

T. Times 201

Chapter 201: Man and Wife

The farce thus came to an abrupt end, with the stage having been ruined. There was no longer much of a show for people to watch.

Most people nowadays did not really know much of the previous generation of hidden dragons, but they learned that the current generation of hidden dragons actually seemed to get along rather well.

They had initially expected to witness each of the hidden dragons display their skills to get in. Several of them, like Xuan Chong, might have expressed their dissatisfaction while still showing their prowess, demonstrating their capabilities without offending the host too much.

In this way, they would have also provided some entertainment for the onlookers.

Unexpectedly, from the very start with Situ Xiao, or perhaps even with Zhao Changhe, who had already drawn his saber even before Situ Xiao appeared, the hidden dragons aimed to put an end to the farce the direct and hard way.

Ji Chengkong also directly slapped the Wang Clan in the face, nearly tearing down their signboard. Of course, he did not actually dare to be too harsh, and he did not actually tear it off, as he still had his life to consider, but the crooked plaque was still a stinging slap to the Wang Clan's face.

Then, Xia Chichi and Zhao Changhe swiftly and decisively smashed the gate apart while chatting and laughing.

It seemed that none of them were willing to accompany the Wang Clan in their little games.

Zhao Changhe's words, that he would just smash it to pieces, seemed to carry a deeper meaning.

But what really puzzled people was that even though the stage had been ruined, the Wang Clan surprisingly did not send any powerful figures to intervene. Instead, they only sent out someone who looked to be a butler. He slowly approached the gate, inspected it for a moment, and calmly said, "Go fetch some craftsmen to make a new gate, then have the signboard properly hung up. Have this done by the end of the day."

After saying that, he even respectfully cupped his fist and bowed to Zhao Changhe, Xia Chichi, and Xuan Chong, saying, "It was just a small game. Please do forgive us if this has offended you. The young master has been waiting for you in the banquet hall for some time. Please come in."

Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi exchanged glances, secretly acknowledging that this was indeed the kind of etiquette and manners that were to be expected of a prominent clan. At the very least, Cui Yuanyong had given them such an impression before. They thus could not help but wonder what game the Wang Clan was playing earlier.

Without saying a word, the two of them faintly smiled and walked into the hall side by side.

Xuan Chong: "..."

Wasn't it the two of us who came here together? What am I now?

The broken gate remained open, and the hidden dragons that arrived later looked at the hole in the gate in surprise. They presented their invitations as expected of them, and everything seemed to proceed in a normal manner.

However, those who had witnessed what had happened earlier were kicking themselves, regretting that they could not go in and watch the following events in person. They felt that the

events that were going to take place in the banquet hall would be even more exciting and fascinating than the earlier event.

Meanwhile, Zhao Chang and Xia Chichi entered side by side. Xia Chichi was smiling happily underneath her mask, and she said, “Hey, isn’t this the first time we’ve walked side by side openly since Beimang?”

Zhao Changhe looked a little nostalgic and said softly, “Yes.”

If there was a time in this world when he felt most like he was at home, then it was truly those one or two months when he lived together with Chichi. After that, no matter where he stayed, he never got that same feeling again.

It was a pity that they had to go their separate ways so soon. Their relationship, which should have grown stronger over time, ended up having to be secretive due to issues involving larger forces. Because of that, even getting to walk side by side out in the open became something to be happy about.

He did not know if the encounters with Vermillion Bird, especially the most recent one, had allowed for looser restrictions on the relationship between him and Chichi, but at least for today, they were both able to attend the banquet of the Wang Clan as guests. At least for today, there was no problem with them being in close proximity to one another.

I should make the most out of this...

As these thoughts crossed his mind, he joked, “Why did you come so early? This isn’t like you at all. I really thought that you would only appear during the grand finale, making a big entrance befitting your name.”[1]

Xia Chichi shrugged and said in a low voice, “Well, I knew that you would be here, so I wanted to come early to see you. This way, before the banquet begins, we can have the chance

to talk a bit. Who knows when we'll get the chance to do this again? So what's the point of putting on airs?"

Zhao Changhe felt warmth welling up in his heart and whispered back, "I never thought that the Wang Clan would actually invite you. After all, to the imperial court, you are considered a rebel. It's rather audacious of the Wang Clan to openly invite a rebel to their banquet, and you actually dared to come. Are you not afraid that they'll send out five hundred executioners after you?"

"Why would I not dare to come? With the Wang Clan's status, they are naturally capable of inviting people from both sides. Also, would they go through so much effort just to deceive someone like me, who is only at the seventh layer of the Profound Gate? That would be ridiculous," replied Xia Chichi. Then, she suddenly switched to voice transmission. "Your identity as the prince is becoming increasingly real in everyone's eyes. They are more likely to want to kill you than to plot against me.... Of course, the likelihood is still quite slim. Moreover, your whereabouts aren't exactly a secret, so there's no need for the Wang Clan to make a move against you right now."

"Ugh..." freewebnovel.com

"While the prominent clans of Great Xia do boast scholarly heritages, their rise in this world began in the ruins of martial arts. Ultimately, they all still retain an air of martial arts and the spirit of jianghu. If you were to look at this matter from a martial arts perspective, it would not actually seem that out of the ordinary. In the world of martial arts, it isn't uncommon for powerful forces to invite opposing sides over for whatever events." Xia Chichi said leisurely. "Some might even find such actions bold and admirable."

Zhao Changhe nodded inwardly, acknowledging that similar examples did exist in the modern world.

It is indeed not all that surprising.

However, one could also argue that the Wang Clan was no longer affected by the deterrence of Xia Longyuan. As a member of the Wang Clan, the empress likely understood Xia Longyuan's

situation better than others, and it now seemed that he was in a worse condition than what was being let out.... Perhaps the Wang Clan's actions were even meant to convey this message to the world, which was quite despicable.

Xia Chichi looked at the servant of the Wang Clan, who was leading the way, and then at Xuan Chong, who was leisurely enjoying the scenery behind them. "Can you use voice transmission now? It's not easy to talk here. I feel like someone might eavesdrop on us. If you're able to use voice transmission, the chance of our conversation being intercepted is much smaller."

Zhao Changhe did know how to transmit his voice. It was a technique that varied little among different forces. He had previously studied and grasped the Pure Bliss Art of the Maitreya Cult, which was a complete system. With it being a complete system, it naturally included a way to use internal energy to transmit sound, a subtle application achievable only by practitioners of internal arts rather than the brute strength of practitioners of external arts.

He had not been able to use it before due to his insufficient internal cultivation. He had only just broken through to the fifth layer for his internal cultivation, so he was not sure if he could use it just yet. Anyhow, he tried it out, "Hello?"

Xia Chichi: "..."

"I can actually do it now," Zhao Changhe said happily. "It turns out that the fifth layer is enough. The manual I was referring to said that one needed to reach the seventh layer first, though."

Xia Chichi rolled her eyes at him. "Normally, it is indeed required to reach around the seventh layer. However, you're using... his inheritance. It's simply of a different quality."

"Urgh..."

Having spoken of Xia Longyuan's cultivation technique, Xia Chichi's expression grew slightly melancholic. She sighed and said, "Judging from the Wang Clan's behavior... he... he might really be unwell...."

Zhao Changhe pursed his lips.

No wonder Chichi looks a bit sluggish as of late. Who knows what complex emotions she's feeling right now? No matter how much she might resent him, he is still her biological father at the end of the day. And I'm the only person she can confide in.

"I don't know if I should find an opportunity to go to the capital to pay him a visit..." Xia Chichi whispered. "I feel like it actually might even be easier for me to go to the capital than you. If you were to go to the capital, it would really stir up some trouble. Your cultivation... is not quite there yet."

Sure enough, Chi Chi was the one who understood his thought process the most. Without reaching a certain level of strength, it really was not appropriate for him to go to the capital. Zhao Changhe could only say, "As long as you don't go and stir trouble in the imperial palace, poking around outside should be fine. However, I doubt that you would hold yourself back like that. Just make sure not to get arrested as a rebel, it would really be ridiculous if that were to happen"

Xia Chichi laughed and said, "Let's talk about it again later. I'm still hesitant."

Zhao Changhe responded, "If the situation is right and I do go to the capital... I'll keep an eye out for you."

Xia Chichi did not mince her words. "Then you better hurry up and train. Aren't you kind of soft lately? That perseverance you had back then that attracted me, do you even still have it?"

“I have been practicing without pause. First Seat Tang had asked me to slow down a bit, but playing the guqin and painting also ended up contributing to my cultivation. It’s quite effective. I’m not just idling away my time.”

“What about when it comes to women?”

“...At least so far, I’m still waiting for you to come and claim my first time.”

Xia Chichi glanced at him, her eyes shimmering with charm beneath her mask, “Wasn’t your first time already on my lap ages ago? Alright, alright, don’t start spouting nonsense just because you know how to use voice transmission now...”

Zhao Changhe did not know how to react. Who really is spouting nonsense between us? By that logic, my first time was taken by my right hand years ago...

Young men and women rarely get to spend time together, and it often feels like there’s so much to say and there is never enough time.

Unfortunately, no matter how grand or large the Wang Clan might be, the distance from the entrance to the banquet hall was only so great. Soon, the servant of the Wang Clan that was leading the way stopped and bowed toward them. “The banquet hall is just ahead. The young master has been waiting for you.”

Both of them sighed and ceased their conversation simultaneously, sharing the same thought: It would have been better if the Wang Clan was a bit bigger...

“The Sixth Hidden Dragon, White Tiger Saintess Xia Chichi, has arrived~”

“The Eighteenth Hidden Dragon, Bloodthirsty Asura Zhao Changhe, has arrived~”

The guard that was standing by the entrance announcing their arrival made Zhao Changhe wish that he had a mask to hide his face as well.

The Wang Clan's solemnity was a bit too much for him.

However, just as they stepped through the large door and before they could even see what the hall looked like, a discordant voice rang out coldly, "It is indeed understandable for the Wang Clan to extend invitations to the hidden dragons throughout the world without regard for their origins. After all, this is a grand occasion. We need not mention the conflict between the righteous and the evil here. However, attending a banquet with a mask on and concealing your identity, is rather rude, don't you think? Is this the making of those from demonic cults?"

Before Xia Chichi could say anything, Zhao Changhe spoke up first. "Who the hell are you? Mind your own damn business!"

Under her mask, Xia Chichi's originally ice-cold expression instantly turned into a mischievous smile.

Chapter 202: Langya Sword Conference

Everyone in the hall was shocked.

Even the person who had been talking smack just now was stunned speechless.

He had just been talking about how those from the demonic cult had no manners, but it seemed like it was this Zhao Changhe that was the one truly lacking in manners! Wait, what does this have to do with you anyway? Is Xia Chichi your wife?

Vermillion Bird, who was standing on a distant rooftop, had been gazing at the entrance to the banquet hall. Her expression was also filled with surprise.

With the Four Idols Cult being regarded as a demonic cult, it undoubtedly had many enemies. It was thus not surprising if someone felt like looking for trouble when the saintess of the Four Idols Cult flaunted her presence at such an event. There might even be victims of the Four Idols Cult among the people here. Although it might not have been Xia Chichi's doing, as she had only just recently joined the cult, it was normal for her to be made to bear their hatred.

A few days ago, Xia Chichi had asked her what to do if she were getting bullied, and Vermillion Bird had simply replied that her most reliable support was there as well.

But even Vermillion Bird had not expected Zhao Changhe's reaction to be so fierce. It seemed as if in his eyes, bullying Xia Chichi was no different from slapping him directly in the face.

Even though Zhao Changhe was notorious in the jianghu, he had actually begun to earn a reputation as a hero in the recent months. Regardless, at the end of the day, he seemed to care little about his reputation.

No wonder Xia Chichi hasn't been able to forget him. What a pain.

Amidst the astonishment, the man finally spoke coldly, "Everyone says that you have long since betrayed the Blood God Cult. You even went so far as to escort a weak woman home, as well as kill the vanguard general of the Maitreya Cult. With all of that being the case, you should be considered to be among the righteous. But now, it seems that not only are you still a bandit of the jianghu, but the matter of you leaving the Blood God Cult is also questionable.... Are you a member of the Four Idols Cult now? Otherwise, why would you be so eager to show off in front of your master?"

Zhao Changhe sneered. "I have always been a bandit of the jianghu. Who in the world would have the patience to listen to your pretentiousness? When it comes to manners, how others dress is their business. Even the host has not said anything, so who are you to disregard their authority and speak of their other guests? Is that your idea of manners? Tell me your name. I'd like to know which family raised such an ill-mannered person."

"You!" The man stood up abruptly from his table and pointed at Zhao Changhe.

Just as he was about to say something, however, the young master at the main seat finally smiled and said, “This is my birthday banquet. Please stop quarreling and give me some face.”

The man glanced at Wang Zhaoling in surprise, but Wang Zhaoling simply maintained his polite smile.

The man had no choice but to sit back down and stop talking.

Both Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi noticed this detail and could not help but laugh inwardly.

Who would behave so recklessly during such an occasion? Even if they did have a grudge against the Four Idols Cult, it would not warrant such behavior. Besides, Xia Chichi had no idea who the man was, so where could the animosity come from? Those who truly held a grudge would have acted differently. It was thus obvious that this person’s actions were at the behest of Wang Zhaoling.

This directive had no purpose but one—to test Zhao Changhe. For the Wang Clan, Zhao Changhe’s identity and status had to be handled with extreme caution.

Is this a test of my relationship with Xia Chichi, as well as my temperament? Well, they should have seen enough now. In any case, it’s best to be seen as a rough and reckless man. It’s a really useful persona these days.

Zhao Changhe raised his voice even louder, “I am willing to give face to the host, but it seems that it was not me who was lacking manners here, but the one who was barking nonsense right before the host. I can’t help but wonder who that was.”

The man glared angrily, and Wang Zhaoling waved his hand, “This is my good friend, Lu Bingcheng from the Lu Clan of Fanyang. He is ranked twentieth on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons. I believe that brother Lu was just trying to protect my face. After all, regular banquet guests indeed do not wear masks. But it seems that the custom of the Four Idols Cult somehow

slipped my mind. I apologize on behalf of brother Lu. Let's all take a step back and take our seats, shall we?"

Zhao Changhe thought to himself, Impressive. I can't say the same for the Lu Clan, but this Wang Zhaoling's actions are indeed fairly impressive.

While the Lu Clan of Fanyang might sound intimidating, in reality, the Lu Clan in this world was somewhat lacking. They might not even be able to compare to the Tang Clan, and they certainly had no one comparable to the three ranked at the top of the Ranking of Earth. Compared to the Wang Clan, they were not even in the same league.

Where is the arrogance and recklessness of a brainless young master in Wang Zhaoling? He's even speaking as if Lu Bingcheng isn't a close friend. He's quite good at adapting to the situation.

Just like him, even if Wang Zhaoling had been impulsive just now, it would not have mattered. But seeing as the other party had made such a move, if he still insisted on causing a scene now, it would no longer be considered reasonable in the eyes of others.

He turned to see if Xia Chichi had anything to say, but he saw the little tigress standing quietly by his side like a dutiful wife, completely leaving the decision up to him.

Zhao Changhe smiled, cupped his fist, and said, "It seems that I was indeed rather rude just now."

Wang Zhaoling said, "Feel free to take whichever seat you want, no seating arrangements were made."

After being in the hall for so long, Zhao Changhe had already seen the situation in the hall clearly. It was a huge banquet hall, but there were not many seats. Wang Zhaoling sat at the main seat, with two rows of tables and chairs extending toward the door at his left and right. They were all single-person tables.

Behind the rows of tables and chairs were spacious areas occupied by musicians and dancers, and they were now preparing for their performances.

It seemed very casual with how they were letting everyone sit wherever they pleased. It was very unlike the typical etiquette of aristocratic families that emphasized seating arrangements and status. But when giving it some thought, this really was the most appropriate way they could handle the matter—Cui Yuanyang was here, and according to the Ranking of Hidden Dragons, she was only around the ninetieth position. However, if her seat was placed further back, the Cui Clan would not just let it go. But if she sat in a position reserved for honored guests, how would the others with higher rankings than her perceive it? At the end of the day, was this a banquet for the hidden dragons or a family banquet?

In the end, it was best to just let everyone sit wherever they pleased, which also conveniently made the Wang clan appear casual and generous.

Zhao Changhe looked around for a seat, and his eyes immediately landed on Cui Yuanyang.

The little girl was staying with the Wang Clan, so of course she had arrived at the hall long ago. She did not sit at the honored guest's seat but had chosen a position somewhere in the middle, presumably corresponding to her ninety-ninth ranking. She sat there quietly, lightly lifting her sleeves, and pouring herself tea. The earlier commotion seemed to have completely passed her by, and she seemed to care little about the seating arrangements. With a relaxed and graceful demeanor, she was the very picture of a refined young lady.

In fact, quite a few people were stealing glances at her, showing a hint of admiration, but none of them dared to sit next to her.

Zhao Changhe's mouth twitched and he almost burst into laughter.

Who said she couldn't act? She can at least play the role of a refined young lady as it's been ingrained in her since childhood. Now that I think of it, why is she suddenly acting like this?

He thought about it and felt that it would be quite simple for him to play along with his own persona. He walked directly to the empty seat to the right of Cui Yuanyang and sat down while looking slightly embarrassed. He pretended to steal glances at her while awkwardly lowering his head to look at the table.

Xia Chichi was stunned for a moment before she realized that this guy was playing the role of a rogue from the jianghu who wanted to eat swan meat but had gotten rejected. Of course, he would not miss the chance to linger around the young lady of the Cui Clan. His expression is absolutely perfect. When did he learn acting?

What was even more incredible was Cui Yuanyang's reaction. She raised her eyes slightly and quickly glanced at the unexpected guest beside her, looking somewhat flustered and shy. Her cheeks unconsciously turned red, but she just pursed her lips and kept silent. She lowered her head to sip her tea slowly, trying to conceal her embarrassment. Her demeanor perfectly resembled that of a bashful young lady being relentlessly pursued by a suitor.

Xia Chichi's small mouth underneath her mask remained half-open for a while. Finally, she snorted and sat down next to Zhao Changhe on his right.

Just a moment ago, he seemed to be standing up for his wife, but in the blink of an eye, he was flirting with another woman right in front of her. Xia Chichi gritted her teeth and silently adjusted the jade hairpin on her head, but she found that she did not even know what to say.

There were quite a few people paying attention to them, including Wang Zhaoling. Everyone could not help but find them amusing. They wondered how Zhao Changhe, whose ranking was not even that high and whose cultivation was not even that outstanding, was able to attract everyone's attention as if he were the protagonist on a stage.

Wang Zhaoling made a suggestive remark, "Little sister Yuanyang, would you like to sit next to me?"

“No, there’s no need for that,” Cui Yuanyang said softly. “This is a banquet for the hidden dragons, and it should follow the order of our rankings. I’m only ranked ninety-ninth, so it’s not appropriate for me to occupy a high position.”

Wang Zhaoling said, “There’s no such rule here.”

“I have my own thoughts on this,” Cui Yuanyang quickly glanced at Zhao Changhe and lowered her head again. “Besides, big brother Zhao has been kind to me...”

She paused as if making a difficult decision and then solemnly greeted Zhao Changhe. “Greetings, big brother Zhao. It’s been quite a while since we last met. You still look as impressive as ever. I am truly delighted to be able to see you again.”

Xia Chichi hissed, feeling her teeth almost hurting.

Zhao Changhe was dumbfounded, remembering his comment from a few days ago when he told her that if her acting was not good, then she would be exposed. Right now, he felt like he was not a protagonist at all, but rather a clown.

Wang Zhaoling said leisurely, “If our information is correct, then the relationship between Saintess Xia and brother Zhao shouldn’t be shallow, right? That should be why brother Zhao was so furious just now.”

Zhao Changhe broke out into a cold sweat, but Xia Chichi, who had been silent until now, finally spoke in a calm tone, “Young Master Wang, is this banquet of hidden dragons that you have arranged perhaps for gathering information about the personal affairs of the hidden dragons?”

“Where did you get that idea?” Wang Zhaoling chuckled. “The banquet has not even started yet, many people have yet to arrive. We’re just chatting casually.”

“Since we are just chatting casually, may I indulge myself as well?” Xia Chichi said leisurely. “It’s said that the Wang and Cui Clans are forming a marriage alliance, with your younger sister marrying Cui Yuanyong. Do you intend to marry Miss Cui as well, Young Master Wang?” freewebnovel.com

Zhao Changhe perked up his ears. He was not sure if Xia Chichi was trying to provoke Cui Yuanyang or if she was helping him address the most pressing issue on his mind.

But Wang Zhaoling laughed it off and said, “There are no such plans. Although my family does have close ties with the Cui Clan, we’re not bound together in such a manner. It is rare for people to do things like that.”

The implication of his words was that each marriage of their offspring corresponded to a political resource, and his marriage could potentially bring in another ally, so there was no need for him to marry someone from the Cui Clan as well.

Xia Chichi nodded and said nothing more. Zhao Changhe’s heart also relaxed. If you don’t covet Yangyang, then we have no grudges. Even if you want to be independent, it is none of my business.

But then Wang Zhaoling laughed again and said, “But there are quite a few other young handsome men who admire little sister Yuanyang. It is not without reason that brother Zhao is like the protagonist on a stage as soon as he arrives. Haha.”

Bang!

The sound of a wine flagon hitting the table echoed from the corner of the hall. Situ Xiao’s drunken voice then rang out, “Where’s the wine? Who the hell has the patience to listen to all this drama? If there’s no more wine, I’m leaving!”

Zhao Changhe inwardly praised Situ Xiao’s timing.

All this probing and testing is getting annoying. What exactly does your Wang Clan want? It's better to lay it all out now. My identity is sensitive, and no matter how much I play the rough character, it really isn't appropriate to speak like this. On the contrary, this drunkard feigning madness under the influence of alcohol has come in at just the right time.

At that moment, another group of people arrived outside. Naturally, even though it was called a "banquet of hidden dragons," that did not imply that every single hidden dragon would be there. In reality, only a few dozens of people were invited, and now almost everyone had arrived.

Wang Zhaoling also stopped smiling and said calmly, "Actually, many people speculate that this banquet of mine is for me to test my sword. Although that is indeed part of it, perhaps not everyone believes this to be the case. All in all, my true intention is simply to get to know the heroes of the world.

"Although our generation is blessed with abundant resources, it is not easy to gain experience. Once we go out, there are dangers everywhere, and the malice that exists is far beyond what ordinary people can imagine. Did everyone not see what Saintess Xia just had to go through?"

He smiled apologetically at Xia Chichi. "Bringing strong guards along in our travels would make it so that there's basically no point in going out for experience, but without them, our family would not agree to let us out. I believe that this is something that little sister Yuanyang is familiar with.

"While we, who have climbed up onto the Ranking of Hidden Dragons, might find it easier than ordinary people, perhaps due to some of our backgrounds, breaking through the limits of mortals and delving into the Profound Mysteries has undeniably become more difficult. Today, making friends with heroes from all over the world and seeking like-minded companions has become a luxury. Besides hosting banquets, what else can we do?"

Someone finally interrupted his monologue. "If you wanted to invite guests over to make friends, would it not have been better for you to extend polite invitations to everyone? Why set whatever barriers and be so exclusive? Making friends is difficult enough, yet you even took an approach that might offend people."

Wang Zhaoling laughed heartily and said, "If they cannot even handle our servants, then it is not worth befriending them. And for the other barriers we set, there are other reasons for them. Please forgive me for keeping you in suspense. Of course, if anyone is displeased, I apologize."

Wang Zhaoling raised his cup and stood up, then drank three cups as "self-punishment." Then, he turned his cup over and said with a smile, "Regarding the sword-testing, I know I'm not the only one who has the desire to spar with others. I believe plenty of you share the same sentiment. We are all on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons, yet we rarely meet each other. Remember when brother Yuanyong wanted to challenge Yue Hongling? He had to mobilize so much manpower and go through so much effort just to find her whereabouts, then he had to travel all the way to Beimang just to spar with her. Isn't that incredibly inconvenient?"

Situ Xiao finally raised his head from his wine cup, his eyes sparkling.

Wang Zhaoling said loudly, "The hidden dragons of the Central Plains, drinking and comparing martial arts. This is the Langya Grand Assembly, the Langya Sword Conference! If this event is successful, our Wang Clan of Langya is willing to host such gatherings every few years. What does everyone think?"

Everyone cheered, "A great idea!"

Zhao Changhe smiled faintly, lowering his head to gaze at the wine cup on his table, his eyes rippling with thoughts.

So the Wang Clan have such adventurous and wild ideas.

Chapter 203: Then It's Worth It

The ordinary practitioners of the jianghu might not notice anything problematic regarding this proposition. In fact, they might even be quite excited about it. Organizing such martial arts meets would indeed help scratch the itch of many martial artists as there was a genuine demand for it.

Just one look at Situ Xiao, the drunkard who had been so unruly just now, would confirm that his eyes were now shimmering with excitement and he was clearly somewhat tempted by the idea.

At most, people might think that the Wang Clan's approach was a bit presumptuous, as they seemed to want to assume the role of the leader of the martial arts world. However, since they were only targeting the youth, it would not be as conspicuous, and with the Wang Clan's status, conducting such martial arts meets for the younger generation could still be justified.

However, Situ Xiao's background was also rather formidable. He came from the top sect in the divine land, the Divine Brilliance Sect. It was said to have inherited a remarkably complete ancient system. The cultivation of this sect was quite similar to Zhao Changhe's namely, they leaned toward external arts as the main focus. They regarded the tempering of their body as their primary practice while supplementing it with internal arts.

The Divine Brilliance Sect had produced many outstanding experts. In fact, their master was actually ranked fifth on the Ranking of Heaven: Li Shentong. In comparison, Wang Daoning, the head of the Wang Clan, was ranked tenth, the last on the Ranking of Heaven. Naturally, if they started talking about qualifications, the Divine Brilliance Sect was also capable of organizing such events.

In fact, organizing such martial arts meets was not difficult, so why had no aristocratic families or large sects done so in many years? At most, regional sects would conduct small-scale competitions or tournaments for their disciples.

The main reason for this was that the imperial government already had a similar system called the Martial Examination. It had a broader scope and, besides sparring, it also served as a clear selection mechanism. Those who performed well in the Martial Examination could join the military or organizations such as the Demon Suppression Bureau and the Imperial Guard. This was an important part of the national talent system.

However, few people from major clans or sects were willing to participate in the Martial Examination, and even fewer individuals on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons were willing to do so.

On the surface, a national-level examination would seem different from this small-scale martial arts meet between a few dozens of people. But no matter how one might try to brush it aside, they were essentially similar, and this kind of assembly they were having simply served as a demonstration of organizational status.

Therefore, the Divine Brilliance Sect had never truly considered organizing such martial arts meets, and neither had clans like the Cui Clan.

The Wang Clan's move was obviously probing the imperial court. The current assembly might not hold the significance of a selection, but what about in the future? Especially since they even seemed to plan to call it the Langya Grand Assembly...

Right now, it was just the young hidden dragons, but in the future, what if it involved the experts of the various forces at the eighth or ninth layer of the Profound Gate? And in the distant future, what if it involved those on the Ranking of Man?

Even Xia Longyuan did not do such things!

"What do you think about this?" Zhao Changhe asked Xia Chichi through voice transmission.

Xia Chichi said indifferently, "What does this have to do with me? I'm not here to compare myself against others or compete in martial arts. The Wang Clan of Langya can do whatever they want. It benefits the Four Idols Cult if they stir up even more chaos. I thought that their grand invitation was something special, but if this is all that it amounts to, then I shouldn't have bothered coming. It's just a waste of my time."

Zhao Changhe nodded and sent a voice transmission to Cui Yuanyang, "Yangyang, what do you think about this?"

As soon as he sent out the voice transmission, he secretly cursed himself for being an idiot again. Wait, Yangyang still shouldn't be able to use voice transmission with her current level of strength.

To his surprise, Cui Yuanyang responded to him as if nothing were out of the ordinary, “My father told me to only bring my eyes and ears. Apart from discussing my brother’s wedding, I’m not supposed to take any stance on anything else. I was told to just let the Wang Clan do whatever they want, and to neither support nor oppose them.”

Zhao Changhe was shocked and said, “You can transmit your voice too?!”

Cui Yuanyang muttered, “Big brother Zhao, it seems you’re underestimating my family’s Qinghe Purple Qi Art. Although the color of mine seems to be somewhat off since it’s green, the power seems to be about right.”

Zhao Changhe: “...Fair enough. But if Wang Clan rebels, will your clan still go through with the marriage alliance?”

Cui Yuanyang replied calmly, “This is the way of aristocratic families, big brother Zhao. If the Wang Clan gains power, we will benefit. If Wang Clan fails, whether my brother will divorce the young lady of the Wang Clan or send her to the cold palace[1] depends on him.”

Zhao Changhe was surprised. “But aren’t you loyalists?”

“That is my father’s decision, and it has nothing to do with the survival of our clan.”

Zhao Changhe fell completely silent.

Xia Chichi, who had been in fact eavesdropping on their conversation, sighed.

And you dared say that the Cui Clan did not teach you how to meddle in domestic disputes! But then again, with the kind of education this little bitch got in that aristocratic family, it

seems that she really doesn't care how many women he has. She only really cares about her place. No wonder she's most worried about Tang Wanzhuang.

While the three of them were conversing amongst themselves, others were also engaged in private conversations to varying degrees. The hall became a bit noisy for a while, but it soon quietened down.

After all, there really was not much to discuss. The matter was quite simple.

Even the reasons for the assessment for those who were invited and the closing of the gate beforehand were quite obvious—they were all to test their character. Who would be intimidated by the Wang Clan, who would go with the flow, and who would be rebellious? By now, the Wang Clan had a pretty good understanding of everyone's stance, and they must have done their fair share of public relations, persuasion, and maybe even coercion in private.

That was why Wang Zhaoling regarded Zhao Changhe as a "protagonist." Given Zhao Changhe's sensitive identity, his attitude would be crucial.

Seeing that everyone had quieted down, Wang Zhaoling smiled slightly, "My Wang Clan is not planning to organize such grand events just for show. For all those who participate in the sword testing, my Wang Clan will naturally present them with gifts. And for the one who outshines everyone else this time, they will naturally be granted a treasure as a reward."

Someone said, "With Cui Yuanyong absent, brother Situ Xiao ranking second, and you, brother Wang, ranking third, all of you being at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate.... Although the Ranking of Hidden Dragons really may not represent one's actual strength, at this level, for those of us who are still at the seventh or even fifth or sixth layer, it's impossible to surpass you two. Isn't that so-called reward already guaranteed to end up in either of your hands?"

Wang Zhaoling laughed and said, "I certainly won't be taking such a reward for myself, and I can see that brother Situ has no interest in it either."

Situ Xiao raised his head and downed a large bowl of wine. Then, he laughed heartily and said, "I don't care what your Wang Clan is thinking, and I don't want any treasures. Being able to fight against other heroes is what I desire. As for the consequences afterward, those are not my problem. Don't expect me to stand up for you."

Wang Zhaoling cupped his hand and said, "That's sufficient."

He paused and his gaze shifted to Zhao Changhe, but he continued to address everyone, "The actual reward we prepared is for those at the sixth or seventh layer. I wonder if anyone is confident in becoming the champion?"

Zhao Changhe leisurely sipped his wine and casually asked, "What is the reward?"

Wang Zhaoling smiled slightly and said, "A rare treasure from the sea. When consumed, it can slightly expand one's meridians."

Zhao Changhe's motion of sipping wine froze, and both Xia Chichi and Cui Yuanyang subconsciously held their breaths.

As expected, the Wang Clan had come prepared, nailing his weak spot in one shot.

Wang Zhaoling chuckled and asked, "So, brother Zhao, are you interested?"

After a brief silence, Zhao Changhe suddenly smiled and said, "I... won't be participating. I'll just watch everyone perform. I'm here to celebrate brother Wang's birthday. That is fine with you, right?"

Wang Zhaoling, who had been carrying a confident smile all along, suddenly stiffened, his warm smile freezing on his face.

Whether others recognized this martial arts meet or not was actually of little importance. Of course, Situ Xiao recognizing it, and dozens of hidden dragons participating in it would grant it some prestige.

However, whether Zhao Changhe participated or not carried a significant meaning that others might not understand or know of.

In the eyes of forces like the Cui, Wang, and Tang Clans, Zhao Changhe's identity as the "prince" had basically been confirmed. The current consensus was that he resented his father's abandonment, refused to return to the capital, and was roaming the jianghu. This happened to fit the template of the true prince, Xia Chichi, by about 99%.

It did not really matter if outsiders did not know of the identity of this so-called idler of the jianghu. However, as long as he acknowledged and personally participated in the martial arts meet, the message conveyed to those who were well-informed and were paying attention was extremely valuable. Firstly, it proved that the prince had no intention of inheriting the throne, and secondly, it proved that this "rare commodity" did not oppose the Wang Clan representing the Xia, even though he may not openly support them.

One could not underestimate the significance of this. Once many people recognized the underlying meanings, this would make their future actions much easier. This was why, on the bow of the Cao Gang's boat, the Wang Clan's subordinates had given no face to Xuan Chong but were practically begging Zhao Changhe to attend the banquet.

The Wang Clan knew that coercion would have the opposite effect on Zhao Changhe, and it might even provoke a falling out with the Cui Clan. Thus, they could only resort to temptation.

Treasures that expanded the meridians were also extremely rare for them. They had gone to great lengths to obtain one, believing that it would undoubtedly attract Zhao Changhe, who had long suffered in this regard. They must have thought that as long as Zhao Changhe was not stupid, he would know that this item was reserved for him and he would definitely participate.

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Unexpectedly, he refused!

He actually refused!

Not to mention Wang Zhaoling, who was doubting his own life decisions at this moment, even Xia Chichi and Cui Yuanyang were somewhat shocked by Zhao Changhe's decision.
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Could it be that while he appeared to be roaming the jianghu, he actually had a tacit understanding with Xia Longyuan?

Zhao Changhe seemed to know what they were thinking. He took another sip of wine and said softly, "Some people sweat blood to protect this land, while others take advantage of chaos for personal gain. I may be a rough character, a bandit if you must, but I also know who and what is truly deserving of respect."

By saying that he was a rough character and a bandit, he was essentially telling them that he was not aiming to seize power he simply looked down on the Wang Clan's actions rather than having a conflict of interests.

Wang Zhaoling understood, and his eyes narrowed slightly as he calmly remarked, "Brother Zhao, do you know what you might be missing out on? It's possible that you will never find such a great opportunity again in your lifetime! Are you really not going to participate just because of that?"

Zhao Changhe finished his wine in one gulp, then smiled knowingly. "If it means that some people can cough less, then it's worth it."

Chapter 204: I Have Had Enough Wine

Wang Zhaoling's expression turned ugly.

They could not force Zhao Changhe to do anything. As for getting rid of him, that was absolutely out of the question.

Although they had not figured out Zhao Changhe's true relationship with Cui Yuanyang, there was no question that Zhao Changhe was Cui Yuanyang's benefactor. The Cui Clan had given him Dragon Bird, which essentially conveyed the message that they acknowledged his identity. If it were not for the Cui Clan's certification, who would recognize the possibility of Zhao Changhe being the prince?

If not for that, killing him behind the scenes would have been feasible, but that was obviously not the case.

Dragon Bird had brought a lot of inconvenience to Zhao Changhe, but the benefits that it had brought him were substantial as well every coin has two sides.

Cui Wenjing's attitude was like a sharp sword hanging above them, and the Wang Clan absolutely did not want to offend valuable allies like the Cui Clan. With that being the case, could they really even carry anything out now? They might as well just go home and sleep.

Not to mention Cui Wenjing, even the Wang Clan's countless affiliated forces, disciples, and former officials would find it difficult to support something as drastic as killing the prince. If word spread, the Wang Clan's influence could potentially collapse overnight.

This was where the biggest difference between the aristocratic families and the demonic cults lay. The aristocratic families all required legal justification for their actions. Once they deviated from this principle, history would remind them of the severe consequences. Of course, if they managed to make use of those principles well, achieving success would be much easier for them compared to the rebellious demonic cultists. All they had to do was change flags.

Wang Zhaoling glanced irritably at Cui Yuanyang, who blinked innocently, like a bewildered rabbit. Wang Zhaoling knew that they could not expect any clear stance from her. Her presence here was a friendly gesture from the Cui Clan, but that was as far as they would go.

It was not actually because of the custom of not seeing one's partner before marriage that Cui Yuanyong skipped this gathering. It was purely because what he represented was different from Cui Yuanyang, so he deliberately avoided the banquet. With Cui Yuanyang coming as an ignorant little rabbit, no matter what ended up happening in the banquet, the Cui Clan could simply play dumb.

All of them were cunning old foxes.

After remaining silent for a while, Wang Zhaoling decided to give up on trying to sway Zhao Changhe.

After all, as long as Zhao Changhe sat here without storming off and disrupting things, and since outsiders would not really be able to know the full situation, they could bend the truth so that he could be interpreted to have supported and participated. There was no need to complicate matters unnecessarily.

With this in mind, Wang Zhaoling smiled and clapped his hands. "Alright, let's leave it at that then. Regardless of whether you participate in the sword testing or not, I would like to first thank all of you for coming to celebrate my birthday. Let us all eat and drink our fill, so that we can all have the strength when we begin sparring.... Bring out the dishes and start the music!"

"I won't be eating." Situ Xiao stood up unsteadily and stretched. "I have had enough wine. Now, all that's left is for my sword to drink as well."

Wang Zhaoling was stunned. "Brother Situ, what do you mean..."

Situ Xiao chuckled and said, "Old Wang, don't overthink it. You've forgotten the basics. Earlier, everyone speculated that you were using your birthday as an excuse to invite hidden dragons from all over the world to test your sword. Honestly, despite the arrogance that you have displayed, it does suit my taste. It is true to the spirit of a martial artist to test the heroes of the world. I am willing to accompany you in this sword testing that you have arranged, as well as to verify some things for myself. We will both benefit from a spar between us. Do you really think that I came all the way here from Huguang to attend your banquet just for a meal?"

Wang Zhaoling's expression gradually became more serious.

Situ Xiao said lazily, "You talk about the difficulty of training and invite heroes from all over the world, but then you're the one who is actually choosing to miss such good opportunities with all the schemes you're plotting? Look back and ask yourself, do you not regret it?"

He slowly pulled out the heavy sword from his back. "I, Situ Xiao of the Divine Brilliance Sect, challenge the hidden dragons of the world. I shall toast anyone who is willing to come forward! Who will accept my challenge?"

The entire hall fell silent, and Wang Zhaoling took a deep breath.

The stage he had set up had become Situ Xiao's martial arts arena.

But this was indeed his original intention, wasn't it?

Even Wang Zhaoling himself could not deny that there was a surge of pride and excitement in his heart.

However, how could the two strongest fighters end up fighting before the sword testing even began? Would the following matches between the other hidden dragons not become a joke?

If he really wanted to elevate his status, he should stay seated on the main seat, watching others spar, and then accept the challenge from the victor, and then win. That would be the perfect ending.

Wang Zhaoling suppressed his urge to join the fray and kept a smile on his face as he said, "Since brother Situ wants to test his sword, he surely will not overwhelm others with his

strength. Who is willing to come forward and spar with brother Situ to verify their techniques?”

There was silence for a moment. Who the hell would go up? Situ Xiao never said that he would not rely on his superior strength to suppress others. Moreover, even if he did, no one had the confidence to face him.

Just like with Chi Li back then, the only one who could match him was Yue Hongling. Now that Situ Xiao was standing there, the only one who could truly fight him was Wang Zhaoling himself.

Situ Xiao stood in the center of the arena with his sword in hand, but no one stepped forward to accept his challenge for a good while. Gradually, clear disappointment and disdain appeared in the eyes of the ragged drunkard.

Yue Hongling has already climbed onto the Ranking of Man, Cui Yuanyong did not come to avoid suspicion, and nobody here is willing to step forward. What kind of hidden dragons are these?!

Suddenly, boisterous laughter came from the side of the arena, “A toast to brother Situ!”

Everyone turned to look, only to see Zhao Changhe tossing out the wine cup in his hand directly toward Situ Xiao at the center of the arena.

Situ Xiao’s eyes lit up instantly.

The corners of Wang Zhaoling’s mouth twitched as he said, “Brother Zhao, didn’t you say you weren’t going to participate?”

Zhao Changhe said with great surprise, “Why, Brother Situ and I merely met at a banquet, and ended up sparring with each other. We’re not participating in whatever competition for whatever prize. What does our spar have to do with the Wang Clan?”

Wang Zhaoling: “...”

Xia Chichi could not help but chuckle, and her grip on her sword hilt gradually loosened.

She also wanted to participate but hesitated because of her identity. She did not expect Zhao Changhe to be so shameless.

Others, however, did not think too much of it, and their eyes were fixed on the wine cup that had been tossed.

The cup was full of wine, almost to the brim, but as it flew toward the center of the arena, not a single drop spilled, highlighting the exquisite control with which it had been thrown.

“Yue Hongling’s Sun-Shooting Flying Feather Hidden Weapon Art mixed with the Tang Clan’s Azure Waves Clear Ripples Intent. How very exquisite,” Wang Zhaoling muttered to himself in a soft voice. The fighting spirit in his eyes became stronger and stronger, almost to the point where he forgot why he had hosted this banquet in the first place.

Situ Xiao’s eyes were also filled with joy as he suddenly raised his heavy sword.

Clack

A crisp sound could be heard as the bottom of the wine cup landed and brushed against the blade, sliding along it until it reached the hilt, where it momentarily stopped. Surprisingly, instead of falling and spilling, the glass tilted forward and the wine gushed out like an arrow.

Situ Xiao opened his mouth, and every drop of wine directly entered. The cup then landed steadily on his blade. It was as if someone had just poured it for him to drink.

“Excellent wine!”

Situ Xiao laughed heartily. With a slap on his waist, the stopper of his wine pouch popped open, and a stream of wine gushed out, landing accurately inside the cup. When the flow of wine ceased, the cup was filled to the brim.

Immediately, he swept his heavy sword and said, “Cheers to brother Zhao!”

The heavy sword that clearly weighed tens of jin swept across with a whistling sound, but there was only a faint sound as it tapped the cup, sending it leisurely flying back while not a drop of wine was spilled.

This move was much harder than Zhao Changhe’s earlier toss. In terms of skill alone, he was clearly much better than Zhao Changhe.

Zhao Changhe did not have any more flashy tricks up his sleeve. He simply reached out and caught the cup of wine before downing it all in one gulp. He exclaimed with delight, “Excellent! Excellent sword art! Excellent martial arts!”

After he finished speaking, the wine cup landed back on his table and Dragon Bird was taken out!

With the sound of a dragon’s roar, a dim blood-red light surged across the hall, heading straight for Situ Xiao in the center.

Situ Xiao casually thrust his sword in response. The blood-red saber light suddenly changed, and Zhao Changhe seemed to be flying in the air as he gracefully shifted half a step to the side. Then, he transformed his slash into a stab, thrusting his saber at Situ Xiao’s chest.

Situ Xiao's expression finally became solemn, and he urgently dodged to the side to get out of the way of the stab. He was ecstatic. "Haha, excellent! Excellent sword art! Excellent movement art!"

Excellent...sword art...?

Many people watching were puzzled. Isn't Zhao Changhe using a saber? It's even outrageously sized for a saber...

But that sudden thrust just now did seem to contain the essence of a sword art. Where did he learn such a sword art, and how did he seamlessly integrate it into his broad saber techniques? Can a newcomer to the jianghu really achieve such a feat? freewebnovel.com

"The Tang Clan's Water Treading..." Wang Zhaoling muttered under his breath. "I have no idea where he learned that from. Either way, Tang Wanzhuang probably helped him integrate it into his saber. His relationship with Tang Wanzhuang..." freewebnovel.com

Cui Yuanyang pursed her lips and sniffled.

Chinngg!

The sword and saber finally clashed in the arena. However, what took place was not a fierce collision between a heavy sword and a broad saber that everyone expected. Instead, the blades grazed against one another, producing a harsh grating sound.

As they passed by each other, they each struck at the other's chest and ribs with their left hands, and dull thuds echoed the air.

Zhao Changhe's fingers brushed past Situ Xiao's ribcage, but he felt as if his hands were hitting a sheet of iron. He was unable to injure his opponent at all, and his fingers even felt a bit sore. Situ Xiao's finger struck at Zhao Changhe's acupoint, but likewise, nothing happened.

After passing by each other, they turned back to look at each other.

Zhao Changhe rubbed his chest where the acupoint had been hit, feeling like he had lost. He was unable to hurt his opponent at all, while his own acupoint had been hit, and it hurt.

The joy on Situ Xiao's face became somewhat strange: "Brother Zhao..."

Zhao Changhe: "Hm?"

"You're a grown fucking man, yet you're playing with me with flower-picking hand arts! Are you just trying to touch me inappropriately?"

"...I don't know any fist or palm arts. I was just looking for an opportunity to learn. Can you teach me?"

Situ Xiao looked both amused and exasperated, "You really aren't polite."

After saying that, he held his sword in both hands, slightly bent forward, and stared fiercely. "My sect's hand arts may not be considered fierce, but they can make you as tough as iron. If I can gain something from this battle with you, I will give you a set of hand arts. There's no harm in doing it anyway."

Zhao Changhe stood with his saber held horizontally and his stance appearing slightly off. A fierce bloodthirsty aura erupted from him. "Compared to that, I would much prefer to see what you can do with that edgeless heavy sword."

Wang Zhaoling: "..."

Is this not what I wanted for the Langya Sword Conference? At first glance, yes, it seems so. But why does it feel so off...

Before this display of sword and saber, it seemed that he had become just another bystander, with no one caring about him anymore.

Chapter 205: Frenzied Saber, Peaceful Sword

Clang!

The head-on collision of the broad saber and the heavy sword announced the end of the warm-up and the beginning of the official confrontation between the eighteenth hidden dragon and the second.

Everyone, including Wang Zhaoling, watched intently.

Although it was said to be an official confrontation, it was not entirely so, as neither side intended to overpower the other with brute force. Their main focus was simply comparing their techniques.

Due to Situ Xia's prestigious lineage, it was hard to conceal that he was already at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate it was a fact well known to the world.

On the other hand, few knew that Zhao Changhe had broken through to the sixth layer just two days ago. In everyone's mind, he was still at the fifth layer, as that was the level at which he had killed the Maitreya Cult's Fa Sheng just recently.

If Situ Xiao, with his cultivation at the eighth layer, were to overpower Zhao Changhe, who was believed to be at the fifth layer, then there was practically no point in sparring.. What

attracted people to martial arts was the opportunity to broaden one's understanding by witnessing others' techniques while reinforcing and confirming one's own insights. Martial artists grew through real battles.

Thus, one said that he hoped the other party would allow him to gain something from the battle, while the other said that he wanted to see how skilfully his opponent used the sword.

Consequently, Situ Xiao restricted his own strength to the fifth layer of the Profound Gate, while Zhao Changhe was happy to not have to reveal his recent breakthrough to the sixth layer and also fought with strength equivalent to the fifth layer.

In a battle between two combatants at the fifth layer, the outcome depended on one's understanding and application of their techniques, as well as their combat acumen and intuition.

Swoosh!

The heavy sword slashed toward Zhao Changhe's shoulder in a seemingly ordinary manner, almost as if it were chopping firewood. This strike did not seem particularly fast.

Dragon Bird roared out as Zhao Changhe relied on its longer blade to directly chop at Situ Xiao's waist.

This strike also didn't seem anything special.

It was as if they had lost their grandeur and became much less impressive than everyone initially imagined after constraining themselves to the fifth layer.

However, just as some began to think that these two fighters were nothing special, they were stunned to find that even before the sword and saber collided, and even before Situ Xiao's sword could be seen to change into a defensive stance, the sound of an impact echoed. Those

with particularly keen senses noticed that the hilt of the sword had gently tapped the tip of Dragon Bird, deflecting the saber.

“What just happened?” exclaimed the young master of the Dai Clan.

Wang Zhaoling watched intently as the scene unfolded and casually explained, “Situ Xiao’s sword was simply unstoppable... Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that they aren’t anything special just because they’re both fighting at the fifth layer of the profound Gate. There is still a difference in the way that each fighter expresses their skill and strength among peers, not to mention the differences in how each faction applies their strength.

“The Divine Brilliance Sect places focus on physical strength, with much better techniques for expressing explosive bursts of power compared to other forces. Situ Xiao’s slow sword movement just now was actually just him gathering strength. If you think that his sword is easy to block and try to parry it casually, the force that’s unleashed at the moment of contact could easily send your sword flying. This is an expression of skill, and it can also be seen as a way of overpowering one’s opponent with brute force.

“Zhao Changhe’s response is also the best option I can think of. By exploiting the difference in the length of their weapons, he attacked in order to force Situ Xiao to stay on the defensive, thereby dispersing the momentum that Situ Xiao was gathering. Interestingly, there are very few moves like this among saber arts, so he was actually making use of a sword art...

“In fact, what is much more interesting here is how Zhao Changhe incorporated the Tang Clan’s Ripple Refraction Intent into his move. It did not look very fast when he chopped toward Situ Xiao’s waist, but it was actually moving quite a bit faster than it looked. This was the trap he set for Situ Xiao. If Situ Xiao had underestimated him and thought that he could suddenly accelerate his own attack instead of defending, then he would have been the one to suffer injury first.

“In the end, both sides saw through the ideas that the other had and responded perfectly.”

Everyone was silent.

Not to mention finding the best response in an instant, there were probably many people who had ended up falsely thinking that the two of them were nothing special when only using strength at the fifth layer.

Some silently realized that even though they were at the fifth or sixth layer, if it was them in the arena instead, they would have been defeated during that very first exchange.

As they say, experts can see the truth, but the truth can hardly ever be explained in just a few words. Just during the time it took for Wang Zhaoling to explain that first exchange, the two in the arena had already gone through another twenty. Commentary from bystanders had completely lost its meaning.

Fortunately, everyone present was among the top tier of martial artists, and there were very few who actually could not understand anything. Most of them could somewhat grasp the ideas being put into play, and even if they did not get it right away, they could think about it later when they have time. They all watched intently and wordlessly.

The fight in the arena was no longer as slow-paced as it had been when it began. Their movements were extremely swift. One was like a drunken immortal gazing up at the moon, carefree and mysterious, while the other was treading water, elegant and graceful. Yet both of them were wielding heavy weapons weighing tens of jin, creating a stark contrast between lightness and heaviness that was difficult to comprehend. It was truly difficult to understand how these two managed to do it, but it seemed perfectly effortless and normal to them.

Swoosh!

Dragon Bird whizzed past as Situ Xiao twisted in an incredibly deceptive manner, sliding sideways at an angle that seemed impossible, then swiftly pivoting to deliver a sword strike toward Zhao Changhe's ribs.

The howling wind generated by this strike felt like the wind in a mountain cave during a raging storm. He was no longer taking it easy. He was truly showcasing what it meant to unleash a

transcendent sword strike that even someone at the sixth layer would not be able to deal with while only using the strength of someone at the fifth layer.

This was an explosive ultimate technique of the Divine Brilliance Sect: Divinity Descends!

Situ Xiao was simply not one to use all kinds of fancy tricks. He and Zhao Changhe were largely the same. If he were to unleash this strike with his true strength, there would undoubtedly be external manifestations, allowing him to truly display the awe-inspiring might of a divine presence.

At the same time, Zhao Changhe, who had seemingly missed with his attack, ingeniously transformed it from a horizontal slash into a downward chop, meeting Situ Xiao's sweeping strike head-on.

Clang!

The hall was filled with the prolonged echo of the collision.

The onlookers were astonished to find that Zhao Changhe's strength could keep up with Situ Xiao's. He did not show any signs of weakness at all! frēewebnovēl.com

Seeing the bloody aura emanating from his saber, along with his eyes that had turned blood red, it was clear that Zhao Changhe was using Scattering the Gods and Buddhas.

He had infused the essence of this ultimate technique into his regular moves, and he was no longer restricted to its original method of operation. Vicious qi, bloodlust, true qi, and physical strength all merged, allowing him to unleash a strike that was no less formidable than the ultimate technique of the Divine Brilliance Sect.

If you summon the might of divinity... then I shall force it to scatter!

Boom!

The residual shockwave of their clash violently spread out, causing nearby cups and bowls to tremble and shake, giving the illusion of an earthquake.

They seem to be getting a bit carried away...

As the two combatants faced each other amidst the clash of blades, they suddenly burst into laughter. “Exhilarating!”

“So strong...”

“Are they really just using power at the fifth layer of the Profound Gate?”

“I’d believe it even if they said they were using power at the seventh layer or higher...”

“If it were me up there, I probably wouldn’t even last...I can’t even tell how long. I might have been able to handle some of the earlier exchanges, but this... Even if I went all out, I wouldn’t be able to manage.”

“It’s normal for Situ Xiao to have such a deep understanding of martial arts. After all, he isn’t really at the fifth layer of the Profound Gate. Also, he’s been famous for so many years... But Zhao Changhe is really just at the fifth layer of the Profound Gate, yet his understanding of martial arts has actually already reached Situ Xiao’s level. Moreover, he’s even got a large arsenal of techniques and seems to have almost no shortcomings...”

“Is this really a battle between the second and eighteenth hidden dragons, and not the second and third?”

Wang Zhaoling: "..."

The third hidden dragon is right here...

But as the two combatants stepped back three paces each, Zhao Changhe raised Dragon Bird and laughed aloud. "Brother Situ, I suppose you also have many ultimate techniques that you're hesitant to use. I believe that you haven't had enough yet... I'll be trying a move out, and I'll let you be the first to test it!"

Situ Xiao stared at the saber in Zhao Changhe's hand with great interest, but he immediately made a judgment as Zhao Changhe flicked his wrist, sending Dragon Bird rushing toward him in a peculiar arc.

This was a modified sword art, and Situ Xiao immediately decided on a course of action.

It did not matter in what way the sword art was modified. The fact that Zhao Changhe solemnly issued a warning indicated that this was an ultimate technique. And given that he was willing to casually display it in public, it seemed that he had the confidence that onlookers would not understand the intricacies of the technique, much less know how to counter it.

Sure enough, when Situ Xiao solemnly blocked the saber strike, he discovered that Dragon Bird retreated at the slightest touch, not giving him a chance to land a solid blow, and delivered a second strike with astonishing speed.

As Situ Xiao moved to block the second strike, the third one already arrived.

The strikes came one after another, getting faster and heavier. It was as if he was caught in an endless river, with each wave surging relentlessly, constantly gathering momentum. Each strike seemed to absorb the power of the previous one, causing each following strike to become stronger than the last. By the fourth or fifth, the force had already surpassed even that of the

Scattering of the Gods and Buddhas earlier... No, it was more like the power of the Scattering of the Gods and Buddhas was already contained within it.

Situ Xiao suddenly felt overwhelmed, in terms of both speed and strength.

What kind of weird move is this? Why is it allowing him to break through the limitations of his speed and strength?

The momentum is just growing and growing. It's unstoppable like a raging river!

Suddenly, Situ Xiao remembered a line from the Tome of Troubled Times: "The long river rushes onward unstoppably..." freewebnovel.com

Isn't that exactly what's going on right now?

Yet Situ Xiao still felt exhilarated. The more he blocked, the more exhilarated he felt. He could not help but burst into laughter. "Incredible! This is amazing! Hahaha, what a brilliant sword art!"

As the continuous sound of clanging echoed like pearls falling onto a jade plate, Wang Zhaoling suddenly stood up with a solemn expression.

Beside him, Lu Bingcheng said, "Zhao Changhe's endless saber momentum feels suffocating even for those of us who are merely watching. It's truly terrifying... What kind of ultimate technique is this? How in the world is he able to achieve something like this..."

Wang Zhaoling could not answer. He had no idea how Zhao Changhe was doing it either...

This was because this technique was not from one of the martial arts of this era. Rather, it was an ultimate technique created by the Sword Emperor, chosen by Zhao Changhe from among countless other techniques. With that being the case, how could the people of this era recognize it?

“Brother Zhao! Be careful!”

Amidst the battle, Situ Xiao’s booming shout rang out. The onlookers only saw a dazzling brilliance flare at the point where the sword and saber collided, momentarily losing their vision.

This was another ultimate technique of the Divine Brilliance Sect: Divine Brilliance!

As the light faded, Zhao Changhe staggered back several steps. There was a clear bloodstain on his right shoulder, but the injury he had suffered did not seem that serious.

Situ Xiao stood quietly in place, unharmed and unperturbed.

Has the outcome been decided?

Wang Zhaoling was about to speak when he heard Situ Xiao sigh and say, “I’ve lost.”

Wang Zhaoling said, “Huh? But we can clearly see that you aren’t hurt.”

“But I just used power at the seventh layer of the Profound Gate. I could not figure out how to deal with his move while using the same level of power! A loss is a loss!” Situ Xiao laughed heartily. “Excellent saber arts, excellent sword arts! This was incredibly satisfying! Just battle alone makes this trip worthwhile!”

Zhao Changhe, clutching his wound, also laughed. “As I said at the entrance from the moment you slammed the gate open, I knew that I had not made this trip in vain.”

Situ Xiao grabbed a flagon of wine from the table. “Care for a drink?”

Zhao Changhe unfastened the gourd at his waist and gestured, “Please!”

Both of them lifted their flagon and gourd, raising their heads and drinking as if they were alone in this world.

It seemed as if they had not even just gone through an intense battle as the scene resembling the reunion of lifelong friends ensued.

Xia Chichi’s eyes flickered as she saw the old gourd, extremely incongruous with Zhao Changhe’s otherwise decent attire and certainly not befitting of his status.

She suddenly remembered why Zhao Changhe had such an old wine gourd.