

## Carefree 291

### Chapter 291: Return

The seal on Changli Mountain Hollow was real, but Old Mother of Tianmu would surely not tell Fang Yuan the truth.

They were just sacrificial sheep!

They were planned to kill each other and from there, satisfy the requirements to break the seal.

Because of this, every organisation put in their best effort to trick newcomers into entering the hollow.

"Sigh... Why is the requirement so weird? To ask for Illusionary Divine dream masters under the age of 60? Although we have such talents, they are painstakingly trained by us. How can we sacrifice them just like that? The only solution is that every organisation contribute a few..."

Elder Smelter sighed.

"Why is that? Are you soft-hearted now?"

Old Mother of Tianmu laughed.

"Nope!"

Elder Smelter's expression remained unchanged. "We are not killing them completely. It's just that we've given them a slim chance of survival and it's up to them to see if they can do it. Furthermore, after the seal is broken, they can also enjoy the spiritual treasures in the hollow. This will be their fate! Whoever can survive will be the true talents! The rest of them would be killed because they are useless and do not deserve to survive!"

"Haha... Well said!"

Before Old Mother of Tianmu could continue, a black silhouette on the wall started laughing. "Dream masters are all respectable! How can we let the useless people destroy our reputation? Only by such a method can we sieve out the real dream masters. The representative from Source Seeking Sect is a reserved who is already aware of the requirements of breaking the seal! Furthermore, he has voluntarily entered the hollow even after knowing what would happen! If he were to survive, we can officially recognise him as a dream master!"

"Old Xue!"

Elder Smelter was stunned. As his eyes blinked continuously, there was fear written on his face.

After all, the bunch of dream masters from Source Seeking Sect were all crazy!

They were not just crazy, but also powerful and would do anything to attain their goal.

Everyone would feel a little uneasy when facing people from the Source Seeking Sect.

"Don't worry, I'm just here to take a loot... After all, we have a stake in the Changli Mountain Hollow!"

Old Xue laughed, which did not ease their emotions. "Alright, I want to remind everybody that this place is too close to the Jade Capital. The Imperial Court has yet to discover the Changli Mountain Hollow. However, at the moment of blood sacrifice, the energy of the hollow would surge and the Hidden Dragon Guards would be able to locate the hollow and make their way here..."

"If the 5 organisations unite, why should we be afraid of the Hidden Dragon Guards?"

There were flames in Elder Smelter's eyes as he commented.

"We're not afraid of the Hidden Dragon Guards. But if the Imperial Court sends every highly-skilled person they have, we will have trouble!"

Old Mother of Tianmu added.

"The Imperial Court is the biggest thief of all!"

Elder Smelter was enraged by sounded jealous at the same time.

It was no joke that the royal family of Da Qian had the power of the heavens!

Even if normal True Divines and True Elemental spiritual knights would reach their peaks, they would be able to achieve another breakthrough under the blessing of the Dragon Meridian. If they do so, they would be as strong as a Prominent Divine dream master!

Although there were only a few of such people, together with the Hidden Dragon Guards, they were on par even if the 5 powerful organisations were to combine forces.

If they did have such abilities, the royal family of Da Qian would be wiped out long ago.

"Hehe... That's right!"

Old Xue's voice was sharp like a bird. "With the geographical advantage, they are fortunate... We believe that it is the Imperial Court's doing that prevented us from being able to find the source of dream masters... In reality, the inheritance, the hollow, all these are small issues. The 5 organisations should come together to destroy the royal family of Da Qian or even sacrifice their blood. From then, we might be able to trace the source of dream masters..."

"Keke..."

Elder Smelter exchanged glances with Old Mother of Tianmu and was laughing inside. The bunch of dream masters from Source Seeking Sect were indeed crazy!

...

Water Realm, Golden Lake Prefecture, Black Lake District.

The District Leader was no longer Xu Ren. Because of his commendable efforts, he was promoted to the prefecture level after 3 years. He was now a Prefecture Minister.

In fact, he was slated to become the Prefecture Minister after the retirement of the current Prefecture Minister. Therefore, many people started to support him and establish good relations with him, making him rather influential.

At this point in time, an old daoist with a head full of white hair brought along two children and were strolling on the streets in Black Lake District.

"Mm, the people are doing well and there have been no more sightings of evil gods blackmailing the people. This is good governance!"

The old daoist smiled and stroked his beard in satisfaction.

"I've heard that this is the work of the previous District Leader, the current Prefecture Minister, Xu Ren. He was strict and harsh against thieves and robbers and took the initiative to clear evil gods. He also took extra care of the old people and educated the masses. In 3 short years, the people in the district would no longer steal and there was no need to lock their doors while they were sleeping at night. This is true prosperity..."

The child behind continued but appeared to be only 12-years-old.

On the other hand, the other child looked around and lowered his voice. "The current district leader Zhang Gui is under Xu Ren... Xu Ren served out of pure loyalty last time. Now, he has settled down in the Golden Lake Prefecture. Not only did he shift his entire family here, he has also bought numerous plots of land and rebuilt temples. With all his assets, he is the most influential family in Golden Lake Prefecture!"

"If this is his fate, then it is normal..... Otherwise, how else should he plan for his future?"

The white-bearded old daoist smiled. "The uprising of the people dao is the trend. We daoists should follow the heaven's intention. Everyone in the Xu Family would be heavily involved in the upcoming tribulation. We must pay close attention!"

"This of course!"

The child behind chuckled. "Our people have been instructed to establish good relations with him. Otherwise, as an official from a foreign land, without us secretly helping him to influence the Imperial Court, do you think he will be able to have such progress? Not to mention how smooth it was for his family to settle down?"

"It's a pity.... The Xu Family is close to many demons..."

The child at the side sighed. "Who knew how the demons started?"

"From the Killer Tribulation, the fates of everyone would be messed up. This is only normal!"

The old daoist's beard drifted with the wind, but his tone was chilly. "These demons want to support the Dragon Court and take our share of fate energy and karma! By killing Clear Wind, they have displayed their persistence! We shall allow that carp demon to live for another day. Hehe, when the time is right, we shall kill the demons in front of Xu Ren to display our might!"

The 3 of them spoke as they walked. Although there were passers-by, they did not leak any information. Soon, they arrived on the outskirts of the city.

"Grandmaster, are we here to kill the giant demon?"

A child asked. Seeing that there was no one around, he toyed around with a hint of sword essence in his hands.

The sword essence was a pure white and as extremely concentrated. However, in his hands, the sword essence became liquid-like and flowed around. The child's cultivation in swordplay was shocking!

Since he looked young, he had to be a reincarnation and was a powerful person in his past life.

"That's right, it's that giant demon!"

At the outskirts, the old daoist no longer tried to conceal himself. As energy surged around him, his robes flew with the wind. It was a majestic sight to behold; he was like a deity.

Behind him, the two children transformed into swordlight and combined. "Have we located the Giant Venomous Snake?"

"Yes!"

The white-bearded daoist was infuriated. "We had detected something the moment Venerable Clear Wind died. However, the killer was too cruel and did not even leave his spirit behind. Without and leads and after a few years, I have received a prediction from an elder fortune teller. Finally, I know that this is the doing of the two demons from Black Lake District!"

"That carp demon has the protection of the fate energy from Xu Ren, so let's forget about her for the moment. The Giant Venomous Snake is the culprit behind all and lives in seclusion. Therefore, we must kill it to appease our brother. Otherwise, everyone would think that Xuan Zhen Sect is weak!"

"Although this demon has weak karma, it is extremely cunning and would not leave traces behind. We have tracked it a few times but in the past few times, it has escaped successfully... Not this time!"

"Rumble!"

As the 3 of them spoke, they had entered a forest.

The skies changed and fish-scaled clouds appeared. The dark clouds brought with them an atmosphere of danger.

"Is this... Heavenly Tribulation?!"

The daoist was extremely familiar with such a vibe. The clouds were different from the usual dark clouds and therefore, he could immediately identify it.

"Haha... That's right! This is a Heavenly Tribulation!"

The old daoist laughed heartily. "That Giant Venomous Snake is extremely powerful and has a few tricks up its sleeves. It will be hard to deal with it. However, I have asked the fortune teller to calculate the ripe time to strike. This is the tribulation period of the demon, and therefore, it will not be able to escape us!"

There was a murderous look on his face. "With such a weak fate energy, do you think you can transform into a dragon? Hehe... We are involved in this demon's people tribulation! Striking together with the Heavenly Tribulation, it has no way of escaping!"

With the dark clouds, lightning and thunder, it was the best compass to guide them to the Giant Venomous Snake.

The 3 daoists made their way and soon after, they had arrived at the foot of a mountain.

At the foot of the mountain, there was a source of spring water. The spring water was chilly and gave off cold vibes.

Streaks of lightning began to rip across the skies, forming a net of lightning.

"Haha... This demon's Heavenly Tribulation is indeed powerful! We might not need to strike, and it will be dead!"

Seeing this, the old daoist was overjoyed. However, he became confused. "This doesn't seem right... By helping Xu Ren and clearing the evil gods, it has accumulated good deeds. How can it have such a weak fate energy? How can its Heavenly Tribulation be so intense?"

"This must be because it had gone against the Xuan Zhen Sect! By doing so, it had put itself against the people dao!"

A child laughed. "Regardless, this is good news to us!"

"That's right!"

The old daoist stroked his beard. The 3 of them were daoists and were afraid of approaching the tribulation. Therefore, they looked at everything from afar.

"Kacha!"

"Whoosh!"

Water splashed everywhere and a huge black silhouette appeared.

It had a snake's head and 4 legs. The scales on its body were black but had a hint of golden glow. As it looked up into the sky, it roared like a ferocious beast.

"What a Giant Venomous Snake!"

The 3 daoists turned shocked. "With such power, no wonder it can attempt to transform into a dragon!"

Chapter 292: Horned Dragon

The Giant Venomous Snake was a powerful type of snake!

With 4 additional legs, it could walk on land and swim in the water. It had limitless abilities.

But alas, its snake properties were still more than its dragon properties. It was still a beast! To become a dragon, it had to undergo a complete transformation! As well as undergo a tribulation!

Now, the scales of the Giant Venomous Snake glittered; it was evident that it had plenty of dragon properties in it. It was unbelievable.

However, this was only Fang Yuan's incarnation. In the past 10 years, it had continuously absorbed the essence of the Dragon Pearl and had grown tremendously. As it roared, its demonic energy exploded from its body and acted as a shield. As the streak of lightning struck its body, there was only a charred mark with no severe injuries.

With how things were, although there were a few more Heavenly Tribulations to come, it could survive all of them with its brute force and transform into a dragon!

"What a demon! Do you really think you can become a dragon? The Xuan Zhen Sect will never allow it to happen!"

The white-bearded old daoist gritted his teeth and whipped out a spiritual talisman which was giving off a purple glow. "I invite all the grandmasters of Xuan Zhen Sect, and together with the help of karma, to destroy this beast!"

"Whoosh!"

The spiritual talisman swirled and formed a purple glow as it shot into the sky.

"Kacha! Kacha!"

A layer of dark clouds formed, filled with streaks of lightning within. They were tribulation clouds and together with the natural heavenly lightning, the intensity of the tribulation increased by folds in that instant.

With a single bolt of lightning, the Giant Venomous Snake wailed as blood spurted out. A big hole was struck on its body and around it were charred marks.

"The Magical Thunder Talisman is the treasure of the sect! There are limited numbers of them and every usage would consume a huge amount of karma and fate energy from the sect..."

Both child daoist were shocked.

"This Giant Venomous Snake is already displaying properties of a dragon. If we really allow it to transform, it will become much more powerful than it was. How can we let that happen? After all, this is a threat to our sect. We have to kill it now!"

The old daoist roared. "Both of you, quickly help!"

"Kill!"

Both children exchanged glances. With a wave of their hands, two streaks of sword essence appeared. One was green while the other was purple. Both of them swung their sword essences at the Giant Venomous Snake.

The two children were actually reincarnations of the elders from Xuan Zhen Sect. They were equipped with the Purple Sword and Green Sword. Although these two swords were still inferior compared to the spiritual treasure of the sect, they were still powerful magical equipment and were comparable to the lightning tribulation!

The swordlight and streaks of lightning combined as they circled the Giant Venomous Snake.

It was an emergency!

...

"D\*mn, what is this all about?"

It was a whole new experience for Fang Yuan to locate the world by himself and execute the dream-traversing technique independently.

However, that feeling completely changed as soon as he entered the Water Realm.

A huge force was felt, as though it was about to separate Fang Yuan from his incarnation and isolate him outside of the Water Realm.

The good thing was that the locating of the Water Realm was already in effect. With his incarnation in the realm as well, it was not that easy to separate Fang Yuan from the realm. He was forcefully squeezed into the realm but it felt as though he was locked up in a wooden box and spun around. His spirit felt uncomfortable.

After spinning, he opened his eyes. His dream-traversing technique was successful as he entered his incarnation.

In a short moment, he adapted to his body as information flooded his mind.

"What? It has been 15 years?"

"Is my Giant Venomous Snake undergoing a tribulation now?"

Fang Yuan looked up at the streaks of lightning and felt a little dizzy. "Isn't one month in Da Qian equivalent to one year here? Why is it 10 years now? Is this because of the tribulation here? That it does not want to be disturbed?"

Of course, he could slowly think about all these next time. More importantly, he had to survive this tribulation!

"It was a good thing that I brought along with me the karma I had earned. However, since this incarnation is slowly breaking down the Dragon Pearl and absorbing the dragon element, there shouldn't be any problem with it!"

He raised his head and was deep in thought as he observed the dark clouds dissipating.

At this moment, a purple glow appeared and the Heavenly Tribulation struck once again.

Furthermore, two streaks of swordlight flashed by. One was green while the other was purple, and both had the intent to kill.

"D\*mn!"

Fang Yuan was enraged. "Who dares to attack me!"

There was a hint of gold in his eyes. He wanted to kill.

"Go!"

With that, he activated his actualised dream world. The remnants of people's dao karma appeared and formed a golden flower. The golden flower floated to the top of his head before disappearing.

"Buzz!"

The link between the actualised dream world and the realm strengthened once more as two magical swords appeared before the Giant Venomous Snake. "Water-Fire Dual Sword Array, strike!"

"Whoosh!"

Both the Fire Sword and Water Sword flew out, forming a small sword array. With a single sweep, it trapped both the green and purple sword essence within the array.

However, this was all Fang Yuan could do.

In the next moment, the streaks of lightning turned purple and covered the Giant Venomous Snake.

"Rumble!"

Everything shook.

Following, the dark clouds dissipated and sunlight peeked through the clouds. The destructive scene felt like an illusion.

"Eh? Is the Giant Venomous Snake dead?"

The old daoist and the two children exchanged glances. Following, they walked up and saw a 90-foot-long ferocious Giant Venomous Snake corpse.

The corpse was jet-black and was filled with many holes on its body. Every hole was charred and there was a creepy silence in the vicinity.

"It's impressive that it is still able to preserve its corpse after undergoing the Heavenly Tribulation and my Magical Thunder Talisman!"

One of the children scoffed and sounded confused. "Where did the Water and Fire Sword go to? The swords that trapped our sword essences!"

"Hehe... This Giant Venomous Snake is considered a powerful demon. It must have some treasures in it! We cannot let it go to waste!"

The other child laughed and walked up, ready to slit open the demon's stomach.

"Eh? Something's not right, let's get out of here!"

The old daoist was stroking its beard. Seeing the child walking up to the corpse, he did not think too much. However, a piece of jade around his waist suddenly gave off an alarm which sent chills down his spine.

"Whoosh!"

One of the children bent over and was inspecting the Giant Venomous Snake's corpse. It could not run in time and was struck by a White Bone Flying Sword. Without a shriek, he collapsed and his spirit was



destroyed as well. A small purple sword dropped to the ground and a distinct sound was heard. It was still shimmering in its glow, which showed that it had extreme spiritual properties and was unwilling to be destroyed just like that.

"Brother!"

Seeing this, the old daoist and the other child started to tear in their eyes. "Demon, die!"

"Splash!"

Swordlight and magical techniques sliced away at the corpse, breaking it into many pieces.

However, within the corpse, there was a golden glow. The silhouette appeared.

The silhouette was only 3 feet long. It was like a small green-gold snake. The scales on it were green and they emitted a golden glow. On its head, there was a small horn.

As it looked up towards them, there was no snake property. Instead, it had a powerful vibe like a dragon!

It was no longer a snake, but a dragon!

The 7th Transformation of the 9 Steps of Dragon Transformation Formula! The Horned Dragon Transformation!

It was recorded in the : "A young dragon with a horn is a Horned Dragon! It would have the body of a fish, the tail of a snake, patterns on its body and a horn on its head!"

In fact, this was how a dragon would look like before maturity.

Even though it was young, it was still a dragon! It was no longer like the previous fish and snakes, and it had magical properties as well! It would be able to dispel poison and give off a righteous vibe.

"The heavens are blind to let you transform into a dragon!"

The old daoist was devastated.

Dragons were the leaders of all animals. They would be able to control the weather like a real god. Any demon who would be able to transform into a dragon would be considered powerful! A demonic god! They were impressive.

To put it in another way, Fang Yuan was now eligible to become the Golden Court Dragon God based on his magical powers and his species.

It was partly fate for him to be able to achieve to this far. Cultivators would at much as possible avoid killing these dragons, for they would experience a decrease in fate energy and would have to undergo a Heavenly Tribulation themselves!

After undergoing the tribulation, Fang Yuan was now a dragon and was completely different from before!

"The heavens are fair to every living thing! Since everyone has the same treatment, why can't I become a dragon?"

With a golden glow, a young man clad in golden robes appeared; it was Fang Yuan.

But now, this was no longer his Yin Spirit. It was his actual physical body.

Higher-tiered demons would face more difficulties in trying to form a figure.

In the 9 Steps of Dragon Transformation Formula, Fang Yuan would only be able to form the human body at the 7th Transformation.

Of course, the formed figure would be a human of 15-years-old and would have decent looks, unlike those of the demons.

With a cold laugh, Fang Yuan continued. "Look at you. You are with the people dao, and yet you are afraid that others would have a share of karma. You say that the heavens are unfair but in fact, it is you people who are selfish! The people dao are losers!"

The old daoist and the leftover child looked at Fang Yuan as their heart shook.

In that instant, they felt as though they were the ones in the wrong.

"What a minute... this must be one of your demonic techniques! Don't be confused!"

The old daoist reacted quickly and exclaimed.

As he recited a formula, a glow covered his entire body like a bubble. This formed a defensive shield around him.

The remaining child, although a reincarnation of an elder, had not restored all of his cultivation. He was left rooted to the ground, not knowing what to do.

"Whoosh!"

Fang Yuan would not let this chance go to waste. With a finger, the Water-Fire Dual Sword Array flew out, forming a sword array and trapping the child. He released the sword essence from both swords and in that instant, a green spiritual sword fell to the ground and vibrated.

"You..."

Seeing Fang Yuan walking up to pick up both the Purple Sword and Green Sword, the old daoist was infuriated. Both swords were still vibrating but were well in Fang Yuan's control. The old daoist spat out a mouthful of blood and was enraged.

Although these two children were reincarnations of elders with cultivations in spiritual swords, their powers were now restricted and instead, they had lost both spiritual treasures.

"Demon! How dare you take my sect's flying swords?"

The old daoist was anxious and with the wave of his sleeves, two streaks of black rope flew towards Fang Yuan. They were like black snakes as they wrapped around the Purple Sword and Green Sword.

Not just that, the old daoist continued to recite a formula in an attempt to re-ignite the two swords.

"These heavenly treasures belong to those who have them... Now that I have them, they are mine!"

Fang Yuan laughed heartily.

Since they were enemies now, how could he return them their weapons?

From the time he had killed Venerable Clear Wind, the tussle between the sect and him had already begun. Only one side could be left standing.

Thinking about this, Fang Yuan quickly used his karma flowers. As they were being consumed, the resistance from both swords started to reduce.

"What treasures!"

Fang Yuan was overjoyed. "Don't think about having these two swords back!"

Chapter 293: The Encounter

Fang Yuan had successfully transformed into a dragon and had absorbed more than half of the Dragon Pearl within him. Now, the power in his dragon body was surging and it was unbelievable.

The few daoists with their cultivation were now inferior to Fang Yuan.

With the wave of his hands, the sword essences of the fire and water sword exploded. The two black ropes disintegrated in the sky.

"You!"

In shock, the jade around the old daoist waist started to glitter and a glow emerged, covering him.

"Whoosh!"

With the rumbling of thunder, a White Bone Evil Slaying Sword shot out like an arrow and pierced through his forehead. The shocking sword essence shattered his elemental clone.

"Bang!"

The headless corpse of the old daoist fell to the ground and dyed the ground with his black-coloured blood.

"Hehe... I'm afraid these 3 daoists are among the powerful ones in Xuan Zhen Sect! Would this be enough to be considered as a strong blow to Xuan Zhen Sect?"

Fang Yuan thought to himself.

After killing these 3 daoists, it would affect his karma, but that didn't matter.

This was because he had already transformed into a dragon and his ability alone would be able to overcome the loss of fate energy. Therefore, killing these 3 daoists were nothing.

Looking at his stats window, Fang Yuan realised that there was a tremendous change:

"Name: Fang Yuan

Race: Horned Dragon

Essence: 36

Spirit: 36

Magic: 40

Profession: ???

Cultivation: ???

Technique: [Nine Steps of Dragon Transformation Technique (7th Transformation)], [Weather Controlling Technique (Grade 1)], [Natural Magical Strength (Grade 3)], [8 Gates Sword Array (3rd Sword) (2%)]

Skill: [Medicine (Level 3)], [Botany (Level 5)]"

"My current stats are about the same as my true stats in the world I belong to. My Magic has been restored to how it was due to the fact that I had used karma to restore the link with my actualised dream world... Has Grade 5 of the Water Controlling Technique evolved to Weather Controlling Technique?"

Fang Yuan rubbed his chin and glanced at his techniques before letting out a sigh. "Or should I say... Grade 5 is a stage in itself and after achieving a breakthrough, there will be changes to the technique. Since my skill is in Botany, should I expect something to change after achieving a breakthrough in it?"

At this point in time, he was extremely sure that if he were to achieve the 8th Transformation to become a water dragon, the cultivation of his incarnation would surpass his actual cultivation level.

This was nothing much though; the greater his abilities, the better he would be able to reap from this world.

There was a tinge of excitement on Fang Yuan's face. "Who would've thought that time would pass quicker in this world after the tribulation! This is indeed fate for me to enter the realm at the correct time!"

Originally, he planned to kill his way to achieve the next transformation but now, he was living in the moment he had been waiting for!

With a happy heart, he started to scavenge for loots. Both the child daoists had nothing on them, but the elder daoist had a few treasures with him, especially the piece of jade around his waist.

After keeping it, Fang Yuan shot his finger out. The flames from his sword essence erupted, incinerating the 3 corpses into ashes.

"Xu Ren has done a good job... Has he been appointed the Prefecture Minister already? There's Xu Ting as well. He is 18 this year and should be experiencing a tribulation soon..."

He rushed towards the prefecture city in a hurry.

Previously as a Giant Venomous Snake, he would give off a demonic vibe wherever he go. Now, as a dragon, he could go anywhere and people would welcome his auspicious vibe.

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Golden Lake Prefecture, Prefecture City.

Next to the Xu Family Mansion, Fang Yuan sat by a roadside stall, took out some money and bought himself a pot of tea and a few dim sum. Heartily, he started to indulge.

In his consciousness, he started to retrieve the memories of his incarnation for the past 10 years.

"The powerful countries of the people dao would be Da Chu, where Xu Ren is at, Da Qi and Da Liang... Da Chu is experiencing a downfall now with the death of her previous king. The new king is only 8-years-old and power still lies in the ministers around him. With the weakening of the Imperial Court and the natural disasters that are happening, Da Chu is in a mess... The Imperial Court will have no choice but to take things into their own hands and take Da Chu back!"

"Golden Court Prefecture... It is still quite prosperous but unfortunately, it is a few towns away from the Imperial Court and the Imperial Court will have difficulties helping the prefecture. Therefore, it seems as though the prefecture is governing itself..."

This was the time.

However, as the people dao became stronger, the fact that there were involvements of demons meant that things were much more complicated.

"Under Xu Ren, the evil gods in Golden Lake Prefecture have been cleared and the emergence of the few righteous god like Golden Court Dragon God ensured that support was given entirely to the people dao. Therefore, there have been fewer cases of evil demons wrecking havoc..."

"On the other hand, in the An River and Qi Lake, the demons have become increasingly rampant. Could the demons have known of the trend of the world and could this be their response to it?"

Of course, there were intellectual demons among them and Fang Yuan felt that things wouldn't be as simple as they seem.

"Looking at things now, the king is young and the time is ripe. If he doesn't take any action now, he would miss out on a golden opportunity..."

Although Fang Yuan's incarnation was living in seclusion for the past few years, it had received messages from Li Luan. From there, Fang Yuan could deduce and predict the happenings of the upcoming tribulation.

"Things will have to come together after splitting, and split after coming together... Looking at the state of Da Chu and the fact that Da Qi and Da Liang did not invade Da Chu meant that both Da Qi and Da Liang are having their own domestic problems as well. If there were to be an uprising of a dragon, Da Chu could have its peace restored and could even take over Da Qi and Da Liang. Fate energies would surge everywhere and the people dao would prosper!"

Fang Yuan thought silently to himself.

Of course, the dragon might not appear in Da Chu. As long as it would appear anywhere with people and civilisation, things could still happen.

With the emergence of dragons and other demons, there were too many factors, too much for Fang Yuan's experience to comprehend.

"Guest?"

As he was deep in thought, he attracted the attention of many passers-by. The stall owner walked up to Fang Yuan, confused.

"I am waiting for someone! You don't have to serve me!"

Without thought, he waved his hands and smiled. The person he was waiting for had arrived.

"Hiss..."

Following the direction in which Fang Yuan was looking at, the stall owner took a glance and saw a 15-year-old young woman walking out from the Xu Family Mansion. As she came out, she was stunned and speechless.

"Greetings brother, I am Li Luan!"

This lady was indeed Li Luan. However, compared to how she was before, there was a huge difference.

As they exchanged their greetings, both of them were shocked at each other.

Li Luan was shocked at Fang Yuan's successful transformation and the fact that he no longer had any demonic vibes, but the vibe of a majestic dragon. Her senses told her that Fang Yuan had the same vibe as her father, who was also a dragon!

Of course, just by her eyesight along, she was unable to deduce that Fang Yuan had successfully transformed into a dragon; she could only tell that he had tremendous improvement in his cultivation.

Fang Yuan was stunned by the fact that Li Luan had a physical body.

"Who would've thought... that you can undergo a successful reincarnation and become a human!"

With the flick of his finger, he segregated the both of them from the rest with a spell before commenting.

He was right! The lady before him was a true physical human, not a demon!

Li Luan must have gave up in being a demon and went into a pregnant lady to be born after 10 months. In this way, she could have a physical human body and this was similar to the two children from Xuan Zhen Sect.

"No wonder they cannot do anything to you!"

Fang Yuan was initially confused. Even with Xu Ren's protection, there were many highly-skilled humans who would not allow her to even come close to the Xu Family.

He wouldn't have guessed that she would have the resolution to reincarnate into a human!

"This is nothing much. After all... I have been following the Xu Family for all these years. With your help, I have slowly understood fate... The uprising of the people dao is indeed heaven's intention, so why go against it?"

Li Luan spoke calmly but Fang Yuan could feel that she was still hiding something.

After a long while of silence, Li Luan continued. "Are you here for..."

To her, Fang Yuan was always mysterious and the past few times, she realised that he was a cruel person who would strike fear in many.

If not for all that had happened, she would not want to be associated with Fang Yuan.

"I want to meet Xu Ren! The time is ripe and he should strike now!"

Although Fang Yuan was composed, it felt as though he was shouting into Li Luan's ear.

"Alright, I will relay your message to him!"

She understood what he meant. With a pale face, she gritted her teeth and stood up.

"Yu!"

At this point in time, a few horses arrived at the door of Xu Family Mansion. The few servants at the doors passionately exclaimed, "My Lord has arrived!"

"Mmm!"

A young man leapt down from the horse. He was nimble and had sharp facial features. He was rather handsome.

Seeing Li Luan walking over to him restlessly, the young man threw his horse whip. "Luan'er, what happened?"

Seeing how anxious he was, it was obvious that he was related to Li Luan.

"No... Nothing much!"

Li Luan blushed. Seeing how Xu Ting wanted to help her tidy her hair, she avoided him and ran into the mansion.

"What happened?"

Xu Ting was stunned. As he looked across, a servant went up to him and whispered something into his ear. Soon, he glared at Fang Yuan.

'Hehe... Could this young kid have fallen for her? What is Li Luan doing?'

Fang Yuan was confused. 'No... Not right. As a demon, there would be simpler ways to mess with the humans! Li Luan has become close with the Xu Family and would probably have intertwined her fate with the family... Although I've helped Xu Family in the past, If I were to get myself involved this time, I would reveal my identity...'

He had the premonition that things would not go smoothly this time.

At the same time, he was on guard; things were unpredictable here.

"My Lord, old master is inviting him in!"

Li Luan quickly rushed out. Seeing this, she tugged on Xu Ting's sleeve; she didn't want them to fight.

"Since my father wants to see him, let him come in!"

Xu Ting felt down and appeared depressed.

Fang Yuan swung his robe and entered, registering this young man's minute expression.

'Jealousy? Confusion? Hatred? Interesting... Only with such a chess piece will I be able to enjoy a good game of chess!'

Chapter 294: Calculations

Greetings, Master Xu!"

Fang Yuan waved his hand and sat down unceremoniously before sizing Xu Ren up.

They had not met for 15 years. The upright angry youth who was worried about the country and his people then had turned into an expressionless two-faced middle aged man. Not a hint of anger could be found upon his face even though Fang Yuan was so disrespectful. It was clear that Xu Ren was shrewd which caused Fang Yuan to feel that the flow of time had been cruel.

"It seems like my lord is here!"

Xu Ren looked at Fang Yuan's youthful features and felt a sense of regret. He gave another solemn bow, "I would like to thank you once again for your great help in the past! What other teachings do you have for me this time? If you have any use for me, I would not hesitate to go through great lengths to help!"

Fang Yuan remained expressionless after hearing this. However, he laughed coldly in his heart.

Using his spiritual sense, Fang Yuan could already sense the hidden room that was concealed in the study room.

Within this antique study room, 8 skilled martial artists were hiding. There were also another two magic masters outside!

Furthermore, the 8 martial artists were full of killing intent. It was obvious that they had killed many others before. They had trained their essence and magic to the point where even demons and ghosts were afraid of them.

With an order, the study room could turn into a battlefield. Even though Fang Yuan was capable of the 5th or 6th transformation at that time, it would be troublesome for him to kill Xu Ren when he was surrounded.

Needless to say, after the Xu Family relocated here, they had amassed their power and had many links with other martial artists. It would not be difficult for him to call up hundreds of loyal soldiers.



This was Heaven's will.

'It seems like Xu Ren has truly grown up!'

Fang Yuan thought solemnly but said, "I would not dare...You have the protection of Fate. I am here this time to ask you if you will act now that the time is ripe."

"Fate?"

Xu Ren was shocked. He waved his hand in the direction of Northwest. "I, Xu Ren, am an official of the court. I must naturally be loyal to the king..."

He stopped in the middle of the sentence as he saw Fang Yuan's smile and could not continue.

He now remembered that the opponent was a demon! He would not fall for this type of trick. Xu Ren fell silent and nodded his head.

He finally spoke after a long time had passed. "The previous king did me a huge favour. I was not willing to scheme against his country at first. However, this concerns my race and as such, even if I am unwilling, I must try my best in order for my people to be happy!"

It seemed that after one had been in the court for long, he would learn to use the glorious banner of People Dao as an excuse and a cause to conceal his disloyalty and plans for a revolt.

Fang Yuan nodded although he knew that it was a lie.

Whether there was such a cause, was another situation altogether. Fang Yuan could tell that Xu Ren was intelligent.

Fang Yuan was clear about it ever since Xu Ren moved his entire race here and spread the word to raise sacrificial knights.

"How do you intend to do it?"

Fang Yuan asked again.

The current magistrate, Kou Wei, is very old and sick. He is retiring soon and I have made preparations to take over his post and strengthen my base..."

Xu Ren's face twitched, but he still told Fang Yuan his plan.

Afterall, there were no outsiders in the house. His bodyguards were all sacrificial knights who were all extremely loyal.

"If that is the case, we will lose time!"

Fang Yuan scoffed upon hearing what Xu Ren said.

The tribulations were only taking place these few years and yet, Xu Ren wanted to idly wait for the magistrate to retire? After all, he was not the hidden dragon [1] but merely his father. He had lost his fearless spirit and the courage to usurp everything and start again.

"Then, according to your intention, I should act now?"

Xu Ren laughed. He had made up his mind to kill the demon in front of him on the spot if it were to suggest that to him!

Afterall, Da Chu was weakened. Even if they mustered troops to revolt, they would only perish.

"Not necessarily!"

Fang Yuan smiled. "Do you still remember your wishes in the past?"

Xu Ren absentmindedly remembered the past when he was still a hot-blooded youth. He had the ambition to rule the country and make it peaceful for the people. "The Golden Lake Prefecture has 2 evils, which are the evil gods and the pirates!"

After a few years of purging the evil gods, there were not much of them left.

Only the pirates, who advanced and retreated like the wind, were left. They usually hid within the Golden Court Lake like water droplets in the sea [2] and were extremely skilled in battles on water.

Furthermore, the natural and man-made disasters in the other prefectures had resulted in the victims seeking refuge at the Golden Court Lake, which gave the pirates an endless stream of backups.

Although Xu Ren had sent his troops to stomp out the pirates and have even achieved a decisive victory, the pirates came back not long after like how the spring wind brought along life during springtime.

According to his calculations, there was only hope in removing the pirates if he occupy the surround prefectures around the Golden Lake Prefecture and govern them together.

"Unless, you make this trip today because you have a plan to exterminate the pirates?"

Xu Ren asked joyfully.

"How did the officials handle the situation after capturing the pirates the past few times?"

Fang Yuan played around with the teacup and spoke frankly with the official. With this kind of temperament, Xu Ren could not help but felt that even his talented son could not match Fang Yuan.

After pondering, he replied, "The leader of the pirates are executed while the rest are relocated. However, I do not have much land in the Golden Lake Prefecture and am unable to relocate all of them. As such, there were many repeat offenders!"

"Previously, you were working within the constraints of being in the local authority and could only do so much. But now, by thinking out of the box, wouldn't you have everything? The Golden Lake Prefecture has always been focused on the development of the military. Wouldn't this make an excellent source for soldiers?"

Fang Yuan smiled as he presented his idea.

Truth be told, all these were made by Heaven's will for Xu Ting.

If not, how would he manage to rise up the ranks so easily?

"Converting the pirates to become soldiers? Once the quota is exceeded, it would be no different from openly revolting..."

Xu Ren pondered for a while and felt that Fang Yuan had not fully expressed himself. He could not help but stand up and gave a deep bow, "Please enlighten me!"

He could not help but feel that the same scenario played out many years ago when he made the decision to exterminate the evil gods!

"There are many waterways in Da Chu. After training them, these pirates will make a topnotch navy...Furthermore, they owe their lives to you and would be loyal to you!"

Truth be told, the navy was just a supplement to the cause. What Fang Yuan really meant was that Da Chu had existed for hundreds of years. The rules of the king had greatly affected the people. If one is to stage a revolution, even with the support of his people, there was an 80% chance of failure. At this time and age, the king's influence was unbelievable.

As such, if the revolution really took place, there would be little support.

However, the pirates were lawless. They were the people who killed the officials and went against the law. They would be fiercely loyal if they were able to lead a better life and saved from the harsh seas.

They would not hesitate to go against the heavens. This was the type of mentality that the revolutionary army needed!

"Well..."

Xu Ren understood immediately and was moved.

In any rebellion, if the people's minds were not resolute, once shaken, there would be spies and the army would be defeated.

The Imperial Court had been awe-inspiring for many years. There were few who would dare to usurp everything.

However, there were no shortage of people within the pirates who were willing and dare to bring down the king.

It would certainly be advantageous to him if he manage to recruit the help of the pirates.

Most importantly, he would be able to hide the troops within the lake where they would not be seen or heard unless when called upon. Once called upon, they would be able to occupy the waterways and attack the other prefectures. The chances of catching the others off-guard and unprepared was very high.

If that was the case, he would be able to act immediately with great confidence that he would be able to annex the region.

If he had time on his side...ruling the world would not just be a dream!

"You have enlightened me with your words!"

Xu Ren immediately kowtowed, tears flowing from his eyes, "I am able to reach where I am today due to your help many years ago. I am willing to build a shrine in my family house and offer sacrifices throughout the four seasons. I hope you would not decline my suggestion!"

Up till now, he still believed that Fang Yuan was a Black Dragon General that was sealed and a god.

"Haha...This is all Heaven's will. Do you think I came up with this plan?"

Fang Yuan laughed before leaving.

With a flash of golden light, he disappeared without a trace.

Upon witnessing this scene, Xu Ren's face darkened and he mulled for a long time before clapping his hands. "Come out!"

"My lord!"

The wall behind the study room opened and two men walked out. They kneeled down respectfully.

"This matter...this is a top secret, I presume you know the rules?"

Xu Ren laughed coldly.

"Rest assured, my lord, this matter will not spread. If any rumours leak out, I will be held accountable!"

The martial artists knew the weight of the situation. They solemnly kowtowed, their scalps dark red in colour.

"I naturally trust you all. You all can go now!"

Xu Ren waved his hand and allowed the martial artists to retreat before looking towards Wen Sheng.

"Shen Changhe [3], you are the mastermind. What do you think of this plan?"

This scribe was dressed in green robes and was around 30 years old. He was in his prime and appeared scholarly. He was full of confidence, and after overhearing what was said, he said, "My lord, I overheard the conversation just now. After consideration, I feel that this plan is remarkable. Hiding the troops in the lake. Once there are changes, we can completely control the surrounding 5 prefectures and immediately create the atmosphere to..."

"The most crucial element is still to capture the pirates in the right and just way so that no one can find fault in my doings!"

"Yes!"

Xu Ren stroked his beard. It was obvious that he was very satisfied.

"It is just that...who will spearhead this operation?"

He looked towards Shen Changhe and asked.

Shen Changhe shuddered and broke out in cold sweat. He immediately kowtowed and said, "As the official, even if the magistrate has washed his hand of this matter, it would be best to avoid implications. However, you can send young master!"

"The young master has already become a scholar. If he were to perform this task, he would be awarded the post of a 9th grade official with the power to investigate in every county, and may even become the substitute district lieutenant..."

The power to control the troops was a heavy responsibility. As the mastermind, Shen Changhe would not be so foolish as to get himself implicated.

Truth be told, recommending Xu Ting was the only option.

"Hmmm...the world is in a mess. So what if he becomes a scholar? It would be better for him to become an official directly. I will go speak to Ting'er..."

Xu Ren could not help but smile when he thought of his son.

The responsibility of improving the family's social status in the future lied with his talented son.

[1]A person of power and significance

[2] The pirates blend into the surroundings well

[3] Wen Sheng and Shen Changhe are the same person.

Chapter 295: Dragon Palace

"The immeasurable!"

In a small temple, the chief Daoist walked out of the room where he was conducting morning classes. He gazed silently in the direction of the Golden Lake Prefecture.

This Daoist was named Qing Xuan, and was in his fifties. His hair was half white, and his complexion was often a healthy pink. He was full of vitality.

However, at this point in time, his face was ash grey as he stared at the reddish skies.

His heart felt as though it was going through a storm.

'The convergence of fate energy, the gathering of an evil aura, this smells of war...the Xu family wants to rebel...'

This was expected, and his sect had invested in this too.

"But according to the plan, wasn't it up to the three grandmasters to advise the head of the Xu family, and subsequently claim all the credit? Why did they act so early?"

This had resulted in a loss and would inevitably compromise the great scheme of things.

"Could it have been the Carp spirit?"

Daoist Qing Xuan pondered, and his eyes were cold.

"I wanted to let her off, seeing that she had already reincarnated into a human being, and also had the protection of dragon aura. Who would've known that she would betray her master? She must be destroyed!"

In truth, if it was only to aid the Dragon Court, it was alright to sacrifice karma and fate.

But the most important consideration was that, this demon was close to the headquarters, and if she antagonised him one day, his investment would most probably fail.

"I doubt that a little demon like her would be this bold..."

The Daoist Qing Xuan pinched his fingers in an attempt at divination, but found the fates difficult to read. He was baffled.

"Although it was destined that our forefathers fought hard for the rise of People Dao...but it remains unclear as to who will have the last laugh when disaster strikes. Although my cultivation in both energy and divination techniques is solid, but I remain confused. Only the three grandmasters..."

"Wait!"

Thinking about the three grandmasters today had put a chill in his heart.

"According to my sect's prophecy, the grandmaster should have arrived, but why hasn't he? Demon hunting is no matter. In the Golden Lake Prefecture, which demon other than the Dragon God would be able to face the combined forces of the three grandmasters together with their purple and green swords?"

"Chirp"

At this time, a green light flashed in the skies, and a little green bird landed on a prune tree in the garden. It continued to twitter and chirp.

"This is..."

The Daoist Qingxuan flicked his fingers, and an enchantment was created. His face was extremely solemn.

"What happened exactly? To the extent where the sect has to activate the green bird messenger?"

As Qing Xuan recited some chants, a spiritual aura fell over the green bird.

"Chirp"

The green bird's large beady eyes turned green for a moment, and it opened its mouth to speak. The voice was an old one.

"Qing Xuan! In the Grandmasters' Hall, the jade tablets of the three grandmasters have all broken at the same time, and they are probably in a bad situation. You shall investigate this covertly. Be careful, and remember to not act rashly!"

"What?"

The green bird was not an intelligent animal to begin with, and after uttering the last word, it reverted to the simple beast it was and started to peck its feathers. It was oblivious to Qing Xuan's terror.

"The jade tablets of the Grandmasters' Hall is a secret feature of our sect. The spiritual wills of sect elders will be accumulated on the tablets. Three tablets cracking at the same time can only mean that all three grandmasters have met with harm...could it be the work of the Golden Court Dragon God?"

There were no other possibilities that he could think of.

This problem, coupled with the disturbances in the Xu family's dragon aura, caused him to break out in sweat.

"The forces that the sect has put in place in the Golden Lake Prefecture cannot be entirely activated, but we should not leave them hanging either..."

Daoist Qing Xuan paced back and forth, deep in thought.

"I won't alert the rest, except for the spy in the Xu family. I will send them a message to find out what exactly happened..."

Except that he could not dig too deep or risk disturbing the dragon aura, which could cause things to turn ugly.

It would compromise investigative efforts if that happened.

However, if he put in effort, there would definitely be results.

The reports came in at nighttime.

"Lord Xu intends to send an army to deal with the pirates in the Golden Court Lake?"

The room was dark save for a tiny light. The Daoist Qing Xuan analysed the situation.

"The Golden Court Lake was vast, with countless of small islands. To clear them all was no small feat...also, there were some heroic figures among the pirates who must not be underestimated..."

In truth, Qing Xuan understood that the Golden Court Lake was a god-given chance for the Xu family to grow their power.

Their decision to act now also meant that the odds were in their favour.

Qing Xuan turned to the messenger angrily.

"This is a serious matter. You must report back to the sect immediately. Our people have to participate in this too...or we will lose a great opportunity."

He looked towards the flame ponderously.

Qing Xuan did not have the means to continue investigating the fate of the three grandmasters. He had to appeal to the sect for help.

---

Fang Yuan was not in the mood.

He went to the water's edge and moved his body slightly. A layer of water vapour materialised and lingered about the surroundings. The light rays were reflected into different colours. This was a special occurrence.

"A horned dragon has power over water, and also has the ability to control the weather..."

Fang Yuan took a step forward and there was a flash of golden light. He had transformed into a horned dragon, and dashed towards the blue skies.

"Huff"

The winds had risen and the clouds were gathering. The sky was darkening. Before long, rain began to fall.

"The horned dragon can master the elements, which is a prodigious ability! The other major demons will never be able to achieve this..."

As Fang Yuan traversed the clouds, he was experiencing something entirely new to him.

"Following the transformation into a horned dragon, one can manipulate all the water vapour in the immediate area. He is no different from a water god!"

Of course, being the youngest dragon around meant that his powers were still very much limited.

Additionally, Fang Yuan had no intention of causing storms and floods, and thus flew about carefully trying to familiarise himself with the art of weather control.

"A good rain knows its season, and comes when spring is here...in truth, this is the limitation of a horned dragon. To create real storms that affect a large area would require one to become a water dragon!"

The horned dragon was a junior dragon, but the water dragon was powerful and was always accompanied by the winds and rain.

"A pity...I've only managed to progress to the 8th step in the 9-Step Dragon Transformation Technique. The most crucial step is the True Dragon Transformation!"

The water dragon was powerful, but was no match for the true dragon.

The water dragons were numerous, like the various lords of the mortal world. But there could only be One True Dragon, just like how there was only one emperor.

As his thoughts wandered, Fang Yuan could not help but examine his luck and karma.

Dealing with Xu Ren had triggered the recovery of his People Dao Karma, which was previously down by half.

Of course, an evil aura was gathering, which was the backlash created from trying to change the general trend.

"Who cares if I am to be dealt with with tribulations...it cannot be out of the blue...with my skills in magic, no one can challenge me in the Golden Court manor. The Daoist Xuan Zhen knew that the revenge plan would take a lot of plan, which leaves one more possibility!"

Fang Yuan's eyes gleamed. He had no intention of slowing down, and the rain began to spread to the edges of the Golden Court Lake.

From the torrents of water rose a water demon mounted on a black fish.



"Who is the one causing such a great disturbance? Do you not know that this is the territory of our Dragon God?"

If Fang Yuan could create such a turbulence, the water demon should rightfully show him some respect.

But the water demon defied expectations and raged on. Following a wave of its arm, a jet of water shot up into the skies.

"Insolence!"

Fang Yuan swung his tail and the water jet fell apart immediately.

Not only that, but he willed the lake waters to become turbulent. The water film formed a bubble and levitated into the air.

The water demon was frightened and was trapped in the bubble like an insect in amber.

Fang Yuan examined it with interest. He had every intention to kill it.

'Hmm...this must be the workings of karma and fate, altering the potential of opportunities to confuse the mind?'

If it was a native, he would definitely be irritated, kill the water demon in one blow and begin a massacre. This would foster an enmity with the Dragon God.

Although this was the worst case scenario, it was a highly probable result.

But Fang Yuan was different!

Gods and spirits from another world had high resistance towards the temptations of fate.

"You actually dared to challenge me, water demon."

Fang Yuan released the demon partially from the water prison, and revealed his true dragon form. He then asserted his authority.

"My...my lord?"

The water demon was terrified.

The dragon was the lord of all water beings, born to be a king.

The water demon had disrespected a dragon and knew that his actions were treasonous. No words could express the fear it was experiencing at the moment.

At this point, Fang Yuan felt a tinge of regret. It was unlike him to be provoked so easily.

"I was playful and did not realise that I was trespassing. This is partially my fault. This, I will spare you. Go report my arrival to the Dragon God, now!"

Following a nod from Fang Yuan, the water demon dived into the deep and disappeared from sight.

In truth, these were but Fang Yuan's excuses.

Knowing that the tribulations were impending, he acted first to bring the ball into his court. This was a useful method.

Like what happened just now. With a clear plan, one would be become more reserved in their actions.

Otherwise, following the activation of heaven's will, one will still suffer. Without any preparation, the effects would be more profound.

Before long, a swirl formed in the water. Water beings formed two rows, and a turtle appeared. It bowed down solemnly.

"My lord the Dragon God, upon finding out that a fellow dragon has come to visit, was extremely happy. May I invite you to join us in for a gathering at the Dragon Palace!"

"Mm lead the way!"

Fang Yuan was intent on finding out more about the Dragon God of Golden Court Lake. He dived into the water and appeared as his human self. He then sat on the back of a large turtle.

"Yes, let your old servant lead the way!"

The turtle was obsequious and pointed out the road ahead.

The turtle race was related to the dragon race, and yet it was very difficult for turtles to cultivate the dragon form. Most of them were loyal followers of the Dragon God, and looked forward to the day where he could become a true dragon and elevate them together with him.

Now that the turtle had met a young dragon in Fang Yuan, it considered him a master too and decided that it would not compromise on the formalities.

The turtle was a sturdy creature, but yet moved at an alarmingly fast speed in the water. Before long, a glittering place of gold and jade appeared before Fang Yuan's eyes.

Chapter 296: The Patrol

The Dragon Palace was opulently grandeur and precious materials lined the floors and walls. Even though it was the most grandiose palace Fang Yuan had ever seen, he was unamused as he had seen similarly magnificent palaces before.

The tortoise guard was caught off guard by Fang Yuan's indifference.

"My master is the richest amongst all in the seas and this palace is home to many treasures of Golden Court Lake; even the previous visitor, the Monkey God, was in utter awe of the palace. Yet, I can't believe unlike others, you are so indifferent to such opulence! Perhaps, you are from the seas?"

With greater reverence, the tortoise guard led Fang Yuan inside a large plaza.

Inside the plaza, a black water dragon opened its eye.

"Leave him here and the rest of you all are dismissed!" he ordered with a powerful demeanour.

"Yes, your majesty!"

With the Golden Court Dragon God's command, all the water dwellers solemnly and respectfully retreated.

However, Fang Yuan's expression changed suddenly as he gazed at the black water dragon. "This can't be right..., that's not his true form!"

"Splash!"

Under the soft noise of water splashing, it was as though the mirage was dispelled by water.

Akin to a soap bubble bursting, the humongous body of the black evil dragon suddenly disappeared and left behind a majestic deity. The deity was donned in a royal crown and had two dragon horns coming out of his forehead.

"God Dao Golden Body!"

Fang Yuan was in awe and paid respects again, "It is my honour to meet you!"

The golden body was cast from the beliefs of the people dao and possessed boundless powers that were even greater than that of the dragon body.

Unfortunately, it was after all built from the intangible beliefs of the people dao and was not bound by flesh.

"So the Golden Court Dragon God's true form is actually a people dao deity!" he thought.

It was a sudden realization for Fang Yuan as all his doubts were cleared at once. "No wonder the clearing of the evil gods' offerings went so smoothly, behind those righteous gods, there was help from this greater god!"

"Ah, no need for formalities!"

The Dragon God raised his hands slightly and a surge of force lifted Fang Yuan.

"I have been paying attention to you for a long time!"

The Dragon God smiled and continued, "I welcome you inside to talk!"

The two of them then entered the palace hall behind the plaza.

The palace hall was colossal. It had forty-nine sturdy golden pillars supporting a golden dome roof. Above it, ripples of water could be seen and it was truly a sight to behold.

"This is the heart of my Dragon Palace, Blue Water Hall! Whatever we discuss here cannot be leaked, and it can even conceal secrets and mislead those who try to predict!"

He then sat on his main seat and gestured towards Fang Yuan, "Have a seat too!"

Fang Yuan sat on the Fire Jade Coral Chair and felt warm and comfortable.

At that moment, a puzzled expression appeared on his face. "Paid attention to me for a long time? Have we met before...?"

"Ah, I have been noticing you ever since you destroyed the Monkey God's magical clone. However, I was busy doing my dragon transformation and was too wary of you. Hence, even though I thought of inviting you many times, it is such a pity I ended up backing out every time..."

The Dragon God grinned, "Also, about that Black Dragon General's Temple of yours? I was also the one who sent people to tidy it, else people would have stopped visiting and providing offerings..."

It was all clear to Fang Yuan.

The Golden Court Dragon God was in charge of all the water deities in the surrounding radius of Golden Court Lake, he must have noticed Fang Yuan since that period.

But was he biased towards the humans since then?

Fang Yuan was even more certain that he could achieve his goals during this trip.

Initially, he simply wanted to meet him first while transformed as a horned dragon and then look for more information later on.

However, he could now complete it in one step.

"This Dragon God's water dragon incarnation is already destroyed, what's left is just the embodiment of people's beliefs. He can be influenced the most easily now, and there's no doubt he is biased towards the humans." Fang Yuan thought.

Fang Yuan stood up and bowed, "Thank you Dragon God! However, I have a favour to ask of you!"

"Go ahead!"

The Golden Court Dragon God gestured.

Although he was already a people dao deity, his heart was still influenced by his previous form. Thus, he had a warmer attitude towards this fellow horned dragon.

"The prefecture minister of Golden Lake Prefecture, Xu Ren, deeply pities the commoners' tough life and furthermore, pirates are rampant over there. He wants to eradicate those pirates but however, the Golden Court Lake is so vast with thousands of islands. So please, I seek your helping hand, Dragon God!"

Fang Yuan narrated Xu Ren's situation and added, "If you help out the commoners of Golden Court Lake, they would be tremendously grateful for your benevolence!"

"Ah, even if you did not mention this matter, I was already prepared to do so!"

The Golden Court Dragon God stroked his beard with satisfaction.

As a people dao deity, it was beneficial for him to maintain both the peace and stability of the environment and a large number of believers.

"As a righteous god, I, the Golden Court Lake Dragon God, would definitely know the hiding locations of all those pirates... Just that gods and humans should not interact too closely, hence, I still require a human aide!"

The Golden Court Dragon God exclaimed with radiance in his eyes, "You! How about you?"

"Of course I can!"

Fang Yuan laughed; he knew that he had successfully established rapport with the Dragon God.

"In his eyes, we are very much alike... both born as dragons, both sensed great tribulations, both wanted to help the people dao... unlike humans and their infighting.... Of course, perhaps the Golden Court Dragon God's does not require a lot of karma points, solely relying on self-sustenance, unlike those of Xuan Zhen Sect who consumed so much and fought with others who vied for it too..." Fang Yuan thought.

"Ah, it is my privilege to have you as my guest! I have already informed my subordinates to prepare a grand feast for you tonight!"

The Golden Court Dragon God nodded, his divine gaze momentarily faded as he chatted like any other noblemen, "You must enjoy a couple of drinks tonight!"

"Of course!"

As they spoke, Fang Yuan began to wonder about the entertainment the Dragon Palace provided and he inevitably expressed his curiosity.

It was normal for someone with such a high cultivation level to be so direct.

"Hahaha..., great!"

The Dragon God was elated. He clapped his hands and two groups of gorgeous shell ladies swarmed out. Behind them were water dwellers carrying an array of delicacies.

Spiritual meals that could be eaten by both humans and Yin Spirits were consumed in the Dragon Palace.

Although it was not very useful for Fang Yuan, it was eye-opening for him and he enjoyed his time with the host.

...

Spring, 3rd Year of Yong An, Da Chu.

At the pier of Black Lake District.

Xu Ting stood on top of two ships and behind him were soldiers. The soldiers were fully geared and carried a faint sense of ferocity.

As he looked at the ships and the soldiers, he was very satisfied.

At that time, Xu Ting was already a ninth grade official. He was assigned as Black Lake District's naval patrol officer.

As a patrol officer, he was in charge of recruiting soldiers, busting pirates, and also had the authority to set up roadblocks both on land and sea. At his current rank, he could only recruit a hundred men at most.

With help from his clan and aid from the district leader, Zhang Gui, he managed to form the troop quickly. The only thing left for the substantial troop was to test its prowess in a real war.

"Father was right, troubled times are ahead. I don't need scholarly honour, in the future, it is a brawn over brain kind of world..." he thought.

Unknowingly, Xu Ting felt melancholic as he looked at his military officer's uniform.

Black Lake District's district leader was an old friend of his father. He was very kind to Xu Ting and supplied him with all the bows, arrow, armour and food that he required.

Xu Ting still had some regrets. Once a candidate has been promoted to an official, he could no longer take the imperial examinations.

"As a man, you shall seek for respect and authority!"

As he stood at the front of the ship and faced hundreds of subordinates staunchly obeying his orders, he felt a strong sense of power and authority within him. The surge of dominance seemingly opened another door in his heart, as he felt like he had a greater ambition ahead of him.

"Eradicating the pirates of Golden Court Lake is just the part one of my grand plans, once it succeeds, my clan would at least have the capital to have a footing in this tumultuous world..." he thought.

Although he also thought of what would happen thereafter, he quickly buried those thoughts.

At that moment, such wild ambitions were too elusive. He had to ensure his current plans succeeded first.

"Sir, we can prepare to sail now!"

The crew reported the conditions of the winds and the water to Xu Ting.

"Hoist the sails! Embark!"

As Xu Ting gave his commands, he glanced at the pier for the last time with no wistfulness.

"Raise the anchor!"

"Set sail!"

The ship's crew were all experienced seafarers. Under his command, the two ships embarked smoothly.

Also, it was an official vessel, it had a larger body, drained more water and was immaculately stable. The possibility of feeling seasick on the ship was also much smaller. Furthermore, the key areas were covered in iron sheets and the ships' defence was unparalleled.

There were two such warships and each had fifty soldiers on it. The soldiers were equipped with bows and other weapons. They were definitely a force to be reckoned with in Golden Court Lake.

"Doesn't matter if it is politicking or working, the worst thing to do is to create a big commotion right at the start. With my current status, a hundred men and two ships are ample. Anyway, we wouldn't encounter pirates throughout the whole journey and they can only have at most five hundred to a

thousand of its people on those small islands. Plus, since they are mostly comprised of the elderly, the women and the young, we would definitely be able to bust them all!"

Xu Ting was not an empty strategist, he was fully confident in his plans and envisioned, "By leading a troop of hundred, I am certain that I can conquer them all, and my power would snowball further afterwards!"

Furthermore, every time the pirates were cleaned up with his efforts, he could claim his merits from the imperial court and be promoted to receive greater power and authority.

Hence, when he finally conquered all the pirates in Golden Court Lake, his rank would be comparable to others.

"Call all the sergeants and above to come to the meeting!"

Xu Ting then issued his command as he watched the glistening waters.

The military system of Da Chu was formed on the basis that five men formed a team led by a corporal and ten men formed a team led by a sergeant.

Be it a corporal or a sergeant, both ranks were below that of a ninth grade official. However, they formed the backbone of troops and were future candidates for officers.

As he met the sergeants, Xu Ting stroked his sword and thought about how he could fully earn the loyalty of his men through leading them with both care and authority.

In this tumultuous world, one has to be fully prepared at all times, and it was even more important to have a firm grasp of one's own military power.

Such a belief was not due to distrust, it was simply due to the temperament of water dragons!

Chapter 297: Eradicating Pirates

"The 'Pirates of Golden Court Lake' is merely a collective title for the numerous different small groups of pirates in Golden Court Lake. The different groups do not work together, they even compete and clash with each other for land, wealth and women..."

Inside the small cabin, Xu Ting looked at the map and spoke with fervour.

The Xu family was rooted in Golden Lake Prefecture for ten over years, it was unsurprising that they had such intelligence in their hands.

"These pirates are mostly refugees from other areas that gather on the islands. Some of them do reclaim the land, but however, most of them rely on plundering! Some of them have even built up stockaded villages!"

In reality, due to limited resources, terrain and reclamation limitations, such stockaded villages were not large in scale and housed at most a thousand people.

Furthermore, the natural resources on the island combined with the plundered materials were still insufficient for large groups of pirates, and hence they had to branch off from one another.

"This time around, we will be conquering the pirates on Heiguan Island. These pirates have pillaged Black Lake District before, killing 27 people in the process and even raided a large family..."

Xu Ting frowned.

When the pirates were ashore, it was natural that they killed and raided. However, since they could break in these large families' estates that were fenced and fortified with tall, huge walls, it meant that the pirates were either very brave, or there were very capable people within them.

"Come, bring Hu San over!"

Immediately after he clapped his hands, two soldiers brought a man over.

From the man's frail and ragged looking appearance, it was evident that he was the poorest of the poor.

Of course, as those around were all soldiers, from the man's savage looking eyes and his body odour that reeked of seawater, they could immediately decipher his identity.

"A pirate?"

A few sergeants exchanged glances, and their face lit up.

"Haha..., not bad, he is indeed a pirate. A pirate from Heiguan Island to be exact!"

Xu Ting stroked his steel ring and mentioned, "Explain everything you know and then guide the way for us! If you heed our orders, you will be greatly rewarded and your criminal records would be expunged! How about that?"

Even though pirates were usually refugees, there were some exceptions.

Hu San was from Black Lake District, however after he committed crimes, he was wanted by the authorities. Hence, he had no other choice than to join the pirates.

Once Xu Ting assumed his post and caught wind of the matter, he immediately tasked his clan members to help him and after observing for a period of time, sure enough, Hu San was caught.

With incriminating evidence held against him, Hu San was surprisingly not stubborn, he lifted his head, and with a slightly hopeful look, said, "Are you... for real?"

"Hehe... our master is an official of the prefecture minister, why would he lie to a scoundrel like you?"

Before Xu Ting could speak, a bodyguard at the side sneered.

As the eldest son of the family, safety was of utmost importance. This group of bodyguards were the cream of the crop, they were all skilled in combat and defence. Also, instead of leather armour, they were donned in chainmail.

The chainmail was made from metal rings looped together and was lightweight and flexible. In spite of that, its defence was much better than that of normal armour. It was costly to make such armour and was only possible for bodyguards of ninth grade officials and above to have it.



However, the chainmail was a common sight here.

As the commander's bodyguard, such treatment was expected.

Just with the five well-armed bodyguards alone, it might even be enough to kill hundreds of people!

Thus, Xu Ting did not have many worries for this conquest.

Nevertheless, preparations for the war were required. It was necessary to fully ready their tactics.

"Prefecture minister... Xu?"

Hu San took a deep breath, "Alright..., I will believe you this time!"

With fire in his eyes, Hu San explained again, "Our boss is called Lu Jia. We occupied Heiguan Island and built a stockaded village on it. There are seven to eight hundred people and three ships! There are hundred and twenty strong men called the Twelfth Jia..., and also, I know the way there and can bring you all there!"

"Good, dismiss him and give him some meat and wine!"

Xu Ting was delighted upon hearing that.

Although they had a map of the waterway, it was reassuring that an experienced person held the task of navigating the directions.

On the vast lake, there were no reference objects to navigate with. Without an experienced navigator, a small mistake could steer the ship off by a huge margin. Thus, this was also the reason why the pirates remained uncaught till now.

...

Hu San was indeed cooperative, after a day of him pointing directions, a small island appeared in front of Xu Ting.

"Hmm, looks clean, shouldn't be some kind of snake island..."

Xu Ting happily said as he shielded his eyes from the sun, looked far away and also smelled the air.

There were thousands of island on Golden Court Lake, some of the islands were dead empty, while other had many species of animals. Reportedly, there were some islands that only had numerous species of snakes; it was truly horrifying and dangerous.

However, the island ahead did not look like such and also did not have the kind of unique stench.

"Sir!"

At that moment, a few sergeants came over, "There are a few ships berthed at the other side of the island. What Hu San said should be true! what should we do? Secretly disembark and detour over to launch a surprise attack?"

"Wait a minute!"

Xu Ting frowned, "Send the scout over first to see how many ships are there!"

At that moment, the daoist priest on the ship was put in to great use.

A white bird flew from the daoist priest's shoulder, circled the sky, landed back and started chirping away.

"Sir, there are three ships!"

The daoist priest reported moments later.

"Very good, your efforts will be remembered!"

Xu Ting was elated.

Although the daoist priest did not have many techniques under his belt, he understood animal language. Even though he only had a common kind of white bird, it always worked flawlessly in scouting. Hence, Xu Ting's father had always thought highly of the daoist priest and treated him very well.

Thus, this time around, Xu Ting brought along the daoist priest to help out himself.

And that was exactly how noble families worked.

With those, as long as the commander was not too incompetent, there was no reason to fail.

"So how Sir, should we launch a sneak attack?"

A few sergeants eagerly wanted to try.

"What sneak attack?"

Xu Ting took a few steps and made up his mind, "Our soldiers are so much more superior, we have plenty of weapons and armours, and our ship is fortified with iron! Whereas, they only have three lousy ships, do you think they even stand a chance? Also, all of us are unfamiliar with the island's terrain, it would not be wise to solely trust one person!"

"We are soldiers, they are thieves! We don't need any devious plans, we just have to raise our flag up high and charge forward... With their three ships, where else can they run after we occupy the pier?"

While the plan seemed simple, it was one that was meticulously devised.

"In this first war, I rather win it clumsily than to lose skillfully. If my plan is infallible, that would be the best!"

Xu Ting quietly told himself.

"Raise the official flag!"

"Prepare the spearguns!"

"Speed up and charge forward!"

...

After listening to Xu Ting's arrangements, the sergeants were not against it.

After all, they were also clear that the pirates did not have much power to defend the pier. The pirates were no match for them.

Furthermore, they were backed by bodyguards and the daoist priest.

Truthfully, it was sufficient to fully suppress the pirates just with this elite force.

With such an overwhelming strength, the morale was high.

"Charge!"

The two warships instantly charged towards the pier aggressively, alarming its people.

Frankly, the pier was actually just a few shoddy structures built on a natural harbour. The ships could barely be berthed there.

Three old and dilapidated fishing boats parked at the side of the shore. They appeared modified of sorts and had numerous fishermen climbing up and down, fixing the sails and tidying the ship.

A ruckus erupted when they saw the two ships carrying the official flag charged towards them.

Not only were their boats difficult to operate, it took a very long time for them to gear up and be prepared to fight back. Furthermore, they lacked shipmen.

When Xu Ting charged towards them, he saw them scrambling to start up the ship. He could not help but laugh as he saw many of them running away and also those who were having difficulty hoisting the sails.

Ultimately, they were thieves against officials, the circumstances were against them. Naturally, their first reaction was to run.

Those who really fought back without hesitation were truly stupid or ready to die.

"Seize their ships! Even if they sink, do not leave them with any!"

Xu Ting wanted to capture them all in one fell swoop and immediately commanded.

"Spearguns... fire!"

A loud boom could be heard as the warship began to roar.

The spearguns were actually crossbows mounted on the ship that shot explosive spears.

"Boom!"

On the opposite side, the spear hit the wooden ship and pierced through a few pirates. Blood spewed everywhere as shrieks of terror could be heard.

"Boom!"

Another official vessel launched another spear. This time, it was slightly off and pierced through the sail, leaving behind a huge hole.

"Truth be told, this kind of speargun can only be used to scare off the opponents. It couldn't even hit a still boat accurately! What if we were on rough seas?"

Xu Ting shook his head at that sight, "Let's not even mention those crossbows or what not, they can't even be used for long. With such dampness and humidity, they would be obsolete after a while..."

He was naturally talented in the battlefield. This time, not only was he collected in commanding, he even had the leisure to think about his own weaknesses.

"Charge!"

Once the ship reached the pier, the soldiers were prepared to jump down the official ship.

As their ship was huge, the deck was high above the ground and gave a dominant vantage point.

"Archers!" a sergeant hollered.

Twenty-something archers then drew their bow and shot at the armed pirates on their deck.

Fully armed soldiers then seized the opportunity and began jumping down the ship to fight.

"Those damned government troops are here, those who don't want their whole family to die, fight with them!"

Amongst the pirates, the very brave ones slashed forward with their swords.

"Form up and stab!"

The soldiers formed up, launched their spears together and the pirates turned into a bloody mess.

"Even with courage, this is all that is left..."

Xu Ting curled his lips as he looked at the scene.

These pirates' equipment were no match for the soldiers. Some of them were like beggars who used wooden spears.

Most importantly, many of them suffered from hunger and were skinny to the bones.

They could only rely on weapons with no gunpowder, and furthermore, they did not even have enough to eat, how would they have the energy to kill their enemies?

Hence, through the ages, none of the refugees who rebelled ever succeeded.

As Xu Ting silently made up his mind, he was no longer undecided on what would be the outcome of these pirates.

Chapter 298: The Pacification

"Kill them all!"

The soldiers assumed their positions in groups of 5 and complemented each other. Furthermore, with their leather armour for protection, they were able to cut through the defence easily.

A large group of pirates were immediately killed, their fresh blood staining the floorboards. Some of them panicked and jumped into the water to escape.

When the second ship fell into the hands of the soldiers, a leader of the pirates immediately shouted. "Things are not looking good! Let's go...retreat and fortify the stockade village!"

He had a well-built figure with a booming voice and his skills were not too shoddy. With a swing of his sword, he sliced through a soldier's leather armour, causing the soldier to scream as his arm was severed.

"The two of you, kill him!"

Upon witnessing the scene, Xu Ting ordered his two bodyguards behind him without a moment of hesitation.

"Understood!"

The bodyguards replied before rushing forward, their faces bearing cruel smiles as they swung the Hundred Refined Goose Plume Swords. "Die!"

"Crack!"

The leader of the pirates raised his sword to parry. The two swords clashed and sparks flew.

A wave of power surged forth which caused him to retreat as his arms turned numb. He felt as though his sword was going to fly out from his hand and his expression changed. "This is... an elite troop!"

He could not comprehend the situation. These bodyguards, who could easily take on 10 people at once, were assigned only to generals. Why would they appear in this area to defeat a few pirates?

However, he could think no further.

The two bodyguards were well coordinated. One of them met the leader head-on while the other advanced slowly as he waited for the opportunity to strike. With a sudden lunge and a flash of steel, the other bodyguard buried his sword into the waist of the leader which caused fresh blood to gush out from the waist of the leader.

With a cold laugh, the bodyguard severed the head of the leader with a stroke of his sword.

"This is a military warfare. Only a fool will play by your rules!"

In a military warfare, everything was fair play as long as the objective was met. So what if there was a small loss of reputation by using a sneak attack to kill the enemy?

It would truly be a joke if they were to talk about rules of the brave and the chivalrous with honour!

"It is almost done!"

When he saw the last will to rebel crushed, Xu Ting revealed a smile and nodded his head.

"Listen well, your leader is dead! Why are you all not surrendering?"

A bodyguard raised the severed head of the leader and hollered, "If you all still go against the soldiers of the imperial court, your whole family will be executed!"

"Sir, please spare our lives, we are willing to surrender!"

It was natural for the soldiers to capture the bandits. With the leaders gone, the remaining pirates did not have much will to fight. They threw down their weapons and knelt down to surrender.

"Good! Prepare the ship, rope in the captives and account for the weapons and the injured..."

As he looked at the archers slowly killing off the pirates who jumped into the water to escape and a large group of pirates being held captive, Xu Ting gave the orders as his heart was filled with joy.

Not long after, the results were back.

"My lord, this time, we have killed 37 people and captured 50 people. The military power of the Heiguan Island has been wiped out..."

A sergeant reported, his face full of joy.

"My lord, I have located the stockade village. Those pirates that escaped previously have gathered within the village. It looks like they are trying to defend there..."

The Daoist priest came forward and spoke.

There was no real solution. After all, no troops would stay for long for just for a small stockade village. Once there were no real benefits left, the troops would withdraw.

"Oh!"

Xu Ting did not speak for a while. Instead, he stood on the floorboard and looked at the lake water that was stained red. There was a corpse floating in it with an arrow lodged in the body. He asked, "How many of our men were wounded or killed?"

"3 people were killed while 5 people were heavily wounded. There were others who had sustain light injuries. They would not affect the operation as they would be able to join in after they are patched up!"

As he was the son of an official, the troops were highly skilled and there was an experienced doctor who saved the lives once at the battle ground, the troops were in high morale.

"They have already discovered us. Do we attack?"

No matter how short and poorly constructed the walls and the ditches were, the offensive side would suffer great loss should they attack the fortified area.

"Why bother, this battle is already over!"

Xu Ting tied up the pirates and laughed.

After a simple interrogation and multiple reports, they discovered that there were around 600 to 700 people left in the village, with most of them being the elderly, women or young children. The leader, Lu Jia was there as well.

Furthermore, the leader of the pirates who was previously beheaded was the second-in-command of Heiguan Island. He was naturally courageous. Of course, he was reduced to a severed head as a token of his bravery.

After hearing the reports, Xu Ting ordered the troops to reorganize and rest. He left around 20 people to guard the pier while he brought the remaining troops and captives before the stockade village.

At that moment, the village was in an uproar. Women and the elderlies could be seen standing atop the wall with worried looks upon their faces.

Afterall, Xu Ting's troops were from the army and as such, represented a sense of righteousness.

Furthermore, they have previously defeated the pirates and killed off many of them.

"Lu Jia is indeed a talent!"

Xu Ting came forward and took a look at the village. The walls were not very high. They were slightly over 3 metres and were dilapidated. Before the village, there was a ditch. Although it was freshly dug and unfinished, it was sufficient to serve its purpose.

With these, if the troops were to assault the village, they would have to pay a certain price.

"It's a shame...he had lost his opportunity!"

If the elite of the pirates were still guarding the village, a hundred ordinary imperial soldiers would not be able to occupy the village.

Even if Xu Ting were to order his bodyguards to spearhead the assault, the losses would still be great. Once there were discontent amongst the ranks, he would have to massacre the entire village to pacify the soldiers. By then, he would not be able to conscript the pirates.

However, the family members of these villagers were in his hands. As such, he had a trump card which gave him an advantage.

"Sir, do we attack?"

His assistant came forward and asked as he witness the last remaining military power of the valiant pirates that came to the wall. There were only slightly more than a dozen pirates left.

The officer's 5 bodyguards were highly skilled and were able to kill off the leader quickly. By doing so, the stand-off would come to an end.

"Why bother risking our troops?"

Xu Ting waved his hand. "Bring out the captives! Advise the village to surrender. Tell them...if they do not surrender, I will use the captives to fill the ditches!"

"Sss..."

The officer pondered awhile before he let out his breath. He felt a chill in his heart before he praised Xu Ting. "You are indeed wise. The pirates will have no choice but to surrender!"

It was simply human nature. How many would act against their loved ones?

Even Lu Jia could not afford to make this mistake as it would incur the fury of the masses! Truth be told, his fate was sealed when the pier was attacked and the route of escape was cut off.

This was a calculated victory!

The officer might not be old, but he was well-versed in the arts of war. As such, he was an asset to Xu Ting.

The assistant pondered silently as he came up with a certain idea.

...

After the demand was made, there was more disturbance within the stockade. Shortly after, the door creaked open, revealing a dozen people carrying chaste berries. Upon seeing Xu Ting, they immediately knelt down. "Greetings!"

"Hmmm, get up!"

Xu Ting looked at the leader of the pirates of Heiguan Island.

He was only around 30 years old. However, he looked weather-beaten and his hair had started to turn white.

Xu Ting knew that the person before him was unwilling, but what else could Liu Jia do? He could not afford to offend the villagers and be labelled as a betrayer. As such, there was nothing he could do but to surrender.

Of course, saving his own skin was most crucial!

Afterall, based on how the imperial courts handled the pirates in the past, there was faith that only the leader of the pirates would be executed while the other pirates were relocated.

The hair on Lu Jia's back stood up as he rose uneasily and looked towards the surrounding fierce soldiers.

"You gathered a group of pirates and broke the law. You even looted a district town and robbed a large family. Your crime is unpardonable...."

Xu Ting carried on. His light tone caused Lu Jia's legs to tremble as he knelt down once more. "My lord, please spare my life! Please spare my life! I am only trying to make a living...food on the island is scarce and many had died of hunger..."

"Thud Thud!"

Not long after, Lu Jia's forehead was red with blood.

Xu Ting was satisfied upon witnessing this scene. "...however, I empathise with you. As such, I am willing to remove your records if you enlist in my army and eradicate the other pirates!"

Lu Jia was very capable and was of use to Xu Ting. However, he required more training to correct his boorish character.

As for how to make use of Lu Jia, Xu Ting had already made up his mind.



"Thank you my lord! Thank you!"

Even though the person standing in front of him was just a youth, Lu Jia still repeatedly thank him.

"Hmmm, Guo Kuixing, bring along 50 people to inspect the stockade and sort out the register..."

Although Xu Ting knew that there would not be much resistance, he could not set his mind at ease and as such, ordered his subordinates to enter the village with the captives.

He only managed to smile after all the families were brought out and the stocks accounted for.

He ordered the soldiers to start cooking in a huge pot, putting in wild herbs, sausages and the likes. They also added in a few salted fish to form a mixed porridge. The porridge were distributed and the soldiers took turn to eat and rest.

The disturbance within the families started to die out as they received a portion of the food as well.

While the others were resting, Xu Ting was kept busy to the point where he did not even have the time to drink water. He listened to Guo Kuixing's report of the stock. "We have captured around 750 people, 70 swords, spears and other types of weapons, 3 sets of leather armour, 500 taels of gold and silver, and a few chests of copper coins...However, there are very little ration. Medicine and cloth are lacking as well!"

"Hmm, all those male pirates above the age of 15 shall be conscripted into the army and sternly looked after. Group the rest of the families into 5 families per group for mutual monitoring. Punish those who try to flee!"

Xu Ting walked a few steps before he spoke. "After you all are done with your meal, board the ship and burn down this stockade village!"

"As for the soldiers, reward them immediately. Those who took part in the battle would be rewarded with 1 silver tael. Those who kill the leaders of pirates will be awarded 10 silver taels. The reward for the main leader is calculated separately...I will not forget the officers who commanded the troops as well."

"My lord, you are wise indeed!"

Guo Kuixing and the other officers were joyous upon hearing the news.

Xu Ting could only laugh bitterly to himself.

Truth be told, there were more losses than gains as the troops had to consume a lot of resources to launch an attack on this small island.

'They do not know that the real rewards are these captives!'

Xu Ting looked at the hundreds of captives, his face revealing a bright smile.

[1] Referring to Xu Ting and his elite troops

Chapter 299: Evildoer

Half a month later, Quicksand Island.

A stockaded village was on fire and thick clouds of black smoke billowed towards the skies.

Xu Ting gazed at the refugees under his charge and singled out the strong men before rearranging them into new groups. He was satisfied with how it all went smoothly.

With Lu Jia, the spy, by his side, Xu Ting led a sweeping operation across the surrounding islands. There was an overwhelming amount of gold and silver. Most importantly, the ex-pirates of Heiguan Island clashed with members of their old brethren in a bid to prove their new loyalties.

To date, the refugees numbered 2,000 with more than 300 able-bodied men among them.

These men were not in the best of shapes but they were fearless. With enough food and the right amount of training, they could become a formidable force.

Also, having killed a few rebellious refugee leaders, Xu Ting had managed to inspire fear among the men. They would not cause any trouble for now.

"My lord..."

Guo Kuixing stood behind him and spoke gingerly.

"My lord is merciful for sparing the refugees. But we do not have enough supplies to support all of them!"

"I know!"

Xu Ting nodded to himself. He understood that things had reached a limit.

It was indeed a large burden for the Golden Lake Prefecture to support thousands more.

Besides, the goods offered by Lu Jia and his surrendered band of pirate leaders were running out too.

The pirate headquarters was a location of utmost importance. The pirates would not give it up so easily.

Also, the pirates might relocate their headquarters if they receive news of the army invasion. This would make things even more troublesome.

"This operation to wipe out the pirates of the Golden Court Lake might be tedious, but I see it as an opportunity to train my soldiers!"

Xu Ting was exhausted but there was fire in his eyes.

"I am the only commander in this vast lake. I call the shots. I get to decide who lives and who dies....when the purge is complete, my reputation will reach new heights."

Of course, at this point, both the men and equipment were at their breaking points. They all needed rest.

Thus, Xu Ting spoke to his second-in-command.

"Don't worry, I understand the gravity of the situation. Tell the boats to retreat!"

Xu Ting's forces had seized many boats and he had to send them in batches, but the distance they had to travel was not too far. It was all manageable.

Xu Ting noticed that his subordinates still looked worried.

"...Father promised me that he would give us land, housing and supplies. I think it will be enough to help all these people settle down!"

Having heard that the arrangements had received the blessings of the Prefecture Minister, the men were somewhat assuaged.

Who knew that Xu Ting was, in fact, laughing coldly to himself. The families of the surrendered pirates were going to be hostages. He would never have to worry about them going against him.

This military operation had given him a better understanding of the situation. He had also become more well-versed in naval warfare.

The next time, he would definitely put in more effort and request for reinforcements from his clan. He would have to win a watershed victory and gain unparalleled influence in the area!

"Time waits for no man indeed..."

Xu Ting gave a deep sigh and gazed at the setting sun.

...

In the capital city of Da Chu.

An imperial manor.

This was not a prince's manor, but its gates were large and imposing, its gardens vast and deep. Guards patrolled the manor grounds in a solemn manner. It was comparable to any of the princes' manors.

In the whole of Da Chu, only one clan wielded such power. It was the family of the Prime Minister of Chu, Wang Qiao.

Wang Qiao was born to a prominent clan and was bright from a young age. He had joined the civil service as a junior official and in the span of 20 years, rose to his position as the premier official.

The late emperor had been a despot who immersed himself in wine and woman. He had died at a relatively young age, and Wang Qiao became the regent for his successor.

Wang Qiao dropped his image as a loyal subject when he ascended to the regency and had built up a court faction loyal to himself. He had also colluded with the corrupt eunuchs and ladies of the harem so as to secure his grip on power.

At the beginning of the year, the royal court had decreed that Wang Qiao was exempt from the full rites of greeting the emperor and could carry a sword to court. This was an exceptional privilege and was a testament to his unparalleled influence.

"Haha...drink up beauty!"

In the back garden, a band was playing a soothing melody. A lady with skin as fair as white jade and a slim waist was performing a song and dance. It was a very precious sight indeed.

She was draped in only translucent silk, which accentuated her perfect figure. Her features conveyed various expressions of love and longing. Even the serving ladies standing around were intoxicated.

Wang Qiao sat in the prime seat and raised a wine cup.

He looked to be in his fifties and had a graceful and unusual aura about him. His eyes were lit up as he watched the performance.

"Thank you, My Lord!"

The beauty stepped forward elegantly and received the cup with her slender fingers. She then drained the cup in a swift movement. Some of the wine escaped her lips and formed a titillating streak by her mouth.

Wang Qiao was enthralled.

"My life becomes much more colourful with such a beauty like you by my side, Beauty She!"

Wang Qiao was about to continue with his frivolous activities when his housekeeper rushed in.

"My lord!"

Seeing that Wang Qiao's expression had turned unpleasant, the housekeeper fell to the floor in a hurry.

"Sorry for dampening your spirits, My Lord, but there is something very important that I need to report!"

The housekeeper produced a written report.

As Wang Qiao read it, his face turned a turbulent shade and he slammed a fist on the table.

"How dare this Imperial Censor!"

The Imperial Censors had supervisory roles and could report directly to the emperor. The role was officially not a high-ranking one, but in truth, the Imperial Censors had much authority.

This particular Imperial Censor was named Hai Qing and had submitted a report detailing the eight major crimes of Wang Qiao. The accusations were very well substantiated and Wang Qiao was actually afraid. His fear quickly turned into rage.

However, the report would never reach the emperor because Wang Qiao had intercepted it.

Wang Qiao was angry indeed and he thirsted for blood.

Wang Qiao might not be a king, but his wrath was a thing to behold. The servants all fell to the ground and prostrated before him. Even Beauty She was trembling.

"Hehe...Hai Qing? An eloquent writer indeed!"

As Wang Qiao calmed himself down, he broke out into a laugh.

"Men, send my personal guards to detain him and throw him into prison. Cut out his ligaments and tear out his tongue..."

"My Lord!"

The housekeeper was shaken. He was a loyal and fairly capable adviser to Wang Qiao and spoke up.

"Throughout history, the Imperial Censors have never been punished for their reports. If you want to deal with him, you should grant him another appointment and relocate him so that he will no longer enjoy the immunity of his position. When the time comes, you can deal with him any way you want!"

"You have a point, but am I to listen to you?"

Wang Qiao knew that his previous order was an impulsive one and he had intended to correct it. However, hearing the housekeeper offer him the exact plan he had in mind, and being under the gaze of the various ladies surrounding him, he was not about to back down.

The housekeeper broke out into a cold sweat.

"No My Lord! I will carry out your orders!"

'This housekeeper thinks that I will tolerate his insolence just because he is old...'

As he watched the housekeeper retreat into the distance, an idea came into Wang Qiao's mind.

'I could use take this chance to test the waters. I want to know how many would dare to cross me!'

In Fang Yuan's previous life, there was the famous Zhao Gao incident of fact distortion. Throughout history, the strategies of power consolidation remained largely similar to each other. Wang Qiao was planning to use an old trick from the book as well.

After receiving the report, Wang Qiao was no longer in the mood for merrymaking, and he retired to his study.

The musicians had already disbanded and went their separate ways, but Beauty She continued to stroll in the garden. Before long, she arrived at the edge of a lonely bamboo forest.

There was a pavilion made entirely out of bamboo stalks. The workmanship was extremely fine and the pavilion remained cool even with the heat of summer.

However, at this point, the pavilion was cold, and there was no one else in the surrounding area.

Beauty She talked to the air. Her behaviour was secretive.

"You are bold to sneak in here...are you not afraid of the repercussions from people dao and fate energy?"

A soft ghostly voice broke out from nowhere.

"Hehe...Wang Qiao is an unscrupulous person who is running out of luck. Why would I be afraid of him?"

Beauty She laughed when she heard the reply.

"What a stubborn person. If you are not afraid, why don't you reveal yourself?"

The presence in the air was silent for a moment.

"The rise of people dao is a major development. The holy beings of the demon race are beginning to understand the thread of thought...this is why you demons can reincarnate at the cost of their powers and longevity, and infiltrate the countries of men. This is to bring about the fall of humanity and prevent them from taking up the heaven's mandate."

"The previous mission involving the late emperor was a job well done. What about Wang Qiao this time?"

Beauty She replied with a serious look.

"For the sake of the demon race, I am willing to do anything. Wang Qiao is obsessed with wine and women. I think he will end up like the late emperor...it's funny how he isn't content with me alone and went to hook up with the empress...her race is well known for their cosmetics skills and even I am in awe of it!"

"Excellent, but he is still useful and you should keep him alive for now..."

The voice in thin air continued to speak.

"Now we should focus our efforts on goading Wang Qiao to usurp the throne. This would definitely trigger a huge civil war in Chu and lead to the destruction of humanity!!"

"Yes, I know!"

There was a shudder in the air, and the presence was gone. Beauty She sighed in relief.

These days, heaven's will had become more obvious.

The tribulations of the demon race had increased, and the thunderclaps from the skies had grown more powerful. A band of gods from people dao and some traitorous demons were in collusion. It was a difficult time.

The holy beings of the demon race had tried to read the fates and decided that it was unwise to go against them. Resistance was futile. Thus, the beings had come up with this plan to create internal conflict and destroy humanity from within.

When demons reincarnated, they could become human. However, this came at the cost of half their cultivation and they would lose their demonic magic. Their longevity would also suffer.

To achieve their goals and hide from their destiny, even the holy beings from the demon race had sacrificed much of their cultivation.

This was the true master plan of the demon race. Not only in Chu, but Qi and Liang as well!

Chapter 300: Map Delivery

Before a nation perishes, there were bound to be omens!

Beauty She twisted a piece of bamboo leaf and thought to herself, "The late emperor could have lived for ten plus years more but he got ruined by Sister Dowager. Now, the minister Wang Qiao has too become a puppet of us demons. It is not hard for an internal conflict to happen in Da Chu..."

However, she had some doubts.

After paying such a huge price, many amongst the demons were still too worried and were preparing to have two strings to one's bow.

Other than the current land, the demons were already searching for new islands and lands in the vast seas. They were preparing to sow a batch of seeds of the demons on these new lands to preserve their elemental energy.

One obvious plan and one clandestine plan, this was how the demons planned to strike back.

As for those demons who harmed humans, they were merely defeatists who have given up.

"The heavenly trend cannot be opposed!"

As Beauty She thought of how despondently the Saint said that with a tinge of savagery, she unknowingly felt her heart became heavier.

"My demon race has dominated for centuries! Used to and still is! The world will still be in our hands in the future!"

"Provoking massive outbreaks of chaos is to eradicate all the brilliant human minds, whenever a human rise up, we will suppress him. All in all, we must stir internal conflict amongst the humans and cause them to deplete their own elemental energy!"

Beauty She's expression turned cold and her eyes sparkled with a blue-green essence, "Mere humans, how dare they vie for the throne of master of all races!"

Moments later, she stood up and left, leaving behind two evenly dissected pieces of bamboo leaves that were slowly falling.

...

At the Pier in Black Lake District.

"Sir, latest intelligence from the capital!"

Xu Ting had only rested for less than half a day before he got interrupted. After reading a few lines of the letter, an uneasy look appeared on his face.

"Minister plans to rebel!"

Although it was a few simple words, it was utterly shocking for Xu Ting.

"Initially, I thought troubled times were ahead of us, looks like I am already in a troubled world now..."

Xu Ting gave a wry smile, with his intellect, he could already predict the chain of events that would happen thereafter.

"I thought I was fast enough, I guess I'm too slow now! Way too slow!"

Once Wang Qiao usurped the throne, he could make use of clearing rebels as a reason to eradicate anyone he deemed disloyal to him and the burden of righteousness could literally be thrown aside.

With how smoothly things went, Xu Ting felt as though he was in a dream.

"There's no problem with Golden Lake Prefecture, however, there is more than one prefecture around Golden Court Lake! For our family to rise, we still require more strength and we have to continue with capturing the pirates, but however, at a much faster pace!"

He gritted his teeth, "We have to continue with the plans of hiding troops in the lake, just that..."

Even though he had the support of his family, it was demanding to support thousands of people. Furthermore, the supply of troops ahead of him was never-ending.

Also, it was too conspicuous to have it carried out in Golden Lake Prefecture.

"I definitely have to look for a more suitable place to allocate the remaining big group of troops..., the leaders of the pirates and their family members definitely have to be placed ashore to control them with ease, while the rest do not have to and can be placed in the lake, in the lake..., in the lake...."

Xu Ting tugged his hair in frustration.

He finally understood that no matter how good a plan was, once executed, numerous unexpected issues would arise. Such situations tested the abilities of commanders.

"Small islands in the lake are too scattered! If they were so spread out, how could I rule them together?"

Xu Ting pondered.

In order to hide the troops in the lake, the most crucial problem to solve was where would the base be.

If they were to use those larger islands, it would be easily discovered by the fishermen who fish in the lake daily and also the numerous pirates in the area.

Unless...

"Sir!"

As he was deep in thoughts and scribbled on his desk, time past unknowingly and it was already dark outside.

A lovely maid carrying an oil lamp and meal boxes came forward.

"Luan'er?"

Xu Ting's gaze softened as he saw her, "What brought you over personally?"

"I was told to specially come take care of you since you worked so hard on eradicating the pirates!"

Li Luan lit up the room, opened the meal boxes and laid out the dishes. There was a plate of roast chicken, a plate of drool-inducing braised pork leg, two plates vegetables and one bottle of wine. They were all Xu Ting's favourites.



"Haha, Luan'er knows me the best!"

After receiving a pair of chopsticks from Li Luan, Xu Ting took a bite and sang praises immediately, "Your skills have improved... I better eat more today! Eh, how come there's no fish?"

On the shores of Golden Court Lake, fish was the most common dish.

Since he started eradicating the pirates, he seized countless dried fish. Hence, he asked curiously.

"Fish..."

Li Luan smiled unconvincingly, "Sir, you wanted fish?"

"No! I'm already sick of it..."

Xu Ting seemed like he remembered something and shook his hands.

In spite of that, Li Luan's face was still pale, it was as though dark clouds were looming over her.

As a thoughtful person, Xu Ting immediately realised the change in atmosphere. "Do you have something that is troubling you...?"

"Indeed!"

Li Luan pulled herself together. "Sir, do you still remember the person who visited your father?"

"I do!"

The plan to hide the troops in the lake was given by that young man. It left such a strong impression on him, how could he not remember?

After further investigations, that man was apparently Black Dragon General, a people dao deity. It was truly inconceivable, and naturally, the misunderstandings dispelled.

However, when Xu Ting heard Li Luan mentioned him again, he felt slightly uncomfortable. "What is the matter?"

Li Luan answered, "He met your father again and delivered this map!"

She took out a scroll and slowly unravelled it.

"Eh..."

Looking at the contents of the scroll, Xu Ting's eyes opened wide. "This is.... the water map?"

Having fought with the pirates for so many days, he studied the water map daily and naturally, he could recognise it, "Not only is this a simple water map, it encompassed the whole Golden Court Lake, such detail..."

Beside him, Li Luan silently heaved a sigh of relief as he saw the sparkle in Xu Ting's eyes.

The map had great utility, furthermore the fact that they could have it meant that Fang Yuan had the support of Golden Court Dragon God. Such rapid progress was shocking.

However, compared to Fang Yuan, Xu Ting was...

At that moment, Li Luan was gratified as he saw how contented Xu Ting was, she then added, "Sir, not only that... look!"

She lightly caressed the water map and a layer of vapour appeared. It was as though the map came to life.

Sparkling red dots appeared on the map; they could be seen clearly on the map moving.

"These are the pirates' hideouts, the brighter the red dot, the more powerful they are..." Li Luan explained.

"This is... a valuable treasure!"

Xu Ting stood up, his face beamed with joy.

With this map, it was akin to having the entire Golden Court Lake! With the help of the deity!

"Such valuable treasure could only be made by Golden Court Dragon God. Congratulations Sir!"

Li Luan then pointed at the map and continued, "There's a big island here, we can reclaim 5,000 acres of farmland there! There's also a deep-water harbour for us to build a pier. It is a great location to place our base in!"

"This place..."

Xu Ting was puzzled and looked carefully, there was indeed an island. He then asked, "Why hasn't it been discovered?"

"Because there are a lot of undercurrents and whirlpools nearby which makes it difficult for ships to traverse through. However, there's a safe route on the map..."

As Li Luan explained, in her heart, she was clear of something.

The island was actually inhabited by water dwellers.

Although many of the water dwellers lived inside the waters, on special occasions, they would come up on land to mate.

On the whole Golden Court Lake, there were a few of such islands which were all forbidden land for humans.

However, for Xu Ting's sake, one of the islands was cleared out.

In his heart, Xu Ting was even more in awe of the heavenly trend and Fang Yuan's power.

"Such a valuable treasure... what a valuable treasure..."

Xu Ting felt slightly uneasy as he held the scroll. However, his hands were still tight. He then enquired, "Then how did Black Dragon General got hold of it? Was he tasked by the Dragon God?"

"I do not know if he was tasked by the Dragon God or not. However, I am sure the Dragon God is on our side. We should provide some offerings!" Li Luan reminded.

"Hmm... that's true!"

Xu Ting nodded his head. This time, with the help of the deity, his wishes came true and it made him feel as though fate was in his favour.

...

Outside the prefecture, Fang Yuan suddenly smiled as he was looking at the scenery. "With the support of the Dragon God, Xu Ting's strength has multiplied... looks like there wouldn't be any more problems with uniting the pirates of Golden Court Lake."

In reality, it was a win-win situation.

With the Dragon God's backing, it was natural to return the favour by multitudes once they succeeded.

Most importantly, it was for Xu Ting reach that level of success where he could return the favour.

Fang Yuan opened the bottle gourd on his waist and drank the dragon palace's rare spiritual wine. As he drank and gazed at the sky, he felt awe-inspiring.

At that moment, as soon as Xu Ting got the information, Fang Yuan naturally got it too.

"A minister trying to usurp, what a coincidental timing! When the nations are in chaos, the demons would definitely interfere and add fuel to the oil, causing the humans to be in a perpetual internal conflict!"

Although he did not know that there were already demons causing chaos in the nation, he could easily guess it as it was obvious for them to attack their enemies at such timings.

As he saw Li Luan fell deeper and deeper, Fang Yuan had an even greater understanding and fear of this realm's heavenly trend.

"The heavens make a fool of people, such a phrase is indeed true... even if Li Luan wholeheartedly wanted to support the Dragon God, she would inevitably be deluded and the outcome would be unpredictable..."

"If that could happen to her, what about those demons who hated the humans to the core?"

Even though there were techniques to pry into heavenly secrets in this realm, most of the results were muddled or gave partial revelations that misled people.

"Some of the demons were too smart for their own good!"

"After all, the uprising of humans was the heavenly trend, there is no place for demons to rule!"

Fang Yuan chose not to be too close to the Xu family due to that exact reason.

Even for the delivery of the water map, Fang Yuan had made use of Li Luan as a middleman to let her benefit, just for the sake of maintaining distance from them. By maintaining a distance from the Xu family, if the situation were to turn awry in the future, he could cut ties with them quickly.

The heavenly trend was hard to predict! One could only tread as though he was on thin ice and be on guard against the unknown at all times!