

Nightwatcher 71

Chapter 71. A Strange Message

After paying the entry fee, they entered the courtyard, where seven to eight people were seated around a charcoal fire, drinking tea and chatting, making the room appear elegant.

Six dancers wearing multicoloured clothes and cotton skirts were dancing lightly and gracefully, twisting their slender waists and plump buttocks.

Xu Qi'an glanced around, but he didn't see the oiran who was like a young lady from a well-to-do house outside and so coquettish in bed.

Sampling tea at a brothel wasn't just about drinking games, there were many other programs like listening to music as well as watching dances. The famous oiran also didn't accompany the guests every time.

Similarly, some guests also need "Private space". Drinking games are quite interesting, but they weren't conducive to talking about private matters.

Some guests came in groups to play drinking games and to connect. At that time, some freedom was needed for them to display themselves freely.

The three of them sat down. Song Tingfeng shrugged, squinted his eyes, and said, "It seems that Miss Fuxiang doesn't plan to go out and accompany guests tonight."

Xu Qi'an asked, "Why would you say that?"

Song Tingfeng explained, "The time for drinking games is limited. Generally, a group of guests stays here for two hours at most, after which they continue to the next table or leave the premise.

"Also, it takes about two hours to have an interesting drinking game."

That means, our group is unable to play a good drinking game, so Fuxiang didn't appear... Why do you know the rules of Jiaofang Si so well? Have you patronized it a little too much?... Xu Qi'an nodded, indicating that he had learned this new information.

After the dance, the dancers took a short break.

A young man in a light blue Confucian shirt got up, raised his cup, and looked around, "Is Young Master Yang, Yang Ling here?"

He asked this three times in a row, but as no one answered him, he sat down disappointed.

At the next table, a middle-aged man dressed richly asked curiously, "Brother, who is this Yang Ling?"

"*Delicate, tilting branches reflected on clear and shallow water; its subtle fragrance drifts with the rising moon at dusk*" the young man in a light blue Confucian shirt raised his chin slightly, "Have you heard of it?"

"It seems vaguely familiar." The richly clad middle-aged man recalled for a moment.

"Of course, As soon as this poem was released, it was touted by scholars as the best quatrain about plum throughout the ages. Even you people must have heard of it." The young man in a Confucian shirt raised his head proudly, "These lines could only have been made by us scholars."

The richly clad middle-aged man wondered, "Why is the young master looking for a person here?"

While the two of them were chatting, the drinkers on the side also stopped chatting and listened attentively.

"It's because this poetry called the best poem throughout the ages was released in Reflecting Plum Pavilion. This poem was given by Mr. Yang, Yang Ling to Miss Fuxiang. The poem uses plums as a metaphor to express her beauty. It was a beautiful idea.

"No wonder Reflecting Plum pavilion has so many patrons lately, and it's no wonder that Miss Fuxiang doesn't show up regularly."

"That's right, I've heard that Miss Fuxiang doesn't accompany guests easily."

"*Delicate, tilting branches reflected on clear and shallow water; its subtle fragrance drifts with the rising moon at dusk*... This poem is so beautiful! I want to meet Miss Fuxiang and that talent."

Upon hearing this, the young man in the light blue Confucian shirt sighed wistfully, "That young master Yang has only appeared once in the Jiaofang Si, and hasn't been heard from ever since. The Imperial Academy had sent some people to look for him, but there was no such person there."

The young man in a light blue Confucian shirt said helplessly, "I came to Reflecting Plum Pavilion daily just to wait for him. It's not just me, all the students in the capital want to make friends with him."

Song Tingfeng clicked his tongue and said, "This is good. Miss Fuxiang is now a woman that can't be coveted."

Zhu Guangxiao also sighed.

Did I advertently drive up the AC price? Xu Qi'an lowered his head and continued drinking with a guilty conscience.

Song Tingfeng looked at his new colleague, and said, "It's a pity you are good at solving crimes but can't write poems. If you could write a quatrain similar in quality to Yang Ling, Miss Fuxiang will pursue you by herself."

"Pursue me?" Xu Qi'an discovered a neglected point.

"Why? Do you think love stories of poor scholars and prostitutes are spread for no reason? Poor scholars could occasionally write some good sentences and give them to the prostitute, and her worth would rise sharply due to it. This is a matter of mutual benefit, so many young and famous scholars are the objects of flattery among prostitutes.

"Let alone wanting silver, they are even willing to pay silver. Ziyang Jushi from the Cloud Deer Academy was quite talented in poetry back then. After becoming the zhuangyuan, he stayed in Jiaofang Si for three months without paying any money." Song Tingfeng said.

Zhu Guangxiao nodded in affirmation.

Song Tingfeng found that his newest colleague was dumbfounded, as if he had been greatly shocked, also as if he had heard something exciting. His breaths had become heavy.

A serving maid laying out the wine, stared at Xu Qi'an for a few seconds, and with a face full of glee, immediately dropped what she was doing, and ran out of the room.

Not long after, the well-dressed oiran appeared on the stage. Her long skirt was dragging to the ground, and the gorgeous jewellery in her black hair and her beautiful face complemented each other.

The thickness of the dress was just right, It didn't look bloated and it highlighted her exquisite and plump figure but also didn't make her seem flirtatious.

Miss Fuxiang's eyes swept across the guests, pausing when they met Xu Qi'an.

"Hey, Fuxiang just looked at me." Song Tingfeng was slightly shocked.

Zhu Guangxiao glanced at him, straightened his waist, and said, "It's surely me."

After greeting the guests, Fuxiang said softly, "Let me dance to help the guests enjoy themselves."

The guests were pleasantly surprised; they didn't expect that the most popular oiran of this brothel would show up.

The guests with keener minds thought, *the famous Oiran Fuxiang is known as a master in both Qin and poetry, but isn't known for dancing. Why would she dance today?*

With her figure, It would be awesome if she danced the Gokuraku Jodo... Xu Qi'an imagined while admiring her graceful dance.

After the song ended, Fuxiang drank a cup of alcohol, and with her cheeks flushed, bade goodbye.

Song Tingfeng smiled and said, "It was worth it."

Zhu Guangxiao nodded.

Song Tingfeng picked up the wine glass and signalled Xu Qi'an, "Miss Fuxiang seldom dances, but she often plays the qin. Being able to see her dancing your first visit, money well spent."

Xu Qi'an raised his glass in return, "I wish I could stay in her room tonight."

Song Tingfeng heartily laughed.

Zhu Guangxiao lightly shook his head.

Song Tingfeng had just finished laughing when he saw a maid walking over "Young Master Yang, my lady invites you in for tea."

...Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao looked at Xu Qi'an blankly, their faces showing little expression.

Xu Qi'an patted them on the shoulders, "Let's meet at the gate of the courtyard tomorrow at 6."

Bang... The scholar in the light blue Confucian Shirt suddenly stood up from the desk, showing shock and glee, and shouted, "Young Master Yang, Are you Yang Ling? You are Yang Ling, aren't you? Brother Yang, Brother Yang. ...This one is Du Ying..."

Xu Qi'an stopped, cupped his hands towards him, and left with the maid.

Yang Ling... The drinkers in the room stared wide-eyed, and a few scholars in Confucian shirts were ecstatic.

Song Tingfeng and Zhu Guangxiao looked at each other silently, "???"

...

Inside a bedroom as warm as spring, lay a bathtub behind a screen.

Soaking in hot water with petals floating in it, Xu Qi'an exhaled comfortably.

Fair-skinned and beautiful Fuxiang was wearing fine gauze clothes while she knelt and sat by the tub to serve him, rubbing his body with her soft hands.

"After not seeing you for a few days, Young Master has become more handsome." The oiran admired Xu Qi'an's strong body, her eyes being mesmerized by it.

Previously, Xu Qi'an had some handsome features, which were not bad, but today, his appearance hadn't changed but he gave off an indescribable temperament.

"As long as you like it, this change is worth it." Xu Qi'an raised his eyebrows.

Fuxiang's face flushed, as she became shy with joy.

She said resentfully, "Young master is just saying some flattering words to deceive me. Young Master looks down on me."

When has a man held her all night without doing anything to her?

"I was tired that day..." Xu Qi'an said confidently. His heart said, *This sounds like an excuse made by an old man in his 40s or 50s.*

He immediately changed the subject and asked, "Do you feel cold?"

The oiran nodded immediately, and said aggrievedly, "Cold~~~"

"Let's wash together if you feel cold." Xu Qi'an pulled her into the bathtub.

plop...

After being caught off guard, Fuxiang screamed.

Fu Xiang lay in Xu Qi'an's arms, and said coquettishly, "Naughty."

She sat on Xu Qi'an's stomach, wrapped her hands around his neck, and talked incongruously, asking for advice on poetry.

Although Xu Qi'an was a smuggled talent, he had memorized a lot of poems, and some of his occasional words would make the oiran blush with excitement.

"By the way, has Young Master Yang heard about Deputy Minister Zhou's dismissal from office and subsequent exile?"

Her seemingly casual question made Xu Qi'an vigilant.

"I heard that he was impeached by Marquis Wei." Xu Qi'an said.

The famous oiran raised her charming and affectionate face to stare at him, and said lightly, "It seems that it's because Young Master Zhou was so wicked that he kidnapped the Shu daughter of Marquis Wei."

"So, beauty is a bone-cutting knife." Xu Qi'an said, half surprised and half emotional.

As a veteran criminal investigator, no one could easily get information from him. However, Fuxiang may have some doubts in her heart.

How could such a coincidence appear? Just the day after talking about the past, Zhou Li really shot at the Shu daughter of Marquis Wei... Well, It may not be a suspicion, but some curiosity was there.

I have to strengthen this woman's affection for me and let her heart firmly be on my side, lest one day she tells an official about me...

"Upon watching Miss dance just now, I suddenly felt something in my heart, and I got a few words..." Xu Qi'an put his arms around the beautiful woman's fragrant shoulders, and recited,

“*Dancing, until her headdress fell to the floor,

Wine spilled, skirts stained,

Delicacies rivalled gaieties,

Day after day, joy after joy.*”[1]

Delicacies rivalled gaieties, day after day, joy after joy... The famous oiran had tears in her eyes, and wept in a low voice, "Young master, Are you poking this servant's heart, So cruel."

After taking a bath, the two of them lay on the gorgeous brocade bed, and Xu Qi'an flipped through the picture book beside the pillow.

The famous oiran's brown eyes were as dark and moist as a deer in a forest, and her face was flushed bright pink. She looked shy, but her posture was like a monarch choosing his subjects.

She had an exquisite appearance, a plump figure, and smooth skin like a jade beauty.

"What do you mean?" Xu Qi'an glanced at her, raising the picture book in his hand.

Fuxiang pursed her lips and didn't dare to answer.

Do you think that I'm a virgin and need to be educated about this? Xu Qi'an sneered and threw away the picture book.

That night, the oiran's bed was shaken until midnight.

...

At 6 the next day, Xu Qi'an dressed up in the service of a slightly haggard beauty, had breakfast, and bid farewell to the affectionate Fuxiang.

Xu Qi'an was proud of the look of worship shown by the head maid in the morning.

Upon leaving the Reflecting Plum Pavilion, he saw his two colleagues in high spirits at the door.

Sure enough, I wasn't asked for money... Hey, I didn't want to prostitute for free, but the beauty was too kind...

Xu Qi'an said lightly, "Morning, both of you."

The three of them left Jiaofang Si's alley side by side. When parting, Song Tingfeng squinted his eyes and couldn't help asking, "Miss Fuxiang... how does she taste?"

The taciturn Zhu Guangxiao also looked over at them.

Xu Qi'an looked forward, and said with three tenths unruliness and three tenths ruffian temperament, raising the corners of his mouth, "That girl... is very moist!"

...

He bought some silk and satin in the inner city, rented a carriage, and drove back to the Xu mansion.

Uncle Xu had asked for leave that day and stayed at home to wait for his news. Xu Xinnian didn't study as he wasn't in the mood to do so.

It wasn't until Xu Qi'an asked his servants to bring the silk and satin that his family was relieved.

Xu Qi'an didn't explain much, pointed at the silk and satin, and said with a smile, "Use them to make clothes for my aunt and younger sisters."

Auntie, who was holding her breath, raised her snow-white and sharp chin and snorted.

Little Pea pulled his trousers to climb up his legs, and shouted, "Big brother, big brother, I saw that Elder sister was crying yesterday."

A blush appeared on Xu Lingyue's melon-seeded face.

Showing too much affection to family members wasn't a good thing. Xu Qi'an smiled at the beautiful young girl, then kicked Little Pea into the air like a shuttlecock before reaching out to catch her.

Auntie was taken aback, while Little Pea giggled mindlessly as a child would.

Second Uncle was taken aback, "You have stepped into the Refining Qi realm."

After receiving Xu Qi'an's affirmation, Second uncle revealed the smile of a satisfied father.

In the study, Xu Qi'an told what happened to Uncle and Erlang.

Both father and son were anxious for a while.

Xu Xinnian looked at his cousin, "Why did the eldest princess send someone to follow you?"

I also want to know that... Xu Qi'an gave a guess, "Maybe, Is it because I was the only outsider in the Academy that day?"

On the day the vision occurred in the Lesser Sage Academy, the Eldest Princess was also in the Academy. So, it's impossible for her to not pay attention to it. In this matter, it was reasonable for her to monitor the only outsider that day.

Xu Xinnian said deeply, "The eldest princess is very smart. Not only has she studied at Cloud Deer Academy for many years, but she also has half a master-disciple relationship with Wei Yuan. Her go skills are also superb, so recommending you to the Nightwatchers was definitely not some idle move.

"Big brother, Don't be surprised if she summons you in the future. Remember to be careful and treat her with caution."

Xu Qi'an let out a "hmmm".

An arrogant person like Xu Cijiu valuing and fearing her so much meant that this eldest princess wasn't a simple person.

After speaking, Xu Xinnian suddenly raised his chin and said, "I have stepped into the realm of Self-cultivation."

I have also become an eight rank Confucian master scholar!

Xu Qi'an was pleasantly surprised, "What's so special about Self-Cultivation realm Confucian Scholars?"

The corners of Xu Xinnian's mouth twitched, "Towards Righteousness, I'll go even if myriad people block my way."

At that moment, Xu Qi'an's heart was full of pride, and he burst out with the courage to face tens of thousands of troops alone.

This inexplicable courage lasted for a quarter of an hour before slowly dissipating.

"Self-cultivation is the process of sharpening one's courage. Confucian Scholars in this realm can convince people with every word and deed. For example, Elder Brother felt what I said made sense just now, so he unconsciously followed suit. So, I'm not worse than you in settling cases now."

No! I'm relying on my actual skills while you are cheating. Xu Qi'an thought.

This is equivalent to a courage buff, a rudimentary version of nature following one's speech... Xu Qi'an's eyes lit up, and he looked at his second uncle. The former then said, "Cijiu, Hasn't big brother treated you well..."

"Get lost!" Xu Xinnian walked away without waiting for him to finish speaking.

Vulgar Martial Artist!

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Xu Qi'an went back to his small courtyard to catch up on sleep.

Suddenly, he woke up inexplicably. The source of his alarm was the small jade mirror hidden under the pillow.

On the surface of the jade mirror, a line of small characters appeared:

【NINE: Where are you?】

Chapter 72. The Daoist Earth Sect

【NINE: Where are you?】

Xu Qi'an stared at the mirror's surface, dazed for ages. *The mirror can talk now? It has its own consciousness?*

What does "NINE" mean anyway? Is this mirror called Nine?

No, if this mirror had its own consciousness, then it wouldn't ask "Where are you". After all, you and I sleep in the same bed every day, how could you not know where I am?

Still staring at the mirror, Xu Qi'an fell into deep thought.

He was thinking about four questions:

One: What kind of treasure is this mirror? Apart from being able to store items, it could also receive messages?

Two: Is this a message? If so, who sent it?

Three: Who was that old Daoist, why would he give me this mirror?

Four: Do I respond?

Putting caution first, Xu Qi'an held onto the idea of "If I pretend nothing happened, then it doesn't exist", silently stowing away the mirror, and not intending to respond.

Moreover, he didn't know how to respond anyway.

Going into the courtyard, he plunged his head into the water barrel, washing his face, then wiping it dry with a cloth. Then, Xu Qi'an made to leave.

He had already joined the Nightwatchers, but his first proper day on the job was the day after tomorrow; the constabulary still needed to arrange for his uniform and gong.

It was still early, just past 12:30.

Xu Qi'an first paid a visit to the Changle County Constabulary, and gave notice to his old colleagues, and Magistrate Zhu, that he had joined the Nightwatchers.

County Magistrate Zhu had already received notice, as the Nightwatchers had already taken his background check from the county office.

Xu Qi'an, Magistrate Zhu, and his other colleagues arranged to have dinner that night, as both a leaving meal, and a celebration of Xu Qi'an's promotion in official ranks.

The location would of course be the Xiaoyue hall, not far from the county offices. For official social events, qinglou brothels were the first port of call.

Before them, Xu Qi'an planned to go to the Goulun, both to listen to music, and also to have lunch.

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The leaving feast started at 16:00, and lasted all the way until 18:45.

In the banquet, Magistrate Zhu sighed, "Ningyan, you're a person from my Changle County constabulary. That you could become a Nightwatcher, is our Changle County's good fortune. This official had always looked favourably upon you..."

He paused, raising a glass and drinking it in one.

If I can continue climbing upwards... then County Magistrate Zhu would be a person in official circles that I can trust to some extent... Xu Qi'an followed his lead, and drank his own wine.

Finishing the feast, none of the constabulary bailiffs left, as the boss of the brothel called over a group of young and beautiful ladies, bringing them to the room, for these great officials to take their pick.

Pretty good looking, if this was in my previous life, then it would be the club, with all the young models lined up in a row... Xu Qi'an shook his head; having experienced the ecstasy of being with Fuxiang, he started to look down upon normal women.

Xu Qi'an arranged appropriately Magistrate Zhu and the other bailiffs, and left Xiaoyue Hall himself, going back home.

Coming to the front door, he found that the lock was undone, and that inside the room there was candlelight.

Has uncle come to find me?

Xu Qi'an pushed open the door, and entered the room.

In the dim candlelight, a white-skirted young woman sat at the tableside, a hand supporting her head, that delicate head lulling slightly.

Xu Qi'an immediately scanned over his cupboard, and was relieved to find that there was no sign of it being open.

Mm, perhaps I could consider using English to write my diary.

He walked over, and lightly pushed away Xu Lingyue.

"Big brother, where did you go..." Xu Lingyue opened her eyes, her charming pupils showing confusion for a moment, and then delight.

Her thin melon-seed face was lit by the flickering candlelight, like a piece of warm fiery jade, with no blemish. Her eyes shone.

"Little Sis is really pretty." Xu Qi'an sighed.

Xu Lingyue looked down shyly, as a startlingly red flush erupted on her face.

She said in a soft voice, "Why did big brother not come home to eat. Dad said big brother must have gone to the brothels."

Uncle so fucking... knows me!

Xu Qi'an said, "No no, just a normal social occasion. I've joined the Nightwatchers now, so invited my old colleagues to dinner."

But the fact that Uncle would think that way was very normal, very normal for a martial artist; putting in so much blood and sweat to reach Refining Qi, having held it in for around twenty years, it was almost definite that one would need to get it all out of them before stopping.

"Big brother has drank... since you've already eaten, then I'll go back. They're still keeping food warm in the kitchen." Xu Lingyue believed her big brother's excuse, and laughed happily.

Xu Qi'an was moved; in this house, apart from Second Uncle, only this little sister treated him the best.

"Mm, it's dark outside, it's not safe to walk outside in the dark. Big brother will take you."

Xu Lingyue did not refuse. From this small courtyard to the front door of the Xu manor proper, was roughly two to three hundred metres. A young vulnerable girl walking alone was indeed not very safe.

But what she did not think of, was that Xu Qi'an took her to the corner of the courtyard, held onto her light thin waist, and leapt into the air. He was going to vault over the wall.

As the tips of her feet finally touched firm ground, she pushed away Xu Qi'an in fright, both shy and angry: "How could big brother be so frivolous."

At the age of seven, boys and girls were no longer allowed to share a room. She was already seventeen, how could big brother hug his little sister's waist like that? Grabbing her hand in the Cloud Deer Academy, was already something that was breaking social norms. The Xu Family though were not a strict intellectual household, and so that was more or less acceptable, but to just grab her waist like that... can a woman's waist be grabbed willy-nilly? Horse riding was another issue entirely, but even when riding, she had never had that happen to her.

Xu Lingyue's legs felt soft, and seeing Xu Qi'an was in somewhat of a daze, angrily stamped her foot, leaving with small hurried footsteps.

She seems to be angry, that shy young girl pouting attitude has got stronger... she's not really angry... Xu Qi'an sighed, reminding himself that he needed to think about these things more carefully.

Even though in his past life, there was no such caution about boys and girls coming into contact, even if they did not know each other very well, hell, in some circumstances, they would stick tightly together, feeling with their bodies the other's warmth and energy. They would be red faced, brows furrowed, panting heavily... referring of course to the metro at rush hour.

But here was not that era, and even with his own little sister, he could not act so wantonly. Xu Qi'an had indeed been careless in this regard.

Looking at Xu Lingyue's disappearing figure, Xu Qi'an then leapt up again, and returned back to his own little courtyard.

At this time, he felt again that mysterious palpitation, and pulled out the mirror again. On the clean mirror surface, was written another line of small text:

【NINE: Where are you?】

Xu Qi'an furrowed his brow; *What is going on?*

The messages had come one after another. If he were not to deal with this, it would feel like there was some unknown danger hidden under the surface.

Xu Qi'an leant against the wall, pondering for a long time, finally deciding to reply.

He had two reasons for this: One, this mirror, after all, was his, and if he could figure out the mysterious abilities of this mirror once and for all, he would have untold benefits.

It would be like clearly holding an AK-47, but waving it around like a walking cane.

Two, he suspected that this message might have come from the old Daoist. If this was the case, then he could get the reason as to why this priest would have given the mirror to him.

A gift for an unknown reason made one feel anxious.

Xu Qi'an tried to reply via voice: "Haha, I'm bathing."

The clear mirror surface showed no sign of change.

He then changed his approach, using his finger as a pen, and wrote this sentence on the mirror.

A wondrous sight appeared: a small line of text appeared on the mirror's surface:

【THREE: Hah, I'm bathing.】

Sending messages via touch?

*Is THREE the number of my mirror? The other one seems to be NINE, does he also have a mirror?
*

【NINE: Who are you?】

Xu Qi'an did not respond.

The opposing side also fell silent. After a few minutes, they again sent a message:

【NINE: Where is brother Jinlian? Is he alive or dead, how did you get this mirror?

You're a member of the Heaven and Earth Society!?!】

"Brother Jinlian" should be that old Daoist that gave me this mirror. This Nine called him "brother", so they must be of the same sect...

Heaven and Earth Society, does this world also have a Ming Restorationist movement?

After roughly guessing at Nine's identity, Xu Qi'an let out a breath, and with his finger as a pen, wrote back:

【THREE: I'm not a member of the Heaven and Earth Society. This mirror was given to me by an old Daoist Priest.】

【NINE: How will you prove that you're not a member of the Heaven and Earth Society, tell this poor Daoist your name.】

Xu Qi'an suddenly had the feeling of a reader wanting to know your address, to send you some local specialty, and instinctively resisted, not answering.

【THREE: *Daozhang*[^1], I'm just a nameless grunt.】

After a while,

【NINE: Where is the priest that gave you this mirror?】

【THREE: I don't know.】

After Xu Qi'an sent his message, he waited patiently to see what would come back as a response.

【NINE: This poor Daoist is Zilian. That priest that gave you the mirror is my sect brother. This mirror is our Earth Sect's magical artefact.

【Haha, seeing that brother Jinlian has given this to you, then you sir must be no ordinary person. I think, you have heard of our Earth Sect's name.】

Xu Qi'an replied: 【THREE: apologies, I know nothing.】

The other side fell silent for a good long while, and then replied with no emotion,

【NINE: The Daoist order is split into three sects: Heaven, Earth and Man.】

So you're a Daoist... Xu Qi'an roused his spirits.

Chapter 73. Horror

【THREE: What's the matter with the Heaven and Earth Society?】

【NINE: The Heaven and Earth Society is an evil cult that has been coveting the magic artefact of our Earth Sect for a long time. Hehe, This magical treasure is also called the Earth Book. It can be used to transmit messages from thousands of miles away.】

【Some time ago, I received a distress message from Senior Brother Jinlian, saying that he had gone to the capital of the Great Feng, because only by entering the capital could he avoid their pursuit.】

【When I was making my way to the capital, I lost contact with Senior Brother Jinlian. So, I sent him a message through the Earth Book, only for the message to get to you. He should have given you his "Earth Book". Presumably, the senior brother's situation is critical enough for him to abandon the book to protect himself.】

What the hell... Who placed this pot on me?[^1] Xu Qi'an was dumbfounded.

【NINE: I don't know who this excellency is, for Senior Brother Jinlian to give you his Earth Book with such confidence.】

I'm just a petty bailiff, No, I'm just a small Nightwatcher... Xu Qi'an felt a chill in his heart.

【THREE: How could he protect himself by abandoning the Earth Book? Can the people from the Heaven Earth Society track the location of the Earth Book? 】

Xu Qi'an, a master in reasoning, keenly grasped the key point.

【NINE: This matter involves a secret of our Earth Sect, so this poor Daoist can't tell it to you. The Earth Book is the most important treasure of our sect. I hope that you can return it to this poor Daoist.】

【THREE: Okay, How can I return this to you?】

Xu Qi'an was a little reluctant, after all, this was a treasure that could act as a storage ring. However, upon considering the risks associated with the book, he chose to go against his greed and return it.

【NINE: This Daoist is in the capital, and can come to find you at any time. If you don't trust me, you can choose an address for exchange. Well, What do you want, sir?】

Boobs, I want warm boobs... Xu Qi'an almost blurted this out.

【THREE: Daozhang is too polite. It's my duty to return the property to its original owner. But Daoist Jinlian had told me that this is a precious treasure and sold it to me at the price of 500 taels of gold.

【I'm not asking for money. It's just that if the treasure is returned to its original owner, I should also be refunded for an equivalent exchange, right?】

【NINE: Yes, It should be so.】

...

Xu Qi'an put away the mirror, dreamed of five hundred taels of gold, and fell into a deep sleep.

The next day, he changed into the Nightwatcher uniform, put his badge in his pocket, sabre on his belt, and tied the new gong on his chest.

He then vaulted the wall to his second uncle's house for breakfast.

After leaving the Xu mansion, Xu Qi'an took the reins from the gatekeeper Old Zhang and rode his horse to the inner city, where the Nightwatchers office was located.

The horse was his second uncle's mount previously, but it belonged to Xu Qi'an now. Of course, to shut up his aunt, Xu Qi'an gave his second uncle fifty taels of silver.

There wasn't any other way to do so; the Nightwatcher office was in the inner city, and was too far from the Xu mansion. If Xu Qi'an walked to the office, it would be lunchtime when he would arrive.

He hurried to the Nightwatcher office and stepped into Spring Breeze Hall, where Li Yuchun was drinking tea with a silver gong.

"A rookie in your command?" The silver gong saw that he was not a familiar face, and asked casually.

"Yeah." Li Yuchun nodded.

"What's his rating?" The silver Gong asked.

Li Yuchun didn't wait for Xu Qi'an to speak and hurriedly replied, "Lower Yi".

The silver gong was quite surprised, and praised, "Not bad, not bad. The office needs young people with similar potential. In the future, you will become part of the mainstay of the Nightwatchers.

The second half of the sentence was for Xu Qi'an.

Xu Qi'an saluted respectfully, and only after that did he explain the purpose of his visit, "Boss, I want to go to the Archive."

He didn't know where the Archive was, nor did he know the authority required to access it.

"If you have any other such questions, you can look for the petty officers near you." Li Yuchun said.

"I understand." Xu Qi'an withdrew from the Spring Breeze Hall.

When the leaders were gossiping idly, as a subordinate, he shouldn't disturb them for small matters. This level of observation of details was required.

After finding a clerk and asking where the Archive was, Xu Qi'an came to a huge courtyard.

He handed his badge to a black-clothed petty officer, who took it, and handed it back to Xu Qi'an after confirming it was correct, saying, "The Archive is divided into four areas, Jia, Yi, Bing, and Ding. Bronze Gongs can only go to the Ding area for checking documents."

Xu Qi'an thought for some time and asked, "How would I know where the information I want to check is located?"

The petty official in black smiled respectfully, and said, "Go to the Archive with the *Ding* sign."

"Jia, Yi, Bing, and Ding" were four different Archives, and Ding was the lowest level and the largest. This conformed to the pyramid rule. The more confidential a document, the lower its number would be.

Xu Qi'an entered the "Ding" Archive, came to the reception desk, and said, "I want to find information related to the Daoist sects."

The petty officer behind the reception desk took out a thick booklet, looked it up for a while, then raised his head and said, "Sir, please wait a moment."

He went into the Archive.

Suddenly, the official in black came out holding a volume of books, and he handed over the books to Xu Qi'an after reaching over to take Xu Qi'an's badge.

Xu Qi'an said, "Bring me a cup of hot tea."

Turning around, he went to the side hall where desks were placed, and started reading the documents he got."

The Daoist sects originated with the Daozun, the venerable Daoist. His era was so far in the past, that it could not be determined. According to legend, the Daozun was a miraculous person in ancient times, that could form three purities from one qi, being: *Yuanshi Tianzun, Daode Tianzun, Lingbao Tianzun.*^[2]

They coincided with the three Treasures: Heaven, Earth, and Man.

This was the source of the three sects of "Heaven, Earth, and Man" in Daoism.

Among them, the two sects of Heaven and Man were like fire and water, as both claimed to be the orthodoxy of Daoism, and wished to beat each other's brains out.

The Earth Sect was the most insignificant, and the style of their disciples was very low-key, as they didn't strive for fame and profit. Those who did not know much about the Daoists may have thought that there were only two sects.

The salted fish sect looked quite pitiful."^[3]

"Over so many years, the dispute for orthodoxy is probably the biggest conflict between the dao sects." Xu Qi'an silently added in his mind, *Yujie^[4] are unparalleled under the heaven.*

Continuing to read, he found that the salted fish mentality of the "Earth Sect" made some sense.

The Earth Sect worshipped the Daode Tianzun, and they cultivated Immeasurable Meritorious Virtue. They travelled around the world, behaved in a low-key manner, and did good things without revealing their name, leaving once they acquired Meritorious Virtue.

"Meritorious Virtue..." Xu Qi'an frowned and thought about it.

In a sense, Meritorious Virtue and Fortune have the same source. The world's people have a saying, *Doing good accumulates virtue, Good people will surely be rewarded.*

Meritorious Virtue meant blessings. Blessings and good luck were the same things.

So, The old Daoist from the Earth Sect could find my specialness, can't he? Upon knowing that I was a lucky person, a European Emperor, he gave me the hot potato with a peaceful mind... Hell, don't you cultivate Meritorious Virtue? How could you do this act devoid of virtue...

Xu Qi'an mentally cursed.

From this, he thought, maybe his strange luck was also a type of meritorious virtue.

However, the eighteen generations of ancestors of the Xu family were ordinary people. Even the little fame and status that uncle and his generation gained, were with a sword in hand hacking and slashing through the fires of battle.

He wasn't sure if they had done good deeds, but they had indeed killed many on the battlefield.

At the time, the manager brought over the freshly made hot tea, and said, "Are you looking for information about the Sect of Man?"

No, The Earth Sect... Xu Qi'an asked back "Sect of Man?"

"Our national teacher is the current Master Priest of the Human Sect." The petty official said, "Master Wei doesn't like that female Dao Master very much."

The Female Dao Master... Ah, that legendary Daoist Nun?

Xu Qi'an suddenly realized that he only knew that the current emperor was obsessed with cultivating Daoism and longed for immortality. So, he canonized a Daoist Nun that looked like an immortal as the National Teacher.

He didn't expect her to be from the Sect of Man.

The Arcanists from Sitianjian, the Human Sect of Daoism, The Nightwatchers, the Cloud Deer Academy of Confucianism, the Great Feng military, The civil officials in the Imperial Court... The capital city was a small pool, but it was filled to the brim with dragons.

No wonder NINE said that the people from Heaven and Earth Society didn't dare to enter the capital.

Jinlian Daoist: Come here and try.

Heaven and Earth Society killers: We'll die if we try.

Hahaha... Xu Qi'an twitched his lips, and said, "Find me some information about the 'Heaven and Earth Society'. Um, are there any books about the Earth Book? You know, Earth Book, the heavenly treasure... uh, if I wanted to go to the Jia, Yi, or Bing archives, where should I apply?

Upon hearing him, the official said with a smile, "The Yi and Bing Archives correspond to Gold Gongs and Silver Gongs respectively. As for the Jia Archives, you need to have Duke Wei's signature to enter. But the information about Heaven and Earth Society and Earth Book you're looking for is in the Ding Archive.

Upon seeing the shocked look Xu Qi'an, he explained, "The Heaven and Earth Society sounds like a Jianghu organization, and the Earth Book is a legendary heavenly treasure. Neither of them is confidential. I'll check the catalogue to see where they are."

After speaking, he went to the reception desk.

Xu Qi'an looked at his back and was again stunned for some time before he understood.

He had fallen into a misunderstanding, thinking that ancient things were more confidential and secret, but it was not. *The more ancient things were, the less valuable they were... Well, It didn't mean they were worthless. Antiques were still valuable, but the rank of ancient secrets was low.*

The real secrets were things that were close to the present, like military intelligence, border defence layouts, the formula of gunpowder, siege equipment, ship blueprints, etc.

He believed that there will be another confidential file in the Jia Archive in the future: *A Study on Human Beast Hybridization*

Authors: Song Qing, Xu Qi'an

Soon enough, the official looked and found information related to the Earth Book and the Heaven and Earth Society.

Xu Qi'an couldn't wait to look through them. The Heaven and Earth Society was linked to his safety, so he chose to read into it first.

...

There were tens of thousands of organizations in the Jianghu, and there were also many sects, all of which weren't objects of great concern.

They operated on grey income sources, but they were still willing to obey the command of the court. A few organizations with deep foundations and powerful existences may not follow the court. But, their existence also played some role in maintaining peace in some places, and they occasionally suppressed bandits in their region.

The Heaven and Earth Society was one of these humble Jianghu organizations.

Records about it first appeared about 60 years ago. In that year, there was a severe drought in Yunzhou^[5], and the refugees turned to bandits and plundered all over the place.

Both Natural and Artificial Disasters were raging.

The local Jianghu united with the court to suppress bandits, and the Heaven and Earth Society were among the helpers.

It seems to be quite a chivalrous organization... Sometimes, those who do good deeds may not be good people. Just like how those who do charity may not necessarily be doing charity out of the goodness of their heart.

It may also be to improve their reputation... Xu Qi'an took a sip of tea and continued to read.

Heaven and Earth Society wasn't an active organization. It was a semi-secret organization, and there were few related records related to it.

Xu Qi'an didn't gain much after finishing the record.

It's normal for me to gain nothing. By being able to force the masters of the Earth Sect to flee to the capital, it shows that it is a very large and powerful organization.

It's reasonable for an organization like this to be able to hide from the intelligence network of the Nightwatchers. Should I report this intel to Brother Chun to enrich the Nightwatcher's documents?

Um... Let's leave it aside for now.

He didn't intend to report this matter to the Office. *Although I might net him some credit, It couldn't be compared with 500 taels of gold.*

Anyone would be red-eyed at a treasure like the Earth Book. What if a Golden Gong takes a fancy to it and makes me hand it over to the treasury...

Xu Qi'an closed the booklet and started looking at the documents related to the "Earth Book".

The Earth book was an ancient treasure, whose origin couldn't be verified. It's only known that it was left by the Daozun whose birth era couldn't be verified.

The records didn't even mention the functions of the Earth Book.

However, there was a note that said that such ancient heavenly treasures were mostly created by heaven and earth by themselves, and couldn't have been refined by human skill.

They had a common characteristic, they recognized a master by the blood dripping into them.

Recognizing a master by dripping a drop of blood... Xu Qi'an could say with confidence that he understood this trope.

The magical weapons given by Song Qing and the Bronze Gong of the Nightwatchers could only be used by instilling energy into them, and they didn't have any concept of recognizing the master. They were tools that could be used by anyone.

Xu Qi'an felt that weapons that recognized masters by dripping a drop of blood didn't exist in this world.

He took out the small jade mirror from his robes and put it on the table, drew his sabre two inches out of its sheath, and pressed lightly on the blade using his finger.

Bright red blood oozed out immediately, and Xu Qi'an put it on the surface of the small jade mirror.

The blood stayed on the mirror for a few seconds before slowly disappearing, being absorbed into the mirror's surface.

The next moment, The scene in front of Xu Qi'an's eyes began to blur, and the booklets, tables, and teacups started to fade, being replaced by chaos.

In the hazy chaos, he saw eight light spots hanging.

These eight light spots should symbolize the other mirrors. Adding me, there are exactly nine mirrors... Xu Qi'an glanced over, trying to find Nine.

But he didn't know which point of light belonged to Nine.

Hmm... I'll just touch one at random to make a friend.

Xu Qi'an raised his hand and tried to touch the light spot closest to him.

The light spot began rippling, and the ripples, like waves in water, spread throughout the chaos.

Xu Qi'an seemed to have returned from a dream, the scene in front of him was restored, and he was still in the reception hall of the archives, with documents, a teacup, and the plain jade mirror in front of him.

But he knew that it wasn't a dream, because he had a miraculous connection with the jade mirror, after it had recognized him as a master by absorbing his blood.

Quite a mysterious and profound Sense of Belonging.

At the same time, a line of words slowly appeared in the mirror:

【SIX: Don't believe NINE, do not respond, do not respond, do not respond!】

Chapter 74. Only Going to the Goulán Would Calm My Soul

【SIX: Don't believe NINE, do not respond, do not respond, do not respond!】

In the quiet guest room, Xu Qi'an stared at this message, a thin film of cold sweat forming on his back.

A indescribable fear started to brew deep in his heart.

He drank a mouthful of tea, mind in a daze, and stared into space for a good while, trying to escape from that mysterious fear.

This "SIX" should be the ball of light that I just touched... what was the meaning of his message, is NINE trying to deceive me?

If NINE is trying to deceive me, then what for? If SIX knows that NINE is lying, then why didn't he say earlier?

If NINE cannot be trusted, then SIX cannot be trusted either.

I'll fucking trust no-one.

【THREE: Who are you? What reason do you have to say NINE is not trustworthy. You're a member of the Heaven and Earth Society, aren't you?】

【SIX: Yes.】

He admitted to it so readily... Xu Qi'an fell silent for a few seconds, before writing:

【THREE: What did you mean earlier?】

【SIX: The Earth Book belongs to the Heaven and Earth Society. NINE is part of the Earth Sect, they are a group of crazed and bloodthirsty freaks, that won't listen to reason. Never never get into contact with them, if you value your life.】

【THREE: How do you know that I and NINE have talked?】

Xu Qi'an voiced his suspicion.

【SIX: Piece number three has been sealed by the Earth Sect, breaking our messaging capability. Furthermore, the Earth Sect can use NINE to locate where THREE is.

【This is why Jinlian Daozhang was willing to give up this piece, and bestow it to you.】

So you're saying, even if I don't make a deal with NINE, he could still locate me via the ninth mirror?

No wonder he's not hurried me to return the mirror back to its rightful owner, and even giving the initiative to me, letting me pick the location.

No wonder yesterday when I asked NINE, if the Heaven and Earth Society could use the Earth Book to locate someone, he changed the topic... Xu Qi'an remembered more details.

No wonder what I pick, he's guaranteed a profit. If I choose to make a deal, he could black-eat-black and off me. If I don't choose to make a deal, he could delay and delay, until he finally found where I am.

Fuck... with a shiver, Xu Qi'an cursed internally.

Six continued to send messages, 【The Earth Book is one body, so we can still see your messages to NINE through the mirror, and were helpless to do anything about it. Until you let a drop of blood onto the mirror and became its owner. Only then did we manage to connect.】

【THREE: What should I do?】

【SIX: I hope you can return the Earth Book piece back to the Heaven and Earth Society. If you're still not comfortable, I can give you an address, you can send someone there on your behalf.】

But that old man's five hundred taels of gold... Xu Qi'an stared at the mirror, not replying.
He trusted no one!

Six isn't necessarily a good person, he might also be out to get me.

If I was that easy to deceive, then all my years at police academy were worthless...

Xu Qi'an replied 【THREE: If the Earth Book belongs to the Heaven and Earth Society, and NINE is of the Earth Sect, then the Earth Sect covets the Earth Book?】

From the information archived by the Nightwatchers, the Earth Book is the Daoist Earth Sect's treasure, whereas this Heaven and Earth Society is merely a Jianghu organisation.

But Six just said earlier, that the Earth Book belongs to the Heaven and Earth Society, that the Earth Sect covets this treasure.

If Six doesn't give a reasonable explanation, then Xu Qi'an will also pull him down.

【SIX: the Earth Book is the Earth Sect's treasure, but that was in the past. Now, it belongs to the Heaven and Earth Society. And the Heaven and Earth Society is made up of a portion of the Earth Sect.】

【THREE: What's this?】

【SIX: This involves a secret of the Earth Sect. I'm not a disciple of that sect, and so am not at liberties to divulge.】

【THREE: I understand. You can leave an address.】

【SIX: Yangshui street in the inner city, the house opposite Zhang's Silk Shop, in the courtyard is planted a kumquat tree.】

Xu Qi'an had finally calmed down fully, drinking a mouthful of tea which was slowly losing its warmth, the tip of his finger lightly tapping the table.

At present, he had three choices:

One, believe Six, and return the mirror. He could spend money to hire someone to do it for him. He wouldn't have to worry about who Six was, nor would he worry about Nine locating him, thus escaping the situation.

Two, make a deal with Nine. The downside was that he was likely to face a black-eat-black situation. The upside was if he gambled right, five hundred taels of silver would be his.

Three, give the Earth Book to the Nightwatchers, and gain merit.

If I was still the small bailiff of Changle County, then I may have picked the first choice; safety first.

But I'm now a Nightwatcher. In the Capital of the Great Feng, I don't need to care how powerful any outside forces are. The dragons must coil up, the tigers must crouch down... no, they wouldn't even dare to enter the city.

I've only just joined the Nightwatchers, and have no resources or merit. I could use this Earth Book to exchange for a bright future.

The constabulary would most likely love to receive one of these ancient treasures. That great eunuch Wei Yuan would not sit by on the sidelines.

After deciding on his course of action, Xu Qi'an went to the constabulary to return the records, and took his own belt token from the clerk in the archives, leaving the building in rash vigour.

In a quiet corner with no person in sight, Xu Qi'an took out all of his things in the jade mirror: a crossbow, the bone-dissolving poison, the heart-protecting mirror, and the four hundred taels of silver banknotes that Brother Chun returned,

After stowing these items properly, he came to the Nightwatcher Constabulary's tallest building: the Tower of Noble Spirit.

The guards at the door blocked his way.

Xu Qi'an took off his token, saying solemnly, "Notify Duke Wei with haste, the Bronze Gong Xu Qi'an has an important matter to report."

The guards took the token, and after making sure it was not fake, examined him, "Why do you not find the Silver Gong you're under?"

"The Silver Gong isn't present, and the situation is urgent, go quickly." Xu Qi'an gave an even more stubborn response.

He did not plan for Li Yuchun to know about this matter. More accurately, he did not plan to let more people know than was necessary.

The Heaven and Earth Society was good, the Daoist Earth Sect was fine too, they were all large powers.

They may not want to take revenge against the Nightwatchers, but Xu Qi'an had a family to worry about.

This was a principle that he understood from when he was a policeman in a previous life.

Xu Qi'an must lighten his own traces on the matter, making both the Heaven and Earth Society and the Earth Sect overlook him.

The two guards exchanged looks, and one of them hurriedly rushed upstairs.

After a few minutes, the guard returned, "You can enter. Duke Wei is waiting for you on the seventh floor."

Only then did Xu Qi'an let out a sigh of relief; the fact that this immensely powerful eunuch was willing to see him, meant that half his plan had already succeed.

He immediately entered the building, and flew up flights upon flights of stairs, all the way to the seventh floor.

At the top of the stairs already stood a clerk waiting for him, leading him through the long corridor and to a tea room.

The room was empty, but on the adjoining balcony was stood an azure cloaked figure.

Wei Yuan turned his head, saying warmly, "What is it?"

His features were handsome, his aura refined. The hairs on his forehead were starting to whiten, and in his eyes swirled the passing of an untold number of years and experiences.

He did not seem like a eunuch, rather more a scholar.

Xu Qi'an did not dare to look him directly in the eye, bowing his head slightly, "This servant has asked for Duke Wei, because this servant has discovered an important matter, and has come to report it."

As he spoke, he drew out the jade mirror from his robe, and presented it with both hands.

"This is the Earth Book, an artefact of the Daoist Earth Sect."

Earth Book... Wei Yuan was dazed for a moment, staring at the small mirror intensely, "How did you get it?"

Xu Qi'an did not conceal anything, recounting exactly how he got the mirror, how he received messages, and what he had discovered in the case records at the constabulary. All of this was told as is to the great eunuch.

He didn't have any reason to conceal anything; he had obtained this mirror before he joined the Nightwatchers, this was his private possession.

Moreover, even if he had gotten it after joining the Nightwatchers, it would still be his anyway.

Wei Yuan wouldn't get any bad impression because of this.

The azure-cloaked eunuch said with a half smile, "Five hundred taels of gold?"

... Bossman, isn't it strange to focus on this point? Xu Qi'an laughed with embarrassment, "This small person is only trying to gain benefit for himself, within reasonable bounds, of course."

Wei Yuan laughed warmly, as his eyes fell on the mirror again. Just then, a line of text appeared on its surface.

【NINE: Have you decided when to make the deal?】

The great eunuch's mouth twitched, as he gave the mirror back to Xu Qi'an, "The mirror has already received a drop of blood and recognised its owner. Only you can reply. Tell him, the exchange place will be Guiyuelou, in the Inner City, the dancing birds room. In two hours' time."

Xu Qi'an immediately replied with the mirror.

【NINE: Sure!】

Wei Yuan said, "You haven't revealed your identity or address, you did well. You may leave now, the rest of this will be arranged."

Then what about my five hundred taels of gold- ah no, my merit... Xu Qi'an thought.

He didn't dare open his mouth, and so cupped his fists, "Yes Sir!"

He did not take away the mirror, immediately leaving the tea room.

Leaving the Tower of Noble Spirit, Xu Qi'an's emotions were very complicated. He had both the relief of handing off a hot potato, as well as the hurt of losing a magical artefact, and five hundred taels of silver.

As for merit, even though the great eunuch did not say anything, Xu Qi'an could understand the aura he had to maintain.

The boss of the Nightwatchers talking merit with a small Bronze Gong, seemed far too unbecoming.

At least he won't treat me badly... Xu Qi'an left the constabulary, heart still panging, planning to go to the Goulun to listen to music, to calm his soul.

Chapter 75. Spear Intent

Jiaofang Si, Reflecting Plum Pavilion

Xu Qi'an lazily slouched on the brocade couch, his Nightwatcher uniform hanging on the back of the chair.

In the spacious room, six dancers were dancing lightly, their slender waists swaying inside their thin gauze skirts.

Behind him, a maid was rubbing his shoulders, while another maid was holding and massaging his legs.

The famous oiran was wearing a gorgeous and delicate long skirt, her head lowered, focused on playing the qin.

Occasionally, she raised her head to glance at Xu Qi'an, who was indulging in pleasure without care.

After a stick of incense, the Qin sounds dissipated, while the dancers withdrew from the room. Fuxiang got up to clean her hands in a copper basin, complaining quietly, "Young Master Yang turned out to be a Nightwatcher."

"Are you disappointed?" Xu Qi'an lowered his head and continued to fiddle with his fingers, replying casually.

The famous oiran put her skirt on the couch, sat on him, pressed his firm chest muscles with both her hands, and smiled charmingly, "I Love it..."

The reason why Xu Qi'an transferred to the Jiaofangsi was mainly because of its proximity. It was not because it would be more expensive to eat and listen to music in the Goulun, compared to the free attention he was being given by Fuxiang.

How could SIX know about the contents of my conversation with NINE? Mirror Three is sealed, so I can't receive signals from the other Mirror Holders. Can the other Holders see my messages? The Earth Book is too inadequate for an ancient version of QQ...[^1]

If I had known by that time, I would have added everyone as friends at the beginning... I was a little scared at that time, and I just wanted to get my hands off this hot potato...

Heaven and Earth Society and Earth Sect have some sort of relationship... Did they split from the same sect?

Xu Qi'an's thought process was interrupted, as he found and looked at the oiran sitting on his waist, twisting her hips. Her beautiful face looked like spring, teasing him implicitly.

She also had a pair of peach-blossom-like eyes that demanded affection from everyone.

"If you continue to move around, the soft seat will turn into a hard seat.", Xu Qi'an said, annoyed.

A few minutes later, the maids guarding the door heard the couch-bed's creaking, as well as the panting of their Lady.

"Aiya, They started in broad daylight."

"Let's get out first, It's probably going to continue until dusk."

...

Guiyuelou, In the Luanfeng private room.

A man wearing black clothes and holding a knife in hand sat straight near the round table.

The black-clothed man had a two-finger long scar on his cheek, triangular eyes, and a fierce light flashed in his light brown pupils from time to time.

It gave off the impression that he was a murderous lunatic, as if he would draw a knife to cut others at the slightest disagreement. A vicious aura hung around him.

He was a death row prisoner in the constabulary, whose name had been signed by His Majesty, and had an execution scheduled in the next autumn.

Today, he was suddenly taken out of death row by a Golden Gong. The Golden Gong told him that he just needed to complete a task satisfactorily, and then he can return to the Jianghu while another death row prisoner would take his place.

The credibility of this statement was quite high. Being on the list signed by His Majesty usually meant that there was no doubt of his execution and that he couldn't be pardoned. Finding a replacement for him was the right thing to do.

This type of "Redemption through Merit" transactions were not that uncommon in the Nightwatcher Office. Before being arrested, he had heard of it from quite a few seniors.

His task was also very simple. He just needed to perform a transaction.

But the black-clothed man also knew that there must have been great danger hidden. Surely, they wouldn't bother to find a death row prisoner for a simple transaction.

The black-clothed man accepted this mission for two reasons: One, Dying without struggling was worse than taking a chance. Two, this was Guiyuelou in the inner city, one of the liveliest places in the capital.

Who would dare to make trouble in this place?

At that time, he heard two "knock knock" sounds from the door of the private room.

"The door is open. Please come in." The man in black responded with a low voice.

The door of the room was pushed open, as an old man dressed like a Jianghu wanderer came in. He was wearing a grey robe, half of his face was hidden in the cloak, with the lower half being exposed. There was a shallow layer of scarring on his jaw, and he had a black beard that looked freshly shaven.

The two sides looked at each other with vigilance.

Heh, You definitely can't enter the inner city with this kind of attire. He probably changed in the Guiyuelou secretly... There may be some weapons hidden in his robe... The black-robed man was disdainful but also vigilant. While he was thinking, the cloaked wanderer asked hoarsely,

"What about the item?"

The man in black stared at him calmly, and said, "I seem to have said that I spent 500 taels of gold for this mirror."

What kind of mirror needs to be bought for 500 taels He thought.

The cloaked wanderer grunted, and reached into his bosom with one hand to take out a stack of silver notes. The denomination of the first silver bills looked to be 100 taels.

Although he knew that he had to hand in the silver bills eventually, money touched a person's heart easily, and his eyes began to gleam uncontrollably, glued to the thick pile of silver bills, and couldn't move away from them.

"Mirror!" The cloaked wanderer said hoarsely as he put the bills on the table.

The man in black looked at the mirror carefully, but put it on the table after not seeing anything.

The cloaked wanderer raised his head slightly, revealing a pair of sharp eyes to stare at the mirror on the table for a moment.

"Very well, The deal is done. After exiting the door, we'll have never seen each other."

He picked up the mirror, while the death row prisoner in black stretched out his hand to the bank notes with shining eyes.

Suddenly the prisoner in black saw the left side of the cloak the wanderer was wearing bulging slightly... *Bad!* His pupils shrank as if he had just been exposed to a strong light. He instinctively tumbled sideways to avoid any future attacks.

This task wasn't simple... Fortunately, I have always been on guard... This is an expert, I shouldn't conflict with him head-on. I'll just break the window and go out. I don't believe that he dares to kill people on the street of the downtown area in the inner city... This thought started to flash in a Black-clothed person's mind.

At that time, he observed the place where he had been sitting. A figure was sitting upright, wearing a black cloth and holding a knife with both hands. His neck was cut flat by a sharp blade and the scar was as big as a bowl spurting fresh blood.

Um?

A string of question marks appeared in the mind of the death row prisoner wearing black. Then, His consciousness fell into the abyss.

The cloaked wanderer put the silver bills back into his arms, smiled, and turned to walk out of the private room.

...

After leaving the Guiyuelou, The cloaked man rode the fast horse he had come in and left the inner and outer city leisurely, before racing on the public road, raising a cloud of dust behind.

After galloping for more than an hour, a tea shed appeared in front of him, with three tables set outside.

The tea seller was an old man with grey hair. There were no customers there, and the old man was sitting at the table drinking tea by himself.

The cloaked man reined his horse, after which it neighed and raised its front hooves, then stopped its high-speed movement.

After tying the reins of his horse to a stake on the side of the road, the cloaked man glanced at both sides before walking towards the tea shed.

He took out the small jade mirror and offered it respectfully with both hands, "Master, I didn't fail the mission."

The gray-haired old man took the small jade mirror before speaking in a low voice, "You brought back an enemy."

The cloaked man was taken aback for a moment. Before he had time to formulate a response, he saw the old man wave his hand to knock him away.

Boom!

The cloaked man who flew up happened to collide with a sharp jet of qi and was blown to pieces on the spot.

Blood splattered across the ground like drops of ink.

The old man squinted his eyes to look towards the end of the public road, from where a tall and upright figure was walking slowly.

When he had initially appeared, he was still quite far, but after a few breaths, he was no more than a hundred meters away from the old man.

"Yang Yan, You are only a dog that Azure Robe has raised." The old man snorted coldly, "Leave, Don't meddle in other people's business."

Facially paralyzed Yang Yan remained as expressionless as ever, "I want to meddle."

The old man flew into a rage, losing control over his mind, and said incisively, "Do not blame this poor Daoist for being impolite to you."

The grey robes of the old man bulged, wisps of black smoke overflowed from his body and began to dance in the air, letting shrill screams out of nowhere.

Yang Yan frowned, "Earth Sect cultivates Meritorious Virtue, When did they start to use these ghostly tricks?"

Cobweb-like black blood vessels protruded from the old man's face, his pupils became scarlet, and he was filled with an evil aura, "Heh, This Daoist will send you to ask Daode Tianzun."

He let out a sharp scream, after which the black smoke in the sky also screamed strangely while rushing towards Yang Yan.

Yang Yan was still expressionless, bringing his left and right fists together.

Boom!

A raging Qi burst out, and with him at its centre, spread out in all directions. It rolled up grass and dust along the way before finally hitting a layer of the black membrane.

A black light flashed in the sky, giving off a moist slippery appearance similar in form to an upside-down glass bowl.

"It's easy to get in my hundred ghosts formation, but difficult to get out. Even if you are a fourth-rank martial artist, You'll have to leave your life here." The old man spoke hoarsely as if he was a devil from hell.

In the air, the black smoke scattered by Yang Yan's Qi reunited again.

Yang Yan frowned, this formation was very different than Sitianjian's formation.

Sitianjian's formations were based on the power of heaven and earth and could exist for a long period. Dao Sect formations were set up based on human abilities and couldn't last long.

This Hundred Ghosts Formation was very tricky and unusual.

Among the major practice systems, Daoism was the leader in the field of primordial spirit^[^2]. Daoist System's Sixth rank was Yin Spirit. Yin Spirits, also called Ghost Messengers in ancient times. They could draw in people's souls at night, and dominate the life and death of mortals.

The Hundred Ghost Formation should be using a similar method.

Although Martial Artists also refined their Primordial Spirit, they only superimposed defence to make their primordial spirit tougher and therefore lacked the means to attack.

"I heard that the eighth rank of the Dao system was called Consuming Qi, and they could drive magic weapons and summon heavenly thunder. Why don't you let me experience them?" Yang Yan was expressionless, his tone filled with contempt.

"Come here!" The old man was enraged again, and two streaks of blood spewed out of his sleeve, like blood-coloured lightning.

Yang Yan didn't dodge, and let the two blood lightning attack him.

Ding Ding!

The two bloody lightning just managed to tear his clothes before flying out.

Copper Skin and Iron Bones!

"Why aren't you retaliating?" The old man said angrily. His face looked extremely ferocious, being covered with a web made of black blood vessels.

"I'm waiting for my spear." Yang Yan said lightly, "It's here."

As his voice fell, a bright silver meteor pierced the sky.

The thin and moist qi membrane shattered without a sound, and wherever the meteor passed, the black smoke evaporated, giving off screeching sounds.

"If the formation couldn't be broken from the inside, then I'll break it from the outside." Yang Yan stretched out his hand to hold a spear, a silver spear.

After saying this, his figure suddenly disappeared, and as if he had merged with his spear he stabbed at the old man with unstoppable momentum.

The old man's blood-coloured pupils reflected a flash of silver light. Undefendable; it was an invincible Spear Intent.

The spear intent of a fourth-rank martial artist.

"Noo!" The old man opened his mouth and spat out a golden pill that shone with blood and black light, slamming it into the spear.

The golden core was turned into powder by the spear intent, and it tore through the old man without any sign of slowing, turning his body into a bloody pulp. The silver light continued onward for hundreds of feet, only stopping upon piercing a hill.

The figure of the old man condensed in mid-air. Half real and half illusory, He resentfully stared at Yang Yan before turning to black smoke and looking towards the distance.

Yang Yan bent down to pick up the small jade mirror and carried the silver spear. Then, he turned around and headed back to the capital.

...

The black smoke escaped for hundreds of miles and finally stopped after reaching a village.

The old man's face appeared in the black smoke, as he stared at the village below him.

Yin Spirits couldn't be alive in the daytime for a long time. Also, their strength was greatly reduced without a physical body, making them unable to face crises.

The old man intended to possess a body and devour the souls of the villagers in the village to nourish himself.

After making a plan of action, the black smoke swooped into the village.

The village, still vivid in the previous moment, shattered like water ripples the next moment, revealing a qi cage surrounded by five-coloured meritorious virtue, trapping the black smoke within.

At the centre of the formation was an old Daoist Priest, wearing tattered Daoist robes, and with mystical facial features, sitting cross-legged.

...

Early in the Morning, Xu Qi'an appeared at the Nightwatchers Constabulary on time.

He was waiting for the follow-up to the "Earth Book" incident.

He would always be uneasy if he didn't know about the result.

Near Noon, a petty official wearing black found him at the side hall next to Spring Breeze hall, and respectfully said, "Master Xu, Duke Wei is calling for you."

Finally... Xu Qi'an nodded a little, "Okay!"

Chapter 76. Night Meeting

The Tower of Noble Spirit, the tea room.

Xu Qi'an came here again, seeing the great eunuch, with the sides of his hair starting to whiten, with a handsome and refined aura. He still wore his sky blue cloak, and in his eyes were contained indescribable years of experience.

Beside him, was a tall and towering figure, with a cold and handsome face.

He stiffly and solemnly sat beside the tea table, back straight, face emotionless.

Wei Yuan sat in front of the desk, intricately enjoying expensive tea. "The mirror has already accepted you as its master, you can be its keeper for now.

"The one who contacted you first was indeed a member of the Earth Sect, and had the intent to kill you no matter what.

"Gold Gong Yang has already beaten back that person; you are not in any danger now. For a long time after, your home will have Nightwatchers stationed around it."

Xu Qi'an frowned; he did not find strange Wei Yuan's course of action, as yesterday when he replied to Nine, he had already gathered that this great eunuch intended to perform a "black-eat-black".

What he was dissatisfied about, was that *boss you didn't do your job properly. Why did you let him run away, you've left such a hidden danger.*

"The Earth Sect's Yin Spirit has no body nor form, and is difficult to kill fully." Wei Yuan explained, slowly drinking tea.

This was an aspect of each cultivation system's advantages and shortcomings.

Yang Yan waved his hand, and the mirror flew through the air towards Xu Qi'an, floating in front of him.

Xu Qi'an took the mirror, putting it into his robe, before bowing, and leaving the room.

Yang Yan, sitting like a pine tree, said in a low voice, "Father, I could not catch his yin spirit."

Wei Yuan laughed kindly, "Why should you have?"

Yang Yan did not understand, his brow furrowed into a tight knot.

Wei Yuan laughed with a light and carefree air, "If you are not skilled, naturally someone else will be skilled."

...

Xu Qi'an left the Nightwatchers Constabulary, and bought two bags of roasted beans, eagerly heading to get in the good graces of his immediate superior.

Li Yuchun was sat behind his desk, reading a dossier, and did not even raise his head.

"Brother Chun, I bought some roasted beans for you." Xu Qi'an, without thinking, said out loud.

Brother Chun? Li Yuchun raised his head, looking at him with a strict expression.

"Boss." Xu Qi'an added.

“Mhm. Put it on the table.” Li Yuchun finished speaking, and buried his head back into the document.

Xu Qi'an stretched his neck to look at his boss, asking “Boss, are you investigating the saltpetre mine case?”

“Zhu Guangxiao is hurt, Song Tingfeng is slacking off, why aren't you at home?” Li Yuchun asked, before nodding, “I am responsible for this case as of this moment.”

“I didn't have anything to do, so thought I'd come and familiarise myself with the constabulary and its surroundings.” Xu Qi'an asked tentatively, “Does this have to do with the Yao people? If it's a secret, then pretend I never asked.”

Li Yuchun grabbed a handful of beans, stuffing them into his mouth, eating and saying at the same time, “I cannot tell you of the details of the case, so I'll pick a few things I can tell you... our initial suspicion, is that the leftover evil of the Wanyao Country^[^1] have members hidden around the capital.”

“Wanyao Country?” Xu Qi'an's mind brought up of the history of the “*Jiazi Danyao*^[^2]”.

“Even though the Wanyao Country became history, these many years the remaining evil elements of the country have schemed by all means necessary to re-establish their state, and take back their old homeland.” Li Yuchun said, “The Buddhist Order leads the many countries of the Western Regions, their forces are powerful, so much so that even a Wanyao Country at its height would be no match. If they want to restore their country, they must make other plans.”

Xu Qi'an suddenly had a thought, “So they placed their ideas on our Great Feng's gunpowder? So that's why that monster was driving away the huihu nearby.”

A sudden revelation.

Li Yuchun was right in the middle of something, and asked “Do you have anything else to say?”

Xu Qi'an tactfully replied, “Nothing more, you get on with what you're doing boss, I'll be over in the other room meditating. If you have any orders just call me.”

Li Yuchun nodded.

After Xu Qi'an left, Brother Chun simultaneously read through his documents and ate the fried beans. Clumsily, he managed to knock the beans off the table, as with a clattering sound, they fell to the floor.

Li Yuchun stared at the beans in daze, and then covered his eyes in pain.

...

In the side room, Xu Qi'an was sat inspecting the jade mirror. Suddenly he felt a furious wave of qi from the neighbouring room, but only for that moment, before it passed.

He did not pay any mind, thinking over why on earth the great eunuch let him keep the mirror, and for what purpose.

Even though he said it was because he had dropped blood, and become its owner, but given that the old Daoist had given it to him, this meant that this type of ownership wasn't permanent.

I'm just a bronze gong, there's no reason to let me look after such an important treasure, is there?

Whatever, let's not worry about that for now. Given that he said he would have people stationed in secret around my home, I won't need to worry about the safety of Auntie and the Sisters.

The Earth Sect's master had been driven away, he probably won't come back to the capital any time soon.

Xu Qi'an meditated until the end of the day, having a relaxed stress-free day at work.

Tonight, should I go find Fuxiang, or should I go find Fuxiang, or should I go find Fuxiang...

Nonono, I need to save up money to buy a house, and move uncle and them to the inner city. This is safer...

I can't waste my silver on a moment's pleasure. Even though Fuxiang has deep feelings for me, and insists on not taking any of my silver, and has built up a close abalone trading friendship, but the money for the maids and dancers I'd still need to give.

A few cash of silver is still silver.

Xu Qi'an, with immense determination, turned his horse around, and left the inner city.

As he got home, it was already twilight.

...

After having dinner, he vaulted the wall back into his own courtyard. In this era without phones and computers, without a nightlife, apart from going to the Jiaofangsi, the only other way he could pass the time was by writing his diary.

Fuxiang is really a woman that men can't resist! She knows eighteen positions, setting off on the long journey for the Buddhist tomes, the journey to the west (breasts).[^3]

Xu Qi'an entered his room, picked up the flint on his table, and lit a candle.

Suddenly, his muscles tightened, as he froze in place.

On the bed sat cross-legged an old Daoist priest, wearing a tattered robe. His speckled white hair was held up with a ebony wood hairpin, with several strands hanging loose.

He had a careless aged aura about him, not conforming to any one type.

"So we meet again." The old Daoist's eyes looked at him peacefully, "Last time, you were a martial artist at the peak of Refining Body. Now, you're already Refining Qi, Sir, you are indeed a person of great fortune."

Xu Qi'an sat beside the table, his body ready to react and fight at any moment. He replied solemnly,

“Daozhang, to break into a common man’s home in the dark of night, what are you after?”

The old Daoist did not mind Xu Qi’an’s hostile tone, replying in a calm voice “To tell Sir, that this poor Daoist’s sect brother Zilian has already ascended to his next life. You need no longer worry.”

“You killed him?”

“I helped him ascend.”

The have you come to help me ascend too?

Nine is dead, and died in this Daoist’s hands... if he can deal with Zilian on his own, then he wouldn’t have needed to give up this treasure in the first place... Xu Qi’an deduced that the Daoist was very likely here to act out a “the sandpiper and clam fight, and the fisherman gains the benefit”.

The question was, how did he set up an ambush?

I know... you fucking- you also followed me! the corner of Xu Qi’an’s mouth twitched.

The fact that the old Daoist could find his way to the Xu manor, meant that he was already following him long ago. Thus, he would naturally also be aware of his position as a Nightwatcher, and also their status within the city.

The Zhou Manor’s assassins, the Nightwatchers, this old Daoist... I’m just an ordinary transmigrator, you pieces of shit, all following me one after another.

I did not consider everything properly, you gave me the artefact, how would you not follow me afterwards, keeping a tab on me... Xu Qi’an tested, “Has Daozhang come to take back the Earth Book?”

The old Daoist shook his head, “I already have one.”

From his sleeve slid out a jade mirror, identical to the one in Xu Qi’an’s shirt.

“This is the one that belonged to this poor Daoist’s brother, Zilian. Number Nine. Now, it has finally returned to its rightful owner. As for Sir’s, take it as a thank you gift from me.”

Without waiting for Xu Qi’an to reply, he continued on by himself, “There are nine pieces of the Earth Book in total, that this poor Daoist has given to different people. Sir is also one of those who this poor Daoist has picked.

“Those seven different people, created the Heaven and Earth Society.”

Xu Qi’an asked, “Who are they?”

The old Daoist shook his head, “They each have their own backgrounds, coming from all across the land. If Sir is curious, you can ask directly, as after all you know how to use the book. This poor Daoist will not reveal the others’ identities, including yours.

“This poor Daoist said earlier, you are a person shone on by the star of fortune.”

Xu Qi’an had a realisation, *of course, this old Daoist can see my strange luck.*

Finally there's someone who knows, who can solve my confusion. Picking up silver every now and then, even if it feels really good, still makes the heart a little anxious.

After all, I'm a solid grounded person.

He did not directly talk about his strange luck, using fully his oration skills, "Please, could Daozhang tell me why?"

Chapter 77. This One is Chen Jinnan

The old Daoist named Jinlian said leisurely, "A few days ago, This poor Daoist was severely injured and didn't have any choice except to hide in the capital. My intuition told me that I would meet someone who could resolve my crisis.

"This Daoist waited on the side of the road for a long time, before meeting you. However, This poor Daoist only knew that your star of fortune was shining, but did not know why.

"The woman in the carriage at that time had a magnificent and auspicious aura, rarely found. Since you gave her a bracelet, you will surely have some relationship in the future."

He said everything clearly and logically but didn't cut to the point. Isn't this routine of those mediums... Xu Qi'an said, "You chose the other seven members of the Heaven and Earth Society just as you chose me?"

"Yes!"

"May I ask the reason?"

The old Daoist smiled for the first time, "Yes, but if the benefactor hears what this poor Daoist has to say next, you'll have no road back."

Xu Qi'an pondered for a long time, weighing the pros and cons mentally, and then nodded, "Say it."

The old Daoist nodded, "Everything this Daoist has done is to save the Earth Sect."

Save the Earth Sect?

"Don't you find it strange? The Earth Sect cultivates Meritous Virtue. However, this Daoist's junior brother Zilian wanted to kill you and killed the death row prisoner who traded in your stead. This is surely contrary to Earth Sect's cultivation philosophy."

NINE killed my substitute... Xu Qi'an looked calm, but a chill had risen in his heart.

He was still not clear about the transaction process. Wei Yuan hadn't explained it. It was only just now did he knew that such a thing happened in the process.

Fortunately, he wasn't deceived by treasures and gold and chose the path most contrary to his heart.

He didn't just escape the crisis, but also showed loyalty.

"This matter is related to the secret of the Earth Sect. Benefactor, remember not to spread it to the ears of outsiders." After seeing Xu Qi'an nodding, Daoist Jinlian didn't explain immediately but stayed silent for a long time before sighing.

“The Earth Sect's current Sect Master has fallen to demonic desires, affecting almost everyone in the sect. Only a few disciples, including me, haven't been affected by the Sect Master's status.

"And the thing that protects us is the Earth Book."

"Demonic?" Xu Qi'an found it hard to believe; the Earth Sect cultivated Meritorious Virtue, and as the leader of the sect, the Sect Master should have had immeasurable merit. At least, It should be enough for picking up a tael of silver whenever he goes out.

*A person like him fell into the demonic path... How could the world be so heartless?

"Success is Meritorious Virtue, and failure is also Meritorious Virtue." Old Daoist Jinlian stared at the candle flame in a daze.

"When Daode Tianzun founded the Earth Sect, he left behind a warning: Fortune and Misfortune don't exist, only people name it so. The rewards of good and evil, Interrelated."[^1]

Speak human... Xu Qi'an complained.

"Does the benefactor think that saving someone's life is a meritorious virtue?" Jinlian asked.

"Isn't it?" Xu Qi'an retorted.

"What if you save a heinous person? He could have been condemned to die by the heavens, but he survived due to you and continued to do evil." Old Daoist Jinlian looked at Xu Qi'an.

"Is it still a good deed?"

Xu Qi'an pondered for a moment, then frowned, “The nature of humanity is change. Light and darkness are intertwined. We shouldn't be cynical and disgusted at the world just because we have seen darkness.

"It's impossible for me to go to the bottom of someone's past before saving them. That would be too unrealistic."

The old Daoist stepped back quietly to take an appreciative look at him, then said with a smile, "Benefactor, the fact that you can say these words, puts me truly at ease with entrusting you with the Earth Book"

“Aye, It's right for ordinary people to practice this principle. But for us, this is the most terrible kind of karma. The deeper the accumulation of meritorious virtue, the heavier the karma one occurs.

The Sect Master had been doing good deeds and accumulating Meritorious Virtue all his life. Sixty years ago, He failed to cross the tribulation and his karma backfired, luring him into the demonic path. An object at its extreme must return, this is that principle.

“If you want to prove the Dao with meritorious Virtue, You must also bear the corresponding karma. One thought leads to immortality and another becomes devilish. This is the fate every member of the Earth Sect can't escape.”

It turned out that the Earth Sect had such a secret!

In such a situation, Confucianism is needed to educate you. As it is said, Gentlemen are right and practice the middle way... Going to any extreme will not lead to perpetuity... Xu Qi'an suddenly thought of something, and his face changed.

If the blessing in me is from a similar source to the Earth Sect, Am I also in danger of becoming a Devil?

He didn't fully trust Daoist Jinlian, so he held his urge to inquire within.

"Don't the two sects of Heaven and Man care about this?" Xu Qi'an took the opportunity to inquire about the specifics, "You are all Daoists, aren't you?"

"The Earth Sect has the hidden danger of becoming demonic. Do you think that the other two sects of Heaven and Man from Daoism don't have any similar hidden dangers, do you?" Daoist Jinlian sneered, "Besides, This is a matter of my Earth Sect. What does it have to do with them, for them to meddle with our sect?"

So, What could the hidden dangers of the two sects of Heaven and Man be... Sixty Years, The Heaven and Earth Society also appeared sixty years ago, which was consistent with the information Xu Qi'an had consulted. He asked, "Daozhang established the Heaven Earth Society for..."

Daoist Jinlian said in a deep voice, "Kill the Sect Leader, cleanse the house."

"What is the realm of the Sect Master?"

"Second Rank."

... Take the damn mirror back. Daddy is strong by himself, he doesn't need your scraps.

The old Daoist with deep facial features seemed to see through Xu Qi'an's thoughts, and said with a smile,

"This old Daoist has cultivated Immeasurable Meritorious Virtue for decades. Though I don't have much ability, I can still judge people well enough. All eight people in the Heaven and Earth Society, including you, will not be small fish in the future.

"You all may be separated throughout the corners of the country, but you all will meet one another in the future. If you join the Heaven and Earth Society sooner, you will all form bonds sooner, which will surely help you all prevent deaths and injuries in fights among heavenly arrogances like you."

Xu Qi'an, who was originally somewhat resistant to joining the Heaven and Earth Society, changed his mind.

If the situation was truly as the old Daoist said, Everyone in the Heaven and Earth Society was talented prodigies, it would be beneficial for him to join this circle.

Maybe, it could play an important role in critical moments.

"Okay!" Xu Qi'an nodded.

The old Daoist nodded slightly, "If you need any help, You can ask me for help through the Earth Book, or ask the other members for help through the Earth Book if they are in the capital. The purpose of Heaven and Earth Society is to help each other.

"In addition, the holders of the Earth book are named according to the serial number of the book they hold."

After finishing speaking, the old Daoist turned into a cloud of grey smoke and escaped from the room, drifting gracefully into the distance.

Yin Spirit!

Xu Qi'an sat at the table and poured himself a cup of tea, replaying the previous conversation in his mind.

At present, It seems that this master from the Earth Sect doesn't have any malice toward me... However, these LYBs always have extensive plans, smoke trails and deceptions, their real plans can seldom be seen through from the surface... He gave me the mirror and used the hands of the Nightwatchers to deal with his fellow disciple... And then the fisherman became the biggest beneficiary of the matter. This proves that the old Daoist is an LYB.[^2]

But he wasn't that afraid. Xu Qi'an had sufficient experience in this area, and he had already figured out a way to survive.

Only an LYB could deal with an LYB.

Wei Yuan!

*This great eunuch is well educated and capable of governing the country as well as commanding the army, so he was supported by the emperor in his current position of suppressing all officials.

It was enough to show that he had extraordinary means.

"If I want to thrive in the capital, I have to hug this leg..." After Xu Qi'an made up his mind, he stopped panicking.

He picked up the fragment of the "Earth Book" on the table and immersed himself in it.

Chaos appeared once again, and the world of the mirror appeared in front of Xu Qi'an. Eight light spots were suspended in the grey chaos, one of which was the brightest.

Xu Qi'an lit up the light spots one by one, and then withdrew from the chaotic world.

Using his finger as a pen, he wrote on the mirror, "Hello everyone, I'm a newcomer. Please take care of me."

No one responded for a long time.

A bit embarrassing... Xu Qi'an re-entered in the mirror, "Hello everyone, This one is Chen Jinnan[^3], please give me some advice."

【SIX: Brother Chen, I contacted the Daoist Priest through the Earth Book, and I got a general idea from him. Thank you for helping the Daoist Priest resolve the crisis. 】

【THREE: It was a piece of cake, Not worth mentioning.】

A piece of cake?

*During their conversation with Daoist Priest Zilian, he was quite ignorant, and his realm was not high... But he was able to help Daoist Priest Jinlian kill Zilian and take back Book Nine... This

THREE may not be strong himself, but his background is surely unfathomable... * Seeing the calm reply of Three, Six secretly guessed.

At the same time, Xu Qi'an saw a text message from another member in the mirror.

【TWO: I haven't paid much attention to the Earth Book recently, What happened?】

Chapter 78. Testing Each Other

【NINE: Earlier, when the Sect Master was asleep, I took the opportunity to sneak back into the Earth Sect to do something. However, I stumbled into an ambush. I fled all the way to the Capital of Feng, only then could I keep my life. To avoid being hunted down, I gave the sealed mirror to ... this young Brother Chen Jinnan.】

*Not only did you tell them my gender, but also gave a bound on my age... * Xu Qi'an was somewhat miffed; he originally could have pretended to be a cute girl, or a skilled master, and catfished them.

【NINE: afterwards, after getting young brother Chen Jinnan's help, I killed Zilian, and avoided this disaster.】

【TWO: THREE, what constabulary are you in?】

*This might as well be asking people online for their address, if I told you then there would be a problem... * Xu Qi'an had a sudden flash of thought, and mimicking Xu Xinnian's tone:

【THREE: Constabulary? The capital's constabularies might as well be a bunch of vegetarians.】

THREE seems to look down upon the constabularies, his tone of voice seems to be rather arrogant. The capital only has so many government-related powers, and the Human Sect is out — Jinlian Daozhang wouldn't work with the Human Sect.

*The Nightwatchers wouldn't use this tone of voice to describe the constabularies, is he of the Sitianjian or the Cloud Deer Academy?

With this time, it's very much like the Confucianist's self-proclaimed "All things are lowly, only studying is good."

Two and Six guessed at the same time.

【TWO: ONE is also in the capital. Perhaps you two know each other? ONE, I know you're in front of the mirror, did you hear about what happened today?】

【ONE: In the Guiyuelou in the inner city, a Jianghu Wanderer has died. Sixty li outside the city, a hillock was pierced through by an unknown force.】

After a pause, One continued writing.

【ONE, have the banditry problems in Yunzhou settled?】

Interesting!

Xu Qi'an's eyebrows raised.

He smelled a whiff of a royal court concubine drama.

TWO pulled ONE under the water, and at the same time revealed to him some information: ONE and I were both in the capital.

This is clearly aimed at ONE. The reason is very simple, from the earlier conversation, everyone knew THREE lived in the capital.

But as THREE myself, I don't know much about the other people. TWO could've not revealed this point.

And ONE immediately returned an eye for an eye, very generously throwing out information, showing that she was a reliable source and giving Xu Qi'an a boost, whilst also hitting back at TWO.

TWO is in Yunzhou... bandits... she's a government person?

Yunzhou has had problems with bandits year after year, thus gaining the nickname from people all across the country: Bandit Province.

As Xu Qi'an's thoughts twisted and turned, both Six and Two were chewing on the information that One gave out.

East of the city sixty li, a hillock was pierced through... it's too little information, can't tell which cultivation path that is, but they were a high rank no matter what.

【TWO: How could it have settled? The emperor of Feng is a brainless baboon, thinking about wanting to become immortal all day, not knowing the toil of the common people.】

This sounds like... TWO is probably not eating the crown's salary... Xu Qi'an guessed.

【TWO: Previous years aside, just this year alone, I investigated through the census records of the many counties of Yunzhou, going all over the place, and from a rough estimate, there have been at least sixty thousand people who have fled, become wanderers, or bandits themselves.】

Wanderers were people without lands, people who could not pay tax and thus gave up their lands and fled.

Without lands, a person still had to live, so some begged, some did temporary labour, and some directly became bandits, raiding and pillaging good people, forming a feedback loop.

Two continued: 【I've exterminated over a dozen waves of bandits, and found that at their back was a more hidden power.】

【ONE: Do you have any idea who?】

【TWO: No... right, how is the situation in the capital?】

Xu Qi'an didn't wait for One to respond, racing to be the first to write: 【THREE: Deputy Minister Zhou has fallen, and the political battle has started. However Deputy Minister Zhou's fall was somewhat absurd; the reason was that his only son had deep perversions, and attempted to molest the second daughter of the Marquis Weiwu.】

This whole string of text was both a message to Two, and also a display of his own skills and abilities, and at the same time testing One.

Anyone who had the status to participate in the battle in court knew, that the real reason for Deputy Minister Zhou's fall was the tax silver case.

What made him disappointed was that One did not correct him.

【ONE: Jinlian Daozhang, I've already investigated for you, the Lesser Sage hall was sealed on the Jia-zi day. At that day, the only outsiders at the academy, apart from the eldest princess, was a civil servant called Xu Qi'an.】

!!!

Xu Qi'an's heart skipped a beat. A sense of panic as if he had just had his personal details published on the internet rose within him.

*Who was this Number One? Why did they want to investigate what happened that day on Jia-zi...

* Xu Qi'an thought back. On that day, Erlang took him to tour the academy, and at a moment's inspiration, he wrote those four phrases on the stone stele.

And made the azure qi rush towards the sky.

At the same time, he was very curious as to why Jinlian Daozhang would be curious in the changes in the Academy.

Logically, this would be something the Imperial Academy's students would care about, what did it have to do with an Earth Sect Daoist?

【ONE: However, that civil servant had no special qualities. Apart from being rather skilled in poetry, he was merely a Refining Body martial artist, and not a student of the Academy, even less so a Scholar.】

【NINE: Mhm, okay.】

【THREE: Daozhang, why are you interested in the change at the Academy?】 Xu Qi'an tested him.

【NINE: I want to know if the lesser saint's stele has split or not.】

【THREE: Is this very important?】

【NINE: Rather so.】

It split... Xu Qi'an did not tell Jinlian Daozhang. Even if he wanted to say, it would not be now.

【THREE: There's something I'd like to ask everyone for advice.】

【TWO: Speak.】

【THREE: Are Arcanists exclusive to the Sitianjian?】

This sentence from him as good as excluded the possibility that he was a disciple of the Sitianjian.

Everyone grew ever more certain that he was a scholar of the Cloud Deer Academy, a student that took the fancy of his teachers. Otherwise, how would he have asked a skilled master to kill the Zilian Daoist?

And this was exactly what Xu Qi'an wanted.

You think I'm a student of the Cloud Deer Academy, whilst in reality I'm a Nightwatcher. Later on if you find out I may be a Nightwatcher, you'll find that I am really a student of the Academy. Alternatively, you'll find out that I'm the tutor for the Sitianjian's Alchemists.

【SIX: I'll answer this. Six hundred years ago, there were no Arcanists. After the Great Feng was founded, then came the Sitianjian and its Arcanists.】

Their sect's history was brief, and there was no record of splitting. Which is to say, apart from the Sitianjian, any wild Arcanists might as well be non-existent... There should still be some, but only very few, otherwise when I pulled out that blue-cover book, they would've found it strange.

No wonder the Arcanists desperately wanted my chemistry knowledge, with how powerful they clearly were.

Because their history was short, and so there was not time to form a holistic theoretical basis and curriculum?

Furthermore, who was the Arcanist behind the tax silver case?

This one suspicious detail in the tax silver case, had constantly occupied veteran detective Xu Qi'an's mind.

On the fact that traces of an alchemist had appeared in the tax silver case, the Sitianjian has taken a very carefree attitude to the matter, not asking nor hearing.

This was not scientific.

No matter if it was Chu Caiwei, Song Qing, or the other white-cloaks, they all never mentioned this in front of him.

【SIX: THREE, according to the rules, you'll have to answer one of my questions.】

Only then did Xu Qi'an realise, that One and Two's conversation was always one question each every time. Earlier he had butted in, and answered about the situation of court in One's stead.

【THREE: Ask away.】

【SIX: What is the second rank of the Confucianists called?】

This is another test, a test of my identity... is it testing if I was indeed a student of the Cloud Deer Academy, or my social status.

Normal students did not know what the Confucian second rank was called; in that stele about the life of great scholar Chen Zhong, it did not ever talk in detail about his rank. Only after Xu Xinnian explained, did Xu Qi'an find out.

The reason why Xu Xinnian knew was that he was a student of the great scholar Zhang Shen, and was a Jushi that had passed above average in the autumn examinations.

Amongst the students at the Academy, he was already near the top.

If I was not a student of the Cloud Deer Academy, then this test might have worked. If a non-Confucian knew what the Confucian second rank was, then their social status would only get higher.

If I couldn't answer, then this group would probably think I'm not good enough.

Xu Qi'an used his finger like a pen, and responded:

【THREE: The second rank Confucian is called Great Scholar.】

Chapter 79. The Benefits of Being Backed by an Organisation

The message had been sent.

No one answered the message for a long time, and no one even called 666. Xu Qi'an sat on the table and waited for a long time before confirming that this group of people had gone offline.

You're too rude... don't you know to inform others before going offline? A bunch of unqualified netizens. He cursed in his heart.

After putting away the small jade mirror and locking the door, Xu Qi'an blew out the candles, and lay down on the bed, letting his thoughts fly.

The Heaven and Earth Society seems to be a pretty loose organization. The members communicate with each other, but are also very guarded with each other.

That's quite understandable. After all, the people in the society are scattered all over the world, All of them may not even be from the Great Feng. It'd be normal for them to be wary of each other.

The benefit that it can grant is sharing of information.

This point was very important.

*Isn't this just a chat group? If you can chat offline, Maybe there would be opportunities for chatting offline in the future.

TWO is in Yunzhou, quite far. Also, their status shouldn't be low, or they wouldn't be able to check the household registration in the various prefectures and counties.

ONE seems to be in the capital. They should be a person with real status and position, much stronger than an imitation product like me, and the one I have to guard against.

SIX... They had warned me not to respond to NINE before and said that they were also in the capital.

ONE and SIX are the ones I have to be careful of. The other members are separated from me by a large distance. Even if they knew my true identity, it wouldn't be a problem since we wouldn't have any conflicts of interest with each other.

ONE and SIX are the kind of netizens who could say "You wait, I'll mess you up real bad." and do what they say.

But on the other hand, If I make a cordial deal with them, These two are near me and can help me with my urgent needs.

The others haven't come online yet.

This feels like playing a game of Mafia, Interesting, Interesting...

Thinking, he fell asleep.

...

The night was like water and the moon like frost.

As the cold wind whistled, the lights of the Lingbao Temple shone brightly in the night.

Ever since the Dao Master of the Human Sect was conferred as the National Teacher, their sect headquarters had moved over to the imperial capital, and the current emperor had built a magnificent Dao temple for them.

A luxurious sandalwood carriage stopped outside the Dao Temple, and Wei Yuan, wearing an azure cloak, stepped down on a small ladder.

The Daoist Apprentice guarding the gate welcomed him respectfully.

Walking through the courtyard, corridor, and garden, he came to a spacious quiet room.

After the Daoist Apprentice left, Wei Yuan knocked on the door with his fingers.

The panel door opened automatically, and a cold voice sounded, "For Duke Wei's presence to grace this hall, this small Daoist is revered and awed."

Wei Yuan didn't care about the sarcasm in the speech and stepped over the threshold to enter the house. The room was cold, and a sandalwood scent was wafting from the desk.

There was a screen between the room and the lobby, and a graceful figure could be faintly visible sitting cross-legged behind the screen.

Wei Yuan's expression was cold, and his tone even colder, "What happened to the Earth Sect?"

The female national teacher's age couldn't be parsed from her voice, as it had the melodiousness of a young girl and the softness of a mature woman.

"Duke Wei knows of astronomy up above and geography down below, why would you need to ask me for advice?"

Wei Yuan shook his head, "I just scolded you with an 'Only Women and villains are hard to deal with' back then, You still hold a grudge over this?"

The person behind the screen became silent.

"The Nightwatchers have a fragment of the Earth Book, do you want it?"

"That's the Earth Sect's property."

Wei Yuan nodded, turned around, and left.

After he left the Lingbao Temple, Yang Yan, who was waiting by the carriage, came up to him, "Father, Did you get any news?"

Wei Yuan shook his head, "The female Dao Master didn't want to say anything, but something must have happened to the Earth Sect."

After getting into the carriage, Wei Yuan put his cold hands near the animal-head stove, and after warming up his body, said solemnly,

"Many artificial and natural disasters have occurred in recent years. The state of Great Feng isn't right. The major cultivation systems have also expressed problems continuously.

"I have been getting a feeling that something is about to happen."

Yang Yan frowned, "Is father worrying too much? On the day we went to the Sitianjian, the Jianzheng said that everything in the heavens was normal."

Wei Yuan said, "The words of those who spy on heavenly secrets couldn't be believed."

After pausing for a while, he became serious and resolute, "We should find out about the current state of the Earth sect at any cost."

Yang Yan: "The Earth Sect has always been very low-key, like a Heavenly Dragon, you see its head but never its tail..."

Wei Yuan's eyes became sharp suddenly, "I said, At any cost."

It is rare to see father have such a solemn attitude. Yang Yan lowered his head, "Yes."

...

In the early morning, Xu Lingyin, wearing a thick padded jacket, held a dead branch in her hand and chased a group of geese as young as her on her stubby legs.

Seeing her eldest brother approaching her, Xu Lingyin put her hands on her hip and proudly said, "Big Brother, Big Brother, I'm already invincible among my peers."

Xu Qi'an looked at her, "Are you invincible in stupidity?"

Xu Lingyin anxiously defended herself, "It's not that I'm invincible in stupidity. It's that I'm invincible, invincible."

She said while waving a few dead branches, indicating that she was invincible in fighting.

Little Pea explained, "My sister said that no one in the family who is my age can defeat me, and I am the fiercest among them."

It's because you're the only child in the family... Xu Qi'an said, "Your sister didn't lie to you."

Xu Lingyin was so happy that on the way to the living room with her elder brother, made large haughty footsteps, as if not acknowledging any kin.

At the dining table, Auntie was eating breakfast gracefully, and saying, "Husband dear, Lingyue seems to have reached the age to marry."

It was reached a long time ago too. Girls from ordinary families could get married at the age of fourteen. The Xu family was large, so they didn't need to marry their daughter off in such a hurry, but seventeen years was indeed the age to marry.

It was because, if a girl was unmarried at the age of 18, she would become a leftover girl. *Clearly 18-year-old girls were at their most tender age.*

Xu Lingyue raised her head all of a sudden, her moist eyes filled with stubbornness, "Mother, I don't want to marry yet."

Auntie rolled her eyes to reprimand her, "Is this still a question regarding your opinion?"

Xu Lingyue refused to accept this, and pursed her lips, revealing the delicate corners of her mouth, delicate as if they were carved, "Second Brother still hasn't married a sister-in-law yet."

Xu Xinnian was inexplicably shot in the knee.

Auntie had her reason and said, "Even if your second brother wants to get married, he has to wait until the completion of the Spring Examination. There isn't any hurry for him. Let's settle your marriage first."

Xu Lingyue puffed her cheeks, silent as a doormat.

Second Uncle Xu nodded thoughtfully, "Lingyue has indeed reached the age of marriage. Ai, Time flies by so fast. She has grown up so quickly."

Xu Lingyin, who was immersed in her food, raised her naive little face upon hearing that sentence, and shouted,

"Elder Sister has grown up and is stirring up trouble."

The entire family, "???"

Xu Qi'an's face became numb, and he forcibly changed the topic, "Even if Lingyue wants to marry, she must marry an excellent man like me."

Auntie snorted with disdain.

Make trouble again, right... Xu Qi'an said with a chuckle, "Auntie can live such a good life of prosperity because she married a second uncle, who is like me."

The beautiful Auntie couldn't refute this sentence, so she only stared resentfully at her unlucky nephew.

Uncle Xu felt very comfortable listening to his nephew's boasting, and said smilingly, "Does madam have any candidates?"

Auntie said, "We'll choose the candidates slowly. I just wanted to discuss this with you."

Xu Xinnian glanced at his family and announced, "From tomorrow onwards, I have to go back to the Cloud Deer Academy to prepare for the Fall Examination."

After he had stepped into the realm of self-cultivation, Zhang Shen, the great scholar, recalled him to Cloud Deer Academy to teach him theory and practice while preparing him for the next year's Fall Examination.

His gaze swept the crowd calmly as if he were waiting for their reaction.

Auntie immediately passed a slice of meat to her son, "My Cijiu has always had great promise."

Only then did Xu Xinnian nod in satisfaction and let out an "Mm."

After having had breakfast, Xu Qi'an was about to leave the house when he heard a young maiden's clear and soft voice behind him, "Brother..."

Upon turning, he was faced with a slim girl with delicate features.

Xu Lingyue said aggrievedly, "I don't want to be married."

Xu Qi'an thought for a while, then grinned and said, "In the future, Talk about it with me, Cijiu, and second Uncle. When is it the turn of women like your mother to decide the family's affairs."

"Xu Ningyan!" Auntie had appeared by Xu Lingyin at some point in the middle, with her hands on her hips and her willow-like eyebrows squeezing.

The beautiful woman's chest rose and fell with anger, and her face looked red with anger, "Rascal, Repeat what you said just now."

Xu Qi'an didn't bother to talk to her and ran away in a hurry.

...

After rushing his horse to the Nightwatcher's Office, Xu Qi'an went straight to the Tower of Noble Spirit.

It's this bronze gong again... After communicating with the surprised guard, he let Xu Qi'an enter the building.

Ordinary bronze Gongs weren't qualified to report affairs to Duke Wei, since they had superior Silver and Gold Gongs above them.

And Duke Wei wouldn't personally summon a copper gong to his office.

But this new bronze gong, has received such a different treatment. Whenever he came, he was summoned by Duke Wei.

After ascending to the seventh floor, Xu Qi'an entered the tea room, where he saw the Azure Robe in the observation hall.

"What's the matter this time?" The eunuch showed his back to him, not turning around.

He wanted to confess everything about last night. He had the Nightwatchers as his backer, and Wei Yuan's feet to hug, so there wasn't a need for him to bear anything by himself.

It didn't just reduce the risk, but also helped him win the trust of father Wei.

Chapter 80. One Blade From Heaven and Earth

In the future I want to be a person with this kind of aura... Xu Qi'an thought in admiration, and cupped his fists,

“Last night, Jinlian Daozhang from the Earth Sect came to visit me. He did not hurt me, nor take back the Earth Book, rather inviting me to join the Heaven and Earth Society.”

“The Heaven and Earth Society...” Wei Yuan turned around, walking back into the room.

“The Heaven and Earth Society was founded by that Daoist Jinlian of the Earth Sect, and the Earth Sect disciples under his banner.” Xu Qi’an, seeing Wei Yuan make an intently listening posture, knew that the report that he had given had value.

“There are nine core members of the Heaven and Earth Society, which are simultaneously the nine holders of the fragments of the ‘Earth Book’. They take the number order of their fragments as their nicknames, and do not use real identities.” Xu Qi’an summarised everything about his conversation last night, “Currently I only know that ONE is in the capital, and is very influential and powerful; TWO is in Yunzhou rooting out bandits, and may be from the government.”

The great eunuch with whitening hair thought for a long time, before asking “Not knowing each others’ identities... what else did Jinlian tell you?”

Xu Qi’an replied truthfully, “He said that the Earth Sect has had a problem, and he must clear out his house. For this he founded this Society.”

He looked at the great eunuch, as those deep time-worn eyes suddenly lit up, and looked back intently. That deep and full voice said with some seriousness, “Explain.”

“The Sect Leader of the Earth Sect has fallen into demonic tendencies, and has pulled down with him nearly the entire sect. Only a minority kept clear minds, and escaped the sect hearth. This was because they had the protection of the Earth Book.” Xu Qi’an fully sold out Jinlian Daozhang, “So he created the Heaven and Earth Society, and bestowed the Earth Book fragments to heaven’s favoured prodigies all over the world, raising them, to one day help him clear out the sect.”

The Sect Leader has fallen to demonic tendencies, no wonder Zilian became so dark and evil... No expression could be seen on Wei Yuan’s refined and handsome face. With an examining tone, he asked “Why do you think Jinlian told you this?”

Xu Qi’an was just about to say that he didn’t know, but seeing Wei Yuan’s deep gaze, hearing the examining tone in his voice, he swallowed those words back down.

With Wei Yuan’s scheming mind, he definitely wouldn’t be looking for answers from me... he’s testing my abilities.

Um... if I had just said “I don’t know” those three words, would I be marked as not clever enough in this great eunuch’s heart, as a subordinate of average ability?

Xu Qi'an's mind sprang to life, as he smiled with a rather relaxed expression on his face, "Every member of the Heaven and Earth Society knows about the problem in the Earth Sect. The reason why Jinlian Daozhang would tell us truthfully, is to show his sincere intents."

Wei Yuan ever so subtly nodded, "The movements of the Earth Sect are hidden; up until today, the Nightwatchers have not known about the sect falling from Meritorious Virtue into the demonic path."

Xu Qi'an opened his eyes wide, "Is Duke Wei saying, that Jinlian Daozhang is using me as an intermediary to form a secret alliance with you?"

Wei Yuan finally nodded with satisfaction, but did not respond, rather saying kindly "From now on, you will be the Nightwatchers' spy within the Heaven and Earth Society. You will be responsible for finding out their true identities. If necessary, the constabulary will give you a level of help."

Xu Qi'an clasped his fists together, "Yes Sir."

If I had been a little slower earlier, would Wei Yuan have taken the Earth Book fragment, and picked a more clever person to replace me, and put them as a spy into the Heaven and Earth Society?

Great People's tests are really like a spring breeze flowing by, if you're not paying attention for one second you would make a mistake...

Wei Yuan said, "You are Refining Qi now, you should pick a special martial art for yourself. Go pick one from the record hall."

"Do you prefer Dao or Jian swords?"

"Dao!" Xu Qi'an replied.

When he was still a regular petty official, he always carried a dao. Even though he rarely had any opportunity to use it, but he had worn one for so many years that he had grown fond of this type of weapon — it was better than a Jian, anyway.

Wei Yuan reminded him, "When you pick a special art, remember to pick something that is purely a dao art. Disregard anything that is too flamboyant or complicated."

"The Martial path is different from the others, and doesn't have much in the way of magical tricks, only power. Therefore, the purer a martial artist is the better. When you finally step into the high ranks, you'll understand this principle."

A few simple words, was worth more than a ton of gold. Xu Qi'an felt very pleased, "Thank you for your tutelage, Duke Wei."

He had only started in a big organisation, and if he were to get Wei Yuan's appreciation and agreement, then the potential of both his job prospects and martial cultivation were boundless.

The Sitianjian takes in children, not child chickens^[1]. The Confucianists don't suit me. Furthermore, neither of them are marital artists. For the martial path, the only real choice is the Nightwatcher Constabulary.

...

Holding Wei Yuan's note, Xu Qi'an came to the record hall. With him was Li Yuchun.

Li Yuchun glanced at the clerk leading the way, and said with significance in his voice, "When did you start hugging Wei Yuan's leg?"

"Duke Wei asked for me himself." Xu Qi'an made an innocent face.

Li Yuchun nodded his head slightly, without any displeasure, not asking any further.

The aptitude of Upper Jia was given by Duke Wei himself. He had intentions to raise Xu Qi'an, and so this was normal.

For this, Li Yuchun already had expectations, and so was not dissatisfied or jealous at his subordinate going around him and reporting directly to his superiors.

Firstly, because an Upper Jia must be trained well, and Duke Wei would definitely pay him extra mind. Secondly, Xu Qi'an was a bronze gong under his order.

With this relation in place, he could not wait for Xu Qi'an to walk higher and higher.

The clerk lead them to a bookshelf, saying: "There are 407 dao arts, they are all stored here."

After the two Nightwatchers nodded, he backed off.

Li Yuchun glanced at Xu Qi'an, and before the latter could speak, he laughed "Are you going to ask me, which Dao art is the strongest?"

Xu Qi'an laughed cheekily.

Li Yuchun thought for a moment, saying tentatively "Special arts come in two types, one is in skill, the other in dao. Don't even bother with the latter, and as for the former, there is no weaker or stronger; it all depends on the person."

The two of them slowly started picking Dao art manuals. Xu Qi'an remembered strongly Wei Yuan's teaching, and did not look for the flamboyant arts.

After two hours, Li Yuchun was somewhat impatient, "Don't you like any of them?"

...Boss, I forgot to tell you, I have decidophobia! Xu Qi'an nodded, laughing bitterly.

Li Yuchun thought for a moment, "Wait a moment."

He summoned the clerk, and asked: "Recently, have any new special arts come in? I'm talking about dao ones."

The clerk thought deeply, "Yes. A few days ago a few manuals came from the Sitianjian, we paid a few thousand taels of silver for them."

A few thousand taels... Li Yuchun did a double take, and then smiled, "Xu Ningyan, your luck is not bad."

He then explained, "A special art worth a few thousand taels of silver, would be higher quality than any of the ones here. I gather there's probably an incomplete version of some dao sword Dao art. [^2]"

"Dao?" Xu Qi'an's eyes gleamed.

“A special art that has contains the rhythm of the Dao, normally created by a high ranked martial artists, containing their own life experiences and realisations about martial cultivation. If you want to become a high level martial artist, then you mustn’t touch these kind of special arts, because this is someone else’s Dao. However, fragments and incomplete versions can be learned from.”

Li Yuchun ordered the clerk, “Bring them over.”

After a short while, the clerk returned with a few manuals. One of them indeed was an incomplete piece of a dao Dao art.

《*One Blade from Heaven and Earth*》

The person who picked this name either has Eighth-grader syndrome, or psychosis... Xu Qi’an gathered his first impressions, and then picked up the thin book, starting to read its preface:

In the world, there is nothing that cannot be cut with one strike of the blade. If there are, then my suggestion is to run.

Xu Qi’an resisted the urge to drop this manual that instant, and continued reading patiently.

After reading through the introductory core principles, his opinion of it was changed.

If I’m not wrong, then the master who wrote this book indeed is psychotic. He thinks, that anything in the world could be cut with one strike, including heaven and earth itself.

Enemies, naturally, are no exception.

Any excess exchange of blows, or combat, are all a disgrace to the martial path.

I will only make one strike, that decides who lives or dies. Of course, psychosis doesn’t mean losing common sense; in the introduction he noted, that if I were to meet an enemy I cannot defeat, then I should run for it.

Xu Qi’an slowly finished reading, as his mind rerated this art anew: Focus everything on one point, and reach the peak of perfection!

He closed the manual, eyes gleaming, “I want this one.”