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Chapter 31 Why! What's so good about that man?

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Meanwhile,

Shangguan Zhenhai, the Family Head of the Shangguan Clan, Great Elder Shangguan Liyan, and the Great Arrogant Shangguan Yunque were all engulfed in immense shock.

The small Rank Six Aristocratic Changning Wang Clan had unexpectedly produced two Great Heavenly Prides.

Although Wang Zong'an, currently sixty-five years old, had only reached Level Three of the Heavenly Human Realm and was quite a bit weaker than his sister, it was still necessary to consider who he was being compared to...

When Great Arrogant Shangguan Yunque was sixty-five, his Cultivation Realm was about the same. And how much stronger could the Little Commandery Prince Wu Zhixing be at sixty-five?

The way the Shangguan look at Wang Zong'an instantly changed, and their regards to the distant Changning Wang Clan of Longzuo County escalated several levels in an instant.

If a family had two Great Heavenly Prides emerging simultaneously, one following the Saint Place of Learning Palace route and the other taking the path of safeguarding the clan, it would undoubtedly mean a rapid and powerful rise for the Wang family within a short period, as long as they could endure for about five hundred years for both Great Heavenly Prides to concurrently advance into the Divine Power Territory.

And given Wang Shouzhe's ability to make money, supporting a Great Heavenly Pride shouldn't pose too much of a problem.

By then, the Changning Wang Clan would soar high, directly entering the ranks of the top Third-Class Aristocratic Families.

Even if by that time the Shangguan also ascended to Third Grade, but the dual Divine Power-bearing scholar and warrior family of the Wang would still be a notch above the Shangguan Clan, even with the many restrictions faced by Wang Liyao in the Academy. Furthermore, the bloodline of Liyao, the Great Heavenly Pride, was extraordinary, and she might even compete for the position of Saint.

If she truly became the master of the Sacred Land in the future... then the Wang family would soar unrestrainedly into the sky, becoming a top-tier clan on par with Second Class Aristocratic Families like the An Duke's Mansion.

Which clan would dare look down upon such a family with immense potential?

Silence.

After being silent for quite a few moments, the people of the Shangguan Clan gradually came back to their senses from their immense shock and managed to calm their emotions with some effort.

"Young Clan Leader Zong'an's potential knows no bounds, truly making this old man envious," lamented the white-haired Great Elder Shangguan Liyan, "People always say that there is but a single tier of bloodline difference between the Heavenly Prides and the Great Heavenly Prides, and that with effort, one can catch up.

Such a claim might have some market before ascending to the Purple Abode, but only when one reaches the Purple Abode Realm would one realize the vast chasm between them is like a moat separating heaven and earth."

"We, the Heavenly Prides, find advancing a single step in the Purple Abode Realm akin to moving mountains and filling seas, fraught with insurmountable difficulties. Let alone walking the entirety of the Purple Abode path and witnessing the Divine Passage Way—it's as difficult as ascending to the heavens."

It's no wonder Shangguan Liyan sighed; the most formidable aspect of Great Heavenly Prides is that it's only when they reach the Purple Abode Realm that they truly begin their journey, a path that Heavenly Prides could only hope to gaze up at for their entire lives.

This isn't to say that Heavenly Prides cannot cultivate upon reaching the Purple Abode Realm. Some with high bloodline quality, reaching the Top Grade Class A Heavenly Prides, also harbor that sliver of hope to advance into the Divine Power Territory.

But all of this cannot be achieved without resources, which are always limited. Every Prominent Family will economize meticulously, investing only in ventures that promise a high return on investment.

Rather than spending a great deal to allow an exhausted elder of the Purple Abode Realm to quickly ascend a few levels, the resources would be better saved for nurturing the younger generation, creating more Heavenly Humans, or even investing in the next generation of those in the Purple Abode.

After all, the lifespan limit of the Purple Abode Realm is only about eight hundred years, and achieving Divine Power is essentially hopeless. Blindly pouring resources into such efforts is equivalent to squandering the family's wealth. No Family Head would dare to act so rashly, as this would incite fury within the clan.

"You flatter me too much, senior," said Wang Zong'an, who, after displaying his power, withdrew his imposing manner and reverted to his initial graceful humility, "Becoming a Great Heavenly Pride was truly a stroke of luck for Zong'an.

When I first went to the Purple Abode Academy in Longzuo to 'gild' myself, how could I have expected to catch the eye of the Longevity Tree, to be bestowed with Yi Wood Essence and receive the Spirit Seed of the Longevity Tree?

That hits home, ah~

Setting aside Great Arrogant Shangguan Yunque who also had his share of fortune, both Shangguan Zhenhai and Shangguan Liyan felt a pain so piercing, it was almost impossible to breathe. Why couldn't they have been favored by the Longevity Tree?

They had also heard of the Longevity Tree in the Longzuo Academy; it was rumored to now be a Peak Level Eight existence. Perhaps one day, the Longevity Tree would pass its transformation tribulation and become a Level Nine Demon King.

At that time, wouldn't it mean that the Changning Wang Clan would have added another backer? A Level Nine Demon King is on par with a Divine Power Territory Enlightened One of humankind. Unlike Tianhe who looked like he wouldn't live another few hundred years, the Longevity Tree was famously a long-lived species with a lifespan even greater than that of Turtle class spirit beasts.

As long as Young Clan Leader Zong'an remains alive, or the young Longevity Tree continues to stay with the Wang Clan, this bond will persist indefinitely.

"Young Clan Leader Zong'an, you just mentioned wanting to bring us along to make money? Could you provide more details on the situation?" Shangguan Zhenhai shifted the topic somewhat awkwardly, yet without losing politeness.

They couldn't continue the prior topic any longer; he was already filled with intense feelings of defeat.

"Please take a look at the planning for our Anbei Wei," said Wang Zong'an as he produced a set of the Sky Mechanism Recording Disk, activating the images contained within, "Here is our experimental farm, growing high-yielding Pearl Rice and cumin, surrounded by vast tracts of green alfalfa fields."

"Pearl Rice, as a high-yielding coarse grain, is extremely resistant to storage. It can serve as quality feed for warhorses, carriage horses, working oxen, and so on; it can also be a part of wartime and disaster relief supplies. Ordinary people can also use Pearl Rice as a supplement in their diet, which has wonderful benefits such as improving bowel movements."

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"Anbeiwei has abundant sunshine—if it can maintain its irrigation. It can produce two seasons of Pearl Rice each year, which is of excellent quality and very inexpensive. With meticulous farming, each acre could yield up to twenty-five dan, selling each dan for three Copper Coins, making the annual yield per acre seventy-five Copper Coins.

Additionally, with the intercropping of cumin spices and straw used for silage feed, the gross annual income per acre could reach one Qian Gold and twenty Copper Coins."

"The region of Anbeiwei is vast, about five to six times the size of a normal guard region. Its biggest feature is the absence of hills, lakes, or forests, allowing for maximized land use. This facilitates large-scale farming, irrigation, and harvesting, significantly reducing costs."

"Just Anbeiwei alone is estimated to have 12 million acres of farmland suitable for Pearl Rice, with an annual economic total value reaching about 15 million Qian Gold."

People from the Shangguan family gasped as they listened.

15 million Qian Gold each year! What a staggering figure, equating to 1.5 billion over a hundred years.

Sure, everyone knew these were gross earnings and taxes and various costs needed to be deducted. Yet, even so, it left them profoundly shocked. Who could have imagined that Anbeiwei, previously undervalued by everyone, had such high economic potential?

"Livestock is also a major feature of Anbeiwei; with inexpensive silage feed combined with Pearl Rice as fodder, it can sustain a large number of cattle and horses, which are highly competitive in the market. Pay attention to this chart which shows the cost of raising a cattle compared to its selling price, the gross profit reaches a full three Qian Gold."

"In the future livestock farms planned in Anbeiwei, we are expecting to breed two million high-quality beef cattle and two million dairy cows, with the dairy cows' plan to follow. Just the beef cattle alone will yield a gross profit of six to seven million."

The scale of beef cattle is very large, output ample.

In wealthier nations on Earth, the per capita annual meat consumption is merely fifty to a hundred pounds. But this is the Profound Martial World, where Profound Martial cultivators rely heavily on meat consumption to supplement their Qi and blood.

It's impractical for even cultivators from the Spiritual Platform Realm, Heavenly Human Realm, or even the Purple Abode Realm to consume vast quantities of Spirit Meat daily—it would be too costly. It's necessary to supplement with regular meat as well."

Moreover, the majority of this world still comprises lower-tier cultivators, with a considerable consumption of ordinary meat.

"Please try our Jade Crystal Grape Wine, this wine has beautifying and nourishing effects," Wang Zong'an then brought out beautiful glass bottles of wine and a complete set of elegant glassware, pouring a glass for everyone present.

The crimson grape wine emitted fragrant aromas, perfectly complemented by the transparent glass.

Upon tasting, everyone found it indeed was sweet and flavorful, with a lingering aftertaste, truly qualifying as a fine wine.

"The ample sunlight in Anbeiwei contributes to the sweet and rich flavor of the Jade Crystal Grapes produced here, and the wine we brew is top-grade. Though not as fine as Spiritual Wine, wouldn't a bottle selling for twenty to thirty Copper Coins be reasonable?"

With our plans for the Jade Crystal Grape bases and wineries in Anbeiwei, producing tens of millions of bottles annually is just the beginning. With successful marketing, it's sure to be a lucrative project."

In the Imaging Disk, young beautiful girls either brewed Jade Crystal Grape Wine or worked on bottling it, all within the clean and aesthetically pleasing factory environment.

Under Wang Zong'an's vivid description, a series of commercial plans unfolded in the minds of those present, clearly depicting the enormous future profits.

Not to mention the members of the Shangguan family were dazzled by the prospect of earning Qian Gold, even An Commandery Prince, who had heard this for not the first time, still felt his blood boil with excitement, developing what one might call the grand illusion of "I, too, am a wealthy man."

"Young Clan Leader Zong'an, earlier you mentioned leading us to prosperity...", Shangguan Zhenhai, a well-traveled and experienced clan leader, was also visibly moved, swallowing hard, "Could it be, you plan to share the benefits of Anbeiwei with us? If we could receive a substantial share, we are willing to take risks to support An Commandery Prince."

As Wang Zong'an said before, the Shangguan family was indeed short of money.

Kang Commandery Prince has many supporters, and given the current state of the Shangguan family, even if they were to join Kang Commandery Prince, the benefits would be limited.

On the contrary, if they could secure a stake in Anbeiwei, what would the Shangguan family have to fear?

Moreover, An Commandery Prince had quietly laid such a grand strategy, not to mention securing the support of two Great Heavenly Proud from the Changning Wang Clan, but also revitalized Anbeiwei, which everyone had looked down upon... The chances of success were not absent in the future.

"Senior, you jest. Anbeiwei is the foundation of His Highness; countless years of effort have been poured into it. How could it possibly be given away lightly?" Wang Zong'an replied with a light, casual laugh, "It is only because our Wang family greatly supports the development of Anbeiwei that we can have a share."

Shangguan Zhenhai was nearly fuming with anger.

Although he understood the principle that 'no pain, no gain', you, Wang Zong'an, had painted such a rosy picture of Anbeiwei's prospects, raising their expectations, only to say at the last minute that they had no part in it.

That's not a fair way to treat people.

"Is Young Clan Leader Zong'an here to make fun of us Shangguan folks?" Shangguan Zhenhai said indignantly, "If you came with the purpose of making enemies, congratulations, you've succeeded."

"Senior, do not rush. Just because we do not share the benefits of Anbeiwei, it does not mean there are no other benefits," Wang Zong'an remained unruffled by Shangguan Zhenhai's anger, calmly adjusting the Imaging Disk, "Anbeiwei, as far as the entire Northwest Region is concerned, is just an insignificant corner. Please, look here—"}}

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In the scene activated by the Sky Mechanism Recording Disk, an aerial view of the entire Dala Desolate Desert was presented. Within it, the already vast Northern An Guard was just a tiny, almost negligible corner.

"The Dala Desolate Desert is vast and boundless. Its size is about three times that of a commandery. Once this uninhabited area is successfully reclaimed, it will generate an astronomical amount of economic benefits. Not to mention cultivating a cultivator from the Divine Power Territory, even ten or eight would be a breeze."

Wang Zong'an was extremely persuasive, accompanying his confidence, he was indeed an excellent lobbyist.

Shangguan Zhenhai became a bit dazed, "Zong'an, as grand as the Great Desert is, conquering it would be extremely difficult, wouldn't it? The biggest problem would still be the lack of water, right?"

"Elder Zhenhai need not worry.

We have already planned out a grand canal, which will not only solve the water source issue but also address transportation problems, killing two birds with one stone," Wang Zong'an then pulled out another conceptual planning map, on which a magnificent canal ran from the Western Sea all the way to Northern An Guard, with a branch leading directly to outside the Thirty-Six Guards of Return to Dragon City.

Shangguan Zhenhai was staggered, nodding involuntarily, "That's truly ambitious."

Suddenly, he frowned, "However, this plan sounds familiar. That's right, An Commandery Prince seemed to have mentioned this plan in the court, and it was publicly ridiculed!"

As he spoke, he glanced towards An Commandery Prince, who looked embarrassed.

"Ridicule is nothing but the baseless assertions of the ignorant. If everyone could see the immense benefits involved, how could it be An Commandery Prince's and our turn?" Wang Zong'an scoffed, "Within less than a hundred years, they will all be ruing their rash words."

Shangguan Zhenhai and the others were also stunned by the projected earnings of Northern An Guard as planned by Wang Zong'an. Indeed, if the Dala Desolate Desert could be conquered, the benefits would be tremendous.

But that Grand Canal...

"For the Grand Canal, we plan to employ one million laborers, dividing the project into thousands of sections to carry out the construction simultaneously," Wang Zong'an explained, "Besides, we will also recruit Independent Cultivators, hire a large number of Profound Martial Cultivators, as well as conscript Artifact Refining Puppets, and others to work on the construction, expecting to complete this epic and grand project within fifty years."

"At the same time, we will take the lead in afforestation in the Dala Desolate Desert, gradually enclosing the land, starting with drought-resistant alfalfa to improve the sandy soil. It is projected that within a hundred years, we can initially conquer one-twentieth of the Great Desert, and within five hundred years, transform the Great Desert into an oasis.

Adding several prosperous, grain-producing commanderies to Da Qian, generating massive economic benefits each year."

The eyes of Shangguan Zhenhai and the others widened.

Five hundred years may seem long, but it's less than half the lifespan of a cultivator from the Divine Power Territory. Moreover, there are many Prominent Families that have endured for over a thousand years; the Shangguan, for instance, has existed for thousands of years.

Any Prominent Family that has continued for thousands of years would not only focus on the immediate gain. Perhaps Shangguan Zhenhai might not be able to see the ultimate outcome, but the descendants of the Shangguan could.

Moreover, in five hundred years, it would be about time for Shangguan Yunque to strive for the Divine Power Territory.

"Zong'an, you said you'd make us rich. What should we do to get a share of the pie?" Shangguan Zhenhai probed.

"Your Shangguan annually contribute five hundred thousand Qian Gold for two hundred years, totaling one hundred million Qian Gold.

Additionally, you'll need to provide no less than a thousand cultivators from the Vital Energy Refining Realm, a hundred from the Spiritual Platform Realm, ten from the Heavenly Human Realm, and one from the Purple Abode Realm for the Dalra Reclamation joint company to command, continuing for no less than five hundred years," Wang Zong'an threw out the well-prepared plan.

"All total investment, total revenue, total expenses, taxes, etc., will be managed by the Dalra Reclamation joint company. The actual controller of the Coalition is His Highness An Commandery Prince, and all future dividends will be calculated and distributed by the Coalition."

A hundred million Qian Gold?

When Shangguan Zhenhai heard this number, his heart trembled, but it was somewhat relieving that the payment could be spread over two hundred years.

As for so many cultivators, it was also quite a burden for the Shangguan. The vast Shangguan Family had many places needing staffing.

But the temptation Wang Zong'an offered was far too great. As long as they could endure the initial difficulties, the subsequent benefits were immeasurable. Therefore, he was still very tempted; if necessary, they could even mortgage or sell off some properties.

"We pay such a huge price, what percentage of the shares will we ultimately get?" Shangguan Zhenhai, unable to contain his excitement, inquired.

"What percentage?" Wang Zong'an laughed, "Elder Zhenhai really has quite a sense of humor. That's the revenue of several commanderies. Does your family intend to be as wealthy as a nation? Since you're the first we are negotiating with, I can offer you a little extra. You will have a three percent stake and dividends.

As long as the Dalra Reclamation joint company lasts, the Shangguan will forever enjoy these rights."

"Three percent?" Shangguan Zhenhai jumped up in shock, "We pay such a significant price only to get three percent?"

"Please do not be angry, Elder Zhenhai. Take a look at this expected investment amount and future revenue growth chart," Wang Zong'an calmly pulled out a chart, letting the Shangguan study it slowly, then took his leave, "Gentlemen, the conditions we have offered are already very favorable. Don't miss such a heaven-sent opportunity. Zong'an and the others will take our leave now."

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Wang Zong'an knew that such matters couldn't be resolved in a single day. When Prominent Families take action, especially involving investments that require so much manpower and resources, there's always a need for internal discussions. He was in no hurry.

Shangguan Zhenhai, holding the revenue projection chart, expressed slight astonishment, "Young Clan Leader Zong'an and His Highness the Commandery Prince, are you leaving without attending the welcoming feast?"

"Everyone is quite busy; we'll have it when we find the time," Wang Zong'an replied with a smile as he stood up and bowed his hands, "His Highness the Commandery Prince and I still have many other families to visit."

Indeed, there were more than just the Shangguan family in Shangjing City...

"There's another question. If our Shangguan family agrees to take part in this project, do we need to explicitly show our support for His Highness the An Commandery Prince?"

"Senior Zhenhai worries too much; this is merely a cooperative development project. Whether you support His Highness the An Commandery Prince or His Highness the Kang Commandery Prince, it won't affect the subsequent processes.

To be honest, this project is too costly; even Prince Dexin's branch and His Highness the Kang Commandery Prince, we want to invite them to join the effort - the more, the merrier."

"Good, good, good; then there's hope for cooperation," Shangguan Zhenhai affirmed.

During the conversation, Wang Zong'an and His Highness the An Commandery Prince formally took their leave.

After that, they visited one family after another in a serious and formal manner.

As expected, they were determined to make good on the boasts they had made. They even went to Prince Dexin's and Prince Yong'an's mansions to lobby for investments, though they were "politely shown out" quite quickly.

But just from this alone, one could see that the partnership between His Highness the An Commandery Prince and Wang Zong'an was serious. This fact made those with vested interests even more resolute in their convictions.

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Time flew by.

A month later.

In the Middle Segment of the Peace River, Jiaolong Island.

As the base of the Jiaolong Gang, the island was shrouded in mist and water vapor all year round, protected by a great formation and thus easy to defend, hard to attack. The harbor of Jiaolong Island was frequented by numerous large river vessels, and the view from the sky was quite spectacular.

There were several peaks on the island, and the highest of these had been artificially flattened to build a cluster of buildings, where the members of the Jiaolong Gang resided.

Within this cluster, stood a grand and imposing hall known as the "Jiaolong Hall."

This Jiaolong Hall served as the place where the Jiaolong Gang discussed their affairs, and it was also the center of the gang's power.

Inside the Jiaolong Hall.

On the spacious main seat, Long Wuji, who was usually insouciant and carefree, now had an iron-blue complexion, and on the ground lay a pile of shredded letters.

His close subordinates, including Zhao Wu Qing, stood trembling at the side, heads lowered, not daring to speak out of turn.

Ever since the boss learned that Wang Shouzhe had sided with the An Commandery Prince, his temper had become volatile, easily irritable and unpredictable.

His communications with the Imperial City became more and more frequent, and his mood worsened with every letter he received.

"Shouzhe, you are indeed going further and further down the path of betrayal," Long Wuji clenched the arms of his chair tightly, a certain green light flickering in his deep-set eyes, "What is so good about that Wu Mingyuan? That you go to such lengths to help him."

"Isn't it nice for everyone to be happy brothers together?"

"No, we cannot let Wang Shouzhe continue to make mistakes; the way back is ashore," Long Wuji's eyes slightly narrowed, a hint of ruthlessness flashing through them. "Someone, order the troops to set out; our target is Changning Defense. Position the entire army outside of Changning, and station them there. As soon as the appointed date arrives, immediately command the troops to strike Ping'an Town."

"I, Long Wuji, must personally ask him why he chose to betray me."Chapter 32: With skillful wielding of the hoe, the wall will naturally collapse!

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While the situation in Shangjing City was unpredictable,

inside the fortress of Anbeiwei.

With the migration of the population, Anbeiwei had gradually ceased to be as sparsely populated as before. Although the population was still not large, the gathering of people had given birth to a considerable number of natural villages.

The lives of the common people at the bottom were simple. Whether it was a battle for the throne by an emperor's son or the high-level power games, they were all far removed from their everyday lives and did not affect them in the slightest. To them, the most practical thing was to have three square meals a day. They worked hard and strove for a life that was just slightly better than the present.

Little Deer Village.

It was one of the many natural villages formed due to population migration, an ordinary little village not yet half a year old.

Its name was casually chosen by the village chief after spotting a rock by the village entrance that looked like a little deer. As time passed, everyone gradually got used to the name.

The Li family lived in a row of residential buildings in the village.

For generations, they had been tenant farmers for the Sun Clan from the Prominent Family of the Southern Desert. With the land reclamation in Anbeiwei, a direct branch of the Sun Clan from the Southern Desert moved there, and so their family followed.

Of course, the main reason was that in Southern Desert County, there was a scarcity of land for the abundance of people. Being tenant farmers, they had not had land to cultivate for a long time. Hearing they could receive land just by coming here, they decided to try their luck.

As for the residential buildings, they were funded and constructed by a business association called "Wang Family Triple Construction." They used a material known as "cement," along with pebbles and steel bars, and built several residential buildings in just half a month.

These houses were not only large and spacious but also exceptionally sturdy, far better than any house they could build themselves.

The people from "Wang Family Triple Construction" knew they couldn't afford to buy houses, so they promised that by paying a relatively small sum of money every month, they could live in these houses indefinitely, and, reportedly, after twenty years, they would own the houses outright.

Of course, the price was that, for the next twenty years, they could only plant the seeds provided by the Wang Family Grain and Seed Business in their allocated lands. When harvesting time came, they also had to sell the produce to the Wang Family Grain and Seed Business first.

But what did that matter? As long as they had land to till and could earn money to support themselves and their families, what they cultivated was all the same to them.

Early that day, Old Li took his son out of their row house, carrying a hoe to the field on the east side of the village to begin loosening the soil and fertilizing the land.

The fields around them were already filled with people who were busy and heads-down at work.

However, unlike the initial nervousness and insecurity, they now worked with calm and composure; even their hoeing gestures carried an air of nonchalance.

It was, in fact, quite normal, because over the past few months, they had started to notice the differences in Anbeiwei compared to other places. Not to speak of anything else, the seeds provided by the Wang Family Grain and Seed Business for planting were no ordinary matter.

These tenant farmers had spent their whole lives eking out an existence from the soil. They might not be able to study how to improve seeds, but they were much more sensitive to the quality of seeds than most people.

The seeds from the Wang Family Grain and Seed Business not only germinated quickly and had a high survival rate, but their vigor was extraordinarily strong, thriving even in the arid lands of Anbeiweiwei.

This was the case with the previously planted pearl rice and cumin, and now it was the same with the alfalfa.

Their own alfalfa seeds were no good, hardly sprouting at all, and even the few that did were weak and wilted, nowhere near as healthy as those from the Wang Family Grain and Seed Business.

The contrast was striking, and the inferiority was evident.

The thoughts of a tenant farmer were simple. In their view, a high-quality variety meant a good harvest, which in turn meant more money to be earned.

So when they discovered that all the seed varieties from the Wang Family Grain and Seed Business were excellent, they felt reassured and had new hope for the future of Anbeiwei.

"Dada dada~"

The crisp sound of horse hooves rang out as a black half-grown colt, followed by two smaller ones, trotted along the cement road in the center of the village.

"Hey~ Big Black, taking your wives for a walk again~" Little Li, seeing this, leaned on his hoe and joked with a grin.

Whether Big Black understood or not, it neighed at him in greeting before ambling into the field to enjoy the alfalfa with the other two colts.

Since there was a share of alfalfa meant for them, Little Li didn't stop them. Instead, he walked over and patted the neck of Big Black.

Big Black was clearly familiar with him, not resisting at all; it even nudged him affectionately.

"Dad, Big Black is growing so fast and his muscles are getting strong. He'll surely grow up to be tall," said Little Li with a satisfied smile. "The horses we raised before never looked this good. Do you think it has something to do with this alfalfa?"

"Is that even a question?" Old Li gave him a look. "Haven't you seen that they won't even touch other grasses besides the alfalfa?"

Indeed, they wouldn't even consider eating them, let alone give them a second glance. It seemed that in their eyes, the Wang Family's alfalfa was a delicacy, whereas ordinary alfalfa was nothing but spoiled leftovers.

In fact, there were many other wonders in Anbeiwei.

Besides the towering structures made from cement and the excessively good quality seeds, there were also the broad and straight gray-white roads constructed in an incredibly short time, the "Unified Irrigation System" buried deep underground and composed of countless pipes, as well as the enormous "Large-Scale Agricultural Machinery" made entirely of metal that they had seen during harvest time...

Chapter 32: Swing the hoe well, and the wall will naturally fall_3

Fortunately, the Family Head, Wang Shouzhe, was enlightened and had discreetly put in a great effort to investigate the family of the independent cultivator girl. He found that the family of the independent cultivator was generally clean and clear, with no undesirable records.

After some effort, he managed to persuade the rather stubborn Wang Shouliao and allowed Wang Zongping to marry the independent cultivator girl. The marriage was quite peaceful, and Zongping even managed to achieve some accomplishments within the military ranks.

However, Wang Yingdie's innate talent was not particularly high, but the Wang family was always generous to its members. After taking a series of Dan medicines like Enlightenment Pill, Blood Refining Pill, and Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill, her talents improved to Middle Grade Class C, making her a Little Sky Pride.

Now, at twenty-five, her strength had reached the seventh level of the Vital Energy Refining Realm, and she had acquired considerable experience in handling matters, fully capable of managing minor issues independently.

This time, Wang Shicheng brought her along because her bloodline talent was highly sensitive to the growth of plants, often identifying problems invisible to the naked eye. Her presence doubled the effectiveness of information gathering.

And now, the data collected would become an important basis for developing the next generation of superior alfalfa grass.

The Little Commandery Prince, Wu Shengjun, after finishing his pleasantries with the village leader Sun Sinen, looked around at everyone performing their duties and felt a great sense of satisfaction.

After months of adjustment, not only had the locals who relocated to An Commandery adapted to life there, but the officials of the Commandery Prince's Residence had also gradually adapted to this new working manner.

Everything was developing in a good direction.

Sometimes, even he, who had personally deployed many plans, would marvel at the changes in An Commandery.

His gaze unwittingly drifted towards the southeast, a hint of worry in his eyes.

According to the plan set by his father and Zong'an, this year's development of An Commandery was just the beginning; next, there will be a series of grand plans to implement.

It had been some time since his father and Zong'an had gone to the capital, and there was uncertainty whether they could successfully raise sufficient funds.

The funds needed were astronomically large, challenging for any single family to undertake alone.

He hoped everything went smoothly, for only then would conquering the Dara Desert be possible.

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Daqian Capital, Return to Dragon City.

In recent years, Return to Dragon City had truly been extraordinarily lively. First, Li Yao, the Great Heavenly Proud, broke through the "Top Ten Outstanding Youths" list, and before the ripples settled, An Commandery Prince and the Young Clan Leader of the Wang family, Wang Zong'an, went to Return to Dragon City, and began to heavily promote the reclamation project of the Dara Desert.

Simultaneously, another shocking news spread.

That was, Wang Zong'an, like his sister, was also of Great Heavenly Proud caliber. Such startling news quickly caused a chain reaction in Return to Dragon City, making the Dara Desert reclamation project widely known.

Meanwhile, in the busiest tavern in Return to Dragon City—White Cloud Tower.

The area around the Obsidian Fighting Stage was covered with banners, using bold and enlarged fonts with highly provocative phrases like "Da Qian's once-in-a-millennium opportunity," "Quasi Emperor's Son guides you through the Great Desert," "A century of investment for a millennium of prosperity," "Leave a legacy for your descendants," "Imperial Household credit worth billions of gold," "Business genius Heng Commandery Prince's sole recommended project," "Li Yao, the Great Heavenly Proud, fully invests Divine Spiritual Treasure," "Fight for the rise of Da Qian," "One share flourishes through generations," "Miss this opportunity, and regret it for a lifetime..." and so on.

Under the densely packed banners, one of the discreet and enigmatic Quasi Emperor's Sons—the An Commandery Prince, along with the Great Heavenly Proud Young Clan Leader of the Wang family, Zong'an, were passionately rolling up their sleeves, fervently presenting their grand plans and goals.

In the private boxes were the leaders of Fifth Grade Prominent Families, and the single seats were crowded with many Rank Six and Seventh Aristocratic Family heads or Old Ancestors, all fully engrossed in digesting the results presented by An Commandery Prince and Wang Zong'an, astonished at the generous grand blueprint.

The plan was not only more detailed and meticulous than what the An Commandery Prince had initially proposed, but it also specified how much capital, manpower, and materials were needed for each phase, and added many new elements, such as the benefits that each completed stage would generate and so on.

These details should not be underestimated.

It is precisely these details that transformed what originally seemed like an unachievable grand project into a manageable system project that, by methodically following each step, was assuredly feasible.

All these Prominent Family elders were sagacious; a nebulous grand blueprint could not deceive them, and they naturally had their judgment about whether a project was feasible or not.

Rather than telling them about the magnificence of the project, how beneficial it was for Da Qian, or the profound impact it could have on the future, it was more solid to use tangible data to show them that this business was a guaranteed profit, capable of earning big money.

Below the stage.

The officials of An Commandery Prince's Residence had already set up work desks on the site, along with partnership contracts and more.

Unlike the typical haughty demeanor of some Government Office officials, those from An Commandery Prince's team, though not very prominent, were very enthusiastic and quite young.

They were all standing at work desks, methodically explaining the investment plan of the Dalra Reclamation Joint Company, their obligations, and potential future returns and risks to those Prominent Family members who came to inquire.

Chapter 32: Swing the hoe well, and the wall will naturally fall_4

Each clause of the project was written unmistakably clear without any manipulation of ambiguous wording. The risks were also clearly stated in the clause notes.

The officials would even carefully explain the risks and ask the subscribers to reconsider it multiple times.

It was exactly this serious and responsible attitude that convinced the already interested families of 6th and 7th grades, who eventually decided to subscribe to scattered shares within their financial means.

These scattered shares, aimed at the 5th, 6th, and 7th-grade families, accounted for twenty percent of the total shares, divided into two thousand shares, each representing one ten-thousandth of the total shares.

Even just one of these shares was a substantial investment for a 7th-grade family, as it meant they had to spend two thousand Qian Gold every year and continue this for two hundred years, cumulating to a total investment of four hundred thousand Qian Gold.

In addition, subscribing to one share also required them to contribute ten Qi Refinement Realm cultivators and one Spiritual Platform Realm cultivator to the Reclamation Team.

For a typical 7th-grade family, it would be quite strenuous to come up with four hundred thousand Qian Gold outright, but spread over two hundred years, the burden was much lighter. The tricky part was supplying cultivators to the Coalition, but upon reflection, rotating them every ten years was also manageable.

Unavoidably, the position of the 7th-grade families in Return to Dragon City was too low.

In Return to Dragon City, where high-grade families were everywhere, it was extremely difficult for 7th-grade families to survive independently. The simplest strategy to avoid being squeezed out was to attach themselves to higher-grade families.

As a result, almost half of the 7th-grade families in Return to Dragon City were vassals to these high-ranking families, and even the better-off ones were semi-vassals, having to act cautiously at all times.

Moreover, for 7th-grade families in Return to Dragon City to rise in grade was much harder than it was for local powerhouses.

However, there were benefits for 7th-grade families in Return to Dragon City; the greatest being the stability and high sense of security. As long as they clung tightly to their lord's coattails and avoided causing trouble, they could generally continue for one or two thousand years, and some even had legacies lasting four or five thousand years.

Unlike local powerhouses that often experienced turnovers every few hundred years, only a very few 7th-grade families were able to endure a thousand years without faltering, and most of those that did had already become 6th-grade families.

Now, they saw an opportunity to break the rigidity of the class structure before them with manageable risks. Even though these 7th-grade families in Return to Dragon City had been comfortable for a long time, they were still willing to take a chance for their descendants' future.

Besides, An Commandery Prince had also said that it didn't involve siding in the emperor's sons' contest, it was purely a business venture, and even if he lost in this contest, it wouldn't interfere with making money.

Since the future benefits were secure, naturally, more families were willing to invest. Several of the stronger 7th-grade families decided, after family consultations, to sell some of their fixed assets to subscribe to two or three shares.

"Li family of the 7th-grade, West City sector, subscribes to one share."

"Wang family of the 7th-grade, West City sector, subscribes to two shares."

"7th-grade family of the North City sector..."

"Gongsun Clan of the 6th-grade, East City sector, subscribes to twelve shares."

"Chen Clan of the 6th-grade, South City sector, subscribes to ten shares."

"Xu Family of the 5th-grade, Return to Dragon, subscribes to one hundred shares."

"Wan Clan of the 5th-grade, Return to Dragon, subscribes to one hundred and ten shares..."

According to the subscription contract, 6th-grade families needed to start from ten shares, and they must provide a Tianren Realm powerhouse for periodic service. Otherwise, the Coalition wouldn't include them.

For 5th-grade families, it was a starting point of one hundred shares, and besides needing several Tianren realm cultivators, they also had to provide a Purple Abode Old Ancestor, although constant service was not necessary, only forty percent of the time was required.

Each family's subscription was loudly announced by a designated person, broadcasted widely.

In Return to Dragon City, where there were numerous families of the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades, when all their financial resources were combined, it amounted to a truly formidable figure, and in reality, the mere two thousand shares did not completely satisfy their appetite.

As the first subscriber appeared, many families quickly realized that if they did not hurry, they might miss the opportunity.

In a situation where there were more monks and less porridge, these mere two thousand scattered shares were declared sold out within just ten days. This left many families, who hadn't arranged their finances in time or were still hesitating, filled with regret.

Meanwhile, the eight 4th-grade prominent families of Return to Dragon City also succumbed one after another; with the stronger Shangguan family among the 4th grades stepping forward first, subscribing to three percent of the shares, the remaining seven 4th-grade families couldn't sit still any longer and soon, four of them subscribed to two percent of the shares.

Adding the two percent shares of Heng Commandery Prince, who had already declared his stance early on, the total shares subscribed now reached thirty-three percent.

...

Meanwhile,

Inside the Imperial City, at Zhuozheng Pavilion.

The aging Emperor Longchang, unusually a bit annoyed,

A thick stack of memorials, all impeaching An Commandery Prince, had piled up on the desk before him, and all had been reviewed by the cabinet before being presented to him.

"Ridiculous, utterly ridiculous," Emperor Longchang cursed angrily, "He, Wu Mingyuan, is after all one of the only two potential Emperor's sons, to bare-chestedly join that Wang Zong'an in, that, that... Old Yao, what do they call it?"

Eunuch Old Yao bowed his head and whispered softly, "An Commandery Prince said, they call it a 'roadshow' to seek 'angel investors' with exceptional foresight."

Chapter 32: Good Hoeing Makes the Wall Fall Naturally_5

"Yes, 'roadshow,' just hearing it doesn't sound like a proper name. Ming Yuan isn't usually like this; it must be that Wang family stirring things up behind the scenes," Emperor Longchang huffed, "It's embarrassing; he's lost all the face of the royal family. Look at these impeachment memorials, they've piled up nearly as high as a desk."

"It's just a major project, couldn't he have proposed it at The Grand Assembly and had it discussed collectively by the ministers?"

"Well, Your Majesty..." Old Yao's corner of the mouth twitched slightly and he gently reminded him, with a touch of embarrassment, "Dozens of years ago, An Commandery Prince did propose the development of the Great Desert at The Grand Assembly, and he was verbally attacked by all the ministers. Among them, the most vicious critic..."

At this point, he opened his mouth but didn't dare to continue.

Emperor Longchang's face turned awkward as he too remembered the past event. The person who had been the most vicious critic was none other than himself, wasn't it?

But he couldn't be blamed for that, for at the time, first, he felt that Wu Mingyuan was too overly imaginative, as many Prominent Families had failed to cultivate the land before, and Wu Mingyuan's plan seemed very unlikely to succeed. Second, it was because he was advanced in years and his pioneering spirit had long been worn thin.

Furthermore, with the Kang Commandery Prince, Wu Chengsi, and his faction making a fuss and pressing him, he felt that Wu Mingyuan simply wanted to use this project to win over people's hearts, to raise the status of a Quasi Emperor's Son, and to struggle vainly.

However, what he did not expect was that Wu Mingyuan actually took the development of the Great Desert seriously and, over the decades, managed to turn the barren Anbei Command into an impressive experimental land, which somewhat served the purpose of a granary.

Based on this accomplishment, proposing to develop the Dala Desolate Desert was naturally a different matter.

Detailed data, a clear development path, future risks, and benefits - all were based on real accomplishments, making the proposal infinitely more convincing compared to Wu Mingyuan's initial plan, which was just tall talk.

Moreover, with the support of figures like the Great Heavenly Proud, Li Yao and Zong'an, the credibility and feasibility of the project increased even more. Even Emperor Longchang felt that as long as An Commandery Prince was willing to put in the hard work, this project was likely to succeed.

"Hmph, it all sounds so noble, saying that this is just about making everyone rich together, and has nothing to do with the competition for the title of Emperor's son," Emperor Longchang thought bitterly, as if he had forgotten everything he'd just recalled, and naturally shifted the point of his criticism, "When all is said and done, Wu Mingyuan and the Wang family are just trying to gather support.

Otherwise, why didn't they go to Kang Commandery Prince's Residence to seek investment?"

"This... Your Majesty, An Commandery Prince has already been to Kang Commandery Prince's Residence," Old Yao's mouth twitched again as he spoke in a low voice, "but the Kang Commandery Prince's wife, Zhao Yijing, hastily received them and then used the excuse that the Prince was not at home, saying it was inappropriate to make decisions without him, and politely sent them away..."

Speaking to this point, even he could not help but feel embarrassed for Emperor Longchang, maintaining his professionalism with great effort to stifle a laugh and not lose his composure.

He knew the Emperor well, aware that Emperor Longchang was actually somewhat in agreement with An Commandery Prince's development plan and wasn't truly angry. He was just annoyed that An Commandery Prince had acted without consulting him, feeling slighted and unable to resist voicing complaints.

"A pretense.

He's merely taking advantage of the fact that Kang Commandery Prince is at the battlefield abroad and not at home to pretend, in order to promote his own selflessness," Emperor Longchang's mouth twitched too, then once again feigned forgetfulness and focused on the next criticism, "If An Commandery Prince really had the country's interests at heart, why didn't he come to discuss it with me?

Does he see me as a foolish, obstinate Emperor?"

"He must still hold a grudge from the slight scolding I gave him years ago and is bent on proving me wrong," Emperor Longchang projected his own thoughts, growing convinced of this explanation.

No sooner had he spoken than an eunuch came to report from outside, "Your Majesty, An Commandery Prince along with the Great Sky Pride of the Changning Wang Clan, Zong'an, respectfully request an audience."

Emperor Longchang's face stiffened.

Wu Mingyuan was truly not giving him face. He had just finished complaining about the man's pettiness, and there he was asking for an audience? Does Longchang have no dignity?

"Old Yao, that brat Wu Mingyuan now comes seeking an audience; it's most likely that his grand undertaking has encountered difficulties," Emperor Longchang fell silent for a while, finally finding a pretext and pretended to ponder, "What do you say, should I meet with him or not?"

Knowing the Emperor's intentions well, Old Yao bowed his head with a sycophantic smile, "Your Majesty has always been magnanimous and caring towards the younger members of the family. You cannot keep dismissing An Commandery Prince, he is also the direct descendant of Princess Qingluo's line, the father of Little Princess Yiluo.

Besides, with the newly prominent Great Sky Pride Zong'an accompanying him, Your Majesty certainly wouldn't refuse to see them."

"Hmph, you old fox, presuming to know the imperial will, we'll settle this later," Emperor Longchang scolded with a smile and then cleared his throat, becoming solemn once more,

"However, for the sake of Yiluo and Great Sky Pride Zong'an, I must offer some face. I also want to see what that lad has to say. Old Yao, announce~"

With a flattering laugh, Old Yao excused himself before going out to solemnly announce, "His Majesty summons An Commandery Prince and Wang Zong'an for an audience."

Old Yao's voice wasn't loud, but it carried precisely all the way to the gates of the Imperial City.

After a short while, An Commandery Prince and Wang Zong'an, led by the eunuch, arrived at Zhuozheng Pavilion to have their audience.

Chapter 32: Swing the hoe well, and the wall will naturally fall_6

After the audience ritual was over, the two men took their seats under the arrangements of Emperor Longchang.

Emperor Longchang first chatted with Wang Zong'an, showed concern for the Changning Wang Clan's situation, Wang Zong'an's cultivation, and the condition of the Spirit Seed of the Longevity Tree, fully demonstrating the care and empathy of an emperor toward a Great Heavenly Proud. He even specifically mentioned Wang Liyao and gave him a great deal of encouragement.

Wang Zong'an naturally responded with modesty, maintaining his dignity and grace without shaming Wang Shouzhe in the slightest.

A good amount of time passed, the length of two cups of tea, before the pleasantries ended and it was Wu Mingyuan's turn to speak.

In his prime, Emperor Longchang liked to put on airs and self-promote, but as he aged, his actions became more whimsical.

Relying on the fact that Wu Mingyuan was his own son, and that even if the old ancestor berated him he could only obediently accept it, Emperor Longchang was about to open his mouth and give Wu Mingyuan a piece of his mind to vent his frustration.

Unexpectedly, Wu Mingyuan suddenly stood up, excitedly saying, "Your Majesty, great joy! Great joy!!"

The words Emperor Longchang was about to say were immediately choked back.

His face twitched, and he said irritably to Wu Mingyuan, "What joy can there be?"

"Years ago, thanks to Your Majesty's teachings and hard criticism, you pointed out the many overly ambitious parts of my plan.

At first, I was somewhat defiant, but as I reflected slowly over time, I finally understood that every word, every sentence of yours, contains the wisdom accumulated from thousands of years of imperial life," Wu Mingyuan said with tears of gratitude, passionately adding, "Therefore, after enduring pain and deep reflection, I adjusted the plan and spent decades, bit by bit, working solidly to achieve some results before I dared to come before Your Majesty."

You're overthinking it, I was just scolding you for the sake of scolding you.

Emperor Longchang muttered in his heart.

However, seeing Wu Mingyuan giving him so much face and voluntarily giving him a way out, his mood also improved, and he feigned a kind tone, "Ming Yuan, your realization is indeed commendable, it is not in vain that I devoted myself with good intentions."

"I am fully aware of your achievements and subsequent plans. You have indeed done well, not disgracing our Imperial Household. Have you encountered any difficulties in coming here this time?"

"Your Majesty, there's nothing troublesome," Wu Mingyuan said, "Even with some minor issues, I could handle them. The main purpose of coming here is to thank Your Majesty for the teachings back then. Secondly, I have reserved 10% of the equity at Dalra Reclamation joint company for Your Majesty. Today, Ming Yuan and Zong'an specifically came to present the contract to Your Majesty."

"Ten percent equity?" Emperor Longchang laughed kindly, "Ming Yuan, the whole world is mine, why would I need your ten percent equity? Your filial piety, I've accepted in my heart."

Although he did not pay much attention to the ten percent equity, he also felt quite pleased.

It seems that Ming Yuan truly appreciated his advice, even though I was merely scolding him at the time, it unintentionally resulted in "unintended success."

"Your Majesty is wholeheartedly dedicated to the country, for which I have great respect. But Your Majesty always needs to have some private funds," Wu Mingyuan earnestly said. "With this ten percent equity, when bestowing rewards to your cherished juniors or purchasing things you love, you can do so with more freedom."

"That's also true. Always using the royal treasury for rewards makes others inevitably criticize behind our back," Emperor Longchang deeply felt satisfied, his heart growing warm.

How had he not noticed before that Ming Yuan was so eloquent? Each sentence seemed to speak right to his heart, indescribably smooth and fitting.

Thereafter, there was another round of pleasantries.

Having his mood brightened by Wu Mingyuan, Emperor Longchang became much more generous than usual, and he also bestowed a range of valuable treasures to the younger generation, Wu Mingyuan and Wang Zong'an, encouraging Wang Zong'an to cultivate diligently and strive to reach the Divine Realm as soon as possible.

If the family really couldn't support two Great Heavenly Proud, they could also seek him out for help, and he could think of some solutions.

Leaving aside Emperor Longchang's merits and faults in this lifetime, he truly took heart in nurturing promising members of the imperial family or other Great Heavenly Proud from the Prominent Families. Even Shangguan Yunque had received many benefits from him in his earlier years.

Among the eleven Divine Realm Powerhouses in the Imperial Household, one became a son-in-law to the Imperial Household because his family couldn't support him.

Now, his native family, under his protection, although not yet a Third-Class Aristocratic Family, was already among the strongest in the Grade Four Prominent Families. Just waiting to produce another Great Heavenly Proud, they could rise to the Third-Class Aristocracies.

A short while later.

The meeting concluded, and Wu Mingyuan and Wang Zong'an were politely seen out of Zhuozheng Pavilion.

After the two had left, Emperor Longchang, feeling quite nostalgic and comforted, remarked, "Old Yao, Ming Yuan, our little stubborn donkey, has grown up and started to take care of his old ancestor. Look, that ten percent of the equity he reserved to use for rewarding the younger generation. I've heard that Shangguan spent a huge price to get only three percent of the shares."

Old Yao was taken aback, slightly puzzled, and reminded in a low voice, "Are you not planning to spend any money for this ten percent share, Your Majesty?"

Emperor Longchang waved his hand, saying, "That's Ming Yuan showing his filial piety to me, why should I pay money?"

"Your Majesty, although that's true," Old Yao's face twitched a few times as he persisted, "but I've heard that this 'Coalition' is meant to be a collaborative development company by an alliance, its charters mainly involve families investing together, holding shares together, reaping profits together..."

If Your Majesty does not invest cash or effort, other families might not say anything publicly but might privately criticize Your Majesty, thinking you are siphoning company assets... and who knows how the history books might write about this later..."

Chapter 32: Swing the hoe well, and the wall will naturally fall_7

Emperor Longchang's expression gradually darkened, his eyelids twitching, "I was wondering why Ming Yuan, that little stubborn donkey, seemed to have had a sudden change of heart. Who would have thought he was actually digging a pit, waiting for Old Ancestor to jump into it? When did he become so cunning?"

Recalling Wu Ming Yuan and Wang Zong'an's series of moves from before, a thread in his mind instantly connected, "This matter is probably not so simple. According to their previous actions, once I've put in the money, that kid would definitely shamelessly publicize it with something like 'His Majesty has generously invested a huge sum, taking one-tenth of the shares of the Coalition,' and so on.

Like this, the other three Third-Class Aristocratic Families who are still observing would most definitely respond immediately..."

"Good! This kid has played quite a smart game of the fox exploiting the tiger's might~~~ Hehehe~ little did I expect that despite my daily hunting, in the end, the little stubborn donkey pecked my eyes out."

"Your Majesty, please calm your anger," Old Yao said with profuse sweat, "It may not necessarily be Ming Yuan's intention. It would be better to send this old servant to deal with the situation."

"It's alright, if Wu Ming Yuan can outwit me, then it is indeed his talent. I am the ruler of a nation, and once a decree is issued, where is there room for retreat?" Emperor Longchang instead chuckled, "I originally thought that this struggle for the emperor's throne had already lost its suspense. Who would have thought that Wu Ming Yuan could rise astonishingly."

Now, the situation has become murky and complicated."

"However, that's what makes it interesting~~~ Thinking back to when I fought for this throne, it also took countless efforts and thoughts; how could I let these youngsters take it easily? Hahaha~"

...

Downstream of Peace River, near the river to the town of Zhenze Wei, beyond the stretch that passes through the Wild Marsh.

From a few days ago, one after another large riverboat sailed down from the upstream, stopping less than a mile away from the riverbank.

They did not approach the riverbank, but just stayed there, as if they were gazing into the distance downstream.

In just a few days, the waters of Peace River near Zhenze Wei had gathered dozens of riverboats. They lay there like hibernating behemoths within the river, staring down Changning Wei, ready to burst out and bite ferociously at any moment.

On these riverboats, the flags of the Jiaolong Gang were unfurled without exception.

In the Peace River region, almost no one would fail to recognize these flags. In the howling river winds, these flags flew against the breeze, as if they were an invisible deterrence, brewing a sense of oppression like the calm before the storm.

Unnoticed, a mood of panic and unease began to spread.

The fishing boats and merchant ships that passed by on Peace River had become cautious and nervous, and even if forced to pass by the fleet, they would stay as far away as possible, wishing that the Jiaolong Gang wouldn't notice them at all.

At the small port under Zhenze Wei's jurisdiction, dockworkers loading and unloading goods, and the merchants coming and going, all consciously kept a much lower profile.

Due to the appearance of the Jiaolong Gang's merchant ships, the business at the docks had deteriorated a lot these past days, with a growing trend of worsening. Many merchants preferred to lose some profit rather than conduct business under such conditions.

On the flagship of the Jiaolong Gang.

Long Wuji sat with legs apart as if riding a tall horse, pinching a small Qiankun wine pot, occasionally taking small swigs from it.

In the distance on the river, a solitary building ship was moored.

This building ship was also considered a giant riverboat, quite large in size, but compared to the Jiaolong Gang's dozens of riverboats, it seemed lonely and vulnerable, as if it could be torn apart at any moment.

The flag of the Changning Wang Clan fluttered on the riverboat.

Wang Shizhao, the Junior Clan Leader of the Wang family, stood at the bow, calling out from afar, "Master Dragon, my grandfather has said that as long as you nod, he will personally come and take you to the Wang family as a guest."

"Hahaha~~" Long Wuji laughed loudly in response, "Junior Clan Leader Shi Zhao, do take the trouble to go back and tell your grandfather. There are still five days left until our fifty-year

appointment. When the time comes, there's no need for Master Shouzhe to invite me, I, Long Wuji, will personally pay a visit."

"Master Dragon, my grandfather has said..."

Wang Shizhao once again urged a few sentences, but Long Wuji stood by his oral promise from years ago, firmly refusing to visit the Wang family ahead of time.

"Why must it be this way, why must it be this way."

Wang Shizhao, helpless, could only leave sheepishly, commanding the riverboat to turn around and head back.

After the Wang family's tower ship had left, Zhao Wuqing, curious, asked, "Foster father, since Master Shouzhe has already released signals of seeking peace, why don't we just take the easy road? This way, you might also make Master Shouzhe feel goodwill, perhaps there's still a chance for reconciliation."

"Hmph!" Long Wuji downed a swig of wine, his eyes brimming with confidence as he said, "By doing so, would I, Long Wuji not become someone who breaks his word? That youngster Shouzhe is full of tricks, if I really went this time, maybe he would use this matter to spin stories, and I will never allow him to succeed."

"Don't worry, as long as I 'communicate' properly with Shouzhe, he will surely be touched by my 'sincerity', and become our brother again."

"Foster father is mighty," Zhao Wuqing admired endlessly.

"Hahaha~ Wuqing, you must understand a principle. In this world, there isn't a corner that can't be undermined, only shovels that don't work hard enough," Long Wuji laughed loudly, "In any case, whether he likes it or not, I've decided that Shouzhe will be my brother."

Thereafter.

In the Wang family's main residence, within Shouzhe's study.

Wang Shizhao returned without success, quite uneasy. With his head lowered in helplessness, he relayed Long Wuji's words verbatim to his grandfather.

"Grandfather, it's Shizhao's lack of ability," said Wang Shizhao. "Please punish me, grandfather."

"It doesn't matter, you are not to blame for this," Wang Shouzhe, leaning against the Taishi Chair and sipping his Spiritual Tea, said thoughtfully after hearing his words, "Long Wuji is someone whose father is the Prince of Yong'an, and his mother is the legitimate daughter from the only Second-Class Aristocratic Family of Da Qian, the Zhao Clan from An Duke's Mansion.

He has been highly indulged since childhood, headstrong and proud, unwilling to be restrained, and yet he values promises greatly, with a reputation for nobility. If possible, it's far better to have such a person as a brother than as an enemy."

Would Wang Shouzhe not investigate someone with whom he had a fifty-year agreement? The only doubt about him was that the legitimate daughter from An Duke's Mansion had disappeared without a trace shortly after giving birth to Long Wuji.

This issue was one which both the Prince's Mansion of Yong'an and An Duke's Mansion kept tightly sealed, as if it had never occurred.

"Grandfather," Wang Shizhao frowned slightly, puzzled. "But Long Wuji is of the same lineage as the Kang Commandery Prince, a natural ally. I'm afraid it's going to be difficult to persuade him to switch sides."

"Shizhao, you have to understand a principle, in this world, there isn't a corner that can't be undermined, only shovels that don't work hard enough," Wang Shouzhe smiled and said, "I believe in the power of sincerity to move hearts. As long as I reason with him and appeal to his emotions, I will surely be able to influence him."

"... Grandfather, what you say makes so much sense."

As Wang Shizhao looked at his grandfather's smile, he couldn't help but feel a sense of emptiness inside him. He always felt like what his grandfather said and what he truly thought might not be the same thing.

Before long, several days had passed in the blink of an eye.

On the day of the agreement, the Jiaolong Gang's fleet swiftly set sail at a single command, majestically passing through Broken Dragon Gorge, directly advancing towards the Dingpu Ferry Terminal owned by the Wang family.

At the same time, the Divine Might Cannons at the Dingpu Ferry Terminal were all loaded with ammunition, ready to fire.

The great battle.

Was on the verge of erupting!

Chapter 34 Shocking! Long Wuji Falls, Great Emperor Furious _2

Long Wuji's face finally eased up, and he raised his glass with a smile, "Just as I thought~~ With my judgment, how could the Bright Pearl whom I hold in such high regard lack quality or virtue? Fine, let's hear what you've got in mind."

"Ruolan, go and release the water from the Broken Dragon Slot slowly so that Big Brother Long can drink without worry," Wang Shouzhe said with a smile, then turned and instructed Liu Ruolan.

"Husband..." Liu Ruolan's eyes glanced at Long Wuji for a moment, seemingly still somewhat apprehensive.

"It's alright, Big Brother Long is a hero who keeps his word," Wang Shouzhe heartily complimented Long Wuji, "Since he said he would admit defeat and not interfere, he will certainly not go back on his word."

"Yes, husband."

Liu Ruolan bowed slightly and gracefully departed.

Before long, rumbling sounds could be heard from within Broken Dragon Gorge. The Broken Dragon Slot opened a gap, and the long-accumulated water gushed out through the breach, a magnificent spectacle to behold.

However, this controlled release of water did not bring a significant impact downstream, let alone the possibility of sweeping away the fleet. The stored water would be gradually released over several days.

"Shouzhe, your 'Broken Dragon Slot' is truly remarkable, ingeniously designed, a piece of heaven's craftsmanship," an emotionally relaxed Long Wuji began to shower praise on the Broken Dragon Slot, "Only an Immortal Dynasty like the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty would use such ingenious methods to manage the great rivers."

The Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, a name Wang Shouzhe had heard countless times. It was said to have a long history and formidable strength, with a territory many times larger than that of the Great Qian Land, possessing all manner of inconceivable, advanced techniques beyond the imagination of the people of Da Qian.

Presently, his grandniece Wang Licui was traveling in the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty with her Master.

Having heard so much about it, even Wang Shouzhe couldn't help but feel a certain longing for that legendary Immortal Dynasty. But as the head of his clan, he was afraid he wouldn't be able to spare the time to visit the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty and see it for himself anytime soon.

"Shouzhe's Ping'an Town is quite reminiscent of the early stages of towns under the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty," Long Wuji admired endlessly, drinking his wine, "The port is well-organized, and even the river embankments are built so magnificently broad and powerful. The people live in wealth and enjoyment, content and happy. Just thinking about it is admirable."

Having kept an eye on Wang Shouzhe for so long, Long Wuji was certainly not ignorant about Ping'an Town.

While Ping'an Town's prosperity couldn't be compared to that of the County Town or Shangjing City, among the towns and villages around Guard City, it may not be entirely unique, yet it was nonetheless one of the very few.

What's more important was that all this was achieved by Wang Shouzhe in just seventy years. Meanwhile, the other wealthy and powerful places had mostly gone through a thousand, or even several thousand years of accumulation; there was no comparison at all.

That was why Long Wuji had such appreciation and even admiration for Wang Shouzhe.

"It's just a pity, Shouzhe, that you and I are ultimately not on the same path," Long Wuji said regretfully, his expression somewhat disheartened.

"Actually, when Big Brother Long extended the invitation, I did give it some thought," Wang Shouzhe clinked glasses with him and took a sip, "I even spent a great deal of time and energy studying the various merits and achievements of Kang Commandery Prince, as well as his personality."

"And what did you find?" Long Wuji asked with increased interest.

"I found that Kang Commandery Prince has a harmonious family, treats Zhao Yijing, the legitimate daughter from the Zhao Clan, with mutual respect after marriage.

He is also very strict in educating his descendants, has quite a royal demeanor, and there's never been word of his descendants stirring up any kind of scandal," Wang Shouzhe pondered, "Moreover, he is adept at forming alliances wide and far with various Prominent Families, Princes, Commandery Princes, etc., and has garnered tremendous support. Even in the Sacred Land, he's well-spoken of."

"It is said that he recently joined forces with Gong Yang Ce to the outer realms' battlefield. With their skills and strategies, if all goes well, they are bound to achieve considerable Merit Points and gradually earn the respect of the Military System."

"Overall, Kang Commandery Prince is a rather remarkable Quasi Emperor's Son with a sense of ambition; many aspects of him are beyond reproach."

Long Wuji's unease grew as he listened, and he couldn't help but frown, "If he's that outstanding, does he not deserve your allegiance? Shouzhe, are you really willing to throw away a bright future for the sake of a great-grandson's marriage contract?"

"But his excellence is all in service of becoming the Great Emperor. It feels to me as if he has been preparing for the position of the Great Emperor since he was a child," Wang Shouzhe sighed, a solemn look crossing his eyes, "Of course, that's not necessarily a mistake."

After all, considering Kang Commandery Prince's identity, Bloodline Talent, age, and so on, he fits the conditions of a Quasi Emperor's Son perfectly. Your Prince De Xin's line has naturally instilled great hopes in him from a young age."

"Indeed," Long Wuji nodded frequently when he heard Wang Shouzhe's analysis, "Our Old Ancestor De Xin has always placed great importance on Wu Chengsi since he was a child, educating him according to the standards of an Emperor's son and strictly demanding him to make no mistakes.

Even for marital matters, we were extremely selective, waiting for a daughter of the Zhao Clan's main line, leading to marriage only after his forties. And he himself is very hard-working, satisfying both the Old Ancestor De Xin and other Princes."

"That's exactly it," Wang Shouzhe's mouth revealed a knowing smile, "Bearing high expectations from a young age, carrying the mission of competing for the position of the Great Emperor, shouldering a heavy burden, every step taken was to get closer to the throne. Time and again, he provided satisfying results to his elders, growing amidst various praises."

Chapter 34 Shocking! Long Wuji Falls, Great Emperor Furious _3

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"Even when courting allies, he did not hesitate to use some underhand methods, such as secretly fomenting discord within prominent families or directly compelling them with an overwhelming trend, coercing others to take sides with an arrogant 'thrive with me or perish against me' attitude."

As these words were spoken, Long Wuji's face could hardly maintain composure, he responded with an embarrassed and dissatisfied tone, "Shouzhe, you should not point at the monk and scold him for being bald."

"I am simply stating a fact, not deliberately targeting you," said Wang Shouzhe, frowning slightly. "In the 'excellent' Kang Commandery Prince, I see many of the so-called 'imperial tactics.' Courting, suppressing, dividing, beautifying oneself—these methods are not wrong in themselves.

The mistake lies in his reliance on these methods to achieve his ends, lacking the broad-mindedness and vision that a true emperor should possess."

"If one were to look back through the historical records, it would be clear that when Emperor Longchang vied for the position of Emperor's son, although he also possessed some cunning

strategies, he did substantial and genuine work. His vision, scope, and tactics were all considered exceptional among his contemporaries, a true embodiment of a great emperor."

"Even so, the lofty goals that the Great Emperor proclaimed in his youth, such as 'expanding Tiance, opening up Longzuo, developing the Southern Desert, conquering the North of Liao'—which seemed more like pipe dreams at that time—have now all been realized. The overall national strength of the Great Qian Land has more than doubled since then."

"That's because Wu Chengsi has not yet become Great Emperor. Although I admit he likes to embellish himself, he is also a man with grand ambitions," Long Wuji retorted. "His partnership with Gong Yang Ce to establish the 'Dawn' organization also comes with ideals, setting extremely lofty goals."

They are preparing to strengthen national power, conquer South Qin, attack West Jin, and elevate the might of our Da Qian Land."

"The 'Dawn' organization?" Wang Shouzhe chuckled coldly. "Indeed, under the Kang Commandery Prince's name, this organization has attracted many a remarkable talent and is growing stronger by the day. Sadly, it's just a tool for power struggle, nothing more than a sword to eliminate those who think differently."

"Moreover, under His Majesty's governance is our Great Qian Land truly shrouded in such darkness? Dawn, Dawn, what darkness is it breaking? Who exactly is it criticizing?"

"Has this broken organization ever done anything beneficial for the nation or the people? Has it infiltrated enemy states to sacrifice itself in eliminating critical threats? Or in the face of the natural disasters that happen every year, has Dawn ever organized any relief efforts?"

"In the eyes of Kang Commandery Prince, the eight hundred million people of Great Qian might as well be mere insects, and the prominent local families are nothing but servile dogs. The power of an emperor, the desire to control everything, that's what he truly cares about."

"Stop... with this talk..." Long Wuji's forehead started to sweat.

"There are no outsiders here. I have said before, there are things I simply cannot hold back," Wang Shouzhe spoke indifferently. "Even when Kang Commandery Prince does achieve something and embellishes himself, it's only to please those high-ranking Princes and nobles. Various disasters like droughts, floods, earthquakes, pest infestations, he hasn't deigned to glance at them."

How can such an pretentious Quasi Emperor's Son be fit to be a great emperor? Even an organization of water bandits like Jiaolong Gang would offer money and effort for disaster relief along the banks of Peace River, what about him?"

Long Wuji took a deep breath: "Say what you will about Wu Chengsi, but let me clarify one thing, the Jiaolong Gang is a legitimately registered business, not an organization of water bandits."

However, he could not help but admit that after Wang Shouzhe's dissection, he too felt that Wu Chengsi was indeed trying too hard to impress.

Previously, he had a vague feeling that something was off about Wu Chengsi but couldn't pinpoint what it was.

After all, they both came from the same lineage; the teachings he received as a child were not much different from Wu Chengsi's, just not as strict. Even though his naturally untamed character meant the influence on him was lesser, it still existed.

But, the three words used by Wang Shouzhe seemed rather precise—"hollow pretense."

Now thinking back, all the places that felt amiss to him suddenly became clear.

Even though he had come to agree with Wang Shouzhe's words, he still persisted, "Wu Chengsi is still young, once he becomes the Great Emperor he will have plenty of time to learn."

No matter how unworthy Wu Chengsi was, he was born of their De Xin lineage; his grandfather was Long Wuji's elder uncle. Moreover, the Commandery Prince Consort Wu Chengsi had married was the young lady of the direct line from the second-class Prominent Family of An Duke's Mansion. She was someone Wang Shouzhe's own mother would have to address as Grand Aunt.

"Whether he will learn or not, I do not know, but as the saying goes 'look at the old from the young,' the issues with Kang Commandery Prince stem from his childhood education," Wang Shouzhe analyzed. "Prince Dexin was once the image of the Great Heavenly Proud, unfortunately born at the wrong time, he missed the opportunity of the True Dragon era.

Thus, he placed all his hopes on Kang Commandery Prince and perhaps was too hasty in his education. The root of the problem, I'm afraid, lies with the Prince himself."

"Enough, brother Shouzhe, you've gone too far. Prince Dexin is my Old Ancestor..." Long Wuji's face darkened, looking like he was about to start throwing punches.

Jiang Yusong and Wang Shizhao to the side were breaking out in cold sweat.

"Let's talk about Prince Yong'an, who has always been..."

"He's my father!" Long Wuji, incensed to the point of laughter, said, "Wang Shouzhe, are you deliberately trying to provoke me, hoping I would strike first and then what? Is there an ambush waiting for me? No matter how much he is to blame... I won't allow you to insult my father!"

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"Very well, I'll give Long Big Brother some face." Wang Shouzhe eased off, then turned back to question Long Wuji, "Ask yourself, by forcing me, Wang Shouzhe, to pledge allegiance to such a lord, don't you feel like you're pushing me into a pit of fire?"

"Uh... I didn't think so before, but now that you've put it like that, it does seem a bit like that." Long Wuji also felt somewhat embarrassed, "Never mind, since the matter has failed anyway, do whatever you please, Shouzhe. It's just that thinking about being on opposing sides in the future makes me quite depressed."

"Long Big Brother, are you still poised to strongly support the Kang Commandery Prince? What are you after?" Wang Shouzhe looked at him with curious eyes.

"What can I be after? That's my nephew after all..." Long Wuji said with some discomfort, "Given our relationship, I can't just go and support Wu Mingyuan, can I?"

If he dared do such a thing, let alone his father, the old Ancestor De Xin would beat him to death.

"Does Long Big Brother have any dreams of his own?" Seeing that Long Wuji was obviously wavering, Wang Shouzhe delivered a key strike.

"Dreams?"

Long Wuji was stunned and then fell into deep thought.

After a while, he drank several sips of his drink in silence and then spoke slowly, "Probably, to make some achievements to prove myself~ I'd also like to hide far away, not wanting to see that old..."

"In that case, I do have an immature idea." Wang Shouzhe advised, "Actually, Long Big Brother, you also know that the world is vast, with a broad expanse of lands abroad. Why not join forces with me to explore overseas?"

"Explore overseas?" Long Wuji's eyes lit up, "That point you made, Shouzhe, coincides with my own thoughts. It's just that the seas are treacherous with big risks."

"Exploring the overseas continents, whether it be for trade or pioneering, contributes to our Great Qian Land, better than always engaging in petty internal strife." Wang Shouzhe gently persuaded, "Long Big Brother, you changed your surname to 'Long' (dragon), but you and the Jiaolong Gang stay trapped inland by the Peace River.

Continuing like this, at best you would remain a river-crossing Jiaolong. Only by reaching the sea can you transform into a true dragon and truly show your brilliance."

"Well said." Long Wuji was slightly excited, "I've long been fed up with this little Peace River~ Dragons belong in the vast sea, that's where my true stage and destiny lie. Younger brother Shouzhe, what you say truly speaks to my heart."

"As I expected from my big brother, truly harboring grand aspirations. Come on, let's drink to that. I'll take you to see the ironclad ship I spent decades researching and building in a short while."

"Cheers!... Wait, ironclad ship? Sails probably won't be enough to move it, right? Could it be driven by a Formation? But that would consume spirit stones outrageously."

"Of course, it's not purely driven by Talisman Arrays. Allow Shouzhe to keep you in suspense for just a bit longer... after we finish this drink..."

"What drink? Come on, take me to see it. If it's really possible, I'll call you big brother."

"But Long Big Brother, we're still on opposing sides..."

"Opposing what? Formation what? That youngster Wu Chengsi won't miss one less supporter, nor will he notice one more. Shouzhe, let's collaborate as brothers to explore the great overseas world, it has nothing to do with picking sides."

"Indeed, it has nothing to do with taking sides, our collaboration is for the rise of the Great Qian Land. Cheers to that."

"Cheers!"

The affection and romance that men have for metal ships seem to be ingrained in their very bones. From the moment he heard the term "ironclad ship," Long Wuji was excited.

They drank until halfway, and with high spirits, he urged Wang Shouzhe to take him to see the ironclad ship.

Then, an even more excited Long Wuji continued to drink with Wang Shouzhe.

This drinking session lasted for days.

Even though Long Wuji was an elder of Purple Abode with strong vitality, after several days without using Mysterious Energy to expel the alcohol from his system, he became quite drunk, and in his tipsiness, he even pledged brotherhood with Wang Shouzhe.

From that point on, the terms "Long Big Brother" and "Virtuous Younger Brother Shouzhe" were officially established.

After this feast, Long Wuji truly boarded Wang Shouzhe's "thief ship" and began flexing his muscles, ready to conquer the boundless ocean and claim kingship over the seas.

However.

The news of Long Wuji and Wang Shouzhe becoming sworn brothers, ready to fully engage in commercial cooperation, and the exploration of overseas, spread like wildfire.

Soon, even within Return to Dragon City, this news started to circulate.

The "fifty-year promise" between Long Wuji and Wang Shouzhe, as well as their brotherly affinity for each other, also became a topic of much enjoyment to some.

To the lower-ranked Prominent Families, this was merely a topic of idle chatter, but for the upper echelons, it unquestionably stirred up a thousand waves with a single stone.

Head of the Jiaolong Gang, Long Wuji, was the son of Prince Yong'an, a significant figure of the legitimate Prince De Xin lineage. This matter was a semi-public secret among the upper echelons, and everyone tacitly understood it.

And such a person ended up mingling with the "hostile camp" of the Changning Wang Clan, wouldn't that signify internal strife within Prince De Xin's lineage?

Let's not dwell on the series of disturbances this caused among the upper echelons of the Prominent Families.

In the Imperial Palace, within Zhuozheng Pavilion.

Emperor Longchang lounged in a wide, comfortable chair, eyes half-closed, seemingly quite content. Old Yao stood by his side, animatedly narrating backstory sentence by sentence.

If one were to listen carefully, it would be startling.

Each line he spoke was a replica of the conversation between Wang Shouzhe and Long Wuji at Broken Dragon Gorge, recounted through Old Yao's mouth with emotional and tonal precision.

It was unknown who leaked that meeting's discussion to His Majesty.

"Should one scrutinize the annals of history, they would understand that our Emperor Longchang..." When Old Yao reached this part, his smile was particularly obsequious. After finishing, he added,

"Your Majesty, though Master Shouzhe may be the head of a minor Prominent Family from the countryside, he does possess some exceptional insights.

He acknowledges the difficulties You face as the Great Emperor and Your remarkable achievements."

That old face of Emperor Longchang's also wore a smile of satisfaction, "Old Yao, could it be that Wang Shouzhe knows of the man by Wuji's side working for Us and deliberately spoke for Us to hear?"

"Your Majesty is overthinking it. Wang Shouzhe even belittled Your shrewd tactics in Your Youth~" Old Yao said with a smile, "Jiang Yusong is an elite nurtured personally by this servant, gentle and reserved, very capable of keeping secrets, with a perfectly crafted cover identity. Even after years by Prince Yingji's side, he never revealed any flaws.

Even if Wang Shouzhe were extremely astute, he couldn't have guessed he was Your Majesty's man."

"Shrewd tactics." Emperor Longchang's smile faded somewhat and he said indignantly, "What I have is called resourcefulness! Humph~ To say that I made empty boasts in my youth. If he had said that to My face, I'd make sure he knew what 'Imperial Might' feels like."

"Let it be, considering his other comments were somewhat 'reasonable,' I shall begrudgingly forgive him this once. Old Yao, continue~"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Old Yao, well aware of Emperor Longchang's temperament, kept his face unchanged and continued with a smile.

"Was our Great Qian ever shrouded in darkness under Emperor Longchang's rule?"

"Dawn, Dawn, whose dawn are we breaking? Who are we cursing?"

"The Emperor's power, the desire to control everything, that is what they care most about."

"Never once did he glance at the droughts, the floods, the earthquakes, the plagues... "

"How can such a hollow Quasi Emperor's Son make for a good Great Emperor?"

By the end of it, Old Yao's forehead was beaded with sweat, yet he didn't dare fabricate anything and had no choice but to continue verbatim.

The face of Emperor Longchang grew darker and more ominous by the moment.

"Bang!"

The desk made of millennium Spirit Wood shattered into dust.

Old Yao, scared witless, immediately shut his mouth.

"In the eyes of De Xin's lineage, I, Longchang, am but darkness looming over their heads?"

"Prince De Xin, are you so unscrupulous in cultivating the Kang Commandery Prince because you resent that I age too slowly, causing you to miss your chance?"

A series of low, thunderous shouts emanated from Emperor Longchang.

His face had turned extremely unsightly: "Summon that scourge Wu Chengsi to see Me!"

"Your Majesty, Kang Commandery Prince went to the foreign battlefields to slay enemies along with Great Heavenly Proud Ce," Old Yao said, sweating profusely.

"Slaying enemies? Haha~ Shouzhe is right; it's all for self-promotion, to embellish one's own image. He's managed the court officials, the top families of many provinces, the Zhao Clan, and even the Princes. Now, he's preparing to win over the Military System. Tsk tsk, such ambition and talent, Kang Commandery Prince."

"If I don't abdicate, who knows, he might even raise an army in rebellion one day."

"Dawn, break his damn dawn!"

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Outbursts of imperial anger echoed one after another within the Zhuozheng Pavilion.

The two Heavenly Human Realm Guards outside the door were so frightened that their faces turned pale, and they trembled uncontrollably.

It had been a very long time since they heard His Majesty this enraged.

As they say, "Serving the Emperor is like accompanying a tiger." When the Great Emperor became angry, someone must inevitably face misfortune. It was unclear who had been so foolish as to provoke His Majesty this time.

In Zhuozheng Pavilion, Old Yao listened to the tirades of anger, his heart pounding and cold sweat streaming down his face.

Even though he had accompanied the Great Emperor for a thousand years, he seldom saw the Great Emperor so furious.

He couldn't help but mutter to himself that Mr. Wang really had some talent, not only did he successfully raise Miss Li Yao and Young Master Zong'an into astonishing Great Heavenly Prouds, but he was also quite a character himself.

However, Old Yao had indeed served His Majesty for a thousand years and understood the Great Emperor's temperament quite well.

To offer consolation at this time would be like running headlong into the Great Emperor's fury, most likely incurring His Majesty's wrath. The only option was to wait until the Emperor had vented his anger and calmed down on his own.

As expected.

After the time it took to sip a cup of tea, Emperor Longchang's expression gradually returned to calm. However, his half-closed eyes still gleamed with severity, evidently indicating that the anger in his heart had not yet subsided.

Only then did Old Yao summon people to clean up the scene, replacing the table in the hall with an identical one, lighting Immortal Fragrance to calm and focus the mind, and presenting a cup of Cold Moon Immortal Tea.

Soon, the Zhuozheng Pavilion was restored to its original state, as if the chaos that just occurred had never happened.

Emperor Longchang leisurely sipped his Immortal Tea, "Old Yao, tell me, how should I deal with Prince De Xin and Kang Commandery Prince?"

"Your Majesty, this humble eunuch dares not recklessly discuss the affairs of the True Dragon family," Old Yao replied with his eyes low and compliant.

Serving the Emperor is like accompanying a tiger.

He knew well that with his status, he should never comment rashly or display any biased preference. He must remember to always put His Majesty's wishes first; only in this way could he securely and enduringly maintain his position and survive.

"You are simply too cautious and meticulous," chided Emperor Longchang. "You have served me diligently for a thousand years—how could I not understand your loyalty? Since ascending the throne over three thousand years ago, my old friends and family have long since passed away. Now, besides you, who else can I talk to openly and honestly?"

Just speak your mind; even your offhand remarks could provide me with insights."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Old Yao bowed his head and bent his body, pondering for a good while before tentatively speaking, "Ultimately, this matter boils down to Prince De Xin's lack of proper education for his children. Your Majesty could summon him for a stern reprimand, to have him reflect on his mistakes and revive the family traditions of his lineage."

"De Xin..." Emperor Longchang, expressionless, tapped his fingers lightly on the desktop, musing, "The boy has ambition but no great talent, high spirits but no real substance. Take that bet with the

Enlightened One Tianhe as an example—wasn't it just a loss of twenty Superior Spirits and a few taunts? Yet he stormily ran off, showing his petty-mindedness.

His entire demeanor and presence fell to a lower level, and in the end, it burdened Yong'an to scramble and secure the funds to pay his debt."

"Prince Yong'an is quite stable," Old Yao commented softly in favor, "I remember His Majesty fondly nurtured him when he often came to the palace as a little child."

"Indeed, Yong'an has a sincere and honest nature, but growing up under the shadow of De Xin, he became somewhat meek and lacked spirit and decisiveness. As a result, in the end, he couldn't even keep his wife by his side."

Speaking of this matter, Emperor Longchang still harbored some resentment, discontentedly remarking, "Yong'an, that foolishly filial boy, thought himself to be in the right. He would be disdainful of Yingji's 'naughtiness' every day and, under the guise of paternal authority, rigidly controlled and often chastised his son, hoping to mold Yingji into a yes-man as foolishly compliant as himself.

My poor Yingji, not only was he deprived of a mother's love from a young age, but he also had to endure Yong'an's deplorable behavior. Had it not been for that, would he have been so angry that he ran off to become a river pirate..."

"That, Your Majesty," Old Yao gently interjected, "the Jiaolong Gang is a duly registered merchant fleet. Although Prince Yingji acts impulsively, he did indeed clean out the real bandits of Peace River, securing the waterway for safe passage and allowing the economy there to flourish. Whenever there's flooding in Peace River, the Jiaolong Gang contributes money and effort as well.

They could be considered as having merits..."

"Old Yao, it's truly rare for you to speak well of those children. It seems that like me, your heart aches for Yingji. Rest assured, I've never blamed the child; otherwise, I would not have had you secretly send people to assist him," Emperor Longchang sighed, his dissatisfaction with Prince De Xin and Prince Yong'an growing, "Yingji's mother had an extraordinary talent, even surpassing Yong'an.

At the time of Yingji's departure, he was already a Second Rate Supremacy with exceptional talent. If proper plans were made, his talents could certainly have been enhanced even further."

"It is such a pity, such a pity that Yingji missed a great opportunity due to disharmony with his father. Otherwise, Yingji could perhaps have become a Quasi Emperor's Son. His personality may be a bit brash, but in terms of true character and loyalty, he's exactly like me."

"Fortunately, Yingji is lucky, having met Zong'an who pointed him down a clear path. It's better this way; he doesn't understand the Emperor's Strategy and has cultivated a rough and tumble spirit.

It's more fitting for him to venture out than languish in the court, sparing him from being trapped in the mire of De Xin's lineage," said Emperor Longchang, resembling a patriarch of a Prominent Family, incessantly expressing his concern for his dear descendants, fretting over their futures.

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"Your Majesty, since Prince Yingji is setting out to pioneer new territories, should we recall Jiang Yusong?" Old Yao asked cautiously.

"Ji'er is too impulsive and easily falls prey to schemes, suffering losses in the dark. With the meticulous-minded Jiang Yusong by his side, I will feel more at ease," Emperor Longchang's eyes were filled with affection for the younger generation, "What's more, Ji'er is used to running wild, there must be someone to keep me informed, lest he makes too serious a misstep."

"As you wish, Your Majesty," Old Yao bowed in response.

After a long rambling, Emperor Longchang finally felt the irritation in his heart begin to subside and settle down.

His slightly cloudy eyes seemed to contain a dense authority: "Old Yao, draft an imperial decree for me: Kang Commandery Prince Wu Chengsi has lived up to the sacred expectations, personally braving dangers on the battlefield beyond our borders, repeatedly establishing military prowess, serving as an example for all members of the Imperial Household.

For this, he is specially awarded a Commandery Prince Purple Gold Crown, a top-rated royal manor, ten Superior Spirits, and five million Qian Gold. In addition, Zhao Yijing is granted the rank of Second-Class Commandery Prince Consort, with all the coronets, robes, and ritual implements to be fully prepared. Let this be decreed."

"This..." Old Yao was a bit stunned.

His Majesty had just scolded Kang Commandery Prince to the point of verbal assault, as if he wished to be done with him by death, yet how come in the blink of an eye, he had bestowed such generous rewards on Kang Commandery Prince?

Not to mention, that Purple Gold Crown of the Commandery Prince, adorned with the true dragon seal, was a tremendous honor and favor.

Since the Great Emperor had ascended the throne thousands of years ago, there had been only a score of Commandery Princes who had received such honor, and most of them were royal siblings who had earned the Power of the Dragon.

The most recent recipient of this honor was none other than the late Hao Commandery Prince.

"Old Yao, do you have an objection?" Emperor Longchang sipped his tea leisurely, his old eyes half-closed, appearing drowsy, his tone neither pleased nor angry.

"This servant wouldn't dare," Old Yao bowed quickly in courtesy, "This servant shall attend to it at once."

Having said that, Old Yao bent his back and slowly retreated from the Zhuozheng Pavilion.

Once outside the Zhuozheng Pavilion, he dared to show a hint of regret on his face. As someone who had followed His Majesty for a thousand years, he certainly understood His Majesty's personality.

This time, if His Majesty had called back Kang Commandery Prince from abroad for a harsh scolding, it would have been better, as it at least would have meant he still held considerable hope for Kang Commandery Prince.

But now, not only had His Majesty not called back Kang Commandery Prince for a reprimand, but instead he had discreetly lavished rewards on both Kang Commandery Prince and Consort Yijing, leaving even Old Yao unable to determine what His Majesty really intended to do.

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Several days later.

In Return to Dragon City, there were two great Ducal families. One was the Ding Duke of the Great Qian Wang Clan, and the other was the An Duke of the Zhao Clan.

These two families were among the earliest to follow Emperor Ziwei Xuandu to the Savage Land to pioneer, and they were the meritorious founders of the nation. Their strength was formidable, their merits illustrious, they were the Great Emperor's left and right arms.

Therefore, the Founding Emperor himself personally decreed the ennoblement of the two great Duke titles, hereditary and unchanging, continuing to this day.

There was a time when both of the great Duke families were ranked as Second-Class Aristocratic Families, with comparable power, prestige, and foundation. However, thousands of years ago, during the transition of emperors, the two great Ducal families faced utterly different fates due to choosing different camps.

Due to their failed support of the new emperor, the power and influence of the Da Qian Wang Clan were seriously weakened. Over thousands of years, they slid from Second-Class to Third-Class, and even among the three Third-Class Aristocratic Families, they were considered the weakest in power.

But the Wang family still bore the title of "Duke's Mansion", so when ranking the Third-Class Aristocratic Families, people still habitually placed the Wang family at the forefront, calling them "First among the Third-Class."

As a result, the Da Qian Chen Clan and the Da Qian Gongye Clan, the other two Third-Class Aristocratic Families, naturally harbored some dissatisfaction, and there was no shortage of rumors and whispers behind the scenes.

And the An Duke Zhao Clan, having firmly stood behind Emperor Longchang, was rewarded with the Power of the Dragon. Over these three thousand years, they developed increasingly stronger, often marrying into powerful lines within the Imperial Household.

The Zhao Clan of today had become a mighty family with four Divine Skills.

Moreover, because of the continuous expansion of the family's foundation, the Zhao Clan had a much higher probability of giving birth to Great Heavenly Prouds compared to ordinary Third-Class Aristocratic Families, averaging one every couple of hundred years. This not only maintained the

regular rotation and exchange of the four Divine ability species but occasionally even produced an extra one.

Even the Great Emperor had to weigh his options carefully before moving against the Zhao Clan, lest he inadvertently damage the foundation of the Imperial Household.

The main residence of the Zhao Clan was located in the west of Return to Dragon City.

It occupied an extremely vast area, nearly equivalent to the size of a Guard City in the provinces. Within the main residence, various attributes of Spirit Veins crisscrossed, with rich Spiritual Energy bound by Formations, achieving a dynamic balance in an incredibly complex manner, resembling a man-made small-scale Heavenly Abode.

In such an environment, even a mortal could live a disease-free life and easily surpass a hundred years.

However, in reality, there were no true mortals within the Zhao Clan's estate. Even a floor sweeper or a servant girl doing menial work possessed Bloodline and were Qi Refinement Profound Martial Cultivators.

As for Elder Zhao at the gatehouse, he was a hidden Mid-Late Stage Tianren Realm head of household. Even the gatekeepers were uniformly Spiritual Platform Realm Cultivators, and the cultivation bases of the chief and deputy Commanders even reached the Early Stage of the Tianren Realm.

In such a place where Spiritual Platform Realm and Tianren Realm Cultivators could be regarded as founding ancestors of doctrinal sects in other regions, they were merely gatekeepers at the An Duke's house, which spoke volumes about the depth of the Zhao Clan's foundation.

But as the saying goes, there are always Seventh Rank officials in front of the Chancellor's gate.

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The gatekeepers and guards of the Zhao Clan couldn't be just anyone. They held a considerable status. Many members from lower-ranked prominent families would have to go through them to present their visiting cards when seeking favor from the Zhao Clan.

Even if a Purple Abode Realm Old Ancestor came in person, they would have to be polite with the gatekeepers and discreetly slip them a red envelope, which showed how lucrative the position of the Zhao Clan's gatekeepers was.

As usual, on this day.

Those from Kang Province, Dragon City, and visitors eager to curry favor with the Zhao Clan were an endless stream. Among them, a small portion were from minor Level Six or Seven families within Dragon City, while a majority were from various county towns outside Shangjing City.

There would never be a shortage of people in this world looking to ride on the coattails of the powerful and influential. The entrance of the Zhao Clan was always bustling with activity, a sight to behold every day.

Suddenly.

A guard's voice could be heard from afar, "Miss Yijing is returning to the mansion to visit her family."

As the words fell, those lazy and laid-back gatekeepers of An Duke's Mansion, who carried themselves like lords, immediately sprang into action. They swept the ground, sprinkled water, and rolled out a brand-new red carpet. In just a short moment, they had completed all the preparations for the legitimate daughter's return home.

In the distance, an opulent carriage was slowly approaching.

Each of the four horses pulling the carriage was a pure Level Three Bai Yu Snow Horse without a single stray hair. The carriage itself was made of high-quality Ten Thousand Years Spirit Pine Wood, emanating a faint scent of pine that served to calmly focus the mind while also being exceedingly lightweight and sturdy.

Combined with the talisman arrays carved onto the carriage, it could even withstand a strike from a Purple Abode Realm Cultivator!

Four teams of eight guards each flanked the carriage from the front, back, left, and right.

The captains of these guard teams all possessed Sky Human Realm Cultivation. Walking beside the carriage was an old nanny dressed in palace attire.

This old nanny didn't look very remarkable, but only a true powerhouse could sense the terrifying and formidable aura she emitted, which indicated she was at the very least at the advanced stage of the Sky Human Realm.

Such a procession was extremely rare even in the affluent Dragon City.

Therefore, some visiting members from other prominent families couldn't help but inquire in low voices, "Goodness, isn't that the Azure Dragon Emblem of the Imperial Household on the carriage? Which influential Commandery Prince's Commandery Prince Consort could this Miss Yijing be, to have such a grand entourage?"

The number of Commandery Princes in Da Qian was not small, most of whom were concentrated in Dragon City. However, not every Commandery Prince was famous, influential, or wealthy.

Some declining branches of the Imperial Household only had a Commandery Prince or two left to maintain their dignity, with talent dwindling within their families and relying solely on subsidies from the Imperial treasury just to keep up appearances.

Such Commandery Princes wouldn't even think about putting on airs. When they encountered rich and powerful princes like the Heng Commandery Prince, their knees might go weak and they wouldn't dare say extra words.

As the out-of-town prominent families asked their questions, the local families who had come to seek benefits suddenly found a sense of superiority, "Whose Commandery Prince Consort? Hehe, of course, she's the Kang Commandery Prince's Consort, the Quasi Emperor's Son.

Miss Yijing is the current legitimate daughter of the Zhao Clan, and her marriage to the Kang Commandery Prince represents a union of two powerful forces."

"In my opinion, the Zhao Clan is simply powerful! Once the Kang Commandery Prince ascends to the position of the Great Emperor, who in the entirety of Da Qian could compare to the Zhao Clan?"

As many hushed conversations took place, Zhao Yijing was escorted by the gatekeepers and guards into An Duke's Mansion.

Not much later.

Zhao Yijing met with the current Family Head of the Zhao Clan, Zhao Chengwen, in his study.

"Jing'er pays respect to the Old Ancestor."

Yijing, dressed in resplendent attire, bowed respectfully and spoke in a reverent tone.

"Jing'er, there's no need for such formalities." From a distance, Zhao Chengwen gestured airily and said with a smile, "You have been personally conferred the title of Second Class Commandery Prince Consort by His Majesty himself. You hold a prestigious position, which is incomparable to ordinary Commandery Prince Consorts."

Zhao Chengwen was a seasoned Purple Abode Realm Cultivator who had served as the Family Head of Zhao Clan for two to three hundred years. He was now over five hundred and forty years old. Even for a Purple Abode Realm Cultivator, he was entering the middle and later stages of life.

His temples were already graying, giving the appearance of a man around fifty years old in mortal terms.

The Zhao Clan had already started training the next heir to take over as Family Head. In just a few more decades, once the successor reached the Purple Abode Realm, Zhao Chengwen would retire to the position of Clan Elder.

"Old Ancestor, even if I become the Empress, I am still your Jing'er," Zhao Yijing said in a soft and clear voice. After performing a full salute, she took her seat at the guest's position.

Zhao Yijing was born a Sky Pride of the Zhao Clan and had reached the peak of Level Six of the Sky Human Realm before the age of two hundred. Her appearance remained as youthful as ever, but her demeanor grew even more noble and majestic, exquisitely extraordinary.

However, she was not in a hurry to advance to the Purple Abode Realm because the Imperial Household had rules. Once the Kang Commandery Prince formally succeeded as the Crown Prince,

she, as his primary wife, would have the right to use the wealth accumulated in the imperial treasury to enhance her Bloodline by one more level in the Sky Human Realm and become a Great Heavenly Proud.

This consideration was for the future Empress. Generally, the Crown Prince would ascend to the throne between the ages of four hundred and six hundred, whereas Purple Abode Realm Cultivators often only lived to be over seven hundred years old, with few surpassing eight hundred.

It certainly wouldn't do for the Crown Prince to ascend as the Great Emperor only for his official wife to have already passed away or become an elderly woman unfit to be seen. Thus, if the Crown Prince's Consort was not already a Great Heavenly Proud, the Imperial Household would spare no expense to help her become one.

This way, she could at least accompany the Great Emperor for more than a thousand years, assisting him in managing the inner palace.

As a result, the position of the Crown Prince is also an extremely important opportunity for the Crown Prince's Consort, one that will never come again if missed.

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"Jing'er, did you come back to your maternal home this time because of Yingji's matter?" Family Head Zhao Chengwen asked with a smile.

"Old Ancestor." Zhao Yijing's expression bore a hint of grievance. "Previously, An Commandery Prince and the two Great Heavenly Prouds of the Wang family made a huge fuss in Shangjing City, directly intervening in the struggle for the Emperor's son, which has already had a significant impact on Cheng Si. How could Uncle Yingji do such a thing as to stab us in the back at this critical juncture?"

"Old Ancestor, why don't you write him a letter of reprimand, telling him not to mingle with the Wang family anymore?"

Talking about this matter, Zhao Chengwen's face also turned rather serious: "This is complicated. By rights, as a junior, you should not be privy to this. But now that it involves the struggle for the Emperor's son, that scandal can't be kept from you any longer."

"Although Yingji is my sister's son, when he was young, she fell out with Prince Dexin over differences in educational philosophy. At that time, Yong'an, still a Commandery Prince, didn't

stand by her side either—instead, he chastised her for being ignorant. Over time, the discord between Yong'an and my sister grew.

Later, after an argument, my sister, in a fit of rage, attempted to leave with her child but was intercepted by Yong'an, who accidentally injured her in the process."

"Enraged, my sister then went to the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty and has not returned since. Because of this, our An Duke's Mansion has also had a major fallout with Prince Dexin's lineage. In the end, it alarmed His Majesty, who made a holy judgment, severely punished Prince Dexin and Yong'an, and personally drafted an edict to send for my sister, Zhao Xiqing, inviting her back.

But my sister has always been stubborn and proud, a Great Heavenly Proud by nature. She looked down upon Yong'an's cowardice and preferred to struggle alone in the Immortal Court."

Zhao Chengwen clearly remembered that at that time, he even beat up Commandery Prince Yong'an.

"Alas," Zhao Chengwen's face still looked somewhat unpleasant as he spoke of the matter, "Yingji, that boy, takes after my sister, untamed since childhood and has always been close to our Zhao Clan. But if he truly decides to do something, let alone me, his uncle—even His Majesty, unless he issues a decree to summon him forcibly, might find it difficult to make him turn back."

"Jing'er, now that you understand the ins and outs of this matter, just bear with it and don't take it too much to heart. As time passes, people will no longer talk about the name Long Wuji."

"So even the Old Ancestor can't do anything about that willful Uncle Yingji?" Zhao Yijing was quite resentful.

Such back-stabbing behavior had dealt a not insignificant blow to the morale of her husband Kang Commandery Prince's supporters. Not to mention, among the royal relatives who supported her husband, many had stood with him because of Uncle Yingji; now that he had caused such a scene, quite a few of the royals were wavering.

"Jing'er, even His Majesty has tacitly consented, so you mustn't do anything rash," Zhao Chengwen warned, "Do you understand why His Majesty, at this juncture, has suddenly made a grand show of rewarding Kang Commandery Prince's Residence, conferring upon you the honor of a Second Class Commandery Prince Consort?"

"Isn't it to commend my husband's service on the foreign battlefield and to offer some form of reward and consolation?" Zhao Yijing asked, slightly puzzled.

"It's not that simple. Just making some military achievements on a foreign battlefield doesn't warrant such honor," said Zhao Chengwen with a hint of joy on his face, analyzing in detail for Zhao Yijing, "The last person to be bestowed such honor was Hao Commandery Prince. And who is Hao Commandery Prince?"

He is almost the nailed-on successor for Great Emperor; both Kang Commandery Prince and An Commandery Prince pale in comparison to him."

"His Majesty must have already decided in his heart; he just hasn't made his stance clear yet. Recently, An Commandery Prince came up with the 'Dala Desolate Desert Development Plan,' causing a big stir and garnering support from many Prominent Families. It looks glorious on the surface, but ultimately, it has tarnished His Majesty's face."

"Afterwards, the Wang family caused a stir with Long Wuji, intending to rally support for the fight over the Emperor's son's position, which was a move to pull people to their side and divide the opposition."

"Originally, our Zhao Clan was preparing to retaliate, but unexpectedly, His Majesty directly greatly rewarded the Kang Commandery Prince's Residence, clearly stating his stance and telling An Commandery Prince's lineage that the Emperor's son's position has long been decided in his heart, advising them to settle down and not cause trouble."

"Additionally, it's also because of Yingji's matter; he feels a bit of guilt. Taking advantage of the situation, he offered compensation to the Kang Commandery Prince's Residence to settle the people's hearts."

Zhao Chengwen's analysis was logical.

Once Zhao Yijing heard this, her expression became relaxed, and her anxiety and dissatisfaction dissipated. In the Emperor's son's struggle, although His Majesty alone could not decide the outcome, his opinions were extremely important; many neutral princes and commandery princes would be influenced by His Majesty's preferences.

"Thank you, Old Ancestor, for your guidance," Zhao Yijing was extremely grateful.

"Don't mention it, don't mention it; we're all family. His Majesty's signals are now very clear, so we mustn't make any superfluous moves at this moment, lest we inadvertently give others something to seize upon and end up in a passive situation," Zhao Chengwen said with a smile, "Since you've come back home, Jing'er, reunite with your relatives for a while and don't worry.

When Cheng Si returns from the foreign battlefield, he will surely sweep away all those jokers."

"Yes, Old Ancestor," Zhao Yijing was overjoyed.

...

Almost at the same time.

In the famed White Cloud Tower restaurant.

A group of young officials was busy reorganizing and summarizing account books, clicking away at abacuses rapidly.

Stacks of Gold Notes and even Purple Gold Notes were kept in specially made secure cash boxes, filling the room to the brim, their golden radiance nearly blinding.

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An Commandery Prince stared blankly at the many cases of banknotes, feeling like he had lived the first half of his life in vain.

He didn't know how long it had been.

Eventually, the officials finished compiling the ledger and presented it to An Commandery Prince and Wang Zong'an.

An Commandery Prince glanced at it and nearly fainted from the shock of the total sum of funds listed.

Six hundred and ninety million Qian Gold.

A full six hundred and ninety million Qian Gold!

Logically, the fund collection should amount to less than twenty million Qian Gold a year. But among the Prominent Families of Shangjing City, there were those with deep reserves; how could they pinch pennies and go through such trouble year after year?

The majority of Prominent Families would pay in one lump sum for ten years, while a minority would pay for fifty years at a time.

For instance, the Gongye Clan and the Wang family both paid particularly large sums.

Furthermore, the emperor, who disliked the hassle the most, took one-tenth of the stakes and paid two hundred years' worth at once, a total of about three hundred and thirty million or so.

In his words, having taken the money, they should "scram off to clear land in the Dala Desolate Desert and not come back to rip him off."

Latter on, Old Yao revealed that His Majesty meant that since he was old anyway, he might as well take the money out of the national treasury. Whether the treasury would be in deficit or impoverished in the future had nothing to do with him. If the treasury became poor, it would be up to the successor emperor's son to figure it out...

Grateful, An Commandery Prince found the emperor's words very reasonable and happily accepted.

"Zong, Zong'an," An Commandery Prince said, swallowing, "So, so much money. I've never seen this much money in my life. It's really tempting to take the cash and run off to live a carefree life in the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty."

Wang Zong'an was also dazed. Although the Changning Wang Clan was wealthy, their annual expenses were considerable.

Especially since his father, Wang Shouzhe, was a man extremely lacking in a sense of security who liked to save various aces up his sleeve and would frequently invest heavily in R&D, which also accounted for a significant proportion of expenses.

Therefore, he, too, had never seen that much money at one time in his life.

However, after all, he was the man who oversaw the creation of the Green Luo Guard. Over the decades, the total funds spent there were astronomical. Compared to An Commandery Prince, he was somewhat more composed.

"Stay calm, stay calm," Wang Zong'an encouraged An Commandery Prince, "Compared to our future total revenue, this is just a small sum. This amount of money is only worth two or three Divine Spiritual Treasures. It's not worth running off with the cash..."

Two or three Divine Spiritual Treasures, just that?

An Commandery Prince glanced at Wang Zong'an, "Young Clan Leader Zong'an, I've noticed you've been quite inflated lately. It sounds as though your Wang family's Divine Spiritual Treasures are numerous. Currently, only Miss Li Yao has one, right? And that was bought by the Enlightened One of Tianhe, who had to sell his cauldron and take on debts to afford it.

And you're saying that's not worth running off with the cash?"

Divine Spiritual Treasures?

Speaking of this, Wang Zong'an was somewhat speechless. Recently, he had heard that his beloved grandson Wang Anye had effortlessly broken a formation and obtained two Divine Spiritual Treasures at once; one of the swords even housed a Spirit Remnant of an elderly gentleman in the advanced stage of the Divine Power Territory, its value inevitably higher than ordinary Divine Spiritual Treasures.

It turned out that Wang Zong'an and An Commandery Prince had been busy for so long, going around deceiving and collaborating to trick the emperor. Yet their achievements seemed to be about the same as what his grandson did by casually tumbling outside the domain...

Truly, comparisons do kill.

"Not worth running, not worth running," Wang Zong'an couldn't help shaking his head at the thought, feeling even more that the six or seven hundred million Qian Gold wasn't much at all.

Having a grandson like Wang Anye was worth billions of Gold.

A group of young and competent officials listened until their faces nearly fell.

Both of you bigshots talk about running off with the cash as if you don't even see us in your eyes anymore?

However, everyone knew that these two bigshots were joking. Once the Dala Desolate Desert reclamation plan succeeded, what was this little sum of money?

A few officials solemnly critiqued the bigshots for being flighty, then sighed and said, "We work ourselves to death for Da Qian, trying to build up our foundation, yet that's not as good as Kang Commandery Prince casually embellishing his reputation. His Majesty... who knows what he's thinking, actually ennobling..."

"Alright, alright, let's not speculate on the sacred intent," An Commandery Prince comforted the young and outstanding officials, "Our grand plan's first step has been successfully completed. Now we just need to solidly do a good job on this matter. As for the position of the emperor's son, we'll vie for it if we can.

If not, we'll still make the Great Qian Land powerful and prosperous enough to support more common folk."

With An Commandery Prince's reassurance, the officials regained their morale and vigor.

...

Zhuozheng Pavilion.

Emperor Longchang, half-reclining behind the desk, listened to Old Yao's report on various feedback, his expression full of mockery and amusement.

"Heh heh! Emperor's Strategy makes it sound like no one else knows how to play emperor's games," Emperor Longchang said with some pride, "The battle for the emperor's son is not that simple. Is there really such a thing as a sure-win situation?"

"Wu Chengsi, oh Wu Chengsi, don't say I didn't give you a chance. The best education doesn't come from my scolding. Only the painful blows from enemies are the best nutrients for a man's growth."

"If you can come to understand the true path of the emperor and realize that a Great Emperor must learn much more than just Emperor's Strategy, then it's not too late. But if you fail to mature, hehe~~"

"And you, Stubborn Donkey Wu Mingyuan, don't think that just with the Dala Desolate Desert reclamation project you can completely turn the tables. You're just starting to play the game. Emperor's Strategy, hehe, you still have a lot to learn. But, considering your filial piety, I have secretly helped you once, no, twice. Be sure to seize the opportunities."

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"Fight, struggle. If the Emperor's sons don't contend, where will the fine plays for us to watch come from? Why should I have toiled so hard years ago, nearly losing my life to succeed, while you all wish to ascend the throne so effortlessly?"

"I don't care. As long as I'm alive, none of you will win so easily."

Emperor Longchang muttered to himself, seemingly thrilled and smug about his own schemes. After all, he was old and had the capital to do as he pleased.

Old Yao, the attendant standing by, bowed his head as cold sweat broke out. It was indeed hard to fathom the heart of a great emperor.

...

While Shangjing City was in a state of turmoil.

Ping'an Town remained an idyllic haven, unaffected by the troubles of the outside world.

The children ate, studied, and were disciplined as they should be. They lived and grew up happily and blissfully.

In the familiar courtyard, still a riot of blooms and brimming with spirit, it was like a heavenly abode.

Within the pavilion of the small courtyard, Wang Shouzhe and the refined Jiang Yusong played chess.

The outcome was unsurprising, with Wang Shouzhe thoroughly bested in the game. After three rounds, he had lost every single one.

He immediately laughed and resigned, "Mr. Yusong's disregard for the way of the official is no wonder he was demoted to a den like the Jiaolong Gang, where bandits gather."

His words seemed as casual as a light breeze passing through the clouds.

Jiang Yusong, however, had a momentary stiffness in his expression, and a flicker of discomfort passed through his eyes. He laughed and replied, "What Master Shouzhe says, I fail to understand?"

"It's commonly said that a hero's twilight years and a beauty's greying hair are the regrets of the human world," Wang Shouzhe personally poured tea for Jiang Yusong and continued with a smile, "However, these pale in comparison to the sorrow of an emperor's fall after three thousand years.

A Great Emperor, with supreme authority, could decide life and death for countless prominent families, glorified throughout his life. As he grows old and nears death, although he understands the inevitability of power transition, he can't help becoming more sensitive, suspicious, and changeable in mood.

The occasional unease in his heart also makes him crave more control, hoping to keep all changes in his own hands. These are all natural human tendencies, nothing to be ashamed of."

"Brother Long has a special identity and has been watched by His Majesty since he was a boy. Yet, he is an unruly dragon, a Demonic King. For His Majesty to plant one or more spies by his side is both to keep his actions from getting out of hand and to assist him in his work, quietly protecting him from being ambushed. It is all very sensible and reasonable."

A bead of cold sweat slid down from the side of Jiang Yusong's temple.

His fingertips began trembling uncontrollably as a sense of unspeakable shock and fear enveloped his heart.

Wang Shouzhe had such audacity, indeed great audacity! Not only did he dare to speculate on the sacred imperial intentions, but he also spoke about it so brazenly!

Moreover, he couldn't understand how he had exposed himself. Could it be that Wang Shouzhe could see through people's hearts?

"You must be wondering how someone with such a perfect identity cover as Jiang Yusong could be suspected. Heh, it's quite simple. Of those dozen generals around Brother Long, I've carefully investigated each one over the decades."

"Apart from you, others have more or less murky pasts, and many of their identities don't hold up to scrutiny. It's normal, isn't it? No matter how the Jiaolong Gang dresses up and registers with the government office, it's still a bandit organization. What upright and promising person would join a notorious bandit group for no reason?"

Feeling a chill in his heart, Jiang Yusong countered, "Family Head misunderstands. The leader once saved me; I joined to repay the favor."

"Right, that's a very reasonable justification. But if I were Emperor Longchang, looking to constrain and monitor the Demonic King Long Wuji, I'd need to pick someone with brains, the ability to judge the times, smart enough to offer timely advice and influence Long Wuji, right?"

"Not to look down upon the upper echelons of the Jiaolong Gang, but aside from Mr. Yusong, the remaining dozen or so... are not as sharp as Brother Long... How could they bear the responsibility of restraint?"

"All your deductions are conjecture, Master Shouzhe. How can you condemn me, Jiang Yusong, based on this?" Jiang Yusong's complexion grew somewhat pale.

"Mr. Yusong, aren't you underestimating the Wang family a bit? Since I've already suspected you, while you're on Wang family's territory trying to send messages out... specifically to Return to Dragon City..." Wang Shouzhe shook his head helplessly, "Could it be that you think the decades of the Wang family's efforts have been in vain?"

"Ah!" Jiang Yusong's spirit collapsed, his face ashen as he pleaded, "Family Head, I am working on behalf of His Majesty, please show some mercy."

"Rest assured, since you belong to His Majesty, why would I trouble you?" Wang Shouzhe said with a smile, "I should thank Mr. Yusong for helping to convey a message to His Majesty."

Jiang Yusong shuddered, looking incredulously at Wang Shouzhe: "Were your words that day intended for my ears, for me to pass the message back? Impossible, impossible. Even if you suspected me, I might not have been with the leader that day; it was he who spontaneously wanted my company!"

"Spontaneously?" Wang Shouzhe's smile carried a hint of mockery, "Do you think my acting at the Peace River, 'you come up, I go down', was for naught? It was to make Brother Long unsettled, wondering if Shouzhe would secretly set traps to harm him."

Jiang Yusong remained stunned for a long while, only to gaze at Wang Shouzhe in shock: "So that's it, that's how it is. At that time, the leader was indecisive and suspicious, and among those close to him, I was the most delicate and cautious of mind. Bringing me along as a precaution was the most natural and reasonable choice."

"Thus, without raising any alarm, you placed me in the game. The meeting at Broken Dragon Gorge was so significant, and I was bound to report truthfully to the higher-ups... seizing this opportunity, Master Shouzhe was able to apply eye medicine for the Kang Commandery Prince from thousands of miles away in front of His Majesty and, at the same time, smoothly root me out as an insider.

Master Shouzhe, your calculations are truly meticulous! This killing two birds with one stone strategy is so ingeniously executed, Yusong has no choice but to admire it. However, what if you had miscalculated?"

"Miscalculated?" Wang Shouzhe said indifferently, "If I miscalculated, it's no big deal. After all, the primary objective was to strategize against Brother Long. As for the rest, that's just killing two birds with one stone."

Killing two birds with one stone?

Jiang Yusong felt a mix of fright and incredulity.

Master Shouzhe dared to liken His Majesty to a rabbit... so much audacity, truly!

No good!

Today... I, Jiang Yusong,

am doomed.

Chapter 36: Miss Lici's Sweeping Conquest of the Immortal Dynasty

...

Wang Shouzhe, knowing full well that he was the Emperor's spy, still spoke such words in front of him, clearly convinced that this conversation would not be relayed back.

Jiang Yusong's hand, hidden in his sleeve, clenched involuntarily.

He had never believed that being the Emperor's man would deter Wang Shouzhe from harming him. After all, this man had always been extremely cautious and full of strategic wits. Killing him without raising suspicion was something others might not achieve, but that didn't mean Wang Shouzhe couldn't.

Perhaps, for this day, Wang Shouzhe had already prepared numerous plans.

Drops of cold sweat slid down Jiang Yusong's forehead.

His only way to save himself...

"Mr. Yusong is a smart man," Wang Shouzhe said, sipping his Spiritual Tea calmly, "since Shouzhe has lifted the lid today, there must surely be a result."

Jiang Yusong turned pale, took a deep breath, and said, "Master Shouzhe, you are far too bold. Aren't you afraid I might agree pretentiously and then turn against you? You also mentioned that the Emperor is in a very sensitive mood right now."

"I have said, Mr. Yusong is a smart man. Whether the Emperor likes it or not, his era is bound to come to an end," Wang Shouzhe said with an indifferent tone, "The shift of power is unavoidable. Surely, Mr. Yusong wouldn't forgo a promising future for himself and his family for an Emperor whose reign is ending, would he?"

"Or perhaps, Mr. Yusong favors the Kang Commandery Prince more? Thinking of using my head as a pledge of allegiance? I don't think so. If you truly favored the Kang Commandery Prince, you wouldn't have relayed those detrimental comments to the Emperor that day."

Jiang Yusong shuddered, incredulous, "Master Shouzhe, you even know the content of the messages I sent?"

"Sir, you are on Wang family's ground," Wang Shouzhe chuckled and saluted, "Shouzhe here, thanks Mr. Yusong for your truthful report that day."

Only then did Jiang Yusong let out a bitter smile, letting go of all resistance, "Before meeting Shouzhe, Yusong thought of himself as also possessing intricate thoughts and considerable political acumen. Now compared to Master Shouzhe, I feel as naive as a child. However, there's still one small question in my mind."

He paused here, took a deep breath, and then asked that crucial question, "Master Shouzhe, you are neither old, nor have you served officially under the Emperor, nor even met the Great Emperor. How can you so thoroughly decipher human nature, even the nature of an emperor?"

Wang Shouzhe couldn't help but smile wryly.

Could he say that he had seen too many dramas and read too many novels about palace intrigue in his previous life?

With such an "expanded" vision as a basis, in this life, as he aged and gained experience, he also continuously thought over and pondered these matters. Over time, naturally, he became smooth in their application.

Although he had never met the Great Emperor, Li Yao had, and she had even discussed it with him in letters.

He had never underestimated the Great Emperor, but he also knew that no matter how majestic and decisively the Emperor ruled, at the brink of his reign's end, he could not escape human nature.

Sensitive, suspicious, these are curses that every emperor faces in his later years.

This time, it was a deliberate play of unsuspecting minds, "bullying" the Great Emperor once.

Moreover, even if his schemes were deciphered, it wouldn't be a big deal because what he said was mostly the truth, with just a few exaggerated parts. If revealed, they were nothing more than tactics in the strife among the Emperor's sons.

As a supporter of the An Commandery Prince, it was natural for him to plan and act for the prince.

The Great Emperor must have been psychologically prepared; if he really saw through it, he would mostly just think Wang Shouzhe naive, laughable for thinking he could deceive the emperor.

Moreover.

If it were the Great Emperor in his prime, grand and inviolable, even with all the courage Wang Shouzhe could muster, he wouldn't dare offend him. Coveting the throne or showing ambitious tendencies, daring to conspire with the Emperor's spies, that would be nothing short of a death wish.

This illustrates that different times and circumstances require different strategies.

Of course, he definitely couldn't reveal the truth, and saying it was from ancient texts wouldn't work either, as Jiang Yusong was well-read, which could instead give him away easily.

Wang Shouzhe paused for a moment, then smiled slightly, "Mr. Yusong asks a very good question, but this is Shouzhe's personal secret, just consider that Shouzhe has a natural talent in this area. Maybe one day, the truth will come to light."

"Since it's Master Shouzhe's secret, Yusong will naturally not pursue it further."

Jiang Yusong was somewhat disappointed, but not surprised.

He stood up, looking at Wang Shouzhe with admiration and added respect, bowing deeply, "Yusong pays respect to the lord, and asks for your guidance in the future."

"This... Shouldn't Mr. Yusong be paying homage to the An Commandery Prince as his lord?" Wang Shouzhe was slightly surprised, "That is a figure with the potential to ascend to the Great Emperor's position."

"Previously, my lord praised Yusong for having meticulous thoughts," Jiang Yusong said with a free and easy smile, "In fact, after setting a fifty-year agreement, I began to secretly observe the Wang family, admiring Master Shouzhe immensely by that time. During this period residing at the Wang family, Yusong observed every aspect meticulously and was filled with emotion."

"Master Shouzhe, being able to transform Ping'an Town radically in just seventy years, demonstrates abilities and foresight far beyond ordinary. Combined with Master's prudence and thorough thinking, great deeds are surely in the future. If Yusong were to choose a lord, I would prefer to pledge allegiance to Master Shouzhe."

Chapter 36: Miss Lici's "Sweep" Through the Immortal Dynasty _2

"That would work," Wang Shouzhe thought for a moment and then took out a Sky Mechanism Recording Disk. After activating it, he said, "Mr. Yusong, please feel free to say anything."

"What... should I talk about?" Jiang Yusong asked, his expression one of dismay.

"Talk about His Majesty's current rule, discuss the Kang Commandery Prince's character and behavior. Don't worry, just share some honest opinions; there's no need to hold back." Wang Shouzhe smiled, his demeanor as gentle as jade, elegant, and showing his "thoughtful consideration."

Jiang Yusong's face turned slightly dark.

Wasn't this the legendary test of loyalty?

A short while later, Jiang Yusong left Wang Shouzhe's courtyard, his face deathly pale.

The cold breeze blew, leaving his back feeling chilly. Looking back at Wang Shouzhe's courtyard, his eyes filled with a hint of fear.

No wonder when he mentioned Master Shouzhe to the Wang family's children, it scared them into crying on the spot, calling him the "Great Demon King."

At the time, he was somewhat puzzled; Master Shouzhe had always been as warm as the spring breeze, exceptionally caring toward the clan's children, even nurturing outstanding Sky Prides like Li Yao and Zong'an. How could he have earned the title "Great Demon King"?

But just now, he had finally understood what it meant to meet the "Great Demon King."

Those parts kept inside the Sky Mechanism Recording Disk as a test of loyalty, if heard by His Majesty, would surely lead to a gruesome execution and the decimation of his entire family.

If heard by the Kang Commandery Prince, he would unhesitatingly be ground into mincemeat.

"Well, having boarded Master Shouzhe's ship, I never intended to disembark," Jiang Yusong said, forcing a smile and shaking his head.

Now that the test of loyalty had been delivered, from here on out, he would just need to diligently fulfill his duties.

Thinking of the first task Master Shouzhe had assigned him, Jiang Yusong felt a tingling on his scalp. Master Shouzhe really did dare greatly.

While Jiang Yusong's thoughts drifted, a figure wearing a floral dress and carrying a beautiful bag—a Little Qinglong—majestically floated about a yard above the ground, passing him by.

As a genuine Azure Water Dragon, Wang Lilong had the pride that came with being a dragon. Anything that could be floated through, she would never crawl.

Tailing this Little Qinglong was a young boy who seemed listless, as if he'd already given up on life.

This boy was naturally Wang Anye.

Overseeing his Grand Aunt Lilong every day, Wang Anye felt his life had dimmed, and he was too weary at heart.

This Grand Aunt Lilong was even more troublesome than Wu Yiluo, that mischievous spirit.

"Is that... is that a dragon?" Jiang Yusong rubbed his eyes, his heart nearly leaping out of his chest.

Of course, he knew the common knowledge that any creature referred to as a "dragon" was at least Level Seven!

And only monsters or Spirit Beasts that reached Level Seven could transform their shape and size at will.

"What are you looking at? Haven't seen a dragon before? Keep staring, and I'll eat you, roar~"

Wang Lilong "displayed her ferocity," brandishing her claws at Jiang Yusong before continuing to float back to Master Shouzhe's courtyard arrogantly.

Wang Anye helplessly greeted the sweat-soaked Jiang Yusong, trying to calm him, "I'm sorry, sir. My grandma doesn't have any ill intentions; she just enjoys scaring people. You don't have to be afraid."

Then, he hurried after her with his short legs: "Grand Aunt Lilong, wait for me."

Moments later, the courtyard echoed with Wang Lilong's sweet, coquettish voice: "Daddy, I'm back from school, I want a hug~~"

"Were you well-behaved at the Clan School today, Long'er?"

"I was very good today, just ate two teachers and five classmates, teehee~"

"You little rascal, go on, your mother has prepared 'Red-Blood Eel and Mixed Nut Spirit Rice Soup' for you to rejuvenate and nourish your brain, specially waiting for you to come back from school, to replenish you~" Wang Shouzhe's voice was especially "affectionate."

"Daddy, I just remembered I promised to go to a classmate's house to do homework, see you!"

Before even finishing speaking, Jiang Yusong felt a streak of blue adorned with flowers flash past him, stirring up a series of breezes.

But before it had gotten far, that "lightning" flash was suddenly seized by Wang Li, a prominent lady of the Wang family—the figure of Liu Ruolan grabbing her back: "You girl, your academic performance has been suffering, and it's hard at the Clan School too, how can we not nourish your brain?"

"Oh, Anye is here too? What are you doing shrinking in the corner with your head bowed, Grandmother almost didn't see you. It's been a few days since you last visited Grandmother, perfect timing today, you're in luck, I made extra 'Red-Blood Eel and Mixed Nut Spirit Rice Soup.' You're also exhausted from studying daily, eat with Long'er."

This sentence was like a thunderbolt in Wang Anye's gloomy life.

His heart shattered, tears shamelessly trickling from the corners of his eyes, while his face still forced a sweet smile: "Ye'er loves the soup Grandmother makes the most."

"Then why are you crying?"

"These are tears of joy and excitement."

"Such a good boy... Grandmother loves you the most."

Amid the ongoing voices, Jiang Yusong mechanically moved his feet, walking further and further away.

His mind was still shocked that Master Shouzhe was raising a dragon as his daughter, yet another part of him was moved by that warm scene.

As the saying goes, the devil is in the details; Master Shouzhe and his wife were so patiently caring towards their children, and the children so adoring of them. Such a warm little family, truly enviable.

Worth following such masters and mistresses!

Chapter 36: Miss Lici's 'Sweeping' Victory Over the Immortal Dynasty _3

...

As time swiftly passed, Long Wuji thrived in Ping'an Town like a fish in water, directing the young men as they learned to operate ironclad warships, and often took the ship to roam the Eastern Sea.

Long Wuji and the members of Jiaolong Gang naturally felt high-spirited, as if they were about to soar through the oceans and roam the skies.

Wang Shouzhe certainly wouldn't allow maritime control to fall into Long Wuji's hands casually, thus it was essential to dispatch family members into the overseas system. This included not only outstanding descendants from the direct lines of the Wang family but also collateral relatives and the head of household working together.

The Wang family had once developed the Green Luo Guard and was not unfamiliar with maritime affairs. They had also started cultivating talent for sea expeditions early on.

The boundless and mysterious sea was where many passionate men yearned to be, and young generations of the Wang family, excellent collateral relatives, and the head of household all eagerly volunteered to join the sea expedition team.

The Wang Family School grew more and more prosperous; implementing the strategy of "teach without discrimination" in Ping'an, Xing'an, and Green Luo Guard, cultivating generations of cultured and aspirational talent.

Wang Shouzhe felt quite gratified by this enthusiastic participation.

But on this day.

He had nothing pressing to do, so he sat in the courtyard drinking tea and enjoying the splendor of the exotic flowers and rare plants, spending his days leisurely and comfortably.

All of a sudden.

A young woman of delicate beauty and refined appearance, clearly born of a respectable family, rushed into the courtyard with a face full of grievance, wailing, "Grandfather, grandfather, you must stand up for Ping'er!"

Following her was a handsome and tall young man whose face was filled with panic and terror, "My lady, my lady, let's speak calmly, let's not disturb grandfather's rest."

"This..." Even an individual as composed as Wang Shouzhe couldn't help but be startled and hurriedly said, "Ping'er, don't panic. Sit down first and speak slowly."

This was Wang Shouzhe's granddaughter-in-law from the Yuwen Clan, who would normally not resort to tears in front of her husband and grandfather unless something significant had occurred. Even if there were issues, she would more likely go to Xu Family, Wang Shouzhe's daughter-in-law, or, if she were really upset, find Liu Ruolan.

The fact that she came directly to Wang Shouzhe indicated that it was no minor issue.

"Yes, grandfather," Yuwen Clan's daughter promptly ceased crying and obediently sat down, waiting quietly for her grandfather's decision.

As for the young man behind her, Wang Shihao, his face was full of embarrassment and fear, not daring to look at Wang Shouzhe.

"Scoundrel!" Wang Shouzhe's face turned cold as he angrily said, "What outrageous thing have you done to reduce Ping'er to such a state of panic and distress?" Every family, even those who strive to discipline their children, inevitably has some descendants who cause headaches.

Even the imperial household had the likes of Long Wuji, a Demonic King that even Emperor Longchang could not handle. Among Wang Shouzhe's direct descendants, his second son from the primary lineage, Wang Shihao, was particularly apt at infuriating him.

"Plop!" Wang Shihao, terrified and pale, immediately knelt down and said, "Grandfather...I, I've only signed up for the overseas expansion group. I thought that, as the Wang family, one of us from the direct line should go to hold sway."

Wang Shouzhe couldn't help but glare at him, "Have you completed your family mission?"

"This, this not yet... but grandfather, I just long for the sea~" Wang Shihao said bitterly. The task the family assigned him was not an easy one; they wanted him to father five children. But so far, he'd only had one child, Wang Anru, with his wife from the Yuwen Clan.

"Then you will stay home and live a good life with Ping'er," Wang Shouzhe said sternly, "What can a youngster at the initial stages of the Spiritual Platform level do in a sea expedition team? Enough, enough, Ruolan, your grandson is causing trouble again... His father is not at home. It will be troublesome, but please take care of it."

Wang Shouzhe was too lazy to argue further and directly called for Liu Ruolan.

As expected, upon hearing the situation, Liu Ruolan dragged Wang Shihao into the room and taught him a harsh lesson until he admitted his fault. She then sent him back to the Yuwen daughter-in-law and kindly smiled, "Ping'er, our Hao'er is just a bit wild, my apologies for the trouble he causes you. In the future, if anything upsets you, come and talk to Grandmother.

Go now, you should live your lives well."

"Thank you, Grandmother. Thank you, Grandfather." Yuwen Clan's daughter graciously thanked them, then supported the chastised man back to their home, thus ensuring a period of peace.

After his grandson and granddaughter-in-law had left, Wang Shouzhe also felt a headache coming on; this boy, Shihao, just never seemed to learn. It looked like some measures needed to be considered.

Alas~ being a family patriarch truly isn't easy.

...

At the same time.

Leaving Da Qian, crossing the vast Desert North Plateau, and heading north, one would pass through a frigid area before reaching a Non-Frozen Port.

Departing from there and crossing the vast Hurricane Ocean, one could arrive at another continent of especially vast landmass.

On that continent lay a very powerful nation—Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty.

Compared to Da Qian, Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty was stronger, with a more prolonged history, and its territory was many times larger than that of Da Qian. The lengthy epochs had not only granted it formidable strength and heritage but had also allowed it to develop a unique civilization.

Compared to the still-developing Da Qian, Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty was unquestionably a preeminent immortal dynasty.

Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty.

He Lan Province, South Mountain County.

In the county town, on the busiest street, there was a restaurant named "Stay Immortal Roast Meat."

This was a restaurant mainly focused on barbecued dishes.

The interior design of the restaurant was rustic and hearty, with tapestries depicting Fierce and Divine Beasts hanging on the walls, and colorful stone tiles covering the floors. Even the tables, chairs, and tableware were custom-made, resembling either leaves or bones, which offered a taste of exotic flavor.

Chapter 36: Miss Lici "Sweeps" Through the Immortal Dynasty _4

In the restaurant, the waiters, all bearing cultivation bases, moved lightly and swiftly, walking like the wind. Although most of them were only at the second or third level of the Qi Refinement Realm and used basic movement techniques, it was clear that they were all bona fide Profound Martial cultivators.

Near the entrance, in a cabinet, plates of fierce beast meat were neatly stacked inside an Ice Crystal Storage, looking succulent and translucent, inviting one's appetite. Next to it, another cabinet contained condiments for side dishes, spirit vegetables, and spirit fruits, all neatly organized.

The sign at the door was written in bright colors with several lines: "Special Promotional Offer! For the next three days starting today, our Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef is available in unlimited quantities."

Among them, "Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef" as well as "unlimited quantities available" are highlighted in bold, exceptionally eye-catching.

At this moment.

In front of the restaurant's counter, a naïvely charming woman was confronting the restaurant owner. Each holding one side of a beef platter, their actions seemed to have frozen in place.

The woman wore a long, goose-yellow dress, her face still chubby with baby fat, looking naively adorable, and was none other than Wang Shouzhe's grand-niece, Wang Licui.

Following her master, Master Yunyang to the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, thirty years had passed unconsciously. Wang Licui, now eighty-eight years old, still retained her youthful appearance that had not changed a bit over the years, still with that same naïve look.

However, her strength had advanced dramatically over these thirty years, and she had already broken through to the sixth level of the Tianren Realm last year.

Continuing at this rate of cultivation, it was highly probable that she would break through to the Purple Abode Realm before the age of one hundred and fifty.

The shop owner across from Wang Licui was a middle-aged man dressed in brocade clothes, wearing a head crown typical of the Frost Moon region and sporting a small mustache on his lower jaw, appearing quite shrewd.

"Owner, this is my Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef," Wang Licui exerted force with her hands, attempting to take the tray from the owner's hands, but unexpectedly could not pull it free, a look of confusion appearing on her naïve face, "Owner, why won't you let go?"

The shop owner looked at Wang Licui's slightly chubby face, his expression torn and helpless: "Grand Aunt, can you really eat anymore?"

"Of course, I can," Wang Licui nodded confidently.

"But you've already eaten twenty plates..." The shop owner was on the verge of tears, "If you keep eating, my stock of Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef will run out."

"But, the sign clearly states 'Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef available in unlimited quantities,'" Wang Licui blinked her large, innocent eyes, her face utterly guileless, "Are you saying that was just written for the sake of it, not to be taken seriously?"

The shop owner grimaced, grumbling internally.

It was true that his sign was worded as such, but each plate of Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef in his restaurant weighed three kilograms, and a typical Tianren Realm powerhouse could eat only four or five plates. Even those cultivating War Body techniques at the Tianren Realm could, at most, consume up to ten plates.

Eating more would mean the overwhelming vital energy in the spirit beast meat would accumulate within the body without proper digestion, eventually causing harm.

That was precisely why he dared to offer "unlimited quantities." Because even with an open supply, there was a limit to a cultivator's stomach; it was impossible to eat indefinitely.

Furthermore, his restaurant charged per head, with differing rates according to strength levels. The fee for Tianren Realm cultivators was significantly higher than that for Spiritual Platform Realm ones, and that rate actually included the cost of the Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef.

With this "unlimited quantity" gimmick, he had attracted a lot of popularity, and money was not short in coming.

But he truly never anticipated encountering a peculiar case like Wang Licui, who seemed unthreatening yet had a bottomless pit for a stomach, impossible to fill.

This incident had cost him dearly now.

After a lengthy stalemate, the shop owner finally let go reluctantly.

Maintaining credibility and reputation was utmost in running a business. After all, it was his gimmick, and begrudgingly, he had to honor it, otherwise, once word spread, his shop would cease to operate.

Wang Licui, bearing a platter of Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef, returned to the private booth.

In the booth, another girl sat, spirited eyes and pearlescence graced her features. Behind her, stood a human-shaped puppet emanating formidable majesty, clad in metallic armor.

Next to the table, five medium-sized wolf pups crouched neatly in a row, their blue eyes fixed on the plate of meat in Wang Licui's hands, continuously flicking their crimson tongues.

Ignoring their longing gazes, Wang Licui took her seat in the booth, telling the girl on the other side of the table, "Wan'er sister, go ahead and eat~ After you finish this plate, I'll go get more."

"Thank you, Sister Licui,"

The girl smiled sweetly at Wang Licui, then picked up the sliced Spirit Rhinoceros White Beef and started grilling.

This girl was a direct descendant of the Lan family of Suiyun state, named "Lan Wanyi."

Suiyun State was located in the western part of the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, with He Lan province and Mobei State between it. The Lan family was a Third-Class Prominent Family, one of the local powerhouses with substantial strength.

When Master Yunyang first brought Wang Licui to the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, their first stop was the Lan family of Suiyun, and they stayed there for over a decade with Wang Licui.

After more than a decade, that "friend" indebted to Master Yunyang for two chickens could no longer withstand and most politely asked Master Yunyang to depart smoothly.

Chapter 36 Miss Lici "Sweeps" the Immortal Dynasty _5

Master Yunyang, unabashed yet unsuccessful in his struggle, could only do as before, bringing Wang Licui along in search of the next opportunity.

What was different this time was that when Wang Licui left, in addition to the five wolf pups that had come with her to the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, she also brought Lan Wanyi with her.

Lan Wanyi, as a direct descendant of the Lan family, shared the rare devouring type of bloodline with Wang Licui, able to expedite her cultivation by consuming large amounts of Fierce Beast meat. Due to their similar bloodlines and shared hobbies, it wasn't long after moving in with the Lan family that Wang Licui quickly became best friends with Lan Wanyi.

Lan Wanyi's Bloodline Awakening Level wasn't as high as Wang Licui's, nor could she improve her Bloodline Talent simply by eating, but she still possessed a Talent of the Tianjiao Grade A, which was much stronger than that of an average Sky Pride.

If luck was on her side, it wasn't impossible for her to advance to the Divine Power Territory.

This time, she left with Wang Licui not just because she couldn't part with her newly found sister but also because she wanted to seek opportunities of her own.

With a Peak Purple Abode Realm Puppet provided by her family for protection, Lan Wanyi's safety was ensured. And so, they traveled along, eating as they went, and without realizing it, they had already been companions for over a decade. Lan Wanyi was skilled at grilling meat, and before long, steaming grilled meat was placed on Wang Licui's plate.

"Sister Lici, without us noticing, we've already eaten at three out of the five 'self-serve grill restaurants' here in Zhuan Xu City. Do you think those restaurant owners might get together again and blacklist us?" she said somewhat anxiously.

"It's fine, the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty is so vast, we've only eaten through three states. There are still several states we haven't been to yet, so we can eat for a long time. Once we finish them all, we'll think of something else," Wang Licui replied carefreely, "If all else fails, I'll take you out to sea.

When I came to the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, I saw giant Dragon Whales in the Hurricane Ocean. If we could catch one, we'd be able to eat for a very long time."

Lan Wanyi paused mid-reach for the meat, her eyes suddenly lighting up: "Is Dragon Whale meat tasty?"

"Based on my experience from eating so many Fierce Beasts, Dragon Whale meat should be very fatty and tender." Wang Licui licked her lips as she spoke, unable to hide her craving, "Such meat is perfect for grilling, sizzling as it cooks, sprinkle on some spices, and it would definitely taste amazing."

Lan Wanyi was tempted by her description, unable to stop herself from fantasizing about the delicious taste of Dragon Whale meat.

That's the great thing about following Sister Lici; she always had all sorts of ways to get her hands on tasty food. Sometimes, when passing through desolate mountains and wild ranges, she could find all sorts of strange yet delicious food hidden away in nooks and crannies.

For example, the idea of eating at "self-serve grill restaurants" was Sister Lici's brainchild. If it wasn't for that idea, with their appetite, the Immortal Crystals they had would've been long gone.

While eating, Wang Licui couldn't help but think of her own Master, feeling a pang of longing, "I wonder if Master's journey to the southern part of the Immortal Dynasty is going smoothly?"

A few years ago, Master Yunyang had already reached the Peak Purple Abode Realm's complete fulfillment. Now, having to take care of Wang Licui and save up resources needed for ascending to the Divine Power Territory, the financial strain was immense, forcing him to look for ways to make money.

Just recently, her Master took a job to escort a shipment of supplies to the southern part of the Immortal Dynasty, which had already taken him three months.

"Although the escort mission comes with certain risks, Master Yunyang's strength is formidable, so he should be fine. Plus, it's a job for the Wu Family of the Cold Moon, which offers a generous reward and is a rare opportunity. As long as it's safely delivered, he can earn a lump sum of fifty thousand Immortal Crystals as the reward.

With that money, we'll be able to carry on for a while," Lan Wanyi comforted Wang Licui, "Also, my father told me that devouring-type talents like mine, once promoted to Purple Abode Realm and having grasped their Small Divine Power, will no longer feel hunger as voraciously as now. I

suspect Sister's situation will probably be similar. By then, the pressure on your Master won't be as great."

"That's true," Wang Licui nodded, "After comprehending my Small Divine Power, I can directly absorb energy from Heaven and Earth Treasures, which is much more efficient than solely relying on consuming food for energy. But I've only recently begun to grasp my Small Divine Power; it's still a bit of a strain to use it, and it doesn't last very long, so I still need to eat to replenish my energy."

In fact, after having understood her Small Divine Power ten years ago, she immediately noticed the difference.

Before, she would get hungry very often, needing several meals a day, and she would become weak if she went too long without food. But ever since she gained her Small Divine Power, the frequency of her hunger returned to normal, and not eating large amounts no longer affected her strength.

Conversely, her appetite had experienced a stair-step increase. Now, if she wished, she could easily devour an entire Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Bull, as if her stomach had an extra space where the food could be stored and slowly digested.

The two women ate and chatted, occasionally feeding the drooling wolf pups beside them. Unbeknownst to them, they had already polished off over a dozen plates of Level Five Spirit Rhinoceros White Bull meat.

The wolf pups were all paid for at the beginning, so naturally, they had their share of the meat.

The restaurant owner, initially "worried" they wouldn't be able to eat everything, would "kindly" ask each time only to eventually give up completely and hid away, where he couldn't see them, letting them take as they pleased.

Chapter 36: Miss Lici "Sweeps" Through the Immortal Dynasty _6

After four hours, the two women finally felt somewhat full.

"Finally got a bit of a full feeling~~ Let's go together to [Yao's Air Transport] later. I want to entrust them with sending these wolf cubs back to the Great Qian Land," Wang Licui patted her belly, contentedly letting out a long sigh, "These wolf cubs are also growing up, and need to be sent back to the family quickly, otherwise they won't get familiar with us once they're grown."

Lan Wanyi, who was equally lacking in life goals, naturally had no objections.

After eating for a while longer and completely finishing the meat on their plates, the two patted their half-full bellies with satisfaction, and left the barbecue restaurant with five half-grown wolf cubs in tow.

"They're gone?"

Seeing the two women walk away, the reclusive shopkeeper finally breathed a sigh of relief and came out from the back room.

At last, he'd managed to send these two grand aunts packing. If they had continued eating, he would have begun to doubt whether they would have eaten him into bankruptcy.

"By the way, how many plates of Level Five Spirit Rhino White Beef do we still have?" he casually asked his assistant.

The assistant opened the freezer to check and immediately became stiff, speechless for a long while.

The shopkeeper was puzzled and peeked inside, only for his expression to freeze as well, "All gone? They're all gone?"

He immediately rolled his eyes back, almost unable to catch his breath and nearly fainted on the spot.

...

[Yao's Air Transport] Helan Province, South Mountain County branch.

This was a business operated by the prominent First Grade family of the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, the renowned Yao family. Through their unique Cloud Crocodile Flying Boats, they transported precious cargo in large quantities across various states and counties. Despite the expensive fees, the service was guaranteed.

Moreover, every so often, specialized Cloud Crocodile Flying Boats would travel overseas to distant and remote imperial capitals for offshore trade, bringing back local specialties with distinctive local features.

"Young miss, Spirit Beasts are living creatures; during transport, they require specialized cultivators for feeding and care, which means the transportation fees are ten times higher than for ordinary living creatures."

Inside the trade shop, a plump Heavenly Human Realm shopkeeper rapidly calculated the costs, mumbling incessantly, "These Silver Moon Grey Wolf cubs you have possess decent bloodline talents, so their food and drink along the way must not be stinted."

"Considering the long distance to East Qian Country and the half-year single journey our Cloud Crocodile Flying Boats must make, not to mention the customs fees when entering East Qian Country, our precise calculations come to a total of fifty thousand Immortal Crystals for transporting these five wolf cubs to All Returns Dragon City."

Fifty thousand Immortal Crystals?

Foodie group members Wang Licui and Lan Wanyi looked at each other, is this a joke?

Fifty thousand Immortal Crystals could buy a massive amount of Spirit Meat. Their master would have to risk his life on an escort mission just to earn that much money, and it was touted as a "generous reward" and "a rare opportunity."

What's more, with their appetites, when could they ever save up any Immortal Crystals?

"I, I don't have that much money," Wang Licui's eyes, flickering with disappointment, betrayed her sadness.

She had been with these five Silver Moon Grey Wolf cubs for quite a while; they were gradually reaching the age for taming. If they were not shipped home soon, the family's children wouldn't be able to tame them.

"Well, young miss, how much money do you have?" the fat shopkeeper asked kindly, "Our Yao family likes to make good connections, and seeing the potential and talents you both possess, we

could give you a discount. After all, our Cloud Crocodile Flying Boats only travel to East Qian Country once every ten years."

Then, Wang Licui pulled out her shriveled money pouch, and opened it to reveal a bunch of clinking copper coins and shillings. She looked up longingly at the fat shopkeeper, "Uncle, could I possibly owe you at first? I'll pay you back when my master earns money from his job."

"Yes, yes, fatty shopkeeper uncle, let's put it on the tab," Lan Wanyi also pleaded pitifully as she looked at the chubby shopkeeper, echoing the sentiment.

The chubby shopkeeper's face instantly stiffened.

These two young girls with fairly impressive talents and strengths, not even a hundred years old, should have been the darlings of their families at this age, so how could they be so poor that they clinked with each shilling?

Also, could you refrain from adding adjectives in front of "shopkeeper"?

A moment later, the chubby shopkeeper uncle "politely" asked them to leave.

"Fatty uncle, help us out, if we don't send it now, the little wolves are going to grow up," Lan Wanyi pressed.

"Greasy and chubby shopkeeper, I'll sing a song for you, please help sister Lici," Lan Wanyi begged with watery, large eyes, flashing repeatedly.

However, the shopkeeper's conviction was very firm, and his attitude was becoming more and more polite, "It's impossible to give credit. East Qian Country is too far, and you two are too poor..."

As they were negotiating,

A woman dressed in a white immortal robe, wearing a veil, walked into the shop.

She was tall and graceful, with a demeanor as cold as frost, especially her eyes, which were deep like ice, faintly shimmering with a light blue glow, extremely unique.

She seemed to carry an invisible deterrence with her that, from the moment she entered the door, in just these few short steps, her unseen aura had engulfed the entire room, causing an inexplicable heaviness in people's hearts, unconsciously arousing awe.

And this was still when she was not intentionally releasing her pressure; if she were to let it out, her aura would undoubtedly be even more terrifying.

It was evident that she must be a high-ranking powerhouse who had long held authority, if not a Celestial being in the Divine Power Territory, then she had to be at the level of Master Yunyang in the Peak Purple Abode, or else she wouldn't have such an aura.

Her eyes swiftly glanced at Wang Licui and the others, and a flicker of unusual light passed through her profound gaze, "Young girls, are you from East Qian Country?"

"Immortal sister, my name is Wang Licui, I am from Longzuo County in Great Qian Land. This is Lan Wanyi from the Suiyun Lan Family. You're so beautiful, and so powerful, Immortal sister, do you have acquaintances in Great Qian Land?" Wang Licui didn't hesitate a bit, immediately started sweetly calling her 'sister' and clung to her like a lifeline, in a way that was practiced enough to be pitiable.

When the fat shopkeeper saw the woman, especially the unique emblem of the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty on her flowy immortal robe, his expression instantly changed.

He quickly scurried over, bowing and scraping, explaining, "This Immortal emissary, those two young girls want to send something back to East Qian, but cannot afford it, it's not that our firm is troubling the customers."

"From DaQianLanzi?" The Immortal Dynasty woman, with a profound aura, seemed to show a hint of nostalgia, "Although not someone from Return to Dragon City, you could still be considered a fellow townspeople. Never mind, for the sake of being from the same hometown, I'll take care of this bill."

"Really? That's so embarrassing," Wang Licui's eyes lit up, and then she quickly came to her senses, declining with a suddenly disheartened expression, "No, let's forget about it, the shipping fee is too expensive, I can't trouble you with that."

"It's no trouble, I can afford this expense," the woman from Immortal Court said, finding Lici cute and kind-hearted, and thus felt a stroke of fondness, "It's not often that I meet fellow townspeople. After this, let me invite you two for a meal and talk to me about the recent situation in Great Qian Land. It's been many years since I've been back."

"Invite us to a meal?"

The foodie sisters Wang Licui and Lan Wanyi's eyes were full of delight, saliva nearly dripping from their mouths.

They had just come out to send a parcel and stumbled upon such a pie-in-the-sky stroke of luck?

Chapter 37 The True Foundation of the Clan's Development and Expansion! _2

The woman from the Immortal Court gave the pudgy shopkeeper a cold look. "What's the lowest you can go? You should know the consequences of cheating me."

She had plenty of money, but she wasn't foolish.

The pudgy shopkeeper's face turned pale as he kept wiping sweat from his brow. "Eighty percent off is the lowest I can go. That would be forty-seven thousand two hundred Immortal Crystals in total, rounded down to forty-seven thousand."

"No more than thirty thousand!" Lan Wanyi raised her hand and said, "Our wolf cubs are still small and can't eat that much."

"Grand Aunt, who bargains like this?" the pudgy shopkeeper said with a wry smile. "At most, I can knock off another thousand."

"Thirty-one thousand, that's the absolute limit."

"Forty-five thousand, I really can't go any lower."

"Lici, let's just forget it. When your master returns, we can send them back to East Qian Country together. I can also take the opportunity to try the cuisine of East Qian Country. We can bring back the Immortal sister's goods as well, free of charge."

"Forty thousand, that's really the lowest we can go. We're not just earning the shipping fee, we also have to pay insurance for the wolf cubs, right? If anything happens, our Yao family is fully liable."

"Thirty-two thousand... you did deceive the Immortal sister just now."

Lan Wanyi argued tenaciously.

Soon, Wang Licui also joined the haggling fray, claiming that her little wolves were so well-behaved and quiet that they won't fuss over just any food.

After half an hour of intense bargaining, they finally settled on a price of thirty-six thousand Immortal Crystals.

Indeed, while transporting and caring for Spirit Beasts was costly, charging five times the price of one wolf for five wolves was a bit excessive.

In the end, the woman from the Immortal Court swiftly paid the shipping fee. The price was likely quite low.

After settling on the price, there were a series of standard procedures to follow.

The Immortal Court lady's items were relatively simple to handle, only requiring a check of the variety and quantity before boxing them up.

However, Wang Licui's wolf cubs were more troublesome as they needed a professional Beast Tamer to evaluate and record their age, aptitude, strength, physical appearance, and health status before the cubs could be handed over to the Beast Tamer employed by Yao's Air Transport to be sent to the Yunqiao Flying Boat.

Registering aptitude and appearance was to prevent the young Spirit Beasts from being secretly swapped by the staff during transport, and it was also a way to be responsible to the customers. Checking for health conditions aimed to ensure that only healthy Spirit Beasts were sent on the Yunqiao Flying Boats, because if any issues arose en route, the blame would fall on Yao's Air Transport.

Wang Licui was somewhat reluctant to hand over the five wolf cubs to the Beast Tamer.

After all, she had raised them for thirty years and had grown quite attached to them. The sudden separation was a bit hard for her to adjust to.

"When you get back home, you must listen to the family, understand? Fourth Uncle Shouzhe won't spoil you like I do, so you must be smart and know whom you can provoke and whom you cannot," Wang Licui fondly patted each of the fluffy wolf cubs' heads, giving them a litany of advice, regardless of whether they understood.

As she spoke, she took out a piece of paper and a pen, quickly drew a rough sketch, and pointed at two figures on the drawing to advise the wolf cubs, "See this? This is Fourth Uncle Shouzhe. He's a fearsome Demonic King, and if you get caught misbehaving, he'll make you read books. Next to him is your Fourth Aunt; she's usually very gentle, but if you make her angry, you're done for."

The five nearly grown wolf cubs sat obediently on the ground, glancing at Wang Licui and then at her drawing, their five pairs of blue eyes blinking, uncertain if they understood.

Lan Wanyi, standing nearby, clicked her tongue in wonder.

My, my, to be caught and made to read books—sister Lici's family sounds terribly frightening.

And with that scribble that Lici sister drew, who could recognize who it's supposed to be from that picture? Let alone the five confused wolf cubs, even she couldn't manage it.

After a good while of incessant chatter, Wang Licui finally let go of the five wolf cubs with reluctance and watched them being taken away by the Beast Tamer, each with a beast ring.

However, Wang Licui wasn't of a sentimental nature; her emotions came quickly and left just as fast.

Once the cargo had been shipped.

The three beauties, one adult and two young ones, left Yao's Air Transport in high spirits and headed straight to the food street.

The pudgy shopkeeper waved goodbye to the three beauties, then turned back to wipe away the cold sweat and chuckled, "The young lady thinks she can outwit me? Just one Beast Tamer is enough to easily handle five wolf cubs—this is a huge profit."

Unfortunately, the shopkeeper's joy came too soon.

Little did he know that these wolf cubs had been pampered by Wang Licui for years and had become completely domesticated.

He could never have foreseen how much of a psychological shadow this shipment would cast on everyone aboard the Yunqiao Flying Boat, a shadow that lasted for many years as crew members would get headaches at the sight of wolf cubs.

A major loss.

...

As for the future, naturally no one could say for sure. But at least for now, both the shopkeeper and the three ladies were very happy.

The food street was full of incredible delicacies, and the Immortal Court lady didn't hesitate to let the two girls eat their fill.

It was a rare treat for the young ladies to be given free rein to eat as much as they liked, even after an elder learned about their appetites. Wang Licui and Lan Wanyi were thrilled, merrily eating their way from one end of the street to the other.

The Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty's livestock industry was highly developed, and many local delicacies made use of Spirit Meat and Spirit Vegetables. Although typically of lower grade, the prices were by no means cheap.

Chapter 37: The True Foundation of the Clan's Growth and Expansion! _3

Every time they passed a street stall, the stall would become empty.

The next stall continued to empty out~~

The girls from the Immortal Court would pay with Gold Coins from their pocket money, then with Immortal Crystals, and then they started to use small-denomination Immortal Crystal notes, followed by large-denomination Immortal Crystal notes...

Although she had been mentally prepared for those with devouring-type Bloodlines to be able to eat a lot, such an exaggerated scene still deeply shocked her.

That Lan Wanyi managed somewhat better since she was one of the more outstanding among those with devouring-type Bloodlines, but it was still just two or three times the appetite of normal devourers.

But Wang Licui was another story; her cheeks, still plump with baby fat, bore an honest expression, seemingly harmless, and her belly did not seem that big, yet it was like a bottomless pit, no matter how much she ate, it never filled up.

Just half a day into it, the food street's owners had all closed up shop early.

However, it seemed this was just the appetizer, as the Immortal Court girl asked if they were full, and Lan Wanyi said she was about half-full. But Wang Licui spoke hesitantly, twisting and turning as she said she was almost there.

Clearly, she wasn't full yet.

You should know that for those with devouring-type Talents, the measure of the strength of their Talent was their appetite. This little girl's appetite was truly a bit exaggerated, her Talent and potential must be far beyond her estimate.

The Immortal Court girl became intrigued, wanting to see where Wang Licui's limit lay.

She decided to bring them to a luxurious restaurant, where she waved her hand and ordered all kinds of high-end ingredients of Level Five and Level Six; she even served them a part of a Level Seven ingredient that weighed thousands of pounds—a piece of dragon leg meat.

And not just any dragon, but the leg meat of a Yao Earth Yellow Dragon.

"Wuu~ Immortal sister, you really are a good person." Wang Licui gnawed at the dragon leg meat grilled with cumin and chili powder, tears of gratitude falling, "I've lived for so long, and this is the first time I've ever eaten dragon meat."

Although she had eaten Level Seven Fierce Beast meat before, it was the meat of a giant yak.

And dragons, even among Level Seven Fierce Beasts, were very formidable, typically living deep in mountains and Daze marshlands. Even Cultivators of the Divine Power Territory making a targeted hunt might not succeed; either they couldn't find it at all, or they might accidentally let it escape.

Hunting wild creatures was never easy; many people came back empty-handed just from fishing, let alone hunting dragons.

Lan Wanyi, standing by, eyed the dragon meat with great craving.

But her stomach was already quite full, and the Level Seven dragon meat was a super nourishing item. She could only eat a little of the scraps that Wang Licui tore off for her. Not even having eaten a few dozen pounds, she began to feel bloated and uncomfortable, her qi and blood too vigorous and somewhat indigestible.

This girl's Bloodline is probably not ordinary at all.

The Immortal Court girl was also filled with astonishment, her gaze softening a little, "If you can eat, then eat a little more, if not, you can pack it up and eat it slowly."

"I can eat, I can eat, it's so delicious." Wang Licui devoured the dragon meat in large bites, her mouth greasy, her eyes blissfully closing, "What's your name, Immortal sister? Which Clan do you come from?"

That dragon meat was indeed powerful; with hundreds of pounds gone down, she felt the rush of qi and blood within her body, and the potential that hadn't budged in a long time was getting loose, seemingly on the verge of breaking through to Second Rate Supremacy.

And you should know, advancing from Third Rate Supremacy to Second Rate was a huge hurdle. She had been stuck at this bottleneck for many years, but only now did she feel the possibility of a breakthrough.

"My surname is Zhao, Zhao Xiqing is my name. I originally came from the Daqian Zhao Clan, but now I'm drifting in the Immortal Court." The Immortal Court girl couldn't help her own growing appetite, casually picking some of the Level Six Spirit meat from the table to eat, and teased, "Why are you asking this? Are you planning to repay me?"

"Yes~ My Fourth Uncle has great expectations for me, and from a young age, he always emphasized to me, 'Licui, if someone helps you, never forget them, and repay them if you have the chance.'" Wang Licui reluctantly put down the half-eaten dragon meat, cleaned her hands, and pulled out a small notebook, seriously jotting down Zhao Xiqing's name, her origin, and so on.

The thickness of that small notebook was considerable, and at least more than half of the pages had already been written on, indicating the number of "kind-hearted people" who had "helped" Licui was quite large.

And she also recorded every single one of them very carefully.

This was very good, following her Master's teachings.

Seeing her seriousness, Zhao Xiqing couldn't help but smile slightly, "When do you plan to repay me, Licui?"

"My Master said I must remember everyone who has helped me," Wang Licui solemnly put away the notebook, earnestly saying, "Once I become the Lord of Lingyun Holy Ground, I will repay everyone who has helped me, one by one."

"Pfft!"

Zhao Xiqing, who was sipping a clear drink, almost spat it out.

Luckily, she was quick to react and covered her mouth in time.

"Cough cough cough~"

After coughing several times, Zhao Xiqing regained her composure and, in disbelief, stared at Wang Licui, "You lazy girl, you sure are confident."

"It's okay, my Master said I stand a very good chance." Wang Licui boasted with a slight air of pride, "Besides repaying favors, I'm going to go back to the Wang family to thank my Fourth Uncle for his meticulous cultivation of me. Then I'll reveal my identity as the Sacred Master, blind him with astonishment, and while I'm at it, give him a pile of books to read thoroughly."

No snacks for him until he finishes reading."

Chapter 37 The True Foundation of the Family's Growth and Expansion! _4

"Do you know what kind of status the Sacred Master of Lingyun Holy Ground holds? In Da Qian, they're the only one who can sit on an equal footing with the Great Emperor," Zhao Xiqing said, shooting her an annoyed look. "Such a person, even in the Frost Moon Immortal Dynasty, can walk sideways with impunity."

"I know, I know, the Transcendent Void Realm is really strong," Wang Licui said earnestly, picking up the roasted dragon meat and biting into it voraciously once again. "Otherwise, I really wouldn't be confident about suppressing Fourth Uncle, the Great Demon King."

"..."

In Zhao Xiqing's eyes, not only does the master of Lingyun Holy Ground need to have an exceptional cultivation base, but they must also shoulder the significant responsibility of assisting the Great Emperor in protecting Da Qian.

If this lazy girl really became the master of the Sacred Land, our Da Qian might just be ruined.

Although she wasn't in Da Qian, she still had a lot of affection for it. At that moment, she really wanted to snatch the dragon meat from Wang Licui's hands, lest she end up supporting the enemy.

...

Ping'an Town.

This is a miraculous place.

In just seventy years, it has undergone earth-shattering changes.

Many of the common folk, the elderly who lived through it all, caught up with a good era. They earned substantial fortunes, married, had children, and continued their lineage. Despite a life of hardship, it was all worthwhile.

Through hard work, they fought out a wealth that generations before them couldn't have amassed.

Retired elders, while playing with their grandchildren, couldn't help but boast about their accomplishments, saying things like "I built the embankment of Ping'an Town," or "I participated in the construction of Shouzhe Pass," and so on.

But what these elders cared about even more was whether their children had made something of themselves.

As the Wang family's industries grew ever more powerful, holding key positions within them was no longer something you could achieve simply with passion, unlike decades before.

With the continual expansion of Wang Family School, and village schools popping up one after another everywhere, basic education has essentially become widespread within the Wang family's territories.

The domestic servants of the Wang Clan Main Residence, as well as the hiring standards for all major clan industries, have been clearly stated: starting from the year 3215 in the Great Qian Longchang Calendar, completion of eight years of Wang Clan's compulsory education has become a mandatory requirement.

This is a line that cannot be crossed.

As for the elite managers, or high-level technicians, they need to take exams for Wang Family's Clan School and go through specialized training and assessments in the relevant fields.

If their performance is outstanding, they might be included in Wang family's intensive training program, even to the extent of consuming precious Enlightenment Pills or Blood Refining Pills to

train them into Profound Martial cultivators, with the potential to become cultivators of the Spiritual Platform Realm in the future.

With that, they could leap over the dragon gate, moving from commoners straight up into the clouds, becoming cultivators held in high esteem. If they had the opportunity to reach the Spiritual Platform Realm, that would be an even more incredible feat.

You should know, in those ordinary Rank 9 Prominent Families outside, it's the family's Old Ancestor who is at the Spiritual Platform Realm.

Unconsciously, the importance placed on education has penetrated deep into the bones of all Wang family's subordinate commoners. In their homes, children who do well in studies are doted upon, while those who perform poorly inevitably face their parents' reprimands and beatings.

After all, if you're not good at studying, you're only destined to be at the bottom for life.

And if there's a child who can get into the main campus of Wang Family's Pearl Clover Academy—Zhuwei Academy—that's something to be truly proud of.

Being able to enter any of the major Refining Tool Elite Classes is like a fish leaping over the dragon gate; they could even study alongside the Wang Family's Direct Line and Direct Vessel heirs from a young age.

Old Sun.

An utterly ordinary old man.

When his parents were young, they encountered a severe flood and fled all the way to Changning Fort, where they were fortunate to be taken in by the Wang family, avoiding a fate of constant displacement.

During those most difficult times, his parents had taken part in river dredging, embankment reinforcement, and terraced fields development, even living in a temporary shelter for a while. But they didn't find it hard. Instead, they found every day meaningful, full of hope for the future.

Because the Wang family was truly different from other Prominent Families and clans; they actually regarded the common people as human beings.

On Wang family's lands, there had never been instances of deducting wages or bullying of commoners. Even if a manager dared to act up, they would be caught and punished according to clan rules right away. Hence, within the Wang family's territory, commoners always felt an extraordinary sense of security.

And even the weakest refugees, as long as they were willing to work, could earn enough to fill their bellies, promising a future to look forward to.

Through work, his parents met and married. As they saved money through hard work, they also took out a loan from Wang Clan Bank to buy a cement house developed by Wang Family's own construction, and soon after, Old Sun was born. That's how his family took root and settled in Ping'an Town.

Today, Old Sun's parents are long gone, and Old Sun himself has aged.

But the proudest achievement of his life is not the multiple houses he has accumulated in the invaluable Ping'an Town, nor is it the newly developed hundred-acre courtyard in Xin An Town. It's the fact that among his many children and grandchildren, one managed to get into the Refining Tool Elite Class of Wang Clan's Pearl Clover Academy—Sun Xiaole.

Just because of this, Old Sun walks out with his head held high and his chest puffed out whenever he strolls around.

Seeing him, all his old buddies are full of envy and warmth, flattering and supporting him at every turn.

Who can blame them? Old Sun's ancestral grave is clearly blessed with good fortune, having a grandson like Sun Xiaole who got into an elite class.

Chapter 37 The True Foundation of the Clan's Development and Expansion! _5

...

Entering the elite class was equivalent to joining a higher circle. Now Sun Xiaole not only shared a desk with a noble son of the Wang Clan's Direct Vessel, but they had also become good friends.

It was said that Sun Xiaole had recently graduated and applied to work at the Wang Clan's Artifact Refining Headquarters. With his academic record and performance, passing the application was a sure thing. Not to mention, he had already interned at the headquarters for several months before graduating, so he was already familiar with the workings of the Artifact Refining Headquarters.

As expected.

A few days later, a special messenger arrived with gongs and drums to deliver the letter of appointment from the Wang Clan's Artifact Refining Headquarters.

This letter of appointment was extremely valuable, signifying that Sun Xiaole had become a key trainee of the Wang Clan's Artifact Refining Headquarters. After a few years of training at the grassroots level, he would gradually move into the middle ranks, with a very strong possibility of becoming part of the managerial level as a Principal.

And the moniker "Old Sun" in the mouths of the villagers transformed into "Elder Sun".

...

Wang Clan's Artifact Refining Headquarters

The mountain range to the east of the Wang family's main residence had been developed into fertile land over a long period. Taking advantage of the mountain's natural terrain and through digging and construction, the area was turned into a series of staggered refining workshops.

The most core workshop of Wang Clan's artifact refining was located in Qinglian Fire Valley, while the workshops on the outskirts mainly focused on fabricating basic tools, instrument components, weapons, and so forth.

Having already gone through an internship, Sun Xiaole quickly adapted to his work at the Artifact Refining Headquarters.

He was currently in charge of an ordinary agricultural iron instrument workshop, which specialized in forging basic farm tools such as hoes, sickles, shovels, axes, and plows.

The workshop Sun Xiaole was responsible for only forged one item – iron hoes.

The annual output of agricultural tools by Wang Clan's Artifact Refining was enormous. Just the yearly turnover and demand for agricultural tools from Ping'an and Xin An towns were staggering numbers, and now the Wang Clan was expanding into the lands beyond Shouzhe Pass, needing agricultural tools at a rate that had skyrocketed more than tenfold.

Don't underestimate this mere iron hoe. For decades, the Wang Clan's Artifact Refining Headquarters had continuously improved the assembly line production of iron hoes, striving for perfection in output and quality assurance details. Today, it was vastly different from the handmade forging methods of most Prominent Families and blacksmith shops.

Through persistent efforts over the long term, the iron hoes produced by Wang Clan's Artifact Refining not only cost several times less than those of other Prominent Families, but they were also of better quality and yielded greater quantities. As a result, many merchants from other regions would directly make large purchases of "Wang Clan Iron Hoes" to sell elsewhere at huge profits.

That day, Sun Xiaole was, as usual, busily coordinating the production in the workshop. His life was fulfilling and his prospects were boundless.

With the support from the Wang family, he had started Qi Refinement in the Vital Energy Refining Realm at an early age and was now at Level Three, although he was only eighteen.

His only worry was that he was too popular.

Not only did the aunts in the same neighborhood constantly try to set him up with girls, but some female clerks from the Artifact Refining Headquarters also frequently cast him amorous glances, showing their affection.

However, Sun Xiaole currently had no interest in romance or marriage; he just wanted to work diligently, improving step-by-step to qualify for more important positions and live up to the Wang Clan's focused cultivation of him.

What's more, nobody knew that ever since his days at the Wang Clan Pearl Clover Academy, he had already set his heart on a goddess—none other than Miss Yinglei, ranked fifteenth among the Wang Clan's "Ying" generation. She was the same age as Sun Xiaole and also just graduated this year.

Fulfilling the Wang descendants' penchant for excellence, Miss Yinglei had entered the headquarters' office with distinguished results, becoming the assistant to the Artifact Refining Headquarters' General Manager, Elder Zongyao.

However, Sun Xiaole dared only cherish this youthful infatuation in secret. Miss Fifteen was a noble lady of the Wang family, granddaughter to the renowned Celestial being Elder Wang Shou Yong.

Between them lay a natural chasm.

He could only rely on his efforts, continuous efforts, to strive to get closer, to quietly protect her for a lifetime.

As Sun Xiaole conscientiously worked,

suddenly someone came to inform him to go to the headquarters' office, saying that Deputy General Wang Shichuan wanted to see him.

For a moment, Sun Xiaole was somewhat stunned. As a student from the Refining Tool Elite Class, he was quite clear on the management structure of the Artifact Refining Headquarters; there was one general manager and three deputy managers. Just that General Manager Wang Zongyao and Deputy Manager Wang Ping were from the authentic first generation of Artifact Refiners.

They needed to focus on Artifact Refining, as well as take charge of teaching Refining Technique internally.

At present, the real management of the Artifact Refining Headquarters lay in the hands of Deputy General Wang Shichuan.

Nevertheless, when summoned by a deputy manager, Sun Xiaole naturally didn't dare to neglect the call and immediately entrusted his work to his deputy before rushing to the office of the deputy manager.

He knocked and entered.

The first thing that caught Sun Xiaole's eye was not Wang Shichuan, but a youthful and pretty lady dressed elegantly. Her charming and genial smile made Sun Xiaole's heart skip a beat. Wasn't this Miss Fifteen, Yinglei?

But Sun Xiaole had an extraordinary composure, and he quickly gathered his thoughts, bowing respectfully to Wang Shichuan not far away: "Sun Xiaole pays respects to General Chuan."

Wang Shichuan, the son of Wang Zongyao, looked just as handsome as his father and was in his forties – the prime of his life. With a naturally imposing look, he glanced at Sun Xiaole: "Sun Xiaole, I remember you. The talented student from the Refining Tool Elite Class with a high overall quality assessment, you even surpassed two of the Wang Clan's Direct Vessel disciples in cultural courses. "

Chapter 37 The True Foundation of the Family's Development and Expansion! _6

Sun Xiaole hurriedly said modestly, "General Chuan has overpraised me, it's all thanks to the nurture of our family." He was included in the priority cultivation list and was to join the Wang's family general system, except his profession wasn't in the martial field.

"JingLei, the candidate you recommended isn't bad," Wang Shichuan nodded in satisfaction, "At least you proved reliable this time. If this kid didn't come from a commoner family, his achievements would probably surpass yours."

Wang JingLei stomped her foot in disagreement, "Sixth brother, when am I ever not reliable? I'm not like Wang Yingqi and Wang Ying Xuan, those troublemakers and brats."

"Alright, alright, you are relatively reliable, and your results in this graduation exam are also quite good, the top of your class," Wang Shichuan said with a smile, "I heard that Great-uncle personally praised you, saying you are a role model for the younger generation of girls."

"Of course, I've heard that sixth brother used to be at the bottom of the class, and only became determined to make progress after being severely beaten by four uncle."

"Oh, you sure dare to expose someone's shortcomings," he replied.

Listening to the two siblings joking, Sun Xiaole kept his head down, pretending not to hear. The gap in their statuses was too great for him to overstep bounds casually.

"Sun Xiaole, since JingLei recommended you, and your own professional knowledge is also quite solid," finally, Wang Shichuan said, "I have an important task for you, though it's slightly dangerous. Are you willing?"

Sun Xiaole immediately became serious, "I am honored by the cultivation of the Wang family and would not hesitate to go through fire and water."

...

Meanwhile, as the Wang family continued to develop and strengthen.

In the Zhuo Zheng Pavilion of the Imperial Palace in Guilong City.

One of Emperor Longchang's greatest pleasures recently was to observe the consolidated reports from all places, including those about Kang Commandery Prince, An Commandery Prince, but what he enjoyed most was the reports about the Wang family.

"Interesting, I didn't expect that small Ping'an Town could blossom so much under Wang Shouzhe. It seems I have underestimated him."

"How come I never noticed before that Changning Fort's tax revenue was so high? The contribution of the Wang family to the country is not small."

But as he continued to read, something seemed wrong.

Emperor Longchang's expression grew more and more displeased, "What audacity, that Wang Shouzhe really has some nerve. To think he dares to criticize my achievements while taking advantage of the emperor being far away, after a few drinks with Yingji. Talking about 'two parts pass, eight parts merit!'"

"What's this, saying that because I like to expand the empire but do not like to develop internal policies, resulting in the relatively poor state of the nation!"

"Listen to this, what kind of talk is that? I've spent most of my life fighting against West Jin and South Qin, but he doesn't appreciate that I'm protecting our home and country, instead wildly

criticizing me as a warlike monarch. I faced two enemies proudly and was feared, yet now I'm being judged by this ignorant child."

"Your Majesty, please calm your anger, calm your anger, Wang Shouzhe had no idea that someone from our side was beside him, that's why he dared to speak so recklessly," Old Yao said anxiously while sweating coldly, thinking to himself that the Wang guy really knows how to stir up trouble.

You drink if you want to drink, but why engage in such reckless talk?

"You don't know? Just because you don't know, you can recklessly criticize me behind my back?" Emperor Longchang's good mood was completely gone, and he was so angry he wanted to smash the table. "The greatest achievement of my life is that I have stood against two great empires and remained undefeated. If he's capable, let him come to my Zhuozheng Pavilion and point out my faults to my face.

What's the use of criticizing me behind my back?"

"Your Majesty, please calm your anger. Over the years, haven't you heard all sorts of private criticisms through your spies?" Old Yao hurriedly tried to appease him.

"That's different. I actually quite appreciate that kid Wang Shouzhe. Humph, it's like casting amorous glances at a blind man." Emperor Longchang was very angry, "Old Yao, pass my decree, summon that boy to the capital; I want to confront him face to face."

"Your Majesty, you mustn't do that," Old Yao advised earnestly, "We should just listen to these privately spoken words and let it be. Besides, that kid Wang Shouzhe did say some good things about Your Majesty."

"Yes, Your Majesty, please look. But if we speak of this generation of Emperor's sons, alas, Brother Long, why is each generation worse than the last. Although the current Emperor has various... he is ultimately a hero of great tactics, a wise and discerning sovereign, with very strong comprehensive abilities. A lifetime of minor mistakes, but no major faults."

"As for the two current Quasi Emperor's Sons, one is hypocritical and cunning, only capable of scheming and manipulating others for power. If he ascends to the throne, our Great Qian Land may end up in utter chaos, everyone living in panic, full of self-preservation, and falling into a state of internal strife."

"The other, well, he is just a simpleton who only knows how to work hard without any royal political tactics. If he ascends to the throne, wouldn't he be easily controlled by his ministers behind his back? To end up with a puppet emperor would be a great joke indeed."

"This is considered speaking well?" Emperor Longchang glared with old eyes, feeling like his lungs were going to explode with anger, "What does it mean to say that each generation is worse than the last? Or to suggest that my generation is just muddling through? What does it mean to make small mistakes all one's life without committing any major ones? What does it mean to have various...?"

"But ultimately, he did say some good things, good things," Old Yao persisted in trying to persuade him, "After all, they were just drinking behind closed doors and speaking privately, Your Majesty should not take it to heart."

"Humph! The only thing that sounds reasonable is indeed that those two Quasi Emperor's Sons are no good. The fortunes of my Great Qian Land are not good," Emperor Longchang said in annoyance, yet he also felt that Wang Shouzhe's comments about the Quasi Emperor's Sons had some truth to them, and lamented, "If Hao'er were here, how could that boy have the nerve to criticize?"

Questioning our Imperial Household's ability to produce excellent children."

"Right, has that boy pledged his allegiance to An Commandery Prince?" Emperor Longchang suddenly said, "Should we let An Commandery Prince listen to what that boy said, to sow discord between lord and vassal by criticizing the sovereign behind his back?"

"Your Majesty..." Old Yao was speechless. Was this something a dignified emperor would do?

"I'm just making a joke. I'm not so narrow-minded that I can't listen to a bit of 'advice'," Emperor Longchang eventually returned to his senses, not so narrow-minded to an extreme degree.

"An Commandery Prince hasn't left yet, has he? Summon that simpleton for an audience. I want to properly teach him the art of royal politics, so he doesn't let that 'sycophant' Wang Shouzhe have all the power, and secretly control the court politics behind my back."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Also, issue another decree to the Prefectural Governor Taishi Ankang of Longzuo County, telling him that since the national treasury is depleted, the tax rate for Longzuo County will not change, but in ten years the taxes must be increased by fifty percent. Otherwise, I'll replace him with a governor who is closer to the Kang Commandery Prince."

"Haha, Wang Shouzhe, Wang Shouzhe, you think you're so clever, don't you? I want to see just how capable you really are. Dare to criticize me behind my back? I'll make life difficult for you, infuriate you to death!"

Old Yao was immediately speechless.

His Majesty was planning a remote confrontation with Wang Shouzhe. This was boredom indeed.

Chapter 38: Expansion! Prosperity! The Fundamental Growth of the Wang Family

...

The Shouzhe Pass, built entirely of cement, was tall and majestic, resembling a meandering dragon lying between Xin An Town and the outer territories. From a distance, it looked immensely robust and magnificent.

This ten-mile-long pass was both the gateway for humans entering the outer territories and the frontline defense against the fierce beasts from beyond.

With it in place, the people inside the pass could live in peace.

With it in place, the common folk felt safe.

Shouzhe Pass was much wider than ordinary city gates, with soldiers stationed and patrolling atop the walls all year round. These soldiers included the town guard of Xin An, the Wang family's head of household, and also some hired from among the common folk who were specifically responsible for cleaning, organizing, cooking, and maintenance tasks.

The guards and the head of household capable of manning the ramparts were all well-trained elites, each brimming with energy and sharp-eyed, clearly tough individuals.

But atop the ramparts of Shouzhe Pass, the most dazzling stars were not these men but the Divine Might Cannons, resembling ferocious giant beasts.

Along the entire Shouzhe Pass, a Divine Might Cannon was mounted every thirty feet.

Stretching across the ten miles of the city gate, these cannons stood like steel giants, guarding the vast territories explored by the Wang family.

Although unable to defend against aerial fierce birds or other flying fierce beasts, they could block the majority of terrestrial fierce beasts, ensuring long-term peace inside the pass.

Beyond this, near some naturally isolating mountain ranges, a watchtower was set up on high grounds every several miles.

These watchtowers, constructed from reinforced concrete on the spot, were three-level small fortresses with underground shelters and other facilities.

Each watchtower's standard configuration included one Cultivator from the Profound Martial at the Vital Energy Refining Realm, and four common clan soldiers, forming an independent sentry team of five.

Their daily duties included patrolling and keeping watch within their assigned areas to prevent wild beasts and fierce beasts from crossing over the mountains.

They also had to observe the skies for any dangerous flying fierce birds, and if any abnormalities were noticed, they had to immediately launch a signal flare.

Different sizes and colors of flare represented different levels of danger.

Green flares denoted Level One and Level Two fierce beasts, orange represented Level Three and Level Four, and red signified Level Five and Level Six. As for purple... that naturally indicated Level Seven and Level Eight fierce beasts.

So far, beyond Shouzhe Pass on Xin An Town's border line, over the decades there had been one red, more than twenty orange, and thousands of green incidents.

There had never been a purple incident.

Once that happened, it would be a disaster for the entire Xin An Town.

The frontier camps set up every few tens of miles by the Wang family would respond according to the different danger levels and handle the crisis. Once a red signal appeared, they would immediately launch a sky-reaching signal cannon as formidable as a Divine Might Cannon.

At that time, a Heavenly Human Realm Elder from the Wang family or another Prominent Family stationed in Xin An Town would swiftly arrive to either kill or contain the fierce beast.

Even if unfortunate enough to encounter a purple alert, the Wang family had contingencies, but significant losses would be hard to avoid.

Fortunately, fierce beasts above Level Five, with considerable intelligence, would not recklessly invade human territories. Not to mention a Level Seven Great Yao, which knew well what the consequences of rampaging through human lands would be.

Establishing a new habitat for humans always carried such dangers.

It offered boundless opportunities for wealth and prosperity, yet was equally filled with endless crises. This was true for the Wang family and also for the commoners and Prominent Families who followed the Wang family to start new settlements.

In summary, these were Xin An Town's internal defense mechanisms, which over decades had become very well-established, gradually entering a phase of stability.

The frequency of wild beast and fierce beast attacks on the territory had been decreasing. In recent years, there had been fewer beast tides.

Beyond Shouzhe Pass lay the broadly defined outer territories.

However, over the decades, ongoing exploration and clearance activities conducted by Independent Cultivators, Prominent Families, and the official military of Xin An beyond Shouzhe Pass had made the area within five hundred miles almost free of fierce beasts, relatively safe.

This region, now primarily led by the Wang family's alliance of Prominent Families, was soon to become the focus of major development. This region also included a large body of water, Deep Taihu Lake, benefiting from rich soil and water resources.

Once developed, it would become a prolific producer of grains, fisheries, silk, and other crops, easily supporting a population of millions.

On this day.

A convoy bearing the Wang family's clan emblem slowly drove out of Shouzhe Pass.

The convoy consisted of more than ten draught animal vehicles, with the first two being lightweight carriages and the remaining ten pulled by Level Three horned Spirit Cows, being ultra-heavy cattle carts.

These ultra-heavy cattle carts, with their yokes, wheels, and weight-bearing keelbones crafted from Spirit Wood Material or steel, could single-handedly carry about ten tons. The cargo on the carts was covered with tarpaulins, leaving only the massive contours of pot-like goods just visible under the tarps.

The wheels rolled over the compacted earth roads of the outer territories, leaving deep ruts.

The convoy was escorted front and back by fully armed soldiers of the Wang family and clan soldiers.

Along the way, numerous Independent Cultivators, taking advantage of the Wang family's frontier expedition, made way for the convoy. They knew who truly ruled this land.

The lightweight carriages for passengers carried several young people.

Among them was Sun Xiaole, prominently present.

This was his first time leaving Shouzhe Pass, and he felt both nervous and excited.

Chapter 38: Expansion! Prosperity! The Fundamental Growth of the Wang Family _2

Outside Shouzhe Pass, there were countless vast heavens and earth, but also terrifying fierce beasts. For someone who had always lived in the safety of human towns since childhood, this was a rather unfamiliar territory, and the environment where one could encounter a fierce beast at any moment made him feel uneasy.

But when he remembered the mission he was carrying, Sun Xiaole's heart calmed down.

Before coming, he had already understood what he needed to do.

This time, the Wang family was lucky in their expansion beyond their domain; they had discovered a rare copper ore belt, and the reserves were not low. However, to extract the copper ore and directly transport it back to the Wang Clan's Artifact Refining Headquarters for smelting was not suitable either in terms of cost or the impact it would cause.

One must know, the value of copper ore was much higher than that of iron ore, it was a piece of fat meat dripping with wealth, and if the noise made was too great, it was hard to ensure that it wouldn't attract covetous attention.

Therefore, Vice President Wang Shichuan sent Sun Xiaole to oversee the construction of a basic copper refining workshop. They would then gradually scale up operations, smelting the copper ore on site into fine copper before transporting it back to the Wang family.

Sun Xiaole was a top talent and a graduate of the Refining Tool Elite Class. He was smart, eager to learn, and had a stable personality.

Although he was still young and lacked some experience, after the start of the large-scale expansion beyond the domain, all the talent that the Wang family had cultivated over the years had already been put to use, and they were now stretched thin. Therefore, reserve talents like Sun Xiaole also had to be pushed into action ahead of time, letting him grow while on the job.

There were also other caravans similar to Sun Xiaole's team.

Under the overall coordination of the Wang family, camps were being established one after another beyond their domain. The fierce beasts around these camps had already been selectively cleared, marking out safe zones. Waves of civilians were sent into the camps to remove weeds, rocks, and trees, level the ground, dig trenches, and toil for the future homes they were building.

The human race, as a group, never lacked resilience.

It was because of this spirit of overcoming obstacles and the ingrained earnestness and diligence that they grew and flourished bit by bit. Emperor Ziwei Xuandu was so, as were the ancestors of the Longzuo Wang family, and so was the old ancestor of Zhou Xuan's Ping'an.

Compared to the ancestors, including Wang Shouzhe, the younger generation of the clan was not much inferior. They too had their full share of passion, never shying from hardship or fatigue, not only carving out the Wang family's current grandeur but also laying a better foundation for their descendants.

It was the same for the Wang family, the minor Prominent Families, the commoners, and the tenant farmers.

The caravan led by Sun Xiaole had been traveling for almost twenty days before they finally arrived at their destination—Copper Mountain District. Along the way, the journey was fraught with danger, and they even encountered an attack by a pack of wild wolves.

Fortunately, the soldiers of the Wang Family caravan were formidable, ensuring the safety of the group and slaughtering the pack of wolves.

They were not the first team to arrive in the Copper Mountain District. The Wang family's vanguard clearance team, survey team, mining team, and even the construction team from the Wang family's first build had already left their footprints here. They had barely opened up a dirt road, built temporary camps, and even dug the ditches for water extraction.

The conditions were tough, but during the great pioneering period, whose conditions were not difficult?

Wang ShiKai, a scion of the Wang family's direct line, was also fighting on the front lines in the Copper Mountain District. Despite being very busy, he still took the time to greet Sun Xiaole, clapping him heartily on the shoulder and saying, "You must be my sister JingLei's classmate, Sun Xiaole? Work hard here, and if you encounter any difficulties, you can come to me for a solution."

Wang ShiKai, 25 years old this year, ranked twelfth in the "Shi" generation, was indeed Wang JingLei's older brother. He was also a handsome and valiant man, inheriting the Wang family's tradition of good-looking men and women, though he had become somewhat tanned from years of working outdoors.

This added even more to his robust and hearty demeanor.

"Twelfth Young Master, I will definitely work hard and not let down the cultivation of the Wang family," Sun Xiaole also said, having grown up listening to stories of the Wang family at home and feeling grateful in his heart.

If it hadn't been for the Wang family's support during that great flood, how could the Sun family be enjoying such good days now?

"Very well, once you achieve some success, I will pick out a nice girl from the collateral bloodlines of a few in-law families to propose marriage for you," Wang ShiKai encouraged him heartily.

"Thank you, Twelfth Young Master."

Sun Xiaole felt a pang in his heart, but he was also crystal clear that there was an insurmountable gulf between him and the goddess of his dreams, JingLei.

With JingLei's talent and level of cultural cultivation, even marrying into a simple 7th Rank Celestial being's direct line of a Prominent Family would be a disadvantage for her. Only a Rank Six direct line was barely worthy of her.

Moreover, with the Wang family's powerful development, marrying into a direct line of a Fifth Grade family was highly possible. After all, in the bloodline of JingLei's grandfather, Old Ancestor Shu Yong, there were three individuals of Sky Pride, making their bloodline as noble as that of any Fifth Grade direct line, if not more so.

From then on, Sun Xiaole settled down and immersed himself actively into his work. At the same time, he resolved to dutifully adhere to his responsibilities, intending to properly marry an earnest girl with whom he could share mutual support and affection in a few years.

Those beautiful memories would be kept forever in the deepest part of his heart. When he was old, he could occasionally take them out and reminisce about his life.

Sun Xiaole was just one of many young people like him who graduated from the Wang Family School's Zhuwei Academy every year.

Based on their specialty, academic performance, and potential, they would be carefully cultivated and integrated into the vast Wang Industry Group, to shine their light and warmth, becoming the enduring foundation of the Wang clan.

Chapter 38: Expanding! Strengthening! The Fundamental Growth and Prosperity of the Wang Family _3

The widespread land clearing outside the domain was like a raging fire, bringing countless opportunities and leading many onto a different path in life.

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Meanwhile,

The Wang family's sharpshooter vanguard team had already crossed the 6,000-mile mark from Ping'an Town.

This place had remained in its primitive state for untold millennia, and humans had not set foot here for who knows how long.

Of course, Wang Zongchang of the Wang family was an exception. As a scion of the Sundering Wind Bloodline and the one skilled in stealth and wilderness survival, he often found it more convenient to operate alone than in a team.

In a concealed camp,

Wang Zongchang was discussing the terrain map with Wang Luo Jing and Wang Luoqiu: "Fifth Aunt, Sixth Aunt. Just over that mountain range and lake ahead, I sensed the presence of a Level Seven Great Yao, which should be its habitat. We will rest here briefly and send a message for family support."

Level Seven Great Yaos were top-tier Fierce Beasts, and even the current Wang family would avoid them if possible.

However, the territory of the Great Yao just so happened to be situated on the crucial passage to the God Martial Army Training point for the Wang family, and the territory of the Level Seven Great Yao was vast, making it difficult to circumvent. Therefore, the Wang family had no choice but to eliminate it.

They had spent a lot of time and energy cleaning this place up along the way. Yet Wang Luo Jing remained light and indifferent, seemingly unconcerned. Wang Luoqiu, on the other hand, maintained a dust-free presence, every movement exhibiting vivacity and a commanding aura, full of a major figure's presence.

Purely from appearances, Wang Luoqiu had more of an emperor's temperament than An Commandery Prince, Kang Commandery Prince, or even a certain moody Great Emperor.

Of course, one couldn't delve into the disparity in strength.

Now 85 years old, Wang Zongchang had grown into a very mature and steady man after many years of independence. His every move unconsciously exuded an air of authority. Compared to his peers in Shangjing City, both his mindset and maturity were on a completely different level.

It couldn't be helped—the Dragon City was simply home to too many powerhouses.

In their eyes, anyone under a hundred years old is still a youth, and over time, it had become quite natural for these young talents to view themselves as still young.

This was how the environment determined the maturity of one's mindset.

As the saying goes, the children of poor families take charge early. At eighteen, Wang Shouzhe began taking over the family's responsibilities and fought for the life and death of the clan.

Wang Zongchang did the same, arranging everything cautiously and meticulously, and these past few months had passed without any major incidents.

As per the prearranged plan,

Wang Zongchang crushed a precious Message Jade Talisman. Such talismans, which could convey messages across thousands of miles in an incredibly short time, typically cost tens of thousands of Qian Gold. Not even the Imperial Household would waste them for normal communication.

Why not save up some money and foster more of the family's children, right?

Almost in an instant,

While Wang Shouzhe was in the courtyard telling stories to the children, the Jade Pendant hanging from his waist emitted a slight buzz, radiating a certain glow.

At the same time, a message reached his ears.

He narrowed his eyes slightly, then calmly finished the thrice-told Tale of the White Bone Essence, before letting the children—who had heard this story countless times—go.

The children cheered as they were liberated.

Joking aside, even the parents and grandchildren in their homes had grown up hearing these stories and had briefed the children about them long ago!

If not for the Demonic King's pressure, who would want to listen to these old tales?

In terms of interesting content, the current popular bootlegs like "My Classmate is a Dragon," "Li Yao Sweeping the Capital," "The Boring Life of the Young Clan Leader in the Academy," "The Troubled Life of the Seven Young Lords," and so on were truly engaging.

As for the few officially published books by the Wang family, such as "Shouzhe's Wise plan to Secure Anqing," "Guide to Life in the Foreign Region," "Three Hundred Questions about Refining Tools," which were exquisite colored collections, were left utterly unheeded.

The children's studies were strenuous enough; who wouldn't want something easy and fresh to read?

Half a day later,

Two flying carriages ascended from the main residence of the Wang family, soaring towards Shouzhe Pass.

Flying carriages are especially dangerous when used outside the domain as they attract attacks from Fierce Beasts—especially flying-type Fierce Beasts that relentlessly chase them.

Normally, a flying carriage would be slower than similar-level Spirit Birds, and tamed birds like celestial cranes are not adept at combat and tend to be timid.

This is why flying carriages generally only fly in safe regions.

But now, since both carriages were flying over a cleared area, it was relatively safe. Even if they accidentally encountered an attack from some kind of fierce bird, it would be the bird's bad luck!

There's no helping it when there's a group of heavyweights sitting in those two carriages.

Especially the one containing Wang Shouzhe, with an Azure Dragon on the left and a Seven-tailed Firefox on the right. Even if a Level Seven Great Yao bumped into them, it would regret it bitterly.

The flying carriages travelled at an extremely fast straight-line speed. After taking a few breaks in between, they had united with Wang Zongchang's group within two days.

"Anye, please ask your master to tailor a Formation with the main purpose of trapping the enemy," Wang Shouzhe instructed his great-grandson Wang Anye, "I've prepared all the necessary materials for setting up the formation."

Chapter 38: Expansion! Strength! The Fundamental Enlargement and Prosperity of the Wang Family _4

Wang Anye held Epoch in his hands, feeling the immense pressure of life.

He was only eleven years old and already had a quick-tempered fiancée, a Sword Spirit Master who was strict with him.

Every day, he also had to look after a dragon that liked to cause trouble, accompanying it to and from school.

All these were still manageable, but for the family to go hunting a Level Seven Great Yao and to take him along... At the mere age of eleven, was he supposed to bear the burden of his family's rise?

Under the watchful eyes of all the old ancestors of the family.

Wang Anye called out, "Master, did you hear that?"

As his words fell, Ji Wuchen, dressed in white clothes and white hair, looking ethereal like an old sword immortal, appeared.

He gave Wang Shouzhe a slight bow as a sign of respect, "Master Shouzhe, the materials for a formation capable of trapping a Level Seven Great Yao could cost no less than fifty thousand Immortal Crystals, right? Although some can be recovered, about thirty percent will be lost. Given your group's strength, dealing with a Level Seven Great Yao should be more than sufficient."

"Senior Ji," Wang Shouzhe also greeted him politely, returning the gesture, "We lack understanding of that Level Seven Great Yao, so it's better to be cautious. I understand Senior Ji's concerns, and here is a Treasure Pill, a Soul Return Pill, enough to compensate for the loss of soul energy for Senior Ji."

"A Soul Return Pill, are you really willing to give it to me?" Ji Wuchen suddenly became emotional, "Just to set up a formation, is it worth it, is it really worth it?"

The level of a Resurrection Treasure Pill had a significant effect on the soul. With this pill, his Divine Soul would be much more stable, and he would be able to use more soul energy afterwards.

It could be said, its value far exceeded the loss incurred this time.

"Naturally, it's for the sake of caution. After all, this is the Wang family's first time hunting a Level Seven Great Yao," Wang Shouzhe spoke indifferently, "Everyone here is our own people, and I don't want any mishaps to occur."

Our own people?

The Firefox ancestor smiled contentedly.

If it weren't for the consideration that the lady Liu Ruolan was present, she really wanted to snuggle into Brother Shouzhe's arms and act spoiled. Oh my, it was truly embarrassing.

Upon hearing this.

Ji Wuchen fell into deep thought and reflection, "If I had half, no, one-third of Master Shouzhe's caution back in my days, I wouldn't have ended up like this."

Indeed, if it weren't for his recklessness back then, relying on his high talent and strong power, how would he end up with only a Spirit Remnant?

After passing all the formation materials to Ji Wuchen, Wang Shouzhe watched him set up the formation while explaining the intricacies to Wang Anye, his heart feeling a rare surge of excitement.

The Wang family had hunted Level Five and Level Six Fierce Beasts over the years but had yet to hunt a Great Yao.

A Great Yao was said to be a treasure throughout its whole body.

Its flesh, rich in vitality, was very beneficial for Tianren Realm Cultivators and Purple Abode Realm Cultivators to compensate for the physical and mental exhaustion during cultivation, indirectly increasing the pace of their cultivation. This was especially true for those Cultivators who practiced War Body cultivation techniques; they benefited even more.

Its hide could be used for armor, bones for Alchemy, and even the blood was a great supplement. Some materials from scaled Great Yaos could be used to craft defensive or offensive Magical Treasures.

Moreover, a Level Seven Great Yao possessed Divine Skills, and it was rumored that after killing one, there was a chance of obtaining materials condensed with Divine Power, which could be used to craft treasures usable only by Purple Abode Realm Cultivators.

All these were valuable goods that money might not necessarily be able to buy.

Of course, no matter how good the goods are, they must be safely acquired. Considering his usual caution and that it was their first time hunting a Great Yao with no prior experience, how could Wang Shouzhe be careless?

The preparations made over the years had been quite thorough.

However, what exactly does the training ground of the Divine Martial Dynasty look like? What opportunities will he gain from this venture?

For this matter, Wang Shouzhe had been looking forward to it for over sixty years!

Chapter 39: Powerful! Shou Zhe's Endless Trump Cards

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Under the stimulation of the Resurrection Treasure Pill, Ji Wuchen used less than ten days' effort to properly arrange the Formation.

Truly worthy of being called "Sword Formation Dual Absolutes," the efficiency was indeed top-notch.

"My precious disciple, do you understand this Crazy Sand Illusion Formation?" Ji Wuchen admired the grand formation he had set up, and a satisfied look of pride appeared on his face, which resembled that of an old sword immortal dressed in white.

In fact, before activating any enemy-trapping formation, it must be made indistinguishable from the surroundings. Therefore, it looked empty, no different than before the formation was set up.

"Responding to Master," said Wang Anye with a helpless face, "Master, I've just started learning the basics of formation... Could you lower your expectations for me just a tiny bit?"

"Haha, your teacher of course knows you don't understand; I'm just showing off to you. The grand formation set by my 'Sword Formation Dual Absolutes,' how could ordinary people understand it?" Ji Wuchen stood with his hands behind his back, his white hair and robes fluttering with the force of his Divine Soul Power, exuding an elegant demeanor, much like that of an old Immortal.

When talking about ordinary people, he glanced at the Wang family members with his eyes.

The message was clear without words.

The expressions of the Wang family members immediately turned sour, except for Wang Shouzhe, who remained calm and collected.

Master... if you always show off like this, it's easy to get yourself killed. Wang Anye grumbled inwardly, then suddenly realized something. Wait a minute—Master has already been killed.

Sigh~ Great grandfather was right after all. Character determines fate. My master got himself killed mainly because he was too flippant.

Wang Anye, oh Wang Anye, you must take heed and not follow in your master's footsteps. It's better to learn from great grandfather, always be steady, and don't do anything unless you're completely sure of it.

While Wang Anye was reflecting on himself, he heard Wang Shouzhe's commanding voice: "Anye, take out the explosives from your 'Boundless Treasure Ring'."

The enemy-trapping formation was just one of the strategies; Wang Shouzhe's ultimate move was not limited to this alone.

"Yes, great grandfather."

With a weak movement of his Divine Sense, the Divine Tool Level Storage Ring that could fit perfectly on his finger spat out a large pile of explosives, stacking up like a small hill.

At the same time, the Boundless Treasure Ring, speaking in human language, said, "Anye, my little treasure, you need to advise your great grandfather not to stuff everything into my belly. This stuff is too damn dangerous; if it explodes, wouldn't this missy's soul be scattered?"

This Treasure Ring could talk, though it had the voice of a young woman.

It was very clear that "she" identified herself as a female.

"Sister Boundless, these explosives have been specially processed for safety and won't explode easily," reassured Wang Anye with patience, "In the future, I'll store more treasures inside your belly."

"Alright, alright, alright, I love storing various Spiritual Treasures and Immortal Crystals, lots of Immortal Crystals~~" The Boundless Treasure Ring was clearly very excited, "Just don't be like your teacher, who despite being in the advanced stage of the Divine Power Territory, is not only poor as hell but also keeps stuffing rubbish into me."

Ji Wuchen felt extremely awkward, being spoken about like this. Cultivating formations was indeed profitable, but it was also costly, so he really wasn't very wealthy. These two Divine Spiritual Treasures were originally passed down from his own Master.

While Ji Wuchen was still alive, he had often been mocked by the Boundless Treasure Ring, and he didn't expect to continue to be nagged at after death...

"Sister Boundless, I'll try my best," said Wang Anye.

He had gradually come to understand the temperament of the Boundless Treasure Ring. She was a very "gentle" sister, who just didn't like cheap things in her belly. She was happiest when filled with treasures worth a fortune.

"Our Anye, my little treasure, is truly strong, being able to store so many valuable treasures at such a young age," praised the Boundless Treasure Ring, liking Wang Anye much more than Ji Wuchen, speaking to him with a tone a hundred times gentler, "When you grow up, you'll definitely be able to collect even more Heaven and Earth Treasures.

Hehehe~~ Sister likes rich and handsome boys like you, I made the right choice this time."

Wang Shouzhe watched the Boundless Treasure Ring with envious eyes.

Its Storage Space was far superior to that of the Endless Abyss. The only flaw was that Divine Treasure Level items could develop Artifact Spirits, and over time, as well as through different experiences, these spirits would often develop unique personalities.

Encountering an Artifact Spirit with a disagreeable personality could sometimes be quite a headache.

If it weren't for concern about his face as a great grandfather, or the fear of being reprimanded by Liu Ruolan, Wang Shouzhe might have wanted to say, "My dear great-grandson, you are too young, and your Boundless Treasure Ring's Artifact Spirit is too mature. I'm worried you can't handle her. Come on, let me keep it safe for you until you grow up and can control yourself."

"Cough cough~ Let's all work together to bury the explosives at the core position," Wang Shouzhe, trying hard to suppress the thought of tricking his great-grandson, diverted his attention.

This Profound Martial world already had explosives, commonly used in mining to break rock—not exactly a rare commodity.

Wang Shouzhe's knowledge of explosives was quite general; he just knew the basics.

Therefore, although the Wang family's research institute had always been working to improve explosives, and indeed there were some results, their inventions were still far from modern explosives and their power was fairly mediocre.