

I Am Supreme

#Chapter 1 - Read I Am Supreme Chapter 1 **Chapter 1: Men Who Wield Swords, Command Brotherhood**

“Men who wield swords, command brotherhood!”

Yun Yang murmured, raising his goblet for a toast and gulped the crimson wine, his gaze cold and thoughtful.

He lazed on a chair, dressed in purple, under the orchid roof of the courtyard. His eyes seemed to be looking at the canopy of orchids, yet his dazed, faraway look was as if he was staring into another dimension.

His features were delicately sculpted; perfectly arched eyebrows framed a pair of deep black orbs, and a straight chiseled nose sat atop lips akin to a budding rose.

His face was a perfect piece of jade, with raven black hair tied carelessly on his head and a fringe which hung loosely, framing both sides of his face. His whole being exuded otherworldliness, the kind that was tinged with lonesome exclusivity.

His beauty was parallel to that of a maiden.

Even so, 99% of girls in the world would not have features as delicate.

Yet the combination of such features brought about a cold and distant feeling, like a deity above the clouds that was dismissive of mortal emotions.

Although he was rather thin, and his face was too pale, those added a melancholic charm instead.

Yun Yang seemed to enjoy repeating the saying, “Men who wield swords, command brotherhood!”

Then he offered a toast once more, as if inviting someone, and emptied the cup.

An unmistakable sadness swept across his face, with abysmal agony sitting deep in his dark pool of orbs.

Suddenly, his gaze turned sharp like shards of glass.

The piercing gaze came and vanished in a flash, but several blossoms of orchids in front of his eyes trembled and fell, withering before they touched the ground.

Yun Yang's gaze turned a little dull, wondering how long it would take before he could recover his own cultivation base¹. He had too many things to be done yet not a single ounce of his cultivation base remained.

Footsteps came from behind him.

"Young Master," an elder stood behind him respectfully.

Yun Yang did not turn his head, merely asking, "What is it, Lao Mei?"

The old man stood straight behind his young master in reverence. Although his young master was yet to heal from his injuries, his cultivation base was all gone and he could do nothing about it. His intimidating dignity and honor still could be felt despite his weak state.

It was a strange feeling, seeming to come from nowhere, but its existence was concrete.

"There are two matters." Lao Mei said in a brief manner, "First, the military had raided the houses of President of the Censorate² Wu Wenyuan and a few censors³ without notice. I've also heard that it was a direct order from Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan. Wu Wenyuan's whole family had also been captured while Wu Wenyuan himself was arrested, and is now held behind bars."

Yun Yang listened without saying anything.

It was nothing out of the ordinary – just a downfall of an influential official from the imperial court. This would not be worthy of Lao Mei's personal report so he knew that there was something more.

And Lao Mei would divulge the details.

"We've had our eyes on Wu Wenyuan for half a year now. This servant⁴ has made slight arrangements during the raid and found a secret chamber within Wu Wenyuan's secret chamber. When the officials left after the raid, this servant had personally gone over to retrieve what was in the secret chamber."

Yun Yang was not even the least bit curious about the fact that Lao Mei was able to enter the zone during the military capture of the imperial official, to find and retrieve what was said to be the most secure and obscure secret chamber.

Lao Mei continued, "There was an authorization tally⁵, a jade pendant, a medicinal pill⁶, and a beast pill⁷."

Yun Yang frowned.

Lao Mei quickly followed, “On the authorization tally, ‘the best time of the year is spring’ was written! On the pendant, it wrote ‘tenth of the first month’. The medicinal pill is a revival pill from Hall of Pills while the beast pill was a mystical pill made from a sixth grade mystical beast, the green-head hawk.”

“Mm... Wu Wenyuan is now being charged with... treachery, and is alleged to be involved in the War of the Nine Supremes at Tianxuan Cliff,” Lao Mei finished.

Yun Yang was still silent, but Lao Mei could see the obvious shudder when his young master heard the words ‘Tianxuan Cliff’.

Lao Mei felt the reducing temperature – a chill coming right from the heart permeating the courtyard, as orchids dropped without the existence of wind, forming a shower of petals.

After some time, Yun Yang said, “Bring Wu Wenyuan over, I’ll question him myself!”

With Wu Wenyuan now jailed in the Ministry of Justice’s prison, how could he possibly be fetched over?

Yet Lao Mei promised without hesitation and continued, “Young Master, I’ve heard that the military plans to pay homage to the Nine Supremes, with Wu Wenyuan and a thousand heads of the betrayers.”

Hearing ‘Nine Supremes’, Yun Yang paled, his heart panged as if stabbed with a dagger. He said, “I have my ways.”

Lao Mei replied, “Yes.”

“What’s the second matter?” Yun Yang then asked.

“It’s that... we have no more money.” Lao Mei said awkwardly, “We still have ten thousand silver taels, but my estimation tells me that they can only last us till tomorrow night.”

Yun Yang nodded, saying, “I understand.”

“Lunch is ready.”

“Got it.”

Lao Mei then went away.

A sliver of malice surfaced in Yun Yang’s expression, “Year! The best time of the year is spring! Tenth of the first month... You guys are finally coming out?”

A faint smile appeared.

It was one that would frighten anyone who saw it, as the faint smile was wicked and murderous, as if haunted with souls of the unrest!

The dining table was full of mystical beasts' meat, they were aromatic but too much to go around.

There were at least 40 to 50 catties⁸ of meat.

Yun Yang sighed and began to eat.

Lao Mei turned his head away with a cough.

This was a daily moment that he was most reluctant to watch – his usually elegant young master who seemed to come out from a painting, had to finish so much meat alone!

Although his meal etiquette was impeccable, there were still...at least 50 catties of meat!

How big of an appetite was needed to consume them all?

His young master's appetite had increased to an insane amount ever since he came back bearing injuries a year ago.

Each of his meals must be served with at least several dozen catties of mystical beasts' meat, and each serving of meat for a meal would cost 8 thousand taels of silver.

This was unsustainable, especially on top of other large expenditures.

What really happened to his young master?

Just as he was engrossed in his thoughts, his young master spoke, "Send invitations to Ma, Liu, Zhang, Qin, and Ling. I'll host a banquet tonight at White Cloud Restaurant."

The corner of Lao Mei's lips quivered before he said, "Yes."

Soon after, Yun Yang ate the last piece of meat and swallowed the revival pill from the Hall of Pills easily, before popping the mystical pill made from the seventh grade mystical beast into his mouth as well.

Just the value of the last two items alone were already close to being priceless.

"Just about full," Yun Yang said.

The corner of Lao Mei's lips quivered a bit more violently.

The invitation had evoked furious wails in the courtyards of all seven different young masters!

"I'm not attending!"

"I have no money!"

"Whoever goes is a son of a b*tch!"

"Bastard, a banquet again? Oh my god...how could this be?"

"Oh god, oh earth, kill him with a lightning strike please... this vampire... he hosts a banquet the very moment I have money..."

"Father, give me some money, Yun Yang is hosting a banquet again..."

"...F*ck."

Yun Yang went on his way as night came.

Lao Mei followed him, with cautious steps.

Yun Yang's robe seemed to change colors under the rays of the sunset; cold and distant in black with hints of mysterious navy when he walked, yet there seemed to also be a glimmer of elegant purple.

His stroll on the street was elegant, yet naturally at ease.

His pace was slow as his internal injuries caused burning agony within him with each step he took, but a smile hung on his lips regardless.

It seemed that the searing pain allowed him to remember something, allowing him to imprint it in his mind. Only then would he feel better. Lao Mei, who was behind him, looked at him, feeling the otherworldliness of his young master.

White Cloud Restaurant was the most luxurious restaurant in the Empire of Yutang's capital, Tiantang City.

The workers of the restaurant were rather surprised.

Seven young masters who dressed lavishly were in the hall, all of them regular patrons of White Cloud Restaurant. There was never a moment that they visited without much joy and pride, but this time round...

All seven young masters wore the same haughty look, some sighing while some cussing; discontent filling the air...

What happened?

Just as the workers were wondering, a shadow had already stood by the door.

Everyone widened their eyes in amazement when a lantern light illuminated the person's face.

Only half of his face was lit up by the light, yet it was enough to stir marvel within all that were present.

A few waitresses lowered their heads bashfully, eyes radiating and hearts thumping, with their cheeks flushing a rosy pink.

This young master... is really handsome! If only I could...

The figure by the door sauntered in, with his robe in all sorts of elegance and mystery, with the ever-changing dark purple and navy.

"Haha, all my good friends came indeed." Yun Yang smiled, "Please, please enter. We haven't met in a long time, we must have a good round of drinks this time round."

One of the young masters then said with gritted teeth, "Young Master Yun, there's no need for drinks. Let's be straightforward, how much do you want this time?"

Yun Yang smiled as he tilted his head, replying in a friendly manner, "Why, Young Master Ma, are you not honoring or even obliging me? Not even having a sip, are you?"

Young Master Ma paled, quickly defending himself, "No, no, not at all. Who dares disregard Young Master Yun? Haha..."

As he spoke, he kept signaling others with his eyes.

"Right, right. Young Master Yun's reputation is higher than the sky. Drink, we must drink." The few young masters nodded in agreement, with forced smiles and humorless laughter.

Yun Yang smiled gently, "If so, please."

"You first!"

"Please!"

The young masters replied in an equally eager manner, walking upstairs harmoniously but when they turned around, all their faces were close to tears...

God, drinking this time? There was no such pleasant treatment the last time...

They wondered how much this goblet of wine would cost...

Everyone sat in their respective seats; Lao Mei stood behind Yun Yang, with a straight and unmoving face.

"A long time ago, there lived a rabbit. Once, it got drunk and actually assaulted a bear..." Yun Yang joked in a light tone. The joke was not even the least bit comical, but all seven young masters roared in laughter as if they had heard the world's most hilarious joke.

"Young Master Yun, this is the ultimate joke... Hahaha, I'll live depending on this joke for the next half of the year..."

"Ah, the laughter, my stomach hurts..."

Yun Yang nodded smiling, "Looks like everyone welcomes me, huh?"

"Of course!" Young Master Zhang spoke quickly, "If anyone failed to welcome Young Master Yun, that'd be really... really tactless!"

All the other young masters nodded like pecking chickens. "That's right, that's right. Anyone who doesn't welcome Young Master Yun is a bastard."

Their eyes met, all of them thinking, "Damn it, all six of you are bastards! Me too... Anyone who welcomes this character... that person is a bastard!"

Wine and dinner was served.

Yun Yang coughed and said, "Since all my brothers are here, Yun Yang has something to say, but he is also quite embarrassed..."

Young Master Ma spoke, close to tears, "Young Master Yun, please speak."

"Yes, since everyone welcomes me so much, I'll be straightforward then." Yun Yang chuckled abashedly and continued, "I'm strapped for silver taels recently, so I'd like to... seek for a way out of this, possibly with the help of you guys."

All seven young masters' expressions turned bitter, "How much would Young Master Yun need?"

Yun Yang looked at the dishes on the table and exclaimed, "The meal today is not cheap..."

Before he finished, Young Master Qin had already interrupted him, "It's just a meal, how can we let Young Master Yun spend on us? Let me do the honors!"

Yun Yang nodded, "Young Master Qin is indeed sensible, I'll be disrespectful if I decline."

Young Master Qin's face was sour, "Oh, don't mention it, we're all brothers."

"Mm, I told a joke before the meal. Everyone felt that it could last for a year's worth of joy." Yun Yang said, "I don't need much this time, 7 million silver taels. I think, that would last till the next joke..."

All seven young masters were ashen-faced.

7 million taels? 1 million taels per person?

What joke would be worthy of this much silver taels?

Young Master Ma spoke with a frown, "Young Master Yun, it's not that I don't want to help you out, but currently... the family business is not doing so good, each branch is suffering losses..."

Before he could finish, Yun Yang smiled at him, "2 million taels of silver from you."

"I..." Young Master Ma had his expression frozen, "This..."

"Is 2 million taels too little?" Yun Yang continued, "Then 3..."

"Not at all, not at all..." Young Master Ma interrupted him immediately, "2 million taels it is then. Young Master Yun, let's make a toast."

He gulped the wine as soon as he raised the goblet, the wine tasting bitter in his mouth.

He felt stupid. It was 1 million taels, why did he say anything more?

The other six people looked at him sympathetically, with a gloat.

Damn! Speak more, would you?

"Young Master Ma is just the kind of friend I like, forthright and noble!" Yun Yang complimented, "Who would think such friends are too many to have?"

Young Master Ma looked like he had just gobbled down feces, while the other six relished in his expression.

“Then, my 6 other brothers, I don’t think you would think that 1 million taels would be too little?” Yun Yang asked chuckling.

“Not little, not one bit little,” they said, exasperated.

This joke today was expensive.

They knew it would cost them an arm and leg to attend this time, but nobody would have known that it was much more merciless than the previous times!

Translator Notes

1 Cultivation base (修为 xiū wèi): the possessed Qi of a cultivator by practicing and/or cultivating.

2 President of the Censorate (左都御史 zuǒ dōu yù shǐ): the Censorate was a high-level supervisory agency in ancient China headed by two Presidents, another of which was called 右都御史 (yòu dōu yù shǐ).

3 Censors (御史台官员 yù shǐ tái guān yuán): officials of the Censorate.

4 This servant/laonu (老奴 lǎo nú): literally means old slave; used as first person pronoun to humbly refer to oneself.

5 Authorization Tally/Fu (令牌 lìng pái): a tally made of bamboo, metal (gold, silver, bronze) or jade used as a proof of authorization

6 Medicinal pill (丹药 dān yào): miracle drug/medicine with various effects, often for immortality, boosting cultivation, antidote, etc.

7 Beast pill (兽丹 shòu dān): miracle drug/medicine with various effects, often for immortality, boosting cultivation, antidote, etc. with beasts as one of its ingredients.

8 Catty (斤 jīn): traditional Chinese unit of mass; 1 catty = 500 grams.

Chapter 2: Blood Over Four Seasons

It was a fruitful trip for Yun Yang.

He exited the restaurant joyously as seven other young masters escorted his leave, "Take care, Young Master Yun. Let's meet again next time..."

The seven people finally let out a sigh of relief after losing sight of Yun Yang's figure.

"I'll eat! Eat all I can!" Young Master Ma gritted his teeth. "How much do I have to eat to get back my 2 million silver taels?"

The other six young masters rolled their eyes, reveling in his pain, as there was at least someone unluckier than they were!

Merely thinking about it made them feel delighted. "Come, come, let's not return before we're drunk! Boss, serve your dishes! Damn it, I'm going to eat up the portion I deserve!"

Then, they entered the restaurant once more.

Young Master Qin who was footing the bill, paled and exclaimed, "You guys want to overstuff your stomachs? Get out!"

He scurried in to stop them.

...

Lao Mei followed Yun Yang with his arms full of newly acquired wealth, but the questions in his head were more than the fortune he had in his hands.

All these seven young masters were insolent brazen characters who did nothing good, so why were all of them so obedient? Just this year itself, they have already been blackmailed twice by his young master, let alone the years before.

What kind of authority did his young master have on them?

"Use the 6 million taels in the few places generously." Yun Yang instructed as he walked, "You know what to be cautious of."

Lao Mei replied seriously, "Don't worry, young master. I understand."

Yun Yang nodded.

As they spoke, they had already arrived at the gates of Residence of Yun.

Yun Yang lifted his head to look at the four words on the metal plate, smiling in deprecation before he entered.

'Cloud Transcending the Heavens1'.

The golden words hung above the entrance of Residence of Yun. They were personally written by the current emperor; an ultimate sign of respect towards Marquis² Yun, that very much resembled a dragon.

The doors closed.

Far away, some place outside the residence, a person's voice could be heard chanting, "Nine Supremes of Yutang, heroes of the world, the nation mourns, warrior souls sent, ninth of the third month, knights by the altar, behead the cunning and wicked, homage to the souls of heroes, the souls of warriors shall forever be, their great spirits shall forever remain..."

Countless of heavy hearted people were out; officials, military commanders, soldiers, civilians alike... Everyone was heading towards the flower and incense shops...

All candles and incense were sold out that afternoon in Tiantang City.

Faint sobs arose.

Today was the eighth of the third month. Tomorrow would be the day to pay tribute to the heroic souls.

Yun Yang leaned against the door of Residence of Yun, listening to the rise and fall of the chants in agonized longing.

"Nine Supremes shall forever be!"

Yun Yang spoke softly, his eyes determined, "Because I'm still here!"

...

Residence of Yun.

Secret Chamber.

Yun Yang was dressed in a purple robe, standing and watching Wu Wenyuan in front of him with crossed arms. A murderous glint flashed across his orbs as he spoke softly, "Censor Wu, I've long heard of your name, but never had the chance to meet you. Hence, I especially invited Sir³ Wu over today to have a good chat."

Standing opposite him dressed in a prisoner's uniform was Wu Wenyuan. He chuckled, "Young Master Yun, I've only thought of you as the young master of Marquis of Heavenly Clouds⁴, but never paid any attention to you before. It looks like you're one unpredictable individual in the Empire of Yutang."

He laughed, "To have easily brought me here from the prison gates, Young Master Yun seems to have exceptional tactics."

Yun Yang looked at the President of the Censorate. He could see no hint of nervousness nor fear in the latter's eyes.

This was a person prepared for death.

Yun Yang made a decision in his heart and briefly smiled, "Just simple methods, please excuse them."

Wu Wenyuan spoke, "I wonder what it is that Young Master Yun wants to talk to me about, to have brought me out here from prison?"

Yun Yang smiled casually, "I'd like to play a game with Sir Wu."

"What game?" Wu Wenyuan questioned.

"Hmm, a game of asking questions." Yun Yang laughed. "You'll ask me a question and I'll ask you one in return."

Wu Wenyuan chuckled as well, "You may be able to answer my questions but I may not want to answer yours."

Yun Yang smiled, speaking gently, "According to my knowledge, Sir Wu's entire family has been captured, including your old mother, your wife, two of your consorts, your three sons and a daughter."

Wu Wenyuan's gaze turned cold, "What are you trying to say?"

Yun Yang continued gently, "Sir Wu has already dismissed life and death, of course you shan't need to care about anything anymore. It's just... would Sir Wu dismiss your family's lives as well?"

Wu Wenyuan narrowed his eyes. "You mean...?"

Yun Yang said lightly, "If you answer my first question, I can grant you an easy death. This is the first bonus."

Wu Wenyuan said mockingly, "Would you let me live even if I didn't answer any of your questions?"

Yun Yang lifted his head slightly. "How you die matters, Sir Wu must understand this too. If you don't answer my questions, not a single family member of yours will live, but you, Sir Wu, you'll have to live forevermore right here."

He grinned, revealing a row of pearly whites. “Sir Wu, what do you think?”

Wu Wenyuan was prepared to die. but he still had shivers running down his spine.

To live forevermore...

This auspicious term of longevity was connoted with a sickening dread coming from Yun Yang. Of course Wu Wenyuan could not fathom how he could ‘live forevermore’.

He was silent for a moment before saying, “Did you mean that my family can still live?”

Yun Yang replied, “Naturally. Answering my second question guarantees your wife’s life, the third question is for your mother’s life... The fourth, your daughter. The fifth question, guarantees the life of your least favorite youngest son, and the last question, your entire family – except you – can live, and live as free men that is.”

Wu Wenyuan closed his eyes in anguish. “And if I don’t answer one of the questions?”

Yun Yang answered easily, “For example, if you don’t answer the fourth question, I’ll let your daughter live, but in a brothel. And I’ll make sure each customer knows she’s Sir Wu’s daughter. Hmm, each question represents one person in your family.”

Wu Wenyuan glared with widened eyes as he hissed, “You’re vicious!”

Yun Yang smiled. “It’s not me, it’s you. It’s your refusal to cooperate that has led to such a tragedy. Instead, as a son, a husband, and a father, you could have provided them with a better living environment.”

Wu Wenyuan shut his eyes, despair filling his heart.

His preparation to succumb to his death vanished without a trace.

Yun Yang had gotten his Achilles’ heel right when he spoke.

“Young Master Yun indeed.” Wu Wenyuan smiled dryly.

“What do you want to know?”

Yun Yang placed both his arms behind him and spoke softly, “The first question, the best time of the year is spring. This is a good saying, but to uncover the meaning within, I’d like Sir Wu to explain further.”

Wu Wenyuan’s face was of defeat, he seemed to be struggling for a while before he replied, “It’s the Four Seasons Tower... four seasons in a year. This means to have Hall of Spring take action...”

Yun Yang nodded. "Very well, as a bonus for answering this, you can die with ease now. Second question – tenth of the first month, what does it mean?"

"I'm the tenth of the first month." Wu Wenyuan had his eyes closed, as he answered listlessly, "Each season of the Four Seasons Tower has three halls; each hall is named after a month and contains thirty people, from the first to the thirtieth."

"Congratulations, your wife stays alive." Yun Yang continued with a grin, "Third question, who's Mr. Nian5?"

Wu Wenyuan met Yun Yang's eyes and said, "I don't know."

Yun Yang frowned, staring into the man's eyes for some time before relenting, "Okay, let me change the question, who's the head of the Hall of Spring?"

"I don't know that either." Wu Wenyuan laughed humorlessly, "You really don't have to keep asking me this. We've been using a single-way contact all along so nobody knows who the other party is. I don't even know who is the ninth and eleventh of the first month, let alone the head of the hall!"

Yun Yang exhaled, he did not look pleased.

"The President of the Censorate in the imperial court is but only a day in the four seasons of the year without any duties... Four Seasons Tower, what a colossus!"

Yun Yang chortled but the chill within gave Wu Wenyuan goosebumps.

"Since you don't know anything..." Yun Yang went on with a frown, "Then, who are the people involved in ambushing the Nine Supremes at Tianxuan Cliff during spring last year?"

Just hearing about the ambush on the Nine Supremes at Tianxuan Cliff was enough to crack a spasm on Wu Wenyuan's facial muscles. "I'm only a planted agent, the one responsible for implementing the plan has always been the head of Hall of Spring. I don't know who's involved."

Yun Yang nodded. "Other than you, there must be other planted agents. Are they from the military?"

Wu Wenyuan answered, "The ninth and eleventh who've contacted me felt like military generals, but I don't know their exact positions and I'm not sure of it either."

Yun Yang continued, "Alright, I've finished asking my questions. You can begin asking me now, should you have any."

Wu Wenyuan shuddered before asking louder, "Why do you only ask these questions? Since you've asked about the incident at Tianxuan Cliff, you should have more to ask!"

Yun Yang answered coldly, "Because I know the answers to the other questions. Besides, if I go on asking and you manage to successfully answer, I'll have to release your son, and I'm not willing to do so."

Wu Wenyuan was angered and shouted, "But you've already asked me four questions!"

His anger was met with a flat tone, "You didn't manage to answer the last two questions, so I'll be kind and count that as you answering one. Thus, in total, you've answered only three of my questions. The first question grants you an immediate death, the second question lets your wife live, and the third saves your mother. Don't worry, leave that all to me!"

Wu Wenyuan's body went limp; hopelessness evident in his heart.

This person gave him hope by betting on life & death questions, but cut it off at the most crucial moment – the most important person whom he cared the most about, was still unable to escape his fate of dying.

He looked at Yun Yang's fiendish expression and asked abruptly, "Who are you really?"

An extreme grief swept across Yun Yang's face as his gaze stayed frozen in midair while he slowly uttered word by word, "I am Supreme Yun!"

I am Supreme Yun!

Ever since his last battle and his return to Tiantang City with severe injuries both physically and emotionally, an utmost grief and pain filled his entire being each time he thought of his own identity.

He could finally utter these four words by himself after a year!

Because I've found the first clue, I can finally have a slight wave of peace when I think of my brothers.

Wu Wenyuan's face was of intense shock, looking at Yun Yang, dumbfounded. The shock had rendered him speechless. He could only hear Yun Yang continue proclaiming word by word, "I am... Supreme Yun of the Nine Supremes!"

"You didn't die?!" Wu Wenyuan hissed, "You've died!"

A strange expression appeared on Yun Yang's face; his voice agonized, "The Nine Supremes will never die!"

Wu Wenyuan snickered distractedly, “So be it, so be it... You haven’t died...”

He whispered the line to himself a few times, his eyes losing glow and his soul seemed to have left him. “Who would have known... the central figure of the Nine Supremes is actually alive... This, is this fate?”

Yun Yang’s face was distant but his gaze was as deep as the ocean.

With such pools of darkness, no one could see what a rollercoaster ride his inner thoughts were experiencing.

“Sink the clouds in the sky, whirl the winds on the earth, startle the lightning and thunder, secure the vault of heaven.” Wu Wenyuan murmured, “the golden ray shines, the dragon rises and soars up high, to infinity it achieves, prairie fire burns, traces of water lost to blood of the heroes, and for eternity it nourishes! Nine Supremes, there’s still someone alive...”

Yun Yang’s gaze was set ablaze as he heard the lines; he mumbled softly, “Indeed, I’m still alive. And since I’m alive, countless people must die!”

“All who were involved in the incident of Tianxuan Cliff... must die!”

“The blood debt that so many of my brothers seek...” Yun Yang lowered his head and spoke gently looking at Wu Wenyuan who was in front of him, “You’re the first.”

Translator Notes

1 Cloud Transcending the Heavens (天外之云 tiānwài zhī yún): literally means cloud that is higher than the sky/heaven; used to mean the superiority of Yun Yang’s family – a word play using his family name ‘Yun’.

2 Hou (侯 hóu): equivalent status of a marquis, that is a nobleman of hereditary rank in imperial China.

3 Sir (大人 dà rén): Chinese suffix (prefix after translating to English) used to address an official or a person of authority.

4 Marquis of Heavenly Clouds (天外云侯 tiānwài yún hóu): lit. Marquis of the Clouds outside the Heavens. Seemingly a title bestowed upon the head of the Yun Family.

5 Mr. Nian (年先生 nián xiān sheng): a person referred as ‘year’ as halls were named after months and people in it were referred to in day 1 to day 30.

Chapter 3: Birth of the Lotus of Fate, Endless Divine Art Descends

Yun Yang was fully submerged in his thoughts, as he gazed at Wu Wenyuan's decapitated torso, lying still in a widening pool of blood. Staring at the corpse, his expression twisted as he felt an unusual breeze envelop and penetrate his being – almost as if springing from the death of Wu Wenyuan.

It was an exhilarating feeling. His dantian¹, parched and meagre since he sustained those injuries a year before, began to awaken and bloom. Tentatively, like a child with his first steps, Yun Yang began to probe and control his flow of Qi², feeling the whispers of energy start to flow through his long inexistent meridians³ – his eyes snapped open with a radiant glow; recovery was a possibility after all!

Despite being unsure of the entirety of what was transpiring, Yun Yang was more than satisfied to have even arrived at this conclusion.

“Such are the rewards for answering my doubts,” Yun Yang looked down at Wu Wenyuan's lifeless form and murmured, “I won't renege on my word. Although you proved to be a traitor to the Empire, wicked and treacherous... I shall keep my promises.”

“Because this is the Nine Supreme's promise.”

With that epitaph, Yun Yang walked out of the room without looking back.

“Send both the body and head back to the prison, then save Wu Wenyuan's wife and mother and release them.”

By the time his final words dissipated, Yun Yang had disappeared; to be replaced by Lao Mei who had appeared, as silent as an apparition.

When Yun Yang returned to the canopy of orchids once again, the moon was already waxing bright in the velvet sky. He stared at the moon in silence, a mournful smile tugging at the corners of his lips. A series of revelations flashed through his mind.

“Brothers, I know now who they are. The Four Season's Tower!”

“Mr. Nian is the mastermind of the Four Seasons Tower.”

“4 seasons in a year, 12 months and 365 days. They represent 365 people.”

“There's hope for my ability to recover!”

“Don't you worry, I will live well.”

Like a mantra, Yun Yang chanted these in his heart, the pain and sadness crushing him like a relentless vice, causing his hands to tremble with rage.

After a long while, Yun Yang exhaled, his anger tinting his puff of air crimson in the moonlight. Just as he was about to arise, the sliver of weak Qi in his dan tian finally reached its breaking point, having chugged through his meridians for the entire day. Any martial arts practitioner worth his salt could have their Qi flow through their meridians a few times in a single breath – even the most novice of them could do so – but Yun Yang's Qi had taken him almost two full hours to journey an entire round through the meridians. It was a clear indication how clogged his meridians were.

Just as his Qi was about to complete a loop, Yun Yang felt a sudden surge in his mind, the clap loud enough to shatter his soul. Feeling his mouth fill up with blood, the last thing Yun Yang could recall was the landscape turning blurry, before he collapsed on the floor, unconscious.

Lao Mei, hurrying over to him, was astounded to see the green glow emanating from the young master's body. It was filled with so much life energy that Lao Mei, who had seen many things before, was shocked.

While he extended his arms towards the supine man, the green glow bloomed as bright as the sun, and Yun Yang's body began to shake. With a gasp, Lao Mei felt the energy wind its way towards him, picking him up like a rag doll, and flinging him clear across to the gates. Crashing bodily into the metal bars, Lao Mei was rendered immobile and barely able to stand. The impact was so great, he could feel his internal organs collapse, and his bones shatter into mush.

Lao Mei's eyes bulged as exquisite pain wracked his body. How could this have happened? His cultivation base qualified him as the top five known experts in Tiantang City. How could a brief contact with the gentle green glow hurt him so horribly? Picking himself up with great effort, he saw that the glow around Yun Yang's body had begun to fade.

Rubbing his eyes in disbelief, Lao Mei peered incredulously at the young master – there was nothing unusual, nothing to indicate that he had unknowingly lashed out with enough force to harm innocents around him. "Utter madness..." Lao Mei muttered angrily to himself, "Could I have imagined it? Caused myself harm? Why would I even do that?"

Yun Yang was... somewhere else.

An emerald light, not unlike an azure sun, rotated in the sky, and Yun Yang's body and soul alike, felt oddly at ease. Almost as suddenly as he had arrived, however, he felt a heart-stopping jolt, and his consciousness, mystified as it was, was wrenched back into his mortal coil. Immediately, his olfactory senses kicked in, and an overpoweringly pungent scent almost caused him to retch. He began to feel the coarse bed under his

back, the air vile enough to possibly suffocate an entire town's population. An unmentionable epithet passed his lips as he leaped out of the bed and rushed out to escape the odour, only to realize that it emanated directly from him.

Staring in horror at his arms and body, a slick covering of slime covered his entire torso, and seemed to fill every orifice, even his nostrils. Working on pure instinct, he held his breath and made a grand leap straight into the pond in the middle of the courtyard. The resultant splash drenched the sides of the pond and revealed a pair of frightened eyes that materialized right in front of the beleaguered Yun Yang.

It was Lao Mei, whom, after attempting to attend to his master, failed utterly when faced with the noxious stench. Having nowhere to hide from the terrible fumes, and seeing that his master was in no real danger, Lao Mei had also decided upon the pond as a suitable getaway. To his horror, not only did he fail to escape the horrendous odours, the source of it had found him again.

"I have braved the dark underground of martial arts, and cheated Death countless times. I have faced enemies terrible beyond comprehension, and I have never faltered, not even once! None of that, however, compares to this abominable smell!" Lao Mei was beginning to sway dizzily. "What's worse, it follows me wherever I go, and it reeks of maggots and corpses... I give up!"

With his eyes rolling all the way back into his head, Lao Mei collapsed into a dead faint.

Yun Yang was already scrubbing mightily at the slime, trying to cleanse himself of it. It wasn't long before he began to see shapes start to emerge all around him. Blinking in speechless amazement, he could only chuckle as the fishes in the pond bellied up and floated in a macabre ring.

After a gruelling two hours of scrubbing, Yun Yang finally began to feel life was worth living again. He was exhausted, and the faint glimmer of dawn marked the beginning of a new day. Lying down in the pond, the reluctance to move at all threatened to send him right under its surface. Lao Mei, who had finally regained consciousness after his fainting spell, was still somewhat tongue-tied.

"Young master, your skin..." The words came out crookedly. "Is this how natural jade is meant to look like?"

Transformed. Yun Yang's face was smooth and clear, resembling the perfection of a jade carving. Fair and rosy, with an ethereal translucency, he practically glowed with an inner light. He had always been a dashing man, marred only by battle scars that would never disappear, most prominent of which was the one earned during a near fatal encounter.

His face was now smooth as alabaster, the scars that marked him vanished like an old moon.

“Cleansed of impure meridians! Natural golden jade!”

Lao Mei exclaimed in awe. What had happened to his young master? How was it that this phenomenon that all martial artists sought for entire lifetimes, happen so suddenly and unexpectedly?

Yun Yang extended his sense to probe his body, a hint of delight blossoming in his mind. Aside from his cultivation base that had yet to recover, his body now was akin to a newborn's – healthy and flawless!

“Once the injuries in the meridians' heal, it was only a matter of time before the healing energies of the cultivation base began to manifest itself.” Yun Yang was happy with his condition now, despite not entirely understanding how it had occurred.

Yun Yang was nothing, if not pragmatic. The lack of information did not overly bother him; the fact was that it had happened, and he was the better for it. He would find out how it happened soon enough, but of utmost priority was to recover his abilities with all haste! As it was, his strength had been sorely depleted since the horrendous battle a year ago.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed in consternation.

Where was the frost jade that had adorned his wrist?

After performing his ablutions, Yun Yang gingerly returned to his room, all the while escorted by Lao Mei and his intense scrutiny. Flipping his sheets over, he made himself comfortable on the soft mattress, and began his search for answers. Entering a mental state of fugue, a dense mist began to collate before his eyes, and amidst the swirling clouds was a rotating lotus seed, pulsing with golden light.

A green aura surrounded the seed, and as he inhaled, he caught a whiff of a rather wonderful fragrance.

The top of the lotus seed had cracked.

A tiny seedling surfaced; its green stalks were fresh and translucent like that of jade. Anyone whose eyes laid rest on it immediately felt at ease. Swaying slowly, the seedling literally gave out waves of a strange energy.

“What on earth was this?” As Yun Yang attempted to digest this new sight, an implosion of dizziness washed over him, as a surge of information flooded his psyche all at once. The agony almost caused him to blackout, and his head throbbed with pain.

Faintly, a swivel of shiny, golden words appeared in his mind.

“Chaotic wuji⁴, it is the birth of all things; it comes out of nothing, and grows into infinity... It absorbs the air of the wronged, soothes the injustice of the innocent, and conducts oneself in clear conscience. The bitter heart of the lotus forms the foundation of life; intention serves as its blade, severing all evil... and within the massacred evil, a lotus seed sprouts. Brilliance shines across the land, dissolving impurities and dispels it to light...”

“Endless Divine Art.”

A mystical revelation consumed him, right at that very moment. Yun Yang snapped his eyes shut. After a time which could have been moments or an entire eternity, he reopened them, and the brilliance of epiphany shone clear in his eyes.

“So this is it...”

“I finally understand...”

His meridians were suddenly cleansed, rid of impurities and corruption. Understanding finally dawned, but with it, came intense agony.

If I had known... If it had occurred earlier, my brothers wouldn't have had to die...

So, it was because of this... that I didn't die. It was because of this, that I managed to crawl out of the hill of corpses during the battle at Tianxuan Cliff.

I suffered from a myriad vital injuries, 17 in total, any of which would have killed a normal man... but I lived...and it was because of this.

That tiny bead of a lotus seed.

Yun Yang closed his eyes in sorrow; his thoughts chaotic as they brought him back through time, rifling away through his memories.

He had just joined the Nine Supremes, and had just fought three gory battles that very day. In the midst of battle rage and war fire, something, he could never tell what, descended upon his head, and he had ceased to remember anything after.

It was his eight brothers that had saved him.

Later, he realized that the object that had hit him, causing him to slip into unconsciousness was a lotus seed. A tiny lotus seed, which lodged itself deep inside his skull, causing no end of amusement for his brothers, who mocked him ceaselessly.

“The youngest of the Nine Supremes was laid low by a lotus seed!” His brothers' laughter still echoed in his ears.

Yun Yang, flustered, attempted to extract the lotus seed from his head, with every intention of smashing it to bits. The oldest of them told him with a loud guffaw, "O'ninth, keep it with you. Anything could happen on the battlefield, keep this as a reminder to always be cautious of everything. You must know, even a lotus seed could knock out one of the Nine Supremes!"

Everyone exploded in bales of laughter, but he took the suggestion seriously, as he kept the lotus seed and hung it around his neck with a string of silk.

In his idle moments, he would pull it out on it's tether, and take good, hard look at it.

Even a lotus seed can lay low a hero.

From then on, he became more cautious; from being the youngest among the nine, he gradually became the core and the brains behind the Nine Supremes. Even the oldest of them exclaimed that he had somehow grown up all at once after the undesirable incident. Although everyone still laughed when the matter was brought up, the brothers no longer looked derisively at it; not after the number of times that Yun Yang's attention to detail and infallible planning saved their lives and brought them success beyond their belief. The brothers even thought that Yun Yang would be a notable figure in the Tianxuan Continent if he kept up with his progress!

Yun Yang himself could feel the vigilance that the lotus seed had endowed him. It improved his clarity of mind by leaps and bounds, making him all that more appreciative of the seed, and increasing his reluctance to remove it.

In his quieter moments, Yun Yang had even sworn to do all he could to revive this lotus seed when world peace had been achieved, and he could trade his armor for a plowshare. Then, he would build a large pond for this seed to allow it to grow and germinate into a pond full of lotuses. As for him, he would build a small hut by the lake and spend the remainder of his mortal life there. This very same seed – it was the lotus seed in his subconscious mind.

Now, it had bloomed in his own subliminal thoughts, and to top it all off, it even whispered it's name gently in the inner parts of his being, where peace and tranquility fought a balance with clarity and boundless energy.

It called itself, "Lotus of Endless Fate".

Translator Notes

1 Dantian (丹田 dān tián): the part where a cultivator's Qi is concentrated and stored in their body, usually somewhere in their lower abdomen.

2 Qi (气 qì): an energy that exists in all things in the world; regular appearance in the novel as cultivators cultivate Qi.

3 Meridians (经脉 jīng mài): Channels for Qi to flow, similar to what blood vessels are for blood.

4 Wuji (无极 wú jí): the state before Taiji where yin and yang are not yet distinguished.

Chapter 4: The Change Within a Night

A lotus was growing in his subconscious mind.

How extraordinarily peculiar!

“To think that such a strange phenomenon could exist in this world!” Yun Yang was astounded. In his lifetime, he was reasonably confident that such an event had never taken place in the known universe.

Improbable as it was, it had happened. And it had happened to him.

“Does this bode disaster? Would I be controlled, or morph into some form of demon? Or is this the calling of the heavens, and I am to answer it, losing my mortal relations in the process?”

In the entire ordeal, Yun Yang had remained as calm as any man could be expected to, given the circumstances. He was aware that there would be a rationale behind such an occurrence – it only remained to be seen if it was an event of great fortune or unparalleled mishap! Resigned to his fate, Yun Yang breathed a sigh of contentment. “Be it fortune or disaster, I will accept it with open arms,” he exclaimed with a smile. “So long as I can complete my brothers’ unfulfilled wishes, and seek vengeance, I will cherish this opportunity that I have been presented, and shoulder the misfortunes that fate decides to deal.”

As what little of the mystical Qi residing in his body began to flow, a look of quiet yearning dawned on Yun Yang’s visage. It was slow going and would consume a few more hours of valuable time before it completed a full cycle. Yun Yang was a patient man, however, and as he waited for its completion, weariness took over. Gradually, his eyes began to droop, and before long, the labors of the day took its toll, and Yun Yang dozed in peaceful serenity.

In his subconscious mind, the seedling suddenly began to move. Wriggling was the closest approximation to describe this movement, and in its quaking, shards of pain began to lance through Yun Yang’s body. Seething in agony, Yun Yang awoke, the pain climaxing until it became almost unbearable. He was close to the edge, when abruptly, he felt a tearing sensation, almost as if a barrier had been ripped away from the top of his head. He began to experience a new sensation, akin to a flow of cooling energy

recycling through his soul. It was the Qi, entering and egressing through the peak of his body, churning powerfully as it came and went.

“Awakening of chakras1!”

Yun Yang gazed into an endless horizon, wide-eyed, almost fainting from the ecstasy that coursed through him. This Endless Divine Art could give rise to such an amazing experience! Being a skilled member of the Nine Supremes, how could Yun Yang not have known the difficulty in awakening chakras? Not everyone had the potential for its cultivation; even if one were fortunate enough to possess it, it was still a far cry from gaining mastery over it. Everything about being innately gifted was undeniably true, especially in the different levels of the world of martial arts practiced in Tianxuan Continent.

From one level of Qi mastery to another, the differences and gaps were vastly and distinctly unique. It was the lifeblood of martial artists to cultivate chakras – tail chakra2, sacral chakra3, perineum chakra4, core chakra5, crux chakra6, medial chakra7, crown chakra8, third-eye chakra9, and occipital chakra10.

Their cultivation was divided into three levels, Foundation Qi11, Spirit Qi12, and the highly vaunted Mystical Qi13. Of course, there were those of even higher levels, but they were rare, few and far in between.

Foundation Qi martial artists possessed at most one or two innately awakened chakras (the sacral chakra and core chakra) or none at all; their strength predominantly arose from rigorous training while their energy came from expending and exploiting their physical potential. Their cultivation of Foundation Qi came from expending their own vital Qi. They were, however, doomed to reach only limited achievements, regardless of their best efforts.

Spirit Qi martial artists – martial artists with internal strength14, possessed three innately awakened chakras; the power of yin15 contained within them could be used to inflict destructive damage upon others. They could cultivate their dantian and obtain spiritual Qi from Heaven and Earth, all through meditation. Those with higher cultivation could harness enough energy to split entire monuments and crack rocks, as well as unleash their maximum potential strength in a violent and intense manner.

Mystical Qi martial artists, the elite of the lot – possesses six innately awakened chakras. Spiritually one with Heaven and Earth, they could cruise through the seas and reach for the skies given the amount of power they held in their hands. Those whose cultivations were at their peak could melt gold and even convert metals from base materials, climb mountains and wade through rivers like they were walking on flat ground. These masters could perform feats beyond the human imagination, and defy the laws of physics, stopping short of bending reality.

Yun Yang, being possessed of six innately awakened chakras, was considered one of the most gifted individuals in Tianxuan Continent. That was all the more reason he knew the difficulty in awakening chakras, a nigh impossible feat. To awaken one's chakra, it would not only depend on one's effort alone but was subject to a terribly large dose of luck and fate. If one was born without any awakened chakras, there wasn't much that one could do to elevate one's self beyond normalcy. To some extent, it was said that awakened chakras could not be developed, it could only be 'bestowed.'

Yun Yang's awakened chakras were his tail chakra, sacral chakra, perineum chakra, core chakra, crux chakra, and medial chakra; these were innate. He thought this was all he could be his whole life – at best, a practicing expert somewhere, with no hope of becoming a legend. Who would have known that he was capable of awakening another chakra in such a short period after cultivating the Endless Divine Art?

Crown chakra!

The impossible had happened, and he was now a being with seven awakened chakras.

This divine oddity would make him one in a million in the history of the Empire of Yutang. Although it was only an extra chakra, the impact it would lend to his physical attributes could only be described as the contrast between the heaven and earth.

Where his soul was once dead and buried, now Yun Yang felt like it could soar gleefully in the skies. He could already distinctly decipher the mystical power of the Endless Divine Art, and with further cultivation, he could even increase his capabilities– this was a godsend indeed! With the birth of the crown chakra, spiritual Qi sourced from both heaven and earth began to pour into him. With mystical hands, Yun Yang moved the Qi to each crevice and corner of his physical body, cleansing and cleaning his meridians of all the impurities and corruption that beget the mortal form.

As he continued to perform the ritual, he was unaware of the implications that his actions were having on the spiritual plane. High above in the sky, spiritual Qi from all across began to dissipate and wane, becoming increasingly weak and sheer. Martial artists who were cultivating nearby began to experience a sense of alarm, as they felt the absence of spiritual Qi as keenly as a man struck blind feels the absence of light.

What was happening?

With swoops of wind, silhouettes began to appear on the roof, one after the other as they looked around in a daze, feeling the odd change of spiritual Qi between heaven and earth.

They stared at each other at a loss; the same incredulity reflected in every pair of eyes.

“Which grandmaster is it, who has arrived at Tiantang City?”

Only a grandmaster of legendary stature could claim enough spiritual Qi from heaven and earth to exhaust the entire pool. Only the grandmasters of old could have conjured such a phenomenon, and how many of them with such an elevated level of power still existed in the whole Tianxuan Continent?

What would such an appearance in Tiantang City portend?

Near the palace, a silhouette appeared high in the air as his eyes were filled with shock, gazing straight ahead towards the southwest towards the direction of the aura.

“Who is it that has come?”

Another silhouette shot up and landed beside him, his face grim. They looked at each other, their own eyes reflecting each other’s bewilderment.

“Whoever this individual is, he is immensely powerful.”

“But it’s coming from the slums...”

“So who is it?”

The silhouette that was first to arrive forced a smile terrible to behold, “Whoever it is, it’s someone we can’t afford to provoke.”

Within Yun Yang’s subconsciousness, the tiny seedling of green was wriggling and seemed to be expanding little by little. A pure form of vitality was emitted from the earth, from the very sky. Wild plants and living flora in Tianxuan Continent welcomed the same vigorous growth in the very same instant as well, blooming in into miraculous flowers and giant trees.

Indeed, everything within the human realm seemed to have changed within a single night.

“My purple jade ginseng, how did you bloom within such a short span of time?” An old man looked at his newly born flower that was emanating a crisp fragrance, dumbfounded in his courtyard. He had been taking meticulous care of this purple jade spiritual ginseng for twenty years, but the plant had never made even the slightest progress, let alone bloom.

With a suspicious mind, the old man had initially thought that someone had switched the purple jade ginseng for another while he wasn’t looking.

In the borderless forests, a handful of hunters aroused from their slumber and looked at their surrounding in stupefaction. Just the previous night, they were worried that wild beasts would attack them in hopes of obtaining the warm flesh they so desired, so they made the extra effort to build their sleeping area atop a large tree branch. Come the

morning, however, they found themselves surrounded and wrapped in a canopy of tree leaves.

“What’s going on?” a hunter exclaimed in confusion, “We just fell asleep not too long ago. This canopy of tree leaves looks like it has seen years of growth! Ah, look at the two trees beside us. I chopped two large branches yesterday as a support, but how... how can these two trees grow so fast? Exactly where I’ve cut the branches, new ones are growing, and even larger than before!”

He grabbed the closest person to him in panic, “Brother, brother, how long have we stayed here? I just got married to Yan’er last month, and I can’t possibly be going back to meet a wrinkled version of her!”

Within a night, everything had changed.

It was now dawn.

Yun Yang exhaled lightly, feeling the vitality of his body that was like that of a newborn’s; a smile hanging loosely on his lips.

“Lotus of Endless Fate; a leaf of infinity, when the bud bloomed, there was the world; evanescence of time, years that lost count, the day the golden lotus blooms, echeveria¹⁶ cleanses all; the supposed creator of the world, awaits the fate that binds; now that fortune has arrived, your destiny is laid.”

Yun Yang squinted his eyes, uttering softly, “Lotus of Endless Fate.”

After giving it some thought, the passage was easy to comprehend.

‘When the bud bloomed, there was the world’ meant the first time the lotus seed budded, it created the universe and the world. On the second occasion when it budded, it blossomed into the echeveria of fortune; and the existence of echeveria gave birth to a new destiny. What Yun Yang was fortunate enough to experience this time, was the third budding of the Lotus of Endless Fate!

‘Now that fortune has arrived, your destiny is laid.’ The words were almost prophetic in nature.

Yun Yang tried suppressing the excitement he felt but failed miserably. Almost immediately, he returned inward into his subconsciousness to gaze upon the green seedling again, to gain a closer connection to the plant. He realized that the Endless Divine Art was only the first reward that the Lotus of Endless Fate had brought him. Only when he had completed the prerequisite of basic skills and when the first leaf had grown, could he begin to endeavor for more, with the growth of the second leaf.

Yun Yang frowned. How could one hasten the growth of the Lotus of Endless Fate?

In all the teachings, there was never any clue or hint on how to accomplish this. He rested his chin on his palm and began to ruminate on the problem.

“The lotus seed fell from the sky and knocked me out. I then hung it from my neck all this time. Nothing had changed before that deadly battle. I was supposed to have perished during the fight, but I returned fully alive, and the terrible wound I bore on my chest had healed as well. The lotus seed was missing at the time. Could it be possible that the lotus seed had entered my body, and bonded with my blood?”

Stroking his chin, perplexed, Yun Yang continued to ponder, “But it had only gone in, and nothing else had happened... I have not been recovering from my injuries nor have my cultivation base been replenished... until today. I felt a surge of energy when I killed Wu Wenyuan and stood over his dead body.”

“With this energy, only then did I realize the sudden appearance of the lotus seed.”

“Then my dantian revived and my energy returned, and so I began cultivating the Endless Divine Art...”

A hint of morbid enlightenment flashed across Yun Yang’s eyes. He thought about the maxim, “Chaotic wuji, it is the birth of all things; it comes out of nothing and grows into infinity... It absorbs the air of the wronged, soothes the injustice of the innocent, and conducts oneself in clear conscience. The bitter heart of a lotus forms the foundation of life; intention serves as its blade, severing all evil... and within the massacred evil, a lotus seed sprouts. Brilliance shines across the land, dissolving impurities and dispels it to light...”

“Comes out of nothing, grows into infinity... air of the injustice... massacres evil, the lotus seed sprouts...”

It began to fall into place. “Must I kill to obtain energy from the Lotus of Endless Fate?”, Yun Yang mumbled to himself. “While... massacres evil could mean... to destroy the wicked? As for ‘absorbs air of the wronged, soothes souls of the innocent,’ that’s easier to understand now...”

A voice cut through Yun Yang’s ponderings and brought his thoughts to a halt. “Young master, today is the ninth day of the third month. The memorial ceremony for the Nine Supremes has begun.” Lao Mei was outside, voice tinged with concern for his master. “Today is the anniversary of the heroes’ sacrifice. The emperor and the bureaucrats will arrive at the heroes’ graves in another two hours.”

Yun Yang catapulted back from his subconscious, into the dreary physical realm once again; an agonized look of loss flashed across his eyes.

“Young master, will you be going?”

“Yes, I will.” Yun Yang inhaled deeply; countless scenes and memories of his family flashed through his mind, as he bit his lips in sorrow.

“How could I not send my brothers off? I will attend even if I’m dead!”

Translator Notes

1 Chakras (窍穴 Qiào xué): cultivators aim to awaken them to receive energy from the universe, these points are usually situated near glands in the body; not to be mistaken as acupuncture points, they are energy focal centers in the esoteric traditions of Indian religions.

2 Tail chakra (尾闾窍 wěi lú Qiào)

3 Sacral chakra (气海窍 qì hǎi Qiào)

4 Perineum chakra (会阴窍 huì yīn Qiào)

5 Core chakra (命门窍 mìng mén Qiào)

6 Crux chakra (绛宫窍 jiàng gōng Qiào)

7 Medial chakra (夹脊窍 jiā jí Qiào)

8 Crown chakra (顶窍 dǐng Qiào)

9 Third-eye chakra (意窍 yì Qiào)

10 Occipital chakra (神窍 shén Qiào)

11 Foundation Qi (元气 yuán qì): lowest cultivation level among martial artists; 元气 itself already means energy/Qi, but ‘Foundation’ is added to allow distinction among levels.

12 Spirit Qi (灵气 líng qì): intermediate cultivation level among martial artists; spiritual Qi can be obtained through Heaven and Earth through meditation.

13 Mystical Qi (玄气 xuán qì): highest cultivation level among martial artists; masters of mystical Qi can perform feats beyond human imagination.

14 Internal strength (内劲 nèi jìn): cultivated energy in a martial artist's body that could be used for a variety of purposes including healing wounds and expelling poison.

15 Yin (阴 yīn): part of yin-yang, that is duality existing in all things of this universe; yin is the soft counterpart to yang.

16 Echeveria (玉蝶 yù dié): Echeveria is a large genus of flowering plants in the Crassulaceae family, native to semi-desert areas of Central America, Mexico, and northwestern South America.

Chapter 5: When Would the World's Atrocities End?

Tiantang City, the capital of the Empire of Yutang. If a city were the crown jewel of a country, then Tiantang City would be the heart of the entire Tianxuan Continent. The city boasted a population of around 3 million citizens, with walls strong and high enough to deter even the most fervent of marauders. Fortified crenellations and numerous arrow slits made it a defender's dream and an attacking party's nightmare.

At this moment, funeral music could be heard drifting on the wind in a quiet melancholy; denizens from every corner had come out, forming a long queue that headed towards the center of Tiantang City, where the Tiantang Square was located.

The square was acknowledged as the largest square in the city within the Tianxuan Continent. Built under the supervision and commission of the Empire of Yutang's founding emperor, it served as the militia's training field, but on occasions such as these, was made avail to the general public.

The founding emperor had once said, "All the warriors who train in this square – now, and in the future – will forever be heaven's guests, even when they have perished in the battlefield. Their brave souls shall never be forgotten, and will live on for eternity!" Thus, in the very early days, it was called "Heaven's 1 Square". As the years rolled by, it gradually came to be referred to as Tiantang Square. The original name of the city, "Wu An City" was also slowly replaced and became Tiantang City.

A mass of bodies poured into Tiantang Square. Everyone was either wearing white flowers or had a strip of black silk crepe tied around their arm. In their hands, they carried either fresh flowers or candles, amongst other items for a memorial, their faces expressing the deepest respect and honor.

Today was not just any memorial. Today, the entire nation came together in remembrance of the sacrifices that these noble souls had made, especially those by the Nine Supremes. The Nine Supremes were the most unlikely combination of heroes, with names akin to a mystery. Nine mystical paragons, they were nameless and without

faces, yet everyone knew that they were the Empire of Yutang's best-kept secret, its patron saints. The Nine Supremes had always been involved in the largest and most critical wars in the Empire's history. Each time they appeared, a battle doomed to be lost would take a blessed and unexpected turn. Just their very presence was assurance of victory on the battlefield!

The ninth of the third month last year – a date that the Empire of Yutang's people would never forget.

That was the day that they had lost the Nine Supremes.

The Nine Supremes had led 800 warriors to execute a secret mission when they were ambushed and killed at Tianxuan Cliff. There had been no survivors among the 809 brave individuals who partook in the mission.

It had been an undertaking of the highest secrecy, but somehow, news of it had leaked out, resulting in the deaths of the Empire's finest. The Empire of Yutang had thrown all of its vast resources to hunt down the culprit for over a year now, with little to show for its efforts.

In the square, many generals and veterans looked towards the center of Tiantang Square with tears welling in their eyes. There, nine tall monuments stood proudly side by side – resembling the towering legends that they were built in memoriam after. These brothers had fought together when they were alive, and even in death, they would still stand steadfastly together. Ragged sobs could be heard from the crowd northwest of the square, where the veterans were bunched together. Having survived the wars by paying the price of limbs and longevity, these old and crippled warriors who could barely walk, stood up to pay tribute. Even those who had lost their legs sat upright; facing their heroes and saviors with their hearts brimming with reverence. A vision of the Nine Supremes charging through the battlefield appeared before them; valiant, brave and inspiring all at once.

Dragons of soil thrash the earth, burying their enemies; as the Supreme Earth demonstrates his might.

Flames spout high and mighty, as the Supreme Flame arrives.

Turbulent waves churn the sea, as the Supreme Water moves.

Wind, cloud, thunder and lightning split the tranquil sky, as the Supreme Wind, Supreme Cloud, and Supreme Thunder manifests themselves.

The Nine Supremes!

These were the litanies engrained in the monuments of the Nine Supremes. Those who had come to the square would stare long and hard at them, both saddened and agonized by the majesty of those words.

Borderless earth rages like dragons – Supreme Earth.

Refined gold in his hands, the pack caves in – Supreme Gold.

Monstrous waves, churning majestically across the world – Supreme Water.

Towering wood, standing indestructible – Supreme Wood.

Rising flames of invincible victory – Supreme Flame.

Thunder roars, intimidating the world – Supreme Thunder.

Blood of the heroes, adversities await – Supreme Blood.

The wind in the vast sky, justice with the kind – Supreme Wind.

Heart of the Nine Supremes, clouds that could sink the heavens – Supreme Cloud!

The names of the Nine Supremes were carved onto the monuments; briefly, the sight of nine masked heroes standing tall before powerful enemies, while calmly saying, “Rally forth!” seemed to greet everyone’s eyes again. The throng of people stood upright in front of each memorial, looking at them in tribute, with their heads raised high. There was an unusually large crowd that gathered in front of Supreme Cloud and Supreme Earth’s monuments. Supreme Earth, the leader of the Nine Supremes, had been the eldest. Supreme Cloud, on the other hand, had been the youngest of the Nine Supremes but was also the brain and heart of the team.

...

The sun rose in slow cadence.

Before long, the emperor arrived, surrounded by his bureaucrats, signaling the official start of the ceremony.

Yun Yang stood silently in the corner, just another observer in the multitude of people.

“Young master, do you need me to go over with you?”

“There’s no need.” Yun Yang shook his head.

“This... Now your...”

“There’s no need.”

“As you wish, young master.” Lao Mei’s voice was tinged with disappointment.

Yun Yang had rejected Lao Mei’s company, not because he knew he would embarrass himself by being overwhelmed by emotions, but because he did not want anyone to know his true identity as one of the Nine Supremes! Until he had avenged his brothers, he did not deserve to announce his mantle to the world. Besides, the enemy was all too powerful, and knowledge of his true nature would put him at significant risk.

He stood in silence, watching the nine monuments with heartache and longing in his eyes.

Brothers, I am here.

I’m here to see all of you.

It was as if he was invisible, standing quietly in the dark.

The smell of candles and incense filled the air; the emperor read the funeral oration in an agonized voice, as quiet sobs came from the people.

Yun Yang stood far away, his body ramrod straight and eyes dark as the night. People walked past him, but none of them seemed to realize that there was someone who was alive and breathing, standing in the shadows. The Cloud Veil was a spell unique to the Supreme Cloud of the Nine Supremes, one that rendered him invisible, a formless soul. He stood there silently and motionless; the breeze blew against his dark purple robes, while an air of loneliness swept over him.

Dusk came creeping in.

The ceremony had long ended.

Fresh flowers covered the ground, the smell of candles wafted to the heavens. Warm blood drenched the space in front of the Nine Supremes’ memorial; the crimson red belonged to Wu Wenyuan and his cohort.

The crowd bore no hint of sympathy for them, no tears of remorse towards their kin, even after witnessing the bodies being mutilated further after the execution.

Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan had kept a straight face throughout the event.

Just yesterday, Wu Wenyuan had mysteriously disappeared from his prison, but just as suddenly, his dead body had reappeared at the stroke of midnight. It was also about then that they noticed Wu Wenyuan’s wife and mother’s disappearance. These events had angered the old marshal. The military’s defense was impenetrable; the prison was

guarded with utmost security, trained professionals keeping a close eye on the perimeters. How could such things possibly happen without a single hint of who had done it?

The marshal would become the world's laughing stock. He had already switched out three batches of prison guards in light of these events. The punishment served had already broken several dozen paddles, but it was too late to make any difference.

Finally, the crowd at the square dissipated; the large space gradually cleared and silent once more. Yun Yang stood unmoving in the shadows, his gaze depthless and stern.

This life was one of battles and deaths by warhorses; he wished his brothers a lifetime of safety and happiness in the next realm.

The night breeze blew cold, and the entire Tiantang Square was cloaked in darkness. Yun Yang remained standing where he had stood the whole time, with his eyes closed and his senses extended outward. He could faintly feel the echoes of the past; he was standing beside hundreds of thousands of his comrades. The feeling of countless suits of steel armor felt incredibly real; he could almost hear the words as he and his brothers engaged in idle chatter. The breeze ruffled his stray hair, blowing it back from his well-defined visage. He resembled a delicate statue in the night, calm and secure, yet lonesome and melancholic at the same time.

Soft sobs could be heard, as a young woman in white approached with weak steps and a tear-stricken face. Clutched tightly in her embrace was her young daughter, and by her side, an equally bereaved elder who supported her as she walked. Stumbling like a drunk, her mourning heart had apparently drained her of her energy, and she walked like one of the dead.

"Wang Zhuang, we're going home."

The young woman mumbled, her gaze and expression emotionless and numb. She passed by Yun Yang, close enough to touch him, but without noticing his presence. The latter had his eyes shut tight and remained motionless, but the corner of his eyes twitched as the deep grief hidden within surfaced once again.

Assistant General Wang Zhuang's wife.

Yun Yang remembered Wang Zhuang – the man had only been married for two years when he was deployed a year ago; his daughter had just turned one. However, he had never returned from his stint. The warriors who gave their lives for their country did so with no regrets, but what about their families?

It had already been a year, how was Wang Zhuang's family faring after losing their pillar of support?

The trio went on their way, slowly distancing themselves from Yun Yang.

He sighed inwardly.

A frown quickly followed the sigh. Something did not feel right. He opened his eyes and caught sight of four silhouettes appearing behind the trio. The dark shadows materialized into the shapes of four burly men; their gazes were lustily engulfing the weary woman walking ahead. Hiding carefully in the darkness, they continued to tail the woman from a distance, unknowingly passing by Yun Yang.

A dangerous, murderous intent flashed across Yun Yang's eyes.

As if sensing the impending menace, the men shuddered, feeling as if a ghost had crept up on them.

"This place is indeed a bit uncanny..." one of the men rubbed at his goosebumps that had appeared all over, as he murmured.

"Agreed. Let us go back quickly; there are too many dead souls here. I'm feeling uncomfortable..." another man murmured softly.

Yun Yang's gaze turned icy.

Were there too many dead souls?

For daring to utter such a phrase, the price would be death.

"But Wang Zhuang's death could not have come at a better time! The mule has been dead for over a year, and I've also been waiting for just as long. Now that the memorial ceremony is over, everything should have toned down..." the round one who was most likely the leader chuckled in relish.

"Yeah, this dead mule, we couldn't do anything when he was alive; he still died in the end, and became a lonesome ghost... hee-hee", the thug chortled.

"Hmph, we were bullied when Wang Zhuang was alive, now the tables have turned." The leader whistled, "I must say, the bastard Wang Zhuang's wife certainly looks gorgeous... especially with her teary doe-eyed look – it just makes her all the more attractive! Coupled with that small, soft body..." the words trailed into a lustful sigh.

"Hee hee hee..." the other three laughed lewdly as they ventured past Yun Yang.

Yun Yang took in a deep breath and looked towards the square; it seemed like countless pairs of eyes were staring back at him. He nodded, pressing his lips together as he turned quietly; his purple robe billowed as he began to follow these thugs and their unwary prey.

The road he took became increasingly deserted. They were moving towards the outskirts of Tiantang City, and their surroundings were turning eerier with every step they took.

The young woman and her ward kept walking aimlessly, not having anywhere to go nor having a destination in mind. If it weren't for the elder who was supporting her, she would probably have fainted away a long time ago.

They approaching a building; there was a soft lantern light glimmering just a short distance away.

That was her home.

But alas, is a home without a husband still a home?

It's been a year, Wang Zhuang. Are you alright down there? If it weren't because I had to take care of our daughter, I'd have gone down to meet you long ago...

Did you know, how hard it is to live alone like this?

Just as the trio was turning into an alley, discordant laughter erupted from their backs.

"Oh, little lady, don't walk so fast..." A repulsive voice said, "Turn around and let me have a look at that body of yours... Tsk, tsk, how alluring you are!"

The woman continued walking as if she had not heard anything. The four burly men had finally caught up and moved ahead to block their way, smirking in triumph and anticipation.

"Oh... I can't quite see clearly in the dark... Isn't this General Wang Zhuang's little missus, Juan'er? Tsk tsk... it's no wonder I can feel your allure. Hee hee, Juan'er, how have you been? Why is there a white flower on your head? I've heard that our valiant General Wang Zhuang is now a dead soul? What a terrible shame that must be!" The entire monologue was spoken in the most lecherous manner possible.

The trio faltered in their steps.

The elder who was supporting the woman trembled in rage, "Wang Bao! What do you want? Let us pass!"

The head of the thugs, Wang Bao, chortled, "Give way? Why should I? Oh, sure, I had to give way when Wang Zhuang asked me to, because of his reputation. But now that he has been a spirit for over a year, why should I give way?"

He laughed, and in a salacious voice, he exclaimed, "Still, I have to say... Juan'er's dressing certainly looks enticing... My heart aches just to look at her eyes, all swollen

from crying. Juan'er, Wang Zhuang can't care for you anymore, so why not just let me..."

The elder stood in front of the young woman, and practically screamed at the thug, "Wang Bao, Juan'er's husband, Wang Zhuang died in a war for the Empire of Yutang. He protected the country by giving up his life, and he died a national hero. The things you've said, do you not have a heart at all?"

The beefy Wang Bao chortled again, "Hero? Who asked him to fight in the war? Certainly not I! He didn't die for me, and I have no idea what you are talking about. To me, it's all just a bag of wind!"

"Wang Zhuang, that idiot, restricted us from doing so many things when he was alive. I've wanted him dead for so long; it warms my heart to know he's finally gone! Hee hee, I'll admit that he was a spectacular bloke when he was alive, but he's been dead for a year! Now that he's buried six feet under, it's time for me to have some fun with his wife. Is he going to stand in my way?"

With a glint of lustful menace in his eyes, Wang Bao began to advance on Juan'er.

Translator's Note

1 Heaven (天堂 tiān táng): Shares the same phonology/pronunciation as Tiantang.