

Es. Benefits 381

Chapter 381: The Tianqi King's army advances eastward_1

After the Chu Family's annulment letter was published in the newspaper, word of the annulment quickly spread throughout the North Country. However, the focus of the people was not on Chu Yuqin, the sacrificial pawn in the family alliance, but rather on the severance between the Chu Family and the Wang Family.

Of course, the lack of public attention on Chu Yuqin was a good thing for Lu Chen. The fewer people talked about it now, the less gossip there would be when Chu Yuqin married into the Prince's Mansion in the future. By then, people would only remember that Chu Yuqin was merely a sacrificial pawn used by the Chu Family for an alliance.

On yet another warm and breezy morning, Lu Chen rose from the Gentle Jade Fragrance of Yelv Nanyan, casting a glance at the beautiful woman he had embraced all night.

During this time, Lu Chen had primarily devoted his attention to the few women with martial skill like Yelv Nanyan. Mu Zixuan and the other two ordinary women had already born him two children each, so it was time for them to rest.

But speaking of which, it was exceedingly difficult for a martial artist to conceive. No matter how cooperative Yelv Nanyan was or what methods he tried, she just couldn't get pregnant.

Of course, it wasn't just a problem with Yelv Nanyan alone. All the women in the Prince's Mansion who had martial skill faced the same issue.

Lu Chen began to wonder if a woman's body structure changed after practicing martial arts, which was why it was so hard to conceive. He had checked them with his Rejuvenating Skill and everything seemed normal compared to ordinary women. Aside from well-developed meridians and their martial skill, there didn't seem to be any changes in their physical structure.

Seeing Lu Chen awake, Yelv Nanyan with her cheeks flushed said, "Prince, there is no morning court today, why don't we sleep in a bit longer?"

Gazing upon the bright expanse before him, Lu Chen truly did wish to sleep in, but he remembered he had to check on the construction of the new city today.

With that in mind, Lu Chen said with a smile, “Nanyan, there must be moderation in all things. We can’t be too indulgent.”

As he spoke, Lu Chen’s fingers gently glided over Yelv Nanyan’s soft body.

Blushing even more at Lu Chen’s words, Yelv Nanyan knew he was teasing her, yet thinking about what happened last night made her heart flutter.

Just then, the voices of maids discussing outside Paradise Spring Court could be heard, “Commander Bai, is the Prince in Paradise Spring Court? Commander Qin is looking for him on an urgent matter.”

“The Prince is still asleep, let him wait a while.”

“Commander Qin seems quite anxious; it must be something important.”

“Alright, I’ll call the Prince for you.”

Subsequently, Bai Qingqing arrived outside Yelv Nanyan’s bedroom, “Prince, Commander Qin is seeking you.”

Hearing this, Lu Chen directly responded, “Tell Commander Qin to wait for me in the study, I will be there shortly.”

“Yes, Prince.”

Lu Chen then rose from bed, and upon his getting up, Yelv Nanyan hurriedly did the same, helping Lu Chen to dress.

The clothing of this era required wrapping and tying of belts, and as someone like Lu Chen who had attendants, dressing was an easy affair. However, for ordinary people, dressing took some time.

Watching Yelv Nanyan tying his belt, Lu Chen thought to himself that it might be time to guide the clothing style of the people in the North Country.

He didn't mind wearing these ancient-style clothes; women looked like ethereal immortals in these long gowns, which he found very attractive. But Lu Chen thought that in some situations, such as in the army, the clothing of this time was too time-consuming to put on.

Lu Chen considered that he should find an opportunity to discuss with Mu Zixuan about setting up a garment factory, so in the future, the soldiers' clothes in the army could be changed into a style that could be donned in an instant.

When Yelv Nanyan finished tying his belt and noticed that Lu Chen was daydreaming, she asked with curiosity, "Prince, what's on your mind?"

Snapping back to reality at the sound of Yelv Nanyan's voice, Lu Chen said with a smile, "It's nothing. I just suddenly thought of something."

With that, Lu Chen cradled Yelv Nanyan's cheek, bent down, and then gave her a deep kiss.

It was Lu Chen's habit to kiss the woman who had shared his bed the previous night upon waking up in the morning. Though no one knew where this habit came from, his women always indulged him.

After their kiss, Lu Chen said with a smile, "I have to get going now. You should rest a bit longer."

As Lu Chen turned to leave, Yelv Nanyan promptly said, "Take care, Prince."

Soon after, Lu Chen appeared in the study, only to find Qin Yushan handling a bow and several arrows as soon as he arrived at the courtyard of the study.

"Qin Yushan, is that the Piercing Cloud Bow in your hands?"

Lu Chen had known about the court's commissioning of the Piercing Cloud Bow quite early. Under the guidance of Lu Shuyun, the Ministry of Works had crafted this special weapon, which reportedly had immense power and could easily kill any martial artist below the eighth rank.

Lu Chen had instructed the Brocade Guard to acquire a few sets of Piercing Cloud Bows for the North Country a long time ago, but the weapon was strictly controlled, and even Grandmaster Liang Zong couldn't get his hands on it.

Upon seeing Lu Chen, Qin Yushan immediately set the bow on the desk and bowed, saying, "Greetings, Prince!"

Lu Chen nodded and replied, "At ease."

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Qin Yushan continued, "The Prince guessed correctly; these are the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrows."

"Commander Liang sent a message back, saying that half a month ago, the Imperial Army and the rebels used the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrows for the first time during battle. The Brocade Guard took this opportunity to acquire a set."

Hearing Qin Yushan's words, Lu Chen immediately went to the desk, picked up the Piercing Cloud Bow, and examined it closely. He pulled the bowstring and found that it was very elastic.

However, the power of a bow and arrow is not determined solely by the quality of the bow, but also by the arrows. Lu Chen then picked up the Piercing Cloud Arrow from the desk and scraped its tip with his finger.

With just that scrape, Lu Chen's fingertip was cut, skinning a layer off.

Seeing this, Lu Chen frowned slightly.

What material was used to make the tip of these Piercing Cloud Arrows? How could they be so sharp? He was a Grandmaster, after all. Although he had not used his Spiritual Energy, a weapon would need to be quite sharp to cut the skin of someone at the Grandmaster level so easily.

Lu Chen then asked the system in his mind, “System, can you identify the materials used to make the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrows?”

[Detected: The materials used in constructing the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrows are extraterrestrial and do not belong to this world.]

Lu Chen was left feeling speechless; this was basically the same as not saying anything at all. In his heart, he had already guessed that the materials for making the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrows were unlikely to be from this world.

At this time, Lu Chen said to Qin Yushan, “Have you tried the power of the Piercing Cloud Bow?”

Qin Yushan replied, “After receiving these two items, I came straight to the North Prince Mansion and haven’t had the chance to test the power of the Piercing Cloud Bow yet.”

Lu Chen then took the Piercing Cloud Bow and Piercing Cloud Arrows and said, “Come, let’s go to the backyard and test it.”

They then proceeded to the Training Ground in the backyard of the Prince’s Mansion, where Lu Chen had the servants prepare several sets of armor worn by the Black Cavalry and lined those sets up in a row.

Next, Lu Chen drew the bow and released an arrow. With the strength of a Grandmaster like Lu Chen, he easily drew the Piercing Cloud Bow. The moment he released his hold, the Piercing Cloud Arrow shot out with a boom.

The next moment, the line of armor was completely perforated by the Piercing Cloud Arrow. Fortunately, Lu Chen had anticipated the arrow’s power might be substantial and had placed steel plates behind the armor; otherwise, the Piercing Cloud Arrow would have pierced through the courtyard wall and could have injured people outside.

At this time, Lu Chen’s face became serious. There was a sonic boom the moment he released the arrow. Could the rebound force of the Piercing Cloud Bow’s string actually be greater than the kinetic energy produced by gunpowder explosion?

Could it be that exaggerated?

Considering himself a Grandmaster and knowing that even using a regular bow and arrow, the force would be huge. He then handed the Piercing Cloud Bow to Qin Yushan beside him, “Commander Qin, you try to see how powerful this Piercing Cloud Bow is.”

Qin Yushan immediately understood Lu Chen’s intention, took the bow and arrow, picked up a Piercing Cloud Arrow, and shot towards the distant armor.

Lu Chen found that Qin Yushan did not draw the bowstring to its fullest, indicating that even a Grandmaster could not fully draw it, which meant that the bow was obviously not for ordinary people’s use.

It seemed that a minimum strength equivalent to a Fifth Grade Martial Artist was needed to use the Piercing Cloud Bow.

At this moment, Qin Yushan released the string, and the Piercing Cloud Arrow flew out with a whistle, but this time, the power of the Piercing Cloud Arrow was not as great—it only pierced through six sets of armor.

After seeing this, Lu Chen thought for a moment, then said to a nearby Seventh Grade Prince’s Mansion guard, “You try it.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

The guard immediately took the Piercing Cloud Bow from Qin Yushan’s hand, picked the last arrow, and aimed at the sets of armor.

By this time, Lu Chen noticed that the Seventh Grade guard was clearly struggling to draw the bow. It matched his expectations: the Piercing Cloud Bow was a weapon crafted for Martial Artists, and ordinary people or low-tier Martial Artists couldn’t handle it.

As the Prince’s Mansion guard released the string, the Piercing Cloud Arrow flew out again with a whistle but this time pierced through only three sets of armor.

In his mind, Lu Chen thought that if that force had these powerful bows and arrows, they would no longer need to fear even the Heavy Cavalry.

The armor of the Heavy Cavalry was perforated in an instant. Before the Heavy Cavalry could engage at close range, they would turn into hedgehogs.

Lu Chen felt somewhat relieved that the North Country had entered the Age of Firearms, meaning they wouldn't need to fear facing such Piercing Cloud Bows. In battle, if they encountered an insurmountable foe, they could simply cover the area with heavy firepower.

The dynamics of future warfare were bound to change, even in a world with Grandmasters. No matter how formidable a Grandmaster, they could only deal with so many enemies, and the skill within a Grandmaster's body could be depleted.

Against the continuous bombardment of cannons, even the most formidable Grandmasters couldn't withstand it, unless they were of the Heavenly Human Realm. However, currently, the major dynasties hardly made public appearances, let alone Celestial-level fighters.

At this time, Lu Chen asked, "Commander Qin, what is the current situation of the battle in the South?"

Qin Yushan replied, "Currently, the Imperial Army has the upper hand, and the Southern rebels are retreating steadily. This is also why the Southern rebels resorted to using the Piercing Cloud Bow."

Lu Chen said, "I didn't expect that after the battle with Great Wu, the combat effectiveness of the Imperial Army is still so formidable."

Qin Yushan added, "Perhaps it's not that the Imperial Army is too strong but rather the Southern rebels are too weak. Now, the Southern rebels are fighting as individual families, each with its own territory, and they are unhappy with other family forces entering their lands. Under such circumstances, it's difficult for them to be a formidable force."

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Lu Chen said, "That is true, I have overestimated those Aristocratic Families."

Just then, a guard from the Prince's Mansion entered the rear courtyard and said, "Prince, Commander Wu of the Brocade Guard requests an audience."

Lu Chen said, "Let him come directly to the rear courtyard."

"Yes."

Soon, Wu Yuan appeared in the rear courtyard. After glancing at Qin Yushan, he said to Lu Chen, "Greetings, Prince!"

Lu Chen asked, "What's the matter?"

Wu Yuan took out a piece of paper intelligence from his sleeve and said, "We've just received news that people from the South's Aristocratic Families have been spotted in Qi Country. It seems that the Southern rebels are trying to win over the Qi Prince to lead troops south."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen, while taking the intelligence from Wu Yuan's hand, asked, "How did the Qi Prince treat those people?"

Wu Yuan replied, "The Qi Prince has arranged for them to stay at the best tavern in Qi Country and has met with them several times. As for the Qi Prince's attitude, the Brocade Guard has not been able to find out yet."

Lu Chen opened the intelligence in his hand and skimmed through it quickly.

Lu Chen did not believe that the Qi Prince would rebel along with the South's Aristocratic Families. Although the Seigniors of Great Xia had long been dissatisfied with the royal family, the current power of the Seigniors was no longer what it used to be.

If they rashly decided to rebel, not only would their current wealth and honor be lost, but they also risked losing their lives.

However, this was not certain; power is so tempting that no one could be sure whether the Qi Prince harbored imperial dreams.

But if the Qi Prince were to rebel, he would surely send envoys to the North Country. The North Country, bordering Qi Country, had now become an entity that Qi Country could not ignore.

Most of Qi Country's troops were positioned in the north, clearly to guard against the North Country. If Qi Country wanted to transfer troops south to attack the Capital city, the Qi Prince would have to consider the possibility of the North Country marching south to support the Emperor.

Just as Lu Chen was about to return to the study, a guard from the Prince's Mansion brought in a soldier bearing a red flag into the Prince's Mansion.

The Red Ribbon Messenger, upon seeing Lu Chen, immediately knelt halfway and handed over the intelligence contained in a bamboo tube, "Prince, the Barbarian Tribe's Tianqi King is leading an army of four hundred thousand troops eastward, and some of the vanguard Cavalry has already arrived in the North Land. In less than half a month, they'll reach the North Country!"

Hearing this, the faces of everyone in the courtyard instantly turned stern. Lu Chen quickly took the bamboo tube from the Red Ribbon Messenger and removed the intelligence, then said to Wu Yuan and Qin Yushan, "Commander Qin, Commander Wu, go immediately to the Hall of Political Affairs and summon the Military Generals from Yan County."

Both men said in unison, "As you command, Prince!"

Afterward, they promptly left the North Prince Mansion, while Lu Chen stood in place, seriously reading the battle report from the front.

After finishing the intelligence from the North Land, something suddenly occurred to Lu Chen.

This so-called Tianqi King had also attacked the Da Yue Dynasty not long ago, but was defeated by the Empress of the Da Yue Dynasty.

Unexpectedly, after being repelled by the Da Yue Dynasty, they didn't settle down; instead, they moved to the North Land, and there was even a possibility they were planning to attack the North Country.

With an army of four hundred thousand marching to the North Land, Lu Chen didn't believe they were just there for sightseeing; it's more likely that the Tianqi King felt humiliated by the defeat in the Da Yue Dynasty and wanted to regain confidence from Great Xia.

Moreover, the Barbarian Tribe has always had a penchant for raiding the south. Having not plundered much of what they needed from the Da Yue Dynasty, they naturally would look to raid other places, and Lu Chen assessed that there was a high probability that the Tianqi King was targeting the North Country.

Recently, from intelligence gathered by Wang Qingci, he knew that since the Da Yue Dynasty had defeated the alliance of the Barbarian Tribes, they had been on guard against the Barbarian Tribes advancing from the northwest. He hadn't expected them to actually come, and with an army of four hundred thousand, no less.

Their ability to gather such precise intelligence was all thanks to those Barbarian Tribes living in the North Land; it seemed his initial decision to incorporate the North Land Barbarians into the North Country proved to be very useful.

After reading the urgent intelligence in his hands, Lu Chen immediately went to the Hall of Political Affairs to await the arrival of the Military Generals.

Meanwhile, not far from North Prince Mansion, some people were watching the entrance of the mansion closely.

These people belonged to the Shadow Guard. Wang Jiantao had been looking for an opportunity to assassinate Bai Qingqing recently, but he dared not directly infiltrate the North Prince Mansion because he was wary of Zhuge Zhongguang.

Though he practiced a Cultivation Technique that allowed him to conceal his presence, he was not confident that he could escape the detection of Grandmaster Zhuge Zhongguang after eliminating Bai Qingqing.

If it were an ordinary Grandmaster, perhaps he might have attempted it, for an average Grandmaster might not detect him in his stealth state. But Zhuge Zhongguang was a Grandmaster on the verge of breaking through to the Heavenly Human Realm.

While killing Bai Qingqing might be easy, after doing so, Wang Jiantao was likely to end up staying in the North Prince Mansion permanently.

Wang Jiantao thought that he was only there to eliminate a traitor, not to be a suicide attacker, so there was no need to risk his life sneaking into North Prince Mansion for an assassination.

Just as Wang Jiantao was staring blankly at the entrance of North Prince Mansion, one of his Shadow Guards whispered a reminder, "Leader, look quickly, two Grandmasters have arrived at the entrance of the North Prince Mansion!"

Upon hearing this, Wang Jiantao's gaze instantly fixated on the two people at the entrance of the mansion.

Those two men rode black horses, cloaked in thick armor, and exuded the aura of Grandmasters from their beings.

Wang Jiantao frowned slightly, sensing that these two Grandmasters were not ordinary in strength; in fact, they seemed even stronger than the Grandmaster who had just left the mansion, which made him feel a tremor in his heart upon seeing them.

He himself was someone who did the Emperor's dirty work, and many had died by his hand, but the murderous aura he possessed was nothing compared to those two, who seemed as though they had emerged from the underworld, their killing intent so intense that he felt uncomfortable even at this distance.

At that moment, Xuanyuan Chen dismounted at the Prince's Mansion entrance and then turned to look in a certain direction, lingering without entering the mansion.

Seeing this, Wenren Lie, who had already stepped through the gates, asked, "What's the matter?"

Xuanyuan Chen then turned and said, "I just felt as if someone was watching us."

Wenren Lie said indifferently, "It's normal. Every day, many petty thieves keep an eye on the North Prince Mansion."

The North Country was no longer what it used to be, and the North Prince was no longer the North Prince of old, so it was common for many foreign spies to monitor every move of the North Prince; there was nothing new about it.

As Xuanyuan Chen walked toward the mansion, he said, "True, let the Brocade Guard deal with those petty thieves. The main matter is what's urgent."

Chapter 384: Luring out the Shadow Guard_1

Only after seeing the two Grandmasters dressed in black armour enter the North Prince Mansion did Wang Jiantao breathe a sigh of relief; his heart had almost leapt into his throat just moments before.

One of the Grandmasters had glanced in their direction, and they had felt the threat of death, sending a chill down their spines.

In the North Country, aside from Zhuge Zhongguang, the Great Grandmaster, there was actually another terrifyingly powerful Grandmaster-level military general!

Just as Wang Jiantao was recovering, a Shadow Guard beside him exclaimed, “Another Grandmaster has appeared!”

Upon hearing this, Wang Jiantao immediately looked toward the entrance of the North Prince Mansion. At that moment, a robust man in plain clothes dismounted his horse, handed it over to a servant of the Prince’s Mansion, and then proceeded to enter.

Although the aura of the robust man wasn’t as terrifying as that of the two men in armor, the power emanating from him made it clear that he too was a Master Level powerhouse.

Shadow Guards have been trained from a young age and often carry out various tasks in secret; they were generally able to easily gauge the approximate realm of a martial artist.

At this moment, Wang Jiantao furrowed his brows in concern. The North Prince Mansion actually housed four Grandmasters, something they hadn’t anticipated at the start.

While Wang Jiantao was pondering how to report this information about the North Country to the Sum Emperor, he suddenly saw yet another Grandmaster appear at the entrance.

Wang Jiantao’s eyes suddenly widened in disbelief as he stared at the man at the entrance of the North Prince Mansion.

Was that...

Mu Changtian???

How was this possible!

Wasn't Mu Changtian killed during his exile in the northwest?

How could he appear in this place?

Wang Jiantao's expression immediately darkened, certain he had not mistaken the man; the individual entering the North Prince Mansion was indeed Mu Changtian himself.

Counting Mu Changtian, there were now five Grandmasters in the North Prince Mansion!

The presence of five Grandmasters wasn't the important issue; what mattered was that the man the Sum Emperor wanted to eliminate had not died and had even appeared in the North Country.

The North Prince most certainly knew who Mu Changtian was, yet he dared to harbor him. And Mu Changtian's presence here also meant that many of the soldiers who had died in the inn previously were likely killed by the North Prince's own men.

Was the North Prince planning a rebellion?

At a time when the Imperial Army was critical in suppressing the rebellion, if the North Prince led the North Country's army south to coordinate with the rebels, then the Capital City would be in jeopardy.

With this in mind, Wang Jiantao immediately said, "Let's leave!"

Everything they had seen today had to be swiftly reported to the Sum Emperor so that he could prepare for what was to come.

After Wang Jiantao and his group left, Wei Siyuan arrived at the North Prince Mansion. If Wang Jiantao had seen another Grandmaster arriving, he would have felt even more unsettled.

About half an hour later, except for the military generals defending Yan County, all the important military generals of the North Country had arrived at the North Prince Mansion.

Inside the Hall of Political Affairs.

Lu Chen sat in the prince's chair, with Zhuge Zhongguang by his side. Seeing that most people had arrived, Lu Chen spoke directly, "I just received urgent military intelligence from the North Land. The Tianqi King has led an army of four hundred thousand Barbarian Tribe troops eastward, seemingly with the intent to attack the North Country."

Hearing this, everyone in the hall looked at each other. The military generals of the North Country were not like the civil officials; they were more composed.

Although the news sounded very urgent, none of the military generals showed signs of panic on their faces. On the contrary, they were somewhat eager to head north.

Ever since the North Country equipped its troops with firearms, they had been continuously training in their use. Now, their proficiency with firearms had reached an exquisite level, and they had even developed several tactics related to the use of firearms.

Though war meant death, these military generals had a strong desire for battle. And not only the generals, but under the North Country's existing military merit system, many soldiers were also longing for a fight as it was the only way for them to acquire substantial military merit.

At this time, Mu Changtian spoke up, "Prince, the North Country's troops are already prepared to fight against our enemies. They are just waiting for your command to head north without hesitation."

Lu Chen said, "An army is maintained for a thousand days to be used for a moment. The North Country's troops have trained for so long; it's time to put them to the test."

Wei Siyuan then asked, "Prince, do we need to call over the hundred thousand troops from Wind Cloud Island? They should have already arrived in the North Country."

Lu Chen replied, "Not for now. Let them stay stationed by the sea. I have already instructed people to build a military base there."

Although the Barbarian Tribe had four hundred thousand troops, Lu Chen did not believe that they would pose a significant challenge to the North Country's army.

For the time being, there was no need for the hundred thousand soldiers from Wind Cloud Island, as they had not learned how to use firearms or undergone the relevant training. Bringing them over now would not be of much use.

Just then, Zhuge Zhongguang spoke up, "Prince, I suggest we station the soldiers from Wind Cloud Island in Yan County."

"Once the North Country's army moves north, our rear will be exposed. If Great Yue or Qi Country has other designs, the North Country might face threats from both front and back, and the hundred thousand troops could have a deterrent effect."

Hearing Zhuge Zhongguang's suggestion, Lu Chen realized he had just received news of the aristocratic families from the South visiting the Qi Prince, and he had forgotten about Qi Prince.

If the North Country's army moved north, Qi Prince might see it as an opportunity. It was entirely possible that Qi Prince could mobilize troops within Qi Country to head south and attack the Capital City.

Chapter 385: Luring out the Shadow Guard_2

Indeed, part of the two hundred thousand troops that the Great Yue Dynasty had recently moved away had returned to the border regions adjacent to the North Country and stationed there. It seemed that the Great Yue Empress was always on guard against the North Country. There was no telling whether the Great Yue Dynasty might take advantage of the North Country's weakened rear and suddenly send troops to attack. It was truly uncertain.

Thinking of this, Lu Chen said, "The Great Scholar makes sense. General Wei, if those one hundred thousand soldiers have already reached the coast, have them rush to Yan County as quickly as possible."

Wei Siyuan replied, "Yes, Prince."

Xuanyuan Chen then asked, “Prince, how many Black Cavalry do you plan to send northward?”

After pondering for a while, Lu Chen knew that inside the Great Sum’s territory, the Piercing Cloud Bow had appeared, capable of threatening Heavy Cavalry. But this time, they were not dealing with the royal court or the rebel forces from the south; their enemies were the Barbarian Tribes coming from the northwest, who most likely did not possess any weapons to counter Heavy Cavalry.

Before the widespread availability of such a powerful cold weapon as the Piercing Cloud Bow, Heavy Cavalry could still play a powerful role in battle.

With this thought, Lu Chen said, “Let’s send forty thousand Black Cavalry northward and leave ten thousand to defend Yan County.”

Having said that, Lu Chen looked towards Xiao Pengthian.

“General Xiao, might you have heard of the Tianqi King from the Barbarian Tribe?”

Xiao Pengthian answered, “Back to you, Prince, I have heard of him. During the old Sky Wolf King’s time, Tianqi King had sent people to the Sky Wolf King’s tribe, attempting to recruit the tribe under his command. I’ve also heard that Tianqi King had sent envoys to the North Fre King’s tribe, but ultimately both our tribes refused.”

“Rumor has it that Tianqi King has reached the Grandmaster Realm, and his ambition is vast. He believes he is favored by the Barbarian God, which is why he changed his title to Tianqi King. He also wishes to unite all the Barbarian Tribes and become the Barbarian Emperor.”

Hearing Xiao Pengthian’s words, Lu Chen’s eyebrows furrowed slightly.

Grandmaster?

This was the first time North Country faced an enemy Grandmaster entering the battlefield.

In this case, they too must bring a Grandmaster with them.

Although Grandmasters might not necessarily withstand the barrage of cannons, they could still disrupt their formations and destroy their cannons.

Should a Grandmaster get close to their cannon-armed positions, their cannons were likely to be destroyed by the Grandmaster.

Think of this, Lu Chen said, “For this battle against the Tianqi King’s army, I shall personally lead the troops northward.”

Upon hearing this, Zhuge Zhongguang said, “Prince, this is not appropriate. You are a Prince of the North Country, tasked with managing the entire North Country. You should not appear on the battlefield.”

Lu Chen is the Son of Destiny; how could he be in a dangerous place? If something were to happen to him, how could he continue to lead this world?

From Zhuge Zhongguang’s personal perspective, he definitely did not want to see Lu Chen head to the battlefield.

Lu Chen said, “The firearms are also considered my invention, and this will be the soldiers’ first time using firearms in combat. How could I not go to the front lines to guide the soldiers in using them?”

“This matter is not up for discussion, this Prince must go to the front.”

Seeing Lu Chen’s resolute attitude, Zhuge Zhongguang had no choice but to say no more. “If the Prince insists on going, this old minister will also accompany the Prince northward.”

Lu Chen immediately said, “That’s not an option. The North Prince Mansion and Yan County still need the Great Scholar for protection. Once I leave Yan County, it is very likely that some petty thieves will target the North Prince Mansion.”

What Lu Chen was most concerned about were his wives and concubines. Although the North Prince Mansion already had the Grandmaster Chen Wanrong, Lu Chen still felt it was not entirely safe.

Zhuge Zhongguang said, “Prince...”

Seeing Zhuge Zhongguang was about to say something more, Lu Chen suddenly realized that this would be his first confrontation with a Grandmaster, and he was uncertain if he was a match for that Grandmaster. Therefore, to be safe, it wouldn’t hurt to be overprepared.

Since Zhuge Zhongguang was set on protecting the North Prince Mansion and could not be moved, then Chen Wanrong could certainly join him in heading north.

As things currently stood, Mysterious Moon Palace was unlikely to come to Yan County to take Chen Wanrong away.

With that in mind, Lu Chen said, “The Great Scholar knows I’m worried about my safety. How about this, I will bring a Grandmaster with me, that way there is no need for the Great Scholar to worry.”

Zhuge Zhongguang said, “Prince, to my knowledge, doesn’t the North Country lack a third Grandmaster?”

Lu Chen said with a smile, “Why not? It’s just that you, Great Scholar, are not aware. The Palace Master of Mysterious Moon Palace is a Grandmaster, having only recently made the breakthrough.”

“I am a Grandmaster myself, and with another Grandmaster, that should surely set the Great Scholar’s mind at ease, right?”

Zhuge Zhongguang said, “If another Grandmaster accompanies the Prince northward, then this old minister will be relieved.”

At that moment, Mu Changtian spoke from the side, “Prince, should we inform the common people about this northern expedition?”

“After all, the enemy has four hundred thousand troops. Although the North Country has already defeated two Barbarian Tribes, if the common people learn of this, it would still likely cause panic.”

Lu Chen calmly said, “This time as we march north, we should indeed let the common people know. Not only should they be aware, but we should also continuously promote it, making the

common people of the North Country understand that North Country's soldiers are heading north to battle the Barbarian Tribes in order to protect them."

Lu Chen's idea was simple: if the common people didn't know that the North Country's soldiers were risking their lives against the Barbarian Tribes for their safety, how could they possibly respect those soldiers?

As for causing panic, Lu Chen was not overly concerned. Certainly, some civilians would be afraid, fear being a common human emotion, but the North Country had frequently faced raids from Barbarian Tribes in the past, and many civilians were already accustomed to it.

Chapter 386: Luring out the Shadow Guard_3

Therefore, letting the common people know that the Barbarian Tribe was moving south, in Lu Chen's view, would not bring too much trouble to the North Country, even if the common people felt panic.

Upon hearing Lu Chen's words, Mu Changtian thought for a moment and felt there was some truth to them.

At this time, Lu Chen unfolded the map in front of him, then said, "Everyone gather around, let's not discuss the trivial matters for now. The Tianqi King's army will soon arrive in the North Country, we must make haste to deploy."

Hearing Lu Chen's words, the military generals in the great hall immediately gathered around the table in front of the throne to discuss the deployment strategy.

After the military meeting ended, Lu Chen allowed Mu Changtian and the others to return to the military camp and gave the soldiers a day off to say goodbye to their families.

Although war was imminent, it was still necessary to allow the soldiers a chance to say goodbye to their families, lest the soldiers die on the battlefield and their families remain unaware of where they went, or if they would return.

In addition to allowing the soldiers to go home and bid farewell to their families, Lu Chen also ordered Qin Yushan to clean up the spies in Yan County; they were soon to move northward, and

without Lu Chen in Yan County, those spies might cause trouble, so it was better to have the Brocade Guard clean up beforehand.

Speaking of cleaning up spies from other countries, Lu Chen thought of what Bai Qingqing mentioned some time ago, that the Sum Emperor had already sent people to eliminate the traitors among the Shadow Guards, and it was very likely that those who wanted to assassinate Bai Qingqing were still in Yan County.

Lu Chen planned before moving north to lure out these Shadow Guards and then eliminate them. If he let them be in Yan County, once he left, they would definitely make a move against Bai Qingqing. This time he was heading north without intending to take Bai Qingqing with him, and with the Sum Emperor's Shadow Guards in Yan County, Lu Chen was very concerned, fearing that these guards would create trouble.

Having decided on the next actions, the entire Yan County became busy.

In the morning, Lu Chen held the military meeting, and by the afternoon, all the common people in Yan County had learned of the approaching southward invasion of the Barbarian Tribe's four hundred thousand strong army.

Of course, this news was released by the newspapers at Lu Chen's behest, as he intended to make extensive propaganda for this war.

Upon hearing that the Barbarian Tribe was moving south again, the people of Yan County became panicked in an instant, some even considering running away. However, more people chose to trust the North Prince, believing in the North Prince's army.

The victories in the previous two wars had given the common people of North Country great confidence. Although there were rumors that the North Country's Heavy Cavalry was annihilated during the battle with the North Fre King, the soldiers of North Country still managed to defend Tianguang City and prevented the North Fre King from moving south.

For most living in the North Country, as long as the soldiers held the north, preventing the Barbarian Cavalry from moving south was considered a great victory.

At this very moment.

Inside a private room of a certain tavern.

Wang Jiantao looked at the newspaper in his hand, pondering for a long time.

He now understood why there had been so many Grandmasters going to the North Prince Mansion that morning; they were probably discussing how to resist the southward invasion of the Tianqi King's four hundred thousand army.

At that moment, a Shadow Guard said, "Commander, subordinates have learned that soon the North Prince will be heading to the military camp on the eastern side of Yan County for an inspection, and Bai Qingqing had always liked to follow the North Prince closely. She'll probably accompany him this time too, which presents a great opportunity for us."

Wang Jiantao thought for a while and remained silent.

Zhuge Zhongguang is a Grandmaster, and someone at the level of Grandmaster should not be following a prince around everywhere. If Bai Qingqing indeed accompanies the North Prince to the military camp and Lu Chen doesn't have many high-level martial artists with him, then it would certainly be an excellent opportunity for them to eliminate Bai Qingqing, and they might even directly make a move against the North Prince.

Of course, dealing with the North Prince was not something he should undertake now; without a clear order from the Sum Emperor, even though he knew that the North Prince was now a major concern for the Sum Emperor, as a commander of the Shadow Guard, he could not act against Lu Chen.

After a brief pause, Wang Jiantao picked up the conical bamboo hat on the table, "Set out!"

...

At this time, Wang Jiantao and the Shadow Guards were unaware that the news of Lu Chen inspecting the military camp was deliberately released by Lu Chen. His plan was to draw out those Shadow Guards who wanted to kill Bai Qingqing, and then directly deal with them, preventing them from causing trouble for Bai Qingqing after his departure, or from creating chaos in Yan County.

Around four in the afternoon, Lu Chen sat in a carriage while Bai Qingqing rode a horse, casually taking a few guards and heading out of the city towards the eastern military camp.

The military camp on the eastern side of Yan County was some distance away from the city, and part of the journey went through a forest.

Forests provided an excellent location for assassins like the Shadow Guards to strike.

Lu Chen was convinced that the Shadow Guards would make a move.

Before long, Lu Chen's carriage entered the area where the Shadow Guards were ambushed. Seeing that Lu Chen had only brought Bai Qingqing and a few fifth-level guards, Wang Jiantao found it strange.

Logically, Bai Qingqing should have already noticed that the Sum Emperor was eliminating the Shadow Guards in North Country, and she was one of the targets. So why did Bai Qingqing still dare to let Lu Chen bring just a few skilled men along?

Could it be that Bai Qingqing didn't tell Lu Chen about the Shadow Guard situation? Or perhaps Bai Qingqing didn't take the Shadow Guards seriously from the start, thinking no one would dare to attack her?

After all, she was a Grandmaster, and killing her was indeed not an easy matter; her confidence was normal.

Seeing that Wang Jiantao had yet to give an order, a Shadow Guard next to him said, "Commander, if we let them pass a bit further, they will see North Country's military camp, and it will be too late for us to make a move!"

Hearing this, Wang Jiantao asked a Shadow Guard who had been trailing the carriage from the Prince's Mansion, "Xiao Qi, are you certain that only the North Prince is inside the carriage?"

"I am certain, I saw the North Prince get on the carriage with my own eyes," replied the subordinate.

Wang Jiantao thought to himself that if it were only the North Prince, plus a few guards, indeed there was nothing to fear.

Although the North Prince was rumored to be a martial artist, his age was evident and he could not be overly strong no matter what.

With that in mind, Wang Jiantao no longer hesitated.

“Attack!”

Chapter 387: The Woman of This Prince_1

Wang Jiantao and his companions weren't there to assassinate Lu Chen, so they didn't start with a surprise arrow attack on Lu Chen's carriage. Instead, they stepped out in the open and surrounded both the carriage and the guards from the Prince's Mansion.

At that moment, Bai Qingqing said expressionlessly, “Who are you?”

Wang Jiantao and the others were wearing cloaks and their faces were covered with cloth, concealing their full visage. However, Bai Qingqing obviously knew who they were and her question was purely rhetorical.

Having grown up in the training grounds of the Shadow Guards, Bai Qingqing was, after all, a disciple of Wang Jiantao. She was very familiar with the martial aura Wang Jiantao exuded. The moment Wang Jiantao made his appearance, she knew it was him.

Wang Jiantao then said coldly, “Commander Bai has been quite busy lately, so busy that you've forgotten your own duties.”

After hearing the commotion outside, Lu Chen lifted the curtain of the carriage and, with a smile, asked Bai Qingqing beside the carriage, “Bai, do you recognize them?”

Without any expression, Bai Qingqing answered, “Your Highness, I do not!”

Upon hearing Bai Qingqing's response, Wang Jiantao scoffed, "Commander Bai is indeed forgetful of old acquaintances, forgetting even your own foster father."

"Since you've chosen to betray the organization, I believe you are already prepared for death."

In the midst of speaking, Wang Jiantao drew the blade from his waist.

Without hesitation, Bai Qingqing also drew her sword and then said to the guards of the Prince's Mansion, "Protect the Prince!"

As her words fell, Bai Qingqing charged towards Wang Jiantao who was not far off.

Besides Wang Jiantao, the other Shadow Guards did not join the fray, continuing to encircle the guards and the carriage without any intention of attacking Lu Chen.

Their presence was solely to eliminate Bai Qingqing, the traitor. Although the North Prince was also a thorn in the Sum Emperor's side, the Emperor hadn't ordered them to act against the North Prince, so they had no choice but to separate him from Bai Qingqing.

Meanwhile, Lu Chen stepped out from the carriage and sat beside the coachman's seat, simply watching the fight between Bai Qingqing and Wang Jiantao unfold.

Having listened to the conversation between Wang Jiantao and Bai Qingqing, Lu Chen realized that this Wang Jiantao was likely the one who trained Bai Qingqing into a Shadow Guard. To cultivate a Shadow Guard devoid of emotions, Bai Qingqing must have endured much suffering as a child. Thus, Lu Chen wanted to give Bai Qingqing a chance to seek her own vengeance.

If Bai Qingqing truly was no match for Wang Jiantao, Lu Chen would intervene. As a Grandmaster, he was acutely aware of every subtle movement in his vicinity. Should Bai Qingqing be in danger, he could save her in an instant.

Just as Bai Qingqing was about to reach Wang Jiantao, he pushed off with his legs with ease, leaping into the air and kicking off a nearby tree, flying straight towards Bai Qingqing with a slash that sent an invisible wave of sword Qi her way.

Mounted on her horse, Bai Qingqing remained unflustered. She leaped off and swung her sword at Wang Jiantao, her Sword Qi colliding with his, slicing the surrounding trees in half as ripples of force passed through them.

From the initial exchange, Wang Jiantao sensed something was amiss; he realized Bai Qingqing's strength might have surpassed his own.

How could that be?

When Bai Qingqing left the Capital city, she had only recently broken through to the Master Realm. Her strength shouldn't exceed his.

From their brief clash, Wang Jiantao could clearly feel that Bai Qingqing's realm had reached the pinnacle of the Master Realm, markedly different from an ordinary Master.

Wang Jiantao landed from the air, then chuckled, "It seems that Commander Bai's strength has improved rapidly during your time in the North Prince Mansion. I wonder what benefits the North Prince gave you to provoke your betrayal."

Bai Qingqing ignored Wang Jiantao's words and turned into a blur as she rushed straight at him. The next moment, a cold glint of her sword aimed directly for Wang Jiantao's neck.

However, Wang Jiantao did not panic; a smirk briefly crossed his lips, and in the blink of an eye, his figure simply vanished from the spot.

Seeing this spectacle, even Lu Chen was momentarily surprised. His gaze had been fixed on Wang Jiantao and Bai Qingqing, and he hadn't expected Wang Jiantao to disappear so swiftly under his watch.

But after all, as a Grandmaster, it wasn't long before Lu Chen sensed Wang Jiantao's presence again; by then, Wang Jiantao had already reappeared behind Bai Qingqing.

A blade of light swept towards Bai Qingqing's waist, and just as she seemed bound to be struck, and Lu Chen was about to intervene, Bai Qingqing reacted, arching her body back to gracefully dodge Wang Jiantao's blade.

Then Bai Qingqing counterattacked with a sword strike, but again, it inflicted no damage as Wang Jiantao's figure disappeared once more.

Wang Jiantao continuously attacked with elusive movements, putting Bai Qingqing on the defensive. Lu Chen recognized that Wang Jiantao's techniques were incredibly tricky, bearing a striking resemblance to Shadow Shifting, allowing him to easily evade enemy strikes.

Even though Bai Qingqing was on the back foot, she was, after all, an Extreme Realm Master and her reaction speed was sufficiently fast. It was not easy for Wang Jiantao to catch her off guard, as she was able to anticipate each attack.

At that moment, Lu Chen, eyeing the Cloaked Shadow Guards who were still surrounding his guards and carriage, said teasingly, "Aren't you all going to join the fight? What are you doing encircling my carriage?"

Chapter 388: The Woman of This Prince_2

Hearing this, the Shadow Guards did not speak; they remained standing in place, surrounding the Prince's Mansion's carriage.

It was at that moment Wang Jiantao realized that no matter how he attacked, he couldn't kill Bai Qingqing—she always managed to react in time.

Since Wang Jiantao had taught Bai Qingqing's swordsmanship himself and was extremely familiar with it, he originally thought he could easily eliminate Bai Qingqing, the traitor. However, to his surprise, she had achieved a breakthrough to the Master Realm in such a short period of time, which put him at a disadvantage.

No, he couldn't drag this out any longer; if he delayed until the Grandmaster from the Prince's Mansion arrived, it was very likely that his mission would fail.

He was one of the Sum Emperor's few remaining Shadow Guard leaders who had never failed, because all those who had failed were already dealt with by the Sum Emperor.

If he didn't complete the mission this time, death was the only thing waiting for him.

At that moment, Wang Jiantao took a pill from his sleeve and stuffed it into his mouth.

Seeing Wang Jiantao take the pill, Bai Qingqing's brows raised slightly.

As the Deputy Commander of the Shadow Guards, Bai Qingqing also knew that the Shadow Guards had a kind of Blood Burst Pill. Once this pill was consumed, a Martial Artist's skill would greatly increase in a short period, similar to entering the Blood Burning State.

However, the side effects of using the Blood Burst Pill were very small, taking only a month or two to recover.

Clearly, what Wang Jiantao had just used was the Blood Burst Pill.

The next moment, Wang Jiantao's knife technique suddenly became sharper, and his strikes grew much stronger. Wang Jiantao, who had been trying to use stealth to attack, was now directly engaging Bai Qingqing head-on.

Blades clashed and sparks flew; trees around them fell one after another, causing a great commotion.

At this point, Bai Qingqing was beginning to feel overpowered. Her swordsmanship, taught by Wang Jiantao, was very familiar to him. She was barely able to fend off Wang Jiantao's attacks by relying on her Realm.

But as Wang Jiantao's skill inside his body increased, Bai Qingqing couldn't hold up at all and could only keep retreating.

Then, with a slash from Wang Jiantao, a huge blade force instantly sent Bai Qingqing flying. Although she blocked part of the attack with her sword, she was still knocked back more than ten meters and spat out a mouthful of blood, obviously sustaining internal injuries.

Seeing that Bai Qingqing was no match for Wang Jiantao, Lu Chen didn't plan to stand by and watch anymore; he immediately jumped down from the carriage.

Seeing Lu Chen heading towards Bai Qingqing, the knife-wielding Shadow Guards immediately surrounded him, and then a Ninth Grade Shadow Guard said, “North Prince, if you come any closer, don’t blame us for attacking you!”

Hearing the Shadow Guard’s threat, Lu Chen let out a cold laugh, “You’re the first person to dare threaten me this year.”

As soon as Lu Chen finished speaking, the Shadow Guard’s body involuntarily flew towards Lu Chen, struggling to break free but to no avail.

Soon after, the Shadow Guard felt Lu Chen grabbing his neck, and he felt his skill rapidly draining from his body.

Seeing this, the other Shadow Guards sensed something was wrong—the North Prince’s strength was obviously underestimated by them. Then, a Shadow Guard shouted, “Attack!”

Although they hadn’t received orders to kill the North Prince, if he intended to stop them from completing their mission, they wouldn’t be polite.

Meanwhile, not far away, Wang Jiantao noticed what was happening near the carriage. Seeing the Shadow Guards suddenly charging towards Lu Chen, he frowned.

Just then, an aura of great power suddenly emanated from Lu Chen, centered on his body, pushing all the Shadow Guards to the ground.

Feeling the terrifying aura coming from Lu Chen, all the Shadow Guards were stunned, even Wang Jiantao was taken aback.

“Grandmaster!!!”

How is this possible?!

The North Prince had been in the North Land for less than four years; how could he become a Grandmaster?!

No wonder the North Prince only brought a few people with him on this trip—he was already a Grandmaster, how could he possibly be afraid of being assassinated?

Wang Jiantao quickly came to his senses and inwardly cried out “bad.”

They had been tricked!

It was clearly a trap set by the North Prince, designed to draw them out, those who wished to eliminate Bai Qingqing. Now they were in trouble.

Facing a Grandmaster, they had no capacity to fight.

At that moment, Wang Jiantao glanced over at Bai Qingqing, who had suffered injuries.

Could it be that today they could only retreat?

No!

If he didn’t complete the mission, he would face death upon his return!

With this thought in mind, Wang Jiantao immediately gripped the knife in his hand and charged at Bai Qingqing; he intended to take advantage of Lu Chen’s momentary distraction to kill her and then use his shadow shifting technique to escape.

Even though Lu Chen was a Grandmaster, he was still so young; Wang Jiantao was very confident in his movements, believing that even a Grandmaster couldn’t capture him.

Suddenly, Wang Jiantao appeared in front of Bai Qingqing and swung his knife at her.

Seeing this, Lu Chen snorted coldly, actually daring to kill someone before him.

The next moment, using Shadow Shifting, Lu Chen’s body appeared beside Bai Qingqing without any warning, pinning Wang Jiantao’s knife between two fingers.

Wang Jiantao was shocked. "Such speed!"

Chapter 389: The Woman of This Prince_3

Lu Chen used his fingertips to snap the knife from Wang Jiantao's grip, causing Wang Jiantao to swiftly backpedal several steps.

At that moment, Lu Chen spoke, "Wang Jiantao, you have some nerve, daring to kill my woman right in front of this Prince!"

Having said this, Lu Chen immediately embraced Bai Qingqing, who had already been injured, and then healed her using the Rejuvenating Skill.

Upon hearing Lu Chen's words, a rosy flush appeared on Bai Qingqing's pale face, particularly at Lu Chen's words "this Prince's woman," which made her heart race uncontrollably.

Seeing that Lu Chen had directly mentioned his own name, Wang Jiantao said, "Prince, now that you know my name, you must have been told everything by Bai Qingqing. If you wish to avoid bringing disaster upon yourself, it would be best to hand Bai Qingqing over."

Lu Chen indifferently remarked, "People who threaten this Prince usually meet with a very unpleasant fate."

Upon saying this, the martial presence around Lu Chen surged, imposing a heavy oppressive force that made Wang Jiantao, standing at a distance, struggle to breathe.

Wang Jiantao thought to himself that today's assassination attempt had definitely failed, and he would have to find another way to kill Bai Qingqing. He couldn't afford any further delays; if he did wait, his own escape might become impossible.

With that thought in mind, Wang Jiantao's body vanished on the spot as he made his escape.

Seeing Wang Jiantao attempt to flee, Lu Chen chuckled, then let go of Bai Qingqing. His figure flashed, and he threw a punch at a certain spot; the next moment, Wang Jiantao reappeared, his body flying backward and crashing through over a dozen trees.

Wang Jiantao coughed up a mouthful of fresh blood and lay on the ground, looking at the distant Lu Chen with disbelief.

“How... how could you possibly have tracked my movements!”

Wang Jiantao had always been confident in his agility. In his view, unless someone was a Grandmaster about to break through to the Heavenly Human Realm like Zhuge Zhongguang, catching him was impossible.

Lu Chen was still so young, and even if he had broken through to the Grandmaster Realm, his strength should not be that formidable. And yet, he had managed to pinpoint Wang Jiantao's position instantly, throwing Wang Jiantao into a state of utter panic.

As Lu Chen walked towards Wang Jiantao, he said, “Commander Wang, you hit this Prince's woman and thought you could leave without paying any price? Aren't you underestimating this Prince a bit too much?”

As Lu Chen drew nearer, Wang Jiantao immediately said, “North Prince, I am a man of the Sum Emperor, and it was he who sent me. If you dare to lay a hand on me, once the Emperor finds out, he will surely accuse you of rebellion!”

Lu Chen, with a face full of indifference, said, “Rebellion? If you die, then no one will know that it was this Prince who did all this, will they?”

As his words fell, Lu Chen raised his hand. Seeing that Lu Chen was really going to strike, Wang Jiantao immediately stirred up all his skill, used the Blood Ignition Skill, and made another attempt to flee.

Wang Jiantao knew his own limitations; even after using the Blood Ignition Skill, he didn't believe he could match a Grandmaster. The key issue was that Lu Chen was a Grandmaster who could detect his presence.

What Wang Jiantao feared most was a Grandmaster who could not only discern his location but also keep up with his speed—and Lu Chen was precisely such an individual.

Seeing Wang Jiantao flee again, Lu Chen did not hesitate and used Shadow Shifting once more.

At that moment, Wang Jiantao looked back to see that he could no longer see Lu Chen and the others, and he breathed a sigh of relief, only for a clawed hand to suddenly grip Wang Jiantao's neck the next second.

Wang Jiantao's entire being froze.

How could this be possible!

It was then that Wang Jiantao realized the cultivation technique Lu Chen was using was very similar to his own, capable of entering a stealth state to make the body disappear from sight.

But Lu Chen was clearly faster. After all, Lu Chen was already a Grandmaster, and no matter how much Wang Jiantao tried to run, he could never escape from Lu Chen's grasp.

Just as Wang Jiantao was about to plead for mercy, he suddenly felt the skill inside his body flowing endlessly towards Lu Chen.

Wang Jiantao became even more terrified.

What kind of martial arts is this!

Why had he never heard of any skill in the martial world capable of siphoning away another's skill?

In desperation, Wang Jiantao managed to beg, "Spare... spare my life..."

After absorbing half of Wang Jiantao's skill, Lu Chen threw him to the ground. Wang Jiantao hastily knelt and pleaded for mercy, "Your Highness, spare my life! I was only ordered by the Emperor to eliminate Bai Qingqing, I harbored no intentions of lifting a finger against you!"

Lu Chen let out a cold snort and said, "Bai is this Prince's woman. To strike her is to strike at this Prince!"

Wang Jiantao continued, “Your Highness, spare me, I know some secrets about the Emperor. If you don’t kill me, I will share all of these secrets with you!”

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen commented thoughtfully, “Oh? You know secrets about my royal father?”

Lu Chen had refrained from killing Wang Jiantao outright because he felt that Wang Jiantao might still be of use. As the leader of the Shadow Guard and someone close to the Sum Emperor, Wang Jiantao had done plenty of dirty work for him, making him the person most likely to know the Emperor’s secrets.

Fearful that Lu Chen might not believe him, Wang Jiantao hurriedly said, “Your Highness, your mother’s death was orchestrated by His Majesty himself. The Emperor has always believed you are not his biological son, which is why he has always neglected you and sent you to this impoverished North City.”

Upon hearing Wang Jiantao’s words, Lu Chen was taken aback.

He of course suspected that his mother’s death was very likely the Sum Emperor’s doing, but what he did not expect was that the Emperor believed he wasn’t his biological son?

What was this about?

Had his mother deceived the Sum Emperor?

Frowning, Lu Chen then asked, “Why would my royal father think that I am not his biological son?”

Wang Jiantao hastened to answer, “Because every time His Majesty visited Consort Yue, he would wake up the next day with a splitting headache, with no recollection of what happened the previous night.”

“The Emperor suspects that Consort Yue was unfaithful, and that you are the child of another man. Over the years, His Majesty has been ordering the Shadow Guard to investigate who your biological father is. Back then, the young men who had any dealings with Consort Yue were all discreetly dealt with by the Shadow Guard.”

Chapter 390: Rongrong, You're So Beautiful!_1

Hearing Wang Jiantao's words, Lu Chen fell into deep thought.

He wondered why the Sum Emperor treated him so poorly, thinking all emperors were emotionless. Plus, being Chu Yue's child, he assumed the Sum Emperor simply didn't care about him, to the point of ignoring assassination attempts on his life.

It turned out that in the Sum Emperor's eyes, he wasn't his child at all.

What on earth did his mother do back then to make the Sum Emperor believe he wasn't his child?

After giving it some thought, Lu Chen felt a headache coming on.

But then again, all men are similar in that they can't tolerate being cuckolded. As a man himself, Lu Chen could understand the Sum Emperor's feelings.

But for the Sum Emperor to determine whether he was his son, there had to be enough evidence, right?

Could it be that the Sum Emperor thought that forgetting what happened at night equated to not having shared a room with his mother?

This matter, he feared, would have to be clarified with Chu Yuqin.

Chu Yuqin was her mother's maidservant, and she should know quite clearly what happened before his birth.

At this moment, Lu Chen looked at Wang Jiantao and asked, "Does my royal father have any other secrets?"

Wang Jiantao immediately said, "His Majesty plans to summon Grandmasters from all over to assassinate Zhuge Zhongguang."

Upon hearing this, Lu Chen's face turned instantly grim, now aware of such a matter.

So, Zhuge Zhongguang's premonition was correct. The Sum Emperor's targeting of forces suspected to have Grandmasters was not to deal with the Aristocratic Families of the South but to take on the North Country.

Truly worthy of a sage summoned by the system, Zhuge Zhongguang had foreseen this.

Just as Lu Chen was about to ask more, he suddenly noticed Wang Jiantao's face turning red, and then his body seemed to expand.

Lu Chen instantly sensed danger. He swiftly used Shadow Shifting to get away from where he was. Wang Jiantao was now clutching his throat, a look of unwillingness on his face as he hoarsely growled, "His... Majesty..."

As his voice fell, Wang Jiantao's body instantly exploded, destroying all the surrounding trees and leaving a huge crater, with Wang Jiantao's body turned into countless pieces.

Seeing this scene, Lu Chen, who was at a distance, was stunned.

What was going on?

Why did Wang Jiantao suddenly self-destruct like this?

From Wang Jiantao's prior attitude, it seemed that he didn't wish to die, and the self-destruction was likely against his wishes. So why would he self-destruct?

Before his death, Wang Jiantao shouted the words "His Majesty". Could this be the Sum Emperor's doing?

Lu Chen immediately returned to Bai Qingqing's side. He needed to ask her what was going on, for if this was indeed the Sum Emperor's doing, it meant that the Shadow Guards might also have something in them that could cause self-destruction, potentially including Bai Qingqing.

Upon reaching Bai Qingqing's side, without a word, Lu Chen grabbed Bai Qingqing's delicate hand and used Rejuvenating Skill to examine her body.

Seeing Lu Chen return with such a serious expression, and having heard the distant explosion, Bai Qingqing asked in confusion, "Prince, is he... dead?"

Lu Chen said, "Wang Jiantao self-destructed, but it seemed he didn't wish to die. I can't understand how he self-destructed."

Hearing this, Bai Qingqing said, "The Shadow Guards all take a certain poison. It could be related to that."

After examining Bai Qingqing's body, Lu Chen said, puzzled, "Strange, I didn't find any signs of poisoning in your body?"

Bai Qingqing was a Shadow Guard, too, and even the Deputy Commander. If the Sum Emperor had taken measures against betrayal with Wang Jiantao, it was unlikely he hadn't done the same with Bai Qingqing. So why was she unaffected?

Lu Chen's expression grew even more grave. Wang Jiantao's sudden self-destruction made him anxious; he didn't understand how the Sum Emperor, from such a distance, knew about Wang Jiantao's betrayal and then made Wang Jiantao's body explode.

Of course, Wang Jiantao's death was one thing; he was worried about Bai Qingqing.

Bai Qingqing was also a Shadow Guard, and the Deputy Commander. If the Sum Emperor could make the traitorous Wang Jiantao explode, logically, he could do the same to Bai Qingqing.

At this time, Lu Chen asked, "Bai, are you sure all Shadow Guards take the same poison?"

Bai Qingqing responded affirmatively with a hum.

Lu Chen continued, "Does my royal father periodically give you an antidote?"

Bai Qingqing answered, "It is a poison that doesn't need an antidote."

This...

Bai Qingqing, sensing what Lu Chen was worried about, continued, “In the past, there have been Shadow Guards on missions who would suddenly self-destruct. They typically took a Blood Burst Pill and eventually used the Blood Ignition Skill right before self-destruction.”

Lu Chen suddenly understood, then said, “It seems the poison my royal father had you take is a primer. When certain conditions are met, the Shadow Guard will self-destruct to prevent betrayal.”

Lu Chen had more or less guessed the cause of Wang Jiantao’s self-destruction.

The Sum Emperor first administered the so-called poison as a primer. Later, when Shadow Guards encountered formidable opponents during missions—foes that could make them take a Blood Burst Pill and use the Blood Ignition Skill simultaneously—the Shadow Guards would immediately self-destruct.

Perhaps in the Sum Emperor’s eyes, by the time Shadow Guards resorted to the Blood Burst Pill and Blood Ignition Skill, they were already likely to fail their mission, and to prevent any chance of betrayal, the Sum Emperor devised such a failsafe measure.