

T. Times 206

Chapter 206: Thousand Li of Cold

Xia Chichi's eyes brimmed with sentiment, and the surge of emotions in her heart was not something she could easily express to others.

That was the first gift that I ever gave him, something barely worth a few copper coins.... That he's kept it all this time is one thing, but to think that even with the storms and bloodshed he has gone through, he's been able to keep the gourd intact....

It was as if the heavens themselves were carefully preserving their memories, preserving their past together.

From those moments of excitement to now, all that remained was joy.

Amid her wandering thoughts, she heard Wang Zhaoling say, "Brother Situ, since you're not injured, then do you want to continue sparring?"

Situ Xiao stopped drinking and wiped his mouth, "Are there any rules for organizing this martial arts meet that you've organized? Or is it just anything goes?"

Wang Zhaoling said, "I planned to have everyone draw lots, but with you causing such a scene, there's no need for that anymore. So, pretty much anything goes, you can see if anyone is willing to challenge you."

Situ Xiao nodded approvingly. "You're not bad yourself...."

His interlocutor could handle things with ease and grace, not sulking just because his plans were disrupted. That was indeed a good display.

Wang Zhaoling smiled and did not say anything.

Situ Xiao took another swig of wine and said, "I'm a little tired at the moment, so I'll be taking a break. I'll watch the others battle and see if anyone can make me itch for a fight."

Wang Zhaoling nodded and said, "Since neither of you are participating in the prize competition, we can still proceed with the competition that I had originally planned. Does anyone else want to go up and challenge others like brother Situ? If not, we shall proceed with the drawing of lots."

Nearly everyone present believed that there would be no more challengers like Situ Xiao. After all, apart from Situ Xiao, with his cultivation at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate, who else would dare come out and challenge the heroes and have to face successive battles?

But just as this thought crossed their minds, suddenly, a white-clad girl wearing a tiger mask appeared in the arena, calmly saying, "I, Xia Chichi of the Four Idols Cult, challenge the heroes of the world."

Zhao Changhe was drinking and almost choked to death when he heard this.

Vermillion Bird, who had been quietly observing from the rooftop in the distance, was stunned.

Cui Yuanyang, who had a piece of cake stuffed in her mouth, had her eyes open wide in shock.

The entire hall fell silent.

What are you doing?

Weren't you just saying earlier that you pretty much just wasted your time by coming to such an uneventful gathering? Did the battle just now stir your blood as a martial artist and made you itch for a fight?

But your identity is sensitive, isn't jumping out like this no different from directly provoking those of the righteous path? Just look at everyone's faces! You aren't like Situ Xiao. Can you handle the successive battles?

Moreover, as the saintess of the Four Idols Cult, by participating in a martial arts meet organized by the Wang Clan, aren't you trampling on the face of the Four Idols Cult? Won't Venerable Vermillion Bird punish you when you go back?

Yet, Xia Chichi only spoke indifferently, "How do we determine the winner? Should I defeat all opponents? Or is it enough to have the most victories?"

She actually intends to participate in the competition...

Vermillion Bird's eyes narrowed as she suddenly realized what Xia Chichi was planning.

Finally, Zhao Changhe rushed to her side, tugged on her sleeve, and whispered, "What are you doing?"

Xia Chichi smiled and replied, "Helping you get the treasure you need."

Zhao Changhe's heart skipped a beat and he stared fixedly at her, unable to say a word.

Xia Chichi added, "I'm just working toward recruiting you into our holy cult. I heard that this was one of the conditions you proposed. So don't try to persuade me with hypocrisy, I must fight."

Vermillion Bird was at a loss for words. Right...

On the other hand, Wang Zhaoling seemed quite pleased. With the participation of the saintess of the Four Idols Cult, the prestige and authority of the martial arts contest that their Wang Clan was holding would undoubtedly rise. As for the prize being taken away by Xia Chichi? He simply deemed it impossible. He did not believe at all that she had the strength to handle being targeted by everyone.

Thinking of this, he said, "If the competition were to be held by drawing lots, the winner is whoever makes it all the way through. But if we are going to be carrying out the competition in the manner of a gauntlet, then indeed, the one with the most victories shall be crowned victor. Nobody can withstand successive battles to defeat all opponents. Neither I nor Situ Xiao would even dare say such big words."

Xia Chichi nodded and said calmly, "Then... Who wants to come up first?"

Lu Bingcheng could not hold back any longer and was the first to step forward, "Witch, I'm here to meet you!"

He had to be the first to come out. He had been the one picking a fight with her before, so if he did not dare to act when it came time to fight, would he not then be turned into a laughingstock?

Xia Chichi glanced at him and said indifferently, "Normally, you would not even qualify to spar with me. Today, for the sake of becoming the one to win the most matches, consider yourself honored that I spare you a glance."

What the fuck?

Even though he had been practically forced to enter the arena and was genuinely not in the mood for fighting, Lu Bingcheng was now genuinely angry. He sneered and said, "Then I'd like to see for myself if the saintess of the Four Idols Cult is as impressive as she claims."

Swish!

He drew his long sword and swung it directly at Xia Chichi's mask, as if intending to reveal her face to everyone.

Lu Bingcheng, who was at the sixth layer of the Profound Gate, was among the top twenty hidden dragons.

It was somewhat humorous to note that among the top fifty hidden dragons, almost all of them were at or above the sixth layer, yet the eighteenth was at the fifth layer, making him out to be quite eye-catching.

Yet nobody found it odd.

After all, the Ranking of Hidden Dragons did not solely rank someone based on their strength. Zhao Changhe's abnormal cultivation speed and combat mastery earned him significant points in terms of potential. Who would dare to dispute his ranking? If you don't dare recognize his potential, then why don't you try reaching his level within eight to nine months?

Not to mention number eighteen, if it was claimed that he was among the top three in terms of just potential alone, then probably everyone present would agree.

However, Zhao Changhe knew that he could not rank in the top three. The speed at which one progressed through the levels of cultivation was just one criterion for the evaluation of potential, and it did not capture the whole picture. It did not necessarily represent the ability to break through certain major thresholds in the future. It was incredibly unlikely for someone at the fifth or sixth layer to make it into the top three as compared to someone who was at the eighth or ninth layer.

In any case, Xia Chichi was at the seventh layer of the Profound Gate, while Lu Bingcheng was at the sixth layer, so on paper, Xia Chichi should have the upper hand. However, the gap

between them was not actually that significant. Everyone here was a hidden dragon, hence the name of the ranking, and none of them could be underestimated.

Moreover, Lu Bingcheng did not even have to claim victory. As long as he made it so that Xia Chichi expended a considerable portion of her energy, then she would face plenty of difficulties in her following battle.

Under everyone's gazes, the sword crossed the vast hall, and in the blink of an eye, it was less than three chi from the mask.

Xia Chichi had been standing there calmly all along, only moving suddenly at this moment.

Iceheart was drawn and its cold light flickered.

Even those far away could feel the piercing chill and icy intent coming from this sword.

Some people had not even managed to have a clear sight when Lu Bingcheng's chest spurted blood, and he fell to the side like a broken kite, curling up into a ball. The wound on his chest began to freeze rapidly, the scene extremely bizarre.

The whole audience was shocked.

He had actually been struck down with just a single sword stroke!

Zhao Changhe returned to his seat, his mouth half agape in shock.

It was the first time in so long that he had seen Xia Chichi properly make a move, and it was so powerful...

The unparalleled sharpness of her sword intent made even those on the sidelines feel Lu Bingcheng's despair. It was truly a chilling, soul-freezing obliteration.

Zhao Changhe suddenly came to a realization—Damn, I don't think even I have what it takes to beat her. ...Hey, wait, Chichi is actually following the path of a cold swordsman. Is there something I'm missing about her? She's so well-behaved and cute when I'm with her....

In the distance, an elder of the Wang Clan sighed and said softly, "The edge of the White Tiger has returned after many years. The sword is an ice sword, and it seems to contain a hint of the Black Tortoise's art.... Could she also be versed in the Azure Dragon's art? Such wild aspirations! If we include Chi Li and Yue Hongling, this generation of hidden dragons... may just be the strongest in the past century. These are truly turbulent times with stirring winds and brilliant stars."

Vermillion Bird took a deep breath, suppressing the surging emotions within.

For a long time, the world only knew of Vermillion Bird, as if there were no others among the four idols in the world. And now, the long-dormant claws of the White Tiger had finally reappeared in this world.

This was the future of the Four Idols Cult! How could Vermillion Bird allow such a saintess to go and fall in love with someone? freewebnovel.com

Xia Chichi did not even look at Lu Bingcheng, who was curled up into a ball. With her sword held horizontally, she calmly asked, "Is there any other hero... who wishes to come and enlighten me?"

The entire hall fell silent, and for a moment it was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop. Only Lu Bingcheng's pained moans seemed to permeate through the eerie silence.

Some individuals, whose rankings were not far from hers, were intimidated by her aura. They hesitated for a moment, pondering repeatedly about Xia Chichi's earlier sword strike.

Considering they were at the seventh layer, just like she was, would it not be too embarrassing if they were also defeated in an instant?

The White Tiger roared in the hall, while the Black Tortoise rose from the icy ocean. The bone-chilling cold pierced into everyone's hearts, freezing them to their core.

Chapter 207: Your Palm Can Suppress the Skies, but What About the Vast Seas

As they watched the fierce aura emanating from the ice-cold swordswoman in the arena, they suddenly remembered something....

There were many people who had not come to attend this Langya Sword Conference. Apart from those who could not be found, had other commitments, or made excuses not to come, the largest group of absentees were those from foreign lands.

People had not forgotten that the top spot on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons had been held by Chi Li for the past two to three years. In fact, the number of foreigners on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons was not lower than the number of those of the Divine Land.

So out of the around 250 hidden dragons, only several dozen had actually come.

The current fourth and fifth were both foreigners and were obviously absent from the hall.

And Xia Chichi was ranked sixth.

In other words, after Wang Zhaoling and Situ Xiao, Xia Chichi was the highest ranked.

With this realization, many people felt that it was quite normal for them not to go forward.

Thus, after waiting for about half the time it would take to make a cup of tea, many people turned their heads to the person on the right of Wang Zhaoling.

The man who was being stared at by everyone sighed and slowly stood up. “Yang Bugui of Hongnong. Please enlighten me, Saintess Xia.”

Yang Bugui was the seventh hidden dragon.

If there was anyone who could be considered to be Xia Chichi’s most suitable opponent among those present, it would undoubtedly be him.

Xia Chichi said calmly, “Why did you wait so long before coming forward?”

Yang Bugui said, “I did not want to compete with you under the premise of a gauntlet. I would have much rather had a proper one-on-one battle between us.”

Zhao Changhe, who was staring at him closely, nodded slightly. Xia Chichi’s pretty face under the mask also showed a hint of a smile. “If you beat me, then that will not be a problem.”

“Indeed,” Yang Bugui said slowly as he raised his sword. “Please enlighten me.”

As soon as his words fell, a blend of blue and white light approached the point in between his eyebrows.

The blue came from her sword, while the white from her clothing. In the incredibly beautiful scene where a person and sword merged into one, he instead felt the terror of death.

Yang Bugui had never experienced such extreme devastation and sharpness in a battle of the same level. Xia Chichi had taken away almost all of the gentleness associated with the White Tiger, opting only for its most extreme killing intent at this moment. Her formidable desire for destruction was worthy of someone from a demonic cult.

In addition, it had to be admitted that she was genuinely powerful. Yang Bugui knew that he could not block this sword strike. With such overwhelming destructive power, even if he parried it with his sword, the momentum would still lead it to graze his throat.

He suddenly dodged out of the way while simultaneously pointing his sword at Xia Chichi's mask.

The sharp gaze under the mask was resolute and unyielding.

Yang Bugui's heart skipped a beat, realizing that he was in trouble.

Swish!

Iceheart streaked across Yang Bugui's chest, and blood splattered.

The mask was split into two, with several strands of hair flying in the air. The stunning face beneath the tiger mask was slowly revealed.

Zhao Changhe suddenly stood up.

Yang Bugui clutched the wound on his chest and said in a hoarse voice, "I underestimated Miss Xia's determination to battle. I accept my defeat, and I am in utter admiration of you."

Xia Chichi held the hilt of her sword and cupped her fist in acknowledgment.

Finally, someone found themselves having a hard time understanding what happened and asked Wang Zhaoling: “What’s going on? Why couldn’t he even handle a single strike?”

Wang Zhaoling silently looked at Xia Chichi’s breathtaking beauty and responded in a low voice, “Brother Yang’s move was quite conventional as a counterattack. After all, this was just a friendly match. As long as his opponent did not intend to fight to the death, they would naturally evade. As such, he expected to be able to break through her sharp and relentless sword art with such a move. However, Saintess Xia... intended to end the fight quickly and decisively to avoid any excess consumption of her energy. She thus chose to rely on the protective effect of her specially made mask to forcefully withstand his counterattack, aiming to defeat her opponent in a single move. Brother Yang underestimated her determination to win, leading to his defeat.”

Everyone gasped in shock, their gaze toward Xia Chichi changing slightly.

Miss, your mask is not some divine object. What if it failed to block the attack? You would have disfigured yourself!

Wait, holy shit, she’s so beautiful!

The entire banquet hall fell silent, everyone was staring at Xia Chichi’s beautiful face.

How can the summer sun ever be late to rise...

She had made her mark on the world, but the timing seemed off.... She had revealed herself this time, but it wasn’t for herself; rather, it was for Zhao Changhe.

Xia Chichi did not seem to care about her true identity being exposed and remained calm, “Who’s next?”

Yet, still, there was silence.

Wang Zhaoling furrowed his brow tightly.

Originally, even if Yang Bugui could not defeat Xia Chichi, he should have still been able to significantly tire her out. However, with how their battle had played out, Xia Chichi had barely expended any energy, all she really lost was a now-inconsequential mask. If things continued this way, forget about winning more matches, she might just go and defeat everyone on her own.

Moreover, she was extremely ruthless. Both of the opponents she had faced were now seriously injured. She knew very well that the victory was determined by the number of wins. Individuals like Yang Bugui would have still had the possibility to obtain more wins through various manipulations if she had not injured them, so she had decisively made her move.

The treasure that the Wang Clan had acquired through many difficulties was meant to lure Zhao Changhe, not to be handed over to the Four Idols Cult.

Even if Xia Chichi did eventually give the treasure to Zhao Changhe, it would appear as if the Wang Clan was giving gifts to Xia Chichi, which was beyond foolish.

Wang Zhaoling finally sighed and said, "If I were to personally step forward, would you consider it as bullying?"

Xia Chichi's always cold expression softened into a sarcastic smile, "Young Master Wang, challenging the hidden dragons is your rightful duty. It is why you even held this assembly to begin with, right? You should have been the first to step forward like Situ Xiao did, challenging the heroes of the world rather than obstructing others' victories. Are you feeling a bit uncomfortable now perhaps?"

Wang Zhaoling pursed his lips and did not refute her words.

Xia Chichi said calmly, “Since you want to end my streak, let’s fight. I may not necessarily be inferior to you. There’s no need to portray yourself as someone who can suppress everyone... Forgive my bluntness, but you are not worthy.”

Indeed... the third and the sixth hidden dragons were not too far off from each other in the eyes of the Tome of Troubled Times. While it was said that their levels were comparable and transcending levels was nearly impossible for those of such rankings, it was never a certainty.

A young man lacking experience and a witch honed in the ways of the demonic cults—it was truly hard to predict what the outcome would be.

Xia Chichi’s words were blunt, but Wang Zhaoling did not seem to take offense. He merely smiled slightly, “I’m not deliberately trying to portray myself above everyone else, but if I even lack this bit of confidence, then it would truly be unfitting for me to be the third hidden dragon. I won’t use a weapon in this battle. I shall face you with just my bare hands. Exercise caution, young lady.”

Xia Chichi remained noncommittal. Suddenly, she darted forward and thrust her sword straight at Wang Zhaoling’s throat.

The momentum, technique, and angle were all identical to the strike she had aimed at Yang Bugui. It was fierce and deadly, intent on annihilating everything in its path.

Yet, whether the intentions were the same, no one knew for sure. This was also a form of psychological warfare.

Yang Bugui, who was bandaging his wounds nearby, stared intently at this strike, wanting to see how Wang Zhaoling, who could clearly analyze others’ battles so clearly, would perform when in the midst of one himself.

Wang Zhaoling chose a very simple course of action. He just calmly pushed out a palm.

In an instant, the sea roared, and the colors of mountains and rivers changed.

It was as if dark clouds were pressing down from the sky, obscuring the sun. But then, a strong gust of wind suddenly rose and swept through, as if the divine hand had brushed away the gloomy clouds, leaving the sky clear and cloudless.

The divine arrow that flew toward the scorching sun in the sky was met by this sudden tempest, and it was directly pushed back, swaying and falling like a feather.

Xia Chichi's fierce and deadly sword strike was directly slapped back by a palm. She flipped backward, her embroidered shoes leaving long marks on the ground as she landed. She supported herself with her left hand on the ground and raised her head slightly, astonishment evident in her eyes.

This young man seems to be the opposite of Zhao Changhe. Zhao Changhe was a stalwart man, yet he made use of both finesse and agility. On the other hand, this seemingly refined Wang Zhaoling simply unleashed a ferocious and overwhelming attack!

Absolute power trumps all superficiality!

This was the palm art that was considered second mightiest in the world, the Heaven-Suppressing Sea Palm!

Whether he used a weapon or not, the difference was not actually that significant....

Many people were truly mesmerized.

First it had been Situ Xiao and Zhao Changhe, then Xia Chichi and Yang Bugui, and now Xia Chichi and Wang Zhaoling.

The splendor of the divine land's hidden dragons shone brightly in this past half an hour, igniting the passion and enthusiasm of countless peers. At this moment, no one cared about victory or face anymore, they just wanted to fight!

Everyone except Zhao Changhe.

He tightly gripped the hilt of his saber, his gaze fixed on Wang Zhaoling's palm, afraid that he might not be able to catch the next strike....

Wang Zhaoling leaped over, towering above, his palm striking down toward Xia Chichi, who was propped on the ground.

Xia Chichi raised her head fiercely, her long sword swirling upward like a dragon. Sword qi surged like a tsunami, surging toward the sky.

Your palm can suppress the skies, but what about the vast seas?

The sword qi suddenly spiraled, surging upward. The onlookers seemed to see an azure dragon bursting out from the towering waves, its head soaring into the sky with a resounding roar.

The Azure Dragon raised its head!

She was not only the White Tiger Saintess, but also the successor of the Azure Dragon!

Boom!

The sword qi pierced into the palm wind, emitting an ear-piercing whistle.

Then, the fierce wind scattered, dispersing in all directions. Xia Chichi whirled and fell backward, and she suddenly spurted out a mouthful of blood.

A hand suddenly supported her back, dissipating the force. It allowed her to gently fall back four or five steps, completely eliminating the qi surrounding her.

Xia Chichi did not turn back, but a smile unconsciously formed on her lips.

Without having to look back, she knew that it could only be Zhao Changhe. Logically speaking, he should not have interfered in this match, but Xia Chichi did not blame him for meddling. She knew that without his help, she would not have been able to dispel the qi and would have suffered internal injuries.

His sight was sharp, and he had a clear grasp of the situation of the battle, but he could not bear to see her getting hurt. He did not want her to suffer any hidden injuries.

Compared to his dear wife, what did victory or defeat matter?

Wang Zhaoling did not pursue further. He looked down at the faint bloodstain in his palm and said softly, "You really managed to hurt me. Fighting you bare-handed was indeed a bit too presumptuous of me.... Your reputation is well-deserved."

As Zhao Changhe backed away with Xia Chichi, he replied directly, "You're truly skilled. I shall concede on behalf of Chichi."

Intervening was against the rules, but as long as they conceded, it would not be an issue.

The corners of Xia Chichi's mouth twitched, but she did not refute it. Instead, she simply allowed him to arrange things as he wished, looking somewhat like a submissive wife.

The onlookers' eyes widened.

Weren't you the very definition of a cold swordswoman just now? What in the world happened to you?

Wang Zhaoling also felt a bit amused and dumbfounded. "You withstood all the force that would have struck her, and not even a strand of her hair was harmed. If anything, it was my hand that suffered quite a bit, yet you look at me as if I beat up your wife."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

"So, Brother Zhao, do you intend to fight on her behalf and participate in the competition?"

Xia Chichi was afraid that Zhao Changhe would actually impulsively join in, so she hurriedly said, "We're competing based on the number of victories, not an elimination system, right? Why should I stop just because I lost one match? I can carry on!"

"Big sis, why don't you take a break?" A voice came from the side, the speaker sounding as if she struggled to mutter the words she said.

Everyone turned to look and saw that it was Cui Yuanyang, whose cheeks were puffed from eating. She barely managed to swallow the last bite of pastry, and then said, "I almost choked to death..."

Everyone was speechless.

But then Cui Yuanyang stood up, and stretched her joints a little before lightly jumping forward. "I, Cui Yuanyang of Qinghe, would like to challenge the heroes of the world."

Chapter 208: Purple Qi Fills the Mountains and Rivers

This time, it was Zhao Changhe's eyes that bulged wide open.

Now it's this little girl? This little princess of the Cui Clan is lowering her status to participate in the Wang Clan's competition? Did her father not tell her to just use her eyes and ears and do basically nothing?

No, even if you suddenly feel roused by the previous displays and now want to spar with someone, who here do you think you can even beat?

Cui Yuanyang seemed to know what he was thinking and grumbled, puffing out her cheeks as she said, "What? Is my Cui Clan not allowed to compete for the treasure that expands one's meridians? Even if I don't win, then I'll just negotiate and demand it as a dowry for my brother's wedding!"

Zhao Changhe was speechless.

The corners of Xia Chichi's mouth twitched, knowing the real reason behind her actions.

Xia Chichi knew that Cui Yuanyang was not after the treasure but after a certain someone's favor. She rolled her sleeves and stepped forward with her sword in hand. "I'll spar with you. Please enlighten me!"

Cui Yuanyang: "?"

But before Xia Chichi could even take two steps forward, she was pulled back by Zhao Changhe. "Stop messing around... You say you aren't injured but your breathing is a mess. Don't think that I don't know. Just adjust your breathing at the side. You need to be ready in case something happens later..."

Xia Chichi pursed her lips and remained silent, though she was fairly sure that nothing would be happening later on.

Surprisingly, Zhao Changhe added, “Even though I think that there might not be any changes later on, it would still be much better to be prepared. Besides... This way, I get to see the splendor of the hidden dragons of the divine land, especially our Chichi.”

Xia Chichi tilted her head to look at him and saw his eyes sparkling.

Suddenly, the two of them inexplicably felt like they had gone from being married to being new lovebirds... Since their parting, they had changed so much that it felt like they were meeting each other anew.

The saber that suppressed Divine Brilliance, Zhao Changhe, now had an imposing aura and a dignified demeanor.

The sword that shattered Langya, Xia Chichi, was clad in clothes white as snow.

Were they still the same people they used to be?

The feeling was truly strange, especially considering how well they had known each other back then.

“I don’t really have much splendor,” Xia Chichi said leisurely. “But I have to admit, I did feel the urge to battle after seeing your display earlier. I felt quite happy after I got to fight a bit myself... In fact, even Wang Zhaoling did not disappoint me as much as I thought he would.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. Wang Zhaoling did seem to have been stirred by the martial spirit of the event, and it was likely that his actions had already deviated from the original plan of their clan.

Xia Chichi turned to look at Cui Yuanyang, who was in the arena, and smiled faintly, “And there’s her too.”

Cui Yuanyang said that she wanted to help Zhao Changhe secure the treasure, but perhaps she, too, had been stirred by that martial spirit?

After months of seclusion, understanding the secrets of the Qinghe Purple Qi, and being bestowed with the ancestral sword of their clan, was all she did just for show?

Of course not, and she would prove her worth and demonstrate what she has learned in front of the heroes of the world!

It seemed that the Wang Clan organizing this grand event had truly scratched an itch in many people’s hearts.

Just then, a voice came from the arena, sounding slightly impatient, “Is there any hero who would like to come forward and enlighten me?! My feet are falling asleep from waiting!”

The crowd looked at each other, feeling quite embarrassed.

Who the hell would step forward to “challenge” a cute fifteen-year-old girl? Whether they win or lose, won’t they lose all their face?

Finally, anger surfaced on Cui Yuanyang’s small round face, “You all don’t consider me a martial artist, do you? Fine, then I’ll take the initiative to challenge someone.”

She paused for a moment and looked at Wang Zhaoling, who was bandaging his palm, “Big brother Wang, how about a battle between you and me, limited to the fifth layer like in big brother Zhao’s battle, to validate our progress?”

Wang Zhaoling’s expression twitched. “I’ll just admit defeat.”

Without saying a word, Cui Yuanyang suddenly sent her palm toward his shoulder.

Situ Xiao, who was drinking and watching the show from the corner, suddenly showed a look of surprise in his eyes.

Wang Zhaoling’s expression instantly became solemn, and he pushed with his uninjured left hand.

Bang!

Their palms met.

Due to Wang Zhaoling limiting his power to the fifth layer, this Heaven-Suppressing Sea Palm did not give off the same earth-shattering sensation as it did when he had faced Xia Chichi just now. However, it was still fierce and violent, giving off the impression that it would turn the delicate little girl it was directed to into mincemeat.

But from the opposing slender jade hand, waves after waves of qi surged, and it was not even pushed back in the slightest.

Like the waters of Qinghe, deep and vast, flowing incessantly.

Like expansive qi, rising from the heart, pervading mountains and rivers.

That fierce and violent palm strike was dissipated in the vast expanse of mountains and rivers, its force gradually dissipated until it was no more.

Pa!

Their palms separated, and surprisingly, Cui Yuanyang merely shook her hand, while Wang Zhaoling had been pushed back half a step.

The entire hall was in an uproar.

Although Wang Zhaoling did restrict his power to the fifth layer, and although he did use his left hand, which was not his good hand, that did not change the fact that it was absolutely shocking for him to be at a disadvantage!

Wang Zhaoling himself could not believe it. “What...”

Cui Yuanyang said seriously, “The Tome of Troubled Times ranked me as the ninety-ninth hidden dragon, but I honestly feel unworthy of it. They say I’m young, but I’ve been practicing martial arts for as long as I can remember. It took me ten years just to reach the fifth layer. What merit or ability do I have to be listed among the top hundred hidden dragons? But I will work hard to make myself worthy.”

Her gaze swept over the onlookers, especially those who were at a similar level of cultivation as herself, and she said word by word, “I, Cui Yuanyang of the Cui Clan, have decided to step into the jianghu today.”

Unfortunately, despite her strong performance and formal words, the crowd remained silent, with no one daring to challenge her.

Only Xia Chichi was itching to go, but Zhao Changhe held her back firmly by her sleeve.

Cui Yuanyang looked around, and disappointment finally appeared in her big eyes. She shook her head and said, “If no one challenges me, does that mean I win by default?”

Wang Zhaoling sighed deeply and asked, “Did you also come forward for the treasure?”

Cui Yuanyang’s eyes flickered, and her formally serious expression suddenly became playful, “Can I not?”

Wang Zhaoling said, “It’s not a pill or something like that. You need to enter a place by yourself. So...”

He paused and suddenly laughed. “After all this fuss, we haven’t really gotten to carry out a martial arts meet among the hidden dragons. It’s clearly just been a family trying to snatch a treasure from the hidden dragons.”

Cui Yuanyang looked at the sky and pretended not to understand.

“My family also has too many agendas, so everything’s become a mess,” Wang Zhaoling chuckled. “Let’s discuss that matter later. For now, little sister Yuanyang, please have a seat and let’s actually carry out a proper martial arts conference, shall we?”

Cui Yuanyang stared at him for a while, and then smiled brightly and said, “Okay.”

She knew that Wang Zhaoling had thoroughly understood the significance of her actions. When the Cui Clan desired that “treasure,” there was no need for any victory in martial arts; it was meaningless as the situation was already determined.

It was just a pity that the desire to engage in a thrilling battle like the one her big brother Zhao and big sister Xia got to enjoy now seemed like an extravagant hope.

Wang Zhaoling's words earlier were indeed correct. It was difficult for people like them to sharpen themselves.

But it doesn't matter. What's important is that big brother Zhao's expression changed after that exchange between me and Wang Zhaoling. Will he stop treating me as a child now?

Cui Yuanyang returned to her seat, stealing a glance at Zhao Changhe, who seemed pensive. Cui Yuanyang poked at the pastries on the table but then saw Xuan Chong jump into the arena, clearly intent on fighting someone. "I would kindly ask everyone for some pointers!"

At the same time he leaped out, someone else also jumped into the arena, but Xuan Chong beat them to it by half a second.

The two of them looked at each other, laughed simultaneously, and politely greeted the other, "Please enlighten me!"

Wang Zhaoling smiled. The martial arts competition had finally taken on its rightful appearance.

Although it seemed like the Wang Clan's desired political display had been achieved, Wang Zhaoling suddenly felt a little regretful. Would it not have been better if it were like this from the beginning?

With the splendor of the hidden dragons of the divine land in full display, the Langya Sword Conference would have been immensely captivating.

At the very least, it would not have led to so many jokes about broken doors and stolen plaques, nor would it have allowed Situ Xiao and Zhao Changhe to take the limelight. From beginning to end, he had just been a supporting character, and even winning felt tasteless.

He turned to look at Zhao Changhe and suddenly transmitted a message. “Brother Zhao, after the competition, let’s go for a walk and have a chat.”

Chapter 209: Wang Zhaoling

The martial arts conference went on for a full day starting from when Situ Xiao broke down the gate at the entrance.

Following the match between Situ Xiao and Zhao Changhe, the rules of the competition came to be completely disregarded. Everyone who stepped into the arena would fight whoever they wanted to, and it was up to them whether they would suppress their strength and spar at the same level or not, and it was up to them if they simply wanted to test how many opponents they could go with their true power before being taken down themselves. In short, the conference had taken on an air of freedom and spontaneity

The rule of determining rankings by number of victories easily became meaningless without someone responsible for counting the wins. People would forget about it while fighting, and who knew who had won how many matches?

So even this rule was eventually discarded. Anyway, other than Zhao Changhe, there really was not anyone who was that eager for the treasure.

None of them were at the bottom of the jianghu. Anyone who could climb onto the Ranking of Hidden Dragons among those in the divine land was generally exceptionally talented. Other than a certain man probably surnamed Xia, who had some issues with his meridians, most others really did not have such a problem. If the treasure could bring about significant improvements to their meridians, then maybe more people would have desired it, but since it was just a slight expansion of the meridians, it failed to garner much interest. That was not the reason they were there.

No... what nearly everyone present truly cared about was the opportunity to battle.

This was the meaning that a proper martial arts meeting was supposed to have. There were no ulterior motives and no hidden agenda; they were embodying the true essence of martial arts for these hot-blooded youths.

Situ Xiao could not resist joining in again, creating a lively atmosphere. In the end, everyone gathered for a banquet and drank until they were heavily intoxicated.

Zhao Changhe sighed regretfully.

He really wanted to participate; perhaps he was even the one who wanted to do so the most. Not only would these fights provide great experiential value, but he could also review each fight through the page of the Heavenly Tome. Unfortunately, he could not participate, and he even had to reluctantly give up on a reward that was incredibly valuable to him.

Xia Chichi did not attend the banquet and left early.

Each person had their restrictions due to their status, and they could not just act however they wished.

Zhao Changhe sat there drinking alone, and Wang Zhaoling walked over, holding a wine flagon, and poured him a drink. "Shall we talk?"

Nearby, Cui Yuanyang perked up her ears.

Wang Zhaoling glanced at her, and continued to speak to Zhao Changhe, "Just the two of us."

Cui Yuanyang attempted to follow along.

Wang Zhaoling said helplessly, “If you want to keep pretending to be distant in front of others, then by all means, do it. Don’t let down your father’s efforts. My Wang Clan can look past certain things, but others may perceive it differently. In a sense, this is also Uncle Cui’s way of urging Zhao Changhe, but I doubt that he really needs such urging. Regardless, you should understand his intentions...”

Cui Yuanyang didn’t respond.

“Originally, you should not have even participated in the martial arts competition...” Wang Zhaoling glanced at his left palm and shook his head with a wry smile. “Well, since you have this ability, then it’s fine. Having trained so hard for such abilities, you must display them in front of others at least once. Otherwise, what is the point of all the training you’ve gone through from a young age?”

Cui Yuanyang said, “Hey, why are you suddenly lecturing me?”

“It’s just that I feel that today has been very boring... Others might have found it rather interesting, but I feel like I’ve just been a clown,” Wang Zhaoling chuckled. “Look, even now, Situ Xiao is singing and drinking, and even Xuan Chong is laughing loudly. Meanwhile, what are we doing? It’s boring, really boring. I suddenly understand why Brother Zhao refuses to acknowledge his identity.”

Zhao Changhe finally said, “But there are still things you must do, right?”

Wang Zhaoling was silent for a moment, and then he made a gesture of invitation, “Shall we?”

“Alright.” Zhao Changhe stood up. This time, Cui Yuanyang pursed her lips and did not follow them.

Summer nights were hot, but the Wang Residence was cool.

Man-made streams surrounded them, waterfalls nearby cascaded down the rockery, and pavilions were scattered around. The cool mist in the air made Zhao Changhe feel like he had returned to the waterside pavilion of Suzhou rather than being in the vast land of Qilu.

The clamor of drinking and revelry in the banquet hall gradually faded away, as if they had completely moved to another world.

Even the contrast between the heated battles and the current coolness of the surroundings made it feel like they were a world apart.

Wang Zhaoling leaned against the railing of the pavilion, gazing at the lotus leaves in the pool below. After a while, he said, “You said that some people pour their hearts and souls into protecting this land, while we are merely seeking our own interests. But then, why don’t you help her? Are you afraid of getting involved in larger conflicts, or are you also just concerned with your own interests?”

“Both,” Zhao Changhe said calmly. “Of course, my main reasoning is that I have no desire to protect the imperial family. It’s none of my concern. Admiration for the loyal ministers and capable generals is one thing, but getting involved is another.”

Wang Zhaoling nodded and said, “We have also deduced that this is your attitude. It’s quite obvious, and you don’t really do much to hide it.”

“Indeed,” Zhao Changhe said. “So, what is it that you wanted to talk to me about?”

“Have you ever considered that many of the current problems are caused by His Majesty himself? That if there were a change in leadership, perhaps these so-called troubled times could come to an end quickly?”

Zhao Changhe said, “Perhaps. But can I ask you a question?”

“Please.”

“Even with His Majesty’s strength, he also had to rely on the cooperation of various families in the beginning to establish the empire. In the end, this ultimately led to the dominance of aristocratic families and powerful sects in each region. I refuse to believe that someone like him would not want to suppress everything, but simply that he is unable to do so, correct?”

“Of course. There are always things that require compromise. Individual martial prowess cannot decide everything.”

Zhao Changhe said, “While being the strongest in the world may not be able to decide everything, it can deter many things. If he were to go all out and insist on taking Maitreya’s head, I doubt Maitreya would be able to keep it on his shoulders. The barbarians and shamans dare not enter the pass, not because of those defending Yanmen but because of him. There are still many loyal ministers and capable generals who are sacrificing their lives, still holding out hope for him. The curtain of troubled times has not been completely drawn back not because of how effective First Seat Tang has been in patching things up, but because he’s still alive.”

Wang Zhaoling nodded and said, “Indeed.”

Cui Wenjing also educated Cui Yuanyang about this in the past. Did she really think that the Tang Wanzhuang had been single-handedly supporting the entire structure of the empire, with the emperor having no hand in it as well? Had she been blinded by storybooks?

“Your father only ranks tenth on the Ranking of Heaven. Even if he is hiding his strength, it is unlikely that he can defeat the Great Shaman of the northern barbarians. I don’t even think that the Wang Clan’s power necessarily surpasses that of the Cui Clan. Even when Situ Xiao was provoking you again and again, you stomached all of it, not daring to smear the face of the Divine Brilliance Sect in the slightest. You let yourself be stifled to such a degree, yet even if your plans did succeed, would it not just result in a situation where the strong dominate the weak again? I doubt it would be any different from the rumors that have already spread about him.”

Wang Zhaoling shook his head slightly and said, “You’re making assumptions, but that is not how things are done in the imperial court. As for my performance, I’m afraid you’ve also misunderstood it—in our eyes, no matter how strong a sect is, they are just commoners. Their economy and military have nothing to do with us. I’m not afraid of Situ Xiao, and my father isn’t afraid of Li Shentong. Rather than saying that I’m afraid to offend Situ Xiao, it would be more accurate to say that I was adapting to the situation, and he actually helped me achieve what I wanted.”

“Alright...” Zhao Changhe paused, then suddenly asked, “But then why are you so anxious?”

This time, Wang Zhaoling fell silent and did not answer.

Knowing when to stop, Zhao Changhe also did not push him further.

From whichever angle one looked at it, the Cui Clan’s actions were more in line with the thinking of aristocratic families, while the Wang Clan’s move was rather inexplicable. Even if they truly wanted to replace the Xia dynasty, why could they not just wait a few years? There had to be a reason behind it. If they were really allowed to succeed in their plans, it was still unclear whether they would be able to have the troubled times end sooner or cause further upheaval.

Of course, at this stage, they were just testing the waters, and whether they would proceed to the next step was still unknown. It was precisely because it was only at this stage that Wang Zhaoling talked with Zhao Changhe, attempting to sway his opinion and gain his support. When it came to the point where they revealed opposition, Zhao Changhe would probably not dare to step foot in Langya again.

In other words, it was still possible for them to stop. Zhao Changhe wanted to give it a try. He felt that Wang Zhaoling was not actually a bad person.

But then, Wang Zhaoling slowly spoke up, “Who would not want the nation to prosper? Whether we are anxious or not, there are reasons for it, but there is no need to say anything more. I know what you’re thinking, but it doesn’t need to be said. Although I was stirred by the

passion for martial arts, that was just temporary. Even if you don't want the position of crown prince, I do."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Indeed, if the Wang Clan succeeds, this guy would become the crown prince.

"Everyone has their own ambitions, that's all." Wang Zhaoling suddenly smiled and said, "Hey, do you think I'm qualified?"

Zhao Changhe nodded. "Leaving aside other things, your bearing is acceptable."

Wang Zhaoling laughed and said, "I'll take that as a compliment from you. Let me give you a heads-up. There were actually discussions within our clan about whether to assassinate you, of course as long as we are able to make sure that it cannot be traced back to us... The current consensus is to strive to gain your support first, but with your current stance and how things have played out, it seems that you and I might become enemies in the future, and it's likely to be the kind that won't end until one of us dies."

Zhao Changhe was intrigued and asked, "Then why are you telling me this?"

"It doesn't really matter if I tell you. You would have no evidence to say that it was done by my Wang Clan, would you? Are you going to run to Cui Yuanyang and cry to her about it? Let's be serious," Wang Zhaoling said with a smile. "But anyway, the reason why I'm telling you this... Well, you can consider it a habitual gesture of our aristocratic families, building some goodwill. In case things go south in the future, you can leave me a trace of legacy, how about that?"

Zhao Changhe's eyes widened. "You think so highly of me? Why do you think I'd be able to decide something like that?"

“This is simply called an investment. Whether there will be returns or not depends not only on vision but also luck,” Wang Zhaoling patted Zhao Changhe on the shoulder. “As for that treasure that expands one’s meridians, I’ll personally give it to you. I’ll take the favor for myself. Why should I give it to Xia Chichi or Cui Yuanyang?”

Chapter 210: Profound Ice Marine Clay

Zhao Changhe felt that this guy was just going along with the flow and trying to gain some goodwill in vain...

Cui Yuanyang had been dissuaded from fighting, and there was no longer any pressure to look for ways to get the stipulated prize as Wang Zhaoling had already stated that he would have a chat with Zhao Changhe. That meant that the supposed prize was no longer a prize, but would be a part of the marriage negotiations with the Cui Clan. If they pretended that nothing happened afterward, the rabbit would bite.

Xia Chichi also understood this, so she no longer insisted on continuing with the competition. Otherwise, with her not having been seriously injured, it truly would not have been difficult for her to win more matches.

Regardless of whether it was based on the number of victories or the pressure from the Cui Clan, the treasure would have been handed over in the first place.

Of course, there was nothing that could be done if the Wang Clan went and acted dishonestly. They could make up any number of excuses, so there really was no guarantee that the treasure would be handed over. Wang Zhaoling’s willingness to give it to Zhao Changhe directly could indeed be considered a show of magnanimity and thus could be seen as building goodwill.

In fact, even telling him about the impending enmity fell under the category of building goodwill pointlessly.

Zhao Changhe had already clearly stated his aversion to supporting the Wang Clan’s actions, and he even refused to participate in the competition that had been specially made to be enticing to him, preferring to rely on others to try and get the prize for him. Given his sensitive

status, he basically fell into the category of people that had to be eliminated if they could not be brought to one's side.

Of course, it would not be good for the Wang Clan if he died inside their residence. But if he were to be assassinated later for no reason, even his backside could guess that it was the Wang Clan's doing. There was truly no need for Wang Zhaoling to tell him about this...

This was also why Wang Zhaoling could speak of it directly—because it did not make a difference whether he said it or not. But being willing to say it could indeed be considered a gesture of goodwill, as it at least warned him to be careful when he was finally back on the road.

This could only be regarded as a certain level of emotional intelligence. He clearly said that they would likely become enemies, but he said so in a friendly manner, rather than in a way where he would come to be disliked.

If everyone in the Wang Clan was like this, they would be much more troublesome to deal with than the Maitreya Cult... The Maitreya Cult is just too low-level compared to this.

In any case, since the treasure that would help him expand his meridians was guaranteed, Zhao Changhe would naturally not be polite nor hypocritical. It was extremely important to him; it would be absolutely idiotic of him to reject such a valuable opportunity. Xia Chichi and Cui Yuanyang were not supposed to participate in the martial arts competition organized by the Wang Clan, but they had still jumped out and did what they could for his sake. It was only because the Wang Clan came to be troubled by their actions that they ultimately gave it to him. How could he let their efforts down?

When Wang Zhaoling said earlier that it was not something like a pill, but rather a place, it was not a lie. The place he was referring to was a secret area within the Wang Clan, in an ice cave.

Upon entering the ice cave, Zhao Changhe saw a large mass of ice-blue mud-like substance. It was about ten zhang in diameter. It looked like ice but not ice, like snow but not snow. It did not feel cold; rather, it gave off a slightly moist and humid sensation.

Zhao Changhe felt like a combination of plasticine and ice cream... though, of course, the faint mysterious aura emanating from it reminded him that it was definitely not ice cream. It was a treasure.

It was the most fantastical thing that he had seen in this world aside from the Heavenly Tome, and it did not resemble anything from the world of martial arts.

“What is this treasure called?”

Wang Zhaoling said, “It has no name. There is no mention of it in ancient records either. My ancestors randomly named it Profound Ice Marine Clay. It must be preserved in the ice cave. Otherwise, its energy would gradually dissipate.”

“...Why does it sound like there’s a lot of it?”

“It’s actually quite rare. It’s buried deep in the depths of the sea, and it’s extremely difficult to find. My family has been the guardian of the Eastern Sea for centuries, and we’ve only found a dozen or so clusters like this one. It’s as if there was originally a mountain made of this type of material, which then broke down during the collapse of an era. It then scattered into the sea, and buried in the depths. But the ocean is so vast that even looking for a mountain scattered it would be no different from looking for a needle in a haystack.”

Zhao Changhe nodded and looked at it curiously.

A mountain of ice cream, huh? How did something like that even form?

Wang Zhaoling added, “I won’t hide it from you. Although this item is indeed considered a treasure, it’s a bit of a letdown for us.”

Zhao Changhe asked curiously, “Why is that? Even if its effects are minor, it should be better than nothing, right? As far as I know, every large family would have some people born with deficiencies who would need to improve their aptitude. Shouldn’t it be useful for such situations?”

Wang Zhaoling sighed and said, “Because it can only be used once. Its effects are absorbed and it becomes useless after that. It’s not some divine object. With such minor effects, there would need to be massive quantities of it to be useful for a group of people. It can’t be considered valuable to a large clan like ours when we only find one every ten years. And to use it to make a useless person slightly less useless? Our Wang Clan has not reached the point where we can squander resources like that.”

Indeed... Well, it was relatively insignificant for the Wang Clan, but for certain individuals in need, it was like long-awaited rainfall after a drought.

Wang Zhaoling said, “Why do people strive to climb higher? Why is it not enough for us to be a local tyrant at Langya, and so aim to also have influence across the seas? This is because no matter how powerful we are within our own commandery or even beyond, it cannot compare to being wealthy throughout the four seas. Your father... mmm, well, if you don't recognize him as such, it’s fine. Anyway, what I was trying to say was that if he wanted to find such a treasure that would help you transform your meridians, it would certainly be easy for him. The fact that it is not in his treasury right now just means that he has not gone looking for it on your behalf. Otherwise, with a single command, wouldn’t our Wang Clan have offered this up as well?”

Zhao Changhe said, “That’s true. But why are you telling me this?”

“My father already unlocked three great Profound Mysteries, but that is not the end of cultivation. To peer into the powers of the ancient era, neither the information nor resources can be provided by just a single region. Take this marine clay, for example. What if it isn’t only scattered in the seas, but also on land? What if most of it is actually on land? It’s a dream for us to find the source! The same goes for His Majesty. Why do you think he wanted to unify the world back then?”

Zhao Changhe only recalled the blind woman’s words: “Xia Longyuan does not seek the lands of the mortal world.”

During his campaign to unify the world, he had already become the strongest figure in the world. A sweeping conquest could only be for more centralized resources, rather than to become a wise and benevolent ruler for the whole world.

Zhao Changhe sighed, “He became the emperor but did not make any progress. Instead, something went wrong at some point. So why are you following in his footsteps?”

Wang Zhaoling said, “He may not be capable, but that does not mean others aren’t either. Why hold ourselves back?”

Zhao Changhe shook his head, recognizing that everyone had their own ambitions. There was nothing more to be said about this. So, he redirected the conversation to the treasure. “How do I use this?”

“You wrap your whole body in it. Don’t worry, you’ll still be able to breathe.”

“...”

Wang Zhaoling found his expression somewhat amusing, “Having Cui Yuanyang watching over you nearby should put your mind at ease, right?”

“...Do I need to take off my clothes?”

“No need,” he replied. He paused for a moment, then suddenly said, “Your martial arts understanding and insight are second to none. After trying this treasure out, if you have any insights or realizations, I hope that you’ll share them with me. Perhaps with your wisdom, you can discover things that we have not considered or found before.”

Zhao Changhe nodded and said, “Sure.”

It was a very strange experience, being able to chat so casually with someone who was destined to be an enemy, and using a treasure from them and agreeing to share insights and realizations. Strangely, he did not feel any urgency to try it out. He did not even feel the urge to touch it.

Was it because his mind was calm, or was it because he knew that its effects were mediocre, and so his expectations were low?

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Cui Yuanyang squatted in front of the marine clay, blinking as she watched Zhao Changhe enveloped in the clay.

Before Zhao Changhe's face was covered, he peeked his face out and spoke to her, which amused the little rabbit greatly. "Big Brother Zhao, you're so cute."

Zhao Changhe was speechless. "Is that really a word that can apply to me?"

Cui Yuanyang extended her finger and poked Zhao Changhe's face twice, laughing happily as she said, "Is there any more of this mud? I want to cover myself up too."

Wang Zhaoling's face darkened. "Do you really think that this is just some mud? It's really hard to get this stuff, you know? Whatever, you two can play around here. I'm going out."

Cui Yuanyang waved. "Take care, remember to close the door behind you~"

Wang Zhaoling shook his head in exasperation and left.

As soon as the door closed, the ice cave turned dark. Cui Yuanyang looked a bit cold. She folded her arms and crouched nearby, her eyes sparkling as she looked at Zhao Changhe's face. "You seem to get along quite well with him, even trusting him this much. Sitting here in this dark room, covered in mysterious mud, are you not afraid of something going wrong?"

Zhao Changhe clicked his tongue and said, "You were just being cute a moment ago.... Look at you now, you're all suspicious again."

"Hmph." Cui Yuanyang poked his face again. "I don't believe that you have no plans. Tell me."

"I really don't have any plans or schemes. It's just easier to communicate with smart people. If he were a fool, it would be less safe for me." Zhao Changhe smiled. "You're my protective talisman while I'm here. I feel as safe as ever with you around."

Cui Yuanyang continued to poke him, "So I'm the one protecting you now, right?"

"Right."

Cui Yuanyang was quite pleased. "Is there anything else that you need me to do?"

"If you stop poking me, that would be great..." Zhao Changhe's voice began to tremble. "This thing... is starting to take effect. I'll need you to protect me while I concentrate on the changes inside me."

Wang Zhaoling left the ice cave. After walking through a long corridor, he slowed his pace and stood still for a moment before suddenly saying, "Miss Xia, your lover is safe. There is no need for you to lurk around and observe. You might as well show yourself and go see him."

A white figure flashed by, and Xia Chichi appeared before him, somewhat surprised. "You really impress us."

“Us? There’s someone else with you? Venerable Vermillion Bird?” Wang Zhaoling smiled. “Actually, it’s quite easy to guess. Given the current situation, there is actually room for cooperation between our Wang Clan and your cult. With you coming all this way, I don’t believe that there is no intention from your side to explore the idea of an alliance.”

Xia Chichi smiled and said, “So your clan organized this martial arts conference not just to test the waters, nor just to win Zhao Changhe over... but also to negotiate with our Four Idols Cult?”

“That’s right. We’re making a bold move, weighing the world. Others will only focus on the matters that are easier to see. As for inviting those from demonic cults, it’s comparatively a minor matter, as it simply seems like a matter of course.” Wang Zhaoling sighed. “There are always many benefits to doing things in a grand manner.”

After a moment of silence, Xia Chichi said, “Actually... it’s not half bad for celebrating a birthday.”

Wang Zhaoling remained silent.

“As long as what you gave Changhe is truly useful, we will form this alliance.”