defend his back and then he stood next to the envoy. Xiaoxiang Zi handed him one of the swords and slashed the other sword towards Li Zhichang. Li Zhichang raised his sword to parry but his hand became numb when his sword hit the other sword. He tried to use his internal strength to resist the sword but the two swords snapped.

Xiaoxiang Zi’s strokes in snatching and deflecting swords were extremely fast and in the blink of an eye he raised his hands and threw out his palms, disarming four senior Quanzhen disciples. He carried out three strokes continuously and defeated seven Quanzhen experts. The several hundred people in the hall were shocked; they did not expect this zombie-faced man to be so highly-skilled.



Zhao Zhijing has never thought greatly of Wang Zhitan and Song Defang and now that he was trapped in a kneeling position by them in front of so many people, he was furious and stabbed towards Wang Zhitan. This “Big River Heads East” move was one of Quanzhen’s most powerful and swiftest sword techniques. The sword sliced through the air and thrust towards Wang Zhitan’s abdomen.

Wang Zhitan quickly jumped back to evade the thrust. Zhao Zhijing’s sword moves were merciless and aimed to take his life and the tip of the sword followed within two feet of him. It seemed as though Wang Zhitan could no longer evade this blow and everyone looked at them stunned. Suddenly a sleeve flew out and wrapped around the sword. The sleeve was ripped apart but the sword was impeded and Wang Zhitan was able to jump to safety. Two swords were quickly stretched out to block Zhao Zhijing’s sword. The man with the torn sleeve was Yin Zhiping.

Zhao Zhijing was very angry and pointed at him, shouting, “You... you... How dare you do that?”

Yin Zhiping said, “Brother Zhao, you promised not to accept the Mongolian edict. That’s why I abdicated in your favour. How could you go back on your word in such a short time?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “You asked me, ‘Do you want me to accept the Mongolian edict?’ I said, ‘No, I’d never want you to accept the edict!’ How did I break my word? The one accepting the edict is me, not you.”

Yin Zhiping muttered, “So it’s like that, you’re despicable!”

Now Li Zhichang took a sword from one of his disciples and shouted, “My good Quanzhen brothers, we’ll still recognize Master Yin as our sect leader. Let’s arrest this traitor Zhao and punish him according to our Sect Leader’s ruling!” He charged up and fought with Zhao Zhijing. Wang Zhitan, Song Defang and five other Taoists quickly got into the ‘Big Dipper Formation’ and surrounded Xiaoxiang Zi. Although Xiaoxiang Zi’s martial arts were good, he could not comprehend the formation’s changes and he saw seven people flying up and down in front of him and he became confused.

The envoy had already retreated into a corner when he saw that things were not going right. He quickly took out a horn and blew it. Two Taoists rushed up and snatched the horn and captured him. They were however a split second late and the horn had sounded out clearly.

Yin Zhiping knew he had summoned reinforcements and knew that danger was near. He was suddenly jolted into attention and commanded, “Brother Qi Zhicheng, watch this Mongolian official. Brother Yu Daoxian, Brother Wang Zhijin, take three brothers to help Brother Sun guard the Jade Cave at the back of the mountain to prevent any Mongol soldiers from distracting the Five Elder Masters from their meditation. Brother Chen Zhiyi, take six people to guard the front of the mountain. Fang Zhiqi, take six people to guard the left side of the mountain. Liu Daoning, take six people and guard the right side of the mountain.”

The people guarding the left and right were all his fellow disciples under Qiu Chuji. Among the people sent to guard the Jade Cave, Yu Daoxian was Liu Chuxuan’s disciple while Wang Zhijin was Hao Datong’s disciple. Liu Chuxuan and Hao Datong were meditating inside the cave and these two disciples were upright and honest, so they would not allow harm to their masters. Yin Zhiping had made such careful arrangements in such a short time and he made sure there were trustworthy people guarding every strategic position. Everyone could support each other effectively. Even if a large body of troops attacked them, it would be hard for them to get through the defenses. Everyone saw that his eyes were keen and alert and his commands clear and forceful. His manner so imposing that none dared disobey him and all carried out the orders without question.

Suddenly they heard shouting and weapons clashing outside. A few Taoists were still moving to take their positions when there was a whistle and a few dozen people jumped over the wall. The troops from the east were led by Yin Kexi, the west by Nimoxing and the front by Ma Guangzuo; their troops were veterans who had been involved in the Khan’s western expedition.

Khubilai had been attacking Xiangyang for many months and an illness broke out in the Mongolian army. This, coupled with their failure at the siege, caused the army to withdraw. The body of troops that Xiao Longnu saw speedily heading south previously was the last division to attack Xiangyang. Before the army withdrew Khubilai ordered his men to recruit capable men from the Central Plains. The Mongol Khan’s edict to take over the Quanzhen Sect was part of Khubilai’s plan. However, he knew the Quanzhen Sect was loyal and upright, so they may not submit. He ordered Jinlun Fawang to lead skilled Wulin fighters to wait near Mount Zhongnan. If the Quanzhen Sect rejected the edict, they would use force to bring it under their control.

Mount Zhongnan’s security was usually very tight but in just one day they experienced two leadership changes and Chongyang Palace was thrown into chaos. Those who were supposed to guard the mountain were recalled to witness the change-of-command cere-

mony. Therefore it was only when Yin Kexi, Nimoxing and company got right up to the Chongyang Palace that they were discovered. Their sudden appearance caught the Quanzhen Sect unprepared and many of the defenders had not even left the hall. There were enemy soldiers in all directions and although the Taoists outnumbered the enemy forces, most of them were unarmed. Moreover they were surrounded and could only crowd into a small area. The commanding positions all lacked the manpower and it looked like they were going to be utterly defeated.

The Mongolian envoy who was held captive by Qi Zhicheng shouted, “Disciples of Quanzhen Sect, throw down your weapons and suffer your Sect Leader Zhao’s punishment.”

Yin Zhiping said, “Zhao Zhijing betrayed our founder and masters by surrendering to the enemy; he has committed a great sin and therefore is no longer our Sect Leader.” Although he saw that the situation was highly unfavorable, he decided to put up a struggle and repel the enemy. Many of them fought barehanded and before long, there were more than ten dead bodies scattered around the hall. Yin Zhiping, Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan, Song Defang and Qi Zhicheng and others were either injured, had lost their weapons, had their accupoints blocked or even killed. The rest were forced into a corner by Yin Kexi’s troops and could not retaliate.

The envoy’s rank was very high and even Yin Kexi, Xiaoxiang Zi and their soldiers had to obey him. He saw his side had gained a complete victory and said to Zhao Zhijing, “Master Zhao, I’ll save you face. I won’t report the Quanzhen Sect’s rebellion to the Khan.”

Zhao Zhijing bowed and thanked him profusely and suddenly remembered something. He quickly turned to Xiaoxiang Zi and whispered, “I need a big favour from you. My five masters are meditating at the back of the mountain. If they suddenly rush here, then... this...”

Xiaoxiang Zi dryly said, “So be it. I’ll help you fight them.”

Zhao Zhijing did not dare say anymore but was not satisfied. He worried, “Don’t underestimate the Five Masters, if they really come here you won’t defeat them so easily. If they really drive the Mongolians away, it’ll be hard for me to keep my life.”

The envoy said, “Master Zhao, you will first accept the imperial edict and then you will punish your rebellious disciples.” Zhao Zhijing said, “Yes!” He knelt down to listen to the edict.

Yin Zhiping, Li Zhichang and the others had their hands and feet bound. When they heard the envoy read the edict and saw Zhao Zhijing kowtowing and thanking him, they became livid with anger. Song Defang sat next to Li Zhichang and whispered to him, “Brother Li untie my bonds. I’ll dash out and report the matter to the Five Masters.” Li Zhichang leaned back and circulated his internal strength and exerted it with his fingers. He managed to undo the bonds and whispered, “Please report calmly. Don’t shock the Five Masters – they are now cultivating their internal energy...” Song Defang nodded his head.

After reading the edict, Zhao Zhijing stood up and the envoy and Xiaoxiang Zi congratulated him.

Song Defang suddenly saw many people get up and surround Zhao Zhijing. He quickly got up and dashed behind the deities’ statues. Nimoxing shouted, “Stop right there!” He obviously did not care and ran off as fast as he could. Nimoxing’s legs were amputated so he could not give chase so he waved his hand, throwing out a snake-like dart. The dart hit Song Defang’s left leg. Nimoxing shouted, “Go down!” He slowed for a while but did not collapse. Instead he tolerated the pain and continued running. The Chongyang Palace was huge and complex; he turned a few times and the Mongolian troops lost him.

Song Defang got outside, extracted the dart, and bandaged his wound. He went to the medicine room and took a sword and ran to the back of the mountain. He came around a row of pine trees and got to the Jade Cave’s entrance. He groaned in dismay. There were several Mongol soldiers there lifting rocks to block the entrance. A tall, skinny monk stood there and beside him were two people directing the soldiers. He immediately recognized the two people to be Da’erba and Hou Du and knew that their skills were not below that of Hao Datong’s. The tall monk looked extraordinary and his martial arts appeared to be much better than the other two. The entrance was now almost eighty percent covered and he did not know if the Five Masters were still alive. He thought, “Master has treated me very well and today he is in trouble; I must sacrifice my life to save them, or my presence in the world will have been in vain.”

He knew very well that by going up to stop them he would surely lose his life and would still be unable to help the Five Masters. However the Quanzhen Sect was having a great disaster so he would not save his own skin. He unsheathed his sword and rushed out from behind a tree. The sword flew through the air and thrust towards the tall monk. He wanted to kill off their leader, and if he succeeded he would throw the group into confusion.

Unfortunately the monk was none other than Jinlun Fawang. He had already questioned Zhao Zhijing about the situation at the Quanzhen Sect and headed straight to the Jade Cave on reaching the mountain. He knew that once he trapped the Five Masters, the third and fourth generation disciples would be powerless to resist.

Song Defang's sword was less than a foot away from Fawang's back and he seemed not to notice him, so he was secretly happy. Suddenly a golden light flashed and Fawang held out a round golden wheel and smashed his sword. Song Defang shouted in pain and the sword flew out of his hand. He was internally injured and threw up a pool of blood. He became giddy and vaguely heard people shouting around him but he did not know what had happened and fainted.

Fawang had also heard shouting from the hall but with Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the other experts there, he did not think anything amiss and didn't pay any attention. He only told his men to cover the entrance quickly to prevent Qiu Chuji and the others from charging out and wasting his energy.

Once Song Defang left the hall, the situation changed again. The envoy said to Zhao Zhijing, "Master Zhao, the people who stirred up trouble were numerous; I think your position is not very secure."

Zhao Zhijing also knew the people were unhappy with him and would immediately turn on him once Xiaoxiang Zi and the others left. Since it had already come to this, he said loudly, "According to our sect's rules, those who disobey the Sect Leader should be punished?" The Taoists remained silent but they all thought, "You disobeyed the Sect Leader yourself." Zhao Zhijing repeated his question and stared at his disciple Lu Qingdu, wanting him to answer. Lu Qingdu said, "Execution in front of the Three Deities' statues."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Correct! Yin Zhiping, do you admit your offense?"

Yin Zhiping said, "No!"

Zhao Zhijing said, "OK! Bring him here!" Lu Qingdu pushed Yin Zhiping forward and stood in front of the statues. Zhao Zhijing also asked Li Zhichang, Wang Zhitan and the others, but everyone said, "No!" Among those captured however, were some who feared for their lives and had submitted, so Zhao Zhijing ordered their bonds to be untied. Altogether there were twenty-four people who did not submit and Wang Zhitan could not control his fiery temper and he cursed and swore.

Zhao Zhijing said, “You’re so stubborn. Even though I, the Sect Leader, am merciful, I won’t be able to spare you. Lu Qingdu, do you act on behalf of our founder!” Lu Qingdu said, “Yes!” He raised his sword and killed Yu Daoxian who was first in the line.

Yu Daoxian was warm and kind and he had many friends in the Quanzhen Sect. When they saw Lu Qingdu execute him, they shouted in fury. What Song Defang and Fawang heard was their cries of protest. Yin Kexi waved his hand and several Mongolian soldiers blocked the Taoists.

When Lu Qingdu saw such fierce reaction, he was afraid. Zhao Zhijing said, “Quickly do it, why are you delaying?” Lu Qingdu said, “Yes!” He raised his sword and killed another two people. The fourth person in the queue was Yin Zhiping and just as Lu Qingdu raised his sword to stab his chest, a female voice coldly said, “Stop! Do not kill him.”

Lu Qingdu turned around and saw a young lady in white. It was Xiao Longnu. She said, “Step aside! Let me kill him.”



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