

Protect OCL VL4 11

Chapter 11: Shou Zhe Tests the Quasi Emperor's Son! A Storm is Approaching

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Such pitiful children~~

They were completely unaware that they had become the pawns in the covert power struggle between two families, even their future marriages were beyond their control.

However, having no control over one's marriage was a norm in this world, especially for direct descendants.

Because the marriages of the direct descendants were not only their personal affairs but were also related to the long-term future of the entire family. If they were allowed to marry freely, wouldn't that lead to chaos?

Including Wang Shouzhe, Liu Ruolan, and the couple of An Commandery Prince, all had their marriages arranged by their families. Having the opportunity to choose from a few potential partners could already be considered great fortune.

After a short while.

After another round of beatings, the two children finally become well-behaved and began to draw circles in the corner. They looked at each other, and a sense of shared misery arose between them.

However, Wang Shouzhe wasn't in a hurry to discuss the marriage alliance, instead, he leisurely sipped his Immortal Tea and smilingly looked at An Commandery Prince, Wu Mingyuan: "Your Highness Mingyuan, I heard from Immortal Tian Yan last time that you are planting protective forests and improving land in the Northern Guard area, may I ask how it's progressing?"

Actually, Wang Shouzhe knew very well what the results were.

His understanding of Wu Mingyuan and the Northern Guard far exceeded Wu Mingyuan's understanding of the Wang family. The Group Immortal Palace, established by Wang Mei, the head

of the household, had gradually infiltrated the Northern Guard over the decades, becoming Wang Shouzhe's eyes.

When it came to this, Wu Mingyuan suddenly became energetic. "The Northern Guard is located at the northwest border of the Southern Desert County, which is the junction of the Dala Desolate Desert, the West Sea Prefecture, and the Southern Desert County. Although that area is called a 'guard,' in terms of actual area, it's even larger than the sum of the six guards in Longzuo County."

"My plan is to first turn the Northern Guard into a grain production base, and then gradually push into the Dala Desolate Desert with our protective forest, transforming the entire Great Desert into fertile land that stretches for tens of thousands of miles. You see, the total area of the entire Dala Desolate Desert is almost half of the Great Qian Land."

"Now, we have initially overcome the technical difficulties of planting a protective forest and thereby, fulfilling the technical conditions for large-scale planting. Our people have also found a few underground water sources to solve part of the irrigation problems."

"For our primary crops, we use the drought-tolerant Pearl Rice that was improved in Academy Changchun Valley of Long Zuo Purple Abode. It enjoys sunlight and can tolerate drought; its tall plant and thick, long roots help it penetrate the sandy soil and effectively absorb the nutrients of the earth.

Furthermore, Pearl Rice has a very high yield per acre, and its stalk can then be used to raise cattle, sheep, and pigs. The manure from these livestock, after being composted and fermented, proves to be excellent fertilizer for the fields."

"For our secondary crops, we chose Jade Crystal Grapes and Cumin Spice. The former fully takes advantage of the benefits of the underground water resources providing higher value and the wine produced from the grapes can be sold. Whereas Cumin Spice plants can be intercropped with Pearl Rice to maximize the use of land..."

Once Wu Mingyuan started talking about farming, he would become unstoppable, putting his whole self into an excited state, with a gleam in his eyes.

Wu Dianshan, on the other hand, was getting sleepy. He was just a leisurely prince. He enjoyed taking care of flowers and plants, fishing, but as for large-scale farming and development, he was not interested in the slightest.

However, he knew that Wang Shouzhe was becoming interested and seemingly testing Wu Mingyuan's knowledge and capacity.

However, Wang Shouzhe listened very carefully, raising doubts from time to time and having them patiently answered by Wu Mingyuan.

With Wang Shouzhe's questions getting more detailed, Wu Mingyuan's answers also became more comprehensive, covering soil composition, fertilization, pest disease prevention and control, exploration and excavation of underground water, irrigation canal construction, and even the overall planning and construction details of the Northern Guard. He was extremely knowledgeable in every aspect.

His deep understanding of farming and regional planning, as well as his detailed strategic planning, were revealed in no uncertain terms.

Such talent had even earned the affirmation from Wang Shouzhe, who was nodding his head in approval.

Even Wang Zong'an held a hint of admiration in his eyes.

Having personally overseen the entirety of the Qingluo Guard's development and construction, he knew full well the difficulties involved. And what the An Commandery Prince was attempting to achieve with the Northern Guard was far more challenging than the development of the Qingluo Guard.

After all, the Qingluo Sea, where the Qingluo Guard was located, had already seen the completion of its land preparation, and the construction of the Qingluo Guard on this basis was much simpler in comparison. However, the Northern Guard, under the care of An Commandery Prince, was basically a desolate place where everything had to start from scratch.

"Lord Mingyuan, with your current plans, it will take you at most a hundred years to properly manage the Northern Guard," Wang Shouzhe poured a cup of tea for Wu Mingyuan and casually asked, "However, even if this place is managed well, it will only be the size of the six guards in Longzuo County, and its contribution to the overall national strength of the entire Great Qian Land would be negligible.

The underground water in the Northern Guard could hardly support a grand plan of land reclamation for the Dala Desolate Desert. What thoughts do you have, Your Highness?"

Wu Dianshan, who was on the side, couldn't help but admire Wang Shouzhe internally. Wang Shouzhe was definitely the most amazing person he had ever met in his life.

Others, when facing a quasi-emperor's son, would try to curry favour. And if a quasi-emperor's son wanted to recruit followers and vassals, he would also carefully examine and investigate, then meet them and quiz them for an assessment.

But for Wang Shouzhe, the situation has completely turned around. He was the one testing and assessing the quasi-emperor's son. In this case, who's recruiting whom?

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However, Wu Mingyuan didn't care much about this.

It was rare for him to meet someone who was willing to listen to his ideas, could comprehend them, and even pointedly question him. He was in the midst of a passionate discussion; why would he stop?

He gulped down the immortal tea, then continued, "Shouzhe, you're right to the point. Regarding this matter, I already have a comprehensive plan. We, the Northwest Guard, are adjacent to the West Sea Prefecture. From the Northwest Guard to the west, the nearest western coastline is only two thousand miles away."

The "Western Sea" is not a real sea, but a freshwater lake in the West Sea Prefecture. It is named as such because of its vast size, comparable to that of a sea.

"My plan is to start from the Western Sea and open a substantial artificial Grand Canal. First, it will go through east to west, connecting the West Sea Prefecture and the Northwest Guard. Then, we will start from the Northwest Guard and go through the north to south, all the way to the national capital Return Dragon City.

In this way, we can solve the water shortage problem of the Dala Desert, and open up the river for transportation."

Speaking of this, Wu Mingyuan's eyes were shining brightly, indicating that he was seriously planning this matter.

However, not far away, An Commandery Prince Consort, who was intently listening couldn't help but sigh helplessly, "My lord has started promoting his grand plan again. I hope that Master Shouzhe can bear it after listening and not just write it off as ridiculous and walk away."

"Sister Qing Rui, don't worry. My husband is quite resilient." Liu Ruolan covered her mouth and smiled, "Plus, he himself enjoys the planning's grand scheme and seems to hit it off with the lord. However, why would such a great plan be ridiculed?"

"Ah, Sister Ruolan, you may not know. Our household's fortune has been almost all invested into the development of the Northwest Guard and there seems to be no end in sight for recouping the costs. Although the prince's plan seems good, the manpower, resources, and wealth it requires in the process are not something we can afford."

"Before, he had submitted this plan to the court, hoping to persuade the Emperor to allocate funds, but he was criticized as 'daydreaming'. In fact, even the insiders of our Gongye Clan did not support the lord's plan; the difficulty is too high..." Gongye Qingrui said somewhat helplessly.

Despite her hopes of assisting her husband in achieving his aspirations, she could not force her own family to assist. Moreover, her husband's series of planning was indeed grand. It was massive in scale, lengthy in time, and had no foreseeable returns on investment. Even an aristocratic family like the Gongye Clan may not bear it.

Massive initial investments have already emptied the coffers of the An Commandery Prince's Residence, over several decades. Gongye Qingrui is still relying on the Northwest Guard to turn a profit, hence she wasn't too optimistic about the grand scheme.

Unexpectedly.

Upon hearing this, Wang Shouzhe repeatedly nodded in agreement, "Good, this plan has great foresight. If this enormous Grand Canal is successfully constructed, it will revitalise the land along the West Sea Prefecture and Northwest Guard. Despite the colossal investment and long construction period, it can reap lasting benefits."

Commandery Prince An was startled, but soon, he began to take action with enthusiasm, grabbing Wang Shouzhe, "Master Shouzhe, do you agree with the plan, too? Good, good. I thought only Crown Brother Hao agreed with it."

For the past few decades, he tried to sell the plan far and wide, only to be ridiculed. Some good-hearted people advised him that at this time, he should focus on the competition for becoming the Emperor's son rather than planning a massive project spanning hundreds or even thousands of years.

By the time you truly realize it, the competition for becoming the Emperor's son would have ended long ago, and you, Prince An, would have simply played the matchmaker.

"Why should I not agree?" Wang Shouzhe nodded continuously in admiration, "Once this grand scheme is completed, within a thousand years at most, the Dala Desert can be gradually encroached upon, adding two to three prefecture's worth of power to Da Qian, greatly enhancing the national strength of the Great Qian Land."

"Furthermore, the tremendous granary capacity of those additional two or three prefectures could easily maintain a population double that of today." Commandery Prince An said fervently, "At that time, the power of our Great Qian Land will be even more prosperous. How could the barbaric West Jin, which has been opposing us for thousands of years, resist the onslaught of our Black Armor Army?"

"Commandery Prince An, your ambition is admirable."

Wang Shouzhe could not help but sigh.

He had always thought that all Commandery Prince An strove for was the development of the Northwest Guard, but he did not expect that he held such grand ambitions.

His vision, his scope, his demeanor, even made Wang Shouzhe feel somewhat inferior.

However, the positions they held were different, as was what they protected, hence their scopes were naturally different.

For Wang Shouzhe, the Changning Wang Clan represents his roots while all his efforts and planning were just so that the Changning Wang Clan can develop better with a firmly established family lineage, younger generations can have ample cultivation resources, and the elders of the family would have opportunities to break into higher levels.

However, Prince An's case was different.

As one with the imperial bloodline, he should be considering the future from the perspective of the entire Great Qian Land.

Unexpectedly.

Upon hearing Wang Shouzhe's words, An Commandery Prince's seemed a bit embarrassed and replied, "Master Shouzhe, your praise is undeserved. These plans are not entirely mine."

After a pause, his expression seemed to fade as he said, "Over a hundred years ago, when I spent my time discussing the Dao with Crown Brother Hao, we discussed the future and plans of the Great Qian Land. The granary plan for the Northwest Guard and the Dala Desert was just one of them.

Crown Brother Hao has also made detailed plans for the Eastern Sea, Northern Sea, Western Sea, and the Great Wilderness Marsh as well as the regions beyond the Southern Wilderness."

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However, as much as this was said, in reality the An Commandery Prince also contributed a great deal of advice and strategy to those plans. In those years, they would even frequently argue over differing opinions.

"Hao elder brother? Hao Commandery Prince?"

Wang Shouzhe furrowed his brows slightly; this was a name he had not heard before.

Even though the Great Qian Land had quite a number of Commandery Princes, some of whom were reclusive, Wang Shouzhe had looked into the Imperial Household's situation before. While his investigation wasn't too in-depth, he knew the existing Commandery Princes and their basic information. Yet, this was the first time he had heard of the Hao Commandery Prince.

"Ming Yuan, watch your words," Wu Dianshan by his side frowned and admonished, "His Majesty has already issued an order, forbidding any mention of His Highness Hao."

"Yes, Uncle Grandfather, Ming Yuan spoke out of turn," the An Commandery Prince also realized his faux pas and hastened to apologize with a bow.

Seeing this, Wang Shouzhe felt suspicious in his heart.

However, seeing the reactions of Wu Dianshan and the An Commandery Prince, he restrained the urge to inquire further.

With his current intelligence network, it should not be difficult to clear up the matter of the Hao Commandery Prince; there was no need to grill them about it right then and there.

At this time.

Wang Shouzhe's overall impression of the An Commandery Prince was still quite satisfactory.

In fact, as soon as Wang Shouzhe felt the threat of the fight for the Emperor's son, he had already started secretly collecting all intelligence related to the Quasi Emperor's Sons.

Whether it was the Kang Commandery Prince or the An Commandery Prince, the intelligence about them had piled up into half a room at Wang Shouzhe's place.

It could be said that Wang Shouzhe had spent decades studying these two Quasi Emperor's Sons and naturally had a detailed understanding of their pasts, personalities, and some aspects of their private lives.

It couldn't be helped.

The contest for the Emperor's son was a matter of great importance and could not allow Wang Shouzhe and the entire Wang family to be anything but cautious.

Once the Wang family got involved in the struggle for the Emperor's son, they would surely need to take a position. And if their positioning failed, it's not to say the Wang family would definitely be wiped out, but they would certainly suffer long-term suppression.

With a Great Emperor reigning for over three thousand years, the Wang family might be suppressed for that long if they weren't careful, and not even a mighty family could withstand that~

And Wang Shouzhe's view of these two Quasi Emperor's Sons was also somewhat different from that of most people.

Kang Commandery Prince.

On the surface, the Kang Commandery Prince seemed like a perfect candidate for Emperor's son, diligent in governance and loving towards the citizens, amassing military achievements and a renowned reputation. He even placed great importance on his own small family, raising children who each had their own charm, and several had already become mainstays of talent.

In addition, the unwavering support of the Big Heavenly Pride Gong Yangce from the Sacred Land was also a significant plus for the Kang Commandery Prince.

The government and the Imperial Household, as well as the various provinces, mostly looked favorably on the Kang Commandery Prince for the role of Emperor's son, providing various kinds of support.

Long Wuji of the Jiaolong Gang was one such powerful supporter of the Kang Commandery Prince.

In stark contrast, the An Commandery Prince was low-key and restrained, seldom engaging in social events, focusing solely on building protective forests and infrastructure in the north of An.

Had it not been for the title of Quasi Emperor's Son above his head, many people might have forgotten about the existence of such a Commandery Prince...

As one might expect, the An Commandery Prince had very few supporters, his influence not even amounting to a third of the Kang Commandery Prince's.

If another Noble Family Head were in his shoes, they would likely opt to join the side of the Kang Commandery Prince, as it seems to have a greater chance of success.

However, after several encounters with those people, Wang Shouzhe clearly felt that choosing the Kang Commandery Prince might not be a wise decision.

Whether it was the initial struggle for the Direct Line of the Qian Family, the immense pressure from Long Wuji's army, or the subsequent commercial squeeze, all these incidents showed the decision-makers on the Kang Commandery Prince's side to be too eager for quick success, or in other words, somewhat unscrupulous in their methods.

Perhaps, the Kang Commandery Prince could push the responsibility onto Cao Youqing and Gong Yang Ce.

But, as the saying goes, "As above, so below."

If it weren't for the Kang Commandery Prince himself not intervening, or even allowing or frankly being inclined to such a way of doing things, would his subordinates act in such a manner?

In Wang Shouzhe's view, the Kang Commandery Prince's style of conduct and behavioral logic were very clear: everything was aimed at the position of Emperor's son, for which he would stop at no means.

He accumulated military exploits for the position of the Emperor's son, achieved political merits for the position of the Emperor's son, and manipulated power for the position of the Emperor's son.

Among these, many political achievements were merely surface efforts that looked good and sounded pleasing but actually had little real significance for the people of the Great Qian Land.

In a phrase from Wang Shouzhe's previous life, it could be summed up as "unseemly greed."

Furthermore, another important point was at play.

Under the current circumstances, the Kang Commandery Prince already had a myriad of talented individuals and a multitude of followers under his command. Even if the Wang family were willing to join the Kang Commandery Prince's camp, it was uncertain how much attention they would receive.

And if that were all, it would still be fine; after all, Wang Shouzhe only sought to live through the changes of times in peace, not minding whether they were in the limelight or not.

What he feared most was that given this person's nature, he might potentially discard his chess pieces in hand for greater benefits. Perhaps one day, the Wang family could become a sacrificial piece.

The risk was simply too great.

Therefore, Wang Shouzhe had been plotting and calculating, weighing and comparing between the two Commandery Princes.

In fact, even now, Wang Shouzhe was still observing. However, deep down, he was gradually leaning towards... the An Commandery Prince.

Various plans and arrangements related to this were also quietly fermenting.

Until the unexpected incident involving Wang Anye and Wu Yiluo occurred.

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Afterward, Wang Shouzhe resumed his casual conversation with the An Commandery Prince, while Liu Ruolan also accompanied Gongye Qingrui in talking about anything and everything, from beauty and hair care to educating children, and then to techniques of cultivation, and so on.

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Wang Shouzhe had to admit that he quite enjoyed his conversation with An Commandery Prince, finding them like-minded in many aspects, truly resonating with each other in ideals.

As the night gradually darkened,

Wu Dianshan, who was dozing off, finally couldn't hold back and coughed as he reminded them, "Ming Yuan, Shouzhe. If you wish to chat idly, you can continue later. Our meeting today is to discuss matters concerning the younger ones."

In the corner,

Wang Anye and Wu Yiluo, already unable to squat any longer, had switched to lying on the ground playing with ants. For them, each moment was a torment...

Alas, the adults were taking too long, they neither dared to leave nor speak out, which was frustrating.

Hearing Wu Dianshan's words, the two children didn't think too much about it and nodded their heads repeatedly. Whatever it was, they'd get through today first!

Wang Shouzhe glanced at Liu Ruolan, and she too slowly nodded her head.

Afterward, Wang Shouzhe looked at the two children full of expectation and finally turned to the An Commandery Prince, saying, "Your Highness Ming Yuan, I believe Anye and Yiluo indeed make a match of jade maiden and golden lad, equally matched in talent and appearance, fond of each other with mutual affections.

Once they marry in the future, they will surely love each other dearly and support one another along the way. Let us discuss their marriage."

The An Commandery Prince felt a surge of joy inside but managed to nod solemnly on the surface, agreeing, "I see they like each other very much as well, so let's have a good talk about it."

"What? Like each other?"

The children's eyes widened in surprise, then they glanced at each other. Blank and innocent wide eyes blinked, foreheads full of question marks.

Love and support each other? How did the adults come to that conclusion?

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How the marriage was discussed is not the focus for now.

Right when the marriage negotiations began, the children were shooed out, and even Wu Dianshan left quite soon after; the details of the talks were known by very few.

Others only knew that the negotiations took several days.

During this time, the Commandery Prince Consort Gongye Qingrui stormed out and overturned tables countless times, and chilling, somber auras were repeatedly felt coming from the room, with the couples from the An family and Wang Shouzhe all emerging in disarray.

In short, it was full of harrowing moments.

Only after several days, when the marriage was finally settled, did the An Commandery Prince and his wife leave the Green Luo Guard with a content Wu Yiluo.

Green Luo Guard.

Inside the study of the City Guard Mansion,

After the An Commandery Prince and his wife left, Wang Shouzhe took over the study.

Beneath the light of the Fluorescent Stone Spirit Lamp, Wang Shouzhe was writing a letter with a serious expression, while his eldest son, Wang Zong'an, stood by his side with hands down, not moving a muscle, eyes not straying from their focus.

After a long while, Wang Shouzhe finally finished the letter, let it dry, then folded it neatly into an envelope, and handed it over to Wang Zong'an with great solemnity.

He gave a grave instruction, "Zong'an, go to the Purple Abode Academic Palace and personally relay the matter to Li Yao. Tell her..."

"The time has come, act according to plan."

"Yes, Father." Wang Zong'an's body involuntarily gave a slight jolt before immediately regaining composure. He bowed respectfully and retreated step by step from the study before turning to leave.

By now, the sky outside had turned from light to dark, and a huge red sun hung at the horizon, dyeing the clouds near it with an array of splendid colors.

In the distance, ships with giant sails shuttled back and forth across the sea surface in the sunset, as if coated with a layer of golden-red light.

The cries of seagulls, mingling with the sound of the tide, drifted faintly from afar, as though emanating from another world.

Just then, a breeze blew over, whipping up Wang Zong'an's robes, seemingly stirring the tumultuous thoughts within his heart as well.

He looked up at the horizon, squinting slightly, and murmured to himself,

"The wind has picked up~"

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The ease of transportation had greatly reduced the distances between regions.

From the Qingluo Guard in the Northern Sea Bay, returning to the Town Zhe Guard of the Southern Six Guards in Longzuo County, Wang Shouzhe and Liu Ruolan had spent merely two and a half days in their private flying carriage.

If it had been like before, they would have had to travel by sea ship first, then by land, and without ten days to half a month, they simply couldn't have arrived.

However, acquiring a private flying carriage was already sky-high in price. Add to that the long-term domestication of spirit birds, maintenance of the litter, as well as the ongoing expenses of hiring flying carriage drivers, and over time, the costs become quite substantial.

Therefore, the vast majority of the Family Heads or Old Ancestors of Rank Six Prominent Families could only covet the private flying carriages with their eyes. To actually acquire one, they found it too extravagant to bear.

By comparison, although the Wang family was also Grade Six, even just the part of their assets shown to others was not something ordinary Rank Six Prominent Families could compare with. Not to mention, the true foundation of the Wang family went far beyond that, which no outsider knew, except for the core members of the Wang family.

Wild Marsh, Gourd Mouth.

With the Wang family's efforts, the flood barriers and sluice gates had basically taken shape, and the number of Water Dragon vehicles had almost doubled.

Huge Water Dragon vehicles rumbled loudly as water gushed out, continuously pumping water from the marsh bubbles into the area outside Gourd Mouth.

The two Tianren realm Ancestors from the Wang Family even personally took action, breaking through the barriers between the bubbles, allowing the water to flow from top to bottom, all pouring towards Gourd Mouth.

In the Wild Marsh, the water stored in the bubbles, which was already scarce during the dry season, was rapidly decreasing.

It had to be admitted that Tianren realm cultivators possessed formidable strength and extraordinary stamina. If one set aside the prestige of the Old Ancestor and put them to work, their efficiency was not inferior to the multi-functional large-scale engineering machinery on Earth, and they were even more versatile and flexible.

At this moment, a clear cry from a celestial crane echoed in the sky, and Wang Shouzhe's private flying carriage spiraled down from the heavens, gently coming to a rest on the embankment.

Wang Kunyuan, the Old Ancestor of the Wang Family, and Chengye, the Old Ancestor, upon seeing this, hurried over to greet him, "Master Shouzhe, we welcome you."

"You need not be so courteous, you two," Wang Shouzhe said as he lifted the curtain of the carriage and gracefully stepped into the air, smiling, "Seeing the delight on your faces, could it be that you've encountered some good fortune?"

Kunyuan, the Old Ancestor, stroked his beard and laughed, "Master Shouzhe indeed has discerning eyes. Who would have thought, with just the draining of this water, so many treasures would emerge within the marsh."

"Just within these few days, our Wang Family search teams have found over a hundred thousand jin of fish, among which are Level One and Level Two Spirit Fish, as well as Spiritual Clams and Pearls, and so on."

"The harvest of aquatic spirit grass and spiritual medicine is also bountiful. Just yesterday, that young fellow Chengye even found a Level Four Four Color Water Lotus. Deeper under the water, several spirit veins were also discovered."

"Rest assured, Master Shouzhe, we the Wang Family will not monopolize these gains. After all, without the Wang family building the embankments and setting up the Water Dragon Array, these bounties would not have been possible. Once the accounts are settled, we Wang Family will only take three-tenths of it."

No wonder they were so delighted.

This water draining and Jiao hunting operation had not yet caught a Jiao, but there had already been a harvest worth several hundred thousand Qian Gold, and the forthcoming gains were expected to be even more substantial.

Currently, the Wang Family was under great economic pressure, and these finds were almost like gifts from heaven, which was like timely rain for them.

"After all, the Great Wilderness Marsh is the Wang Family's territory. Three-tenths is too little, let's make it four-tenths." Wang Shouzhe smiled and offhandedly gave the Wang Family an additional tenth, then reminded them, "Also, don't drain the pool dry, leave some space for various spiritual creatures to thrive."

"After we clean up the Yuan Water Green Jiao, we'll refill the marsh with water and maintain the ecological environment of the Wild Marsh."

Having experienced life on Earth, Wang Shouzhe knew that excessive destruction of the natural environment would lead to a host of negative outcomes. The existence of an ecological environment like the Wild Marsh was also necessary.

"Yes, Master Shouzhe," the two Ancestors of the Wang Family hurriedly put away their smiles and assured him, "We will surely implement your will."

After this matter with the Yuan Water Green Jiao, and having heard Wang Shouzhe's plans for developing the Great Wilderness Marsh, the two Old Ancestors now had complete admiration and respect for Wang Shouzhe, and mentally they were thoroughly inclined towards the Wang Family, displaying an attitude that looked up to Master Shouzhe as their leader.

Seeing them so compliant, Wang Shouzhe was also very pleased.

After all, the Great Wilderness Marsh was considered the Wang Family's base, and the development of the Great Wilderness Marsh inevitably required collaboration with the Wang Family. If these two couldn't grasp the situation, it would be a true headache.

"How is the situation with the Yuan Water Green Jiao?" he casually inquired.

The main reason for such a huge commotion this time was to capture that one Yuan Water Green Jiao. The soon-to-be dragon, Green Jiao, was entirely precious. Not only was the spiritual energy content rich in its flesh, making it highly valuable for consumption, but its scales, claws, sinews, and dragon blood were also worth a lot.

Previously, the Wang family had hunted down a Level Six fierce beast, profiting handsomely from it. That beast was only newly advanced to Level Six and was far from its peak. This Yuan Water Green Jiao was about to transform into a dragon and would only be more valuable.

"It's hidden in the largest bubble; Old Ancestor Firefox is keeping an eye on it," Wang Kunyuan said. "Though the bubble is deep, it won't be many days before the Yuan Water Green Jiao can no longer hide."

Saying this, Wang Kunyuan led Wang Shouzhe to fly towards the large bubble where the Yuan Water Green Jiao was hiding.

"Brother Shouzhe~~"

As soon as they arrived, a petite and exquisite Firefox suddenly dashed out like a flame-colored lightning bolt, throwing itself into Wang Shouzhe's arms.

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Wang Shouzhe hurriedly reached out to embrace it.

The tiny Firefox was rubbing against Wang Shouzhe's chest blissfully, cooing in a delicate voice, "That little mud loach is so bad, L-girl only hit it a few times and it burrowed into the mud and refused to come out."

Hide in the mud?

A twitch crossed the corner of Wang Shouzhe's mouth.

This Green Jiao really had no dignity; now it truly had reduced itself to a mud loach.

The poor Green Jiao, on the verge of transforming into a dragon, was quite keen of hearing, wasn't it?

Hidden in the mud, it listened to the Seven-tailed Firefox's complaints and almost burst its lungs in anger. If I could beat you, you fox, would I need to hide in the mud?

Its heart was filled with despondency. It had found an opportunity at last but hadn't even enjoyed it before facing this disaster.

Rage, unstoppable rage!

The Green Jiao couldn't endure it any longer.

It burst out of the mud suddenly, and with a sweep of its tail, it forcibly pulled out the huge Pearl Clam nurturing the Pearl Grass, then soared into the air like a spiraling dragon, hovering and roaring at Wang Shouzhe with gnashing teeth, "Aooow, aooow~ aow aow~!"

"Oh, beaten to such a state and still such a temper, daring to howl at me," Wang Shouzhe shook his head, "Little Fire, finish it quickly but be careful not to roast it."

"Aooow, aow oow~!" The Green Jiao was frantic, roaring again and again.

"Brother Shouzhe, it wants to surrender," the Old Firefox ancestor patted her forehead with a paw, a face of disbelief, "Even as a Jiaolong, it has no dignity at all."

"Surrender?" Wang Shouzhe looked at the Green Jiao with surprise, amused by it, "Little mud loach, stop messing around. With you being a wild Fierce Beast, what use do I have for you? Your greatest value, is to turn into a pile of meat to nourish the children of the Wang family."

"Aooow, aooow ooow~" The Green Jiao was so distressed, continuously roaring for quite some time.

"Brother Shouzhe, Little mud loach says, if you let it off, this big clamshell will belong to us," the Old Firefox ancestor lay in Wang Shouzhe's arms, cooing girlishly while translating, "It says there's a Pearl Grass inside that's nearly ripe."

"Pearl Grass?" Wang Shouzhe nodded in realization, "I never expected there to be such a treasure hidden in this little marsh. No wonder this Green Jiao ventured into such shallow waters."

"Brother Shouzhe, does that mean we have a deal?" the Old Firefox ancestor tilted her head to look at Wang Shouzhe, "Pearl Grass is a rare Level Six Spiritual Medicine, one of the main ingredients for refining Spirit Communication Treasure Pills, much more valuable than its meat."

"It's not that simple," Wang Shouzhe shook his head, "The Pearl Grass originally is a treasure of this marsh, I could obtain it just as well after killing it. How could it use my own treasure to exchange for its freedom?"

The Old Firefox ancestor's fox eyes squinted into a slit as she smiled, "Brother Shouzhe, you make such good points."

Then, she turned to the Green Jiao, and with a Loli tone, spoke condescendingly, "Big mud loach, you heard what Brother Shouzhe said, right? Besides this big clamshell, do you have any other treasures to exchange for your life?"

The Green Jiao almost collapsed into the water in frustration, roaring incessantly.

"If you dare curse again, I'll burn you to death," the Old Firefox ancestor stated angrily.

...

...

At these words, the Green Jiao instantly cowered, its head retracted, seeming a bit wronged and slightly rebellious, quietly grumbling in a low voice.

By the time a Fierce Beast reaches the pinnacle of Level Six, its intelligence is already extraordinary. To some extent, it begins to break away from the "bestial" constraints, becoming more akin to the human race.

However, due to the simple living environment of Fierce Beasts and their lack of comprehensive experience, their exhibited behavior is more akin to that of human children aged around eight or nine.

Only upon breaking through to Level Seven and transforming into a Great Yao, does their lifespan and intelligence surge yet again. After being "tempered" for a few hundred years, they can finally "mature."

Just like the Old Firefox ancestor, though already a Level Seven Great Yao, sometimes she still acts quite childishly.

"Brother Shouzhe~~ I think this little mud loach is quite clever and its bloodline is decent. Why not give it a chance to join our Wang family?" the Old Firefox ancestor suggested.

Upon hearing this, Wang Shouzhe was slightly hesitant, "It is, after all, a Fierce Beast that has grown up in foreign lands; its wild nature is not yet shed. Could it easily turn on us?"

"Just relax, Brother Shouzhe. If it were another Fierce Beast, it might be a bit tricky, but since it's a Jiaolong, it's simple," the Seven-tailed Firefox patted her chest, assuring him, "Let it swear by the name of the Ancestor Dragon, and then leave it to me to train. I'll make sure it obeys and acts on command."

Hearing her words, Wang Shouzhe also felt tempted.

Honestly speaking, everything in the Wang family was quite good, and there were plenty of high-end forces in the Heavenly Human Realm, but they only lacked a true Purple Abode Realm force that truly belonged to the Wang family.

The Old Firefox ancestor was strong and had always helped Wang Shouzhe. But when it gets down to it, she remained the Yuwen Clan's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast, spending most of her time with the Yuwen Clan.

It was okay for the Wang family to borrow her occasionally since the Yuwen Clan didn't dare defy the Old Firefox ancestor. But if they really wanted to make the Old Firefox ancestor a part of the Wang family, the entire Yuwen Clan would likely fight against Wang Shouzhe.

Especially Lady Bilian, who was not an easy person to deal with.

However, cultivating a Clan Guardian Spirit Beast usually requires starting from a lower level. Because only in this way can the affection between the Fierce Beast and the family be deep enough to motivate it to actively protect the family.

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Moreover, young Fierce Beasts' temperaments are not yet fixed, making them relatively easier to train. This is unlike higher-level Fierce Beasts whose characters have already solidified, and getting them to obey is not that easy. Plus, Fierce Beasts that grow up among humans tend to understand human nature better.

Just like the Spirit Tortoise of the Water Element that belongs to the Wang family, because it has always lived adjacent to the Wang family, it evidently understands human nature better than wild Fierce Beasts do.

Many of Wang Shouzhe's children and grandchildren used to ride the Spirit Tortoise of the Water Element to school when they were young.

However, this approach has a clear downside, and that is the long cultivation period.

The Water Element Spirit Tortoise in the family consumes plentiful offerings yearly, and its cultivation base progress is considered fast among its peers. Yet, after decades, it has barely stepped into Level Four.

In terms of the overall combat power of the Wang family, it has completely fallen behind the main forces and can only continue to stay in Zhuwei Lake, ferrying children back and forth.

This issue is, in fact, a common occurrence in this Profound Martial World.

Take, for example, the Old Turtle of the Purple Abode belonging to Enlightened One Tianhe, the Green Jiao plagued with Mysterious Ice under Master Binglan, or even the Old Firefox Ancestor; their levels are all weaker than their respective masters.

As for the cases of taming mature Fierce Beasts for their use, they are not non-existent, but the prerequisite is that the family's development speed must be swift enough to continuously suppress the other party. Otherwise, the probability of failure is also very high.

In history, there are far too many instances of Fierce Beasts rebelling after being tamed.

This was also the main reason why Wang Shouzhe hadn't thought about taming the Water Element Green Jiao; the risk was indeed substantial.

"Alright, let's give it a try. To make it willing, our Wang family only needs it to serve for a hundred years. After a hundred years, whether it stays or leaves can be negotiated," Wang Shouzhe pondered and eventually agreed.

He reckoned the family's development potential was still promising. It was just that at this stage, there was a strong desire for a Level Seven Spirit Beast. In a few decades, the number of Purple Abode Realm Cultivators within the family would surge.

By then, would a mere Level Seven Water Element Azure Dragon still be unmanageable?

"Shouzhe brother is indeed clever. If it's just for a hundred years, it will be much easier to tame," the Old Firefox Ancestor understood, and immediately began to negotiate with the Water Element Green Jiao, howling away.

As expected, the Green Jiao started by furiously refusing, but the situation was stronger than the Jiao. And when the Old Firefox Ancestor started beating it severely, it was indeed too fierce.

After several ineffective resistances, it reluctantly compromised, shifting to negotiate terms with the Old Firefox Ancestor.

Ultimately, the Water Element Green Jiao agreed to serve the Wang family for two hundred years, on the condition that once the Pearl Grass matured, it would be reserved for its use to transform into

a dragon. Also, during its service, the Wang family must provide for all its food and drink and must not mistreat it while it is still growing.

Wang Shouzhe naturally would not refuse these terms.

What he wanted was a Level Seven Water Element Azure Dragon, not a Green Jiao at the peak of Level Six.

As for whether it serves for two hundred years or a hundred years, there's not much difference to him. After enjoying the generous nurturing of the Wang family, how could the Water Element Azure Dragon be willing to leave to struggle outside?

Don't you see how contentedly the Water Element Spirit Tortoise in Zhuwei Lake is living now? Even if we ask it to leave, it would be reluctant.

Following this.

Under the mediation of the "middleman" Old Firefox Ancestor, Wang Shouzhe and the Water Element Green Jiao both swore solemn oaths in the name of their ancestors, drafted a contract, and with blood as witness, signed it, leaving the Old Firefox Ancestor to keep it safe.

After the ceremony, the contract was officially established.

In this Profound Martial World, oaths made in the name of the ancestors are still very potent. Neither Wang Shouzhe nor the Water Element Green Jiao could take the names of their Old Ancestors lightly.

Unless there were truly no other options, both parties would generally not violate the contract.

The respect and reverence the humans in this world have for their bloodline ancestors cannot be compared to that of the people on Earth. After all, the basis for the heritage of a Prominent Family is the bloodline; if one does not honor the ancestors, how can the connections between clans be maintained?

And the Green Jiao's veneration for the Ancestor Dragon is even engraved in its bloodline, more so than humans.

Therefore, once the contract was signed, both parties even felt a sense of closeness, almost as if they could sense that they were now kin.

This is akin to how the psychological dynamics often shift subtly between couples after completing a marriage registration.

"Brother Shouzhe, the little mudfish has just become a Spirit Beast maintained by our family and is unfamiliar with many rules. It still possesses some wildness that needs to be shed to avoid frightening the children in the family. Let it stay with me for these two years, and I will properly train it," the Old Firefox Ancestor squinted with a sly grin.

"Besides, I need to teach it a good lesson, so it understands that even if it transforms into a Level Seven Water Element Azure Dragon, its leader is still its leader."

The Water Element Green Jiao shuddered.

No, please~ It doesn't want to follow this insane fox that likes to beat it up for no reason. Surely, this fox has no good intentions~~!!

It gazed pleadingly at Wang Shouzhe, its watery Jiao eyes full of supplication, hoping that the newly-pledged Family Head would grant it mercy...

"What the Old Firefox Ancestor said makes sense," Wang Shouzhe, however, heartily concurred. "There are many rules in the human world, and even more so within the family. A wild Fierce Beast like it would definitely not have been exposed to these and does need to learn them. As for the Pearl Grass, I will keep it safe for now and allow the Green Jiao to ascend after two years."

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Wang Shouzhe said, with a wave of his hand, he collected the huge mussel shell.

Although the Yuan Water Green Jiao was dissatisfied, it immediately coiled itself obediently and listlessly drooped its head under the stern gaze of the Seven-tailed Fire Fox.

It was filled with gloom.

Everything had been fine, so how had it suddenly become the guardian spirit beast of a human prominent family?

However, things had come to this, and fretting was useless. Fortunately, it only needed to serve for two hundred years. The bloodline of the Yuan Water Azure Dragon was considered top quality; its lifespan was also quite long. Two hundred years didn't seem too lengthy for it, and it could reluctantly accept this arrangement.

"Seven-tailed Fire Fox Ancestor, I'll leave the Green Jiao in your care," Wang Shouzhe said with a slight bow to the Seven-tailed Fire Fox, sincerely saying, "You've had a hard time these days."

"Oh my, Shouzhe Brother, you're really too polite. What is our relationship after all?" the Seven-tailed Fire Fox Ancestor rolled her eyes, coquettishly protesting.

This time, it was the Yuan Water Green Jiao's turn to be confused.

It stared with its huge golden pupils, looked at the Seven-tailed Fire Fox Ancestor, then at Wang Shouzhe, its heart filling with shock, feeling like its entire world was crumbling.

Humans and foxes could do this?

However.

Before it could finish being astonished, the Seven-tailed Fire Fox Ancestor had already transformed back to its original form, grabbed its neck, and flew off into the distance, leaving behind a phrase.

"Brother Shouzhe, go ahead with your tasks. I can't wait to play games with Little Green Jiao~ giggle giggle~"

A series of mischievous laughs echoed through the sky, accompanied by the increasingly distant, panic-stricken roars of the Yuan Water Green Jiao, gradually disappearing into the distant horizon.

At this moment.

Only then did the Wang Family Old Ancestor, Wang Kunyuan, dare to cautiously approach Wang Shouzhe, offering his congratulations with a bow, "Congratulations, Master Shouzhe, on acquiring the Yuan Water Green Jiao. Once it transforms into a dragon, the Wang family will truly have a Clan Guardian Spirit Beast."

He was now completely impressed by the Wang family.

With the future assistance of this Yuan Water Azure Dragon, the Wang family was bound to rise further. Moreover, given the Wang family's style, as they grew stronger, they would surely bring the surrounding poor folks to wealth as well.

Perhaps his own Wang Family could also ride on this wave.

"Old Ancestor Kunyuan, once you reach the Purple Abode Realm, the Wang family will surely rise as well," Wang Shouzhe said with a smile, returning the gesture.

"It's all thanks to your care, Master Shouzhe, that my Wang Family sees a future," Wang Kunyuan hurriedly demurred.

The deeper his contact with the Wang family, the more he felt their profound heritage and boundless potential. He had made up his mind, determined to tightly bind himself to the Wang family's fortunes.

If a marriage alliance were possible, even better. His family's new generation direct line maiden was yet to be wed, and marrying into the Wang family's direct line might be impossible, so he thought about seeing if a marriage with the Wang family's direct vessel could work...

Old Ancestor Kunyuan's thoughts had already begun to stir.

Having dealt with these miscellaneous affairs, Wang Shouzhe also returned to the main residence in a good mood.

With the Yuan Water Green Jiao, the Wang family now had one more trump card in the unpredictable future, adding a bit more certainty to their victory.

However, with the emerging turbulence in Great Qian Land, the upcoming days were likely not going to be so peaceful~

...

In Longzuo Purple Abode Academic Palace.

Changchun Valley.

It was another season of spirit tide.

Every year at this time, the concentration of Wood Type Spiritual Energy between heaven and earth peaked, verdure thrived, and vitality burgeoned.

Changchun Valley, where several top-quality Wood Type Spirit Veins converged, reached a peak in Wood Type Spiritual Energy concentration during the season. The valley's vegetation was especially lush and thriving, various Spirit Flowers bloomed competitively, and countless Spiritual Butterflies and Spirit Bees danced among the blooms, appearing extremely busy.

This extremely rich Wood Type Spiritual Energy also prompted the growth of many seasonal special Spirit Plants.

Therefore, during this period, Changchun Valley was even busier than usual, with young people in the attire of Changchun Valley disciples frequently seen moving in and out of the valley.

At the mouth of Changchun Valley.

A youth stood with his hands behind his back, quietly watching the scene before him in Changchun Valley.

He was dressed in a cyan robe, profound and imposing, his demeanor calm and composed, much like the pine trees at the valley's mouth, captivating one's heart.

He had been standing there for a while but had yet to speak or interact with any passing Changchun Valley disciples. His profound gaze seemed to traverse the entrance's restrictions, seeing something deeper, something farther.

In those profound eyes, there seemed to be an indescribable, indistinct color of reminiscence.

Passing Changchun Valley disciples seeing him couldn't help but whisper among themselves.

They could not discern the level of this senior's cultivation. But his demeanor was truly extraordinary. Even compared to the qualities of those legendary direct disciples from various peaks and streams, it seemed to be of an inferior order.

Just as the disciples were hiding in the corner and secretly discussing, they saw a familiar young man urgently emerge from the valley, bowing to the man, "Senior, I am Feng Qiushan, a core disciple of Changchun Valley. Sister Green Fern has received your visiting card and specially sent me to welcome you."

With those words, he immediately opened the valley's restrictions and invited the man inside.

It turned out that the youth at the valley's mouth was the Young Clan Leader of the Changning Wang Clan, Wang Zong'an.

He actually hadn't come alone today.

But Changchun Valley held a different significance for him. Therefore, he asked the head of household, his clan brethren, and nephews accompanying him to stay in the guest quarters of Longzuo Purple Abode Academic Palace, while he himself set foot alone on this long-missed land.

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"Feng Qiushan?" Wang Zong'an glanced at the young man's face, his memory suddenly flooding back, "I remember now, you were part of the disciples who joined in the year 163, weren't you? I recall, you were the Little Sky Pride with the best talent among that group of disciples.

To think that after all these years, you've already reached the mid-stage of the Spirit Platform Realm, it really is quite nostalgic."

Back in his day, when he was at the Academic Palace, the core disciples who were acting as Principals were Senior Brother Jinshan and the others.

Now, it seemed a new generation had taken their place.

Feng Qiushan was stunned, then looked at Wang Zong'an with a mix of suspicion and caution, "Senior, are you, by chance, also from our Changchun Valley lineage?"

"That's right~ When I was young, I too studied in Changchun Valley," Wang Zong'an smiled with elegant grace, "However, back then I was just an ordinary disciple, you probably don't remember me."

Ordinary disciple?

Feng Qiushan's mouth twitched slightly, at a loss for words.

"Senior, with your profound cultivation base as deep as the sea, a demeanor as majestic as towering mountains, and radiating the commanding presence of a superior, it's hard to believe you were just an ordinary disciple~~ Moreover, with your immortal-like appearance, had you really been an ordinary disciple in our Changchun Valley, I'm afraid the female disciples would have lost their souls over you~"

Wait! Hold on!

A sudden thought struck Feng Qiushan's mind: "Senior, could it be that you are the legendary Senior Brother Zong'an?"

He faintly remembered, when he first joined, there seemed to be mentions among his female seniors of a Senior Brother named "Wang Zong'an."

Legend had it that "Senior Brother Zong'an," though an ordinary disciple, had an uncommon appearance and extraordinary demeanor that secretly captivated many of his female seniors.

Back then, many had secretly speculated whether he was the direct line descendant of a prominent family, sent to the Academic Palace for experience.

However, the legendary "Senior Brother Zong'an" kept a low profile, often as elusive as a divine dragon that showed its head but hid its tail.

And that "Senior Brother Zong'an" had accumulated enough Contribution Points a few years later to leave the Academic Palace. Yet, to this day, there were still many female seniors who could not forget him.

The younger generation of core disciples often found themselves compared to "Senior Brother Zong'an," as though next to this legendary figure, they were nothing more than "vulgar and mediocre."

This caused quite a few senior and junior brothers to harbor resentments and almost form psychological shadows.

"My surname is Wang, given name Zong'an. The 'Senior Brother Zong'an' you speak of should indeed be me," Wang Zong'an said with a slight smile, moving with an effortlessly tranquil air.

Could it really be?!

In Feng Qiushan's heart, it felt as if ten thousand Spirit Horses were galloping past, completely overwhelming him.

But at the same time, he felt he was beginning to understand those female seniors.

Because compared to the senior before him, this new generation of core disciples could indeed only be considered "vulgar and mediocre," no wonder the female seniors were always unable to forget about "Senior Brother Zong'an."

"Then, then, Senior..."

"We are all disciples of the same lineage, calling me 'Senior' is too formal, just call me 'Senior Brother'~"

As they talked and walked, before they knew it, they had already entered deep into Changchun Valley.

Along the way, Wang Zong'an's appearance naturally drew many sidelong glances from the surrounding disciples.

And at this time, along the road ahead of the two of them, they began to see some ordinary disciples with baskets on their backs, all heading in the same direction with purpose.

Seeing this scene, Wang Zong'an understood instantly, "Is it the year of the Spirit Tide? Judging by everyone's momentum, the number of Spirit Mushrooms this year must be quite substantial."

It wasn't until this moment that Feng Qiushan managed to snap out of his daze.

However, there was no need to make fun of himself over this since it was clear the senior's strength far exceeded his own, so he didn't doubt the authenticity of the situation.

Hearing Wang Zong'an speak, he quickly returned to his senses and respectfully responded, "Indeed, Senior Brother Zong'an. This year's Spirit Tide is much stronger than in previous years, producing more Spirit Mushrooms as well as ones of better quality. Since you're here, Senior Brother, why not take some back with you when you leave to reminisce over their flavor?"

"That won't be necessary," Wang Zong'an laughed, "My parents are close friends with little sister Green Fern, and every Spirit Tide year they send a considerable amount of Spirit Mushrooms to our home. This year's batch is likely already on its way, so let's leave these for our junior brothers and sisters~"

While talking, Wang Zong'an suddenly noticed two familiar figures ahead and couldn't help but smile, quickly stepping forward to greet them, "Senior Sister Bai Ling, Senior Brother Yuanmo, it's been a long time."

As it turned out, these two were Yuanmo and Bai Ling, senior brother, and senior sister, respectively, from Wang Zong'an's time at the Academic Palace, with whom he had a good relationship.

These two had the qualifications to enter the Academic Palace, naturally, they were quite gifted. Though not Sky Prides themselves, they were on the better end of the Lower Class A tier. Apart

from a few who had come in through the back door for the experience, Lower Class A was one of the basic requirements for the Academic Palace to accept disciples.

Dozens of years had passed, and they had already reached Levels Three and Four of the Spirit Platform Realm respectively. They were no longer wearing the apparel of disciples but that of stewards.

It was evident they had long since graduated from the Academic Palace and were now serving the institution in return.

This had always been the tradition of the Academic Palace.

Aside from direct disciples and core disciples, ordinary disciples needed to work for the Academic Palace for a certain number of years after graduation, or accumulate enough Study Points, to earn their freedom and return to their families.

Wang Zong'an had left the Academic Palace after accumulating enough Study Points as well. But because he was powerful, he accumulated the points quickly, and it took him just over a decade to earn enough and leave.

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Bai Ling and Yuanmo were both overjoyed to see Wang Zong'an. After all, since Wang Zong'an had left the Academic Palace, it had been nearly fifty years since they last met.

In fact, even before leaving the Academic Palace, Wang Zong'an had already revealed his identity to them. Seeing him now, aside from their surprise, they were also filled with emotions.

Who could have thought that the "7th-rank Aristocratic Family" mentioned by junior brother Zong'an would turn out to be the rapidly rising "Changning Wang Clan" of recent years?

Everyone knows that Wang Zong'an, the heir of the Changning Wang Clan, has been stationed in Qingluo Guard City for years and has become a significant figure. Even the City Lord of Qingluo Guard listens to him. The "junior brother Zong'an" from back then is no longer on the same level as them.

Especially for Senior Brother Yuanmo, he felt no jealousy toward Wang Zong'an whatsoever. After all, their social statuses and strengths were worlds apart, making comparisons meaningless.

Compared to that, Senior Sister Bai Ling was much more composed.

After all, even though she had admired Wang Zong'an back in the day, she hadn't harbored much hope and thus wasn't too disappointed.

Now, seeing Wang Zong'an again, she simply felt delighted and immediately bowed respectfully, smiling cleverly, "Given the status of Young Clan Leader Zong'an now, I dare not accept your calling me 'senior sister.' Just call me Bai Ling~"

Yuanmo also respectfully performed a bow.

In the world of Profound Martial, strength dictates heroism. Unless they are from the same clan or have formally become sworn brothers through a ceremony, precedence is given to those with greater accomplishments, regardless of their seniority in school.

However, although strictly following the etiquette, Bai Ling didn't appear at all distant from Wang Zong'an; instead, she enthusiastically invited him to revisit the feeling of old times under the Longevity Tree.

However, Wang Zong'an had urgent matters at hand and didn't agree.

After chatting casually for a few moments, they soon parted ways due to their respective commitments.

After parting, Wang Zong'an continued towards the depths of Changchun Valley, led by Feng Qiushan.

The residence of Senior Sister Green Fern was named "Rose Pavilion," because its courtyard was filled with roses.

Back when Wang Zong'an studied in Changchun Valley, he had also been inside. The actual space used for living and cultivation inside was very limited; most of it had been transformed into research labs, specifically for biological research, on a notably large scale.

Many of Changchun Valley's research outcomes, such as the new Insecticide Powder, were born here in the "Rose Pavilion."

Even many of his father's breeding achievements were discreetly credited under the name of Senior Sister Green Fern.

At this time, the roses were spectacularly in full bloom. From afar, Wang Zong'an could already see the cloud-like, beautifully blooming red roses outside the Rose Pavilion.

Core disciple Feng Qiushan, who led Wang Zong'an, quickly stepped forward, intending to enter and make the announcement.

However, before he could walk into the Rose Pavilion, a figure zipped past him with a "whoosh," so fast that he had no time to react.

Behind him, Wang Zong'an raised an eyebrow and swiftly stepped aside to let the figure pass.

At the same time, a clear female voice came from deep within the Rose Pavilion, "There's still one experiment not finished, Junior Brother Jinshan. You owe me so much money, and the experiment isn't finished yet, and you thought to run away?"

Before the sound died down, a green rose vine shot out from the Rose Pavilion and instantly caught up with the fleeing figure, then wrapped him up tightly and hung him in the air as if flying a kite.

"Senior sister, please let me go~ Oh, Zong'an, it's actually you~"

"Zong'an, Zong'an, save me!"

It turned out that the person strung up in the air was Senior Brother Jinshan. His clothes were torn by the roses vines, leaving him looking quite wretched.

Beneath his pitiful cries, Wang Zong'an could only sweat from his forehead.

Today's Senior Brother Jinshan, reportedly now a Heavenly Human Realm Elder, was still unable to escape the clutches of Senior Sister Green Fern. Ah! What a pity to behold~

"So it's Zong'an who has come, come in," said Senior Sister Green Fern from inside the Rose Pavilion.

"Um... Senior Brother Jinshan, you supposedly never lacked money," Wang Zong'an coughed and asked with some sheepishness, "Why would you sell yourself to Senior Sister Green Fern? You do know her experiments..."

"Well, it, it's just... I ran out of money."

Upon hearing Wang Zong'an's question, Senior Brother Jinshan looked as if he was asked something embarrassing, dodging eye contact and stammering in response.

"Zong'an, he did it to buy the Spiritual Plant Transformation Pill for his Level Five 'White Jade Spiritual Peony,'" Senior Sister Green Fern's voice rang out, "Junior Brother Jinshan, better just accept your fate."

"Congratulations, Senior Brother Jinshan," Wang Zong'an chimed in upon hearing Senior Sister Green Fern, remembering the White Jade Spiritual Peony, and said with a bowed smile, "Though the process was tough and you have accumulated some debt, you've finally fulfilled a long-held dream."

"Congratulations my ass~~~" the bound Senior Brother Jinshan's face streamed with tears of inexplicable sorrow, "Wu wu wu~~ my White Jade Spiritual Peony, it, it actually transformed into a male!"

A male?

Wang Zong'an was initially stunned but soon couldn't help but chuckle inwardly.

Logically, most spirit plants are hermaphroditic and can transform based on their own understanding of gender.

Most spirit plants cultivate a gender identity that aligns with their cultivator's will during their nurturing, then transform into the corresponding gender. Situations like that of Senior Brother Jinshan appeared to be exceptionally rare.

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"Hehe~" Green Fern senior sister mercilessly mocked, "I guess it's because Senior Brother Jinshan is too wretched on normal days, even the White Jade Spiritual Peony is afraid of the tragic fate that would follow her transformation into a woman."

"I'm wronged, oh Green Fern senior sister, I'm so wronged~~" Senior Brother Jinshan cried incessantly, "I take care of her meticulously every day, pouring my heart out to her night after night, how can she treat me this way? The most sorrowful thing in life is nothing other than this."

Every night talking to a Spirit Plant? How lonely that must be...

Wang Zong'an looked at Senior Brother Jinshan strangely, truly unable to understand.

If you are so lonely, why not just find a human senior sister or junior sister to date?

Wang Zong'an clearly remembered that all the senior sisters and junior sisters in the Academic Palace were very warm and eager to fall in love, as long as he was willing.

If his family hadn't already arranged a marital engagement for him, perhaps he would have pursued a passionate love affair with a favored senior sister.

Sigh~ I really can't fathom Senior Brother Jinshan, why on earth would he have such a weird penchant for dating Spirit Plants?!

Wang Zong'an sighed in his heart, but considering that Senior Brother Jinshan had helped him a lot before, he still spoke up well on his behalf.

Thankfully, Green Fern senior sister was willing to give Wang Zong'an this face, and ultimately let Senior Brother Jinshan off, leaving first.

Afterward, Green Fern and Wang Zong'an sipped tea and chatted in her courtyard full of roses.

After a long while.

Wang Zong'an said, "That's the wish of my father. Those new product plants should remain registered under your name."

"You Brother Shouzhe is too cautious, Zong'an, do you know what rumors are out there?" Green Fern senior sister said with a roll of her eyes, "Many people outside are saying that I and Brother Shouzhe are having an affair, and you, Wang Zong'an, are actually my son... That's why I spared no effort in procuring many top-quality spiritual seeds to support the Wang family."

"Cough cough~" Wang Zong'an was immensely embarrassed and hastily stood up to apologize, "I'm sorry to put Green Fern senior sister in this position. But now that the Wang family is getting stronger, my father for the sake of..."

"Alright~ Alright~ If I really minded, I wouldn't wait to say it until now," Green Fern senior sister said nonchalantly, "After all, I have no parents, let them say what they will. Besides, I quite like Brother Shouzhe, the thought of possibly having a child with him is quite appealing. Maybe it will even have the Great Heavenly Pride Bloodline."

"..."

Wang Zong'an's mouth twitched, he lowered his head silently, brooding that even if his sister has designs on his father, could she not mention it in front of him? Could she please consider the feelings of a son?

"As for borrowing some people from Changchun Valley, it's not impossible, but it depends on their own will. And, your Wang family needs to pay them according to the rules," Green Fern senior sister said, "I think Jinshan would be very willing; he owes me too much money."

"Thank you for your consent, Green Fern senior sister." Wang Zong'an gratefully bowed.

After getting a satisfactory response from Green Fern, Wang Zong'an was quickly shooed out by an impatient Green Fern.

Also being borrowed was Green Fern senior sister's Breath Soil Bracelet. Seeing as she had recently been staying in Changchun Valley conducting research and focusing on cultivation to try to break into the Purple Abode Realm soon, the Breath Soil Bracelet was somewhat superfluous.

Afterward.

Wang Zong'an then visited the Longevity Tree, expressing that he had transformed his "beloved daughter" into his life-bound Spirit Plant and was taking very good care of it, though without the Breath Soil Bracelet, it was inconvenient to bring her over.

When there's a chance later on, he'll bring his life-bound Longevity Tree to visit the old Longevity Tree.

The Longevity Tree was naturally delighted, remarking that "the old man has indeed not entrusted the wrong person."

His frequent use of "old man" made Wang Zong'an internally vigilant, convinced that he must indoctrinate his life-bound Longevity Tree properly in the future, doing some psychological conditioning to prevent it from potentially transforming into a burly, beard-dragging foot-scratcher when it reached the ninth level.

As for using a Spiritual Plant Transformation Pill at level five, Wang Zong'an considered it beneath him.

After all, although that kind of pill was effective, it actually caused harm to the root of the Spirit Plant, making advancement to level seven and even more so to level nine many times more difficult.

That White Jade Spiritual Peony was limited in talent, unlikely to advance to level seven. His Longevity Tree, however, had exceptional talent, and he was counting on her advancing to level nine in the future; how could he risk that?

After wrapping up affairs in Changchun Valley, his mission for this trip was thus half completed.

As for the other half... it was to "pay a visit" to his sister Wang Liyao, a woman who had a profound influence on his growth and whom he still greatly admired and revered.

Lakeheart Shattered Island.

Shuiyun Pavilion.

This place, rich with the essence of Primordial Water from Heavenly Lake, could be described as a land blessed by the heavens. Yet the residence itself was built quite simply, filled with a homely atmosphere, a stark contrast to the grandeur of the Pavilion of Primordial Water up above.

This was also where Wang Liyao was influenced by Wang Shouzhe.

When it came to her living quarters, comfort was always her priority. She had even set up a simple herb garden in her courtyard, planting Spirit Plants and Spirit Fruits that were favored by the Spirit Tortoise and Departure Fire Sparrow.

In the courtyard, there were also specially designed pools and bird nests for the two little creatures, creating a warm, farmhouse-like atmosphere.

Had one not seen it with their own eyes, no one would imagine that the residence of Wang Liyao, the famed Great Heavenly Proud from Longzuo Academy, would have this style.

Under the pergola of climbing flowers, Wang Liyao in a pale blue sword-sleeve robe, and as aloof as a celestial being, quietly finished reading her father's letter. A spark of excitement and anticipation flickered in her eyes, as brilliant as the starry sky.

"After preparing for thirty years, it's finally starting. My 'String Song' has waited too long."

She had successfully ascended to the Tianren Realm at the age of thirty-nine.

Now, nearly thirty years since her ascension, thanks to her Second Rate Supremacy bloodline talent, her cultivation base had already reached the mid-stage of the Tianren Realm.

However, for her father's plan, she had always been polishing her strength, solidifying her foundation, and acting low-key. Apart from being meticulous in the affairs of the academy, she rarely demonstrated her power.

Now that her father's plan was finally in motion, it was time for her sword to show its edge.

"Clang!"

A crisp sword chime sounded.

A top-quality sword, full of life, moved by the force of Liyao's spirit, flew out from her waist, swirling around her as if it were a living being, coiling itself around her.

The sword's design was simple and primitive. The inscriptions engraved on the blade were somewhat blurred, but these did not conceal its force in any way.

With its circling motion, a faint green light spread from the blade, its aura mysterious and unfathomable, exuding indescribable elegance and majesty.

As the sword trembled, a voice as crisp and melodious as a string instrument came from within it, "Sister Liyao, it's finally my turn to perform~~ I'm so happy, so happy~~"

This was indeed...

The Sword Spirit—String Song!

As the sword chime began, a formidable might also spread throughout Wang Liyao, akin to lightning over water or vast waves, imposing and majestic.

In her dazzling starry eyes, lightning seemed to suddenly burst forth.

Seeing this scene, Wang Zong'an felt both awe and admiration in his heart.

Indeed, a sister is a sister, and just this aura alone was not comparable to that of ordinary Tianren Realm Cultivators. Even him, who was also considered a Great Heavenly Proud, felt inferior.

This time, his sister would definitely not disappoint their father.

As the saying goes, "The sword's edge comes from sharpening, and the plum blossom's scent from the bitter cold."

Years of dedicated sharpening for one sword; when drawn, it must shine brilliantly in all directions.

Chapter 13: Li Yao Arrives in the Capital! A Great Wind Rises

...

The National Capital, Return to Dragon City.

As the capital of the Great Qian Land, Return to Dragon City had a history of over seven thousand years. It was, without question, the foremost city of Da Qian, whose vast scale and grandeur had reached a breath-taking level.

Surrounding Return to Dragon City were thirty-six Guard Cities, which collectively protected this majestic city of ancient times.

It was said that, in the past, the Founding Emperor, Emperor Ziwei Xuandu, had arrived on clouds along with the master of the Sacred Land, True Monarch Lingyun, and had encountered a Demon Emperor entrenched in the Spirit Veins. Joining forces, they had slain the fiend.

Afterward, Emperor Ziwei Xuandu leveled mountains and valleys, opened the spirit channels, and constructed this powerful city under heaven.

Legend had it that deep beneath Return to Dragon City lay an ancient and unparalleled formation capable of protecting the Great Qian Land for a thousand generations, bestowing enduring blessings, though its truth was uncertain.

Of course, regardless of whether the rumors were true, the city's prosperity was unaffected.

In Return to Dragon City, countless merchants bustled about every day, and these merchants were at the very least from Grade Six Prominent Families. Those below Rank Six did not even have the qualifications to purchase shops within Return to Dragon City.

Walking along the streets, one could occasionally encounter carriages belonging to the Imperial family or the nobility. Those high-ranking families that were rarely seen in other places seemed to be everywhere here. Even a casual passerby might be a collateral relative of a Third-Class Aristocratic Family or a powerful cultivator of the Heavenly Human Realm.

Truly, "there was not a single commoner in sight."

East of Return to Dragon City stood an extravagant restaurant known as White Cloud Tower.

White Cloud Tower was already famous in Return to Dragon City for the "exquisite taste," "exceptional music," and "unparalleled dance" it offered, and was deeply cherished by young nobles, wealthy merchants, and young people of influence.

Decades ago an unintentional "Big Stomach King" competition had made White Cloud Tower even more renowned, leaving behind a legend about a certain foodie and bringing a lasting fervor to the place.

White Cloud Tower seized the opportunity, promoting a "Big Stomach King" competition every three years to attract public interest.

Decades had passed since then.

The business at White Cloud Tower flourished more and more, and the scale of the Big Stomach King competition had grown with each event, offering ever higher rewards.

Lured by fame and profit, not only did the young people from Return to Dragon City eagerly participate, but even those from the thirty-six surrounding Guard Cities flocked to White Cloud Tower at the appointed time to partake in the grand event.

Moreover, the impact continued to spread, with well-informed youths from places like West Sea Prefecture and Qing An Prefecture willing to travel great distances to compete.

Inside White Cloud Tower, the Big Stomach King competition had already begun.

At the center of the first floor, on the Cloud Platform, rows of long tables were neatly arranged, laden with roasted Fierce Beast meat, its rich aroma wafting throughout the entire White Cloud Tower.

The contestants of the Big Stomach King competition had already taken their seats behind the long tables, indulging in gluttony. Servants stood by, tasked with counting and supervising.

Below the Cloud Platform, there was also a bustling area for placing bets on the outcome of the competition.

In the private rooms scattered across the floors like constellations, the patrons who had come for the spectacle had staked out their spots early and were now enjoying the lively contest.

At the top of White Cloud Tower.

Unlike the scattered private rooms in the middle, the private rooms on the top floor were very close to each other. Some were even connected, allowing guests to converse freely by disabling the soundproofing enchantments.

Beneath the top floor was an open-air Sky Garden, where Spirit Flowers and exotic plants grew and Spiritual Butterflies fluttered about; it was an incredibly elegant environment that did not obstruct the view, with a very ingenious design.

Currently, the private rooms at the top were already filled with guests, chatting and enjoying themselves.

At that moment, a figure suddenly appeared in the Sky Garden, taking a leisurely stroll up the stairs.

It was a dignified middle-aged man. He was dressed in a dark purple three-clawed dragon robe, his head adorned with a dragon scale crown exclusively permitted for the Imperial family, walking with an unhurried pace and exuding an extraordinary presence.

Carved cranes on the Fluorescent Stone Spirit Lamps stood on either side of the steps, their hazy haloes casting his already well-defined facial features into sharper relief.

This man was the owner of White Cloud Tower—the noble of the court, Heng Commandery Prince.

"Commandery Prince Heng, good day."

"Your Highness seems in quite good spirits today~"

"Of course, His Highness is in a good mood. Within just a few decades, White Cloud Tower's turnover has increased several-fold. He really has struck it rich~"

"This Big Stomach King competition has reached the highest level of enthusiasm ever recorded. After this event, it would be hard for any other restaurant in the National Capital to compare with White Cloud Tower. Commandery Prince Heng, you'll have to throw a feast~"

Those who dined in the top-tier pavilions were all influential figures of Return to Dragon City, a select group of nobles who liked to join in the excitement and were quite familiar with Commandery Prince Heng. Casual jokes among them were all in good fun.

And Commandery Prince Heng, too, greeted them with a smile, nodding to each one, and if he encountered someone of similar status, he would stop to chat.

Eventually, he took his place in his own private room.

This position was secluded and offered a broad view, allowing someone of the Purple Abode Realm to easily observe the competition with their God Sense and sharp vision.

Soon, the servants of White Cloud Tower brought fruits, dishes, and some Spirit Food and Spiritual Wine specially prepared for Commandery Prince Heng.

The manager of White Cloud Tower quickly received the news and hurried over, standing by respectfully, personally serving wine and setting dishes for Commandery Prince Heng.

Commandery Prince Heng was in an excellent mood, his gestures exuding satisfaction and pride. It was not surprising, after all, anyone who had come into wealth would be in high spirits.

Chapter 13: Li Yao Arrives in the Capital! A Great Wind Rises_2

...

"Who is most likely to win this time?" the Commandery Prince of Heng savored the aromatic spiritual wine and asked deliberately.

"Your Highness," the manager bowed and replied, "This year's Big Stomach King competition has several seed players who are equally excellent. There's Fang Yaowu from the Cang Bear Guard of the Fang family—known as a young prodigy.

This lad possesses exceptional talent, having cultivated the Profound Martial cultivation technique, the 'Cang Bear Impact Mountain' from childhood, which has made him as strong as a bear with an astonishing appetite."

Return to Dragon City's Thirty-Six Guards, each named after various ancient divine beasts, are stationed and guarded by martial families, responsible for protecting Return to Dragon City as the first line of defense for the national capital.

"I've heard of that lad Fang Yaowu; recently his reputation has been rising within the military, known as one of the top ten young Sky Prides." The Commandery Prince of Heng said with admiration, but then added with regret, "It's just a pity that he is from the military, sworn directly to His Majesty, and it's taboo for us imperial relatives to associate with him."

"Another is from our own Rank Four Prominent Family of Return to Dragon City—the young Purple Abode Seed of the Shangguan Family, Shangguan Yunhong. Born with a devouring bloodline, he specializes in the Shangguan Family's own cultivation technique, the 'Dragon Elephant's Infinite Art'.

Now he has made minor achievements with the Dragon-elephant battle body and is hailed as one of Return to Dragon City's 'Top Ten Distinguished Youths Under a Hundred Years Old.'"

The butler began to introduce another candidate.

"The Shangguan Family has indeed been full of talents in recent years," the Commandery Prince of Heng said with a smile, "always managing to maintain a spot among Return to Dragon City's top distinguished youths. The previous generation's Shangguan Yunque even ranked third as a Great Heavenly Proud, giving the Shangguan Family a good chance at reaching Third Grade in the future."

"The future of the Shangguan Family is indeed promising," the butler said with a cheery smile. "Many forces have begun to vie for an alliance with them. It's said that even the Kang Commandery Prince, who is highly regarded among the Quasi Emperor's Sons, has been sending envoys to show goodwill to the Shangguan Family."

"Wu Chengsi?" The Heng Commandery Prince's mouth twitched dismissively with a cold sneer, "That boy, neglecting his duties to ingratiate with others—a real smooth operator."

Several members of the imperial family and clan relatives are quite supportive of the Kang Commandery Prince.

However, there's also a group that bears a grudge against him. The Commandery Prince of Heng is one of those and has even expressed his dissatisfaction with the Kang Commandery Prince at public events more than once.

"Your Highness..." the butler sweated profusely as he pleaded, "That man is becoming very prominent and might well become the next Great Emperor. In private, you should..."

"Am I supposed to fear a mere junior?" scoffed the Commandery Prince of Heng, "No matter what, I, Wu Hanheng, am his senior clan relative. Even if he becomes the Great Emperor, should I, an elder, not speak my mind?"

Most members of the imperial family, being of noble birth, are stiff-spined and more forthright in nature, liking what they like and not flattering those they don't.

"Your Highness is correct."

The butler, grimacing, wiped the sweat from his forehead but dared not argue with the prince.

"By the way, I remember there was a straightforward girl named 'Shangguan Bilian' from the Shangguan family. She once caused a fuss at my White Cloud Tower when she was younger—a rather interesting young lady," the Commandery Prince of Heng reminisced about Shangguan Bilian from the topic of the Shangguan family, "She must be married by now, right? Which family did she marry into?"

"Your Highness, this old servant remembers the incident well—it was quite a stir seventy or eighty years ago, both in the Imperial City and for the Shangguan family," the butler, energized by the gossip, spoke excitedly, "Back then, many families in the Imperial City wanted to marry Miss Shangguan. The Old Ancestor of the Shangguan Family, out of affection for her, left the choice to her.

In the end, she chose a suitor from a rural Rank Six prominent family whose elder of the Purple Abode had just passed away..."

"She's got personality," the Commandery Prince of Heng said with a laugh, admiring her spirit, "No wonder she left such a memorable impression on me. Then again, such an act must have really caused the Shangguan family to lose face."

"Isn't that the truth," the butler agreed with a laugh, "It's just pity that once the Old Ancestor's word was out, it's hard to backtrack, and after failing to convince her privately, he had to let her marry. Several young masters from prominent families in our Imperial City became the joke of the town, unable to win over a young lady who chose a lesser rural family."

And that caused quite a clamor for more than a decade before it finally calmed down."

"Interesting, interesting. When she comes back to the Imperial City to visit, have her come see me," declared the Commandery Prince of Heng, acting on a whim, not waiting for the butler to respond but then sighing deeply, "It's just that I haven't seen that girl Lici in years. I heard she's off with that Yunyang scoundrel freeloading in the Immortal Dynasty. Wonder when I'll see her again—if ever."

The Commandery Prince of Heng had lived long and met many people, but Wang Licui left the deepest impression on him.

Indeed!

During those five years she freeloaded at the White Cloud Tower, she nearly bankrupted the place with her big appetite. How could he not have a deep impression?

Because of this, although he adored the round-faced adorable girl, he had no choice but to issue Yunyang a banishment order. Soon after, he regretted it when the Big Stomach King competition helped the business to skyrocket.

While it wasn't enough to fully support Lici's appetite, it encouraged that scoundrel Yunyang to work harder and hunt in the wilds, just about managing to scrape by.

Ah~

Now he couldn't help but worry about that poor girl, wondering if she was being slighted somewhere in the Immortal Dynasty, unsure whether she could get enough to eat.

At the thought of these things, the Commandery Prince of Heng felt a twinge of discomfort in his heart.

Regretful~~~If only he could reach Yunyang, he would have taken her back to look after her properly, even adopting her as his goddaughter. As for that scoundrel Yunyang, let him earn his own way through labor.

Chapter 13: Li Yao Arrives in the Capital! A Great Wind Rises_3

"Commandery Prince, Miss Lici is naturally blessed with good fortune," the Butler consoled incessantly, "She is a fortunate child, and no matter where she goes, she will never lack food. What's more, Master Yunyang has raised Miss Lici for the competition among the saints after the Emperor's son's contest concludes. By then, she will surely return."

"Very well, very well, I, this prince, will manage the White Cloud Tower well, earn more money, and store more exquisite and top-grade delicacies, just waiting for that girl to come back for a feast," Heng Commandery Prince seemed to find new motivation, his demeanor suddenly radiant once again.

"Come, come, come, let this prince see who will take first place this time, whether it's Shangguan Yunhong or Fang Yaowu who has the last laugh."

By this time, the Big Stomach King competition was nearing its end.

Heng Commandery Prince, too, cast aside his various emotions and focused on the climax of the match.

"Eh? Something seems off," the Heng Commandery Prince frowned, "There are still three people left on the stage. The stout man on the left, with muscles bulging like a savage bear, must be the martial valorous Sky Pride Fang Yaowu.

And the one on the right, with a thick and robust physique like a standing elephant, is likely Shangguan Yunhong, who practices the Dragon Elephant Tempering Body Technique and possesses a devouring kind of Bloodline."

With the vision of the Heng Commandery Prince, even if he had not met them, he could instantly discern the two based on their physique, aura, and other details.

Some special Horizontal Refining Cultivation Techniques, when practiced deeply, would cause various anomalies to appear in the body.

Cultivators of the Profound Martial at the Heavenly Proud Level are even more likely to end up with a deformity. Therefore, it is advisable to marry and have children early, as it becomes increasingly difficult later on.

However, it is not necessarily the case for a lifetime.

In most cases, when Top Grade Horizontal Refining War Body Cultivation Techniques are perfected at the Purple Abode Realm, there will be a transformation back to the original form, and the external appearance will not be too exaggerated compared to ordinary Profound Martial Cultivators. Only during combat will the War Body form be revealed.

Without a doubt, in the past Big Stomach King competitions, the finalists and often the winners were mostly those with voracious appetites who practice the Horizontal Refining War Body style. Other Profound Martial Cultivators, despite having a huge appetite later in their cultivation, could hardly compare with the War Bodies.

But what did the Heng Commandery Prince see?

Between those two colossal men, there stood a woman who appeared "delicately petite" in comparison, wearing a flowing, female-style long robe with sword sleeves, her figure lean and graceful.

Although her face was veiled and her true appearance unclear, one could still sense her extraordinary fairy-like aura.

Especially those eyes, which seemed to twinkle like stars.

Every time she lifted her veil and ate the competition's gourmet food with elegant gestures, the tip of the iceberg of her beauty, barely glimpsed, already dazzled the spectators and the defeated competitors.

"Go Immortal, go Immortal! Defeat Fang Yaowu and Shangguan Yunhong."

One cheer after another rose and fell, growing more intense and vociferous as if to shake the very foundations of the White Cloud Tower.

She didn't eat fast, and her movements were quite graceful, yet her pace was not slow at all.

A large piece of Spirit Meat weighing over ten pounds easily snapped up by her hand. With a gentle squeeze of her mysterious energy, it was astonishingly compressed to the size of a palm, gobbled up in just a few bites.

Unlike the two burly men beside her, who were tearing and biting directly into their large chunks of roasted Spirit Meat.

"Girl, you're practically desecrating a treasure by eating like that," Fang Yaowu said in a muffled voice, "You're completely failing to appreciate the exquisite culinary art of White Cloud Tower's chef."

Spirit Meat greatly replenishes the energy and blood within the human body, far surpassing ordinary meats.

As the level of the Big Stomach King competition rose and its popularity soared, the ingredients used became increasingly premium. By the final stage, White Cloud Tower brought out the extremely rare and precious Level Five Spirit Cow meat to treat the seeded contestants.

But as good as this meat was, it was very satisfying, and a small bite was difficult for ordinary people to digest due to the immense energy and blood within it. Even for Tianren Realm Cultivators, eating too much required time for cultivation and meditation to digest the energy and blood, or else their blood vessels would burst from being overstuffed, bleeding non-stop.

The woman didn't pay any heed to him, continuing to quietly eat one piece of Level Five Spirit Cow roast meat after another. Her seemingly flat and reserved belly showed barely any signs of swelling.

By contrast, the physically formidable Fang Yaowu and Shangguan Yunhong began to sweat, beads forming on their foreheads, their faces turning somewhat red.

Clearly, the Level Five Spirit Cow meat they were consuming was reaching their limit.

"Could this be Lici coming back?" Heng Commandery Prince excitedly stood up, but upon a closer look, he disappointingly collapsed back into his chair, "It's not Lici; when she eats, she's not nearly as refined~"

"Eh? The purity and richness of that girl's elemental water mysterious energy is astonishing. It flows and turns as if true elemental water circulates within her body," he noted.

Ultimately, Heng Commandery Prince, who was of the same generation as Master Yunyang and an Advanced Stage Purple Abode Realm Cultivator, had an incredibly sharp eye. At a glance, he spotted the peculiarities of her condition.

He could even faintly sense a whirlpool of elemental water within her stomach, spinning incessantly like a galaxy, grinding all the food she ate into pieces, absorbing it, and transforming it into pure energy and blood.

None of these energy and blood were wasted. Instead, she absorbed them at an extremely fast pace into her body, transporting them to every part with her elemental water mysterious energy, bit by bit, strengthening herself.

Chapter 13: Li Yao Enters the Capital! The Strong Wind Blows_4

Indeed, even as she ate, she had already entered a state of Cultivation, beginning to digest the vital energy brought by the food.

"What potent 'True Water Mysterious Energy', what rapid absorption speed."

As a member of Heng Commandery Prince and the Imperial Household, not only was his strength formidable, but his experiences were also extraordinary. Yet now, his attention was wholly captivated by her, and he couldn't help but express his amazement repeatedly.

However, just a few breaths later, he noticed something peculiar, "Eh? The characteristics of her Mysterious Energy clearly come from one of the top-quality Cultivation Techniques of the Sacred Land's Nine Veins—the 'Tianyi True Water True Verses'. The method she's using, could it really be the Small Divine Power—"True Water Transforms All Things'?"

"This young woman is only at the mid-stage of the Heavenly Human Realm in her Cultivation base, yet she has been granted permission to cultivate the Sacred Land's legacy True Verses—could she possibly be a Great Heavenly Proud of the Sacred Land? No, that doesn't seem right.

Among the young generation of the Tianyi True Water Vein, one of the Sacred Land's Nine Veins, there is no heir to the Great Heavenly Proud.

Great Heavenly Prouds are rarely seen throughout history.

Even within the Sacred Land's Nine Veins, not every generation is lucky enough to find a suitable heir to the Great Heavenly Proud at just the right time. Occasionally, there would be a break in the lineage for some veins.

Of course, as long as the Sacred Land remains, even if a vein temporarily breaks, it will eventually continue.

But no matter which vein, whenever a suitable heir to the Great Heavenly Proud appears, they would inevitably be a prominent figure known all over the world, and it's impossible for one to just pop up out of nowhere like this.

While Heng Commandery Prince was riddled with doubts, Fang Yaowu—Heavenly Human Realm Arrogant from the military arts domain—finally couldn't bear it any longer. He collapsed to the ground with foam at his mouth, his vital energy churning violently within his body, which looked very alarming.

Every King of Gluttons competition witnessed similar incidents—participants pushing themselves beyond their limits despite being unable to eat more.

Seeing this, the waiters of White Cloud Tower immediately commanded the guards to carry him away, and they forced an emetic into him.

"Fang Yaowu is, after all, a bit inferior to Shangguan Yunhong, who possesses a Devouring class bloodline."

Many of his supporters were full of regret.

Now, all eyes were on the enigmatic and dignified woman resembling an Immortal, and on Shangguan Yunhong, to see who would emerge victorious.

Half an incense stick's burning time later, Shangguan Yunhong picked up the last piece of barbecued meat to his mouth. However, as soon as he opened his mouth, he almost vomited it right out and finally gave up completely. He ran under the stage and heaved violently.

After a considerable time, he recovered enough strength to run back to the stage, furiously pointing at the mysterious woman and cursing loudly, "I, Shangguan Yunhong, possess a Devouring class Bloodline and have finely cultivated my Horizontal Refining Battle Body. How could I possibly lose?! You must have cheated! I refuse to accept this defeat.

"I'll tear off your veil to see which enchantress is causing trouble here!"

With that, the aura around Shangguan Yunhong surged violently, and he charged towards the mysterious woman with thunderous steps. His hand, as large as a fan, shot out swiftly, reaching for her veil.

Under the lamp light, it was clear to see that his entire arm thickened and bulged instantly, the muscles twisting as if a torrential force was brewing within.

Even the tips of his fingers cutting through the air were letting out shrill whistling sounds.

It was evident that, though this claw strike was done casually, its might was still not to be underestimated.

"Miss, be careful."

"Immortal, run quickly."

The supporters of the mysterious Immortal below the platform were anxious, loudly alerting her and rebuking Shangguan Yunhong, "Shangguan Yunhong, you're despicable for not accepting your loss after being defeated!"

But before Shangguan Yunhong's hand could touch her veil,

the mysterious woman deftly dodged his claw and, like lightning, delivered a kick to Shangguan Yunhong's belly.

A "boom" sound resonated, and Shangguan Yunhong, with a body as sturdy as an ancient war elephant, was hammered fiercely, flying backwards out of the stage and smashing heavily onto the ground.

In the midst of everyone's stunned silence,

the mysterious Immortal gently lifted her hand, and a huge scroll rose in the air, hanging steadily at the top of White Cloud Tower; it then unfurled from top to bottom with a rustling sound.

A vast vertical banner was suddenly displayed before everyone's eyes.

It was inscribed with a row of fluid and powerful characters: "Longzuo Academy's Tianhe Successor, Wang Liyao, aged sixty-nine, stages a challenge here today—first defeating the Sky Prides of Shangjing, then sweeping through the Sacred Land's Nine Veins. Anyone below the age of one hundred and fifty is welcome to battle; none shall be rejected!"

Upon the release of this banner,

the scene fell deathly silent.

The supervisor next to Heng Commandery Prince froze completely, cold sweat beading on his forehead, "My God... this is the Challenger of Heaven... How many years has it been since Shangjing had such a grand event?"

Chapter 14: Impressive From All Sides! Li Yao Tests Her Mettle in the Imperial Capital

...

"Challenger of Heaven," has been a tradition since the founding of the Great Qian Land.

In it, the term "Challenger" is derived from the meaning of "testing the edge" for the first time.

From ancient times to the present, Return to Dragon City, the capital, has been the gathering place for high-grade aristocratic families and the Imperial Household, brimming with powerhouses and geniuses, with Little Sky Prides as plentiful as "cow hair."

As for someone like Wang Shouzhe, who started with a Lower Class A aptitude, he would be regarded merely as a passerby in Return to Dragon City, barely receiving a glance from others.

Only those Sky Prides with abilities reaching Middle Grade Class C and above are somewhat more respected. After all, at this level, as long as there's no lack of cultivation resources, the probability of advancing to the Heavenly Human Realm is considerably high.

And if one wishes to truly make a name among the youth, at the very least, one must be a Sky Pride with, moreover, an aptitude of at least Top Grade Class D and above.

But that's just to make a name.

If one wants to become famous among the gathering of geniuses in Return to Dragon City and command the winds and clouds among the youth, even Top Grade Class D is insufficient; you must be above Grade B, and even among Sky Prides, only the extremely talented can achieve this.

You must know, this is the capital.

In County Town, within the same generation under a hundred years old, there are only a few Sky Prides, often not even three when including the local Commandery Prince's family. Among them, those with strength above the Heavenly Human Realm are even rarer, likely only one or two.

But in this Return to Dragon City, among the young Sky Prides under a hundred, including members of the royal family, there are at least thirty to forty, and at times, even fifty to sixty.

Among them, those with strengths above the Heavenly Human Realm number in the dozens, even possibly exceeding twenty.

The challenge of pushing into the top ten among so many geniuses to become one of the "Ten Great Masters" of the younger generation is unimaginable.

Not to mention, among the current top ten young masters, aside from Shangguan Tianque who had left the ranks over a decade ago, there are also two Great Heavenly Prides listed.

Great Heavenly Prides are rare, yet in talent-filled Return to Dragon City, on average, one appears every seventy to eighty years. Especially here in the Great Qian Imperial Household, as the sole

First-Class Aristocratic Family, with a strong and profound royal bloodline, the emergence rate of Great Heavenly Prides is much higher than among other families.

Of course, there are occasional periods of a hundred years without the birth of a Great Heavenly Pride, but such cases are rare. Most of the time, one or two of the top ten masters are occupied by Great Heavenly Prides.

On rare occasions when talent bursts forth, the number of Great Heavenly Prides can even reach three.

Therefore, if local Sky Prides are confident enough and wish to make a name for themselves, they can come to the capital to challenge others, proudly known as "Challenger of Heaven."

Among the capital's top ten young masters, defeating any one of them would earn recognition from all prominent families in the capital, garnering great fame and future benefits.

However, these local Sky Prides almost always end in failure.

No wonder, among the top ten outstanding youths in the capital, about half are members of the royal family.

The rest, mostly, are monopolized by the Second-Class Da Qian Chen Family, the Third-Class Great Qian Wang Family, the Third-Class Da Qian Gongye Clan, and a few other upper Third-Class families.

The occasional Rank Four Prominent Family squeezing in one is already considered extremely fortunate, deserving a thumbs-up in praise.

This is why the GuiLong Shangguan Clan, having had two clan members make the list in the past century, has earned high praise from the Heng Commandery Prince.

However, Sky Prides coming to the capital to challenge are quite rare; though every ten to twenty years, there will always be one or two occurrences.

In comparison, the Challenger of Great Heavenly Pride is truly a significant event.

Calculating it out, it seems that it's been over a hundred years since the last Challenger of Great Heavenly Pride.

Back then, Gong Yangce, the Great Heavenly Proud of Sacred Land, came to the Imperial Capital under a hundred years old to challenge others and gain fame. His performance was like cheating, sweeping through all opponents.

Until he encountered the then number one outstanding youth, the royal Great Heavenly Proud — Wu Chengsi.

Their battle was earth-shattering, indiscernibly matched, lasting many days and nights, and even the Emperor himself was alerted.

Afterward, the Emperor summoned Gong Yangce and spoke with him for roughly a quarter of an hour.

Since then, Gong Yangce's name reverberated throughout the capital, honored as "Master Ce," and regarded as one of the strong contenders for the next generation's Saint.

Meanwhile, Wu Chengsi and Gong Yangce, having fought, grew to appreciate each other and became close friends.

That Great Heavenly Proud's battle has had a profound impact, even affecting the current Emperor's son's competition.

However, back then, the Ping'an Wang Family was still in its "golden age," busily developing and constructing the embryo of Ping'an Town. Even if they heard some rumors, they wouldn't take them seriously.

The Great Heavenly Proud's battle of that time... and ancestors like Zhou Xuan's Old Ancestor, were too far and distant.

The ancestors of the Ping'an Wang Family likely didn't foresee that an event which back in Ping'an Town wasn't even considered gossip after dinner, would, after a span of over a hundred years, end up having such a significant connection with the Wang Family.

And in such a manner.

One can't help but remark, sometimes destiny is indeed miraculous.

...

At this moment.

Inside White Cloud Tower.

After overcoming the initial shock, the people present finally started to seriously examine the "formidable" immortal in front of them.

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Although her face was still unclear, the unmasked aura of Wang Liyao now possessed an indescribable spirit and elegance. She moved with the grace of a celestial being, her aura extraordinary.

Yet within that celestial charm, there was a fierce and unyielding spirit, like that of ancient pines and green bamboos, unbending and daring to challenge the heavens.

Under the glow of the Fluorescent Stone Spirit Lamp, her aura truly resembled that of a goddess from the nine heavens.

"The Tianhe inheritance?" Heng Commandery Prince suddenly realized and said, "I wondered who it was, someone actually capable of cultivating the Tianyi True Water Vein heritage. It turns out to be the legitimate disciple of the Tianhe Enlightened One from Longzuo. That's not surprising.

I heard years ago that Tianhe senior had taken a Great Sky Pride as his legitimate successor, but because she was still young, she has not yet made an appearance in the world."

In the eyes of certain interested parties, even though Wang Liyao had not yet stepped into the world, her name as the successor of the Tianhe inheritance was already known.

Especially for someone of high status like Heng Commandery Prince, although he hadn't seen Wang Liyao, he had basically heard of her and was aware of her existence.

However, as a noble of the imperial family, he himself was a Sky Pride with towering talents.

Having once studied with other Great Sky Prides such as Yunyang and Lang Ya in the Sacred Land, he too had his share of fame, and his name had once made the rounds. Only now, Lang Ya had already become a Divine Skills Enlightened One, while he and Yunyang were still slowly honing their skills at the ninth layer of the Purple Abode Realm, preparing to take the last step.

A person like him, even if he had heard of this matter, how could he be as surprised as ordinary people? Hearing was just hearing.

Had he not encountered this situation today, he might have even forgotten about it.

"Your Highness... This Sky Pride says her name is 'Wang Liyao,'" the manager gently reminded, "This name sounds somewhat similar to Miss Lici."

This manager, capable of running White Cloud Tower on behalf of the Commandery Prince, aside from his considerable cultivation, was naturally also adept at reading people and situations, a person of multifaceted skill.

He also knew that Heng Commandery Prince had always liked and doted on Lici as a junior.

"Eh? That's true~" Heng Commandery Prince glanced at the vertical banner, then took another look at Wang Liyao, somewhat uncertain, "Could she be from the same Prominent Family?"

"But that's not right~ I remember Yunyang once said that Lici came from a small Eighth Grade family. Since when did our Great Qian Land have such powerful Eighth Grade Prominent Families? From the same generation, could there really be two top geniuses emerging?"

Although Wang Liyao hadn't yet started to show her strength, no matter what, she was the Legitimate Successor of the Tianhe Enlightened One. Without some skills, how could she dare to come to the National Capital to test her edge?

You should know, the probability of a Great Sky Pride becoming a Divine Skills Enlightened One in the future is quite high. If she lost too miserably, it would be a major embarrassment – she might be laughed at by her peers for a thousand or two thousand years.

Apart from Heng Commandery Prince, there were also many other influential figures who enjoyed the excitement present that day. Seeing the banner Wang Liyao had hung up, they too were pleasantly surprised and couldn't help but start an animated discussion.

The finale of the Big Stomach King competition had already been worth the price of admission.

Now, a challenger of a Sky Pride, a spectacle rarely seen in a century, had emerged. How intriguing was this? Everyone perked up.

No sooner had it been said than done.

At this moment, the Heavenly Man Protector of the Shangguan family reacted, rushing to Shangguan Yunhong's side to support him, "Young Master Yunhong, are you alright?"

He was truly anxious. As an elite head of household tasked with protecting their Young Master, it was a grave offense to fail in his duties.

"I, I'm still...ugh~~"

Shangguan Yunhong trembled as he stood up, and before he could steady himself, his complexion paled, and he hurriedly bent over.

The Big Stomach King competition had already pushed him to the limit of his capacity to vomit once. The churning in his stomach hadn't subsided when he was kicked in the belly by Wang Liyao, and now he felt a surging turmoil in his abdomen, vomiting uncontrollably once more, his expression full of agony.

Seeing this, the Heavenly Man Protector could not help but flare up, his gaze toward Wang Liyao very unfriendly: "Who are you, some country bumpkin? At such a young age and unaware of the immenseness of the sky nor the vastness of the earth, not only do you dare to make a scene in Return to Dragon City, but you also dare to ambush our Young Master Yunhong?"

Before he finished speaking, he had already flickered into motion, soaring like a large bird, and aimed a palm strike at Wang Liyao from across the air.

"I'll take you down now and deliver you to the Shangguan family head for judgment."

This protector's talents and strength were not weak, and though he appeared to be about a hundred years old, he had already reached the second layer of the Heavenly Human Realm. If placed in a local region, he would doubtlessly be an old ancestor of some Prominent Family.

But under the feet of the Great Emperor, in Dragon City, his brilliance was far less conspicuous.

With this palm strike launched, a dull swooshing sound resonated above the platform. Robust Heavenly Human Realm Mysterious Energy transformed into a massive, earth-colored hand, several meters tall, and ferociously smashed down toward Wang Liyao.

It was like a mountain collapsing or Mount Tai bearing down—its momentum was astonishing.

However, Wang Liyao merely stood there with her hands behind her back, not even lifting her eyelids.

At that moment.

"Clang!"

The sound of a sword chime rang out.

A silhouette clad in a purple dress flashed onto the stage as swiftly as lightning. With a sword in her right hand, she released a powerful slash. The Sword Energy cleaved the earth-colored giant hand in two, sending it flying to both sides of the platform, where it struck with a thunderous crash, blasting out two gaping holes.

Even the platform, made of Top-grade Cloud Stone, could not withstand the strike of a Heavenly Man Cultivator.

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Meanwhile,

the woman flicked her wrist, and the sword's radiance not only didn't weaken but grew stronger, slashing back at the Heavenly Man Protector.

"Boom, boom, boom!"

Several explosive sounds rang out in the air one after another.

The domineering sword light condensed to its utmost, giving birth to a hazy sword intent emanating a yellow glow. Its momentum was vast and fierce, exuding a terrible force as if it could split mountains and cleave the earth.

This was the signature swordsmanship of Master Xuanyao's lineage from the Purple Abode Academic Palace of Longzuo, and once cultivated to a high level, it could split mountains and sever rivers, truly unparalleled in its tyranny.

Although the woman's sword intent was only in its initial stages, it was not to be underestimated. Even a Level Five Fierce Beast known for its defense would struggle to withstand it.

The Heavenly Man Protector's pupils shrank sharply as he swiftly unsheathed his precious sword to block the onslaught.

"Clang!"

The loud clanging sound of metal striking metal echoed, and shards of energy exploded in the air, scattering in all directions.

The Heavenly Man Protector spat out blood, flying backward off the Spirit Platform like a battered kite. Fortunately, other Spirit Platform Realm common household guards reacted and rushed out to catch him, otherwise, his injuries would have been even more severe.

Only when the dust settled did the people surrounding the platform come to their senses, stirring up a commotion.

The woman in the purple dress standing two zhang in front of Li Yao was none other than the follower of the great Sky Pride Wang Liyao—Academic Palace Sky Pride Mo Wanqiu.

With a sword radiating fierce light in her jade hand, she looked down at the crowd below the platform with a clear and calm voice, "My young mistress has said, 'Start by kicking the 'Sky Prides' of Shangjing.' Anyone under the age of one hundred and fifty who considers themselves a 'Sky Pride,' come one and all. Those messy and unworthy ones don't even qualify for my young mistress to take action.

If you want to fight, you must get past me, Mo Wanqiu, first."

"Pfft!"

The Heavenly Man Protector was infuriated, spurting blood again.

Even within the talented Grade Four Shangguan Prominent Family, being a Tianren Realm Cultivator gave him some status, so how could he be considered a weakling?

If it weren't for the fact that he was caught off guard and had no room to dodge mid-air, how could he have ended up in such a sorry state?

Indeed, a Sky People Realm Genius, having reached the Spiritual Body, was naturally a lot more powerful than an ordinary Tianren realm cultivator, but the gap wasn't so significant that he would be defeated in one blow.

"I'm going to fight it out with you." The Heavenly Man Protector was about to lash out in anger when Shangguan Yunhong reached out and held him back, "Uncle Zhong, that girl is a Sky Pride, you're no match for her. Let me teach them a lesson."

After vomiting twice, Shangguan Yunhong finally managed to get past that sickening feeling.

His complexion dark and gloomy, he walked up to the platform step by step, looking down scornfully at Wang Liyao and her retainer, sneering angrily, "Start by kicking the Sky Prides of Shangjing, then sweep the Nine Veins of the Sacred Land. Very well, such grand words! So presumptuous. You must think you are a Great Heavenly Proud."

"Even though a Great Heavenly Proud is powerful, you're merely sixty-nine years old, and your cultivation base is at most Level Three of the Heavenly Human Realm. Whereas I, Shangguan Yunhong, am a Grade C Sky Pride with an energy-devouring Bloodline, now ninety years old and also at Level Three of the Heavenly Human Realm."

"I want to see just what the difference is between me and a Great Heavenly Proud, both at Level Three."

No sooner had he spoken than the aura around Shangguan Yunhong changed dramatically.

A savage and towering fierce aura that belonged to a barbaric beast began to spread from him.

His muscles and bones shifted subtly as his blood circulated furiously inside his body, inflating his already robust physique like a balloon at a speed visible to the naked eye.

In just a few breaths, he no longer appeared human. His limbs were as thick as elephant legs, and his skin was covered with a layer of thick keratin that resembled armor.

"Clang, clang!"

His gaze was cold and foreboding, he walked carelessly toward Wang Liyao's party. With each step he took, the entire Spirit Platform thundered and shuddered.

The brute force of a wild beast spread across the platform, causing onlookers to feel as though they faced not a Tianren realm cultivator, but a terrifying fierce beast that roamed beyond their domain.

Witnessing this scene, the crowd below the platform was shocked and full of admiration.

"The Shangguan family's 'Dragon Elephant's Infinite Art' is indeed formidable. I've heard it's one of the top Horizontal Refining Battle Body techniques, and though not a top quality technique, the War Body it forges is tremendously tyrannical. Seeing it today, it truly lives up to its reputation."

"That's not all. The 'Dragon Elephant's Infinite Art' pairs extremely well with Young Master Yunhong's devouring Bloodline.

When combined, their power skyrockets, complementing each other perfectly," Another voice added, "At the same cultivation level, even though a Great Heavenly Proud has the advantage of a Spiritual Body Bloodline, it's uncertain if they can gain an edge over Young Master Yunhong's Infinite Battle Body. The Dragon Elephant's Infinite Art significantly boosts both strength and defense."

"Ah, such a pity for Miss Liyao, she has an extraordinary aura but is ultimately too young. Only sixty-nine years old and she came to the Imperial Capital to test her mettle. These things can't be rushed. If she had come after turning ninety or so, she would probably have been able to dominate her peers."

Many even started to sympathize with Wang Liyao.

Amidst these discussions,

Mo Wanqiu's expression subtly changed, and just as she was about to draw her sword to fight, she was stopped by Wang Liyao, "Wanqiu, this Dragon Elephant's Infinite Battle Body is not ordinary. Shangguan Yunhong is qualified to challenge me, step back."

"Yes, Young Mistress."

Although Mo Wanqiu felt slightly reluctant, she obediently stepped down from the platform.

With the support from both her family and the Wang family, her cultivation had advanced rapidly, but she had only just ascended to the Tianren Realm, and there was still quite a gap between her and Shangguan Yunhong.

To force a fight would only be to make a fool of herself.

As Mo Wanqiu yielded, Shangguan Yunhong seemed to brim with even more confidence. Snarling like a beast, he disdainfully said, "So, you are the Great Heavenly Proud Wang Liyao, huh? Show me how you kick the Sky Prides of Shangjing."

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The moment the words were spoken.

Shangguan Yunhong started on one foot on the cloud platform, and his speed suddenly surged as he charged towards Wang Liyao.

If before he was like a besieging beast moving sluggishly, now he was like a humanoid Fierce Beast, a stampede. Every step he took on the top-grade Cloud Stone platform left a dented footprint spreading cracks in all directions.

The force of that charge was truly domineering. Even the incredibly stout gates of Guard City would likely be smashed to pieces, and perhaps not even a Level Five Fierce Beast would possess such momentum.

The only choice left for the delicately built Wang Liyao, was to dodge.

But how much space was there to dodge on a cloud platform built for a Big Stomach King competition and dancing?

"This stage is somewhat disadvantageous to the Immortal," someone remarked.

The onlookers, who were psychologically inclined towards Wang Liyao because of her Immortal Girl like demeanor, immediately began to worry for her.

Unexpectedly.

Facing Shangguan Yunhong's domineering charge, Wang Liyao stood prettily in place, with no intention to dodge.

Until the moment of impact.

She raised her delicate arm, her slender fingers opened like tender bamboo shoots and gently pushed forward, her motion as light as flicking the morning dew from a delicate flower.

Yet, the power behind that push was anything but ordinary.

"Boom!"

An explosive force swept out in all directions, causing Wang Liyao's hair and skirt to flutter elegantly.

However, Shangguan Yunhong's charge, resembling that of a beast battering a city gate, was stopped as if he had been acupuncture, frozen in place instantaneously.

The next instant.

With a thunderous "crash."

Shangguan Yunhong's thick legs, like those of an ancient war elephant, were forced three feet down into the cloud platform, abruptly plummeting him to a much shorter stature right in front of Liyao.

The top-grade Cloud Stone beneath his feet had been turned into powder by the immense impact, exploding outwards in a circular pattern.

For a moment, dust filled the air around White Cloud Tower, even affecting the visibility of the surrounding spectators.

"What in the world is happening?" someone exclaimed.

"Impossible! Even the Great Heavenly Proud wouldn't be able to block Young Master Yunhong's charge so easily, would they?"

"Is that, is that a real Immortal descended from heaven? Otherwise, how could she be so formidable?"

The onlookers were dumbfounded.

The intricate application of the Mysterious Technique was beyond the understanding of ordinary spectators. Even some of the powerful bigwigs who enjoyed such spectacles couldn't fully comprehend what had happened, looking on in confusion and doubt.

To the bigwigs from the Purple Abode Realm, blocking Shangguan Yunhong's move wasn't difficult.

But to do it with the ease and grace of Wang Liyao, handling it as if plucking a delicate flower with the power of ten thousand jun, was a bit too challenging for them. After all, it required more than just realm attainment. Without a profound understanding of the Laws and mastery of control, it would be impossible to achieve.

"Good, good, good, brilliant, truly brilliant," the Heng Commandery Prince immediately understood and couldn't help but praise, "This is the true meaning of the primal water essence. The Primal Water can be gentle or strong, only by combining softness with hardness, using force against force, could one turn Young Master Yunhong's powerful charge completely into the ground."

As they say, "One can tell an expert by the sophistication of their craft."

As a fellow Sky Pride, and even more so, having reached the ninth level of the Purple Abode Realm, Heng Commandery Prince's insight and judgment were naturally beyond comparison.

Admiration filled Heng Commandery Prince's eyes.

In his lifetime, he had seen many a Great Heavenly Proud, but few were like Wang Liyao who, at such a young age, had such profound understanding and skillful application of her Daoist Water Body in actual combat.

Many Sky Prides of the Purple Abode Realm, although they too had awakened their Daoist Bodies, might not be able to use them as flexibly and naturally as Wang Liyao.

Before anyone could react further.

Wang Liyao lightly lifted and tossed with her hand, pulling Shangguan Yunhong, still in his Dragon-Elephant War Body state and weighing several thousand pounds, from the platform. She casually flung him aside, drawing a parabola as he landed outside the platform.

With a loud "clang," Shangguan Yunhong lay on the ground for quite a while before he staggered to his feet, still unbelieving that he had lost, and so swiftly at that.

"You, you resorted to tricks, I don't accept this loss!" Shangguan Yunhong roared angrily. He hadn't yet fully exhibited his strength and wasn't injured at all.

How could such trickery account for his defeat?

"Enough," a deep and dignified male voice suddenly floated down from the top floor, resonating like a divine sound in everyone's ears.

The speaker was none other than the Heng Commandery Prince.

The audience immediately cast reverent looks towards the top floor.

They heard the Heng Commandery Prince's authoritative voice state indifferently, "Shangguan Yunhong, to lose is to lose, do not disgrace the face of the Sky Prides of Shangjing. Even if you were given a hundred chances, you still wouldn't win against Wang Liyao."

When the Heng Commandery Prince was young, he had also been the foremost of the top ten outstanding youths of the National Capital for a time, so naturally, he wouldn't allow his reputation to be tarnished.

At the same time, a hint of doubt and concern crossed the Heng Commandery Prince's mind.

He remembered the scene from over a hundred years ago when Gong Yang Ce swept through the Sky Prides of Shangjing with a strong sense of purpose.

In this crucial period of contention for the position of the Emperor's son, Wang Liyao's emergence into the world and testing in Shangjing echoed the actions of Gong Yang Ce from years past.

Could it be...

A profound look flashed across Heng Commandery Prince's eyes.

This time, it seemed things would get interesting.

Chapter 15: Powerful! The Foundation of the Wang Family's Prosperity

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Heng Commandery Prince held considerable prestige within Return to Dragon City.

Especially for Shangguan Yunhong, even if the first elder of the Shangguan family came to see Heng Commandery Prince, he would have to be extremely polite and sincerely address him as "Your Highness" from the bottom of his heart.

It was rumored that His Highness Heng Commandery Prince had entered the final stage of refinement. Once he broke through the last shackle, he would be able to become an Enlightened One of the Divine Power Territory, not only significantly enhancing his strength but also more than doubling his lifespan, which could reach over two thousand years.

At that time, Return to Dragon City would hold a grand celebration, and the Emperor himself would personally report to the ancestral temple, ennobling him in the name of Wu's ancestral family as "Heng Prince."

Even within the formidable Da Qian Imperial Household, there were only eleven living Princes presently.

The status of Heng Commandery Prince within the Imperial Household was evident.

Shangguan Yunhong, even if a thousand times unwilling in his heart, had no choice but to retract his War Body, reverting to a more human-like appearance, and respectfully bowed as he said, "Yes, Your Highness. Yunhong shall take his leave now."

Having said that, he led his household staff away in a sorry state.

After Shangguan Yunhong departed, the equally burly Fang Yaowu suddenly became noticeable.

The attention of many onlookers naturally shifted, and pairs of eyes stared at him intensively.

Having received some treatment, Fang Yaowu finally managed to dissipate the excess Qi and blood within his body, and came back to life. Feeling the eyes of the crowd on him, he immediately felt guilty and said in a deep voice, "This... why are you all looking at me?"

"Brother Fang, as one of the ten distinguished young military talents, would you really stand by and watch as an outsider shows off on the stage?"

"Yes, yes, didn't you always say that you could handle Shangguan Yunhong with just one hand?"

"Hehe~ that person was kicking the Sky Pride of Shangjing." Fang Yaowu's expression turned serious, and he said honestly, "I, Fang Yaowu, am one of the Sky Pride of the Thirty-Six Guards, not the same kind as them. Oh right, I forgot to turn off the fire under the chicken soup at home, I must be off, farewell~"

Saying so, he walked out of White Cloud Tower with his head high, then quickly sprinted away from the scene.

What a joke, that Immortal Li Yao was purely a super-perversed level master; even two of him, Fang Yaowu, might not be able to get the upper hand.

As for handling Shangguan Yunhong with one hand... okay, he admitted he was bragging.

After all, as one of the ten distinguished military talents, even though Fang Yaowu was very burly, his speed was still swift and agile...

In a few breaths, his figure disappeared from sight.

The onlookers inside White Cloud Tower let out disappointed hisses.

Nevertheless, even though Fang Yaowu had run away, the debut battle of the Great Heavenly Proud, Wang Liyao, had already successfully made a name for herself.

Very quickly, the news of the Challenger of Heaven spread like the wind at an extremely fast pace throughout Return to Dragon City and quickly secured the top spot on Return to Dragon City's trending list.

After all, it had been over a century since the last Challenger of Heaven.

Everyone wanted to see just how far Wang Liyao could go. Could she match the records set by Gong Yang Ce in the past?

However, most people subconsciously thought that Wang Liyao probably could not compare with Gong Yang Ce.

After all, there was the issue of age during the battle for Challenger of Heaven; Gong Yang Ce was already in his nineties back then, while Wang Liyao was only sixty-nine now.

How fast the Great Heavenly Proud's cultivation progressed; how could it endure a gap of more than two decades?

While it was causing a stir outside,

Heng Commandery Prince had already invited Wang Liyao to the private room on the top floor, saying amiably, "The Tianhe true transmission is extraordinarily outstanding, and you truly have not disgraced the reputation of elder Tianhe."

"Liyao has seen His Highness, Heng Commandery Prince." Wang Liyao greeted him with neither arrogance nor humility.

"No need for formalities, no need~~ You've just eaten too much roasted Spirit Cow, so I won't serve you any greasy food," Heng Commandery Prince instructed the Great Steward by his side, "Brew a pot of Immortal Tea, prepare some Top Grade Immortal Spirit Fruits to welcome Miss Liyao."

Oh, and remember there's a five-pound West Sea Snowy Skin Fish in the Ice Crystal Treasury; have the chef steam it in its original flavor to help Miss Liyao cut through the grease."

"Your Highness, that Snowy Skin Fish is an ingredient specified by Consort Yi..." the Great Steward said in a low voice.

The Snowy Skin Fish was exceedingly rare and provided remarkable beauty and nourishment for women. Each one was hyped to sky-high prices in Return to Dragon City, let alone a precious fish weighing five pounds.

"Just go and do it," Heng Commandery Prince said sternly, "Consort Yi has eaten it twice already, missing it once won't kill her. Liyao is a distinguished guest of mine and naturally should be treated with the finest ingredients."

Wang Liyao was about to refuse, but Heng Commandery Prince stopped her, "Do not be polite, Liyao. By choosing my White Cloud Tower for your battle as the Challenger of Heaven, you could naturally bring a huge influx of people and fame to White Cloud Tower. What's a Snowy Skin Fish in comparison? Fight here, and do not go elsewhere."

"Then Liyao thanks His Highness, Heng Commandery Prince," Wang Liyao hesitated slightly before saying, "But about that stage..."

"Replace it!" Heng Commandery Prince said without hesitation, "I will immediately replace it with an Obsidian Fighting Stage and hire an Array Master to set up a Protective Array, assuring no delay in Miss Liyao's battle."

Heng Commandery Prince realized that he had been conducting business too straightforwardly for hundreds of years, simply following the traditional routines. But after tasting the benefits of the Big Stomach King contest, his mind became active.

The battle for the Challenger of Heaven could certainly attract more attention than the Big Stomach King contest. In the end, even the Emperor would pay some attention. Imagine the benefits it could bring to White Cloud Tower.

Chapter 15: Powerful! The Foundation of the Wang Family's Prosperity

With this craze, they returned to hold a grand, no, a normal Challenger of Heaven battle every three years. Although it lacked the attraction and impact of the Great Heavenly Proud battle, it could still achieve long-term fame and attract patrons.

Heng Commandery Prince felt as if he had seen the gates to a new world, thinking the past six hundred years had been lived in vain.

As for the purpose behind Wang Liyao's battle, he was content to enjoy the spectacle and earn money. What did it have to do with him, a leisurely commandery prince? Most importantly, once Lici returned, he would make sure she was well-fed and never driven away again.

"Right, does Miss Liyao know Wang Licui?" The Heng Commandery Prince asked curiously as soon as he thought of Lici.

"Licui, my elder sister, is the elder clan sister of our family's 'Li' generation," Wang Liyao said as she clasped her hands in gratitude. "Before coming to Shangjing, my father specifically instructed me to express his thanks to your Highness on his behalf for your kindness."

"No wonder, haha, no wonder Miss Liyao chose my White Cloud Tower for the Sky Pride battle. It turns out, good deeds do get rewarded," Heng Commandery Prince realized with a laugh, then asked, "What is your father's name?"

"My father is Wang Shouzhe from the Changning Wang family, and he currently holds the position of Family Head," Wang Liyao did not hide the fact.

"Wang Shouzhe?" Heng Commandery Prince frowned thoughtfully. "Never heard of him. But to have raised a daughter as outstanding as Miss Liyao, he must be no ordinary man. It would be worth meeting him if the chance arises."

It was quite normal for him not to have heard of Wang Shouzhe; the Wang family had risen to prominence very recently, and their renown was largely concentrated in Longzuo County. Being merely a Rank Six Prominent Family, even if they caused some disturbance, it would seem trivial to those high and mighty figures in Return to Dragon City.

Unless someone exceptionally attentive took notice, it would be hard for the Changning Wang family to catch their attention.

His statement was also just a polite gesture to Wang Liyao; he had no real interest in Wang Shouzhe.

Next, he focused on how to host Liyao. As an "old senior" of the Imperial family, Heng Commandery Prince often felt a sense of responsibility toward some pleasingly talented young people.

Wang Liyao, an extremely intelligent and sharp person, also sensed Heng Commandery Prince's disregard and perfunctory attitude toward her father. However, she didn't mind it.

Her father, Wang Shouzhe, was a man of unparalleled talent and vision. Only those who had truly witnessed it could understand his far-sighted wisdom and formidable strategies.

The Wang family's reputation might not be notable now, but that was merely because her father deliberately kept a low profile.

Someday, his renown would shake the entire Great Qian Land. By then, those who looked down on him today would realize just how wrong they had been.

...

Longzuo County, Changning Station, Ping'an Town.

Wang Family Main Residence.

It had to be admitted, the Old Ancestor Zhou Xuan really had great foresight; even during the financially challenging pioneering era, he had built the main residence on a grand scale.

This had provided ample space for the descendants of the Wang family to thrive and expand.

Wang Shouzhe had a lot of free time.

The family members were all outstanding and could generally handle the affairs they were responsible for. Thus, after they had taken over the family affairs and each stood on their own, Wang Shouzhe's days became increasingly free.

He spent his days in a small courtyard, living a quiet life with his wife, granddaughter, great-grandson, and others, tending to flowers, cultivating grass, and nurturing new plant species.

Of course, he also devoted time to cultivation, as it was still a daily routine.

Aside from this, Wang Shouzhe had plenty of spare time.

As the saying goes, however tough life is, one must not stint on children's education. Therefore, the Wang family placed great importance on the healthy development of their children, with none taking it more seriously than the Family Head, Wang Shouzhe.

His Top Grade Storage Ring had a sizable space, second only to Wang Anye's "Endless Abyss."

In this Storage Ring, one-third of the space was filled with various classical works that had transcended ages: "Nine Chapters Arithmetic," "Three Hundred Questions on Formation Basics," "Hand-holding Guide to Tool Refinement from Zero," "Hundred-day Primer on Alchemy Basics," "Tribe Study Passes," "Bright Point Promotion," and some fundamental science books that Wang Shouzhe had gradually compiled during his leisure time - "Wang's Basic Mathematics," "Wang's Basic Physics," "Wang's Basic Chemistry," and so on.

Additionally, there were many "Five Hundred Secret Exam Papers of the Wang Clan" (for internal use only and not to be leaked), which Wang Shouzhe painstakingly compiled with a group of talented teachers. This was a small special privilege he prepared for the Wang children to help them maintain a leading position in the Clan School.

After all, as the scale of the Wang Family School continued to grow, the proportion of children from the Wang family in it was only about one percent.

Wang Shouzhe, holding a pot of tea, walked leisurely within the main residence.

The trees, planted by the pioneers of the Ping'an Wang family, Zhou Xuan Old Ancestor, Yu Suo Old Ancestor, Yu You Old Ancestor, were robust and tall, their canopies spreading out like a royal crown, casting cool shade everywhere. Walking under such shaded pathways was truly relaxing.

He enjoyed this feeling of protection provided by the old ancestors, which fostered a strong sense of belonging to the family and a sense of responsibility toward future generations.

Chapter 15: Powerful! The Foundation of the Prosperity of the Wang Family

Generation after generation, the new children of the Wang family are the true foundation of Changning Wang Clan's future.

From a distance, under a huge tree that required several people to embrace, a group of children of varying sizes were playing joyfully in the shade. They laughed radiantly like sunlight, so carefree and untroubled.

It is because the Wang family is now strong enough to protect these generations of children, providing them a space to grow robustly.

Under Wang Shouzhe's relentless efforts to cultivate and urge, he had also trained generations of outstanding clan members, such as Lici, Luo Qiu, Zong Chang, and many others.

For this reason, Wang Shouzhe was willing to continue this tradition, striving to cultivate more exceptional clan members.

As Wang Shouzhe approached the children with kindness,

the group of children suddenly froze as if a time-stopping spell had been cast, turning them into adorable little puppets. The brilliant smiles on their faces froze as if encased in ice.

A few moments later,

someone took the lead and shouted, "Four, four Grand Elder Demonic King is out patrolling the residence, run!!"

Then, the group of little rascals woke up as if from a dream, immediately running wildly with their short legs scampering away.

Through long-term "training," they had all summarized the experience that they should not run in the same direction but scatter like birds and beasts.

This idea was naturally based on the attitude that if one could escape, then one should escape.

Alas, they were too young and ultimately underestimated Wang Shouzhe.

Wang Shouzhe's expression did not change, maintaining his kind smile as if it were the norm.

Vines burst from the ground like the long hair of a witch, entangling each of the little rascals and then dragging them in front of Wang Shouzhe.

In total, eight children, not one could escape.

Of course, this group of little rascals was just part of the many children of the Wang family. Today's Wang family was not what it used to be. As generations proliferated, naturally, their numbers were flourishing more and more.

They were growing robustly under the protection of the family, and they would become an even more prosperous foundation for the Wang family in the future.

However, at this moment, they were all frightened, their little faces pale as sheets, and their legs had gone weak. Then, everyone's gaze turned to one of the girls.

It seemed as if that little girl was the backbone among this group of rascals.

"Hello, Grandpa Four~" A ten-year-old girl, blinking her watery eyes at Wang Shouzhe, asked, "Why did you suddenly tie us up? Did Yingqi do something wrong?"

Her face was full of innocent expression, yet she seemed as calm as ever.

Wang Yingqi was Wang Shou Yong's granddaughter, ranked twentieth within her generation and known as "Miss Twenty."

Despite Shou Yong looking clueless in his youth, this granddaughter of his was a mischievous one. Being only ten years old, she had already become a tyrant in the clan school, with even her father, Wang Zonghui, feeling terribly vexed.

However, as the generations of the Wang family continued, the concentration of their bloodlines kept increasing; a snowball effect gradually accumulating. By the ninth generation, the Ying and Shi generations, and the tenth generation, the Xuan and An generations, the children's innate bloodline talents had significantly improved.

Currently, there are only two children in the eleventh generation, Ning and Mei generations, so it's still too early to see any major changes. But clearly, as time passes and many more children of the eleventh generation are born, it will become apparent.

It was like when Wang Zonghui was born, his grandfather Wang Shou Yong was already a Sky Pride of the Spiritual Platform Realm with a Threefold Bloodline. By the time Zonghui was eight years old, he had already tested for a Middle Sub-Grade Bloodline, ranking among the top in his generation.

Then, through the family's Direct Vessel disciples' provision of free Spirit-Initiation, Blood-Tempering, and Bone Marrow Cleansing Pills, he advanced to Mid-Rank 'A' Level Bloodline.

Afterward, Shou Yong painstakingly earned family contributions, adding on family rewards, contribution debt, maternal family donations, and covert support from Liu Ruolan, he managed to acquire a Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill along with a Treasure Pill.

This allowed Wang Zonghui to step into Grade B Double Bloodline during his Qi Refinement Realm. Consuming two Bone Marrow Cleansing Pills in a lifetime, the effect of the second would be very weak, around only ten percent.

Even so, it caused a qualitative leap in Zonghui overall, advancing his bloodline slightly higher than his father, Wang Shou Yong.

Not only did this add a remarkable Sky Pride to the family, but it also led to him marrying a wife who was also a Middle Sub-Grade Little Sky Pride.

The result was his eldest son, Wang Shi Jing, being a Middle Grade Class C... This seriously infuriated Wang Zonghui. According to family rules, a free set of Spirit-Initiation, Blood-Tempering, and Bone Marrow Cleansing Pills was used to upgrade him to Middle Sub-Grade Bloodline.

Fortunately, Wang Zonghui's daughter, Wang Yingqi, exploded in luck during her talent test two years prior, naturally having a Mid-Rank 'A' Level Bloodline. This naturally delighted and also worried Wang Shou Yong's lineage, as just depending on Bone Marrow Cleansing Pills and a few more sets might push her into the ranks of Sky Pride.

But that kind of Sky Pride would only barely step into the category.

Yet, if another Treasure Pill was available—aside from their scarcity in the market—even if it were available, Wang Shou Yong and his son hadn't even cleared the debt for the previous one yet.

Because both father and son were Sky Prides, their consumption of resources was enormous, and it would only increase in the future. Unless they decided not to progress, giving up the future path to Purple Abode, they should take advantage of their youth to push forward as much as possible, leaving ample time to refine for their peak at the Heavenly Human Realm.

Chapter 15: Powerful! The Foundation of the Wang Family's Prosperity

If the surge fails and one is still young, there may be a second chance.

Therefore, the pursuit of the Purple Abode Realm for a Sky Pride is extremely resource-consuming. One only needs to look at the Strong Grade Seven Wang Family of Zhenze to understand that to support one Sky Pride, the entire clan has to tighten its belt.

Thus, even though Shu Yong's lineage contributes much and receives more resources, they remain quite poor. Just the daily cultivation expenses for the father and son are significant, not to mention adding a Sky Pride granddaughter...

Just for Wang Shou Yong's lineage alone, are they planning for a future comparable to a Rank Four Prominent Family?

With no choice but to soldier on, Wang Shou Yong and his son had to approach Wang Shouzhe again. And of course, Wang Shouzhe firmly believed that they must advance, no matter what the cost!

If their contributions weren't enough, they could owe a debt to the clan treasury first—the opportunity once missed would be lost forever.

First, raise the bloodline talent to close to that of a Sky Pride, and then rely on the Treasure Pill of Limitlessness for a surge, reaching as high as they possibly can. After all, there are considerable gaps even among Sky Prides, and some of the leading ones, if lucky enough, might even have a chance at the Divine Power Territory!

With Wang Shouzhe's sweeping decision, Shu Yong and his son naturally returned home with great satisfaction and high spirits.

However, this also brought immense pressure to Wang Shouzhe, the Family Head. In fact, with the current financial power of the Wang family, purchasing a Treasure Pill of Limitlessness was not that much pressure, even if it were to buy one every year.

But the problem is, though producing a Sky Pride is easy, cultivating one is difficult.

To cultivate a Sky Pride to the Purple Abode Realm, it would take between two hundred fifty to three hundred fifty years. Putting aside the likes of the Treasure Pills of Limitlessness and other Dan medicines for increasing talent, the total expenditure would reach thirty to forty million, averaging around one million per year!

Of course, that's just the average annual expenditure.

As for the initial stage, it doesn't require such an exaggerated amount, but the closer one gets to the Purple Abode Realm, the greater the consumption, especially during the surge to that realm. The expenditure is the greatest; it feels like the expenses incurred when one's child is getting married... Most families need a long time to accumulate such wealth!

The pressure on Wang Shouzhe, of course, was not from cultivating one, or even a few, in the Purple Abode Realm.

In fact, the number of Sky Prides and Great Heavenly Prouds in the Wang Family was exaggeratedly high, and when the offspring with exceptional talents descend into the world, how could those with promising talents not be cultivated?

With every addition of a Sky Pride or even a Little Sky Pride, it seems like accumulating a solid foundation and augmenting the family's strength, but it's also a heavy burden on the family.

This is why those Purple Abode Prominent Families find it extremely difficult to cultivate just one or two more in the Purple Abode Realm. It's not about biting the bullet to afford a Treasure Pill of Limitlessness; it's that the family simply lacks the deep foundation necessary for cultivation.

Therefore, Wang Shouzhe had to lead the family to continuously expand their territories and industries, to earn more money, and to gather more resources. Only in this way could they meet the ever-increasing annual total expenses of the growing family.

These thoughts, though slow to speak of, had already passed in a few breaths in the mind of Wang Shouzhe.

He only had to behold Wang Yingqi, and a myriad of thoughts and emotions overwhelmed him.

"Yingqi, my girl," Wang Shouzhe smiled as he gently patted her head, "I heard from your Fourth Uncle that you've been very active lately.

You and Yuxuan have established the 'Heavenly Girl Alliance' in the Clan School, with the following entry criteria: one, the girl must be under fifteen; two, the bloodline must reach Middle Sub-Grade; three, members must unconditionally obey the orders of the Chief Alliance Hierarch Wang Ying Xuan, and the Vice Alliance Hierarch Wang Yingqi."

That's right.

Wang Yingqi and Wang Ying Xuan, the two missies of the Ying generation, the twentieth and the twenty-first! The youngest two have already started to "bully the weak and dominate the strong" in the Clan School.

And gradually, they have taken on the air of the number one "organization" in the Wang Family School, with many teachers unable to handle them.

"Fourth Uncle, is there something wrong with that?" Wang Yingqi said with innocent eyes, "The full name of our organization is 'Talented Young Girls' Mutual Aid Alliance.' It's to protect the weaker girls from being bullied by the teachers and fellow students."

"Also, Ying Xuan is going to the Sacred Land to cultivate in a few years, and after discussing with grandfather and father, they also decided to let me accompany her, to take good care of Ying Xuan. I established the 'Heavenly Girl Alliance' to build some foundations for Ying Xuan, smoothing the road ahead for her future path as a Saint."

"What?"

Wang Shouzhe looked flabbergasted, "Since when did the Clan Leader dictate that Ying Xuan was to walk the path of a Saint? I merely allowed her to go to the Sacred Land for cultivation..." How come there are parts of the family's cultivation plan he, Wang Shouzhe, didn't know about?

"Ying Xuan herself said so," Yingqi blinked, "She mentioned that Old Ancestor Yu An of her maternal family has spoken, and even if it costs her family's entire fortune, she will support Ying Xuan in striving for the path of a Saint, not allowing certain individuals to monopolize power, creating a one-man show, deciding who gets to surge and who doesn't."

Fourth Uncle, who is this 'certain individual' Old Ancestor Yu An spoke of?"

"Err... haha~" Wang Shouzhe's eyelids began to twitch, Fang Youan, oh Fang Youan, you really do plan far ahead, exhaustively strategizing for the rise of the Fang Family.

Latching onto a Great Heavenly Proud was one thing, but now preparing to curry favor with the Lord of the Sacred Land?

When have I, Wang Shouzhe, ever monopolized power and dictated decisions?

To compete is to compete, who's afraid... wait, that's not... On one side is my daughter, and on the other, my granddaughter?

Wait, it seems there's more to it.

I remember decades ago, my grandniece Wang Licui wrote back saying she was following her Master to the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty. She also hinted in her heart that her Master intended to properly cultivate her, aiming to let her join the contest for the position of Saint, rising to the Station of Lord of the Sacred Land.

"Three of them?"

"Daughter, granddaughter, niec... Wang Shouzhe suddenly felt overwhelmed.

Chapter 16: Great Heavenly Proud Sweeps Through the Imperial Capital

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"Grandfather Si, Grandfather Si, what's wrong with you?" Just as Wang Shouzhe was in a daze, Wang Yingqi's crisp voice rang out, "If you think our 'Genius Beautiful Girls Mutual Aid Alliance' is not suitable, then I will go and dissolve it."

"That's... not necessary," Wang Shouzhe said indifferently, but secretly thought that this girlish group, which resembled playing house, wouldn't last long before it fell apart and dissolved.

Wait... did Yingqi mention the character 'beautiful' in the earlier name?

"That's great, since Grandfather Si has agreed, then our 'Invincible Genius Beautiful Girls Mutual Aid Alliance' can officially be established." Wang Yingqi cheered endlessly.

Two other little girls also joined in the cheering.

Wang Shouzhe's eyelid twitched.

Yingqi, this little brat, really knew how to climb up the pole. What do you mean I agreed? By the look of your joy, did you forget you were still tied up by me?

That boy Shu Yong has always been so honest and straightforward, how could he have such a granddaughter?

Right then, he chuckled and said, "Yingqi, in a few years you and Yuxuan will go to the Sacred Land to study and practice. Are you happy about that?"

"Happy," Wang Yingqi smiled brilliantly.

"Yingqi, look, our Changning Wang Clan is just a small Rank Six family, and to those high and mighty families, we are just like a rural clan," Wang Shouzhe said earnestly, "When you and Yuxuan go to the Sacred Land, you must make our Wang family proud and not let others look down on us."

"Yes, Grandfather Si, Yingqi will definitely work hard and show those disdainful people in the Sacred Land how powerful our Wang family is," Wang Yingqi said seriously and solemnly.

"That's good, Grandfather Si is rooting for you~"

Wang Shouzhe said, then merrily began to take out various ancient poetry collections and the teaching materials and mock papers he had carefully compiled.

"These, these, and those, all belong to you. Every month, come to Grandfather Si's courtyard to take an exam. If you pass, you get a reward; if you fail, you get punished."

"What!"

Wang Yingqi was thunderstruck, standing there dumbfounded.

She wanted to run, but tied up as she was, she couldn't escape anywhere. As more and more books were stuffed into her arms, her heart sank further and further, turning stone cold.

She knew, when Grandfather Si said there would be exams, it meant real exams, no cheating or skimming through. Grandfather Si never joked about this.

At that moment, Wang Yingqi shed "moved" tears.

This was also why Grandfather Si was known as "Great Demon King," a title passed down through generations.

Apart from Wang Yingqi, none of the other little brats could escape the clutches of the "Great Demon King."

"Wang Meijing, you are the oldest sister of the 'Mei' generation, although now you're the only one, you must set a good example for the future 'Mei' generation. Be diligent like Big Sister Lici in those days," Wang Shouzhe said earnestly as he stuffed a pile of basic academia, and texts for cultural enhancement into the arms of nine-year-old Wang Meijing.

"Whoo~ Thank you for your concern, Old Ancestor," Wang Meijing also shed "moved" tears.

By her eleventh generation, since the generation gap was so large, she addressed members of the 'Shou' and 'Luo' generations from the seventeenth, directly as Old Ancestor.

Just like Wang Shouzhe often called the third generation's Wang Longyan as Old Ancestor.

"Ninghui, you are the eldest brother of the 'Ning' generation, you must lead by example," Wang Shouzhe said as he stuffed a bunch of introductory books to Wang Ninghui.

The four-year-old boy, still snotty and baffled.

"Wang Xuanyi, this is your share."

"Wang Ansong, Wang Anze, Wang Xuanyu, Wang Xuanqin, do not hang your heads, Fourth Grand Elder will definitely not be biased," Wang Shouzhe knew every one of the family's younger generation as if he were counting his own treasures.

He was like the wind in spring, warmly caring for every young member of the family without missing a single one.

Every child felt the care from their elder and the earnest exhortation to study, each of them tearfully choked up, overwhelmed and unable to express their excitement.

This made Wang Shouzhe very gratified, our Wang family's children are indeed spirited good children, their response full of tears to the affectionate care of the head of the family.

Good, such good children! This is indeed the foundation for the Wang family's future prosperity.

After the encouragement was complete.

The tendrils of the Spirit Plant slid back underground, disappearing without a trace.

Wang Shouzhe, clutching his teapot and occasionally sipping the fine Spiritual Tea, walked with a swaying gait, feeling exceptionally relaxed as he continued his patrol, seeing if he could bring the love of an elder to the next wave of children.

Once Wang Shouzhe's figure had completely disappeared into the corner, the previously sobbing children all collapsed to the ground, clutching their piles of books, and began to bawl their eyes out.

They cried so sadly, so desolately.

Some of the older children also peered out from the corners, their expressions a mix of schadenfreude, bitterness, and nostalgia.

After all, they had also come through this~~

Without having enjoyed the "affectionate care" of the "Great Demon King," how could they consider themselves "qualified" Wang family members?

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Let's not talk about the mundane matters of the Wang family's main residence.

Chapter 16 Great Heavenly Proud Sweeps Across the Imperial Capital_2

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Far away in the National Capital, Return to Dragon City, Wang Liyao's subsequent days were truly filled with excitement and splendor.

The Heng Commandery Prince, who had already mastered the true "business" methods, dismantled the original platform, which was only adequate for dancing and dining, at the fastest speed and replaced it with an Obsidian Fighting Stage, also spending a huge sum to build a Defensive Array.

By the way, he used the excuse of providing a sturdy stage for the Great Heavenly Proud Liyao to block all challengers at the door and register them one by one. In his words, our Great Qian Land is a civilized society, and all competitions naturally need rules. Participants must apply for registration, get a number tag, and challenge in an orderly fashion according to the dates.

This action, although it caused dissatisfaction among many people.

But who did it belong to but the Heng Commandery Prince?

If it weren't for the fact that his age was too great, making him unsuitable to receive the Great Emperor's inheritance, he would inevitably have been qualified to participate in the Emperor's son's struggle.

With such a person establishing the rules, even if there were substantial grievances, one could only chuckle and accept them, and even had to compliment the Heng Commandery Prince on a job well done.

In reality.

This was the Heng Commandery Prince deliberately stirring up hype and preparing to sustain the heat for as long as possible.

As a result.

Wang Liyao was well taken care of by the Heng Commandery Prince with good food and drink, facing a challenge from the young Sky Pride of Return to Dragon City every two days.

"I am the seventeenth-ranked young Sky Pride from Return to Dragon City, Sun Qiuqiu of the Sun Clan of Grade Four, at the Peak of Level Two Heavenly Human Realm, and ninety-three years old this year."

Then.

This fellow called Sun Qiuqiu was thrown out of the stage after just ten breaths.

Two days later.

"I am Ouyang Feiyang of the Ouyang Grade Four Clan from Return to Dragon City, at the Peak of the Level Three Heavenly Human Realm, one hundred and thirteen years old this year, recently fallen out of the top sixteen. "

Under the circumstance where White Cloud Tower was crowded, and private rooms required a minimum spend that was triple the usual amount, all the added seats were fully occupied, and dishes along with drinks were ordered to the brim. That Ouyang Feiyang withstood fifteen breaths before being blasted off the stage.

After such incidents occurred five times in a row.

The spectators, unable to contain their frustration, started to rebel. Those who could afford such an exorbitant minimum spend and still come to watch the match were influential, powerful, and wealthy individuals, right?

Among them were also many from the Imperial Household.

Even if the Heng Commandery Prince indeed holds a high status, should he be so extortionate?

It had become quite clear that the Heng Commandery Prince was deliberately putting the more formidable challengers at the back of the queue, using the so-called "trash" Sky Prides upfront just to fill the numbers.

As a result, to quell the "public outrage," the Heng Commandery Prince immediately arranged for a young Sky Pride master ranked seventh to challenge the Great Heavenly Proud Liyao—Da Qian Chen Family's Chen Muying.

As one of only three Third-Class Aristocratic Families in Great Qian, it has the privilege of preceding its name with the words Da Qian in the presence of other prominent families.

Although the Chen Clan wasn't among those who followed the founding emperor at the beginning of the nation to pioneer, it has become a rapidly rising power.

Today's Da Qian Chen Family is mighty, boasting no less than two old ancestors in the Divine Power Territory.

Therefore, by playing the Chen Muying card, the public outrage subsided slightly. Then again, the Heng Commandery Prince began to hype things up externally, touting Chen Muying as the paragon of invincibility under the heavens.

There were rumors that Chen Muying was one of the Chen Clan's hidden cards, his current seventh rank among the young Sky Prides being merely a ploy to conceal his skill.

Amidst all this praise, Chen Muying was portrayed as an invincible hidden Great Heavenly Proud, as though he could seize the top spot effortlessly if he desired.

As the rumors spread, many people held intense anticipation for this challenge. They believed that even if the rumors were somewhat exaggerated, this would surely be a fight worth the price of admission, not to be missed.

The minimum spend for the private rooms of White Cloud Tower soon soared to six times the original amount.

Under the watchful eyes of thousands, and buoyed by rumors to the point of swelling with confidence, the Level Three Heavenly Human Realm's Chen Muying felt ready to battle the Great Heavenly Proud, and yet, he lost!

Three breaths!

Chen Muying had barely executed one move before he was defeated by Wang Liyao with a sword still sheathed!

It's not that Chen Muying was genuinely that weak, but had he engaged with Liyao with cautious respect, the fight wouldn't have looked so pathetic. It goes to show that sometimes, rumors can indeed be a pitfall. If Chen Muying could rise from this setback, he might still become a hero of his generation.

Also duped were the throngs of spectators, who initially hoped to enjoy the thrill of a fierce battle alongside their drinks and dishes.

That's it?

Was Chen Muying just a foil set up to highlight Wang Liyao?

Cancel the order...

...

Meanwhile.

In the western part of Return to Dragon City, at a decent distance from the Imperial Palace, stood a sizeable residence.

This estate was unassuming in luxury, seemingly no different from the other surrounding estates, but on the plaque above its gate was the Blue Dragon Emblem of the Great Qian Imperial Household.

This meant that the master of this estate was a member of the Great Qian Imperial Household.

In Return to Dragon City, there are many such estates. After thousands of years of Great Qian's development, the number of members in the Imperial Household has become countless, and the properties belonging to the Imperial Household are likewise beyond ordinary imagination.

Although at present, most members of the Imperial Household are actually quite far removed from the Direct Lineage and their bloodline's potency is not nearly as strong as that of the Direct Line, they are still significantly more powerful than other middle to lower-class families, and occasionally, a Great Heavenly Proud is born among them.

This generation has produced a Great Heavenly Proud within the Direct Vessel of the Royal Family named "Wu Zhixing," who, due to his exceptional Talent, has attracted the attention of Emperor Longchang.

The emperor specially brought him to the National Capital, Return to Dragon City, to be educated and nurtured by distinguished teachers of the Direct Lineage of the Royal Family, and now many years have passed.

Chapter 16 Great Heavenly Proud Sweeps Across the Imperial Capital_3

The estate named "Xingyuan Homestead" was the residence bestowed upon this Direct Vessel Great Heavenly Proud by Emperor Longchang.

Xingyuan Homestead's backyard.

In the garden lush with greenery and wild charm, a young man sat cross-legged on a protruding stone by the pond, his eyes slightly closed, silently comprehending the Heaven and Earth Laws.

This young man was naturally the owner of Xingyuan, Wu Zhixing.

Behind him, a dragon-shaped shadow with a certain degree of solidity slowly swam, emanating a majestic and immense aura.

However, unlike the pale yellow pale dragon, this dragon-shaped shadow was of an azure color. It was not the turquoise of a Water Spirit Azure Dragon but a vast azure color like the azure sky and white clouds. Under the ribs of that dragon shadow, there was a pair of enormous wings displaying a rainbow hue, exuding a sacred and mysterious aura.

As the shadow leisurely swam, the winds between heaven and earth seemed to be drawn in, circulating around the young man, creating wind currents that expanded and contracted with his breath, as if they too possessed life.

No one knew how much time had passed.

Suddenly.

A streak of golden light seemed to flash between the young man's brows.

The next instant, the azure shadow behind him came to life, its dragon eyes brightening, and with a flap of its wings, it let out a long dragon chant towards the sky.

Wind.

The brisk wind, as if heeding a command, swept through the heaven and earth with a howl, stirring the grass and lifting up ripples on the water, then spiraling up to the high skies and blowing far off into the distance.

The azure dragon shadow flapped its wings again.

The winds around the world suddenly changed; fierce winds arose, dark clouds gathered, and the weather abruptly shifted from clear skies to a dense cloud cover.

Above the courtyard, dark clouds churned, and the sound of muffled thunder could be heard.

Suddenly.

A bolt of lightning tore through the sky, and the air reverberated with thunderous roars. Amidst the roars, rain poured down like waterfalls, yet it seemed contained by some power, falling only within the confines of this small courtyard.

Outside the wall of the courtyard, the ground remained as dry as ever, without a single droplet of water in sight.

Amidst the drenching rain, the young man remained seated cross-legged, his eyes lightly closed, as if immersed in some indescribable sentiment, oblivious to the world around him.

Raindrops fell on his shoulders and hair tresses, sliding along his robe. Yet his clothes remained as dry as ever, without a hint of dampness.

That was because a thin layer of wind clung onto the surface of his body and clothes, insulating him from the raindrops, separating him from the world.

No one knew how much longer it was before the dark clouds above the courtyard slowly dispersed.

The clouds cleared, and the rain stopped.

The young man in the courtyard gradually opened his eyes.

"Zhixing, my obedient grandson, you're finally awake~ I was getting so bored waiting for you."

Suddenly.

From above came a puffed-up voice.

The young man, who was Wu Zhixing, looked up only to realize that there was a little girl in a purple dress sitting on a nearby tree.

She wore cute twin buns in her hair adorned with pretty golden ribbons, her face full of youthful vibrance, looking exceptionally charming and adorable.

No one knew how long she had been there, her legs swinging, clearly a bit bored.

Beside her followed a middle-aged beautiful woman in an autumn-coloured maid's attire, performing the protective Technique against the rain. When the man looked over, the middle-aged beautiful woman gave him a nod and a half-curtsy.

"I have seen Grand Aunt Xue Ning."

Wu Zhixing came to his senses and quickly stood up, performing the formalities meticulously and respectfully towards the little girl, before returning the courtesy to the middle-aged woman.

This little girl was a descendant of the Direct Lineage of the Royal Family, called "Wu Xuening," two generations his senior. According to the rules of the Imperial Household, even though he was now over ninety years old, he still had to address Wu Xuening as Grand Aunt.

The middle-aged beautiful woman beside Wu Xuening was naturally her personal Attendant and guard.

"Dispense with the formalities, stand up~"

Wu Xuening responded like a little adult, then leapt lightly to the ground with graceful ease.

Although she was only thirteen, her Cultivation base was already at Level Nine of the Qi Refinement Realm. In a year or so, she would be able to ascend to the Spirit Platform Realm. Although she was still too young and her prowess in Mysterious Techniques not yet proficient, she indeed had the makings of a formidable young expert.

"With all the commotion outside, you still have the mind to devoutly Cultivate here?" Wu Xuening walked a circle around Wu Zhixing with her hands behind her back, disbelief filling her bright, sparkling eyes, "You have such patience~"

Wu Zhixing confusedly asked, "Grand Aunt is referring to...?"

"What else could it be? Of course, it's that matter." Wu Xuening recounted, "That girl from their Baiyun Tower family, the one named 'Wang Liyao,' hasn't she boasted that she'll refuse no one under one hundred and fifty years old? This is a 'Challenger of Heaven' that comes once in a century."

As she spoke, Wu Xuening's face showed an expression of vexation, and jumping up, she poked Wu Zhixing's forehead with her chubby finger, "They've come to your doorstep to challenge, and as one of the top ten outstanding youths of our generation, how can you stay out of this? If I weren't so young and unable to defeat her, I would have gone already."

Although Wu Xuening was a Great Heavenly Proud, she was just too young. Certainly strong among her peers, but to participate in the Challenger of Heaven battle, she was completely out of her depth. To actually take part would mean being easily crushed by others.

However, looking at her eager expression, if she were to age another fifty years, no, not even fifty, perhaps just another twenty or thirty years, she probably would have taken up the challenge.

Chapter 16 Great Heavenly Proud Sweeps Across the Imperial Capital_4

Wu Zhixing was drenched in cold sweat, saying awkwardly, "This... Grand Aunt, you know me, I actually don't like to fight at all. The title of 'Top Ten Outstanding Youths', that was their own doing, I never agreed to it."

"As for the Challenger of Heaven, whoever wishes to go, let them. If I have spare time, I'd rather use it to comprehend the laws, striving to grasp Small Divine Power as soon as possible and prepare for entering the Purple Abode Realm."

"You! You, you, you! You're really making me angry! Hopeless block of wood that you are!" Little loli Wu Xuening jumped up and down furiously, her baby-faced cheeks flushing with rage.

Seeing this, the beautiful middle-aged woman beside her quickly comforted her with a smile, whispering soothing words. Wu Zhixing also repeatedly bowed and mumbled apologies.

The huffy expression on the little loli's face slowly subsided.

With her hands behind her back, she started to sigh dejectedly, "Sigh~ why is my fate so bitter? Although gifted with extraordinary talent and exceptional aptitude, born at an inopportune time, I'm too young to catch up with the Emperor's son's struggle, and as a member of the Imperial Household with royal blood, it's inconvenient to join the conflict of the Saint.

And on the rare occasion of the Challenger of Heaven, I can only watch the excitement because I'm too weak."

"Sigh~~ It seems that in this life, I can only rely on being born into the royal family and slack my days away~~ Sigh~ such a miserable fate~ and now, even my usually obedient and well-behaved grandchild doesn't listen to me."

How could this not sound so smack-worthy~

Wu Zhixing's mouth twitched: "Grand Aunt, what exactly do you want to do? Just tell me straight."

"Hehe~ my dear grandchild, you understand me," Little loli Wu Xuening's downtrodden expression disappeared instantly, replaced by a smile, "I want you to take me to White Cloud Tower to observe the Challenger of Heaven. You know, my father won't let me go if I'm not accompanied by someone with enough strength."

"This..." Wu Zhixing hesitated.

The little loli narrowed her eyes, clearly meaning 'dare to refuse and you'll see'.

Recalling the Grand Aunt's past "glorious" achievements, Wu Zhixing's headache intensified. Although reluctant, he finally nodded in agreement.

"Good grandchild, I knew you're the most obedient. Let's go, go to White Cloud Tower."

Wu Xuening opened her eyes wide again, her face looking innocent and cute as she pulled Wu Zhixing out the door, chuckling to herself in her heart.

She knew that her dear grandchild Zhixing would definitely agree. Now she not only had the chance to watch the Challenger of Heaven but also managed to force Zhixing to take action, killing two birds with one stone.

Hehe~ she was indeed so clever~~

...

Inside White Cloud Tower.

Heng Commandery Prince spent quite some effort and finally pacified the diners with his charming eloquence, declaring that if the next fight was not exciting, they would offer refunds!

Then.

He hurriedly rushed to the lounge where Wang Liyao was resting and complained incessantly, "My Miss Liyao, can't you fight properly for once? Drag it out a bit longer, even just for thirty breaths would be good."

"Your Highness, when venturing outside, father has given me instructions," Wang Liyao said solemnly as she leisurely sipped her Spiritual Tea, "One must have their own principles in life and act accordingly."

"Father... judging by the name Wang Shouzhe, he must be a rigid, dull, and conservative man," Heng Commandery Prince slapped his forehead, expressing helplessness, "Forget it, let's do this. From now on until Miss Liyao has finished fighting in the Challenger of Heaven, I will give you a cut of the revenues from White Cloud Tower—a full ten percent! Do you realize how much that is?"

"I'm aware," Wang Liyao nodded slightly, "That sounds somewhat interesting."

"Good, good, good, now we can have a proper discussion," Heng Commandery Prince's smile grew hearty with relief, "To restore our reputation, the next fight will feature Great Qian Wang Clan's Wang An Nan."

"Wang An Nan? From the Great Qian Wang Clan's 'An' generation?" A dreamy look flashed in Wang Liyao's eyes, "That generation..."

"His status is indeed high within the Great Qian Wang Clan, but he's still quite young. Miss Liyao, don't look down on him, he's the third-ranked, actually second-ranked, young talent in the capital, and his talent has been elevated to Second Rate Supremacy after a series of promotions. At ninety-four years of age, he has already reached Level Four of the Heavenly Human Realm!"

"Alright." Even with Wang Liyao's demeanor, she felt a flicker of interest, but the thought quickly passed, and she calmly stated, "Thirty percent, starting from the first battle, of all revenues, and I will cooperate with His Highness the Prince?"

"What?" Heng Commandery Prince gulped, wanting to bargain, but upon seeing Wang Liyao's serene expression, he gritted his teeth and said, "Thirty percent it is, you—you and Lici are just little gluttons."

"However, in this upcoming fight with Wang An Nan, Miss Liyao, you must put on a good show, at least lasting the time of one stick of incense, otherwise, it will be difficult for this Prince to make arrangements afterward."

Suddenly.

Wang Liyao lifted her head, her gaze becoming complex, "Your Highness, do you know that the Great Qian Wang Clan is the main lineage of our Changning Wang Clan?"

"Is that so? That's right, now that I think about it, there was indeed a 'Li' generation in the Wang family before, but it seemed they didn't amount to much," Heng Commandery Prince was surprised but grew even more excited and said, "However, this makes it even more sensational. We're going to make a fortune off this."

In fact, up until he had spent five years with Lici, Heng Commandery Prince had always considered money as something extraneous...

"Does the Prince know that if we go by seniority, Wang An Nan would be considered my grandson?" Wang Liyao held up her teacup and took a sip, "This point makes it difficult for me, I'd feel a bit awkward to strike him down."

"Then Miss Liyao's meaning is..." Heng Commandery Prince was full of doubt, "Should we switch to the fourth-ranked competitor from the Gongye Family instead?"

"No, for this match, the price must go up!"

"..." Heng Commandery Prince.

Chapter 17 I am your Grand Aunt Wang Liyao

...

"Wang Liyao, we had an agreement, thirty percent of all business revenue!"

It took the Heng Commandery Prince more than ten breaths to snap out of his shock before he leaped three feet in anger. Where was the etiquette and demeanor of a Commandery Prince now, his usual calm and collected posture? He seemed more like a petty haggler from the marketplace.

Pointing at Wang Liyao, he roared, "Do you not know, 'A promise from a gentleman is worth a thousand in gold'?"

A person, only after being impoverished, would become more concerned about profits, and the Commandery Prince was no exception.

"Firstly, I am but a humble maiden. Have you not heard that young maidens are hard to raise, Your Highness? Secondly, Wang An Nan is my grandson, and it's somewhat hard for me to bear the thought of beating him." Wang Liyao spoke calmly and unwaveringly, "Just raise it to fifty percent, and I shall reluctantly harden my heart for this."

"An extra twenty percent just because you 'can't bear it'? You, as the great Heavenly Proud destined to walk the path of a Saint, shouldn't you have some semblance of prestige?" A pang of pain slashed through Heng Commandery Prince's heart, as if it had been cut with a knife.

"Ah~ My master... he's gone bankrupt," Wang Liyao sighed deeply.

"What? Master Tianhe, he..." The Heng Commandery Prince was shocked, "Did he, did he invest his entire fortune?"

"All in, not even a cent left for his coffin." Wang Liyao nodded earnestly.

What she said was the truth; not only had her Master Tianhe invested a huge sum into her, but her family also spared no effort in supporting her.

"Good heavens, what a bold spirit! So Miss Liyao, now you're...?" The Heng Commandery Prince switched to a more respectful form of address, instantly becoming more polite.

Master Tianhe was an old predecessor from the Divine Power Territory who had lived for over a thousand years. The amount of wealth and resources he could have amassed was bound to be astonishing. Now he had invested it all in his beloved disciple, Wang Liyao. It was clear how determined he was and one could imagine just how deep Wang Liyao's hidden resources were.

"All in all, I will not disappoint Your Highness," said Wang Liyao, avoiding giving away any concrete details.

"Alright, alright, fifty percent it is," the Heng Commandery Prince perked up as if he had been injected with chicken blood, his spirits immediately lifting, "But let's agree in advance — you'll have to follow my plan on how we fight next. Together, young and old, we'll rake in a huge profit."

It was only now that the Heng Commandery Prince felt a sense of enlightenment; this was how money should be made. In the past, the Sky Pride challenges had always been bustling affairs, but although they made a name for themselves, they never actually turned a profit.

Just like Gong Yang Ce... and even when he, Wu Hanheng, was at the top of the National Capital's top ten outstanding young men... they were both too proud and arrogant. How could they compare with Wang Liyao's solid practicality?

Wait a minute...

The Heng Commandery Prince suddenly felt something was off.

Right, Liyao just happened to appear during the finals of the Big Stomach King contest, sparking the first battle and bringing tremendous popularity to his White Cloud Tower. Then at the crucial moment, she had raised the price...

Could it be that all this was pre-calculated by Wang Liyao?

No, that can't be right.

This thought had just surfaced when the Heng Commandery Prince dismissed it himself.

Wang Liyao was young and had been practicing Cultivation with Master Tianhe from an early age. Given her ethereal appearance, she didn't seem like a woman of deep scheming, presumably only raising the price because she was short of money.

This incident was probably just a coincidence.

Thereafter.

Under the "well-plotted" plans of the Heng Commandery Prince, Return to Dragon City was abuzz with rumors and truths. The talk of the town was about Wang Liyao, the Heavenly Proud from a minor Rank Six Prominent Family in Longzuo County's Changning, the Changning Wang Clan.

In the eyes of Return to Dragon City's nobility and prominent families, not to mention the remote Longzuo County, even Qing An Prefecture was considered a backwater. As for the little Changning defense post, it was something they had never heard of in generations.

Amidst their wonderment, they marveled at how a little Changning defense post had produced a golden Phoenix.

This involuntarily brought to mind Gong Yang Ce; at first, Gong Yang Ce too emerged from an unremarkable family, yet now the Gong Yang Clan, riding on Gong Yang Ce's success, had rapidly risen and was making powerful strides.

It was imaginable that the unremarkable Changning Wang Clan would inevitably be raised to Fifth Grade or even higher in the future.

As Wang Liyao's and Gong Yang Ce's names were brought up together, these two Heavenly Prouds, who had come to compete at the National Capital a hundred and some years apart, were naturally placed side by side for comparison.

Their backgrounds were similar, but the age difference during their respective challenges was significant. At that time, Gong Yang Ce was almost ninety years old, while Wang Liyao was not even seventy. However, Wang Liyao managed to defeat Chen Muying within a mere three breaths, revealing far greater strength than expected.

As a result, some people felt that Gong Yang Ce was formidable at the time, while others thought Wang Liyao was more impressive now. With the incitement of "interested parties," the two camps began to argue, sparking a massive debate.

Wang Liyao's personal reputation skyrocketed, and gradually, the name of the Changning Wang Clan also became known.

Subsequently, news burst from White Cloud Tower that three days later, Wang An Nan, ranked third among the top ten outstanding youths but actually second, would face off against the great Heavenly Proud, Wang Liyao.

This youth was ranked third mainly because, among the young people under one hundred years old in the National Capital, there were two other Heavenly Prouds.

One of them was the universally acknowledged Imperial Household member, Wu Zhixing. His Cultivation base had not yet reached the Purple Abode Realm, and he had not yet distinguished himself in battle, so he was not yet entitled to the rank of Commandery Prince.

Even more regrettably, Wu Zhixing's birth in the Imperial Household was not ideal. His Bloodline did not come from the current Great Emperor but was passed down from another branch of the Imperial Household Bloodline by the previous emperor.

Chapter 17 I am your Grand Aunt Wang Liyao _2

In an era abundant with descendants of imperial lineage, another bloodline from the late Emperor had fallen into decline.

Although the Great Emperor pitied their talent and took them to the National Capital to be raised as the "Direct Line," bestowing upon them decent treatment, he would never grant them the status of Quasi Emperor's Son. In fact, even if the Great Emperor were willing, the other Princes and Commandery Princes of the Imperial Household would strongly object.

It was just as implausible as Wang Shouzhe from the Longzuo branch of the Wang family attempting to vie for the position of Family Head of the Changning Wang Clan; the clan elders and members would certainly not consent.

This Wu Zhixing was indisputably the leading figure among the young masters under a hundred years old.

He was also the biggest obstacle in Wang Liyao's upcoming Sky Pride combat trial.

As for another Great Heavenly Proud, their strength was rather unimpressive.

Because Wu Xuening was only thirteen years old and had not even reached the Spirit Platform Realm yet. She was ranked second merely because of her exceedingly noble birth, her bloodline was almost a direct continuation of the current Emperor's.

Moreover, among her direct relatives, there were two Princes!

Such a person was akin to the esteemed Little Princess of the entire Great Qian. Who among the Prominent Families' Sky Prides would embarrass themselves by trying to snatch her ranking?

Besides, challenging a thirteen-year-old girl and winning would bring them no honor either.

Therefore, although Wang An Nan was not a Great Heavenly Proud, he was still genuinely ranked second among the young masters.

With the capabilities he possessed after awakening, even Chen Muying, who was ranked seventh, could be hyped to the skies, as if he were the only one in the world. Not to mention the actually second-ranked Wang An Nan.

Under the overwhelming hype, Wang An Nan's reputation surged rapidly, and in conversations within the streets and the major taverns, he was lauded as a rare talent that the Great Qian Wang Clan hadn't seen in a thousand years.

He was the shining hope of the now declining Great Qian Wang Clan, bearing the hefty mission of reinvigorating the Wang family and returning it to the Second Class standings.

Cangwu Street.

As one of the most bustling streets in Return to Dragon City, this place housed a variety of high-end shops. Here, one could find everything from Spiritual Artifacts and Magical Treasures to Dan medicine, Array Plates, and secret manuals of profound martial arts techniques.

At ninety-four years old, because Wang An Nan advanced to Spirit Platform Realm and Heavenly Human Realm quite early, he appeared like a young gentleman.

He inherited the Wang family's excellent genes, handsome in looks, and donning a Profound Martial outfit woven from Heavenly silkworm weaving, he indeed looked imposing and presentable.

The Great Qian Wang Clan was one of the oldest Prominent Families in Great Qian Land, having reached its peak with three family members possessing Divine Skills, a true Second Class Prominent Family and the Emperor's trusted right-hand support.

Furthermore, as the founder of the Great Qian Wang Clan had fought side by side with the Founding Emperor, Emperor Ziwei Xuandu, contributing great martial efforts to the establishment of Da Qian, a family member had the right to inherit and enjoy the title of "Ding Duke."

Hence the Great Qian Wang Clan could also be known as the "Ding Duke's Mansion" of Da Qian.

It is worth noting that in the whole of Great Qian Land, only two Prominent Families possessed the title of Duke, an undeniable distinction.

During significant state affairs, the Emperor would often discuss and seek advice from the Wang family.

However, the current Wang family is a shadow of its former glory. Despite still having an old and venerable name and the eligible title of Ding Duke, and still receiving "polite" treatment from the Emperor, the family's influence had waned with only one Divine Skill Old Ancestor supporting it, naturally diminishing the Wang family's prominence.

Wang An Nan, ranking highly among this generation's Sky Prides, had at least salvaged some dignity for the continuously weakening Ding Duke's Mansion. Consequently, he held a high status within the family and was deeply favored and valued by the Old Ancestor.

On this trip, in order to perform exceptionally in the battle of Great Heavenly Prouds, he specifically visited Cangwu Street, hoping to fortuitously find some useful items.

He was self-aware, knowing that winning was unlikely. He didn't set high expectations, desiring only a decent performance, like holding on for a period of half an incense stick against Wang Liyao, the Great Heavenly Proud.

He had watched Chen Muying's battle, which was purely due to that young man getting carried away and exposing a flaw.

But as Wang An Nan strolled along, he bumped into an acquaintance. The person greeted him warmly before hinting slyly, "Brother Annan, you've sure kept yourself well-hidden. It seems I have an eye for talent, having spotted your exceptional qualities early on."

After a while, he encountered another acquaintance who proceeded to offer the same effusive greetings.

Following that, a third and a fourth...

"Young Master Annan, could it be that you're our Wang family's hidden Great Heavenly Proud?"
The attendant guards all showed hopeful expressions.

The tactic of intentionally concealing a Great Heavenly Proud to protect valuable family members had happened before. Could this be one of those situations?

"Nonsense!" Wang An Nan said displeased, "Aren't you clear on whether I am a Great Heavenly Proud or not? Moreover, with our family's current situation, can we afford to nurture two Divine ability species?"

"Hmph, petty tricks of a sly spirit. It seems this Wang Liyao, the Great Heavenly Proud, is nothing remarkable. Does she think I'll fall for the same trick as Chen Muying?"

But before he could take two more steps,

Wang An Nan heard another piece of information. Someone, based on surnames and generational names, had investigated and discovered that the Changning Wang Clan was a branch of the Longzuo Wang Clan, which in turn was a branch of the Third Grade Wang Clan of Da Qian.

Chapter 17 I am your Grand Aunt Wang Liyao _3

...

When it came to seniority, Wang An Nan was actually of the grandson generation to Wang Liyao.

Such news directly infuriated Wang An Nan to the point of explosion. The methods of Wang Liyao, the Great Heavenly Proud, were too despicable, attacking his morale in this manner. For someone of the Great Heavenly Proud's stature, why stoop so low?

However, a series of such promotions had, in an extremely short amount of time, skyrocketed the heat of the battle between Wang An Nan and Wang Liyao to its zenith.

The auction for the private booth at White Cloud Tower had already begun...

As large sums of money flowed in, the smile on Heng Commandery Prince's face was wide as the Mile Buddha's, truly considering Liyao the bringer of wealth or rather, a little wealth deity.

Time flew by.

In the blink of an eye, the time for the challenge had arrived.

White Cloud Tower was packed with a sea of people, myriad spectators thronging the place.

Inside one of the rather elegant private rooms, Wu Xuening, dressed like a little princess, was so angry that she pouted, "That damn Heng Commandery Prince, that wretched old ancestor! We all come from the same Imperial Household, and such a close lineage at that. Charging so much just for a small private room? It's emptied out all my pocket money."

With her fury peaking, she almost blurted out "wretched old man."

"Your Grand Aunt need not be so angry," Wu Zhixing said as he sipped tea, speaking placatingly. "Hasn't the Commandery Prince already given us an 80% discount? Besides, you insisted on coming to see this. I fail to see what's worth watching in this fight; Wang An Nan surely isn't a match for Liyao the Great Heavenly Proud," he continued.

"Isn't there a rumor outside that Wang An Nan is the hidden Great Heavenly Proud from Ding Duke's Mansion? Moreover, he's supposedly the same clan's grandson generation as Wang Liyao~" Wu Xuening said with a look of wonder, "Isn't such an interesting affair worth watching?"

"Er~ Hehe..." Wu Zhixing laughed awkwardly and then brushed it off, "Then let's just wait and see. At least, we can appreciate the grace of Liyao the Great Heavenly Proud," he added.

Similar conversations echoed in other private rooms. After all, with the price of a private room having skyrocketed, those who were still willing to pay for it—would any of them be from modest backgrounds?

This battle had managed to attract many nobles and royals who usually weren't fond of such spectacles.

On the brand-new Obsidian Fighting Stage, energy from the surrounding formations surged.

As the challenger, Wang An Nan was the first to step onto the stage. Beneath his resplendent Profound Martial battle attire, his expression was dark as iron, clearly in a foul mood.

And no wonder; for the past two days, he had been the butt of friends' jokes about grandma and grandson. A good mood in such circumstances would be odd.

Even within the family, investigations had already commenced to determine whether the Changning Wang Clan was actually a branch of the Great Qian Wang Clan... If a branch could produce a Great Heavenly Proud, it would be a matter of immense significance to the main lineage.

Before long.

Under the gaze of the entire crowd, Wang Liyao gracefully floated up to the stage.

Last words of advice transmitted by voice from Heng Commandery Prince rang in her ears: "Girl, remember, for at least one incense stick's time... lay the groundwork for our next wave of making money."

As his words ended.

The Defensive Array roared to life, a powerful energy shield flashing up, enveloping both competitors within it.

The appearance of Wang Liyao, with an exceptional demeanor, drifting like a celestial being, indeed made many in the crowd take sharp notice. Such figure, temperament, and manner truly lived up to the name of Great Heavenly Proud.

Only Wang An Nan, his heart filled with irritability, gave Wang Liyao a salutatory bow with a face ashen as if forged from iron, then impatiently spoke, "I hear that the Great Heavenly Proud Liyao is my Grand Aunt's generation?"

"Considering our family heritage and generational titles, indeed it is..." Wang Liyao calmly responded.

"Arrogant! Our clans have not yet recognized each other, and you dare to recklessly claim relations. I, Wang An Nan, can say the same, that I am of your grandfather's generation," Wang An Nan roared furiously, "Today, let me, your grandpa An Nan, teach you a lesson!"

With that, his figure blurred, and in an instant, he turned into seven or eight shadows, enveloping Wang Liyao in dozens of sword glows.

The Wang's Shadow Sword, a top-grade sword technique, and a mystery not passed outside the Wang family.

It was said that when this sword technique was fully mastered, one could create hundreds of shadows and sword glows, invincible on the battlefield.

What Wang An Nan said in the first half posed no issue. After all, the recognition of clan relations without prior contact relied upon the Family Head and elders to check family trees and inheritance records, even necessitating additional verification before clarifying identities.

Thus, if he merely criticized the premature recognition of relatives before confirmation, with Wang Liyao's temperament she would certainly accept it with equanimity.

However, such outrageous proclamation that a mere "An" generation youth dared to claim as her grandfather not only overstepped bounds but also implied taking advantage of her father.

In an instant.

A coldness flashed through Wang Liyao's starry eyes.

"Clang!"

The sound of metal rang out.

With a surge of Liyao's qi, an ancient sword abruptly left its sheath, shaking and buzzing as it circled and soared around her.

Faint blue light spilled out, imparting a greenish cast to Wang Liyao's complexion.

Certainly, it was the top-quality sword—"String Song"!

"Sister Liyao! That person is so annoying, how dare he take advantage! Let me help you beat him up!" exclaimed the Sword Spirit, its voice as melodious as string music.

Wang Liyao's lips curved almost imperceptibly as she stretched out her hand and "String Song" suddenly entered her grasp.

The next moment.

A magnificent sword light, vast as the ocean's tides, roared forth.

To deal with a Heavenly Human Realm Level Four Sky Pride, she had plenty of tactics at her disposal, several of which could win the match with clever moves using but a small amount of Mysterious Energy. Yet at this moment, she chose the least flashy method.

Chapter 17 I am your Grand Aunt Wang Liyao _4

——By force, shatter the crafty!

Now at the age of sixty-nine, her strength had already reached the peak of Level Five in the Heavenly Human Realm, with Mysterious Energy that was pure and robust. Her martial prowess alone firmly surpassed Wang An Nan, who was only at Level Four of the Heavenly Human Realm.

Moreover, when she ascended to the Heavenly Human Realm, she had awakened her Taoist Body. Tianhe Enlightened One and her mother did not skimp either, passing on their insights into the Laws. After years of dedicated contemplation, her understanding of the Laws and her grasp of power had long since reached a level incomparable to that of her past self.

Compared to Wang An Nan, who had only awakened his Spiritual Body, the advantage she held was immense.

Not to mention, the top quality Sword with a Sword Spirit, "String Song," was far from a mere display.

Once a Sword has a Sword Spirit, it can communicate with its wielder's thoughts, serving as an extension of the Divine Consciousness Power. With the same moves, it can channel more Spiritual Energy from heaven and earth, as well as more Power of Laws, enhancing combat power in a way that ordinary Magical Weapons simply cannot match.

If it were not the case, Tianhe Enlightened One and Wang Shouzhe would not have gone to such lengths, spending a fortune to obtain for her a top quality Sword with a Sword Spirit.

Wang Liyao's eyes were resolute, and with the enhancement of the "String Song" Sword Spirit, the sword light that cascaded seemed to contain boundless might, as vast as the ocean and as ferocious as a hurricane.

Purified Sword Intent, almost Dao-like, burst forth from within, and its terrifying might spread through the Protective Array above the arena, almost as if it could destroy heaven and earth.

In the presence of such fearsome might, Wang An Nan's several afterimages and sword lights were immediately dwarfed to insignificance.

"Hiss!"

Below the arena, in the elegant seats, there were almost simultaneous gasps of shock, with many people standing up in astonishment, their expressions full of disbelief.

This... this... this... Could this truly be the power of a sixty-nine-year-old Great Heavenly Proud?

In the elegant seats, Wu Xuening, the little Lolita, was so startled that her eyes widened, "Wow~ Is this big sister really that formidable?"

This... this seems a bit off~ Even for a Great Heavenly Proud, shouldn't she be this strong? Could it be that her memory was faulty?

Confused, she looked towards her own family's grandson, only to see Wu Zhixing with a solemn face as well. Clearly, Wang Liyao's strength had taken him by surprise as well. The depth of her Bloodline was unfathomable.

And that Sword... it was actually...

Above the arena, Wang An Nan, who faced the sword light directly, was scared out of his wits.

In the younger generation, his strength was already considered very strong and he had seen many grand scenes, but now he felt the tremble in his calves.

Mommy~ This scene, this posture, why did it kinda resemble the times when his dad beat him up?

In desperation, he frantically circulated his Mysterious Energy, exerting his Swordsmanship with all his might in an attempt to fend off the sword light, even swiftly bringing out a Middle Grade Magical Shield in the midst of his busy defense.

However, faced with that vast, ocean-like Sword Intent, his offense seemed like an ant shaking a tree, utterly crushed.

With just one move, Wang An Nan was beaten and sent flying out, spitting blood.

Heng Commandery Prince on the top floor was nearly frantic with worry, and without regard for propriety, quickly sent a message to Wang Liyao, "Miss Liyao, a stick of incense, don't forget what you promised me, a stick of incense!"

A stick of incense?

Very well then, she'd beat him for the duration of an entire stick of incense!

Wang Liyao's expression remained calm, but her attacks were merciless, striking precisely at points that were painful yet non-lethal—guaranteed not to endanger life or leave any internal injuries. She so overwhelmed Wang An Nan that he was soon in a pitiable state.

In the beginning, Wang An Nan stubbornly endured for the sake of his reputation, but eventually, he couldn't take it anymore and started to cry out miserably for mercy.

Regrettably, since Wang Liyao had promised to fight for the duration of a stick of incense, it would certainly be a full stick of incense, not a second less.

The time of a stick of incense.

In the elegant seats, the makeshift tables onsite were dead silent.

What about the Great Heavenly Proud who was supposed to be in hiding? What about the hope of Wang An Nan's rise carrying the Ding Duke's Mansion on his shoulders?

"Grand Aunt Liyao, I was wrong, I admit it, you are my true Grand Aunt~~ Stop hitting me, any more and I'll be beaten to death." Wang An Nan's screams were incessant.

But would Wang Liyao heed him? Having promised Heng Commandery Prince to fight for a stick of incense time, she would not go back on her word.

Ah~ Ah~ Ah

Chapter 18 Unparalleled Luck in the World

...

"This..."

Inside the private box with an excellent position and view, Wu Xue Ning, who had just been murmuring, now had her pretty little face frozen stiff.

Wang An Nan, who was also considered a famous young master in the national capital, was beaten by Wang Li Yao like a grandson, scurrying around the field, covering his head, wailing, and screaming incessantly.

Several times, Wang An Nan already sprinted towards the edge of the field, thinking that if he couldn't beat her, it should be okay to quit, right? But Wang Li Yao would block his way with a ghostly speed, turning her sword scabbard into a series of sword scabbard qi, whipping him until he cried out in pain.

How miserable!

"Cough cough~" Wu Xue Ning shivered and then, blinking her big eyes, turned to Wu Zhixing and said, "Dear Zhixing, that Li Yao, the Great Sky Pride, seems rather formidable. Seeing you sauntering around all day, I'm not even sure if you can match her."

Wu Zhixing blew away the foam on the Spiritual Tea, took a sip, and said, "You haven't even reached the Spiritual Platform Realm, but you speak as if you understand what's happening."

"Wu Zhixing!" Wu Xue Ning puffed up her cheeks in anger, her eyes rounding in fury, "The Commandery Princess here is worried about you. As a member of the Imperial Household and a Great Sky Pride, it would be a shame to be defeated by a girl from the countryside."

"Whether I can beat her or not, it doesn't matter," said Wu Zhixing indifferently, "It won't affect my promotion to the Purple Abode Realm."

Wu Xue Ning trembled with anger, almost wanting to slam the table, "How can it not matter? If you end up like Wang An Nan, pinned to the ground and brutally beaten by a woman, what would become of our imperial family's dignity? What about the face of the ten outstanding youths of the national capital? This Commandery Princess would be furious. If I were just fifty, no, sixty years older!

How could I tolerate Wang Li Yao's rampant bullying in the national capital?"

"Her sword is extraordinary, and so is her background," Wu Zhixing said helplessly as he saw his little grand aunt getting angry, "She's very secretive and doesn't seem like an ordinary Great Sky Pride. Forget it, if she wants to take first place, let her have it. After all, she's qualified."

"No way," Wu Xue Ning opposed vehemently, "If you dare concede so easily, I, I... I will go complain to His Majesty! What's so special about a powerful sword? Can't our magnificent Imperial Household find a better one? I'll find you an even better sword."

"That's a top-quality sword with an Artifact Spirit..." Wu Zhixing said helplessly, "It is indeed very powerful."

"Then I will also get you... what? A sword with an Artifact Spirit?" Wu Xue Ning's eyes widened, "You mean the kind of magical treasure that can talk?"

After pausing for a moment, she clenched her teeth and said, "Okay, just wait for me, I'll ask His Majesty for one. In any case, I absolutely will not allow you to lose to her."

She remembered that Cheng Si, the imperial uncle, seemed to have one, maybe she could ask him to lend it? No, no, that Wu Cheng Si, proud as he is of being a Quasi Emperor's Son, likely wouldn't give her face.

Forget it then, she would ask her great-grandfather instead...

Is that even possible?

Wu Zhixing rubbed his head, a wry smile on his lips.

I, Wu Zhixing, don't want to struggle and vie, just wish to cultivate quietly. Why is it so hard?

Not to mention the buzz of conversation among the various noble seats and scattered ones.

On the stage, Wang An Nan went from initial crying and howling to begging for mercy and, in the end, simply curled up on the stage, skillfully holding his head while Wang Li Yao whipped him, no longer even resisting.

His state was truly pitiable to the extreme.

Everyone initially thought that Chen Muying, who was defeated in three breaths, was the most miserable one. But they didn't expect that one could be even more wretched than another, and Wang An Nan was the more unfortunate one.

One incense stick of time.

Wang Li Yao fulfilled her promise to the Heng Commandery Prince, beating Wang An Nan up for the full duration of an incense stick before she finally stopped and coldly asked, "Wang An Nan, are you my grandfather?"

Wang An Nan, covered in dirt and bruises, tremblingly stood up while covering his buttocks~ and fearfully didn't even dare to glance at Wang Li Yao.

Hearing her question, he hurriedly shook his head, "No, no, no, you are my grand aunt, I, I'm your grandson. The disrespect earlier was my confusion."

He had felt that even though he had been beaten terribly during that period of an incense stick, the other party had not been lethal; there was not a single fatal or crippling injury on his body, just... there was some damage to a certain unspeakable area...

"Why don't you hurry back and heal? Are you waiting for me to send you off?" Wang Li Yao's pretty eyes narrowed, "Get lost."

"Yes, yes, yes, this grandson will leave right away, leaving right now," Wang An Nan dared not provoke Wang Li Yao any further, hastily scurrying off the stage and departing White Cloud Tower with the help and support of his household head and followers.

Soon, the group had traveled quite a distance away.

The head of household, with a somewhat gloomy expression, said, "Young Master, are we just going to swallow this loss today? Shall we ask the family elders to take action and reclaim some face... "

"Slap!"

The head of household hadn't finished speaking when he was brought down by a slap from Wang An Nan.

Furious, he said, "You idiot, are you trying to get me killed? Do you not know she's Wang Li Yao, one of the elders of the Li generation?"

The head of household got up, feeling wronged, and said, "Didn't you say that the family hasn't confirmed this matter?"

"Slap!"

Wang An Nan rewarded him with another smack, laughing in anger, "Could you possibly be any more foolish? With her standing as a Great Sky Pride and a true disciple of the Tianhe Enlightened One, would she need to lie about something like this?"

"Is she taking advantage of our Wang family? It's our Wang family that is benefiting from her! Based on my insight, there's scarcely a chance this is false."

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Thus, the head of household who had been repeatedly beaten felt even more aggrieved, "But Young Master, when you were on the arena, didn't you also act quite arrogantly? And you said... you said you were her... grandfather..."

As he spoke, seeing his Young Master's expression change, his voice suddenly weakened and he dared not continue.

"That was because... I was... temporarily brain-damaged by anger, alright?" Wang An Nan rolled his eyes in frustration, "If I could've calmed down and thought it over, not so impulsive, would I have needed to endure this beating?"

With that, Wang An Nan was supported all the way back to the Ding Duke's Mansion, where the family's physician was startled by his terrible state and hurriedly applied medicine to him.

But before he could settle down to rest, he was summoned by the current Family Head, Wang Yuchang.

As a Third-Class Aristocratic Family, they already belonged to the upper third rank. The Cultivators of the Purple Abode Realm within the family could no longer be considered the clan's Old Ancestors.

Moreover, to ensure that when dealing with outsiders the Family Head would not stand shorter than other leaders due to cultivation level, it became standard for the head to be from the Purple Abode Realm.

In most cases, the direct descendants of a Prominent Family are those with the most outstanding bloodlines, and only on extremely rare occasions do individuals with lesser bloodlines emerge. For a Third-Class Aristocratic Family, a term for a Family Head spans at least two hundred years, and it's not uncommon for three to four hundred.

Selecting someone of excellent aptitude from the direct line is an easy task.

For this reason, families of such rank seldom pass on the headship to the direct eldest son or grandchild anymore; it is often transferred across many generations instead.

The current Family Head of the Great Qian Wang Clan, Wang Yuchang, was such a carefully chosen suitable successor. He was born of the direct line, and now, at only three hundred and thirty years old, he had been the Family Head for merely fifty to sixty years.

However, he did not disappoint his elders.

Under his meticulous management, the Wang family had already begun to recuperate some of their Vital Energy.

And this Wang An Nan, one of the top ten outstanding youngsters under a hundred years old, was precisely cultivated by Master Yuchang himself—an excellent young descendent of the direct line—earnestly elevating the Wang family's reputation.

Shortly after.

Wang An Nan arrived at the ancient and culturally rich study of the Family Head.

Under the glow of the Fluorescent Stone Spirit Lamp, the Family Head Wang Yuchang, in his exquisite attire, was sipping tea with an imposing expression.

Owing to the Wang family's exceptional genes, although he was now of middle-age appearance, he still had a striking look and refined demeanor, even more mature and stable than the handsome and young Wang An Nan.

This, coupled with the authority accumulated over years as the Family Head, meant that even among the various leaders gathered in the Return to Dragon City, he could outshine a good number of them.

Wang An Nan, dragging his injured body and feeling somewhat guilty, reported the incident to Master Yuchang and then said with great shame, "This time, Annan has brought disgrace to the Old Ancestor and the Ding Duke's Mansion."

"How are your injuries?" Wang Yuchang put down his teacup and asked with concern.

"Thank you for your concern, Old Ancestor. My injuries look severe, but when Grand Aunt Liyao struck me, she was very measured and did not hit my vital points," Wang An Nan felt a warmth in his heart, knowing that he was the legitimate blood descent of the Old Ancestor's line and cherished unchangingly by him.

"Hmm, as long as there are no fatal injuries, I'm relieved," Wang Yuchang's taut face slightly relaxed.

"Old Ancestor, I..." Wang An Nan was somewhat choked up.

He had lost face greatly this time, yet the Old Ancestor still treated him as a treasure; he was truly moved.

However, just as he was moved, Wang Yuchang's expression suddenly turned stern again, "Someone! Seize this little beast who does not understand respect and hierarchy. Break his legs and carry him to apologize to Miss Liyao."

"Yes, Family Head."

Two Heavenly Human House guards entered at the command and together pinned down Wang An Nan, speaking gravely, "Young Master Annan, please don't make it difficult for us."

"What!?" Wang An Nan was shocked as if struck by lightning, his face in disbelief, "Old, Old Ancestor, I... I'm your most beloved Annan."

"Unfilial wretch! It's all because I've indulged you too much," Wang Yuchang said with a wrathful face, scolding him, "Such indulgence has made you so domineering and insolent that you disregard everyone. Yao'er is your senior by two generations, and still you dared to utter such disrespectful and rash words?"

Yao'er?

Wang An Nan's body swayed, his expression one of disbelief.

When he was favored, the Old Ancestor always affectionately called him "Annan." Now, his treasured Annan had turned into a little beast, an unfilial wretch.

And that Wang Liyao suddenly became Yao'er... they hadn't even met face to face before...

"Old Ancestor, but... has it been confirmed that she is from the Changning Wang Clan?" Wang An Nan was terrified, almost "struggling in his death throes," saying, "It seems... it shouldn't be that fast, right? There should be verification from multiple sources to prevent the false claim of kinship."

"Rubbish, what is there to verify from all sides about this matter? With such an outstanding bloodline as Yao'er has, she must certainly be a blood relative of the Ding Duke's Mansion. How could the other Wang families produce a Great Heavenly Proud?" Wang Yuchang asserted convincingly, "Even if the records don't match, it must be the records that are wrong."

"Alright... I am convinced," Wang An Nan said, his face ashen.

It seemed the Old Ancestor had firmly resolved to acknowledge the kinship; even if it truly were a sham, he would no doubt find a way to fabricate a connection.

In reality, the Great Qian Wang Clan encountered countless individuals claiming to have the surname "Wang" and seeking to recognize kin each year. Yet, the majority of these cases involved impostors. Even if a small fraction were truly clan relatives, the Great Qian Wang Clan would carefully verify from all sides, only acknowledging them as clan relatives if every detail matched.

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And this process often requires a certification period of ten or eight years.

Even after the certification is complete, it is just about evaluating the other party's current strength and status and then giving them corresponding treatment, which, for the vast majority, means sending them off with a sum of resources.

But as for Wang Liyao, even the preliminary verification was waived.

With a wave of his sleeve, Family Head Wang Yuchang declared with authority, "I have made up my mind on this matter. You have shown such disrespect for your clan relatives and elders, if word

of this gets out, people might think our Ding Duke's Mansion lacks home training. Not only is this your responsibility, but I, as Family Head, am also accountable.

After breaking your legs, I will personally visit White Cloud Tower to see Yao'er."

At the mention of Yao'er, a glimpse of uncontrollable relief and joy shone through Wang Yuchang's austere eyes.

Alright then~

Wang Annan cried his eyes out.

He knew his legs were bound to be broken. Fortunately, he was already a Tianren Realm Cultivator, so as long as his meridians were not damaged, he could take a high-quality bone-strengthening pill and recover after some time.

It's just that he would be carried to apologize...

Forget it, forget it~ He had already pleaded for mercy on the arena. After all, she was his grand aunt, a senior relative, so there was no shame in it.

...

"Grand Aunt Liyao, I'm even calling you grand aunt," Heng Commandery Prince was anxiously pacing back and forth inside the box, his face black with anger, "Do you know how much money I, the commandery prince, have taken in today? Five million one hundred and thirty thousand Qian Gold, over five million Qian Gold.

Just your share of this fifty percent split would be two million five hundred and sixty thousand!"

"You were told to fight for the time it takes an incense stick to burn, and you really did just that? The guests who paid big money for the boxes, aren't they all big shots? Some of them are even people I can't afford to offend."

"Now the crowd outside is in an uproar. If this blows up, not to mention the huge losses from this round, how much less will we make in the future? Wang Liyao, do you have a grudge against money?"

No matter how much Heng Commandery Prince muttered, Wang Liyao remained calm as usual, sipping her tea, "That junior spoke insolent words; not breaking his legs was already giving face to the Ding Duke's Mansion."

"Sigh~ Let it be, what's done is done. We'll take the loss for this round and complaining won't help. I, the commandery prince, need to use my brilliant business acumen to think about the next fight... Just to be clear in advance, this time you must listen to my arrangem..." Heng Commandery Prince reluctantly accepted reality when he was about to make arrangements for the next fight.

Suddenly, a manager's voice came from outside: "Your Highness, great joy, great joy!"

"Get in here. What's there to be happy about at this point?" Heng Commandery Prince's face showed displeasure as he rebuked.

Then, the manager literally rolled through the door, beaming with joy, "All the distinguished guests were very satisfied with this decisive battle; they all thought it was thrilling and entertaining. The scene of Grand Heavenly Proud Liyao beating up her grandson has spread throughout Return to Dragon City."

"Moreover, Miss Liyao's final strike against Wang Annan showed incredible strength, and now the outside world is abuzz with discussions about the impending fight between Miss Liyao and Little Commandery Prince Zhixing. Speculation is rife, and estimates of the odds of winning for both sides are now even at fifty-fifty."

Wu Zhixing had been commanded by His Majesty to be adopted into the direct lineage of Fu Commandery Prince, and hence he was also known as Little Commandery Prince.

However, he would not assume the title of the Fu family's commandery prince in the future; once he reached the Purple Abode Realm, he would be sent to fight in the outer realms to accumulate merits and would naturally be consecrated as a new commandery prince by the ancestral temple.

If nothing unexpected happened in the next five or six hundred years, after Wu Zhixing advanced to the Divine Power Territory, he would be ennobled as a Great Heavenly Proud of the Da Qian Imperial Household, adding another heavy hitter to the royal clan.

No doubt, it was a seemingly predictable and dull life ahead.

"Congratulations, Your Highness, now many people have already booked for the next battle of Great Heavenly Proud. They've even said they're willing to pay any amount for the best seats in the box," the manager said, glowing with happiness.

This wave of business had brought in huge profits for White Cloud Tower, and with it, his own fortune and status had risen.

"Very good, very good, Liyao really is my lucky charm," Heng Commandery Prince's mood did a complete turnaround as he contentedly said to Wang Liyao, "From now on, you are my niece, Wu Hanheng's niece. Whoever dares to bully you, I, Wu Hanheng, will be the first to disagree."

"Your Highness..." Wang Liyao broke out in a cold sweat, rather speechless, "My father is still young."

"Why still call me 'Your Highness'? Just call me Uncle Heng," Heng Commandery Prince said nonchalantly, "Being young is no issue; I am bound to be a sworn brother to your father."

...

At the same time,

Heng Commandery Prince's "sworn brother," Wang Shouzhe, had already arrived outside Shouzhe Pass, in the outer region.

Thanks to the efforts of the Wang family's "outstanding elders" like Wang Zongchang, within a fan-shaped range of one thousand five hundred miles outside Shouzhe Pass, all areas, Spirit Veins, and even the diverse monsters had already been scouted.

As Wang Liyao went to the capital to fight in the "Challenger of Heaven," the Wang family had internally started an orderly extermination of the monsters in the outer region. With sufficient intelligence and strength among other factors, Tier Three, Four, and Five Fierce Beasts were being wiped out one after another.

The flesh of the Fierce Beasts became the best nourishment for the Wang family members' growth, while their hides, horns, claws, tendons, and even bones, blood, and inner core essences were used for Artifact Refining, hide making, Alchemy, among other purposes.

In short, the Wang family adhered to its tradition of utilizing Fierce Beasts in every way possible.

Moreover, wherever Fierce Beasts resided, there would often be Spirit Veins, Heaven and Earth Treasures, as well as various odd natural treasures the beasts themselves had collected.

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Therefore, the Wang family had seen a significant surge in extra income during this period.

However, for the Wang family, farming was the primary source of income. Thus, these cleared areas would enter a second round of development, becoming territories and granaries for the Wang family and their allies.

Whether it was exterminating fierce beasts or reclaiming land, no matter how meticulous the plans were, there would always be some unforeseen incidents.

After Wang Zongchang, Wang Xiaohan, Wang Longyan, and the elder from the Gongsun Clan exterminated a fierce bear that had just entered Level Six, they discovered a huge pit behind its den.

Previously, they hadn't dared to explore too closely for fear of disturbing the bear.

If it were just a pit, that would have been one thing; though rare, it wasn't something they had never seen before. However, the Wang family elders discovered that deep inside the pit, there was a large formation.

After failing to decipher it, they invited Lu Xiaoxiao, the Array Master from the Lu Family of Changning, for assistance. After careful inspection, Xiaoxiao determined it was an ancient formation, dating back at least three thousand years, if not five thousand.

Although the passage of time had rendered many parts of the formation ineffective, the creator's skills vastly exceeded Lu Xiaoxiao's, and it remained indecipherable to her.

Ultimately, the matter was reported to Wang Shouzhe, seeking guidance on whether to involve the Academic Palace.

Intervention by the Academic Palace would mean the formation was certain to be deciphered. The downside, however, was clear; they would have to share any potential benefits discovered thereafter with the Academic Palace.

After some consideration,

Wang Shouzhe took his great-grandson Wang Anye to have a look. If this didn't work, it was never too late to seek help from the Academic Palace.

Thus, the following scene unfolded.

Wang Anye, the seventh little prince, stood forlornly on the cliff, shivering in the cold wind, while below the cliff, several elders, including Wang Shouzhe, all from the Heavenly Human Realm, hovered around the formation on their qi.

"Little Seven, jump," Wang Zongchang called out loudly, "with so many of us watching over you, nothing will happen. Even a fly couldn't fall to its death."

On Wang Anye's handsome face appeared an expression of both amusement and distress. What kind of elders were these? Jumping off a cliff to encounter a stroke of luck and using that luck to solve a formation was such a bizarre idea; how could anyone even come up with it?

Great grandfather was right. The family shouldn't pass around those fantastical adventure scribbles. They had even bewitched the elders.

No jumping.

Obviously wouldn't work.

Wang Anye gritted his teeth, leaped, and, despite his young age, enjoyed the thrill of a bungee jump. True to form, just before he could crash at the bottom of the cliff, the elders caught him, and naturally, he was unharmed.

But at the same time, no miracle seemed to occur.

"I told you, you can't believe such nonsensical stuff from those scribbles," Wang Anye muttered.

"Maybe it's the wrong location. Try jumping again," Wang Zongchang suggested, "our little seventh is quite miraculous."

The suggestion was readily accepted.

Then, over the next few days, Wang Anye jumped off the cliff over thirty times, caught each time, yet a miracle never happened.

At the bottom of the cliff.

Wang Anye wriggled free from Wang Zongchang's embrace and, pouting, walked away: "I've jumped off the cliff so many times it's not even thrilling anymore. I'm not playing this game. If you want to jump, jump yourselves, childish."

Perhaps it was his bad mood, or perhaps his haste,

Wang Anye tripped over a vine and fell to the ground with a thud: "Ouch, what bad luck, even walking can make me trip..."

As the vine triggered something, a rumbling noise of rolling stones suddenly came from within the dense fog of the formation.

The fog in front of them gradually cleared, forming a vortex-like passage.

"It's opened! There's a loophole in the formation now." Lu Xiaoxiao, the 'Array Master,' was overjoyed, picking up Wang Anye and planting a kiss on his cheek, "Anye not only is as handsome as your cousin, but your luck truly is unrivaled in this world."

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...

"Thank you for your praise, Xiaoxiao," Wang Anye said with an embarrassed yet polite smile, "You are very beautiful yourself."

In his heart, he couldn't help but feel that the female relatives in his family, one after another, loved to take advantage of him, always ready to hug, pinch, or plant a kiss on him.

Ah, a person just shouldn't be too handsome, otherwise there is never an end to the trouble.

"This kid has such a sweet mouth, even sweeter than my cousin when he was little," Lu Xiaoxiao said with a radiant smile, then took out a stack of gold bills from her storage ring and shoved it into Wang Anye's embrace, "These are for you to buy candy."

Although the Lu Family of Changning is currently just a 7th-rank Prominent Family, due to being the maternal family of Wang Shouzhe, their standing within the In-laws Alliance is very stable. Over the past decades, they have flourished even more.

Now, within the Lu Family, there are already over twenty cultivators in the Spiritual Platform Realm, among whom three are young generations being heavily cultivated as Tianren Realm seeds.

It was quite evident that Lu Xiaoxiao wasn't content with the Lu Family being merely a 7th-rank Aristocratic Family. She also wanted to advance quickly to the sixth or even fifth rank, staying closely behind her cousin, Wang Shouzhe.

Buy candy? With these gold bills, you'd need a cargo ship to transport the sweets, and they'd last for thousands of years.

Wang Anye's face turned red, but he still obediently and politely thanked Elder Lu Xiaoxiao, even though in his storage ring, the "Endless Abyss," he had so many gold bills that he himself couldn't count.

His relatives loved to give him money for no particular reason, and as a kid, he couldn't spend much anyway. And sometimes, even if he did want to spend some money, it seemed to multiply instead... Sigh, that was genuinely troublesome.

"Xiaoxiao," Wang Shouzhe interrupted, bringing the conversation back to the main point, "What's the deal with this Array? Just because there's a vortex, does it mean we can really go in?"

Wang Shouzhe had also studied some Array knowledge, but the Path of Array was intricate and mystical, a discipline requiring long-term study and accumulation. With him being the Clan Leader, where would he find the leisure for that?

With the time he did have, wasn't nurturing the younger generations of the family a better use? Thus, his understanding of Arrays was limited to some basic knowledge, not extending to the more complex and profound.

But Lu Xiaoxiao took the time to lecture on the basics of Array knowledge at the Wang Family School regularly, and over these decades, she had discovered a few decent Array Master prospects, who were now learning from her.

Other families also had members studying under Xiaoxiao to varying extents.

Strictly speaking within the realm of Changning's defenses, Lu Xiaoxiao was clearly the "top-tier" Array Master.

"Cousin Shouzhe," Lu Xiaoxiao grinned sweetly, "Although this Isolation Array is quite powerful, it has been around for quite some time. Since Anye has already found a loophole, the rest will be easy."

Then, under Lu Xiaoxiao's manipulation, the Array vortex tunnel was slowly torn open until a clear and large gap emerged.

"Cousin, take care of Anye on the outside," Lu Xiaoxiao instructed. Since it was an Array issue, naturally, Xiaoxiao's opinion prevailed.

Plus, the team following her into the Isolation Array was strong, with four Tianren Realm Cultivators, including the formidable Old Ancestor Longyan. Combined with Wang Shouzhe's support from the outside, even if they accidentally encountered a Level Seven Fierce Beast, they would be able to hold their ground.

And considering Wang Shouzhe's character of always planning for the worst-case scenario, and with the family having prospered for so long, accumulating such a vast wealth of resources, wouldn't he secretly prepare a few trump cards to deal with Purple Abode Realm Cultivators or Level Seven Fierce Beasts?

This time, everyone was fully equipped, bringing along the trump cards accumulated over many years; naturally, their safety was assured.

Once they all entered the Array, Wang Shouzhe set up some plant Arrays outside as an additional safeguard, then he chatted up Wang Anye with a grin, "Anye, you're still young. Don't you think wearing the Endless Abyss all the time is a bit too ostentatious? It could attract thieves, right?"

"Hm?" Wang Anye's eyes widened, "Great grandfather, don't worry. I'm the direct great-grandson of the Wang family and the external direct descendent of the Qian Family. No one in Left County dares to mess with me, especially with Old Qian looking out for me in the shadows."

That made sense... Wang Shouzhe found himself at a loss.

The Endless Abyss on the young guy belonged to the Qian Family who had spent a lot of money and connections at auction to acquire it, a birthday gift from Qian Xuehan to his great-grandson. Therefore, even though Wang Shouzhe was quite envious, it wasn't appropriate for him to express it openly.

He couldn't very well say to Wang Anye: Dear great-grandson, how about grandpa trades you a top-grade Storage Ring for your top-quality Endless Abyss?

That would be shameless.

"Do you want the Endless Abyss, great grandfather?" Wang Anye stroked his chin, pretending to be a wealthy tycoon, "You should've just said so. If you want it, it's yours, no—I'll give it to you."

Fortunately, he was quick-witted, avoiding saying the word "reward" out loud, or else he would've been in for a beating from his father when he got back.

Seeing such filial piety in his great-grandson, Wang Shouzhe felt gratified.

It wasn't that he couldn't afford a top-grade Storage Ring; it just wasn't urgently needed, rare to make, and scarcely found throughout the vast lands of Da Qian.

And as the Wang family was about to open up new territories, those in charge donning an Endless Abyss would significantly ease the burden.

Actually, a Storage Ring is a type of personal dimensional space, requiring a person's spiritual power (God Sense) to consecrate. The idea is to form a sustained resonance mark within the space of the storage equipment, allowing items to be stored and retrieved merely with a thought.

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At any given time, you can only form a God Sense link and resonance with one storage space. To switch to a different storage ring, you must first take out everything stored within the dimensional space. Then, you wipe away the original God Sense refining mark and spend a period of time continuously refining it with your God Sense to activate its internal storage space.

Without a sufficiently strong Divine Consciousness, one doesn't even qualify to use a storage ring.

Though young and not yet having unlocked his Spiritual Platform, Wang Anye's bloodline had awakened to the High Segment of the Second Layer, and naturally his God Sense was not weak. Hence, he was still capable of using the storage ring.

After all that explanation, the gist is that an individual can only use one storage ring at the same time, so it's impossible to have a situation where one's fingers and toes are adorned with storage rings.

It's also not possible to carry around a box full of storage rings, using up the resources within one before switching to another. A storage ring that has not been activated by God Sense refining remains inactive, and its dimensional space cannot be used like a box.

It's precisely because of these various restrictions that storage rings with larger capacities are more valuable.

However, Changning Wang Clan's Old Ancestor Wang Shouzhe showed a tinge of modest restraint in his generosity toward his great-grandson, "Actually, it's not that urgent."

"Not urgent? Then great-grandfather can wait a bit longer, until I get a better one to replace it," Wang Anye candidly spoke, "Otherwise, it means another extra cycle of refining, which is rather troublesome."

The corner of Wang Shouzhe's mouth twitched slightly.

Do you take a polite remark seriously? What does "wait until I get a better one to replace it" mean? The "Endless Abyss" is an extremely rare top-grade storage ring, not some common cabbage on the streets.

While Wang Shouzhe was inwardly scoffing, Lu Xiaoxiao's voice came from within the formation, "Cousin Shouzhe, there's no danger inside the formation, but the Formation Eye here can't be deciphered immediately. Let Anye give it a try."

The two elders looked at each other, puzzled by Lu Xiaoxiao's use of Wang Anye as a tool. It was quite absurd that an Array Master unable to break a Formation Eye would pin their hopes on a child. Anyone hearing this would likely find it ridiculous.

But, trusting Wang Anye's past miraculous performances, Wang Shouzhe decided to let him try. With the elders watching over, no harm would come and there would be no loss even if he didn't succeed.

Soon after, the following scene unfolded.

At the core of the Formation Eye, dense darkness swirled like thick ink, forming a vortex resembling a starry spiral.

"Array Master" Lu Xiaoxiao, after pondering for a long while, failed to understand the principle behind the core, seemingly at a loss on where to start.

"Anye, you give it a try," Lu Xiaoxiao said, full of hope.

"Elder Xiaoxiao, how do I solve this?" Wang Anye's eyes were wide with innocence as he stared at the device, his youthful face a mask of confusion.

"If I knew how to solve it, why would I need you?" Lu Xiaoxiao said with righteous indignation.

I'm just a ten-year-old kid, not even graduated from the clan school yet...

Wang Anye was speechless and turned to Wang Shouzhe for help.

"Just give it a try," Wang Shouzhe said, "It's okay if you can't break it, no need to be under too much pressure."

Well, then I'll give it a shot.

Wang Anye looked around and casually picked up a small stone to fling at the Formation Eye. With a "thud," ripples emanated outwards and then... nothing happened.

Wang Shouzhe had a dark expression on his face.

When you're told to give it a try, do you just throw stones? Is this some kind of child's play to you?

However, while he had his internal complaints, he did not stop Wang Anye. There was nothing to be done; past experience suggested that other people's guidance or suggestions would only be counterproductive. It was better to let Wang Anye mess around, as the chances of a miraculous outcome were actually the highest.

A group of adults silently watched Wang Anye with eyes full of anticipation.

Then, they saw Wang Anye pick up an even larger stone to smash... again, nothing peculiar happened.

Not until Wang Anye struggled to lift a huge stone weighing two to three hundred pounds, much larger than himself, and was about to throw it into the vortex did the Formation Eye's core suddenly start churning violently.

An ancient and indignant voice emerged: "Young man, you're going too far. When you pelted me with small stones, I endured it because you're just a child. When you pelted me with medium stones, I restrained myself seeing your numbers... But this big stone... Are you trying to kill me?"

Upon these words...

The complexions of the Tianren Realm Cultivators present changed drastically; they quickly drew their magical treasures and rushed to protect Wang Anye in the middle.

"What kind of demon are you, daring to fool around and deceive us right before our eyes? What is your purpose?" Changning Wang family's senior celestial being Zhou Xiaohan bellowed with an authoritative voice, "Do you realize that we are from the Changning Wang Clan?"

"I was slumbering peacefully right here. It was you all who disturbed my rest!" The Formation Eye's core swirled with black fog, crackling with agitation, "I should be the one asking what your intentions are? This is outrageous!"

Perhaps because of the excessive emotional upheaval, a humanoid figure faintly appeared within the dense fog, dancing like a specter.

"A ghost?" Wang Anye was terrified, his little face turning pale as he instinctively shrank behind Wang Shouzhe, gripping the hem of his clothes, "Great-grandfather, didn't you say there are no ghosts in this world?"

There were some stimulating short stories full of tall tales about ghosts that had been circulated within the family, and while stories of ghosts and spirits have always been denounced as preposterous, faced with the frightening scene before him, his young mind's first thought was "ghost."

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"Anye, don't be afraid," Wang Shouzhe soothed as he patted his head. "Although this thing looks frightening, it's really just an ancient spirit remnant. Despite its bluster, exterminating it would be effortless for us."

In the past, Wang Shouzhe had encountered something similar—the old ghost Jiang Yuchen, parasitizing the jade pendant. That old ghost had once been a cultivator of the Shen-tong realm but had ended up as nothing more than a spirit remnant.

"Hehe~ young one, it seems you have seen quite a bit," the spirit remnant in the core of the formation fumed, "The seat of honor would like to see for itself what exactly you can do to exter..."

Before it could finish speaking.

Wang Shouzhe swiped across the storage ring and tossed out a jade pendant.

Under the surge of energy in the jade pendant, a phantom of a spirit remnant rose up—it was unmistakably the visage of the old ghost Jiang Yuchen. Upon seeing Wang Shouzhe, he was so

alarmed that his divine soul trembled, and he hurriedly bowed in greeting: "This old servant pays respect to the young master."

No wonder Old Ghost Jiang was so fearful; over the years, he had been "tortured" countless times by a couple who appeared to be a perfect match of Immortals, yet were in truth extremely cruel and scheming.

All the knowledge and memories he ever had were thoroughly extracted.

Just as he thought the couple would destroy his soul after plundering all his knowledge, Wang Shouzhe reached an agreement with him that was too tempting to refuse.

Caught between life and death, Jiang Yuchen, powerless to resist, hesitated not a moment to place his trust in Wang Shouzhe, despite the hope offered being slim.

"Old Jiang, give a greeting to your own kind," said Wang Shouzhe with an indifferent tone.

"Eh? There's also a spirit remnant here?" With a scan of his fragmented God Sense, Jiang Yuchen quickly understood and stated, "Reporting to young master, it's possible for a cultivator of the Shen-tong realm to leave behind an undying spirit remnant. However, the weaker the divine soul energy at the preliminary Shen-tong realm, the lower the chances of leaving behind a spirit remnant.

That old ghost inside the formation, his spirit remnant's power is much like mine; likely another in the advanced stage of Shen-tong."

Advanced stage of Shen-tong!

On-site ancestors like Old Ancestor Xiao Han were shocked not only by Wang Shouzhe's spirit servant but also by the content of Old Ghost Jiang's statement.

In the entire Great Qian Land, aside from the current Great Emperor and the lord of the Sacred Land who were both in the Transcendent Void Realm, there were very few great cultivators in the advanced stage of the Shen-tong realm.

And now, it seemed that both spirit remnants were of the advanced Shen-tong realm.

Only Longyan, the Old Ancestor, glanced at Wang Shouzhe nonchalantly and softly transmitted a message, "Shouzhe, why still keep such a sly old ghost? In my opinion, either exterminate it or turn it over to the Academic Palace for handling."

"Old Ancestor, rest assured, Shouzhe has his own ways to suppress it. This Old Ghost Jiang has lived long enough; if used properly, he can be quite beneficial." With Wang Shouzhe's ability, if he weren't fully confident he could control him, why would he keep the old ghost by his side?

Since Shouzhe already had methods and plans, Longyan, the Old Ancestor, was reassured.

Meanwhile.

The spirit remnant in the core of the Formation Eye had also fallen into a silence, evidently startled by Old Ghost Jiang's spirit remnant.

"Old Jiang, can that spirit remnant be suppressed?" asked Wang Shouzhe in a mild voice.

"If it were one on one, because he occupies the advantageous terrain, it would be difficult for this old servant to take him down," the excited old ghost Jiang Yuchen replied. "However, we have the advantage of numbers and can use brute force to break this damaged Hidden Large Array and then easily suppress the spirit remnant."

Although Old Ghost Jiang specialized in the nefarious Golden Toad Codex and had little research into formations, he was, after all, an age-old monster that had lived for over a thousand years in the mortal realm; he'd seen much and knew enough to roughly make out the footing of this formation.

"Stop!" The spirit remnant in the Formation Eye was so provoked that the clouds stirred, "This old man was sleeping peacefully here, and not only do you want to destroy my home, but you also want to suppress me—since when is this reasonable? This is intolerable!"

Wang Anye blinked innocently, his clear eyes seemingly filled with reluctance.

He tugged at Wang Shouzhe's arm and said, "Great grandfather, that old master makes some sense, and he seems quite pitiful. Maybe we should let this go."

Old Ancestor Xiao Han chuckled, "Anye, you're still young and have a kind heart. But setting aside the rewards from breaking the formation, just think about our future expansion of the In-laws Alliance territories—many Spirit Veins around here are abundant with Spiritual Energy which we will definitely need to develop. How can we allow such a hazard to linger?"

Wang Anye's expression also showed a hint of headache before his eyes brightened, saying, "Old master, could you consider moving? I have money, and I can have my great grandfather order a big house to be built for you~"

As he spoke, Wang Anye waved his hand, his arms full of glittering gold notes, among which were some valuable Purple Gold Notes.

"My Ye'er is truly a good child," Wang Shouzhe said joyously as he stroked his great-grandson's head. "Great grandfather promises you, as long as he agrees to move, I'll definitely build him a big house in a remote mountain. As long as he doesn't cause trouble or harm others indiscriminately, we won't harm him."

"Old master, did you hear that? My great grandfather is the Family Head of the Changning Wang Clan; he always keeps his word and certainly wouldn't go back on his promise to a child," Wang Anye earnestly said. "If you agree, I will help you."

The spirit remnant in the Formation Eye pondered briefly, as if considering something.

After a short while, it asked, "Good child, do you know how to wield a sword?"

Chapter 19 My "Filial" Great-Grandson_4

"A sword? I once watched the tides by the sea and, within the time it took an incense stick to burn, I had comprehended the Sword Intention Move - Ocean Limitless," Wang Anye said with a flat expression, devoid of any boastfulness.

"A single incense stick? Show it to me," the Spirit Remnant was also somewhat surprised.

Then, Wang Anye began to position himself and skillfully practiced the Mysterious Element Swordsmanship. Following that, he executed the Ocean Limitless move.

"Very good, very good, your foundational swordsmanship is quite solid, obviously the result of strict family teaching," the Spirit Remnant exclaimed excitedly, "Your Sword Intention Move,

although immature, indeed contains the essence of the tidal Sword Intent. It's evident that you possess exceptional comprehension in the Sword Dao. What is the current state of your Bloodline?

"Innately Top Grade Class C, now elevated to Grade B after some enhancements. Great grandfather said that once I grow a bit more, he will try to elevate it to Top Quality Bloodline Talent," Wang Anye answered honestly.

"Blessed by the Immortal Emperor." Upon hearing this, the Spirit Remnant shouted jubilantly, "Originally, my Divine Soul was shattered, leaving only this remnant barely clinging to life. I thought I would remain so, awaiting the day this remnant slowly vanished. Unexpectedly, the Immortal Emperor has intervened, sending such a Jade Treasure before me."

"Hahaha~~ To think that I, Ji Wuchen of the Sword Formation Dual Absolutes, could take another fine disciple during these sparse times, preventing the lineage imparted by my Master from ending with me."

"Taking a disciple?" Wang Anye was slightly bewildered.

Following that, a vortex at the Formation Eye surged, and an ancient-looking sword shot out, nimble as a swimming fish and swift as lightning.

Above the sword floated a misty light fog, rapidly coalescing into a white-robed man with a beard, yet possessing an extraordinary demeanor.

He looked at Wang Anye with excited eyes, "Good child, are you willing to join under my tutelage, Ji Wuchen? If you agree, I assure you that the Road of Divine Power will no longer be an obstacle in this life, and even reaching the Void Realm might be within sight."

"This..." Wang Anye was somewhat at a loss and looked towards his great grandfather Wang Shouzhe for guidance.

The Spirit Remnant, Ji Wuchen, hurriedly said, "My boy, don't be hasty in refusing. First, I'll give you this Spirit Storage Ring, and I have already merged with this sword's Artifact Spirit, the sword is me, and I am the sword..."

"A Spirit Storage Ring? Is it better than a Top Grade Storage Ring?" Wang Anye's eyes lit up.

"As different as cloud and mud! It's a Storage Ring that can talk~" Ji Wuchen stated proudly, persuading, "As long as you become my disciple, everything of mine will be yours."

Such fortune... Everyone watched this scene, dumbstruck, filled with envy and jealousy, including Wang Shouzhe and the Spirit Remnant, Jiang Yuchen.

"A talking Storage Ring? That sounds interesting," Wang Anye said happily, glancing at Wang Shouzhe, "Great grandfather, I have a new Storage Ring now. That 'Endless Abyss' you wanted can now be used."

Wanted?

Longyan, the Old Ancestor, glanced sideways at Wang Shouzhe, giving him a displeased look. So big a man and still so playful and out of tune?

"Giggle~ Cousin Shouzhe, you're actually envious of Anye's 'Endless Abyss,' aren't you embarrassed?" Lu Xiaoxiao couldn't help but start laughing, "But then again, who wouldn't be envious."

"Shouzhe is indeed fortunate to have such a filial great-grandson."

The others also joined in teasing Wang Shouzhe with chuckles.

Even at his age, having lived for more than a century over two lifetimes and with a skin thicker than a city wall, Wang Shouzhe couldn't help but flush slightly.

He stealthily glared at that rascal Wang Anye.

This kind of thing, we great-grandfathers and great-grandsons should discuss privately, how could you so publicly talk about it? Doesn't he care about face?

However, this boy is really something, he'd just mentioned a new Storage Ring and there really was a new Storage Ring now.

For a moment, even Wang Shouzhe himself couldn't help but envy his great-grandson's fortune.

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"So... Great Grandfather, what do you think? Should I take him as my master?"

Wang Anye's adorable face was tinged with hesitation and confusion.

Today, he had been happily attending the Clan School, sailing through the vast ocean of knowledge when, all of a sudden, his Great Grandfather had grabbed him and leaped off a cliff...

And now, out of nowhere, this Spirit Remnant had appeared, proposing to take him as an apprentice...

Although the prospect of a talking Storage Ring sounded appealing, the whole situation seemed too abrupt, and he felt it best to ask for his Great Grandfather's opinion.

Wang Shouzhe pondered for a moment before looking at Ji Wuchen, noting his aged appearance, yet also his demeanor, akin to an immortal — not someone from the demonic path. However, in these times, there were many who had the appearance of virtue but hearts as dark as ink; one couldn't reach conclusions based solely on appearances.

Especially with such ancient creatures who had lived for one or two thousand years — if they wished to feign a noble demeanor, it would be all too easy.

Wang Shouzhe would not judge by appearances alone, but missing such an opportunity would be a pity indeed. It was better to investigate further.

Thus, he asked, "Senior Ji, what was the highest level of your cultivation at your peak?"

"Advanced Stage of Divine Power Territory, Level Eight," Ji Wuchen was taken aback but responded truthfully. "I am particularly skilled in swordsmanship and formations, with a mastery of a Sword Array cultivation method, which allows the weaker to defeat the stronger, the few to overcome the many."

"What caused you to perish here?" Wang Shouzhe pressed on.

"It's a long story..." When this topic arose, Ji Wuchen's expression darkened, and a chill of sorrow rose in his heart. "My bonded wife, Fu Hongye, fell during the Immortal Demon Battlefield due to a sneak attack by Chao Qiubo of the Red Moon Demonic Dynasty. To avenge my wife, I ventured alone into the Demonic Dynasty to assassinate Chao Qiubo.

Despite countless dangers, I barely managed to kill him, but I was then pursued by the experts of the Demonic Dynasty. By the time I fled to this place, I was already at the end of my rope."

"Knowing my time was short and with no way to return to the Immortal Dynasty, I could only muster my strength to set up a Hidden Large Array here. By using spirit parasitism in my lifeblood sword, merging with the Sword Spirit, I barely managed to maintain a sliver of consciousness, surviving to this day. How many years have passed since then, I do not know myself."

"Are you seeking to take my great-grandson as a disciple in order to possess his body through soul parasitism?" Wang Shouzhe inquired.

"This strand of my Divine Soul has already integrated with the Sword Spirit, essentially becoming an Artifact Spirit. How could I possibly possess another's body?" Ji Wuchen shook his head candidly.

"Then do you wish for my grandson to, once his divine skills are fully cultivated, take revenge on the Demonic Dynasty?" Wang Shouzhe asked again.

Upon hearing this, Ji Wuchen fell silent for a moment, then sighed, "If I claim I have no such intentions, you likely wouldn't believe me. However, my primary goal in choosing to become a Sword Spirit rather than let my consciousness vanish was not for that. Instead, it was to avoid the demise of my Master's lineage in my hands."

"As for seeking revenge... When I infiltrated the Red Moon Demonic Dynasty alone, I never expected to come back alive. Now that I've managed to take revenge for my wife, I have few regrets left. As for the rest..."

He paused, then chuckled, "If there's an opportunity in the future, if Ye'er uses this sword to take down a few more from the Demonic Dynasty, it would also soothe the resentment in my heart."

He made a valid point, and Wang Shouzhe nodded his head in acknowledgment.

But he didn't stop there; instead, he continued to question.

One question followed another, and for a full quarter of an hour, not a single inconsistency was found.

Finally, he said, "One last question, my wife is skilled in a Soul Search technique. If Senior is willing to cooperate, I'll support Anye inheriting your mantle."

"Otherwise, as you know, with Anye's talents, we won't struggle to find him a master of the Divine Power Territory in the future."

"Soul Search?" As soon as these two words were mentioned, Ji Wuchen's Divine Soul underwent a violent fluctuation, showing strong resistance. "No, no, even as a Spirit Remnant, I wish to preserve my dignity."

At the mention of Soul Search, the old ghost Jiang Yuchen also trembled in his broken divine soul form, vibrating slightly, as if recalling some horrific past. Although the young Wang Shouzhe before him was exceedingly cunning, compared with that individual, he was rather "benign."

"If that's the case, let's shelve the matter of Anye becoming an apprentice," Wang Shouzhe said with a slight bow, apologetically. "Although I am almost completely convinced by Senior, Anye is, after all, my legitimate granddescendant. Without absolute certainty, I would never risk his safety."

Wang Shouzhe believed that, as the Wang family continued to grow stronger, every member would have the chance to unleash their potential without their talents being buried.

Especially Anye, a legitimate direct descendent, who was also to marry a daughter of the An Commandery Prince — his future potential was boundless.

Ji Wuchen's face was filled with disappointment; he had thought that accepting a disciple was his choice to make, yet after being interviewed back and forth and essentially being screened out, he felt dejected.

But with his pride, if he needed to cooperate with a Soul Search to qualify to accept a disciple, he would rather disperse into nothingness, allowing this lineage to vanish into the annals of history.

Since ancient times, countless schools had risen to prominence, and just as many had faded into oblivion with the passage of time. His lineage was not the only one.

"By the way, didn't Senior Ji say earlier that you were the sword's Artifact Spirit?" Lu Xiaoxiao, seeing the deadlock, suggested from the sidelines. "Why not have the sword choose its master directly? If Anye can control the sword, he can control the life and death of the Artifact Spirit, and my cousin Shouzhe will be reassured."

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During the refining of high-end spiritual treasures and equipment, the possibility of an artifact spirit awakening in the future is taken into account. Consequently, at the very beginning of the refining process, the artificer will specifically include controlling inscriptions for the artifact spirit so that if one emerges, the owner of the treasure can still maintain complete control.

Otherwise, should the born artifact spirit be disobedient and end up backfiring on its master, what value would these treasures hold? And would the artifact refiner's business still stand?

"In that case, it doesn't seem like a bad idea," Wang Shouzhe said to Ji Wuchen, "While it cannot guarantee a hundred percent safety, it should not pose a large problem as long as we are more cautious. If the senior is willing, that would be my final offer."

After pondering for a moment, Ji Wuchen finally sighed and said, "This sword is called [Epoch], renowned even in the Immortal Dynasty, and is a heritage treasure passed down through generations in my lineage of the Sword Formation Dual Absolutes. If I pass this treasure to Anye and, as the Artifact Spirit, I acknowledge him as my master, it wouldn't be a problem.

Furthermore, I have a responsibility to carry on my master's lineage."

Although the first reason is somewhat far-fetched, coupled with the latter condition, as a soul under one's roof, Ji Wuchen had no choice but to lower his head.

Not to mention, Anye appears to be simple-natured, an uncut jade with potential that could possibly take the lineage of the Sword Formation Dual Absolutes to a new level in the future.

Upon hearing this, Wang Shouzhe silently nodded in agreement.

This Ji Wuchen was far more reliable than Old Ghost Jiang, and indeed a fine candidate for mentorship.

After all, Anye is the legitimate eldest great-grandson and it would be inappropriate for him to enter the Academic Palace or be externally apprenticed like Shou Ye. If he could inherit teachings through this method, it would be a good choice.

Moreover, as the saying goes, having an elder in the family is like possessing a treasure. Heavenly Human Realm elders, having lived long and experienced much, hold knowledge and experience that are treasures in themselves.

While Ji Wuchen may not be able to back his disciple as Tianhe the Enlightened One could, his presence will surely smooth out Anye's path ahead, with immeasurable potential for the future.

Subsequently.

Under Wang Shouzhe's supervision, with Old Ghost Jiang's oversight, and under the watchful gaze of more than a dozen Heavenly Human ancestors from within and related by marriage to the family, the Divine Spiritual Artifact [Epoch] was successfully acknowledged by its new master.

The divine consciousness Anye left in the sword was weak, yet it already had control over the life and death of the artifact spirit.

The inscriptions carved on the Divine Spiritual Treasure contain special restraints against the artifact spirit, binding to its divine soul consciousness. With but a thought from him, the inscriptions would activate instantly and annihilate the artifact spirit.

However, doing so has its side effects. A Divine Spiritual Treasure without its artifact spirit will see a significant decline in power, until it is rejuvenated over a long passage of time when a new artifact spirit is born.

After recognizing the disciple as his master, Ji Wuchen, feeling his dignity was undermined, chose to hide within [Epoch] and did not reveal himself, silently controlling the Spirit Sword Epoch as it hovered quietly beside Wang Anye, guarding in silence.

However, [Epoch] is, after all, a Divine Spiritual Treasure. With Wang Anye's mere Level Three Vital Energy Refining Realm cultivation base, he couldn't hope to harness much of its power, let alone control it effectively.

After all, to use a Magical Treasure or a Spiritual Treasure of any grade ordinarily, one's divine consciousness strength is a prerequisite. Insufficient divine consciousness strength would mean at best struggling with control, let alone wielding it in battle.

Otherwise, wouldn't a Cultivator at the Spirit Platform Realm become invincible simply by acquiring a Magical Treasure or a Purple Abode Spiritual Treasure?

By the same token, Wang Anye presently lacks the divine consciousness strength to control the Divine Spiritual Artifact.

For now, he can only rely on the artifact spirit to wield "Epoch," deploying it for offense or defense.

However, the remaining Divine Soul Power within "Artifact Spirit Ji Wuchen" is extremely limited and once depleted, it will take a long time to recover, making it best used only in critical moments.

Ji Wuchen's greatest role now is not in combat, but in using his thousands of years of cultivation experience to guide Wang Anye in his cultivation and assist him in advancing swiftly to the Heavenly Human Realm.

Only when Anye reaches the Heavenly Human Realm will he be able to consecrate the Divine Spiritual Artifact Epoch as his primordial spirit sword.

At that point, he'll be able to exert a portion of its power. To fully unleash the power of the Spirit Sword Epoch, Wang Anye would need to reach the Divine Power Territory.

From this, it is evident that the young man's problem with his weapon for life is solved; moreover, it has been solved in one step, obtaining the very best.

Not only that.

Ji Wuchen also handed over his only remaining inheritance aside from the sword, the [Infinite Treasure Ring], to Wang Anye. Although the resources stored inside had been depleted by Ji Wuchen during his escape, the mere possession of this Spiritual Treasure grade storage ring was already immensely valuable.

"Great grandfather, once I take everything out of the Endless Abyss, the Endless Abyss will be yours," said Wang Anye, playing joyfully with the Infinite Treasure Ring, expressing his filial intentions to Wang Shouzhe.

"Uh..."

A bead of sweat formed on Wang Shouzhe.

Would you mind not always bringing this up in front of everyone? The head of a grand Sky Pride family, resorting to using a storage ring handed down by his great-grandson – wouldn't that be embarrassing if word got out?

But embarrassment aside, the [Endless Abyss] was indeed a top grade storage ring that money can't buy.

And they were all family; it wasn't such a big deal. In earlier times, many ordinary families with limited funds often had elders eating leftovers from their children.

Additionally, after the formation was broken, valuable gains of equal worth were made.

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Hidden beneath the concealment formation lay a mid-sized, top-grade, earth-based Spirit Vein, which although not vast in coverage, could still cultivate over a thousand acres of top-grade Spirit Fields.

In the short term, of course, it couldn't compare to the infinite value of the Boundless Treasure Ring, but this was an asset capable of generating continuous economic benefits—a fixed asset, no less. Ten years, a hundred years, a thousand years... Given time, its economic value was immeasurable.

Even Wang Shouzhe, no stranger to fortunes and crises, couldn't help but wear a spring breeze smile at such a harvest. He casually waved his hand and allocated a hundred acres each to the Changning Lu Family and the Changning Gongsun Clan.

Both were his maternal families, and recent intermarriages among their younger generations had grown increasingly close, with both having contributed to the pioneering efforts. Supporting and nurturing them well, they would be the Wang family's staunchest allies and a powerful force for the future.

"Thank you so much, Cousin Shouzhe, you are really good to me," Lu Xiaoxiao said cheerfully, really wanting to plant a kiss on her cousin but lacking the gall. So she settled for kissing the innocent Wang Anye next to her— as if he were her little cousin Shouzhe.

"Hahaha~" The Old Ancestor laughed heartily, "Working with Shouzhe is always efficient. Just by joining in the excitement, I've gained a lot."

In reality, the Old Ancestor was well aware of Wang Shouzhe's consistent care for the Gongsun Clan and his gratefulness for the Old Ancestor's past kindness toward the Wang family.

All in all, everyone was extremely satisfied with the harvest this time.

Having cleared this instance, the clearing campaign prior to reclamation continued uninterrupted.

The process was as follows: First, several Heavenly Human Realm elders teamed up to kill Level Five and Level Six high-level Fierce Beasts, ridding their dens. Then, the core forces of the Spiritual Platform Realm from each clan formed teams to clear out Level Three and Level Four Fierce Beasts and their lairs.

In the third step, the younger generation of the Wang family took the lead, along with the head of household and clan soldiers, to systematically clear out scattered Level One and Level Two Fierce Beasts.

By this stage, the Wang family's construction team could enter the outer domain, undertaking basic infrastructure works like bridge-building, road-laying, waterway dredging, and setting up defensive structures in narrower territories.

Of course, this was a lengthy process with an immense workload; there was no rushing, nor could it be hastened.

...

While the Wang family was engaged in their vigorous domain-clearing operation,

at the same time, Return to Dragon City in the national capital was also buzzing with excitement.

The tale of Wang Annan being beaten and crying pitifully by his clan's "Great Heavenly Proud" Grand Aunt Li Yao had spread through Return to Dragon City like the wind, becoming the subject of conversation for many families who hadn't witnessed the scene.

Return to Dragon City, White Cloud Tower.

The White Cloud Tower, now the top "internet-famous" restaurant in Return to Dragon City, was teeming with customers despite no scheduled bouts of Great Heavenly Proud on that day, with guests filling every private and public seat, and a long queue stretching outside.

Aside from his slight irritation at having to give Li Yao thirty percent of the proceeds, the Heng Commandery Prince was practically getting a cramp counting the money, laughing so uproariously at the bounty.

"My great-niece Li Yao's suggestion was excellent," inside a private room, the Heng Commandery Prince who had earned a fortune, personally poured tea for Wang Liyao, "During the intervals between the battles of Great Heavenly Proud, hosting some 'Sky Pride' invitation and ranking fights is pure genius.

It satisfies the desire of the 'middle class' who can't afford to watch the Great Heavenly Proud battles to join the excitement, while also maintaining public interest, getting people used to the habit of turning to White Cloud Tower."

The "middle class" referred to by the Heng Commandery Prince, of course, didn't mean the ordinary citizens—it meant at least those direct vessels from the Fifth Grade Prominent Families within Return to Dragon City, or the direct descendants of the Sixth Grade Prominent Families, and so on.

For the average commoner, merely consuming at White Cloud Tower was out of the question, not to mention approaching anywhere within ten yards of it.

"Your Highness is too kind. It's just a little tactic," Wang Liyao said lightly, sipping her Spiritual Tea with an air of nonchalance, lifting her veil.

She certainly wasn't going to call him "Uncle Heng." The age difference was too great, too embarrassing.

As for her refusal to change the address, the Heng Commandery Prince didn't really mind. Whether she addressed him properly or not was inconsequential; he considered Liyao as his great-niece, and what mattered most was that this great-niece brought him endless wealth.

"By the way, do you know what happened to Wang Annan after he went back?" the Heng Commandery Prince asked with a mysterious air, trying to appear well-informed.

"He probably got another severe beating and then was brought over to apologize to me," Wang Liyao stated calmly.

In fact, the recent Challenger of Heaven-focused battle had been her father's plan all along, including the choice of White Cloud Tower and the timing during the finals of the Big Stomach King competition—the details were all orchestrated by Wang Shouzhe himself.

If it hadn't been for Tianhe Enlightened One's original plan—intending to send Wang Liyao to the capital just when she reached the mid-stage of the Heavenly Human Realm, or Level Four—Wang Shouzhe would not have intervened. Upon learning of it, he went personally to the Longzuo Academy to dissuade Tianhe Enlightened One, delaying it until now.

Regarding Wang Annan, even if the Heng Commandery Prince hadn't invited him to attend, Liyao's father had other plans to provoke him into participating and then severely disciplining him.

This was one of her father's contingency plans. Whether Wang Annan came or not, and irrespective of his reaction, there were subsequent strategies in place to deal with him.

In other words, that "harsh beating" Wang Annan experienced was inevitable.

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However, only a few people were aware of this series of plans. If the Heng Commandery Prince knew that all this had been planned, he might have clutched at his chest in regret for giving Wang Liyao a share of several million for no reason.

And if Wang Annan knew about this, he would probably be so angry that he'd vomit blood and be unable to get out of bed.

This was precisely why.

The various possible reactions of the Great Qian Wang Clan were all within Wang Shouzhe's speculations. Certainly, the most likely possibility was the one mentioned by Wang Liyao.

"Eh? My great-niece is quite capable," the Heng Commandery Prince said, quite surprised, his expression filled with astonishment, "Could it be that you have left your spies in the Duke's Mansion?"

While they were talking, the Manager suddenly came in with a report: "Your Highness, Miss Liyao, Master Yuchang from the Duke's Mansion is here at the tower and has sent a message asking to see Miss Liyao, saying he has come to apologize."

"This really is... quite fast~" The expression of the Heng Commandery Prince flickered strangely, and then he realized, "No wonder, the Duke's Mansion has been quiet for too long, and in recent centuries, they haven't produced any Great Heavenly Proud. Their strength is nearly at the bottom among the Third-Class Aristocratic Families.

If they could connect with my niece Liyao, it would surely enhance the family's prestige greatly~~ Such an opportunity, how could they miss?"

"Please let Master Yuchang come in," the Heng Commandery Prince said with a smile, "I've heard that this generation's Master Yuchang is a clever young man, and the Duke's Mansion has somewhat improved under his management. It seems he is indeed very clever."

With the stature of the Heng Commandery Prince, there was no need for him to go out to meet Master Yuchang. If it were an Old Ancestor from the Wang family with Divine Skills who had come, he would definitely have run to the door to greet them politely.

Not long after.

On the Obsidian Fighting Stage, just as the ranking match of the Sky Pride ended, several soldiers in the dress of the Wang Family's Heavenly Human House slowly carried a stretcher up to the stage.

This scene naturally attracted a great deal of attention.

"Eh? That on the stretcher, isn't that the famous Wang Annan?"

"It's not just similar, that is him... I clearly remember Wang Annan left on foot, has he been injured so severely? The Wang family bringing him here, could it be they are preparing to question the Great Heavenly Proud Wang Liyao?"

"Alas~ Miss Liyao was indeed a bit reckless this time. Although she is from the same clan as the Prominent Family, she ultimately comes from a Grade Six Prominent Family. The Duke's Mansion, with an Old Ancestor of the Divine Power Territory, cannot swallow this insult easily."

The murmur of voices from the audience sounded like gusts of wind reaching Wang Annan's ears, and even in his despair, he couldn't help but feel his face burning hot.

He, Wang Annan, had really lost face this time around. Sorry to the ancestors~~ he truly wished he could faint, so that he would know nothing, which would be better than suffering like this.

"Carry it slowly." Master Wang Yuchang, with a grim face, walked behind the stretcher with his hands clasped at his back, "Let everyone take a good look, and let this wretch suffer more."

"Yes, Family Head."

The soldiers of the Wang Family took the command, thereafter further slowing down their already very slow pace to an excruciating crawl.

Grasping the intention of the Family Head, they not only slowed down but also started showing various delaying tactics, such as taking a roundabout way or walking three steps forward and two steps back, and so forth.

As a result, the whispers grew louder.

As Wang Annan half-lay on the stretcher, enduring the piercing gazes shooting at him from all directions, the whispers stung like poison, making him wish he could just die.

In the past, Wang Annan had been the apple of the eye for the elder clan members, a treasure in their hands, the cherished grandchild.

And now?

He had become a gift meant to appease Wang Liyao.

As if just to make Wang Liyao happy, not to mention breaking two of his legs, even breaking three would be gladly done by the old ancestors at home.

It's just the Great Heavenly Proud, what's so great about that?

Wang Annan sniffled miserably, tears of sorrow streaming down the corners of his eyes.

Finally making it to the stage.

Just under everyone's watchful eyes, Family Head Wang Yuchang stepped forward, his face solemn and serious as he glanced towards the direction of the Heng Commandery Prince's noble seat.

Just as countless people thought he was about to start reproaching.

Wang Yuchang cleared his throat and suddenly switched to a smile, his deep voice also rising at the same time, "Yao'er, our family's Wang Annan, that scourge, dared to disrespect his elder and spoke wildly. I have already ordered your Shi Da nephew to personally do it and break his legs."

"What?"

This situation was quite unexpected, and the scene instantly exploded into chaos. The expressions on many faces went blank for a moment.

The Duke's Mansion was actually not here to accuse but to apologize?

But this was not the end.

Wang Yuchang then turned around on the platform, and harshly said to the person behind him, "Wang Shida, as the saying goes, the misdeeds of the son are the fault of the father. Since Wang Annan behaved so outrageously, you are not free from blame either. Quickly kneel down and apologize to your Aunt Liyao."

As the words fell, a middle-aged man in fine clothes stepped out from the crowd behind, his head bowed as he approached Wang Annan's stretcher.

Just as he was about to "plop" down on his knees.

Suddenly.

From the most elegant seat at the top of White Cloud Tower, a celestial figure gracefully descended, her hand raised slightly, and an invisible force gently supported Wang Shida in midair.

At the same time.

Her clear and gentle voice also followed: "Master Yuchang, do not be so hasty. Our Changning Wang Clan has not recognized relations with your noble family, nor have we verified the records of heritage. I, Wang Liyao, do not deserve this title of aunt."

Wang Liyao's voice was clear and cold, as if tinged with a sense of alienation.

Wang Yuchang and Wang Shida's hearts sank at once, both of them secretly sensing trouble and involuntarily casting blameful glances at Wang Annan on the stretcher.