

T. Times 481

Chapter 481: The Guidance of the Ancestral God

This really is a sacred artifact.

Its sheer weight that made it impossible for Zhao Changhe to lift it spoke volumes. Even if it did not truly match the heavens, it could probably be compared to mountains and oceans.

The energy it primarily held was in the form of blood and qi. It was not meant to be absorbed like normal energy—absorbing that much blood and qi into the body would not serve any purpose. Rather, it was meant for enhancement and transformation. A single person absorbing all of the energy from it was immediately out of the question. It was truly something that was intended to support an entire population, refining and improving their blood and qi, as well as their physique.

Of course, not everyone was suited to the kind of enhancement brought about by the blood jade. Yue Hongling or Han Wubing, for example, were unlikely to be compatible with such changes.

But for the members of the Spirit Tribe members like Sisi, it was very well-suited, and even more so for Zhao Changhe.

The Spirit Tribe's martial arts cultivation was average at best. Besides having most of their combat heritage cut down by Lie's ruthless destruction, their physical cultivation had degraded over time, with the main root cause being the absence of this blood jade.

For Sisi, it was like rain after a long drought. The effects that the blood jade could bring her were, in a sense, even more profound than they were for Zhao Changhe. Just by standing nearby and feeling the blood jade's influence, her physique began to change dramatically. Not only was her body becoming stronger and her blood and qi surging, but even her true qi began growing. The gu in her spirit bag seemed to be jubilant, seemingly all plumping up a bit.

The Spirit Tribe's cultivation methods differed from those of the Central Plains. Their path to unlocking the Profound Mysteries did not require the kind of comprehension and connection that Zhao Changhe might need. In the end, their Profound Mysteries revolved around the human body itself, as well as the use of witchcraft, gu, and the manipulation of blood and qi. Once they reached a critical threshold, they naturally unlocked the Profound Mysteries.

Sisi had already been on the verge of a breakthrough...

Yue Hongling's eyes widened as she watched Sisi break through to the Profound Mysteries right before her.

She could very well be the only person of the Spirit Tribe in this era to break through to the Profound Mysteries.

Yue Hongling's mouth fell open, and so did Sisi's. The two women stood there, slack-jawed, amazed at what they had just witnessed.

Does this even make any sense?

The Spirit Tribe ought to defend this blood jade with their lives. It was incredibly valuable and precious to them! If the Spirit Tribe's ancestors knew that it had been given away so easily, they were likely to rise from their graves in fury.

And in reality, it seems they really were already angry enough to rise from the dead...

But why is Zhao Changhe able to harmonize with the blood jade? What connection does he have with our tribe's Ancestral God?

Sisi's expression began to change.

The corpse demon watched coldly as Zhao Changhe silently transformed his blood and qi. It made no further comment but said, "Lie's rise is linked to many aspects of the Spirit Tribe. Since you inherited his legacy, the artifacts of the Spirit Tribe are indeed beneficial for your cultivation. In fact, they might even enable you to ascend to greatness. In a certain sense, you could be considered half a Spirit Tribe member... From here on out, however, it'll depend on your own abilities, just as it happened with Lie as he conquered the world."

Zhao Changhe quietly observed the changes in his body. In fact, the results he experienced were better than Sisi's. Not only had his blood and qi become more concentrated, but the blood jade had also bestowed him with extremely powerful vicious qi.

Poor Old Zhao had not really killed many people, so his cultivation of vicious qi, which was generally something nourished through bloodshed, had always been lacking. He had mostly relied

on artifacts filled with vicious qi to make up for this inadequacy, but the Blood God's array plate, being incomplete, had a rather weak and insufficient supply of vicious qi. He also could not bear to absorb too much of it, lest he leave the followers of the Blood God Cult with nothing to absorb. He had thus been wondering where to find a larger supply of vicious qi.

And here it was, given to him freely.

However, since the foundations of their cultivation were different, the reaction that the blood jade had with Sisi was more visible. While his was less apparent, his gains were not necessarily inferior.

Hearing the corpse demon's comment, Zhao Changhe finally responded, "I have my own path... whatever I inherited from Lie is just a reference."

The corpse demon scoffed. "Hmph. I'm just curious how you're going to justify this so-called win-win solution. I don't believe you don't want to keep this all for yourself."

Zhao Changhe casually shoved the blood jade into Sisi's hands.

Sisi: "?"

The corpse demon: "..."

Zhao Changhe said, "She's someone truly from your tribe, and she's even the saintess."

The corpse demon wanted to say that giving it to her was not much different from giving it to himself... but the words caught in its throat, and it found itself unable to say anything.

In the end, there was a difference.

Sisi held the blood jade in a daze, murmuring, "Do you really not want it?"

"I've already gotten what I needed from the blood jade, so why would I hoard it?" Zhao Changhe ruffled her hair. "This is your tribe's sacred artifact. Keep it close... Let the elders think the sacred envoy took it; that's fine. Once things settle down, you can bring it back out as your own asset."

Sisi's eyes softened to the point they looked like they might melt.

Yue Hongling crossed her arms, giving them a look.

Are you two really doing this right in front of me?

Sisi asked softly, "Why... Why are you able to harmonize with our Spirit Tribe's blood jade?"

"Uh... your ancestor taught me." Zhao Changhe was a bit overwhelmed by her gaze and quickly said, "Let's get going. There's nothing else here."

"Is this the guidance of the Ancestral God?" Sisi murmured to herself, looking quite complicated.

The corpse demon started thrashing inside the spirit bag, "Zhao Changhe, you—!"

The spirit bag was swiftly closed, leaving the corpse demon blind and muted.

With a heavy rumble, the stone door swung open again. The three of them had been inside for barely a moment, and the elders and guards outside stared in shock at the now-empty stone chamber. "This... the Heavenly Blood Jade has truly been taken?"

Zhao Changhe replied calmly, "What? Did you think that I'd be unable to retrieve it?"

"No, we wouldn't dare..." The elders bowed their heads, filled with even greater reverence, and respectfully asked, "Does the sacred envoy require anything else?"

Zhao Changhe replied, "Since we have the Heavenly Blood Jade, there's no need for any male and female sacrifices this time."

The elders were incredulous and blurted out, "Really? But we've already prepared them..."

Sisi's eyes flashed with anger, and the surrounding guards clenched their fists.

Zhao Changhe said calmly, “Have those chosen for the sacrifices return. If you have so much energy to spare, you should help me with another matter.”

The great elder hurriedly asked, “What is it that you require of us, sacred envoy?”

“The white-robed swordsman, the traitor we’ve informed you about... Have you gotten any information on him?”

“Yes, we do,” another elder quickly responded. “He is at the Thousand Snakes Village to the west. The leader of the village, She Shan, is entertaining and stalling him.”

As it happened, Shi Wuding knew next to nothing about the forbidden land. He did not even understand why the people of the Spirit Tribe treated him with such respect. In fact, he did not realize these people were from the Spirit Tribe at all. He was utterly clueless, and his bewildered behavior confirmed to everyone that he was not the real envoy—he did not even seem to be someone privy to important matters of the forbidden land.

If the Spirit Tribe had any lingering doubts about which side was the true envoy, a simple interaction with him made the truth crystal clear. It was too obvious.

With blades sharpened, they were just waiting for the sacred envoy’s command to strike down the traitor together.

Zhao Changhe exchanged a glance with Yue Hongling, each recognizing the amusement in the other’s eyes. “Then let’s make arrangements. Once we’ve dealt with this villain, we shall return to report our success.”

* * *

Meanwhile, Shi Wuding was enjoying imperial-level treatment at the Thousand Snakes Village, with fine wine, food, and beautiful maids attending to his every need.

Fortunately, Shi Wuding’s sword heart was firm, and he had no particular interest in such pleasures, especially women. He remained focused on recuperating and even asked the people of the Thousand Snakes Village to search for two men and one woman.

To those at the Thousand Snakes Village, this behavior seemed typical of those of the forbidden land, but it definitely did not fit that of a sacred envoy.

The sacred envoys came to collect things, but here he was, asking for nothing... and knowing nothing, at that. Did he really expect to use their resources to confront the real sacred envoy? What a joke.

They did not even wait for instructions from the elders on the sacred mountain. By the time said instructions came, the people of the Thousand Snakes Village had already begun plotting against Shi Wuding.

He might refuse women, but he still had to eat. They added subtle things to his food, substances that would be impossible to detect through ordinary means. Though Shi Wuding had formidable cultivation, his knowledge of the foreign tribes was limited, and he did not notice a thing.

During his stay, any saliva left on utensils from his eating and drinking, as well as stray hairs he had shed, were quietly collected by the people of the Thousand Snakes Village. They were just waiting for the order from the elders to begin their operation.

After about two days of rest, Shi Wuding felt that the injuries he had sustained from the treacherous couple were mostly healed, so he emerged from seclusion and asked, "Have you found the men and woman I asked you to find?"

The leader of the Thousand Snakes Village, She Shan, replied with a sycophantic smile, "Yes, we've heard that they were spotted not far from here, at Sipan Village."

"Oh?" Shi Wuding's eyes flashed sharply. "Where is this village? Lead me there."

Who does he think he is? He's not even showing the dignity of an envoy.[1]

She Shan maintained his ingratiating smile, "Sacred envoy, please follow me."

A team of Spirit Tribe elites surrounded Shi Wuding as they led him out of the village, heading straight toward another barren mountain.

After walking through the mountain for a while, Shi Wuding began to sense something was off.

She Shan, who had been leading the way, suddenly darted off and disappeared from sight. When Shi Wuding turned around, the Spirit Tribe elites who had been following him were gone as well...

From all directions, a hissing sound filled the air. An endless swarm of venomous snakes surged forward like a tidal wave, an ocean of snakes so thick it made one's skin crawl.

At the same time, a fierce wind rose, carrying an endless rain of arrows that blotted out the sky.

Shi Wuding's face grew grim as he drew his sword, ready to unleash a technique that split his single sword strike into thousands. But his arm suddenly went numb, losing all strength.

I've been cursed?

Alarmed, Shi Wuding quickly looked inward and felt a stabbing pain in his abdomen. Countless gu had somehow entered his body and were now threatening to burst forth.

The arrows were already upon him.

Gritting his teeth against the curses and gu, Shi Wuding dodged to the side, aiming to escape into the nearby dense forest.

Just then, the flash of a saber and the glint of a sword appeared—Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling struck together, bringing down their combined might upon him.

Shi Wuding felt as though he were caught in a nightmare.

We all just arrived in this secret realm, so why does it feel like I've stumbled onto your home turf? What did I ever do to these people? Why are they attacking me with such ferocity?

Chapter 482: The Rise of the Saintess

The most unbelievable thing for Shi Wuding was that, in just two short days, the pair had grown even stronger.

Yue Hongling had become a bit more powerful, her blood and qi appearing to have become more vigorous, balancing out some of her innate physical disadvantages as a woman and making her overall strength more well-rounded. While it gave her a stronger foundation for touching the second Profound Mystery, it did not result in any significant change in her combat power.

Zhao Changhe, on the other hand, had undergone a drastic change, becoming far more powerful and imposing. His fierce and brutal vicious qi now made him seem like an ancient demon, so much so that even Shi Wuding, with his steadfast resolve, could not help but feel a sense of dread.

If Shi Wuding had also transmigrated from Earth, he might have wondered if these two were Super Saiyans.

Who recovers from their injuries in just two days and immediately becomes this much stronger?

Shi Wuding sidestepped Zhao Changhe's saber and simultaneously swung his sword, striking the side of Yue Hongling's sword.

Boom!

A terrifying wall of sword qi surged forth, knocking down all the arrows that were descending toward him like a swarm of locusts.

Even Zhao Changhe could not help but be impressed. He really is incredibly powerful... He had heard of such walls of sword qi but never seen one himself. It was unexpected to witness it so suddenly. If he were in perfect condition, someone like Shi Wuding could probably take on an entire army on his own.

However, he was not in perfect condition.

Shi Wuding's abdomen twisted in pain, his limbs weak. He barely managed to fend off the first wave of attacks, but how would he withstand the coming onslaught?

Yue Hongling's sword vibrated slightly, effortlessly deflecting Shi Wuding's sword and leaving him completely exposed.

Meanwhile, Dragon Bird came slashing down toward his chest.

Straining against the weakness and pain, Shi Wuding suddenly opened his mouth, releasing a piercing stream of sword qi that struck Dragon Bird with a sharp clang. Zhao Changhe's hand went numb, and his saber was knocked off course.

Shi Wuding quickly evaded, but Yue Hongling's sword still left a long gash across his shoulder.

He rolled away on the ground, trying to escape from the encirclement.

A fragrant breeze swept by, and a dagger plunged viciously into his back.

Shi Wuding had not even noticed Sisi's ambush. He barely managed to avoid a fatal wound but still took the dagger solidly in his back.

Realizing that escape down the mountain was impossible, he clenched his teeth and leaped off the cliff.

Behind him, Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling's blades followed close, striking at his back. Shi Wuding tried to parry, but his sword was knocked away, and he plummeted off the cliff like a kite with its string cut.

"Persistent bastard... In my experience, this isn't the end of him." Zhao Changhe adjusted his clothes and prepared to jump down. "I need to see his body. We must make sure he's dead."

Yue Hongling grabbed his arm and whispered, "Wait, someone's approaching."

Zhao Changhe's ears pricked up, and he indeed heard the sounds of someone quickly closing in from the other side.

Yue Hongling's cultivation was still a fraction stronger than his own, and it seemed she was now on the verge of breaking through to the second layer of the Profound Mysteries.

They hurried over to the other side of the cliff and saw several black-clad figures racing toward them with astonishing speed. They had not yet arrived, but a haughty voice echoed ahead of them, "What's with all this fighting? Stop at once and kneel to welcome—"

Before he could finish, Zhao Changhe flicked his wrist, and Dragon Bird came slashing down right at the speaker's face.

The newcomers: “?”

Yue Hongling and Sisi reacted simultaneously. Sisi shouted sternly, “The traitor has accomplices! You let him jump off the cliff without intervening. How dare you just stand there?! You’ll be held accountable!”

The real envoy had arrived!

This place was on the path from the Thousand Snakes Village to the sacred mountain, very close to the mountain itself. The envoy, coming from some other route, had also just so happened to arrive here.

There’s still time before the Dragon Boat Festival. Why did they come so early?

Sisi did not have time to think. Her first instinct was to ensure that Zhao Changhe’s cover was not blown, or else everything would fall apart. Zhao Changhe, reacting even faster, had already swung his saber directly at the envoy’s face.

The best-case scenario was for the elders to join in attacking the real envoy. Once they committed this act, the Spirit Tribe’s path would irrevocably change!

Clang!

The envoy, completely bewildered, drew his sword and attempted to deflect Dragon Bird. The surrounding air filled with a gusting wind as several Spirit Tribe elders, eager to earn merit and avoid blame, rushed forward, shouting, “The traitor has accomplices! Die, scoundrel!”

The envoy: “???”

As Sisi had mentioned earlier, the envoy was at most on par with her own level and certainly was not a match for Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling. What level of prowess was needed for an envoy

sent to subjugate and flaunt authority? If they could match Sisi's previous level, that would already be decent...

Moreover, taken by surprise and without any time to mentally prepare himself, the envoy could not even withstand Zhao Changhe's single strike. With one slash, his sword was sent flying, and in the next moment, the three elders' fists and palms struck him all at once.

The poor envoy, who had barely opened his mouth to establish his authority, found himself inexplicably smashed into a bloody pulp before he could even complete a sentence.

His final thought wasn't confusion but rather a sense of fervent devotion: Will the Ancestral God take note of this? You traitors will pay with your lives!

As if responding to his devout plea, the blood he had spurted before dying coalesced in the air, slowly forming a small, one-foot-tall blood figure with a sinister visage. "Well, well, it seems the Spirit Tribe's wings have grown strong..."

As it spoke, an immeasurable wave of blood mist exploded outward.

All three elders coughed up blood in unison, their bodies crumbling under the mist, losing the strength to fight.

Zhao Changhe felt his own blood and qi surging wildly, and his heart tensed slightly.

This is the textbook effect of the Vicious Blood Art! It's just a different execution—Bloodied Mountains and Rivers!

Had he faced this two days earlier, before mastering the saber intent of No Man's Land and killing Frost Hawk, Zhao Changhe might not have been able to handle it. This was a higher-level suppression of the same technique, and the gap felt vast.

However, since gaining insight into the new concept of No Man's Land, Zhao Changhe could now remain as immovable as a mountain. Though the blood mist did affect him, he managed to hold his ground, retreating only three steps with a muffled grunt.

Zhao Changhe quickly suppressed his surging blood and qi. Then, he swung his saber yet again, his eyes taking on a crimson color as a fierce, bloodthirsty qi surged around him.

The blood figure let out a surprised “Huh” and then launched a small, powerful punch.

Boom!

Dragon Bird collided with the blood fist, unleashing a terrifying wave of energy that annihilated the nearby snakes and insects. The Spirit Tribe members shielded themselves, dragging their elders away from the battle.

Everyone was astounded.

It looked like a clash between two ancient blood demons, hardly resembling a battle between humans.

At the same time, Yue Hongling and Sisi swiftly killed the envoy’s remaining followers and returned. Seeing the ongoing battle, they joined the fray, charging straight at the blood figure.

“Hm? Two disciples of the Sword Emperor? One bearing the intent from his early years and the other from his later years... But what’s the ancient sword Dragon Emperor doing here? That’s a different lineage...” the blood figure muttered in surprise. It then grew two additional arms, meeting Yue Hongling’s sword and Sisi’s dagger.

But as the blood hand reached for Sisi’s dagger, the dagger vanished, replaced by a bone sword brimming with energy, which viciously stabbed into the blood hand.

The blood figure seemed to evaporate, emitting a sizzling sound as white mist rose skyward, accompanied by a pained and furious roar, “Very well... The Spirit Tribe’s betrayal, I’ll remember this!”

The white mist faded, and the blood figure disappeared.

All that remained was a devastated mountaintop littered with the bodies of venomous snakes and insects.

The Spirit Tribe members stared at the three of them in horror.

“You... you...” The great elder raised a trembling finger. “You’re fake envoys?!”

The terrifying power of the blood figure, even as a mere projection, had been overwhelming and unstoppable.

That was surely the true ancestral god of the forbidden land! And the envoy it protected—the ones who had just been killed—had to be the real envoy!

The fake envoy had led them to kill the real envoy and had even managed to drive back their god...

They drove back the Ancestral God... But that was just a projection. If their true body comes, will any of us survive?!

The elders, furious and panicked, struggled to their feet, trembling from their injuries. “Rebellion... seize them all!”

“Seize them? You and what army?” Sisi sneered, raising the bone sword high. “Do you know what this is?”

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

The battlefield was not far from the sacred mountain, and the commotion had already drawn the attention of other Spirit Tribe elders, who now flew over, just in time to see Sisi holding up the bone sword.

Someone gasped in shock, “The Blood Ao’s spine!”

Zhao Changhe glanced to the side, realizing why he had sensed a similar aura to the Blood God’s array plate earlier. So it’s because it’s from the same source. Wait a second... The Blood Ao is a turtle, so making an array plate from its shell makes sense, but what’s with this spine? Turtles don’t even have spines, or do they? Hm, maybe they do...[1]

“Indeed,” Sisi spoke loudly. “This is the spine of the Blood Ao. Our Ancestral God Ao is dead, slain by Lie, and its bones are here before you. Stop deceiving yourselves! The so-called forbidden land holds no Blood Ao. And if it does, it would be nothing but a cub. If the forbidden land can rear one, then so can we!”

The crowd stared dumbfounded at the spine, trying to process the information.

“Our ancestors raised the Blood Ao and used its power for themselves!” Sisi proclaimed. “We honor the spirits of our ancestors and obey the teachings of our Ancestral God. If the Blood Ao is our tribe’s guardian sacred beast, then this spine is a relic of that guardian and continues to protect us. We should even regard it as a sacred sword! The object of your worship is right here! Why would you kneel to a mere hatchling?”

That logic was sound.

Some did not understand, while others pretended not to.

Were people truly worshiping a mere beast youngling? No, it was the power of the forbidden land they feared. The notion of honoring the ancestral Blood Ao was merely an excuse, a facade to justify their submission to the forbidden land’s dominance. The elders, in turn, used the forbidden land’s conquest to suppress the ambitions of the younger generation, stifling their desire to explore, learn, and even reclaim power within the Spirit Tribe itself.

That was the reality.

If they could not defeat the forbidden land, there was no point in discussing anything else.

As more Spirit Tribe members gathered, the great elder, needing to maintain a facade of authority, said sternly, “Where did you obtain this so-called sacred sword?”

“From the true Ancestral God, of course!” Sisi lowered the spine and raised a blood-red gemstone. “And look at this! Do you recognize it?”

Gasps rippled through the crowd. “The Heavenly Blood Jade! But why does its aura seem so... different?”

“For millennia, the Heavenly Blood Jade has been the foundation of our tribe’s cultivation, as recorded in our ancient texts, yet we’ve never been able to use it. Why do you think that is?” Sisi’s voice rang out. “As the saintess, I communed with the Ancestral God’s spirit. The Ancestral God imparted a command, teaching me to break the seal on this sacred artifact. Now, the entire tribe can benefit from it! How can that be false?”

Indeed, something like the Heavenly Blood Jade could not possibly be falsified. And for countless years, the tribe’s records had clearly detailed how to use the blood jade, yet no one had ever succeeded. Why was that?

Sisi had only recently become the saintess, and suddenly, she could use it. Why was that?

Was this truly the favor of their ancestral god, bestowing their will upon their saintess?

While strength and power mattered, ancient tribes like the Spirit Tribe also had deep-rooted beliefs and traditions. When an undeniable miracle was before them, there would be countless willing to follow. Not everyone bowed solely to power.

Furthermore, Sisi was not involved with just a singular miracle, but two—the change in the Heavenly Blood Jade and the sudden appearance of the sacred sword!

Zhao Changhe smirked to himself. If these miracles were not bestowed by their ancestral god, then how could they happen?

Several elders quietly retreated to their respective families, shouting angrily, “These are mere lies to confuse the people and incite rebellion against the forbidden land! Do you intend to bring ruin upon the Spirit Tribe? Seize Xiang Simeng and these two impostors pretending to be sacred envoys!”

The atmosphere grew tense in an instant, and a number of people moved to stand protectively in front of Sisi, confronting the elders’ direct subordinates. “Elders, please remain calm...”

A gleam of satisfaction flashed in Sisi’s eyes.

She had only been worried about having no support, but as long as there were some willing to back her, the foundation was there, and she could proceed with certain plans.

Suddenly, she whistled sharply.

High above, an eagle circled before swooping off into the distance. It was a beast under her control.

Not long after, a great cloud of dust arose in the distance, and the ground shook as a vast army, bearing banners with the character Xiang[2], approached the mountain from all sides.

When she entered the secret realm with intentions of assassinating the sacred envoy, she had already prepared for an all-out confrontation. Although her forces from outside the tribe were not entirely loyal, she still had them station themselves at the foot of the sacred mountain, ready for action for quite some time.

The fact that the envoy turned out to be Zhao Changhe and that the action had been delayed until today did not matter—in fact, it was perfect timing!

The Spirit Tribe had not made any preparations for an internal war. None of the tribal forces, including the sacred mountain's guards, were mobilized. They had only gathered on a nearby hill. Now, with this army surrounding the mountain, who could possibly resist?

Sisi raised the blood jade in one hand and the sacred sword in the other, shouting, "These elders have colluded with outsiders, falsely claiming the mantle of the Ancestral God, bowing and scraping like slaves while oppressing our people. They deserve a thousand deaths! Those of the Spirit Tribe who with any respect for yourselves, seize them!"

Technically, bringing Xia people into the secret realm violated a fundamental rule and was punishable by death. Yet the Spirit Tribe members who sided with Sisi were ecstatic.

They had already rebelled, and the key now was to win!

Battle cries erupted, and the younger, more militant members of the tribe, led by Sisi, charged at the elders and their followers.

Amidst the chaos, the chief elder shouted, "The Ancestral God of the forbidden land merely retreated temporarily. He will return! You'll regret listening to this child who knows nothing and only brings you closer to your doom!"

At last, someone roared back in fury, “I’m done being a slave! If we’re rebelling, let’s do it right, even if it turns the world upside down! Death is better than submission! And you, old dog, will die before I do!”

Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling stood at the edge of the conflict, refraining from joining the fight. Now, they exchanged a glance, and Zhao Changhe muttered, “The forbidden land still needs to be dealt with.”

Yue Hongling replied, “Are you confident? That power we just witnessed...”

“No,” Zhao Changhe replied gravely. “But we have to try.”

Sisi broke away from the battle, her face still flushed with the heat of battle. She muttered in an awkward tone, “Um...”

“What is it?” Zhao Changhe asked.

“I don’t actually know where the forbidden land is. No one from our tribe has ever known.”

Zhao Changhe chuckled. “That’s fine. I know where it is.”

Chapter 483: Preparing for Battle

Zhao Changhe had a good idea of where the forbidden land was, or at least where it might be.

The Atlas of Mountains and Rivers clearly depicted it, located not far east of the Spirit Tribe’s sacred mountain. It was the site where the Spirit Tribe once raised the Blood Ao, the Ao Pool. The atlas even mapped out the internal paths of the Ao Pool, indicating that the Black Tortoise of the time had likely personally visited the place back in the day—perhaps due to being kin, in a sense?

Yet, based on what Sisi and the others had said, it seemed like they had no knowledge of this Ao Pool at all.

Given that the forbidden land appeared to have raised a Blood Ao, it was likely that they had taken over the Ao Pool, found a Blood Ao egg or something similar, and raised a new one. Whoever it was that had found the Ao Pool was clearly a god or demon from the previous era who suffered

severe injuries and was barely clinging to life. To avoid being discovered by the Spirit Tribe, they likely set up some kind of barrier or formation to conceal the Ao Pool's existence. And over time, the current Spirit Tribe members had forgotten its existence altogether.

This is likely how the forbidden land came into being—there was probably not much more to it. The fact that the real envoy approached from that direction also supports this theory.

Sisi had no idea Zhao Changhe had access to such information and was both shocked and delighted. “You... you really have an idea of where it is?”

“Yeah. In fact, I'd say I'm at almost certain”

“Are you actually the true sacred envoy sent by our ancestral god to guide us?”

Zhao Changhe could not help but laugh and teased her, “Then the saintess should serve me well.”

Sisi bit her lower lip and remained silent.

Yue Hongling sensed that the lovesick fool's gaze was turning soft and watery. If she were not standing nearby, she believed that Sisi might have even kissed him already.

Zhao Changhe had indeed managed to pull off some inexplicable miracles this time, and he really seemed like a heaven-sent savior to Sisi. While Yue Hongling herself had helped in the battles, she could not compare to Zhao Changhe's seemingly endless supply of strange and miraculous insights. If he insisted he was the true sacred envoy, Sisi would likely believe him.

Zhao Changhe continued, “Hongling and I will go check it out. You should stay here. The Spirit Tribe is in chaos, and they need you as their backbone to unify them. Even if Hongling and I can't win and have to flee, with the support of your entire tribe, we may still have a chance.”

Sisi pursed her lips. “That entity is powerful... Perhaps you should train a bit longer before going? Once I've secured control over the Spirit Tribe, you'll have unlimited resources...”

Zhao Changhe replied, “We need to go now. It was wounded by the bone sword earlier, so it's not at full strength. This is our best opportunity.”

Sisi pressed her lips tightly together, then, after a moment, handed him the bone sword without a word and turned back to rejoin the battle, directing all her worry into the struggle against the elders.

“Xiang Simeng! You’ve defied your elders and created chaos in the tribe! How will you face the Ancestral God in the afterlife?”

“The ones who need to repent before the Ancestral God are you!” Sisi’s eyes turned fierce. “Die!”

“The... The Profound Mysteries? This... This is impossible...”

Zhao Changhe no longer paid any more attention to the typical villainous last words coming from the battlefield, nor did he feel the need to join the fight that was clearly in their favor. Instead, he leaped over the edge of the cliff, descending it rapidly.

Yue Hongling followed, understanding that Zhao Changhe intended to track down Shi Wuding.

Below, the vegetation was broken and stained with blood, showing clear signs of someone tumbling down the mountain. However, there was no trace of the person himself. Shi Wuding’s sword, however, which had been knocked from his grasp earlier, lay nearby.

“As expected, he’s gone.” Zhao Changhe picked up the sword, handed it to Yue Hongling, and sighed. “I have a feeling he’ll come back to mess with us.”

“Most things rarely go perfectly. If he seeks revenge, we can simply face him head-on,” Yue Hongling replied. “Besides, he’s gravely injured. He won’t be causing us trouble anytime soon. If we can secure control over the Spirit Tribe quickly, we won’t have to fear a lone Shi Wuding.”

“True.” Zhao Changhe continued to search through the undergrowth.

Yue Hongling asked curiously, “What are you looking for?”

Zhao Changhe replied in a low voice, “Shi Wuding didn’t seem to have a storage ring. If he was carrying any pouches with medicine or valuables, they may have fallen earlier. I’m looking for Sharp Blade Grass... This is my last chance to strengthen myself before the final confrontation.”

Yue Hongling could not help but feel a bit impressed. Zhao Changhe was not only meticulous but also truly seizing every possible moment to improve his cultivation.

Little did she know, Zhao Changhe was extremely anxious at this moment.

Knowing the location of the forbidden land was located was one thing, but it was still a massive question as to who the person in the forbidden land was and why they used the Vicious Blood Art...

If it was Lie himself, he might as well forget about it. Even in a weakened state, someone of Lie's caliber would be untouchable. His understanding of martial arts, the Dao, and the principles of the world were simply on an entirely different level.

However, Zhao Changhe doubted that the other party was Lie. The disparity in their aura was too large, and while the Bloodied Mountains and Rivers they unleashed was stronger than his own, it was not at the level of the technique's creator.

Still, even if it was not Lie, it felt like a hopeless fight. The ability to remotely observe everything through an envoy already indicated that the entity was beyond his league. The other party had even been able to face off against the three of them at once with just a projection. With that being the case, how terrifying was their true body?

Last time, when he fought the corpse demon, he had been able to call in allies from the Rankings of Heaven and Earth to gang up on it. But what about this time?

Well, this time, he had the corpse demon, who would at least be eager to cooperate on this matter.

Zhao Changhe was still deeply uneasy, and he had been trying to contact the blind woman since earlier, but she had not responded at all.

As he continued searching, he asked the corpse demon, "What do you think of that blood figure earlier?"

The corpse demon replied coldly, "From their divine descent alone, not much is apparent, but it's definitely stronger than those from the Ranking of Heaven that ganged up on me last time."

“Could it be Lie?”

“Lie? Not even close.” The corpse demon, despite his bitterness towards Lie, seemed to have a certain respect for his power. “It can’t be Lie. I’m also trying to figure out who it is. It’s strange. Lie never took on any disciples back then. I can understand how future generations could learn his techniques from what he left behind, but where did this person get Lie’s techniques...”

“Could it be that Lie originally derived his techniques from the Blood Ao? And whoever this person might be, having been with the Blood Ao for so long, has come to grasp a similar concept?”

The corpse demon was silent for a moment before replying slowly, “The one who had the most contact with the Blood Ao back then was me... Lie could only kill the Blood Ao when I wasn’t around.”

In other words, since it had never managed to figure anything out itself, how could whoever this person was do so?

Zhao Changhe sneered, “If you’d been there, Lie probably would’ve taken you down along with the Blood Ao.”

“...” The corpse demon changed the subject, “Still, your theory isn’t without merit. People are different, after all, and each person draws unique insights.”

“Do you think you could take him on?”

“I don’t know. It depends on his condition,” the corpse demon said with a hint of sarcasm. “It’s a pity you haven’t reached the second layer of the Profound Mysteries. Otherwise, you wouldn’t need to feel so uncertain.”

Zhao Changhe fell silent.

His clash with the blood figure left him feeling as if he were slicing at water with a blade—an overpowering sense of futility. His attacks seemed to have little effect, while Sisi’s bone sword clearly worked.

The reason was simple: the bone sword had absorbed a substantial amount of frigid, murderous sword qi from the formation earlier, making it a force capable of piercing the heavens and rending space. Dragon Bird did not have access to such energy reserves, nor a concentrated, piercing form of attack like that.

But this could not be blamed on Dragon Bird; it simply reflected his own lack of power. Even with enhancements, he could not display such might.

With the addition of Sharp Blade Grass, coupled with what he had previously gained from the Heavenly Blood Jade, he could at least attain the second level of the Blood Asura Body, if not the second layer of the Profound Mysteries. This critical transformation would sharpen his attack, from the broader slashing of a saber to the piercing precision of a sword, which was something he had been aiming to master.

He was nearly there. He just needed the final component. If he could find it, it would increase his chances in the upcoming battle, providing at least a bit more assurance.

“Over here!” Yue Hongling called from several zhang away. “I found some medicine bottles!”

Zhao Changhe rushed over to her side and saw several medicine bottles. The bottles were cracked, but thankfully, the medicine inside had not spilled.

Zhao Changhe opened one bottle and studied its contents, his expression uncertain.

His knowledge of pharmacology was already quite advanced, and he could identify most of the contents as medicine for recovering injuries and restoring energy. However, one of the pills seemed to be for honing sword qi, likely containing Sharp Blade Grass.

It should have been a stroke of good luck, something to be overjoyed about... But there was something strange about this pill.

Chapter 484: The Emergence of the Blood Ao

Each person's cultivation was different, and each sect had its own specialized medicines.

What is honey to one could be poison to another.

For a Bashan swordsman, the powerful sword qi contained within the pill could be gradually absorbed to refine and enhance their own sword qi. But for others, the same sword qi entering their body could be like having a thousand swords piercing their heart, spreading throughout their limbs and bones, essentially tearing them apart from within.

If it could genuinely enhance one's power, it might be worth enduring, but the problem was that it might lead to massive blood loss, resulting in more injury than enhancement. In that case, it would be a rather grim joke.

Unfortunately, the components of a fully formed pill like this can't be extracted... Zhao Changhe had no idea how Huangfu Qing managed to isolate the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng from the sword pellet. He wondered if it was some kind of miracle that only fire-type practitioners could achieve.

In fact, even for someone as capable as Vermilion Bird, forcibly achieving this required immense effort, something well beyond Zhao Changhe's abilities.

There were two such pills in the bottle. After a long pause, Zhao Changhe handed one to Yue Hongling and explained its effects. She quickly concluded it would not suit her and handed it back, saying, "Save it for Han Wubing. He might be able to use it."

Zhao Changhe nodded and put away the pills, choosing to leave them untouched for now. "Let's go. Time is of the essence. That entity probably wasn't gravely wounded by the bone sword, and it will recover quickly. Once it does, it'll be even harder to defeat."

Yue Hongling followed him as they sped toward Ao Pool in silence. Suddenly, she asked, "Are you doing all this for the sake of justice or for Sisi?"

Zhao Changhe felt a bit awkward at the question. "Why are you bringing that up now?"

Yue Hongling was driven by a sense of justice. She could not bear to witness innocent boys and girls being sacrificed, so she willingly braved the danger. She would have acted the same way even if she had not known Sisi, without anyone needing to ask.

Zhao Changhe, too, felt that he would have done the same even if Sisi were not involved. No one would have needed to prompt him. But with Sisi in the picture, would anyone believe him if he said it had nothing to do with her?

Yue Hongling said, “Actually, I believe that even without Sisi, you would still do this. We share the same heart—I truly believe that.”

Zhao Changhe turned to look at her, his eyes shining.

“That’s why, for me, I’d rather not see this become something that ties you to Sisi, and I certainly don’t want her to take advantage of you.”

Zhao Changhe asked, “She hasn’t shown signs of doing that, has she?”

“Well, maybe it can’t really be considered taking advantage of you?” Yue Hongling said thoughtfully. “Maybe because I’m a woman, I’m able to understand her better than you do. She hopes you’ll become her subject, following under her banner, rather than someone she has to depend on. I guess that can’t really be considered taking advantage of you?”

“Anyway, I can see why she’d feel that way. After all, her Spirit Tribe has been enslaved for so long. She definitely does not want to trade one master for another. But while I understand that, I’m biased. When it comes to you, I find it uncomfortable. You’re not the type to treat anyone as a slave, so it shouldn’t come to that.”

Zhao Changhe pondered her words, and many of his previous uncertainties about Sisi suddenly became clear. He laughed and said, “So that’s how it is.”

Yue Hongling asked, “Are you hesitant now? Are you still willing to risk it all?”

Zhao Changhe laughed heartily and replied, “I fight for the innocent boys and girls, not for her alone. Let’s go.”

Yue Hongling smiled. “Alright.”

As the sun set in the west, the two raced across the plains, their shadows stretching out long behind them, merging into one as it tilted behind them.

As they sprinted, their hands naturally intertwined.

Zhao Changhe's voice came through softly, "How fortunate I am to have your favor."

* * *

The Ao Pool was also on a mountain, though low and sprawling. This mountain had a pool at the summit. Ancient paths ran along the mountainside, once used for rearing various beasts.

When they arrived at the location marked in the Atlas of Mountains and Rivers, it was nothing but an empty plain. Strangely enough, they could walk across it as if the mountain itself had been lifted by divine hands, leaving only the ground below.

A smaller secret realm hidden within a secret realm.

It was unclear if the collapse of the era could create such nested spatial fragments or if it had been created intentionally, with arrays sealing off an isolated space.

Standing at the site of the Ao Pool, Zhao Changhe suddenly turned and gazed into the distance. He could see the peak of the Spirit Tribe's sacred mountain, and from this angle, it looked as if a heavenly dog[1] had taken a bite out of it, leaving a chunk missing.

The setting sun shone through this gap, casting light onto the plain and giving it an eerie, misty aura that was strangely surreal.

Yue Hongling, with her stronger understanding of arrays, also looked at the setting sun and whispered, "This is a type of yin-yang resonance array. If something is hidden here, there must be a corresponding part hidden at the peak of the sacred mountain."

Zhao Changhe immediately thought of the Heavenly Tome.

No wonder... the Heavenly Tome might have been on the sacred mountain all along, just hidden from everyone. Only by connecting both places could one probably hope to discover this.

That's probably why the blind woman didn't respond... She wouldn't be interested in the forbidden land or Blood Ao. She only cares about the Heavenly Tome. If I'd asked her how to access the sacred mountain's peak, she might have responded.

Frankly, she probably wouldn't care if I died in some random battle... Xia Longyuan and I likely aren't the only ones who have been transferred here from Earth. It's just that everyone else may have already perished.

In many novels, authors write as though just about anyone could survive when suddenly thrown into a brutal world, but in reality, only a pitiful few truly could. Even Zhao Changhe himself did not know when his own luck would run out.

For now, it was best not to dwell on such distant thoughts. The immediate task was to figure out how to break this array.

The fact that there was an array raised another point: the god or demon that was in the forbidden land was likely not from the Spirit Tribe. The Spirit Tribe was not the type to use such arrays, nor do they follow the principles of yin, yang, and the five elements. This was distinctly the work of a Xia cultivator.

After studying the array for a long time, Yue Hongling suddenly took Shi Wuding's abandoned sword and tossed it into the air.

As the last rays of the setting sun struck the blade, they created an unusual refraction, focusing a beam of light on a specific point ahead of them, faintly revealing a hidden blood-red hue within.

"Now!" Zhao Changhe drew the bone sword, becoming one with the sword in a flash, and struck precisely at that point.

This was a sword capable of breaking through space!

Crack!

With a crisp shattering sound, like glass breaking, the space before them split open, and suddenly, a mountain appeared, looming before them.

Shi Wuding had the bone sword absorb energy from the formation he and his sword slaves had set up for so long, yet half of it dissipated in just this single strike. It was as if the sword had been prepared just for this moment, a true dowry[2] divine sword.

Zhao Changhe had no time to marvel at such matters, quickly pulling Yue Hongling along as he swiftly slipped into the mountain.

Using the term “slip into” might not be entirely accurate; it was more like he was charging in under the other party’s gaze. Zhao Changhe had no doubt that whoever was inside knew someone had broken in. Concealing their movements was pointless. The best course of action was to move as fast as possible and take advantage of this time when the other party was still recuperating to launch a surprise attack.

Yue Hongling was surprised to find that Zhao Changhe seemed to know his way around. This ancient mountain had been inhabited and developed for raising various exotic beasts since the previous era. There must have been countless pathways and sections, but Zhao Changhe ignored all diversions, choosing a direct path upward.

Swish, swish, swish!

Several sword lights shot at them from the side.

The people in the forbidden land were clearly thrown into disarray by Zhao Changhe’s assault. No one had ever invaded this area before, and outsiders should not even know how to navigate the area, yet here someone was, heading straight for the Ao Pool. How had he done it?

They had no time to think. Unable to even organize a proper ambush, they attacked haphazardly.

Clang!

Yue Hongling’s Dragon Emperor drew a streak of light, and three of the forbidden land’s guards clutched their throats and fell to the ground.

Dragon Bird whistled through the air, slicing anyone who dared block their path in two.

The two of them charged upward, unmatched, leaving those attempting to intercept them frozen in shock, some even instinctively retreating.

The people here were not weak. In fact, they had been training with a god or demon who was on the verge of revival. Most of them were at the eighth or ninth layer of the Profound Gate, making them some of the most formidable fighters even in the Great Xia. But today, they were up against Yue Hongling and Zhao Changhe, the strongest man and woman of the younger generation in the entire world!

With a buzzing sound, it seemed as though an explosion had gone off in Yue Hongling's mind. She staggered slightly, letting out a muffled groan.

A curse...

Zhao Changhe remained unaffected. He had taken preventive medicine from Sisi, while Yue Hongling had deliberately avoided taking it—this way, no matter if there were side effects, at least one of them would stay safe.

Now it was clear that, at least in this instance, Sisi had not lied.

Zhao Changhe held Yue Hongling's hand and used his Rejuvenation Art to dispel the curse. With his right hand, he swept Dragon Bird in a powerful arc, slicing several attackers in half.

Yue Hongling wrinkled her nose, then pulled a crushed gu from her pocket and reluctantly ate it. Instantly, the curse was lifted.

She stood up straight and pointed her sword. "A Spirit Tribe curse... So, the boys and girls were sacrificed, but some were left behind to serve the god or demon..."

Watching their own kin be sacrificed, they not only survived but did not try to escape or seek revenge. Instead, they became envoys, returning to oppress their own people.

The young couple felt as if they had swallowed flies.

Are these the people we're fighting to save?

Yue Hongling half expected one of them to say, “We have no choice. If we don’t serve, we’ll die,” but from their eagerness to block their path, that did not seem to be the case.

One person snarled, “It’s none of your business! Go on, boast, and preach! Following the Ancestral God, we achieve power far beyond that of our tribe, with everyone bowing before us, free to take what we want. Who wouldn’t choose this path? What would you choose if you were us?”

“Is that so?” Zhao Changhe sneered. “And what’s the price?”

As he spoke, a rumbling came from the not-so-tall summit of the Ao Pool. A massive Ao foot stepped down, scooping up the person who had just spoken.

There’s a wound on the Ao’s foot... Was it left by Sisi’s bone sword just now?

The person who had been picked up let out a bloodcurdling scream that was immediately cut off. It seemed that he had been eaten.

The wound on the Ao’s foot began to heal.

A faint, godlike voice echoed in everyone’s minds: “Since you’re so loyal, I trust you won’t hesitate to help the Ancestral God fully revive, right?”

Everyone turned pale.

Meanwhile, atop the sacred mountain, Sisi held a sword to an elder’s throat, and the Spirit Tribe’s internal strife had been seemingly quelled.

Yet the entire tribe was deathly silent, the sacred mountain still. All eyes were fixed on the low mountain peak that had appeared inexplicably in the distance.

A massive blood pool, vast like a lake, sent its stench wafting toward the sacred mountain, and the enormous Blood Ao raised its head and roared, blocking out the sun and the sky.

Chapter 485: The Corpse Demon and the Blood Ao

Just from its sheer size, it felt like something no human could ever match.

Many of the Spirit Tribe's members that were on the sacred mountain kneeled toward the Blood Ao, trembling with fear.

Even though they saw that it was a creature that devoured people and knew that it was definitely not their guardian ancestral god, they still kowtowed purely out of terror.

Sisi was incredibly anxious.

She instinctively wanted to go and help, but when the Blood Ao appeared, her own people kneeled down in droves, neglecting the prisoners they were supposed to be watching. As a result, the old forces began resisting again, making Sisi so furious she nearly coughed up blood.

Luckily, her main force consisted of the Xia forces she brought in from outside. These people did not even know which side the Blood Ao belonged to. All they knew was that the people they had been fighting before had started acting up again, so they quickly suppressed them, keeping the situation under control.

Sisi had no choice but to stay on the sacred mountain to oversee matters, forcibly suppressing her urge to go and help. She was extremely worried.

Can Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling really win against such a formidable foe?

The next moment, she saw Zhao Changhe leap forward, gripping his saber with both hands and striking fiercely. "You couldn't possibly be this big. Who are you trying to intimidate with such deception?!"

Sisi: "?"

At the same time, Yue Hongling became one with her sword, streaking toward the Blood Ao's eye like a bolt of lightning.

No one noticed that a dark, shadowy gu slipped out of Zhao Changhe's ring and darted straight toward the Blood Ao's forehead.

Clang!

A terrifying wall of blood and qi erupted around the Blood Ao. The saber and sword struck the wall of energy, both being shaken back, forcing them to flip back.

The wall of energy was slightly weakened by impact, allowing the gu to seize the opportunity to slip inside.

Subsequently, both the gu and the Blood Ao let out sounds of surprise.

The corpse demon had intended to use its ancient Beast-Controlling Technique to take control of the Blood Ao, but quickly realized it was futile... because this Blood Ao was not a Blood Ao at all. Its soul had already been taken over by another entity.

Possession...

A human has taken over the body of the Blood Ao?

The situation of the Blood Ao was unlike his current state of residing in a gu. It was a true possession, a fusion of body and soul, making the entity now essentially the Blood Ao.

In the end, the corpse demon's Beast-Controlling Technique could only partially affect it, causing the Blood Ao's body to stiffen and become less responsive to the other being's commands. But as for communication with the beast's spirit, it was met with an impenetrable wall. The corpse demon was utterly unable to communicate with the Blood Ao's spirit.

The other entity was equally astonished and said, "A Profound Control Realm elder of the Ancient Spirit Tribe? I didn't expect a soul to remain here..."

Due to the corpse demon's attempt to seize control, the Gigantification Technique of the Blood Ao was dispelled, and its massive body began to shrink, quickly transforming into a blood-red Ao, about one zhang in size.

Although it was still much larger than the giant turtles and tortoises people usually saw and could be called a giant, it was ultimately of a much more acceptable size now.

Zhao Changhe seized the moment when it was stunned, raising his saber to strike the Blood Ao's head. "I knew it! Even the turtle shell that Lie used for the array plate was only a few zhang wide, yet here you are, a newborn pretending to be able to cover the sun and the sky... Let's see if you're really impenetrable!"

The Blood Ao, stiff and immobile, could only watch helplessly as Dragon Bird chopped down on its head

At the same time, Yue Hongling's sword thrust forward again, aiming for Blood Ao's right eye.

The Blood Ao shut its eyes tightly.

The sword and saber struck, but they could not pierce through.

A powerful layer of blood and qi protected the Blood Ao beyond its shell, rendering Zhao Changhe's slash, much like earlier against the blood figure, futile. It was as if his blade had landed in a dense sea of blood, failing to achieve anything substantial.

Yue Hongling's sword, however, managed to make some impact. Its sharp sword qi pierced through the sea of blood and barely pricked the Blood Ao's eyelid, creating a tiny puncture. But it ultimately failed to break through. The Blood Ao's skin was simply as tough as iron.

The Blood Ao roared in pain, and a terrifying blood sea erupted, sending Zhao Changhe, Yue Hongling, and the gu hosting the corpse demon's soul flying several zhang away.

The corpse demon, being merely a weakened remnant soul, could not withstand the force of this complete exotic beast.

Yet the corpse demon seemed somewhat excited. "What a great body, what a great body! Why didn't I think of this before? There's nothing more suited to the Blood Ao's body than me... Your fusion isn't perfect, is it? There's a sense of disunity, right? Hahaha..."

The Blood Ao, struggling under the corpse demon's influence, was unable to chase after the two who had been flung away. "I see. You must be the Ancient Spirit Tribe's Beast Spirit Saint, Xue Wu! You escaped from Huasheng Temple[1]!"

The corpse demon was deeply shocked. "How do you know—OH! I understand, I understand now! Damn, you're that Venerable Duoluo of Huasheng Temple!"

The Blood Ao did not respond.

"Ha... Hahaha..." The corpse demon laughed wildly. "You bastard... Aren't you supposed to be spreading Buddha's light, enlightening me? And yet here you are, fighting for a beast's body? Not only that, you enslave and devour people! You have the gall to call yourself an arhat[2]?"

Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling exchanged bewildered glances.

After all this, it turned out that this being was the master of the Maitreya Secret Realm, the venerable of the temple that had imprisoned the corpse demon?

The corpse demon had caused trouble in the temple and gotten caught. It was possible that Duoluo went to the Spirit Tribe to discuss how to handle the aftermath. Then, it was during that time that the world underwent an upheaval, leaving him gravely weakened. It was at that time that a page of the Heavenly Tome fell into the lands of the Spirit Tribe, protecting the space around itself. Taking advantage of the situation, Duoluo's remnant soul fled into this space and hid in the Ao Pool to rest and recover.

No, that can't be it. Before he entered the space, he had still set up an array and resonated with the Heavenly Tome... He didn't just happen to escape here. He must have seen the page fall here and followed it, preparing contingencies that included obtaining the Heavenly Tome upon his revival!

He must have woken up some time ago and began planning his revival, first finding an egg of the Blood Ao and using his skills to hasten its transformation, during which he took over its body. Then, it must have been due to the influence of the Blood Ao's body that he came to develop vicious qi similar to the one that Lie comprehended, just not on the same caliber. It seems he can no longer use his original Buddhist powers...

So, it turns out that while the Spirit Tribe Saint, Xue Wu, used his half-baked Buddhist techniques from Huasheng Temple to fool Maitreya, tormenting Jiangnan, the venerable from Huasheng Temple possessed the body of the Spirit Tribe's sacred beast, tormenting the Spirit Tribe.

These two might as well join hands.

In times of catastrophe, when life and death are at stake, it seems there's not much difference between saints and demons. In the end, they both do the same things, don't they?

The Blood Ao finally spoke slowly, "Now I understand why, over all these years, despite taking countless of the Spirit Tribe's secret manuals and using countless of its flesh and blood sacrifice rituals, I could never fully control this body... It's because with your disappearance, and the many people that died during the calamity, key elements of the Spirit Tribe's Beast-Controlling Technique were lost..."

The corpse demon laughed heartily. "Exactly, exactly. I do indeed have that knowledge. Are you regretting not soul-searching me back then?"

The Blood Ao's eyes turned fierce. "If I devour you, I will gain this knowledge. You lack a physical body, so you're no match for me."

The Blood Ao's mouth suddenly opened wide, unleashing a terrifying blood light that shot toward the gu that harbored the corpse demon.

Ripples of pure soul energy emanated from the gu, forming a tangible barrier to resist the blood light's assault. But as the Blood Ao had noted, a physical body, or lack thereof, indeed made a difference.

The enormous power contained within the Blood Ao's body was far beyond what the corpse demon could withstand in its current state.

Yet by a twist of fate, the corpse demon's abilities counteracted the Blood Ao's. Its body became stiff, showing signs of disunity between body and soul, as if both sides were vying for control.

For Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling, this made Blood Ao an easy target. It appeared seemingly easier to hit than when everyone had ganged up on the corpse demon back then.

The corpse demon shouted fiercely, "One of you, attack its forehead and disrupt its spiritual platform! The other, pierce through his crown to sever his connection with heaven and earth. If you

can disrupt the connection between body and soul, I can seize full control of this body! If I fall first, everyone here will die! Hurry, I can't hold him for long!"

Yue Hongling did not need further instruction. Her sword, like a rainbow piercing the sun, was already striking toward the Blood Ao's forehead.

At the same time, Dragon Bird unleashed a crescent blade light, viciously striking the Blood Ao's crown with a thunderous explosion.

The blood sea scattered across a hundred li, and within the Ao Pool, all the forbidden land envoys touched by the blood light had their bodies wither and were entirely drained, becoming nourishment for the Blood Ao. The energy around the Blood Ao grew even more vibrant.

Yue Hongling found that her blood and qi had fallen into extreme disarray. Her blood and qi had become so chaotic that it felt as though her body would explode. In this state, she could not exert the attack power she desired. The difference between her and the Blood Ao was overwhelming, and she could barely withstand the effects of just its aura alone.

Maybe Zhao Changhe could bear it—after all, he specifically trained for it.

But what about herself?

Would she end up being a burden in this battle?

Yue Hongling's gaze grew more resolute, and as the setting sun cast its light through the gap in the sacred mountain, a faint golden glow surrounded her.

The Blood Ao muttered in shock, "Sword Emperor..."

The ancient sword Dragon Emperor began to hum and resonate. Even though it was the sword of the ancient Azure Dragon and had no relation to the Sword Emperor, it still recognized the aura of an emperor.

The emperor of swords was still an emperor.

Zhao Changhe had been unaware that Yue Hongling had a relationship with the Sword Emperor, yet the Blood Ao had mentioned him twice. One bearing the intent from his early years and the other from his later years...

The flashy techniques he had learned were likely from the Sword Emperor's youth, as he had yet to reach the core of the sword tomb.

However, when Yue Hongling roamed the jianghu in her early years, she had ventured into an unknown secret realm and obtained a fragmented legacy. Perhaps that was the incomplete intent of the Sword Emperor in his later years.

Finally, the ancient sword Dragon Emperor began to radiate a golden imperial qi, merging completely with Yue Hongling's sword intent. A radiant light shot into the blood sea, shredding the once-impenetrable barrier to pieces.

The tip of the sword pierced the Blood Ao's forehead, and a pained howl echoed across the entire secret realm.

From the time she parted ways with Zhao Changhe, to her battles in Bashan, her journey into Miaojiang, her assassination of the pacification commissioner, her confrontation with Shi Wuding, her insights into the sword, and her understanding of the Heavenly Blood Jade... She had silently accumulated until now and had reached a critical juncture.

There was a faint sense of the second layer of the Profound Mysteries coming from her, and it seemed like she was about to break through, with just a sliver left to go.

Chapter 486: Seven-Day Blood Curse

At this moment, Yue Hongling was basically in a state of explosive growth.

Amusingly, the factor triggering her explosive growth was not the fighting spirit of a swordsman roused from fighting a formidable enemy but rather her determination not to become a burden to her man.

Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Zhao Changhe fiercely striking at the Blood Ao's head. He seemed completely unaffected by the sea of blood; if anything, it even seemed to give him a slight boost. Although his strike appeared to fail to penetrate its defenses, it accurately disrupted the Blood Ao's connection with heaven and earth.

The insights that Zhao Changhe had achieved in order to reach the first layer of the Profound Mysteries happened to align perfectly with this place. Originally, this wave of blood was not only meant to throw Yue Hongling's blood and qi into disarray, it was also meant to use vicious qi as a blade, mercilessly tearing apart any lifeform within its range. Yet with Zhao Changhe's slash, his saber halted the chaotic flow of blood, and the surrounding vicious qi calmed.

It was Bloodied Mountains and Rivers versus Bloodies Mountains and Rivers, both sides drew upon the power of blood and vicious qi. However, due to the corpse demon's interference and suppression, the Blood Ao could not keep up with Zhao Changhe. Even its ability to absorb flesh and blood to heal itself had become significantly weakened. Its eyelid, which had been wounded by Yue Hongling earlier, was still bleeding.

However, Zhao Changhe frowned, unsatisfied with the power of his attack. This strike only limited the Blood Ao's control over the environment. It ultimately failed to break through its defenses, and the outcome was far from ideal.

Regardless, Zhao Changhe had done his part, while she, Yue Hongling, had yet to truly achieve anything substantial. She had been his guide, and it had not been long since then. She found herself wondering if she would soon become a burden to him.

I'm not letting that happen!

The thought that her purpose had been reduced by half was unbearable. With this feeling burning inside her, she thrust her sword, and it truly felt as if the heavens were responding. It seemed that with her strike, the setting sun dipped beneath the mountain's peak.

Although it was not quite enough to allow her to break through to the next layer in the midst of battle, this strike came very close to reaching the second layer of the Profound Mysteries. It not only wounded the Blood Ao physically but struck at its spiritual platform as well.

The sharp sword qi penetrated its forehead, causing the Blood Ao to howl in pain. A crack appeared in the connection between its spiritual platform and its physical body, which had never fully fused.

The corpse demon was overjoyed, and a wisp of black qi seeped out from the gu and into the Blood Ao's wound.

The corpse demon was elated, yet Yue Hongling suffered. In the instant that the corpse demon's hold on the Blood Ao was released, a wave of blood surged from the Blood Ao's mouth. Yue Hongling, who was too close to avoid it, was hit hard. She was sent flying like a broken kite, her blood scattering across the sky.

"Damn it!" Zhao Changhe felt his heart clench and was about to rush forward to assist her when a massive force swept over, making it difficult for him to maintain his footing. He stumbled several steps before managing to regain his balance.

Raising his head to have a look at what was going on, he saw the Blood Ao thrashing wildly, its four legs pulling free from the Ao Pool and stomping onto solid ground as it rampaged around.

The mountain shook violently, and the ground quaked.

Deep within its spiritual platform, two souls were fighting madly for control of the Blood Ao's body, and it had lost all awareness, attacking every living thing in sight with a primal urge to replenish its missing flesh.

Boom!

The Blood Ao crashed toward Zhao Changhe, who flipped through the air, narrowly dodging it as it slammed into the rocky edge of the pool, shattering giant boulders as if they were tofu.

Bang!

Meanwhile, Yue Hongling finally landed. As she looked up, she saw the Blood Ao frenziedly charging toward her.

She was in a terrible state right now; her blood and qi were in disarray, her insides churning, and even blood trickled from the corner of her mouth. With the condition she was in, how could she possibly dodge the incoming attack?

Zhao Changhe suddenly dashed over, scooping up Yue Hongling and carrying her away. The Blood Ao's charge narrowly missed them, yet it still managed to unleash a wave of energy that sent them rolling across the ground, causing them to nearly crash into a massive boulder at the cliff's edge. Zhao Changhe's grip on Yue Hongling loosened from the impact, and they both coughed up blood, scattering to either side.

The corpse demon's voice echoed through the blood waves, transmitting its thoughts, "That strike you aimed at its crown earlier—do it again! If you can wound its skull and sever its connection to heaven and earth, I can drive this bastard out for good! Rest assured, as long as I'm in this deadlock, the Ao won't retract its head. It will just thrash around!"

The corpse demon's voice echoed through the void, reverberating within Zhao Changhe's head. He looked up and indeed saw the frenzied Blood Ao charging out of the mountain.

Outside the mountain, countless Spirit Tribe members and Xia soldiers were still engaged in battle. When they saw the Blood Ao charging toward them, they were all struck dumb with fear.

How many people would die, crushed by that monstrous charge?

Enduring the pain from her broken bones, Yue Hongling leaped back up, landing on the Blood Ao's head, ready to stab it with her sword. But the Blood Ao violently shook, throwing her off.

Zhao Changhe sprang forward, seizing the moment when the Blood Ao was vulnerable, and slashed down with all his might onto its head.

The blood wave parted, and his saber cut into the Ao's head, breaking through the skin but leaving the skull undamaged.

Not enough... My attack power isn't enough...

Zhao Changhe gripped the folds of the Blood Ao's head tightly, desperately maintaining his hold amidst the violent thrashing. Looking into the gash he had made, he could just barely see a narrow gap where the skull was exposed.

Breaking through that point might have been possible, but only if Yue Hongling had been uninjured.

He could not do it himself. It required gathering all his strength into a single point, and his control of sword qi was too coarse to achieve such precision.

To achieve such fine, pinpoint sharpness, he needed to reach the second level of the Blood Asura Body.

Li Shentong pointed out that body tempering had specific aspects it focused on for each level. The second level of the Blood Asura Body was tailored for this very task. Zhao Changhe's practice of the sword was also aimed at this point. He had completed all the prerequisites, honed his sword intent, and had his blood and flesh improved by the Heavenly Blood Jade. Everything was ready, save for the Sharp Blade Grass that would sharpen sword intent and temper his blood and qi.

He had the pills containing Sharp Blade Grass in hand, but he did not dare to take it.

Looking at the people fleeing in panic before him and the sight of Sisi charging over desperately, madness appeared in Zhao Changhe's eyes.

This Sharp Blade Sword Pill... Consuming it might result in my body being torn apart, but it's a sliver of hope nonetheless.

On the other hand, not consuming it spells certain death, the Spirit Tribe would fall, and even Hongling will die...

There was no choice to be made here. Zhao Changhe quickly pulled out one of the pills and swallowed it.

Seeing him from afar, Yue Hongling rushed over, her face stricken. "Are you insane?!"

Zhao Changhe panted, murmuring, "It's the final step. How could I give up so easily?"

Swish, swish, swish!

Countless strands of sword qi erupted violently inside his body, piercing outward. In an instant, Zhao Changhe became a man drenched in blood, his body riddled with holes.

He roared in agony, clutching the folds of the Blood Ao's head tightly.

As Sisi rushed toward him frantically, she felt as if a heavy hammer had struck her heart, nearly causing her to stumble.

On the sacred mountain, across the plains, countless people stared in stunned silence. They could not understand why this foreign man was fighting so desperately for them.

Among the Xia soldiers that Sisi had brought from outside the secret realm, a few whispered, “Is that... Is that Blood Asura, Zhao Changhe, on that turtle’s head?”

“It should be, with that broad saber and the scar. But why is he so full of blood?”

“Isn’t he even more of a Blood Asura now?”

“He can’t be human, in any case; he must be a god or a demon! How can a person endure that agony? And he’s still fighting!”

Zhao Changhe could not see Yue Hongling or Sisi’s reactions, nor could he hear the awe of those around him. The pain of being pierced by countless swords had obliterated all other thoughts, leaving only a single obsession echoing within his mind: This is body cultivation. Soaking in medicinal baths used to be painful, too; this is just a bit more intense.

Ignoring the rampaging sword qi, he sought the Sharp Blade Grass’s medicinal properties, guiding the sword qi into his blood and qi, refining his flesh little by little, transforming the raging river of energy within him into thousands of sharp threads. The river of energy within his body converged with the sword qi, rebuilding his body

I’ve laid a solid enough foundation with the Heavenly Blood Jade. I can pull this off. As long as I endure this pain and keep my mind from being distracted... but... it’s so difficult...

Zhao Changhe’s consciousness began to blur, his vision hazy with blood, gritting his teeth and holding on with sheer willpower.

Endure it!

At that moment, the pain suddenly eased.

Zhao Changhe glanced inward in surprise. It was not that the pain had reduced, but rather that his internal energy had dropped by more than half, weakening the raging sword qi so much that he could withstand it with just his physical body.

What happened? How did that hellish sword qi torture suddenly turn into a mild cold?

* * *

Far away in Wushan.

Ever since the Blood Ao emerged, the Blood God Array Plate in the secret cave had been trembling violently, as if resonating with something.

Xue Canghai, drenched in sweat, led the members of the cult in forming a formation to suppress it. None of the Blood God Cult's members could understand what was causing the sacred artifact's rampage, but they held it down as best they could. Otherwise, Wushan itself may be overturned.

In the midst of this chaos, a cultist rushed in anxiously and reported, "Cult Leader! Someone's come to the mountain, and he's extremely arrogant."

A clear voice echoed through the mountains, "Where is Xue Canghai? Wang Daozhong from Langya has come to pay a visit!"

Xue Canghai was both furious and anxious. The sacred artifact was out of control, and he was already at his wits' end. Most of his forces were in Xiangyang, leaving Wushan undermanned. Now, at this critical moment, a powerful enemy had arrived.

Is this the end of the Blood God Cult?

Before he could sort out his thoughts, he heard the screams of the guards outside, all of them kicked away by Wang Daozhong with ease.

Wang Daozhong entered with his hands behind his back, looking up at the array plate and smiling casually. “Looks like you’re having some trouble, huh? Hm, that wasn’t my doing, just a coincidence. There’s no need to glare at me like that.”

Xue Canghai coldly asked, “What is the purpose of your visit, Mister Wang?”

Wang Daozhong replied, “So this is the foundation of Zhao Changhe’s cultivation, huh? My Wang Clan wants it. If Zhao Changhe has the guts, he can come to Langya to take it back.”

“Fuck off!” Even Vermillion Bird doesn’t dare seize our sacred artifact! Who do you think you are, you piece of shit?! Xue Canghai was furious, and he immediately resorted to the Blood God Saber. “We’ll die together, then!”

“Die together? Are you even worthy?” Wang Daozhong chuckled, casually thrusting his sword at the weakened Xue Canghai.

But just then, Wang Daozhong’s expression changed dramatically.

Suddenly, his blood and qi surged violently. His internal organs felt like they were being wrung, and he nearly convulsed from the pain. His true qi scattered, leaving him extremely weak.

The power behind his sword vanished entirely.

The Blood God Saber effortlessly sent Wang Daozhong’s sword flying. Xue Canghai was momentarily stunned, then broke into an ecstatic grin. “Who’s the fool putting on airs here? Die!”

Clang!

Wang Daozhong mustered the last bit of strength, slapped the side of Xue Canghai’s saber, deflecting it, and staggered away.

He was utterly bewildered. “Who could have poisoned me?”

* * *

In Miaojiang, beside his sickbed, Lei Zhentang painstakingly donned a robe and chanted. In front of him was a straw doll, a red paper with Wang Daozhong's name and birthdate affixed to it. The doll was smeared with Zhao Changhe's blood, left behind in the lake. The curse had been chanted for seven days before it finally took effect.

At that moment, both Zhao Changhe and Wang Daozhong felt the effects of the shared damage, and their internal energy was simultaneously depleted.

Thanks to the preventive medicine given by Sisi, Zhao Changhe fared a bit better, only experiencing a drop in energy, with no harm to his body. Meanwhile, Wang Daozhong felt his insides burning. He coughed up blood, fleeing a thousand li southwest while being pursued relentlessly by the members of the Blood God Cult.

Chapter 487: Zhao Changhe's First God-Slaying

Zhao Changhe did not know who had helped him, so he instinctively credited the blind woman.

That was timely assistance!

The sword qi flowing out of his body was originally meant to be guided within, according to the training methods of the Bashan Sword Hut. Shi Wuding was able to unleash sword qi from his mouth because he had nurtured sword qi internally, making it his ultimate hidden weapon.

If cultivated properly, every single movement one made would emit sword qi. This was the legendary innate sword qi, where even a drop of blood could be a sword.

Shi Wuding was only half a step away from this level.

In other words, if he could handle the sword qi circulating within him, Zhao Changhe would not need the Sharp Blade Grass. The Sharp Blade Grass was simply a means to produce and condense sword qi.

Everyone's cultivation methods differed. Zhao Changhe originally could not control this sword qi or guide it. But now, with his internal energy significantly diminished, he could try to use it.

He already had the necessary sword intent and knew exactly what to do.

Zhao Changhe quickly focused inward, guiding the scattered sword qi into his limbs, letting it flow through his blood and integrate with his vicious qi, refining it in the same way that Li Shentong had once mentioned for tempering the body.

Ordinary people would not be able to do this, but the transformation brought about by the Heavenly Blood Jade gave him a solid foundation to succeed. It was indeed the ideal requirement for the body cultivation path the Heavenly Tome had revealed.

To Zhao Changhe, it felt like ages had passed. He could feel his very blood cells becoming unbelievably sharp, like tiny swords coursing through his body, with threads of vicious qi weaving through like even more swords, shuttling back and forth.

When he grew somewhat accustomed to it, the sword qi began to surge again as the curse's effect faded and his energy returned.

The second level of the Blood Asura Body had been achieved.

At the same time, the door to the second layer of the Profound Mysteries opened slightly, allowing Zhao Changhe a glimpse of what lay beyond.

It was actually simple, something he had anticipated for a while. When his internal cultivation caught up, he would break through. In this moment of clarity, he could feel that he was just one step away.

The Profound Mysteries were not all that mysterious. In essence, they were still known as “Bodily Profound Mysteries,” meaning it was still about manipulating one's own body in various ways. But unlike when making one's way through the Profound Gate, it was more individualized, with each person's path differing greatly. This lack of a uniform standard had left Zhao Changhe feeling lost between the first and second layers, but now, he had finally found his way.

Exploring the Profound Mysteries could wait... Zhao Changhe opened his blood-red eyes, as the pressing battle at hand was his immediate concern.

Even though the tempering of his body felt like it had taken ages, it had actually been fairly quick—after all, even for normal people, it only takes about twenty seconds for blood to complete a circulation throughout the body. With his physique, it took only a few seconds. This might be a long time in a fight, but fortunately, the Blood Ao was still a short distance away from the crowd.

Zhao Changhe put away Dragon Bird and drew the bone sword, heavily driving it into the tiny crack in the Blood Ao's skull.

The originally boundless power coursing through his body like a rushing river was now focused into a tiny point at the sword tip. A razor-sharp strand of sword qi pierced through, breaking into the Blood Ao's skull.

The Blood Ao let out a thunderous, agonized scream.

The soul of the Buddhist venerable and the body of the Blood Ao were incompatible. This incompatibility was not a major issue normally, but now it had encountered the Spirit Tribe's Beast Spirit Saint, who found this crack and was furiously tearing it open to seize control.

Yue Hongling had destabilized its spiritual platform, allowing the corpse demon to merge directly and attempt to seize the body.

Zhao Changhe's strike at the crown further disrupted the connection, severing the already unstable soul-body bond. A stream of black qi erupted from the head, the telltale sign of a soul being forcibly expelled.

The black qi shot straight at Zhao Changhe's face, seemingly attempting to possess him instead. Zhao Changhe quickly pulled out a talisman and slapped it on the black qi.

With another painful shriek, the black qi transformed into a dark beam and fled toward the sacred mountain, disappearing from sight.

Zhao Changhe lacked the strength to chase it; he clung weakly to the Blood Ao's head, barely keeping himself from falling. He could only watch as the black qi entered the sacred mountain.

Clearly, the enemy had planned for this contingency. They knew how to get inside and had already made arrangements. But that was fine. When it came to the Heavenly Tome, there was still the blind woman that the other party would have to go through.

Yue Hongling flew to his side, hurriedly supporting the wavering Zhao Changhe. "Are you okay?"

“I’m fine...” Zhao Changhe’s gaze was icy as he looked down at the Blood Ao’s head. “But let’s see if that little guy is okay...”

The Blood Ao continued to scream in pain, a sign of its body merging with another soul. The corpse demon’s voice reverberated in Zhao Changhe’s mind, “I commend you for risking your lives to drive away that bald monk and deliver me this sacred body... As a reward, I’ll leave you an intact corpse... Haha... Hahaha...”

As laughter continued, Zhao Changhe casually flipped his hand and threw the other sword pill into the Blood Ao’s mouth.

“???” The laughter abruptly stopped.

“I know how to guide sword qi, but I can’t withstand its rampage. You can’t either, and neither can the Blood Ao’s body. I’d like to see how you’ll handle it.” Zhao Changhe muttered wearily, “The Blood Ao’s shell is tough, but I doubt its guts are just as tough.”

For a moment, the air seemed to freeze. In the next instant, the Blood Ao’s abdomen was shredded from within by countless swords.

Even when Zhao Changhe could not fully suppress the sword qi, he could at least channel it in an orderly way, directing it outward without any of it stabbing into his heart. But neither the Blood Ao nor the corpse demon had the slightest understanding of this. Adding to that, the Blood Ao’s body structure was vastly different from a human’s, so the sword qi, which followed Zhao Changhe’s intended pathways based on human blood flow, was utterly chaotic inside the Blood Ao.

Swish, swish, swish!

In an instant, the sword qi tore through Blood Ao’s insides, turning it into mush and leaving it with almost no intact internal organs.

The newly possessed Blood Ao’s body slumped to the ground, motionless, as if the sword pill had directly poisoned it to death.

A wisp of black qi escaped from the crack in its skull.

The corpse demon was furious. The struggle with the Blood Ao's soul had been far from easy, thus it was far weaker than before, and yet it was left with nothing.

Fine, it doesn't matter if the body is dead, Zhao Changhe must be even weaker now. I can just possess him instead!

Just as it emerged from the Blood Ao's skull, it came face-to-face with a talisman and with Zhao Changhe's cold gaze.

Beside him, Yue Hongling's sword erupted with dazzling light. Having understood everything, she struck down with Dragon Emperor, a radiant golden beam piercing straight down.

"No! You're destroying the bridge after crossing..." The corpse demon let out a wretched scream, and the black qi fizzled, twisting into a distorted face before finally dissipating entirely.

It never understood, even in its last moments, how Zhao Changhe had prepared the talisman so early on, as if he had anticipated dealing with two vengeful spirits all along.

At that moment, Sisi arrived, flying in from the distant sacred mountain. "Are you two all right?"

Zhao Changhe lay weakly on the turtle shell, and Yue Hongling leaned tiredly against him. The two sat close together, laughing. "It seems we just killed your true ancestral god or something. Do we need to run for our lives now?"

Sisi rolled her eyes at their affectionate scene and quickly pulled out two pills for them. "Killing the Blood Ao... It depends on how you spin it. As long as I talk it up, it becomes a feat accomplished only by true envoys carrying divine orders."

She paused, lowering her voice. "As for that soul earlier, well, he was a bad guy, wasn't he?"

Zhao Changhe looked at her deeply, finally feeling relieved. Exhaustion overtook him, and he passed out.

Sisi gazed at him, his body drenched in blood, with hardly a patch of flesh untouched by the rampaging sword qi... She could not fathom how he had managed to stay conscious through the entire battle, making every move precisely as needed.

Tears welled up in her peach-blossom eyes, almost spilling over.

Yue Hongling, slumped beside them, muttered, “Take us somewhere we can recover. Whatever you have to say, save it for later.”

Sisi gave her an apologetic look. “I’m sorry, Big Sis Yue. You’ve helped so much, and I...”

“You’re welcome...” Yue Hongling replied lazily. “It’s fine. I’ve messed with you before too.”

Chapter 488: Pain Transfer Gu

Zhao Changhe did not know how long he had been unconscious.

This time, the injuries were worse and more painful than after the battles at Yanmen and Kuaiji. At least before, he had only blacked out momentarily.

This time, the impact from the Blood Ao had left his bones nearly shattered, which would have been bad enough. But that was just the beginning.

The excruciating pain from being torn apart from within, enough to shred the Blood Ao’s powerful body from the inside, was something he could channel outward, sparing his life. However, the agony of the sword qi piercing through his entire body was not something humans were meant to bear.

It was an unbelievable feat, incomprehensible even to those who had witnessed it.

Yet, that was the kind of man that Zhao Changhe was. He was a warrior who would do anything to win. In the heat of battle, he would have likely chopped off his own head if it meant victory.

But afterward, the consequences hit hard. Even in his unconscious state, he felt immense pain, and he curled up on the bed, his body trembling uncontrollably. No matter how he lay, it hurt.

Even worse, the vicious qi within his body, which had not flared up for some time, erupted with full force this time.

Previously, Zhao Changhe had absorbed a large amount of the vicious qi affecting the Heavenly Blood Jade to return it to how it once was. It had been truly beneficial to him, strengthening an aspect of his power that was sorely lacking. Without that vicious qi, he might not have been able to hold back the opponent's Bloodied Mountains and Rivers.

But now, with his blood and qi extremely weak, this immensely powerful vicious qi had nothing to balance it, and even the sutra he had gotten from Tang Wanzhuang could do nothing to contain it.

So, the vicious qi raged through his body, which had just been tempered and sharpened. He was thus subjected to another round of excruciating pain, and he felt like his body was being sliced apart again.

Even while unconscious, he curled up tightly, groaning involuntarily.

Sisi sat by the bed, carefully removing his tattered clothes and applying a cooling ointment to his wounds.

The touch startled Zhao Changhe, and he instinctively pushed her away, causing her to stumble as the ointment fell from her hands.

Sisi quietly picked it up and continued applying it.

The young maids nearby could not bear to simply watch by the side any longer and said, "Saintess, let us help you."

Sisi ignored them, continuing to apply the ointment herself.

Seeing her persistence, the maids exchanged glances, feeling that their saintess might be in trouble. Finally, one of them gathered the courage to say, "Saintess, he is a man of Xia."

Sisi's hand paused for a moment.

Whether he was someone from Xia did not matter that much to her. Many of the people in Sisi's faction were refugees of Xia who had found sanctuary in Miaojiang, and the Xia forces had played a significant role in the recent battle.

In terms of the tribe's power structure, of course, it would become a problem if people from Xia dominated. However, the Xia that she had taken in were outcasts from Miaojiang, and they depended on the Spirit Tribe for survival. Once she unified the secret realm, their tribe's power would skyrocket, and the Xia would remain only a small faction within the larger force, thereby having little impact.

But Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling were different.

Especially Zhao Changhe... He was compatible with the Heavenly Blood Jade, able to break seals, found the forbidden land no one knew about, traversed the sacred paths as if they were his own, and, finally, unraveled the mystery of the Blood Ao, even suppressing its power of vicious blood qi. To a keen observer, his actions seemed almost guided by a divine hand, revealing a profound familiarity with the Spirit Tribe's secrets.

Some might even say that Zhao Changhe seemed more like the saint than Sisi did as the saintess. It was something that would truly be believed and widely accepted if spread.

If Sisi were a woman with real ambition, the logical choice now would be to make him disappear quietly rather than treat his injuries.

Fortunately, neither Sisi nor even the maids, who barely knew Zhao Changhe, would do something like that. He had sustained these severe wounds for their sake; none of them were so heartless as to turn on him.

Still, seeing Sisi's tender care for him, they could not help but worry.

None of them had the heart to kill him, but they also wished she would not elevate his status too much...

The younger members of the tribe had ventured out to Miaojiang, dealing with the powerful tribes like the Black Hmong, struggling to build a foothold, all because they did not want to be anyone's servant. But if things continued this way, they feared they would go from refusing to serve the forbidden land to becoming lackeys for the Xia.

"Everyone, leave," Sisi suddenly said, breaking the silence.

“Saintess...”

“What, he’s lying here exposed. I don’t mind being intimate with him. Do you all want to stay and watch? Fine, anyone who wants to can take a step forward and become a chambermaid.”

“...”

Sisi sighed. “I know what you’re worried about, but he won’t...”

One of the maids could not help but interject, “We cannot place our hopes on others.”

Sisi glanced at her, then unexpectedly pulled out a gu and placed it in Zhao Changhe’s mouth. “Happy?”

They hadn’t clearly seen what kind of gu it was, but they assumed it must be one of a certain kind. A look of relief and excitement spread across their faces. “Then we won’t disturb you. We wish you and the sacred envoy happiness.”

Sisi replied calmly, “So, you’ve acknowledged him as the sacred envoy?”

“Actually...” The young girls lowered their heads. “He really does seem to be one. Even though we don’t understand why the Ancestral God chose a man from Xia, perhaps it’s simply because we’re not good enough...”

Sisi chuckled and blinked at them. “So, if you truly recognize him as the sacred envoy, are any of you thinking of stepping forward now?”

The girls quickly scampered off, saying as they left, “The saintess can personally attend to him.”

Shaking her head, Sisi returned to applying the ointment.

At that moment, Zhao Changhe was lying still, no longer curled up or trembling, looking more at peace. However, the vicious qi was still raging within him. His arms and chest visibly swelled up and hardened, faintly radiating a dark red qi. The vicious qi was so intense that insects passing by might just drop dead on the spot.

Sisi's hands, still applying the ointment, slowly moved to the more hardened areas of his body.

She hesitated for a moment, then slowly lowered her head toward his body.

* * *

Zhao Changhe falling unconscious was his body's way of protecting itself from excessive blood loss, but he had a vague awareness of what was happening.

Especially the feeling of being overwhelmed by vicious qi, as though he had become a beast driven only by violence and rage, like he had become the Blood Ao itself. This was the inevitable result of the vicious qi backlash. It had nothing to do with the Blood Ao specifically. Any lifeform dominated by the desire to kill would experience this.

Fortunately, his body was so battered that it was worse off than a torn rag. He could not cause any trouble even if he wanted to. Any slight movement brought unbearable pain, and even lying down was torturous. The unconsciousness was his mind's way of shielding him from the agony.

He had no idea how long it would take to recuperate... Without the ability to act on his own, he couldn't even use the Rejuvenation Art, and there was no miracle medicine to heal him quickly.

Vaguely, he thought he saw the blind woman.

"Hm... Quite the hero."

Zhao Changhe, dazed and half-lucid, did not have the patience to deal with her. "I feel like killing right now, so stay away from me."

The blind woman moved a little closer and sniggered. "Are you even capable of moving?"

"Damn you..."

"I really don't understand how someone so reckless with their own life has managed to survive this long," the blind woman mused, tilting her head and resting her fingers on his cheek. "You've been

incredibly lucky so far. Each time you've been seriously injured, some treasure has managed to smooth over the hidden damage for you. Otherwise, with your body, you'd be on a steady decline in a few years, let alone trying to reach higher levels. As for this time, who knows if you'll—"

Zhao Changhe said, "Just shut up. I'm full of vicious qi right now, and I'm extremely irritable. We can discuss this later."

"We can't wait." The blind woman sighed. "If the Heavenly Tome falls into the wrong hands, everything you've done so far will have been for nothing."

"I don't consider what I've done to be pointless. If it saved lives, I'm content."

"And if he takes the Heavenly Tome and retaliates?"

"What do you expect me to do about it? You know I'm too injured to move! Sisi can handle herself."

As he spoke, he could feel a cool sensation on his body, gentle hands applying ointment to his wounds.

But the sting of the ointment on his injuries was unbearable, and he instinctively pushed the person away. He continued, "From what I understand, you're only restricted by the secret realm's space, unable to enter casually. If you could get in, you'd do it yourself instead of bothering me."

The blind woman could not help but laugh. "Sisi can indeed handle herself, but I fear that handling it her way will make all your efforts futile. A hero? In this world, do you really think there's any place for a hero? It's laughable."

Zhao Changhe glared at her, feeling extremely irritated.

In his heart, Zhao Changhe vaguely suspected that this was not the blind woman entering his dream but simply a dream reflecting his own worries...

Because the blind woman would not come to sow discord. It was not in her nature to do so, and she had nothing to gain from it.

But the thought only flashed by briefly. Something was then pushed into his mouth, and Zhao Changhe could not resist.

The effect was incredible, beyond any divine medicine he knew about. The pain subsided significantly in a very short time, and he even felt a bit stronger.

It was odd. His injuries had not healed, yet the pain had lessened... Could it be an anesthetic? But anesthetics don't usually give strength.

As the pain faded, his senses sharpened, and he became more aware of the explosive force of the vicious qi surging within, his muscles taut, blood and qi brimming, desperate for release.

The blind woman in the dream seemed surprised by this change and continued, "Sisi is now the leader of the tribe. Her actions can't be guided by emotion alone. She will have many other considerations that she must keep in mind..."

Before she could finish, Zhao Changhe reached out aggressively, pulling her close. "Stop trying to sow discord. Compared to Sisi, you're the one truly devoid of emotion!"

Surprisingly, the blind woman did not struggle, allowing Zhao Changhe to grab her and press her to the ground.

It was indeed a dream.

The real blind woman would not act like this.

The real blind woman floated in the void, watching Zhao Changhe's fanciful imaginings with a bemused expression, then watching Sisi's gentle hands apply medicine.

The scene felt strangely surreal!

The next moment, Sisi leaned closer to Zhao Changhe.

The blind woman: "????"

How could Zhao Changhe's dream somehow align so well with reality? This isn't my doing!

Wait—doesn't this mean that, in Zhao Changhe's dream, it's me who's doing this?

No way.

Zhao Changhe felt a sudden warmth, as if the pent-up blood and qi had finally found an outlet, bringing him immense relief. Initially, he was passively enjoying it, but gradually, as he regained some strength, he pulled the blind woman up, stripping her bare.

Sisi, caught off guard, was pinned down, and she instinctively struggled, but a wave of pain swept over her, leaving her weak.

The young girls could never have guessed what the gu Sisi fed Zhao Changhe was—it was one known as the Pain Transfer Gu.

The reason Zhao Changhe no longer felt pain was that she was enduring it for him.

Sisi panted heavily, looking softly at him as he tore at her clothing, and then slowly closed her eyes.

The blind woman's hair stood on end with anger. Suddenly, she reached out and knocked both of them out, leaving them unconscious on the bed. "This is to ensure your first time is truly your own. There's no need to thank me."

Chapter 489: Willing to Be A Maid

Actually, Zhao Changhe was only half correct. The one who initially entered his dream to remind him about the Heavenly Tome was indeed the real blind woman. She had already noticed disturbances at the nearby sacred mountain and, disregarding the fact that Zhao Changhe was pretty much a dying dog, intended to spur him into action.

In a way, the blind woman indeed did not care whether Zhao Changhe lived or died.

But after he ingested the Pain Transfer Gu, she realized there was no need to rush him further. She suspected they might start a dual cultivation healing process and did not want to be present for that, so she withdrew.

Though she left, Zhao Changhe's confused state did not dissipate the dream. It continued with him worrying about whether Sisi would betray him after using him, and the dream carried on in the form of a conversation with the blind woman.

It was just a dream, but the blind woman never expected him to so literally fulfill his bold words from before: stuffing the sausage into...[1]

What made it worse was that outside the dream, Sisi was really eating the sausage.

Watching this surreal scene unfold, the blind woman did not even know how to feel. After knocking the pair out with anger and frustration, she panted in rage for some time, disgusted by what she saw. She made a cutting gesture with her hand, aiming for a while before finally deciding against it, storming away in a huff.

She could not take action without consequence.

Knocking out the pair was already the only intervention she had ever made outside of when she went against gods and demons, a moment of historical significance.

Similarly, this event also held great historical significance for the two idiots.

Because this was the first time they truly lay together, side by side, until dawn.

As dawn broke, Sisi woke up, feeling sore but relieved. She found herself nestled against Zhao Changhe's shoulder, clinging to him like an octopus. He was still asleep, but his expression had softened significantly, no longer filled with the pain he had shown yesterday.

Sisi carefully tried to move away, but found his arm wrapped tightly around her waist, preventing her escape.

Not wanting to wake him, she sighed in resignation and settled back down.

Her body still felt weak, as if she had been through a long and severe illness, and she did not have the energy to move.

She didn't want to move, either; resting against his shoulder felt quite comfortable.

His muscles were no longer rigid like yesterday, when his vicious qi had been so fierce it could kill a passing mosquito. Today, he was finally normal, and could even pass off as a pleasantly warm and comforting human pillow.

There was just one spot, though... Strange. The vicious qi hasn't completely dispersed?

She curiously reached out and touched it, then gave it a squeeze.

Zhao Changhe opened his eyes.

Sisi: "..."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

"Um..." Sisi awkwardly retracted her hand. "I was just checking the vicious qi."

Zhao Changhe looked at her with a strange expression. His mind had been very muddled last night, and now he was slightly dazed, struggling to distinguish between dream and reality.

Last night, that sensation felt so real... someone was doing that... Was the blind woman in the dream real or not?

Hmm... While the idea of pinning her down and having her give me a little something is pretty satisfying, I need to get a grip. There's no way that could have actually happened. It must have been a dream.

But if it was a dream, then what about the sensations I felt?

Zhao Changhe looked down at Sisi, nestled close to him like a small bird, her cheeks flushed, and things started to come together. His eyes turned round.

No way... She did that, didn't she...

Her clothes were still disheveled as if they had been roughly tugged and torn, revealing fair skin as smooth as jade and even more...

Zhao Changhe gulped.

Sisi started to squirm. "Now that you're awake, let me go!"

Zhao Changhe leaned in, whispering in her ear, "You checked my vicious qi. Shouldn't I check yours?"

Sisi let out a laugh, half in frustration and half in amusement. "So you're finally showing your true nature, huh?"

"Well, who was secretly taking advantage of me last night?"

"I was helping you release the vicious qi!" Sisi's face flushed even redder. "Do you have any idea how terrifying you looked yesterday?"

"Well... it doesn't seem fully released, does it? How about helping me release a bit more?"

Sisi suddenly fell silent, pleading softly, "Master, the sun's already up..."

It was not even a refusal; in fact, it was more of an invitation.

Here was a woman who had willingly helped him quietly release his vicious qi, who had spent the night in his arms, sharing a bed with him. Any man would know exactly what to do next...

Yet Zhao Changhe bit his lip, feeling a sudden hesitation.

The words from his dream last night had reflected his inner worries. Could he really trust Sisi? Was it wise to become too entangled with her? After all, the Spirit Tribe maids had once warned him that if he became too intimate with her, he might end up ingesting gu and losing control over his own will.

She was like a poppy flower, beautiful but dangerous.

Seeing his hesitation, Sisi, though not actually wanting to do anything at the moment, could not help but look a little hurt.

After a moment's thought, she bit her lower lip, took his hand, and placed it on her chest.

Zhao Changhe: “?”

Sisi said softly, “Go ahead, you can play with them... Are you really so afraid of taking things any further?”

Zhao Changhe squeezed her chest a bit, then said, “You’re not playing games with me to keep me on edge anymore?”

Sisi let out a soft gasp from his touch and chuckled. “Aren’t I already in your hands?”

Zhao Changhe sighed and replied quietly, “Sisi, let’s talk openly, shall we?”

“Master, you’re welcome to lay my clothes open if you wish...”

“You know that’s not what I mean.”

The atmosphere grew quiet for a moment. Sisi smiled lightly. “Your concern isn’t really whether you can handle me. You’re worried that the Spirit Tribe’s rising power will sweep through Miaojiang, and in the midst of the turmoil, it will threaten Xia to the north.”

Zhao Changhe did not respond, but he did not deny it either.

This was not just a problem with Sisi but with the entire tribe, and it could potentially extend into future generations. One day, if it erupted into conflict, he, Zhao Changhe, would be blamed for it for centuries to come.

Perhaps, from the very beginning, this was more than a matter of simple attraction or conquest. It had deeper implications, and their relationship could never be as pure as others'.

There was only one solution: to make this tribe completely bow to him, regard him as divine, and embrace him as their faith.

Conquering Sisi alone would not be enough, though she was undeniably the key.

After a moment's thought, Zhao Changhe suddenly said, "I want to truly be regarded as the sacred envoy."

Sisi's smile remained. "Isn't the saintess already serving the sacred envoy right now..."

Zhao Changhe said, "You know what I mean."

Sisi smiled. "Master, your ambitions are quite big... You're not content with just a maid, are you?"

"You know I don't wish to enslave anyone."

"I believe you, but others may not."

Just as Zhao Changhe was about to reply, he stopped and then asked, "You believe me?"

Sisi looked up at him, saying softly, "Changhe..."

Perhaps it was the first time she had ever addressed him this way.

"I'm not ungrateful," Sisi said gently. "I've already told you... If you trust me, I won't let you down."

Before Zhao Changhe could respond, Sisi extended her small, delicate feet and lightly pressed them against the place where his vicious qi was still overflowing.

Zhao Changhe's eyes widened.

"Master, you like my small feet, right? Let me use them to please you..." Sisi murmured, kissing his cheek softly. "I'm willing to serve you... but the Spirit Tribe is another matter. I've just led them to freedom. I can't just turn it all into a joke. Let me serve you as your maid alone..."

She moved slightly, biting her lip and adding, "Besides, no one else is as easily tricked as I am."

Zhao Changhe enjoyed the soft, springy sensation in his hand, and with Sisi's feet massaging him, he felt pure bliss.

He sighed contentedly and said, "But, Sisi..."

"Hmm?" Sisi looked up at him, her eyes filled with alluring charm. "Do you really want to do it? I thought you might not dare to go that far."

"What I'm trying to say is, as long as you trust me, that's enough. I won't enslave anyone, neither them nor you." Zhao Changhe leaned down and placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. "As for everyone else, when the time comes, they'll willingly kneel before me."

Sisi looked at him with sparkling eyes, clearly not believing his grand claim, but she replied, "I would quite like you to make me kneel, Master..."

Zhao Changhe leaned closer to her ear and whispered, "There will be a time for you to kneel."

The blind woman: "Ugh..."

Good grief, why did I come over here so early? You're still not done... and you're still talking about kneeling!

As the blind woman bent over, pretending to vomit, Zhao Changhe's vicious qi surged and squirted all over.

The blind woman: “???”

Chapter 490: Blood Moon on the Sacred Mountain

Zhao Changhe had no idea how impressive a feat he had just accomplished.

After releasing the vicious qi, he felt refreshed, though his body was still weakened from his injuries. Nonetheless, his mind was much clearer, and it was no longer in the same miserable state as the night before.

He got up and got dressed, then turned to see Sisi lying there, looking as if she wanted to get up but was too exhausted to move.

Zhao Changhe paused, slightly baffled. They had not actually done anything, so why did she look so delicate, like a maid who had been overexerted herself?

He inspected her curiously and frowned.

Why does it seem like you're the one injured instead of me... You don't have any visible wounds, though. You just look like you went through a lot of pain?

What kind of witchcraft is this? Wait... No shit, this really is witchcraft!

Zhao Changhe finally realized why he was not feeling any pain—Sisi had done something to take it upon herself.

He became concerned. “You were in this state, yet you still gave me a massage?”

Sisi smiled. “If it's what you desire, Master, then I shall oblige.”

“You...”

“If I had not done this, then how would I be able to understand how much suffering you endured on my behalf?”

“...What kind of gu insect is this, and can it be reversed?”

Sisi spoke with a hint of smugness, “It doesn’t actually hurt that much. After all, I’m not truly injured, and I have a few secret techniques to lessen the sensation... You know, when you were touching me earlier, I barely felt a thing. Did you not notice that I barely made any sounds?”

Zhao Changhe was both amused and exasperated. “You really are...”

He could not find any words to describe her.

With a coquettish gaze, Sisi stretched out her arms as if she wanted to be lifted. “Since you’re so worried about me, why don’t you carry me out of bed?”

Knock, knock.

A knock at the door interrupted them as a young girl peeked her head in.

“Saintess, we—uh...”

Seeing her saintess’ clothes torn and disheveled, and seeing her completely worn out, as if she had been ravished all night, the maid was stunned and a bit fearful.

It was her first time, yet she was so... enthusiastic. And she... she’s still acting so coy! She’s the leader of a tribe now! If word gets out, her image will be ruined!

Sisi’s face turned stern. “What are you peeking in here for? Haven’t I taught you to knock before entering?”

The young girl looked at her sheepishly. “We don’t have that rule here...”

“Time to teach you some Xia customs!” Sisi jumped off the bed, marching over to pull the maid closer with a huff. “First, knock before entering. Only come in when I say so. After that, you must greet me and ask if I need water to wash up!”

Zhao Changhe looked at the young maidservant, who seemed ready to protest, and almost burst out laughing.

The dragon-slayer becomes the dragon, it seems.

In truth, the Spirit Tribe's social hierarchy was even stricter than that of the Xia, though it was less elaborate in its formalities. Zhao Changhe would soon learn this for himself.

After scolding the maid, Sisi dressed herself in fresh clothes and asked, "What's so urgent that you're interrupting us this early? Have some sense, will you?"

The maid replied cautiously, "There's a disturbance on the sacred mountain. Some strange energy is seeping out, and it's making people uneasy. A few of the imprisoned elders are causing a commotion, saying it's because we've disrespected the ancestral god by killing the sacred beast. They claim that the ancestor's spirits are enraged and are unleashing their wrath upon us..."

Sisi shivered. "A disturbance on the sacred mountain?"

"Yes... It's coming from the peak, around Lieque[1]."

Sisi bolted for the door, almost tripping in her haste. "I'll go check."

Zhao Changhe grabbed her arm. "Don't rush. I know what's happening."

Sisi turned to him, a complex expression in her eyes.

So, he wasn't just boasting before... He really knows what's going on.

Maybe he didn't even need to conquer me to gain the tribe's loyalty. He might be able to win over the entire tribe on his own.

Sisi took a deep breath, calming herself down. "Take me and the sacred envoy to see."

* * *

The term Lieque actually referred to the moon.

The so-called Lieque point of the mountain was the notch on the mountain peak that Zhao Che had seen the sunset through—from a distance, it made the mountain look like the moon with a piece bitten off by a heavenly demon.

Under certain celestial conditions, when the moon moved into just the right spot, it would appear as though the mountain and the moon completed each other.

This phenomenon was a remnant of the collapse of the previous era, and it was commonly believed that part of the mountain had been obliterated during that collapse.

At that time, the Spirit Tribe was nearly wiped out, with many of its people perishing in the disaster. But when a fragment of the moon fell onto the sacred mountain, the area stabilized, allowing the Spirit Tribe to survive and continue to this day, albeit with a limited population.

The mountain where the Ao Pool was located had also been obliterated at that time, though it turned out that it still existed, simply shrouded within a concealed space.

So, what about this mountaintop's Lieque point?

The Ao Pool hosted the Blood Ao, which—whether it was controlled by someone or not—was still regarded by the Spirit Tribe as a sacred beast, akin to an ancestral god.

If there was also a deity hidden at this Lieque point, could it be the true ancestral spirit that has sustained the Spirit Tribe throughout its existence?

And now, could it be that this spirit was enraged?

When Sisi and Zhao Changhe reached the mountain peak, they could clearly see a blood-red, rippling barrier covering Lieque, and it made out what looked like a crescent blood moon.

This blood moon emanated an overwhelming pressure, with an undercurrent of rage and ferocity, yet strangely pulsing with a sense of vigorous life. It gave off the impression of a giant holding up the sky, and a primeval power, ancient and boundless, could be felt even from afar.

Below the blood moon, people could be seen kneeling down, and this stretched all the way down the mountain. Every space that could hold people was filled with those kneeling in reverence, and as Sisi and Zhao Changhe approached, some shrank back, afraid to meet their gaze.

The elders captured yesterday were not locked away but were brought out under guard—the people still needed the knowledge of those who had long-held tribal secrets to explain the inexplicable anomaly before them.

But, of course, the elders' interpretation served their own interests, "We've warned you before! Disrespecting authority, defying your elders, defiling the Ancestral Spirit's sacred place, and slaughtering the sacred beast! Isn't it only natural for the Ancestral Spirit to be furious? Continuing on this path will lead our tribe to extinction!"

"B-but, the Ancestral Spirit wouldn't let us be wiped out... would it?"

"Who would spare traitors? Just look at the sky!" The great elder pointed to the heavens. "The heavens are about to rain blood upon us. Can you not see?!"

Everyone looked up to see blood-red clouds above, an ominous and oppressive sight. The fearful began to tremble, kneeling and murmuring prayers, "Ancestral Spirit, please have mercy on us..."

Some of the bolder individuals tried to approach the blood moon to try and see what was inside.

But no one could get in. They were all repelled by an immense force. One person attempted to dash through, only to be violently rebuffed with a loud bang, ending up with a bloody head. As the vicious blood qi entered his body, he was torn apart, a gruesome sight to behold.

The Spirit Tribe members, now even more terrified, kneeled and prayed more fervently, hoping for their ancestral spirit's anger to subside.

Even the Xia people who had not yet withdrawn, camped at the mountain's base, were murmuring anxiously as they watched. "Could it be that by rebelling, we really angered their ancestral spirit?"

“People say that gods and demons exist, and many powerful figures believe in them. Just look at that blood moon and the sky—it’s no wonder...”

“Yeah, and the Blood Ao was a sacred beast too, right? Its power was terrifying, not any less than the mythical dragons or phoenixes. If it hadn’t gone mad for some reason, Blood Asura would not have stood a chance of breaking through its defenses.”

“So, it’s because we killed the sacred beast that this happened?”

“Maybe we should get out of here... If there’s a reckoning...”

If even the Xia soldiers thought this way, it was no surprise that the Spirit Tribe members did as well. Thankfully, Sisi had just led them to victory and still held some authority. Everyone awaited her arrival to see what she would say.

Standing before the blood moon, Sisi scrutinized it with a mix of awe and uncertainty. She knew something others did not: they really had

killed an ancestor, god or spirit or otherwise.

The entity Zhao Changhe expelled from the Blood Ao’s body with the sword pill and talisman, which then had its soul destroyed by Yue Hongling’s sword, was undoubtedly her ancestor. Whether that ancestor was a deity or not... well, anything that had survived since the previous era kind of qualifies as a god.

Could this really be the Ancestral Spirit’s wrath?

This was something she could not reveal. Sisi forced herself to remain calm and coldly addressed the great elder, “Your words are nothing but superstitious nonsense. Do you think anyone here believes you? If the Ancestral Spirit was here to punish us, we would all feel that wrath deeply. But what is this?”

She could not be sure if the presence contained any anger or malice; the aura was complex and unsettling. However, the oppressive pressure was unmistakable, making it feel as though the sky might collapse at any moment.

Sisi herself was unsure, but she had to give confidence to those on her side. Before the great elder could argue, she quickly continued, “Of course, the Ancestral Spirit exists. But it was enraged because a foreign spirit occupied the sacred beast’s body, and it was furious that its descendants were offered up as sacrifices for an outsider! That’s why the Ancestral Spirit sent down the sacred envoy, who taught me how to resolve the problem with the Heavenly Blood Jade. The sacred envoy even personally acted to uncover the mystery behind the disappearance of the Ao Pool and expel the foreign spirit occupying the sacred beast! These are the facts; these are unquestionable!”

Sisi could not claim that she herself had received a divine revelation as the saintess. She had to elevate Zhao Changhe’s status as the sacred envoy. He was the one who performed all the miraculous feats, and any further actions would clearly depend on him, not her.

She felt a bit bitter inside, thinking that those young maids utterly had no idea what she was going through.

She had originally intended to struggle for some control, but what was the point of that now? Despite being their saintess, it seemed that she was simply destined to end up as a maidservant... and even the rest of her tribe was destined to be subject to the will of her “master.”

In any case, her speech certainly managed to reassure many people. The resolution of the problem with the Heavenly Blood Jade had benefited everyone—it was undeniable. The revelation of the Ao Pool could not be faked either. A true ancestral spirit would not have concealed it.

However, this did not address the immediate issue.

The great elder shouted, “Look at the blood-red sky, the blood moon pressing down on the mountain! Despite this, you still spew this nonsense! If we don’t burn this adulterous couple, we’ll all be turned to dust when our god’s wrath descends!”

“Old fool, if you won’t drop loot, then shut up.” Zhao Changhe’s cold voice came from the side.

Everyone turned to see Zhao Changhe, who had been standing with his hands behind his back, observing the blood moon. Now he spoke up. “After all I’ve done, you still don’t believe I’m the sacred envoy? You side with traitors, wavering in indecision. Have you truly never considered that if the ancestral spirit really is angry, it might be because of your actions?”

Everyone’s expressions turned somewhat odd.

It was not entirely out of the question, after all.

“To return the blood moon to the sky and clear the heavens, I need only the time of one incense stick. But why should I help you? If the Ancestral Spirit has cursed you, then suffer as you will,” Zhao Changhe finished coldly, flicking his sleeve as he prepared to leave.

Sisi grabbed his sleeve, pleading softly, “Master... please, do it for my sake... I will listen to you.”

The great elder sneered, “Just look at this adulterous couple, clearly bewitched! Anyone who believes him is a fool...”

His words stopped abruptly, caught in his throat.

Zhao Changhe had placed his hand on the blood moon, and faint ripples appeared across its surface.

No one had been able to even approach it, much less enter, yet his hand passed through as if there were no barrier at all.

The great elder’s eyes widened in horror, and he was unable to continue speaking.

Zhao Changhe spoke calmly, “I’ll ask you one last time... Why do you think the Ancestral Spirit is furious?”

Countless Spirit Tribe members lowered their heads to the ground. “Sacred envoy, please forgive us. We were ignorant...”

Indeed, they were ignorant, no matter whom they chose to believe.

Sisi sighed and, in front of everyone, kneeled down gracefully before Zhao Changhe, speaking softly, “Sacred envoy, please quell your anger.”

Zhao Changhe looked at her deeply, then, with a flash, vanished into the blood moon.

Sisi stood up, gazed at the blood moon for a moment, then clenched her teeth and commanded, “Take these elders who spread lies and incite the people, and burn them at once!”