

T. Times 131

Chapter 131: Naturally Talented

“38th? Huh? Why am I 38th?”

Inside the Xiaoxiang Pavilion, Zhao Changhe, who had just been showing off his cool personality, sat there and could not help but complain, “Does this damn tome have a grudge against me? Before, when it gave me the 88th place, although it could be understood as ‘goodbye,’[1] it could still also mean great fortunes[2]. What about this new ranking? A friend to women[3]? This is too much!”

Yue Hongling sat next to him expressionlessly and helped him apply medicine to the wound on his chest. Seeing him rambling endlessly, she could not help but knock his head.

Zhao Changhe held his head. “I’m injured, yet you’re still hitting me.”

“What a coincidence, I’m injured too,” Yue Hongling said with an expressionless face. “Explain how you managed to be stabbed in an acupoint without being affected. Did you use the same trick that the celestial maiden did to somehow avoid getting paralyzed?”

Zhao Changhe’s eyes rolled around and he fell silent.

“So you were already in cahoots! Go to hell!” Yue Hongling applied a bit more force to the bandage, causing Zhao Changhe to scream in pain.

“I really have no relations with her! This is a misunderstanding...”

“Then who is it that you have relations to? Tang Buqi’s aunt? Is that why you call him eldest nephew so affectionately all the time!”

Zhao Changhe: “???”

Yue Hongling felt like she had said too much. Why did I say all that...

She turned her head angrily. “What did you whisper to Wan Dongliu in private? I was far away and couldn’t hear it clearly. Tell me now.”

Zhao Changhe glanced around and then lowered his voice to a whisper again, “He should be a member of the Four Idols Cult, and a high-ranking one at that. He should be of the Southern Seven Mansions[4] of the Twenty-Eight Mansions, more specifically the mansion of Zhen. However, I have no idea if his father is aware of this...”

Yue Hongling was stunned and her eyes widened. “In other words, he’s not from the Maitreya Cult, but rather a high-ranking member of the Four Idols Cult? In the end, he is still someone from a demonic cult who wants to rebel? Then the Cao Gang...”

“Yes... The Four Idols Cult’s reach is much deeper than Maitreya Cult’s. Even if the Maitreya Cult did make a bigger fuss first, it feels as if they were merely paving the way for the king.”

“Why didn’t you expose him then?”

Zhao Changhe cleared his throat and fell silent.

Yue Hongling understood and squinted at him. “So Xia Chichi wants to rebel, and you support her, is that it? Are you going to wear a mask yourself tomorrow too?”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “That won’t be necessary.”

Though it would be fun if Chichi wore a mask to play with me...

Yue Hongling sneered. “No wonder that when he framed the northern barbarians, from all the targets he could’ve picked, he chose someone as tough as you. It seems that he thought of you as a traitor to his cult, so it would be a good thing to kill you, right?”

“Ummm...”

“So you thought it was just a misunderstanding and you could not bring yourself to kill him?”

“Well, it was indeed pretty much a misunderstanding. After all, I’m fine. Besides...” Zhao Changhe sighed. “If I really killed him, we would not be able to leave Yangzhou. Anyway, I almost gutted him and he’ll be bedridden for at least a few months. I’ve already vented my frustration, and that’s enough for me.”

Yue Hongling drifted off into thought for a while, connecting some of the details together.

Wan Dongliu had clearly intended to kill Zhao Changhe before, but the way he tried to hit an acupoint this time was a deliberate act of mercy. He likely did this because Zhao Changhe decided not to publicize his secret, making Wan Dongliu realize that he may have misunderstood the relations between Zhao Changhe and the Four Idols Cult. As such, he held back, and later even stopped others from attacking Zhao Changhe. It was as if he understood that he had targeted the wrong person and deserved to be punished.

These two seemingly rough and bold men of the jianghu were surprisingly quite sharp-minded, perhaps even more so than many scholars. At this moment, despite having just been in a brutal fight against one another, their understanding of each other might even be better than the understanding between Wan Dongliu and his closest subordinates. They were true comrades, in a sense.

She originally thought that it would be dangerous for them to stay in the Xiaoxiang Pavilion, but now she could be certain that it was as safe as Mount Tai.

The world was truly in chaos, and heroes emerged in large numbers.

She pondered for a moment, then suddenly smiled.

Isn’t this just great? This is the diverse and wonderful jianghu that my heart desires.

Yue Hongling’s tone softened and she said earnestly, “Changhe, you’ve been quick to pick up our sword and saber intents. I don’t understand how you could learn them so quickly. Concepts such as that aren’t something that you can pick up just by watching, you need someone to demonstrate it in detail for you, and even with that, you must still possess exceptional talent and insight to grasp it. I believe that you’re exceptionally talented, but who is teaching you?”

Zhao Changhe could tell Yue Hongling anything except for the matter involving the Heavenly Tome, so he could only say, “Let’s just say that I’m naturally talented.”

Yue Hongling did not press him for answers any further and simply continued, “Regardless of how you learned it, I advise you against trying to learn everything. It is better to specialize in certain areas than spread yourself too thin. After all, some techniques might not suit you. It’s best to only incorporate the aspects that complement your style and integrate them into your own saber art.”

Zhao Changhe nodded in agreement and said, “Indeed. For example, I find Chi Li’s saber intent to be rather unsuitable for me. It’s always a bit awkward no matter how I try to use it. As for the Spring Water Sword Intent, without the corresponding cultivation technique, it’s quite ineffective. I will give them up and focus on just integrating their aspects of softness. What suits my saber art the most is still yours, and I understand it the most. After all, back in the stronghold, you provided me with a lot of guidance...”

Yue Hongling tilted her head slightly. “Now, I can teach you thoroughly if you’d like.”

“It’s fine, I don’t want that.”

“Huh?”

“Even though it’s yours and you have a lot to teach me, I only want to reference it a bit. That’s enough for me. My path has always been that of the wildest saber. Learning too much will only cloud my own path.”

Yue Hongling looked at him steadily, offering a faint smile. “I’m waiting to see what becomes of your saber.”

He had his own firm resolve, and she knew that he did not need to be lectured like a novice.

Yue Hongling stretched lazily and got ready to leave. “Alright then, you take care of your injuries. I’ll just be next door. Call me if you need anything.”

“Big sister Yue,” Zhao Changhe called her with some hesitation.

Yue Hongling turned back to look at him, only to see his awkwardness as he stumbled over his words, “If we dual cultivate, we would be able to speed up our recovery, including the injury on your shoulder. If you also practice a dual cultivation technique, the combined effects will hasten the healing process.”

Yue Hongling's eyes widened. "Isn't dual cultivation about the manipulation of internal energy? It can help with the healing of external injuries as well?"

"That should be the case. At the very least, it's effective in terms of healing through blood circulation."

Yue Hongling felt a little hesitant.

According to her previous experience, that kind of cultivation indeed did not really involve much intimacy... but it was still dual cultivation, exchanging energy back and forth. Was that really something that normal friends could continuously engage in?

"I've noticed that you've been stuck at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate for over half a year now. Why has it been so difficult for you to reach the ninth layer? I don't know the exact reason, but from what I sensed from your true qi previously, it seemed like the lack of yang qi might be one of the reasons. It might not be the reason, but it's a reason nonetheless. I know that some schools even maintain pure yin or pure yang for their cultivation techniques, but they have other secret methods. However, you're just an ordinary martial artist. In my opinion, it should be a pretty big factor. Why don't we try resolving it?"

Yue Hongling could not help but chuckle, "So now you're the one giving me advice?"

"Does it not make sense?"

"...It does."

"As long as it makes sense," Zhao Changhe said seriously. "Why should the jianghu be bound by so many rules? Since you know that practicing that cultivation technique is perfectly normal, is someone as bold and upright as you really going to be afraid of trying it just because of its reputation?"

Yue Hongling slapped the table. "Afraid of what? Tell me what I need to do!"

...You're supposed to be the older sister between us, but sometimes you act just like a little sister.

Well, she is just a teenage girl at the end of the day.

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In Wan Dongliu's room, Tang Buqi was paying a visit to his ill friend.

Well, that was the pretext, but right now, Tang Buqi's expression was as sour as if he had swallowed a dozen rotten eggs. "Brother Wan, don't accuse me of lacking propriety for questioning you at a time like this, but I really must ask... Are the things that Zhao Changhe said earlier true or false?"

"They're true." Wan Dongliu lay there stiffly, wrapped up in bandages like a mummy. His expression was very calm. As long as the fact that he was affiliated with the Four Idols Cult was not leaked, what Zhao Changhe had revealed earlier did not matter.

Tang Buqi said angrily, "You really made us a part of your schemes?! There's nothing wrong with wanting to deal with the Maitreya Cult and the northern barbarians, so why couldn't you just be straightforward about it?"

"I wanted to assassinate the magistrate, and the Cao Gang wants to dominate Yangzhou. Should I have also told you about that?" Wan Dongliu smiled. "Well, I guess I could have told you all this. Perhaps I could have colluded with you, but your aunt would not be fond of such things. Therefore, I don't believe you would've agreed to it either, so why waste the effort? It would only expose our plans, and it would not achieve anything."

Tang Buqi said with a straight face, "I certainly would not have agreed... and now I know."

"Then, now you know." Wan Dongliu still smiled calmly. "The situation is as it is. Yangzhou can't afford another upheaval. If the Cao Gang acts, even the facade of prosperity will be lost. Do you wonder why Zhao Changhe spared my life? Moreover, on what grounds would you deal with me, the true culprit behind the assassination of the magistrate? I'm afraid that if people were to learn of it, forget about being angry, they might even praise me as a righteous man. If anything, you would be the one to turn into a villain, so why bother?"

Tang Buqi's expression became very ugly. He really felt like he was not the villain on a theater stage, but the comic relief.

Wan Dongliu said leisurely, “The most surprising thing to me in this matter is how close Zhao Changhe seems to be with your Tang Clan and the Demon Suppression Bureau. Perhaps you hold no suspicions toward him and you think that he was just a temporary ally, but what about Gong Chaoqun? Did he really do all that he did just to give you face? Sorry for being blunt, but I honestly don’t think that you hold that much sway.”

Tang Buqi: “...”

Wan Dongliu could not help but find him rather cute. He smiled and said, “I believe that it’s better for you to ask Zhao Changhe about this than to question me here.”

Chapter 132: Either Never or Countless Times

Inside the Xiaoxiang Pavilion.

This time, they did not dual cultivate by having her press her hands on his back. Instead, the two of them sat cross-legged facing each other, then with their palms touching each other, they exchanged true qi with each other.

Yue Hongling felt slightly regretful...well, was it really regret?

This dual cultivation session was a bit different from the last time. Previously, it had been a completely passive experience for her. Apart from sensing the changes in true qi, she did not feel much else. But this time, she was actively participating and interacting with him, and psychologically, it felt kind of...

The psychological aspect was one thing, but she had a much harder time with what she was feeling physiologically...

Why does this process of exchanging yin and yang... feel so comfortable?

It was as if he filled in her gaps, while she gave him the aspect of softness that he needed. During this exchange, both of them were feeling an incredible sense of relief.

That was simply how it was, but if others were to hear such an explanation, they might think that they were doing something way more sensual.

It was no wonder the meaning of dual cultivation had ultimately shifted from its broad meaning to its narrower meaning.

Yue Hongling could not help but feel that what they were doing was wrong and wanted to stop, but the wound on her shoulder truly was healing. Additionally, the weakness brought about by the large amount of blood she had just lost was also swiftly being alleviated. The effects of this form of cultivation were more astounding than any divine medicine. Furthermore, she could also sense that the wound at the center of Zhao Changhe's chest was quickly healing up.

Wasn't she trying to help him recover? Then could she really just stop halfway?

The thing she found to be really annoying was that this form of cultivation was greatly beneficial to her own cultivation, but it was not enough. It was as if she were scratching an itch in her foot through the sole of her shoe. No matter how good it felt, it was nothing compared to taking her shoe off.

After all, this was not a true dual cultivation; they weren't really doing anything.

As a result, she instinctively drew closer to his true qi, as if saying, "Be more direct, this isn't enough..."

Yue Hongling snapped out of it just in time to hear herself moan softly, as if she were pleading.

Her cheeks were already flushed red all the way to her ears.

Zhao Changhe, who was in front of her, also opened his eyes. Their palms were still touching, and they experienced the soothing sensation of each other's true qi in their bodies. Their gazes locked with one another's and they could see the shimmer in each other's eyes.

Yin and yang attracted each other, this was simply the Heavenly Dao. Who could avoid it?

The room gradually heated up, and their breaths became increasingly erratic.

Without realizing it, Zhao Changhe's hand, which had been pressing against her palm, gently switched from pressing to holding.

Yue Hongling suddenly realized. “No...”

She quickly jumped out of the bed and stumbled a little in panic. She leaned heavily on the table as she panted heavily.

Zhao Changhe came up from behind her and embraced her.

Dual cultivation either never happened or happened countless times, and the same went for hugs. Yue Hongling realized that she did not even have the slightest thought of wanting to break free from his embrace. This was despite her shoulder injury already being completely healed and no longer hurting.

“The evil technique... is still an evil technique,” Yue Hongling gasped gently. “This ability to arouse lust is no less sinister than poison. You... you must not use it lightly in the future.”

Zhao Changhe did not say much, because he knew very well that he had not even deliberately used the part of the Pure Bliss Art that aroused desire in another party. Everything that happened had been entirely due to natural attraction, rooted in the genuine mutual fondness between the two parties.

With someone they found unpleasant, what happened just now would never have occurred. They would have immediately felt disgusted and have pushed or kicked the other party away without hesitation.

However, he was worried that if he revealed this, Yue Hongling would lose even the last shred of face and just leave him there. There was nothing left for her in Yangzhou, so she could simply leave at any time.

He did not want to say something that would trigger a parting, so he remained silent.

It was already enough for him to know that she truly had feelings for him.

In fact, deep down, Yue Hongling knew this herself.

At this time, it was better to remain silent than say anything.

Inside the room, only the sound of their heartbeats echoed.

After a long while, Yue Hongling said softly, “I can’t take advantage of you and then act all coy... You were right, dual cultivation is indeed truly beneficial for my breakthrough to the ninth layer. For now, I will look for a secluded place to digest what I’ve gained. The day I emerge from seclusion may be the day I reach the ninth layer. I will thank you then.”

Zhao Changhe sighed, “In the end, you’re still going to leave?”

Yue Hongling seemed to feel a bit like she was taking advantage of him and then running off, so she was left unsure how to respond to him.

Zhao Changhe whispered, “Big Sister Yue...”

“Um?”

“Can I... kiss your cheek, just once?”

Yue Hongling: “...”

Are you an idiot? You’re already hugging me like this. If you just lowered your head and kissed me on the cheek, what could I have even done? Why are you forcing me to answer you like this?

You idiot, you big idiot!

Zhao Changhe also seemed to realize how foolish it was for him to ask, and so he simply lowered his head and went for it.

But then, before his lips could reach her cheek, someone knocked on the door.

Yue Hongling quickly broke free from his embrace and sat expressionlessly at the table.

The atmosphere had been well and truly ruined.

Zhao Changhe was so angry that he wanted to chop the bastard who had just knocked on the door into eighteen pieces. He then shouted angrily, “Who is it?!”

Seeing the color of his face shifting to that of a pig’s liver, Yue Hongling suddenly found herself quite amused.

From outside the door, Tang Buqi’s voice sounded. “It’s me.”

Zhao Changhe: “I have nothing to do with your aunt, nothing at all. Now piss off.”

Tang Buqi: “???”

How did you know what I came here to ask? I see now. You and Wan Dongliu must have planned this together. The two of you really are kindred souls!

He still asked hesitantly, “But your Spring Water Sword Intent...”

“I’m a genius, can’t I learn from others? I’ve also grasped the Fox Spirit Saber Intent, but do you really think I’ve got anything to do with Chi Li?!” Zhao Changhe erupted in anger. “Then again, don’t you also know the Spring Water Sword Intent? Does that mean we have romantic relations? If that’s what you think, then please, come in, let’s have ourselves a good chat. Let me see just how tender and delicate your skin is...”

Tang Buqi bolted in an instant. He did not even bother asking why Gong Chaoqun seemed to have so much trust in Zhao Changhe.

“Pfft...hahahahaha!” Yue Hongling burst out in laughter.

Zhao Changhe, helpless, stood with his hands on his hips and turned to look at her. “Laugh all you want...”

“Is it because I’m here that you’re that eager to sever ties with Tang Buqi?”

“It’s because that bastard interrupted me—” Zhao Changhe paused mid-sentence.

The rosy hue on Yue Hongling’s face faded naturally as she asked, “Anyway, where do you plan to go next?”

Zhao Changhe smoothly let the topic go. “I still have some matters I want to discuss with Wan Dongliu. After that, I’ll see how things go. Maybe I’ll pay a visit to the Blood God Cult and meet Cult Leader Xue?”

“The Blood God Cult?” Yue Hongling was a little surprised. But then, she seemed to understand. “You want to completely resolve your grievances? That makes sense. But be careful, Xue Canghai is much stronger than you right now.”

“I know. I’m not going there looking for trouble. I will act according to the situation.”

“Alright, with the wisdom you have shown in Yangzhou this time, I believe you can handle yourself well.” Yue Hongling stood up and straightened her collar. “All banquets in the world must come to an end, and I really should take my leave now. If fate permits, perhaps we may meet again in the jianghu.”

Zhao Changhe’s expression was really sour, but he remained silent.

Yue Hongling laughed again, as if amused by something. She tilted her head and gazed at his side profile for a while, then she suddenly tiptoed and pecked him lightly on his cheek.

Zhao Changhe: “???”

He was stunned. Is this the real one? This isn’t the celestial maiden, right?

Yue Hongling smiled gently and softly said, “Back in the underground passage, I told you that we could discuss things further once we got back. At that time, I thought that I should reward you since you performed so well... I knew what you wanted, but with all the mess that happened, the atmosphere was ruined. Now, I’m making up for it. Consider this your reward, but don’t get greedy.”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

“I’ve been thinking... The flower-picking celestial maiden said that if it were me, I’d probably do the same things. Maybe she could see things clearer as a bystander, playing the part that should have been mine. It turns out that it really was me who was trapped by appearances and was restricting myself too much. With this single kiss, it seems my thoughts have cleared up. Perhaps me doing this is even better than you making use of your cultivation technique to fulfill your desires and kiss me?”

Zhao Changhe: “.....”

“I never imagined that the boy from Zhao Village back then could one day stand by my side and even help me so much. I’m truly glad to have made this trip to Yangzhou.” After saying that, Yue Hongling finally gently pushed him away, and then gracefully turned around and walked out the door.

Zhao Changhe stood there, touching his cheek as he watched her leave in a daze.

She suddenly stopped at the door, turned back, then said with a charming smile, “Farewell for now. If fate permits it... I’d like to see what you call me then.”

Chapter 133: Mystery of the Celestial Maiden

This time, there was no sadness in their parting like there had been in the past.

In fact, Zhao Changhe even felt the joyous urge to sing a little tune. He was now extremely relaxed and comfortable.

Until we meet again. Just you wait.

Although he still had a desire to pursue her in his heart, he simply suppressed it. It was not purely due to his admiration of her, but more so due to the subconscious feeling of his strength being unworthy of her at the moment.

She had said it herself: anyone who wanted to wander the jianghu with her had to be capable enough to do it.

In the face of such a situation, other than those wealthy and powerful experienced men, there were hardly any men who would be able to muster the courage to advance with her.

But next time we meet, things will be different...

Zhao Changhe was very confident about this. Even though he knew that it would take him longer to advance now, he was not discouraged.

After all, breaking through to the later stages of cultivation was not only about an increase in the demand for energy and the difficulty of the cultivation techniques.

Blessings and misfortunes were always intertwined. The greatest drawback of starting to practice martial arts in adulthood was the rigidity of a person's meridians. It was because of that that it has been so difficult for him to improve his internal cultivation. However, his excellent physique and vigorous blood and qi just so happened to be extremely suited for practicing the Vicious Blood Art, giving him a significant advantage in practicing it. Coupled with his excellent comprehension and diligence in training, along with the unique compatibility and the boosting effects of the Six Harmonies Art, he had been able to create this miracle of reaching the fifth layer in just half a year.

However, he had already pretty much used up the advantage given to him by his physique.

This feeling had become increasingly apparent recently. Chi Li and Fa Yuan had already begun delving into spiritual illusions, and Tang Wanzhuang had even begun manipulating light perception. As people continued to progress in cultivation, their power inevitably touched realms beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. And when it came to that, his comparatively mundane physique would no longer provide him with as great of support. At most, it could be said to provide a good foundation, but his progress would definitely not be as rapid as before, and his cultivation would inevitably slow down.

Otherwise, a genius like Wan Dongliu, who had been practicing since he was a child, would not have been merely at the sixth layer of the Profound Gate at the age of twenty-three. After all, in what way was he inferior to Zhao Changhe? There was no huge gap in their aptitude; all those who could be listed on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons were considered by the very heavens to have surpassed ordinary mortals in potential. As for the differences between those on the list, they were not all that ridiculous. Wan Dongliu's appearance and placing on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons indicated his exceptional talent. It was really difficult to surpass him.

However, Zhao Changhe still felt very confident.

His aptitude had just been validated, and while he might not be called a prodigy, there were certainly no issues with his aptitude. Since that was fine, with the Heavenly Tome in hand, if he could not make progress faster than others, then he would have truly wasted such a massive opportunity.

The reason why he had been learning a little bit of everything before was not because he was greedy, as Yue Hongling said. In fact, it was truly just a process of verification and testing for him, and he had been well aware of this all along.

Now that Yue Hongling had left and there was nothing else to do, the first thing Zhao Changhe did was get a brush, ink, and inkstone from the Xiaoxiang Pavilion, then he locked the door and began writing.

When he had finished memorizing the Vicious Blood Art before, he had not taken it with him when he left the mountain stronghold. So now, if he wanted to get the Heavenly Tome to dissect the Vicious Blood Art, he could only painstakingly transcribe it from memory and draw the example diagrams that had been in the secret book with his rudimentary drawing skills.

When Tang Wanzhuang suggested that Zhao Changhe learn these things, he had verbally agreed, but in reality, he had truly never believed that practicing martial arts would have anything to do with writing and drawing. It was like the language teacher said that one would first need to learn a language well before studying mathematics; otherwise, they would not know how to write essays.

Fortunately, the secret book had been rather thin, only a few thousand words and a number of diagrams. If it had been a thick book with hundreds of thousands of words, Zhao Changhe would have seriously considered just jumping into a river instead.

After painstakingly transcribing the whole day, Zhao Changhe eventually finished writing down the manual. He then immediately placed the golden foil beside it and silently observed any changes in the foil.

At this moment, the golden foil was still repeatedly replaying the battle between him and Wan Dongliu. He knew that this kind of replay had valuable reference value, but he really was not in the mood to scrutinize it right now.

Sure enough, after a short while, the replay of the battle shifted to the background, and in the center, an analysis of the Vicious Blood Art began to appear.

Zhao Changhe sat up straight and carefully observed everything that appeared for a long time before letting out a soft sigh.

It was about as he expected...

The golden foil would analyze the existing content and improve the parts it considered to be subpar, but would not provide additional content for the higher levels.

For example, the upper limit of the Pure Bliss Art was the Profound Mysteries, and the golden foil would not increase that; the same was true for the Vicious Blood Art. The manual for the Vicious Blood Art originally lacked the cultivation technique for the Profound Mysteries, and what he was getting from the Heavenly Tome now still only led him to the ninth layer of the Profound Gate.

As for the so-called improvements, the Heavenly Tome would not actually address all of the flaws of a cultivation technique. When it came to the Pure Bliss Art, it only improved the most basic methods of its cultivation and adjusted the nature of its dual cultivation techniques. Zhao Changhe did not believe that it was flawless in all other aspects, but it seemed that the golden foil simply ignored the other aspects. There was no perfect cultivation technique. Besides, if it was modified, could it still be called the Pure Bliss Art?

The same was true for the Vicious Blood Art. The golden foil made some changes, but it did not address the issue that Zhao Changhe wanted solved the most: the invasion of vicious blood qi.

It did optimize the Scattering of Gods and Buddhas, reducing the consumption and minimizing its flaws. As for the No Man's Land that could completely drive a person insane, it slightly optimized the state of overflowing bloodthirst, leaving a trace of clarity in his spirit, which offered him a precious chance to survive.

Just as Wan Dongliu said, he only had a single ultimate technique, which had even been thoroughly analyzed by others. However, that situation had now changed. This was incredibly valuable.

The Vicious Blood Saber Art originally had seven ultimate techniques, including three for the Profound Gate, three for the Profound Mysteries, and one unknown. Unfortunately, there was no manual for the parts beyond the Profound Mysteries, so he couldn't even imagine that remaining skill for now. The golden foil also displayed improvements to the third ultimate technique of the Profound Gate, but it turned out that it still required him to at least be at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate to use it. Thus, he had to shelve it for now.

Because all of these improvements were only for the skills, they were of no help to the method of cultivation itself.

In particular... the pain caused by the surge of vicious blood qi.

In the golden foil's "eyes," this was exactly how the Vicious Blood Art should be. If you want to make use of that vicious qi to harm your enemies, then you should be prepared to handle the backlash of such vicious qi. It was only natural that once this core aspect was changed, then it would no longer be the Vicious Blood Art. It might then even be called the Blood God Art.

It was likely that what Cui Wenjing had said before was right: the Vicious Blood Art was the original form and the Blood God Art was merely a modification of it. The vicious qi would be restrained and the backlash subsequently reduced, but as a consequence, the power it produced could not be compared to that of the Vicious Blood Art.

Cui Wenjing was ranked 9th on the Ranking of Heaven. His judgments on martial arts were basically axioms; if he made an evaluation, then it was unlikely to be overturned.

Zhao Changhe sighed, but he also understood that greater power had to come at a greater cost. The bigger the gun, the stronger the recoil. How could something named "vicious qi" be obedient? Perhaps it was only on the day that his level was high enough to become its master that he would be able to fully subdue it.

As for how he could become its master?

Of course, that wasn't something that a mere Profound Gate manual could tell him.

Zhao Changhe put away the golden foil and strode out, heading to the Cao Gang to pay Wan Dongliu a visit.

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The members of the Cao Gang were extremely surprised that Zhao Changhe dared to come to pay their young gang leader a visit so brazenly. However, the young gang leader's order from inside surprised them even more, "Treat him as a distinguished guest and invite him in for a chat."

The members of the Cao Gang were filled with bewilderment as they silently led Zhao Changhe to Wan Dongliu's sick room.

The servants and maids in the room had been dismissed long ago, and there was nobody within even ten zhang of the room.

Zhao Changhe looked at Wan Dongliu, who was all wrapped up like a sticky rice dumpling, then he sighed and said, "With your level of caution, how did you even manage to have your mask stolen by a petty thief?"

"My mask was in my pocket, and he sure has good sleight of hand. He caught me completely off guard. It's not like I carelessly left it somewhere to be stolen." Wan Dongliu sighed as well. "But it's your attitude that I'm really having difficulty understanding. Do you also have a mask? Take it out so that I can see which group you belong to. You concealed yourself so well that I nearly ended up committing fratricide."

"I don't have a mask, but I've always been benevolent toward the Four Idols Cult and the Blood God Cult, whether you believe it or not."

Wan Dongliu's eyes flashed with amusement. "Yeah, I'm sure it's the cult that you feel benevolent toward... Oh well, whatever. Forget it, I believe you."

Zhao Changhe stared at him for a while, feeling quite resigned in his heart.

This guy's devotion to the cult is truly impressive. Even though I brutally injured him, he doesn't resent me at all. Well, it's not like I have anything against it. Compared to the hospitable facade he put up when we met, this kind of genuine hospitality feels a lot better.

The next time I see Chichi, it seems that I should try and understand the Four Idols Cult better. It looks like I've misunderstood some things and I've been missing out on a lot of good stuff.

Wan Dongliu said leisurely, "If you have something to say, then hurry up and tell me. My father is on his way here from Jinling[1], and you won't have an easy time if you run into him."

“You have a high position in the Four Idols Cult. Can you help me obtain the Profound Mysteries part of the Vicious Blood Art?”

“What do you want that thing for? Why don’t you just ask for the Blood God Art?”

“I just want the Vicious Blood Art, what’s wrong with it? Of course, it would be great if I could also get the Blood God Art and compare the two.”

Wan Dongliu relaxed and said, “Come on, this is really a trivial matter. To think you’d bother me now over that.... Anyway, if you really want the Blood God Art, I’m afraid it won’t be easy. That’s the foundational cultivation technique of the Blood God Cult. My words don’t have that much sway in comparison to someone like Venerable Vermillion Bird, not even Xue Canghai has anything to say in front of her. However, if it’s just the Vicious Blood Art, it shouldn’t be a problem for me. You can play around in Yangzhou, I should be able to get it for you in two days.”

“Is two days really enough? Don’t tell me that the cult leader of the Blood God Cult is nearby?”

“Nope, he’s far away. However, there is a branch nearby, and it’s not difficult to get the Vicious Blood Art from them. They don’t really think much of that cultivation technique. If anything, I think they even want as many people as possible to learn it, so the cult could control them later using those pain-relieving pills. They just let pretty much anyone learn it...”

Zhao Changhe pondered for a moment, then shook his head. “I know more about this than you think. The part that the Blood God Cult lets everyone learn is just the Profound Gate part, but what I want is the Profound Mysteries part of the cultivation technique. I doubt you’d find that in a random branch.”

Wan Dongliu looked puzzled. “Isn’t it a bit too early for you to look into the Profound Mysteries part? Why are you in such a rush?”

In actuality, Zhao Changhe wanted the Heavenly Tome to analyze the complete version to see if he could extract a method to control the vicious blood qi rather than just brute-forcing it like he was doing now. Of course, he could not reveal this, so he simply said, “With only half of the manual on hand, how can I be at ease? It’s always better to address matters like this thoroughly before moving forward.”

“Then it seems I can’t help you with this matter.”

“You can just tell me where their headquarters is located.”

“In Wushan. It would be more convenient for you to head there by boat.”

Zhao Changhe could not help but feel even sorrier for Cult Leader Xue.

The cult’s headquarters was in Wushan, yet a bunch of elite members, including himself, were sent to the icy tundra to fetch items for the Four Idols Cult. It truly was a pitiful situation for the leader of a cult...

Speaking of the Blood God Cult’s nature, it did not really seem to match a place like Wushan. If the Maitreya Cult were in Wushan, it would seem much more fitting.

With this in mind, Zhao Changhe suddenly remembered something and asked, “Since you seem to know so much about the Maitreya Cult, do you know if they have a celestial maiden at the fourth layer of the Profound Gate?”

“At that level, even if they were called a celestial maiden, it would just be a superficial title. In reality, the people at that level are the ones that the Maitreya Cult specifically sends out to seduce and control people. For example, the magistrate’s concubine. While they’re called celestial maidens, they’re not the genuine high-ranking celestial maidens of the cult.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. This explanation aligned with his initial assessment of the flower-picking celestial maiden. This was how it was supposed to be, right?

But why did something about this feel so wrong to him? During the recent city-wide search for followers of the Maitreya Cult, she still had the audacity to secretly follow him and take advantage of the outbreak of his vicious qi to launch a surprise attack. Was this the kind of courage and cunning that a low-ranking celestial maiden groomed by a branch of the Maitreya Cult should possess?

She imitated Yue Hongling’s tone and mindset so perfectly that even Yue Hongling herself had to admit, despite her stubbornness, that perhaps the flower-picking celestial maiden saw things more clearly and played her character more convincingly.

No matter how he looked at it, she was a formidable and elusive character.

But her cultivation was really low, and her combat skills were still very immature, so what was going on?

Chapter 134: Don't Let Her Down

“What are the genuine high-ranking celestial maidens of the Maitreya Cult like then?”

“They are the dual cultivation partners of Cult Leader Maitreya. They generally have high cultivation levels... Of course, there are also young girls who just so happened to catch the eye of the cult leader, but they aren’t able to just casually come out. Even if they do, they are protected by a group of high-level guardians.”

“Is there nothing else?” Zhao Changhe asked hesitantly. “Isn’t there also a kind of white lotus celestial maiden who needs to be nurtured and taught from a tender age?”

Wan Dongliu looked at him for a while and then said slowly, “Are you talking about something like what the Four Idols Cult did? Raising a saintess who pretends to be a man and accompanies you to sleep for a month or two?”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Wan Dongliu snickered. “The Maitreya Cult has the same origin as the White Lotus Sect. Although, in our opinion, the White Lotus Sect has a much more complete system, how they distinguish themselves internally isn’t something that outsiders can understand. I only maintained a cooperative stance with them before. I was never able to join the cult, they could never trust me enough to let me do so... At least, after I refused their celestial maiden, I lost their trust.”

“Mm-hm.”

Wan Dongliu continued leisurely, “So, whether or not there even exists something like a white lotus celestial maiden, I don’t really know. But based on my common sense, if there were such an immature saintess, there would be no way that she would be listening to the orders of someone like Fa Yuan, who’s merely the leader of a branch temple in Yangzhou. I truly doubt that she would allow herself to be arranged to seduce someone who’s only ranked eighty-something on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons... If you said that she was trying to seduce someone like Chi Li, I might still believe it. Brother Zhao, I think you might be reading too many novels.”

Zhao Changhe retorted, "I'm 38th now, okay? Maybe others could see that I'm not an ordinary person and decided to invest in me early on!"

Wan Dongliu looked him up and down for a while, then pretended like he was too injured to even bother responding. He closed his eyes and said nothing.

Zhao Changhe said, "Are there any other similar forces? More... Hmm, intriguing ones."

Wan Dongliu replied impatiently: "There are countless chaotic sects and cults in the world. Even within a single force, there are already countless branches. Even my branch and your Azure Dragon or White Tiger aren't completely compatible at times. As far as I know, the White Lotus Sect has dozens of branches. Who in the world could possibly answer such a question? If you really want to know more about these things, then I can actually recommend a good place to go."

"Hm?"

"The Demon Suppression Bureau."

Zhao Changhe fell silent. Wu Weiyang had indeed said back then that if he wanted to get more such information, he should join the Demon Suppression Bureau. This information was indeed what the bureau knew best.

Now, whether he should go to Wushan or the capital first became the question...

The matter concerning the celestial maidens was just born out of curiosity; it wasn't actually an urgent matter. It was more important for him to deal with the matter involving the Vicious Blood Art.

Logically, Wushan was first. But the problem was that Cult Leader Xue might not be easy to deal with. If he acted unreasonably and suddenly wanted to kill Zhao Chaghe, his current strength might not be enough to let him keep his life.

Of course, it would be safest for him to find Chichi first. However, he needed to distance himself from her in front of the Four Idols Cult. Otherwise, he may end up harming her reputation and standing in the cult. What would be the point of seeking trouble like that? He did not want to

provoke Cult Leader Xue, so if he went and provoked Venerable Vermillion Bird instead, that would be like running from a wolf only to end up in a lion's den.

Wan Dongliu had no idea what Zhao Changhe was thinking at the moment, so he just changed the topic. "Anyway, about Ji Chengkong, I'm planning to release him."

Zhao Changhe asked curiously, "Aren't you afraid that he'll leak your secret?"

"I was worried before, mainly because I was afraid of arousing suspicion from the Maitreya Cult, which would have affected my plans. But now that everything's done, what does it even matter if he leaks it or not? He can shout to the heavens that I'm a member of the Four Idols cult, but without evidence, would anyone actually believe him?"

"...So, even if I were to leak it, it doesn't matter, right?"

"You are different. Your words actually carry weight, at least in the eyes of the Demon Suppression Bureau. And don't even bother telling me that you have nothing to do with the bureau. I'm not Tang Buqi."

Zhao Changhe did not continue on that topic and simply asked, "Why are you releasing him then? Isn't that no different from asking for trouble?"

Wan Dongliu sighed helplessly. "You don't think I spared him because I am a kind-hearted man, right? I didn't want to offend the Thieves Guild to the point of no return. By then, thieves from all over the world would come to bother me. How would I be able to focus on my own affairs then? Sometimes, it's better to leave a way out. We have our own family and business. We can't be as casual as you when it comes to dealing with things."

"So there really is a Thieves Guild?"

"Not only does it exist, but Ji Chengkong is also a direct line heir. His master is ranked first on the Ranking of Earth: Thief Saint Ye Wuzong. He's the fastest person in the world, someone even those on the Ranking of Heaven would rather not mess with."

"So, when you're out and about, all that matters is having the right backing?"

Wan Dongliu chuckled. “Exactly. If your saintess or the Demon Suppression Bureau were willing to openly support you, you would not be in such a shitty position. And if the Cui Clan acknowledged you, you’d be even more comfortable. It’s strange how you actually have a bunch of backers, but you can’t openly use any of them, and sometimes you even end up in trouble, like my assassination attempt. You’re having it pretty tough, I have to say.”

Zhao Changhe thought to himself, Do I actually also have the backing of the person at the top of the Ranking of Heaven? As messy as these connections may seem, they’re not entirely useless to me. This ambiguous identity brings not only troubles but also many benefits, which is why I have not denied anything.

He found it odd, though. “You seem to have concluded that I have a solid connection to your saintess, is that not a problem to you?”

Wan Dongliu said calmly, “From the perspective of the Holy Cult, her behavior is unacceptable... But because you’ve kept my identity a secret for her sake, it would be pretty damn petty of me to snitch on you. With that in mind, though, I’d still suggest you be cautious. If you can break it off, then do it. Otherwise, if Venerable Vermillion Bird were to find out, you would have a much harder time talking to her than me. Isn’t Yue Hongling good enough? Why be so greedy?”

“Don’t you have a cult leader? Why does it seem to be Venerable Vermillion Bird who handles everything?”

“The Holy Cult isn’t supposed to have a cult leader in the first place. The Four Idols are supposed to work in parallel. If there’s someone who could be considered the leader, then that could only be... the Night Emperor of the previous era.”

Zhao Changhe’s heart stirred. He had heard that name before, back in the reflections at the bottom of the Ancient Sword Lake.

According to what he heard back then, the Night Emperor seemed to have fallen in the previous era... And the page of the Heavenly Tome in his possession should have originally belonged to the Night Emperor. He could not help but wonder why it had ended up in the hands of that woman.

It seems like the Four Idols Cult’s search for that sword may not have just been an ordinary treasure hunt. It looks like there was a specific connection between that place and the Four Idols Cult from the beginning. Surely, their scriptures would mention it, right?

Wan Dongliu continued, “That’s why we have the saints and saintesses. When they reach a certain standard, they become the incarnations of their system, be it for the Vermillion Bird or the White Tiger. The four Venerables decide major matters together. But right now, we only have two Venerables, and even I have no idea who’s taken that position for the Black Tortoise. As such, it has been Venerable Vermillion Bird who handles daily affairs, and it’s not that big of a stretch to consider her the leader. Anyway, these aren’t really secrets. If you ask the Demon Suppression Bureau, they’ll tell you the same things.”

Zhao Changhe nodded and said, “So the reason why the Four Idols Cult has been lying low so far is the vacancies in the upper echelons, huh? That’s why they feel that their strength is insufficient?”

“Exactly. It would be best if someone who is truly compatible with the Four Idols appeared. Then, there would be a possibility of them actually becoming the leader. Or perhaps if someone emerges as the successor of the Night Emperor? Anyway, with Xia Chichi now having the inheritance of two lineages, she has a real chance at filling that gap. Venerable Vermillion Bird not only isn’t jealous, she’s actually very hopeful for that girl. This is an important matter for our Holy Cult as a whole. Brother Zhao, don’t let her down.”

Zhao Changhe fell silent, offering no response.

It appeared like the goals of the Four Idols Cult may not necessarily be in the mortal realm.

Perhaps the reason the White Tiger Saintess had been so captivated by Xia Longyuan back then was because she wanted to find someone who could become Venerable Azure Dragon. At the same time, the reason Xia Longyuan had removed himself from the picture was actually to create a serious fracture within the Four Idols Cult.

But now that both lineages had converged on Chichi, the storms surrounding her may be heavier than he had previously thought.

Don’t let her down...

For a moment, both of them were absolutely silent. Zhao Changhe did not know how to broach the subject with Wan Dongliu. Thinking that it was pointless to remain here any longer, he was about to take his leave when a report suddenly came from Wan Dongliu’s trusted guard outside. “Young Master Tang Buqi has come to visit.”

Wan Dongliu asked curiously, “What’s he up to again?”

“He said he came here to see Mr. Zhao.”

Wan Dongliu looked at Zhao Changhe, who nodded, and then he said, “Invite him in.” Tang Buqi came through the door soon after.

The next moment, Wan Dongliu stared dumbfounded as Zhao Changhe knocked Tang Buqi to the ground and began thrashing him. “You think knocking on the door is very polite, huh?! Next time, don’t you dare knock again! You dare come to see me at such a horrible time? If I don’t beat you to death, I’m not your uncle!”

Tang Buqi held his head and cried out in pain, “The Demon Suppression Bureau searched the White Lotus Temple and found a woman who was tied up in the warehouse and almost starved to death. She claims that she’s the flower-picking celestial maiden! Uncle Gong told me to ask you if you want to see her...hey, why are you still hitting me?!”

Zhao Changhe was startled, and he pulled back the kick he was about to deliver. He dusted off his palms and said, “Ahem, it seems that my dear eldest nephew still has some loyalty. Where is she? Take me to see her.”

Chapter 135: Fake Celestial Maiden

The civil servants of the Demon Suppression Bureau were having a rough few days.

When Zhao Changhe was displaying his heroic spirit on the streets and challenged Wan Dongliu to a battle, they were busy doing all they could to extract information from the followers of whatever demonic cults. While Zhao Changhe was engaging in intimacy with a heroine in the Xiaoxiang Pavilion, they were still engaged in battles of wit and even sustaining injuries in the process.

Investigating and arresting followers of the Maitreya Cult in such a large city was no easy task. It would take at least a month just to scratch the surface. And that was not even mentioning the recent incident at the White Lotus Temple, where they had to comb through every nook and cranny for several days without rest.

One day, while the personnel of the Demon Suppression Bureau were conducting a search of a warehouse at White Lotus Temple, they stumbled upon a girl hidden in a corner among some piles of clothes. When they pulled her out, they found her on the brink of starving to death

When they questioned her, she claimed to be the flower-picking celestial maiden of the White Lotus Temple. She said that she had inexplicably been knocked unconscious and she had woken up in this miserable state a few days before. She even asked the people from the Demon Suppression Bureau what year it was now.

The Demon Suppression Bureau already had undercover agents in the Maitreya Cult. Gong Chaoqun had prior knowledge of a celestial maiden from the Maitreya Cult planning to seduce Zhao Changhe, and that was why he had intercepted him on the road to warn him about the illusion techniques of the celestial maidens. It had then become clear that the celestial maiden who was meant to seduce Zhao Changhe was the flower-picking celestial maiden. So then, where did this nearly-starved celestial maiden come from?

Gong Chaoqun realized something was wrong and quickly asked Tang Buqi to find Zhao Changhe.

Zhao Changhe hurried to the Demon Suppression Bureau to take a look. When he arrived, he saw the flower-wielding goddess who appeared extremely exhausted. Her appearance vaguely resembled the celestial maiden he knew, but there were significant differences that made her seem unfamiliar.

He crouched down in front of her and asked, “Do you know me?”

The flower-picking celestial maiden looked confused for a while and then replied, “Are you... the Bloodthirsty Asura Zhao Changhe?”

The corners of Zhao Changhe’s mouth twitched when he heard that title. “Yes. Did you guess that from my appearance?”

“No, I saw you enter the White Lotus Temple.”

“...And then?”

“I only know that you went to see Abbott Fa Yuan for advice, but I have no idea about what you discussed,” the flower-picking celestial maiden said, clearly struggling to remember the events that took place. “Abbott Fa Yuan told me earlier that if you came, you would be my mission... But before I even received the order that day, I suddenly fell unconscious.”

Zhao Changhe’s expression became increasingly strange.

It seems that someone knocked this woman unconscious and took on her identity... Leaving aside the intentions of the impostor, if they were indeed a fake celestial maiden, then how did they deceive the members of the Maitreya Cult?

Oh, right...

Zhao Changhe knocked his head. The impostor really only needed to make herself look like Yue Hongling. As long as she did that, the other members of the Maitreya Cult would probably not think too much about it...

Wow, whoever she is, that girl is really interesting. She actually took advantage of the opportunity to impersonate Yue Hongling and infiltrate the Maitreya Cult. Even when the White Lotus Temple was attacked that night, she joined in the resistance! She's truly amazing!

Upon further thought, Zhao Changhe could actually conceive an even more interesting scenario.

The impostor had knocked out the real flower-picking celestial maiden not because she intended to replace her, but rather for a different purpose. That would explain why she continued to stay in the White Lotus Temple: she had some kind of agenda.

However, just as she knocked out the real flower-picking celestial maiden, someone just so happened to call for the flower-picking celestial maiden and task her with the mission to impersonate Yue Hongling...

At this point, the impostor would have been in a dilemma. After all, she could not possibly just wake up the real celestial maiden that she had just knocked out and tell her to go do her mission, right?

So, taking advantage of the fact that she was in the clothing warehouse and the dressing room was nearby, she had simply donned a red heroine attire, put on a bit of heroic spirit, and disguised herself. Then, she had confidently gone out, pretending to be the flower-picking celestial maiden on a mission.

The ordinary members of the Maitreya Cult had no reason to give it much thought. They even touched up her makeup to make her look more like Yue Hongling before sending her to Xiaoxiang Pavilion.

The more he thought about it, the more interesting it all seemed to him. What was even more interesting was that, just as the impostor had been sitting in his room waiting for him, thinking about how in the world she was to go about finishing the ridiculous mission, the real Yue Hongling had suddenly burst in and knocked her out, then stuffed her under the bed.

Zhao Changhe almost laughed out loud at the thought.

No wonder she was so cooperative with him, pretending to complete the mission and acting as if something had happened between her and him. It all fit together seamlessly. The real flower-picking celestial maiden should not have behaved like that. He had mistakenly thought that she was a genuine celestial maiden who had not been brainwashed enough.

Although he did not know what her original purpose was, what subsequent changes in her thoughts took place, why she had ended up genuinely helping him through dual cultivation, and what her true intentions were, that was probably more or less how everything had started.

There was no way that she had intentionally come and knocked out the real celestial maiden just to take her place and get close to him. There was no logic to it. If she really wanted to get close to him, a clean and innocent identity would have been much more useful than pretending to be a celestial maiden.

“It’s settled.” Zhao Changhe contemplated for a while before turning to Gong Chaoqun. “This is just an ordinary celestial maiden of the Maitreya Cult. Handle her however you see fit.”

Gong Chaoqun understood his meaning. “What about the one from before...”

“I’ll have to trouble the Demon Suppression Bureau to help me screen through what kind of background such a person might have. She is smart and decisive, handles matters irregularly, yet open-minded like an actual celestial maiden of the Maitreya Cult...”

Gong Chaoqun’s expression became increasingly strange. “Why don’t you go to the Four Idols Cult? Aren’t you quite familiar with them?”

Zhao Changhe was rather annoyed. “The saintess of the Four Idols Cult wouldn’t do this kind of stuff. She would not flirt with people she doesn’t like. You guys have got it all wrong!”

Tang Buqi said in a strange tone, “Well, we don’t understand the saintess of the Four Idols Cult as well as you do.”

Zhao Changhe clenched his fists.

Tang Buqi took a step back.

Zhao Changhe was too lazy to pay any more attention to him and said, “Another clue is that she truly knows the cultivation art of the Maitreya Cult. I suspect her apparent lack of combat experience back then was due to her being unfamiliar with this cultivation art. I believe that she has a different fundamental art, and her cultivation might not be low, but there is still a significant gap between her and Yue Hongling. Anyway, this should have narrowed down the possible suspects quite significantly. Please help me screen for her with this information. Let me know if you find anything.”

Gong Chaoqun was already sifting through the information in his mind. After a moment, he shook his head and then nodded. “Alright, I’ll handle it.”

Tang Buqi’s eyes looked back and forth between the two of them, his gaze filled with confusion.

Gong Chaoqun added, “There is another matter that I believe you’ll find very interesting.”

“Oh? What is it?”

“The correspondence between Fa Yuan and the leader of the Maitreya Cult. You did not read the letters before you gave them to me, did you?”

“No, there were too many letters. I did not have the time to go through them one by one. Anyway, it’s your responsibility to keep track of the movements of the rebels, isn’t it”

“Yes, it is indeed largely our responsibility. However, there was one letter in particular, which you might be interested in,” Gong Chaoqun said with a smile. “In a letter from Maitreya to Fa Yuan, it mentioned the possible presence of a treasure that nurtures vicious energies in the Jiangdong area, with there being a particularly high likelihood of it being in Jinling. Fa Yuan wrote an unfinished reply, suggesting that Yangzhou definitely did not have it and that it was more likely to be in Gusu.” Zhao Changhe listened quietly, but his breathing became noticeably heavier.

Tang Buqi interjected: “What is this treasure that nurtures vicious energies?”

Gong Chaoqun smiled and said, “Well, the Maitreya Cult believes that killing leads to enlightenment, and in line with that thinking, many of their techniques are filled with vicious and aggressive qi. The more malevolent a person is or the more they kill, the more powerful their techniques become. That is why the Maitreya Cult was once interested in recruiting Mister Zhao. As the Bloodthirsty Asura, he fits their killing techniques very well. In fact, the practices of the Blood God Cult also encourage killing. The heavier the vicious qi, the stronger they become. In the later stages of the Vicious Blood Art, relying solely on blood and qi is no longer enough, They also need to kill to nurture vicious energies.”

Zhao Changhe remained silent, understanding the logic behind it all.

A long time ago, when he wanted to break through, he deliberately sought the heads of Wang Dashan’s men.

Why did every battle, especially those involving bloodshed, help his Vicious Blood Art? Why was his strength at its peak after each breakthrough?

It was all due to the fundamental principles behind the Vicious Blood Art.

Tang Buqi continued to ask, “So there are also treasures that can nurture this kind of vicious qi?”

“Treasures, locations, special methods, all these exist. It’s impossible to just rely on slaughtering people yourself.” Gong Chaoqun chuckled, then turned to Zhao Changhe. “You were the one who provided us with these letters, and I thought that this particular piece of information would prove quite useful to you, so I thought I’d return the favor.”

Zhao Changhe took a deep breath. “Thank you very much. It is indeed useful... very useful.”

What had he just been contemplating?

He had already pretty much exhausted the benefits of his physique, so now he needed to consider aspects that were beyond human capabilities.

Vicious qi was the epitome of this, a quintessential aspect of the Vicious Blood Art. In order to break through to the sixth layer and beyond, and perhaps even reach the Profound Mysteries, this was something he needed to focus on.

However, could he really devote himself to solely killing others?

Unexpectedly, before he could dwell on it further, this great piece of news had arrived.

He no longer needed to ponder on where to head next. Wushan and the capital would have to wait for now.

He wanted the subsequent parts of the Vicious Blood Art, but he was afraid of having to face Cult Leader Xue at his level. The answer to that problem was now before him—of course, it was to improve himself as much as he could before confronting the man.

His next destination needed no further consideration.

Gusu, you better get ready.