

## T. Times 491

### Chapter 491: Eternal Blood Demon Body

In fact, even without witnessing the strange phenomena of the blood moon on this sacred mountain, Zhao Changhe could roughly infer what had happened here before he arrived.

It was nothing more than the fact that Venerable Duoluo, who had been expelled from the Blood Ao's body and escaped, had fled here to stir up trouble.

From his past experiences at Kunlun, Zhao Changhe knew that the secret realm created by the Heavenly Tome encompassed the entire Spirit Tribe's vast territory. It would not create a nested smaller secret realm within it. The reason the small, isolated space had formed was due to Venerable Duoluo making use of the celestial phenomenon and the mountain structure to create an array.

Through this unique array, Duoluo not only concealed the Ao Pool but also shrouded the presence of the Heavenly Tome, which he had hoped to retrieve right after his own revival. Therefore, he must have been aware of the Heavenly Tome's existence from the beginning and, after his defeat yesterday, had immediately fled in the direction of the Heavenly Tome.

It was difficult to say whether his concealment was detrimental to the Spirit Tribe or somewhat beneficial.

If the Heavenly Tome had been laid bare in front of the Spirit Tribe people, it might have empowered the tribe immensely. However, Zhao Changhe felt that the aura of this specific page of the Heavenly Tome was particularly distinct and would more likely draw the covetous eyes of other beings, potentially bringing disaster instead.

For instance, when Xia Longyuan was conquering Miaojiang, if he had sensed the presence of the Heavenly Tome here, he would likely have stormed in. Or perhaps, Ying Five's brothers, who were constantly on the lookout for such artifacts, might have stumbled upon it. The page's concealment allowed the Spirit Tribe to flourish naturally until today—blissfully unaware of its existence.

Yet, there was still one thing that Zhao Changhe could not figure out.

Based on his knowledge from Kunlun, these gods and demons could not directly approach the Heavenly Tome. That was why the existence at Kunlun compelled Yuxu to retrieve it. Of course, Yuxu refused and instead sought evildoers to do the job, eliminating them in the process. Even the

blind woman was the same, hoping Zhao Changhe or her former “minion” Xia Longyuan would obediently help her gather the Heavenly Tome, which implied she could not do it herself. If she could, she would have probably done it long ago.

It was highly likely that a physical body was needed for this task. It was reasonable to believe that Venerable Duoluo had merged with the Blood Ao to acquire a suitable body in order to retrieve the Heavenly Tome. A lone soul simply would not be able to obtain it, as was the case with the blind woman and the god or demon at Kunlun.

Even earlier, when Venerable Duoluo’s fusion with the Blood Ao was incomplete, he could not retrieve it. That was why he annually sent emissaries to the Spirit Tribe during the Dragon Boat Festival, demanding sacrifices. On this day, the Azure Dragon constellation was at its zenith, filled with vitality, making it the most favorable day for the merging of body and soul.

Although Zhao Changhe did not understand how souls took over another being’s body, he knew the Rejuvenation Art, the intent of the Azure Dragon, and also understood the art of tempering the flesh and blood. In this aspect, he might even surpass Duoluo in expertise, and he was confident that his judgment on the matter was accurate.

Therefore, Zhao Changhe had not been particularly worried when Venerable Duoluo fled toward the Heavenly Tome. If he could have taken it, he would have done so long ago.

Yet somehow, Duoluo still managed to stir up trouble, and now he could not help but wonder how the spirit managed to do such a thing.

As Zhao Changhe placed his hand on the blood moon, others watching thought he appeared calm and composed, analyzing the situation with expertise as the sacred envoy who understood everything. But internally, he was calling out to the blind woman, “Hey, open the door.”

“Scram!”

“?” Zhao Changhe was puzzled. “Is it that time of the month?”

The blind woman sneered and said, “I reminded you about the Heavenly Tome last night, yet you had the time to hang out and have someone pleasure you with their feet. Why don’t you continue with that now?”

Zhao Changhe was stunned. “Wait, was that really you last night?”

“You can go die for all I care!” With a heavy kick to his backside, he was sent tumbling into the blood moon.

“Damn it! I still have to wait for Hongling!”

“She doesn’t need you to wait!”

To outsiders, it appeared as though the sacred envoy simply flashed into the blood moon.

Shortly afterward, Yue Hongling came rushing in, urgently asking Sisi, “Why did he go in without explaining anything?”

Sisi was equally bewildered. “I don’t know why he suddenly acted so decisively. Maybe something urgent is going on inside.”

Yue Hongling paused for a moment and then dashed toward the blood moon.

Surprisingly, she was also able to go in... It seemed as though the barrier that isolated the Spirit Tribe people did not exist for the two of them.

Sisi scratched her head and tried to enter herself, only to be bounced back by the blood moon, nearly falling on her butt.

“What’s going on... Does Big Sis Yue also have an affinity with the ancestral spirit?”

Of course, there was affinity involved, though it was not exactly with their so-called ancestral deity.

If Zhao Changhe had not called out to the blind woman and just tried to rush in himself, he still would’ve gone in easily due to his long-term possession of two pages of the Heavenly Tome, which had allowed him to foster an affinity with the Heavenly Tome.

It also happened that this affinity could be somewhat transmitted through dual cultivation. Not everyone practiced dual cultivation with Zhao Changhe, but Yue Hongling happened to be the one person who did.

\* \* \*

Inside the blood moon, Zhao Changhe was falling helplessly.

Ahead of him, the mountain loomed. Looking up, he could see its peak, where a golden page floated, radiating a mysterious and vast aura. This aura gave Zhao Changhe a sense of familiarity, and he instantly recognized the nature of this particular page of the Heavenly Tome.

If the initial golden foil could be considered the general outline of martial arts, and the page at Kunlun detailed the various natural elements, such as mountains and rivers, flora, sound manipulation, and the use of the five elements, then the page before him was related to life itself. It encompassed the power of dragons and elephants, the secrets of witchcraft and gu, the giant Ao treading the four seas, its legs reaching the sky, the Kunpeng spreading its wings across the heavens, its wingspan covering the sky and blotting out the sun.

Strength, speed, agility. The tempering of the body, the flow of bloodlines, and the ethereal energies within the human body—true qi, blood qi, vicious qi—all of it.

The Heavenly Tome was a martial arts compendium. It was not a display of creation but a collection of all things related to martial arts. Just a glance could provide any martial artist insights unique to their path, or, for the fortunate, an understanding of divine arts.

Unfortunately, at this moment, Zhao Changhe was not interested in insights. Rather, his main concern was that he was about to crash headfirst into the mountain.

Bang!

Zhao Changhe slammed straight into the mountain and slowly began sliding down, in a display that would have made a certain coyote proud.

“Oh, the second layer of the Blood Asura Body, not bad! Your resilience has noticeably improved. This should be the work of that Heavenly Blood Jade, right?” The blind woman clicked her tongue

in amusement. “When you can slide down and leave a mark on this rock, you might have attained mastery.”

Zhao Changhe, exasperated, retorted, “We’re not here to sightsee!”

Of course, they were not there to sightsee. He could see a blood-soaked figure before the Heavenly Tome, clutching it and screaming in agony.

The figure’s body was being torn apart and reformed, a terrifying sight. Zhao could not even make out their face, but he could guess that it was Shi Wuding.

Shi Wuding had not fallen far from the sacred mountain, so it was not unlikely that Venerable Duoluo, fleeing in the direction of the sacred mountain, had encountered him. Both were Zhao Changhe’s enemies, so they would naturally join forces. Whether Duoluo had taken over Shi Wuding’s body or, like the blind woman, was inhabiting him in some other form, they had found a way to approach the Heavenly Tome.

Beside Shi Wuding, a blood-like bubble pulsated on the ground as if it were a beating heart.

Is that Venerable Duoluo?

The blind woman said coldly, “They tried to take the Heavenly Tome page but were strongly repelled. That is how they ended up this way.”

Zhao Changhe asked, “The Heavenly Tome rejects people? Why doesn’t it reject me?”

The blind woman sneered. “You’re welcome to test that theory.”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

“The other pages are more forgiving, but this page deals with the path of life. One is incomplete, and the other is just a remnant soul. It would be a miracle of this page of the Heavenly Tome accepted such things.” The blind woman continued indifferently, “Of course, this rejection isn’t absolute. Once they become complete lifeforms, this page of the Heavenly Tome would naturally accept them.”

Incomplete... Does that mean Shi Wuding is seriously injured? If that's the case, am I also considered incomplete...?

Zhao Changhe asked cautiously, "How do they become complete?"

"Duoluo has mastered the Buddhists' transformative arts, the divine power to reanimate flesh and bones. With the flesh and blood techniques that he has learned over the years from residing in the Blood Ao's body, combined with the Heavenly Tome's assistance, Shi Wuding can be reborn anew. And the same goes for Duoluo himself; as long as he can acquire flesh and blood, he has the opportunity to transform into a complete person. The blood-red sky and the blood moon before you are both celestial phenomena attracted by a divine art!"

"Divine art..."

"It's, of course, a unique divine art, combining Duoluo's two types of abilities. It may even be called the Eternal Blood Demon Body. If Shi Wuding can integrate his sword qi with the concept of rebirth, he could probably form an Eternal Sword Body. In the presence of the Heavenly Tome, the birth of any divine art is not surprising. But here you are, carrying two pages of the Heavenly Tome for a year, yet still clueless, fumbling around like a novice."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Swish, swish, swish!

As her words fell, the blood-soaked figure's screams gradually faded, a blood mist gathering around him like a forest of sharp sword qi.

The blood-soaked Shi Wuding gasped, slowly saying, "Zhao... Changhe..."

"They're almost finished... Once they complete the transformation, not only will they be able to claim the Heavenly Tome, but Shi Wuding will also break through the third layer of the Profound Mysteries and kill you all." The blind woman sneered. "The fire's practically licking your heels, and you still have the nerve to think about being pleased?"

“They haven’t finished yet, right?” Zhao Changhe drew Dragon Bird, leaped forward, and struck at the blood-soaked Shi Wuding.

Roar!

Shi Wuding let out a bestial roar, turning and countering with a powerful slap that struck the side of Dragon Bird.

It was clearly just a slap, yet it contained a sharp sword qi that entered Zhao Changhe’s meridians. Zhao Changhe, still not fully recovered, stumbled slightly, and behind him, sword qi whistled as Yue Hongling arrived just in time, swinging her sword past Zhao Changhe to block Shi Wuding’s strike.

Shi Wuding, panting, looked at the two, fighting side by side seamlessly. A wave of frustration surged within him.

Fighting one of them was never a problem; fighting both was always exasperating.

Swordsmen were solitary by nature. Sword slaves were merely tools; the only true trust lay in one’s own sword.

At that moment, Shi Wuding felt a pang of regret. If he had brought his sword slaves into this secret realm instead of leaving them outside to guard against intruders... he might have already won, and it would not have come to this.

Or perhaps, if Han Wubing had not turned on him, his loyalty would never have allowed him to watch his master suffer so.

But regret was meaningless now.

It does not matter, though. This time, I have help too.

From the blood bubble pulsing like a heart, an intensely sinister blood qi suddenly surged out, sweeping over Yue Hongling.

When Buddha's Radiance was converted into flesh and blood witchcraft, would it cast death and decay?

Yue Hongling felt suffocated and dizzy, her heartbeats slowing, and even her fair skin seemed on the verge of withering.

Whoosh!

Zhao Changhe threw the bone sword, sending it straight at the blood bubble. "You hold off Shi Wuding. I'll handle this thing."

#### Chapter 492: You Are Already Dead

Yue Hongling knew that while Shi Wuding appeared much stronger than that blood bubble—after all, what could a bubble possibly do?—Shi Wuding's so-called Eternal Sword Body was not perfect.

At this point, Shi Wuding was still in a severely injured state. His body was in such a mess that his face was unrecognizable. Meanwhile, although she had been injured the day before, her wounds were far lighter than Zhao Changhe's, and after a night's rest, she was at least capable of fighting. At this moment, their strengths were relatively comparable.

On the other hand, the blood bubble posed a much more severe threat to her in particular. When Yue Hongling was touched by its blood qi, it felt like her life was withering away—a crushing, overwhelming power that was simply on a different level altogether.

This was not merely the power of something at the third layer of the Profound Mysteries; it was the power of a god or demon at the Profound Control Realm. Even if it was severely injured or damaged, it was still far stronger than them.

Yesterday, they had the corpse demon to hold it back, but today? How was Zhao Changhe planning to handle it?

Initially, Zhao Changhe thought that dealing with this blood bubble would be rather straightforward. Yesterday, they relied on the corpse demon; today, they were fighting over the Heavenly Tome with the blind woman by their side. Was that not enough to absolutely crush this thing? He figured that if Yue Hongling could hold off Shi Wuding for a while, he would be able to pierce through the blood bubble quickly.



So he boasted to the Spirit Tribe members outside that it would only take one incense stick's time to settle the problem inside the blood moon.

However, as he approached the blood bubble, he had not even raised Dragon Bird when he suddenly felt his body go weak, and he nearly stumbled and fell face-first onto the blood bubble.

The blind woman remained silent, watching coldly, barely resisting the urge to kick him forward to make him truly eat it.

"Damn," Zhao Changhe muttered. "It seems I won't be able to rely on the blind woman."

He steadied himself, not bothering to question why she was not helping. After all, since transmigrating to this world, he had never relied on the blind woman to intervene in his fights. Swiftly, he pulled out something from his ring.

It was the Cui Clan's Qinghe Mirror.

The moment that Zhao Changhe felt the sensation of death and decay, he immediately noticed that it was much like a curse. Curses were very peculiar; their effects were often undetectable through conventional introspection. Right now, there was even a powerful figure from the Ranking of Earth running for his life, his organs ravaged by a curse, unable to identify its cause.

Zhao Changhe had confirmed, during his impersonation of Old Wang by the lakeside to counter Lei Ao's assassination attempt, that while he could not detect curses that were affecting him through inner sight, the Qinghe Mirror could reveal them.

Sure enough, upon using the mirror, he saw a peculiar foreign power entangling his body, relentlessly absorbing his life force.

This was not some curse of death and decay, but rather the blood bubble was directly absorbing his and Yue Hongling's life force to nourish itself!

In just a short moment, the blood bubble had visibly sprouted arms and legs, taking on the form of a small figure, albeit headless. When it was possessing the envoy earlier, it could not really use this technique, but now, near the Heavenly Tome, it was maximizing this ability, able to regenerate with even a single drop of blood.

And this time, the blood it was using was from Shi Wuding.

This collaboration was indeed far from sincere or altruistic. Duoluo was still exploiting Shi Wuding... His so-called eternal body relied on drawing the life force of others, and he was thereby leaving Shi Wuding incomplete.

But that doesn't matter. Shi Wuding being used has nothing to do with us. But if you think you can just drain my and Hongling's life force, dream on.

He quietly activated the Rejuvenation Art, allowing him to barely resist the siphoning force acting on his body while also preventing the blood bubble from siphoning any more life force from Yue Hongling.

No matter the kind of foreign energy, when it came to defending against bodily harm, the Rejuvenation Art operated at the level of the principles of the world. It did not matter what it was, it was all treated the same.

The siphoning of their vitality was instantly stopped.

From within the blood bubble came a startled "Huh?" which then turned into a spiteful, ghostly voice, "Zhao Changhe... Yesterday, you broke my heavenly spirit and ruined my plans. And today, you break my Eternal Divine Art? You ignorant swine and dogs of this world will never understand the secrets held within the Heavenly Tome!"

The blood bubble rapidly expanded, transforming in an instant from a figure with small stubby limbs to a blood figure several chi tall and still growing, a vortex forming in its hands, gathering a destructive force that could annihilate all life present.

"You're lacking the page of nature. With only the page of life of the Heavenly Tome, you're not regenerating or achieving some undying effect. At best, you're completing a transfer of life, a blood and qi siphon... In other words, your soul energy has yet to recover. All these phenomena you're displaying depend entirely on the Heavenly Tome. So what are you being so arrogant for?" Zhao Changhe paid it no mind, and instead did something very simple.

He reached out and grabbed the Heavenly Tome page.

Venerable Duoluo, inside the blood bubble, stared in shock. “?”

The so-called resistance of the Heavenly Tome, which was supposed to make people monstrous and ghostly, had no ill effect whatsoever on Zhao Changhe. Instead, it seemed to burst into radiant colors in his grasp, almost joyfully.

The power that Venerable Duoluo was gathering in his hands suddenly dissipated with a puff, as if it were nothing more than air.

As expected, it had never truly belonged to him.

\* \* \*

Although it seemed as if a lot had happened, only a moment had passed since Zhao Changhe had severed the life siphoning of the blood bubble. With the burden on her lightened, Yue Hongling instantly unleashed an attack. Dragon Emperor whistled through the air as it flew straight for Shi Wuding’s forehead.

Obviously, Zhao Changhe was the key here, and she needed to keep Shi Wuding occupied to prevent him from interfering with Zhao Changhe!

Shi Wuding was poised to strike Zhao Changhe, but suddenly, a chilling sensation overwhelmed him. He quickly redirected his sword qi to deflect Yue Hongling’s incoming blow, shocked at her strength. “The second layer of the Profound Mysteries? No, you’re still a hair’s breadth away... How did you advance so quickly...?”

Yue Hongling remained silent and Dragon Emperor continued to strike Shi Wuding relentlessly.

While others might see her being a hair’s breadth away from the second layer as impressive, she felt dissatisfied, as if she had not contributed enough in this battle from beginning to end.

Moreover, there was something strange about this place.

It seemed like there was something about that golden page... By being here in this place, she could feel her sword art on the verge of breaking through, just a tiny step away from complete understanding.

The door for her to reach the second layer of the Profound Mysteries was here.

It was no longer merely “within reach”!

This was where and when she would break through!

“Even if you reach the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, you will die here today,” Shi Wuding said coldly, sword qi surging throughout his body, sword glints filling the air. “You came too late. I will break through to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries here!”

Yue Hongling’s sword split into thousands, her gaze fixed tightly on Shi Wuding amidst the endless storm of sword light. Behind him, she could faintly see a blood-red sword shadow.

Is that a manifestation? No... The Eternal Sword Body, just what is it?

Is it the body becoming a sword, or perhaps the soul becoming a sword? Is it a single strand of sword intent within the body becoming eternal? Perhaps this was the way of the Sword Emperor... But why does Shi Wuding’s sword feel so fleeting, like a mirage?

Boom!

The blood-red sword shadow soared into the heavens.

Outside, the Spirit Tribe members looked up in astonishment.

The third layer of the Profound Mysteries? The power of those on the Ranking of Heaven?

Tap.

A thin, frail figure with a pale face was slowly making his way up the mountain, one laborious step at a time.

He lacked even the strength of an ordinary person, and climbing the towering sacred mountain was a massive effort. He was panting heavily, drenched in sweat even before making it halfway up.

The Spirit Tribe guards rushed to block him. “Where did you come from? This is the Spirit Tribe’s sacred mountain! The Xia people’s camp is at the foot of the mountain!”

Han Wubing took a few breaths, looking up at the blood sword piercing the heavens, and said calmly, “He can’t break through. He never will.”

The guards: “?”

Inside the blood moon, Shi Wuding seemed to hear Han Wubing’s faint words from far down the mountainside.

It was as if a hammer struck his heart, filling him with agitation.

Han Wubing sat cross-legged on a rock halfway up the mountain and closed his eyes. “You’re destined to lose this battle... I’ll be waiting.”

Boom!

Thousands of strands of sword qi merged into one, rushing straight toward Yue Hongling.

Unable to withstand the intense pressure of the sword qi, Yue Hongling retreated a step, bracing herself with one hand on the ground as she looked up.

Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe had taken the Heavenly Tome.

Rays of light burst forth, illuminating the blood sword in the sky, revealing every detail within, laying it all bare before Yue Hongling.

This sword... though it seems fierce, but why does it seem to have significant flaws?

That page... it seems to be whispering to me that this person’s life is extremely incomplete?

Ugh... Why is that page growing brighter, and why do I feel like I can sense some kind of sword intent resonating with me... A swift soaring swan darting toward the blazing sun... What has Zhao Changhe done?

Shi Wuding was roaring, “Han Wubing, what have you done?!”

Now!

Yue Hongling became one with her sword and shot toward Shi Wuding like a lightning bolt, her eyes filled with determination and unwavering resolve!

She was rushing toward the terrifying sword shadow, which seemed much more formidable than the one that Zhao Changhe had seen in the Sword Emperor’s tomb. It seemed to be an all-out suicidal strike, like a moth flying into fire. But the outcome was quite the opposite—her sword shattered the shadow, scattering it to pieces.

There was now nothing separating her from a breakthrough.

Back when she attempted to assassinate Lan Tiankuo, the pronouncement of the Tome of Troubled Times revealed her path. The so-called setting sun could describe both time and imagery, and it could also be a verb.

A rainbow piercing the sun and descending from the nine heavens!

Bound by the imagery of a lone traveler tethered to the ends of the world—too small, too limited. The path of life is about vitality, but why could it not also be about destruction?

This blood moon at sunset, how can it restrain me?

Yue Hongling broke through to the second layer of the Profound Mysteries.

Her divine sword charged onward, cutting through all the sword qi blocking its path, and plunged heavily into Shi Wuding’s forehead.

Roar!

Shi Wuding let out an enraged roar, somehow summoning power far beyond his current abilities. He repelled Yue Hongling away and transformed into a streak of light rushing out of the blood moon, heading straight for Han Wubing.

Yue Hongling withdrew her sword and looked back, choosing not to pursue.

“I didn’t do anything.” As Shi Wuding charged furiously toward him, Han Wubing, though entirely powerless, remained unfazed. “I’ve just come to understand a lot of things over the past two days...”

Shi Wuding stopped right in front of him, raising his hand to strike.

Han Wubing continued slowly, “The other day, when Snow Owl appeared to pursue Senior Thief Saint, you acted as if you were oblivious... I found that odd. If the Bashan Sword Hut was actually the Snow-Listening Pavilion, and if you’re not Snow Owl, then you should be acting under their orders, right? Yet everything you’ve done seems detached from any command, as if you’re only seeking your own sword path. Isn’t that strange?”

Shi Wuding’s hand froze in midair.

“I’ve come to realize... it’s because you’re incomplete.” Han Wubing smiled slightly. “You’ve been using sword slaves to comprehend the myriad sword intents of others. But have you ever considered that you might be one such slave too?”

Shi Wuding’s hands suddenly clutched his head as he let out a pained groan.

“I didn’t realize I was your sword slave, and you didn’t realize you were someone else’s.” Han Wubing’s voice took on a tone of pity. “But now I have found myself, and you still haven’t...”

“Swords are born from the self. What use is there in sensing the intent of others? Look at Heroine Yue; she has always been true to herself. Even if that path was narrow, it eventually led to something greater.”

He reached out lightly, touching Shi Wuding’s forehead. “Your body is severely damaged, and half your life force has been taken by another... Sword qi will seek a more suitable host, and when I

came near, I became its ideal vessel, because, in its mind, you and I are the same. So your sword qi scattered—not because of anything I did...”

As he spoke, a strand of sword qi entered his body.

Shi Wuding’s groans ceased, and the light in his eyes dimmed even further.

“Without this sword qi to support you, your body is already dead, master... It’s the sword qi that’s eternal, not you.” Han Wubing suddenly waved his hand, discarding the sword qi he had just drawn into his body as if it were worthless, flinging it into the mountainside, where it exploded with a resounding blast.

Amidst the explosion, Shi Wuding fell backward, gazing skyward, never to move again.

Han Wubing looked up at the radiance of the Heavenly Tome, as new sword qi slowly grew within him—weak, but unyieldingly resilient.

He comprehended the Eternal Sword Body and was fully revived under the radiance of the Heavenly Tome.

#### Chapter 493: Bashan Sword Grave

It was no wonder Yue Hongling did not bother to pursue.

She knew that with that final strike, Shi Wuding was already dead, closing the chapter on the karma she had accumulated back when she first went to Bashan. The fact that he managed to hold on long enough to run out and confront Han Wubing was only because of the remaining sword qi in his body, sword qi that was not even his own.

This time, she had truly made a difference, and Yue Hongling felt satisfied. She had not been overshadowed by her little man. Now, everyone’s attention was focused on Han Wubing, but that did not matter. She had not acted for the sake of others’ recognition.

Reflecting on it, she realized why Shi Wuding, as one of the most iconic swordsmen in the Great Xia Empire, had been so obsessed with breaking through on his path, going to such lengths and even living as if he were a great villain, yet never managed to break through to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries.



He simply could not break through. He did not even know who he truly was. How could an incomplete person break through to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries, the pinnacle of martial arts power in the current era?

Even if he had managed to break through, he would have likely ended up as nothing more than nourishment for someone else.

Of course, Snow Owl's reasons for making sword slaves were not necessarily the same as Shi Wuding's. Shi Wuding was truly dedicated to the path of the sword, pursuing countless expressions of sword intent. He had not used his sword slaves for some grand conspiracy. But as for Snow Owl, who could say?

Yue Hongling turned to look over at Zhao Changhe, whose battle was also reaching its end. He did not need her help anymore.

As Zhao Changhe had anticipated, Venerable Duoluo was heavily injured. His flesh was borrowed from Shi Wuding, his life force stolen from Shi Wuding, and his spirit weakened after being forced to flee following a clash with the corpse demon. His menacing appearance, seemingly reborn from a drop of blood, as well as the emergence of the blood moon and the blood-drenched sky—a terrifying display of power—was all thanks to the power of the Heavenly Tome.

The Heavenly Tome was indifferent. It did not exist solely for the virtuous or the wicked. It granted benefits to whoever was near it, regardless of who they were.

But to truly obtain it, there were certain conditions. At least this page, which embodied life, would never submit to incomplete and twisted beings.

Thus, neither Shi Wuding nor Venerable Duoluo could directly take the Heavenly Tome. They could only try to modify themselves on the spot. But Zhao Changhe needed no such thing. His aura harmonized with the Heavenly Tome effortlessly.

Having carried two pages with him for so long and tending to them regularly, he and the Heavenly Tome had a bond that was no joke.

Once the Heavenly Tome recognized Zhao Changhe as its owner and no longer provided power to Venerable Duoluo, everything fell apart.

Not only did the terrifying power he tried to unleash dissipate instantly, but even the blood figure, which had been growing in strength, visibly withered. With Shi Wuding's death, the blood figure's life force completely vanished, and a streak of black qi shot out from the blood bubble, attempting to escape the space.

A cloth bag was tossed over it. "This is the spirit bag that the corpse demon... oh, you called him Xue Wu, right? Anyway, it's a bag he used to inhabit. It can contain souls. Care to go in and get a whiff of him?"

The mighty being of the Profound Control Realm could not avoid the bag at all and plunged headfirst into it, with the opening swiftly tied shut.

Intense struggles came from within the bag, and parts of the bag bulged outward as whatever it contained attempted to break out.

Zhao Changhe slapped a talisman onto the bag, and the world fell silent again.

"Blind woman, you really had the nerve to stay out of this and not act against something this terrifying, huh?"

"What's terrifying about it? You could see it was just a paper tiger. All you needed was the courage to stand up to it. Your battle was far easier than Yue Hongling's."

"So that life-siphoning attack just required courage too? I couldn't have countered it without the Qinghe Mirror!"

"Are you bragging about having a crutch?"

"I... Shut up!"

"Changhe." Yue Hongling approached briskly. "Why are you looking so conflicted? Are you hurt?"

"No, no," Zhao Changhe put away the spirit bag and the Heavenly Tome, opening his arms. "It's still my Hongling who's the most dependable. With the mission accomplished, how about a kiss?"

Without hesitation, Yue Hongling stepped forward, wrapped her arms around him, and kissed him passionately.

From fleeing Bashan to this moment, they had fought countless battles of all sizes: Miaojiang's gu arts, figures on the Ranking of Man and Earth, an ancient sacred beast, and Profound Control Realm beings. Each encounter left them gasping for breath, and they constantly felt as if their lives were on the line.

Finally, on this Dragon Boat Festival, with the dust settling, Yue Hongling had reached the second layer of the Profound Mysteries and defeated someone on the Ranking of Earth.

Even with her unyielding spirit, she could not help but feel physically and mentally exhausted. With everything over, she let go of all tension. She only wanted to hold her lover close, to kiss him, and let out all the passion and relief she felt inside.

The page, the bag... All other matters faded from her thoughts. As long as he was there, Yue Hongling felt she did not need to worry about anything. Ever since he had met her at Cangshan, the powerlessness she had felt fighting alone in the southwest had completely vanished. He was like the backbone of the house, holding everything up.

As they embraced and kissed, the manifestations caused by the Eternal Blood Demon Body began to fade.

The sky returned to clarity, even with a touch of rainbow-hued light lingering. The previous oppressive and sinister atmosphere was replaced by freshness and vitality. The life force previously emitted by the Heavenly Tome now covered the sacred mountain, bringing lushness to the land. Even the insects, snakes, eagles, and beasts kept by the Spirit Tribe grew more spirited, and some gu breeders were delighted to discover that their gu had advanced a level.

The blood-red hue of the moon faded and the barrier dissipated. The Spirit Tribe members kneeling outside watched as the broken part of the mountain was slowly unveiled like a bloody curtain, revealing the rocks and vegetation at the summit.

Amid the chaos of the fierce battle, the vegetation and rocks were broken and shattered. In the center stood the sacred envoy and his woman, embracing and kissing as if no one else existed, indulging in the joy of victory.

Sunlight poured down, and it looked as though they were bathed in a halo of divine light.

It was beautiful.

Sisi was so jealous she could almost feel her teeth aching.

The worst part was that she could not even show jealousy. Instead, she had to set an example and lead the crowd in kowtowing. “We pay our respects to the sacred envoy.”

The entire Spirit Tribe seemed to wake up from a dream, their shouts echoing like crashing waves, “We pay our respects to the sacred envoy!”

With this display of fervor, Zhao Changhe’s role as the sacred envoy was set in stone. At this moment, his prestige likely surpassed Sisi’s own.

Yet, Sisi felt none of her previous misgivings.

If someone like him was not worthy of trust, then who else was?

The thunderous chants roused the couple from their passionate embrace. They looked over, and Yue Hongling, unembarrassed, simply smiled. “Go on and play sacred envoy. I’m going to head back and rest.”

“There’s not much to do.” Zhao Changhe stepped forward, addressing the crowd, “I am the envoy sent by the Ancestral Spirit, here to announce its will. Xiang Simeng is hereby officially appointed as the saintess; her words shall be regarded as divine commandments. All matters of the Spirit Tribe are to be handled under her authority.”

Sisi looked at him in stunned silence, her eyes misty.

Zhao Changhe, weary, waved his hand. “Today is the Double Fifth Festival[1]. Conduct your rituals, and the Ancestral Spirit shall grant its blessings. I’m going to rest now. That’s all.”

He was genuinely exhausted. Although Sisi had transferred away the pain from his injuries earlier, he'd taken wounds akin to having been cut by thousands of blades, and this battle had aggravated them further. Mentally, he was utterly worn out. All he wanted now was to sleep.

The Spirit Tribe shouted while kowtowing, "Rest well, sacred envoy."

Yue Hongling shook her head and supported Zhao Changhe as they slowly made their way down the mountain. At the midpoint, Han Wubing was still sitting cross-legged. As the two descended, they exchanged glances and shared a quiet smile.

Yue Hongling handed him a sword. "Shi Wuding's sword."

Han Wubing accepted it. "Thanks."

Zhao Changhe remarked, "So you two killed Shi Wuding. The Tome of Troubled Times didn't light up, probably because we're in this secret realm... I wonder if it'll flash when we leave."

Han Wubing replied, "It might have already done so, just that we can't see it from here... Anyway, it wasn't me who killed him. If the Tome of Troubled Times does make an announcement, all credit should be given to my sister-in-law."

Zhao Changhe teased him, "Aren't you a little too talkative now?"

Han Wubing straightened up with a serious expression.

Zhao Changhe grinned. "I mean, you've gotten chatty lately. So, why not keep talking? Like, calling her sister-in-law a few more times? I love hearing it, and so does she."

Han Wubing huffed, shutting his mouth in annoyance, choosing to ignore him.

Yue Hongling, also exasperated, changed from holding him gently to tugging on his ear. "Who loves hearing it, huh? Who loves hearing it? Why don't you ask Wubing how many sisters-in-law he thinks he's got?"

“So you admit that you’re... Ouch, hey, people are still paying respects to the sacred envoy. Show me some respect, let me save some face...”

“Go back and recuperate! All you ever do is run your mouth. Think being the sacred envoy is impressive now, do you? Try touching even one Spirit Tribe girl, and this lady will put an end to such a lecherous villain!”

Han Wubing smirked, watching the couple as they walked away.

It was not just that he had started talking more; he felt that Yue Hongling had changed too, becoming a bit bolder, and a bit more possessive.

And yet, her sword was growing stronger...

He turned his gaze back to Shi Wuding’s body, standing silently for a long time before finally bending down to bury him. He used the sword that Yue Hongling had just given him to dig a pit and placed Shi Wuding’s remains inside. He carved a simple wooden marker and wrote three words on it: Bashan Sword Grave.

After finishing, he buried the sword alongside the body and then made his way down the mountain with large strides.

Outside the secret realm, people across the world looked up at the golden light streaking across the sky from the Tome of Troubled Times:

In the third month, Yue Hongling paid homage to the swords at Bashan, uncovering hidden truths, and leaving wounded. Shi Wuding pursued her for a thousand li, and Yue Hongling fled into Miaojiang.

In the fourth month, Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling fought Shi Wuding on the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. Unable to win, both retreated into a secret realm.

Shi Wuding pursued into the secret realm, fell into an ambush, and narrowly escaped death by falling off a cliff.

On the day of the Dragon Boat Festival, Yue Hongling fought Shi Wuding again and touched the Second Profound Mystery during the battle. In the end, she defeated Shi Wuding at the summit of Yunyang Mountain.

As he is unable to maintain his ranking, Shi Wuding's position is passed down. Yue Hongling ascends to the Ranking of Earth.

Rank 36: Sunset Divine Sword Yue Hongling!

Floating clouds mourn the instability of life; fleeting years are like waters that never return.  
Farewell to past favors, now I return to seek peace within the gates of Chan.[2]

This verdict seemed mysterious and inexplicable, almost as if it were not speaking about Yue Hongling at all. Instead, it seemed to lament Shi Wuding and perhaps someone else.

Whether it was due to the ambiguous nature of the events in the secret realm or because of some underlying sentiment, no one could quite make sense of it.

In any case, what had taken place did not follow the usual practice of directly replacing ranks, and it deliberately downplayed the role of a certain foot massage connoisseur who had been a central figure in these events. The account made it seem as though Yue Hongling had merely taken advantage of Shi Wuding's weakened state, as if the victory was less honorable.

Yet no amount of embellishment could erase Yue Hongling's accomplishment of understanding the sword during the battle, breaking through to the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, and defeating a figure on the Ranking of Earth.

Everyone was left wondering one thing.

Is she the youngest in history to reach the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, the youngest to ascend the Ranking of Earth?

Chapter 494: The Birth of a Queen

However, the people filled with awe and admiration would never guess what the youngest member of the Ranking of Earth—the heroine who had just slain a powerful foe with grace and valor, whom

they imagined as a radiant figure bathed in the sunset, riding a mighty horse, sword in hand—was actually up to at that moment.

Her soft, suppressed moans were utterly enchanting.

With everything settled and no one around to disturb them, even if they were not engaging in dual cultivation, the young couple could still indulge in each other freely.

Hand in hand, they descended the mountain and returned to the guest courtyard, finding the Spirit Tribe in the midst of conducting a grand ceremony. Not even a single maid was around, as everyone was participating in the rites on the sacred mountain. The two exchanged a look, and a surge of passion rose between them. Almost as soon as they entered, they embraced one another. Zhao Changhe kicked the door shut, picked up the heroine, and leaped onto the bed, where they swiftly tangled together.

“Big sister, you’re still injured. Let me help you recover with dual cultivation...”

“No dual cultivation for the first round. I want you to focus completely on me...”

“As you wish.”

Her red clothes slipped off, tossed carelessly to the foot of the bed, neither noticing the spirit lingering there as the garment briefly covered it, then slid down to the floor.

What am I dealing with here?! The blind woman pinched her forehead in exasperation, wondering if she had chosen the wrong person after all.

You just got your hands on the Heavenly Tome!

Ask any martial artist in the world what they would do as soon as they obtained the Heavenly Tome and had a moment to spare, and I can guarantee that they would say that they would jump right into it!

Not to mention, you still have a prisoner at the Profound Control Realm. Even if you’re not studying the Heavenly Tome, you should interrogate the captive for ancient knowledge or at least



his Eternal Blood Demon Body. That physique clearly has connections with your Blood Asura Body. Anyone with some sense in them would know it's valuable!

And yet here you are, apparently trying to create some of that... beauty treatment for the new page of the Heavenly Tome?

The blind woman sulked in furious silence.

It was no wonder that the report of the Tome of Troubled Times seemed to be a bit biased with personal sentiment.

Then again, even without the personal sentiment, there was truly only so much that it could broadcast to the world. Secret realms and ancient gods and demons themselves were beyond the regular scope of the Tome of Troubled Times.

Besides Zhao Changhe, who ended up nearly as a footnote, Sisi had also been part of the battle where Shi Wuding fell off a cliff. She was a young warrior at the first layer of the Profound Mysteries as well, yet her name did not appear, and she had not even made it onto the Ranking of Hidden Dragons.

If not for the fact that the death of such an important figure such as Shi Wuding had to be reported, the whole affair might have been buried in the dust of the secret realm.

Although Sisi's name was not even known to the outside world, she was now at the peak of her life.

Previously, everyone had kneeled to the blood moon that hung above the sacred mountain. Now that the dust had settled, Sisi, surrounded by the crowd, entered the sacred hall. A few of the tribal elders who had not opposed her trembled as they kneeled before the steps, their bodies forming a makeshift path for her to ascend the throne.

As she stepped on their backs to ascend, Sisi found the sensation somewhat unpleasant. It was unstable, as if she might fall at any moment, but the psychological experience was unmatched—it was the feeling of trampling upon all others.

The Spirit Tribe was far more primitive than the Xia people. While they appeared simply unruly on the surface, they held extreme views on hierarchy and status, especially in important matters. They

had even more barbaric practices, such as sacrificial rituals with live captives, which might happen if Sisi wished it so.

But Sisi was not thinking of such things. She ascended slowly, her mind wandering as she looked at the throne ahead.

As a maid, if he asked me to do this... Hmm...

In a daze, she seated herself on the throne. Below her, voices chanted in unison, "Crown the saintess."

And thus, she was crowned as queen.

In the Ancient Spirit Tribe, they did not truly refer to their leader as king or queen. They used the title of Chieftain, and the role did not hold quite as much authority as a king. The council of elders held significant power, and the chieftain was not a hereditary position but was usually selected from among the most respected of the tribes.

But at this moment, if Sisi wanted to centralize power as a queen, it would be easy. The tribe had not yet formed the concept of such a system, so it was a blank slate for her to shape as she wished.

Zhao Changhe had not thought this far, still focused on supporting a saintess. But Sisi understood the potential that such a moment held. Even if she said nothing, the younger generation that had supported her would never be content with her merely being a saintess.

If she was just a saintess, then how were they to become elders? Were they to wait for promotions by seniority? They risked their necks by siding with her, for what?

So it was inevitable that she would not remain just a saintess... If Zhao Changhe were present, he would know that a queen was about to be born.

Sisi looked at the laurel crown being presented to her by those kneeling before her. Her expression grew increasingly distant.

The Ancient Spirit Tribe once had a chieftain. That chieftain was annihilated by Venerable Duoluo, and since then, no new chieftain had been appointed. Instead, the elders ruled collectively, signifying that the forbidden land was their true ruler.

In that battle, where the tribe was conquered by the forbidden land, the former chieftain gathered the most powerful shamans to place a forty-nine-day curse upon Venerable Duoluo. In the end, it was all for nothing, as every shaman who participated in the curse died from the backlash.

Among them was Sisi's father.

Sisi's father was not the chieftain, which was fortunate. The chieftain's entire family had to be exterminated, but Sisi, with the protection of her father's friends and those who respected a fallen hero, was able to live a normal life. Moreover, she held a significant position, allowing to speak her mind and act as a thorn in people's side when needed.

This painful lesson only increased others' fear of the wrath of the ancestral spirit, but Sisi saw it differently. She no longer trusted her tribe's shamanic arts and resolved to leave the mountains and go to Great Xia to learn martial arts.

That decision had led her here, to this laurel crown before her.

She slowly lifted it and placed it on her head. The beaded veil concealed her beautiful face, and as she listened to her own voice, it sounded distant and ethereal. "Royal power is bestowed by divinity. Until the sacred envoy speaks, I remain as saintess... But it is without question that the system and structure of our tribe must be reformed. Based on what we observed in Miaojiang, where the Black Hmong sought to have a king, we may consider a similar model. You may draft a proposal for the sacred envoy to review..."

Sisi did not know whether she liked the idea of being a queen, but she suddenly wondered, perhaps he would like it? She wondered how he would react if a queen knelt before him as a maid...

Right now, he's probably dual cultivating with Big Sis Yue...

Beneath the beaded veil, her gaze gradually turned seductive.

The Spirit Tribe members kneeling below her would never guess that on her first day as queen, she sat on the throne with feverish thoughts.

No, it wasn't just thoughts. Sisi truly felt a wave of warmth spreading through her.

Why do I feel so... good?

Wait... the... the Pain Transfer Gu?!

Sisi was dumbfounded. She had never used it before, so she had not realized it could transfer more than just pain.

So... this is what a man feels... So that's what it's like? It feels... pretty ordinary, actually.

"S-saintess?" a cautious voice came from below.

"Oh, about that. " Sisi coughed lightly, subtly crossing her legs. "The first item on the agenda... With the great elder having been burned to death, how shall we deal with the remaining traitors who colluded with the forbidden land to oppress our tribe?"

The atmosphere instantly turned grim.

\* \* \*

The Spirit Tribe's festival, the establishment of the new regime's initial rules, the handling of the old factions, and plans for outside the secret realm—it was all a tangled mess. From midday until sunset, they were still far from finished, and many topics could only be introduced for further discussion later.

No matter how much there was to do, they still needed to eat, especially with the sacred envoy around. They could not just leave the sacred envoy to entertain himself, even if that was all he wanted...

The Spirit Tribe slaughtered cattle and sheep, preparing a grand feast. At last, Sisi, who had been busy all day, had a perfect excuse: the queen herself had to personally extend the invitation to the sacred envoy.

No one would dare argue with her. Draped in a lavish, floor-length gown and accompanied by two attentive maids, the young enchantress hurried over to the room from the previous night.

This is ridiculous! They've been at it this entire time! How could they carry on for hours like this?

This shouldn't be possible, right? Is there something wrong with the gu?

As she reached the guest courtyard, she could hear faint sounds from inside that made her blush. In disbelief, Sisi looked incredulously at the stars, feeling dumbfounded.

She had not thought he was this relentless before! Last time, a quick foot massage was all it took.

But this long? Is Big Sis Yue not going to get dehydrated...? Not to mention, you're both still injured. Should you really be doing this?

With a mixture of frustration and resignation, Sisi knocked on the door. "Sacred envoy, I've come to invite you to the feast."

Inside, Yue Hongling's languid voice responded, "Wait outside. However long you used your feet this morning, now you must stand on it for that same time. Don't think I don't know."

Sisi was in utter despair. Are you addicted to making me eavesdrop by the door now?

Her eyes gleamed with mischief as she turned to one of the maids. "Bring me my jade flute."

Her maid quickly handed over a jade-green flute.

In her youth, the saintess was quite talented. She hasn't played or sung for years, though. Is she finally feeling inspired again?

As the gentle melody echoed, Zhao Changhe's expression grew awkward, and he stopped what he was doing. He would have preferred to be oblivious to musical theory right now, because he instantly recognized the song.

Sisi likely did not know the reference, and her intent was genuine, but the way Zhao Changhe heard it...

The maids were curious. “Saintess, what song is this? Did you learn it from the Xia people? I’ve never heard it before...”

“Is it nice?”

“It’s lovely. What’s it called?”

Inside, Yue Hongling, still catching her breath, asked, “What’s that witch playing? Why’d you stop...”

Not only had he stopped, but he’d nearly gone soft.

Inside and outside, they both answered in unison: “It’s called ‘A Phoenix Seeks His Mate.’”[1]

#### Chapter 495: If You Can Still Find Me

It was not until Sisi played A Phoenix Seeks His Mate that Zhao Changhe realized why he had been feeling strangely numb all day, as if he were under anesthesia. It was only now that he realized that it was probably because the Pain Transfer Gu was still in effect.

It certainly made him more vigorous, and the mental pleasure was undeniably still there, but in comparison, the physical pleasure was lacking.

Was all the pleasure being transferred to Sisi instead? What the hell...

With a sigh, he got dressed and stepped outside helplessly. “That gu of yours...”

As soon as he stepped out, the maids immediately kneeled down, not daring to look up. Their earlier giggles and lighthearted attitudes were nowhere to be seen.

Zhao Changhe’s words got caught in his throat as he glanced at Sisi.

Dressed in formal attire, Sisi looked even more stunning than before, but Zhao Changhe was in no mood to admire her at the moment. He frowned and said, "I get why they kneeled down in a formal situation before, but there's no need for them to be so tense on an everyday basis. Let's not make it seem as if you've just replaced the person lording over you. If you do, then what would have been the point of everything we've done?"

Sisi gestured for the maids to stand, smiling. "I didn't tell them to do it. They're kneeling out of genuine reverence. Who told you to put on such a spectacular display?"

She paused, then leaned closer to his ear, whispering, "Do you really... not want to dominate me?"

She lingered on the word "dominate," and her tone was seductive enough to send shivers down his spine. Zhao Changhe gulped and remained silent.

Sisi giggled softly and murmured into his ear, "Master, it's time to eat..."

This is unbearable. Can't she flirt with me some other time? Yue Hongling's watching from inside. She's just putting me in a tough spot.

Zhao Changhe sighed helplessly, "So how do I remove this gu? I can't just have my sensations permanently transferred to you for the rest of my life, can I? How am I supposed to manage?"

Sisi pouted, slightly disappointed, and sighed. "It only lasts for a day. It's not a permanent thing. Since I gave it to you last night, it should die off on its own by tonight."

Zhao Changhe glanced at her, unsure whether to feel relieved or a little let down.

The gu was actually kind of interesting, and he had not fully explored it yet. For example, if he touched himself, he wondered what she would feel.

Feigning nonchalance, Zhao Changhe rubbed his chest a little.

Sisi's eyes went wide.

Zhao Changhe could not help but chuckle.

At that moment, Yue Hongling casually stepped out, tidying her clothes and tying her ponytail. “Is there food?”

Sisi clutched her chest. “Yes... The grandest banquet awaits, welcoming our pair of sacred envoys.”

“And your hand is on your chest... for what exactly?” Yue Hongling asked.

“...It’s the etiquette of our Spirit Tribe. It is meant to show our respect.”

Yue Hongling looked at the two of them suspiciously, trying to discern any hint of mischief. Finding nothing, she said, “We really don’t need or want some grand ceremony. Honestly, we’d prefer a simple meal in a small room with just a few of us.”

Sisi smiled slightly, “Today’s ceremony is a must. I know you two may not enjoy it, so you may simply stay in a small room at the back and have a private dinner. It’s a high-class way for the sacred envoys to participate without having to be wholly present. Unfortunately, I won’t be able to join you.”

“Alright then,” Yue Hongling replied with some interest. “We’ll have our own meal and watch your grand ceremony from there.”

In truth, if they were regular guests at a grand bonfire festival, watching the young men and women of the Spirit Tribe singing and dancing, Yue Hongling and Zhao Changhe would have likely been interested in joining in. But in this particular setup, neither of them felt entirely at ease.

From their private room, they observed the ceremony outside. At the foot of the mountain, a vast expanse was lit by fire stretching for miles, with countless members of the Spirit Tribe solemnly praying and chanting. Though there was singing and dancing, it had an intense, almost shamanistic feel to it. The religious ritual cast a shadow over any sense of victory and celebration.

Leaning against the mountainside with a cup in hand, Yue Hongling sipped her drink and watched for a while before sighing. “Boring.”

Zhao Changhe wrapped his arms around her from behind, resting his chin on her shoulder. This was their favorite position. Hearing her sigh, he smiled and said, “If it were just a regular victory, you



might have gotten the lively celebration you were hoping for. But this feels different. Eh, well. It might be like this today, but after a day or two, they'll probably be celebrating as you thought they would."

Yue Hongling replied, "It's not just the atmosphere... it's hard to explain. Seeing them all kneeling makes me question what we were fighting for in the first place."

She pouted in frustration. "I'm not as cultured as First Seat Tang."

"Then don't try to explain it," Zhao Changhe said, half-amused, half-exasperated. "My dear big sister... You've been getting more and more jealous lately."

"Well, would you rather me be jealous or indifferent?" she asked, leaning back against him with a calm curiosity.

Zhao Changhe was caught off guard by the question, then finally replied, "Hmm... I think I like you the way you are now."

Yue Hongling rolled her eyes. "Are you just asking for trouble?"

"It's because this side of you feels more... real, like a wife."

She huffed but did not argue with him calling her his wife. Instead, she said, "But what if I feel like leaving again?"

"Hm?" Zhao Changhe was dumbfounded. "You're not fully recovered yet. At least wait until you're fully healed before going anywhere."

Yue Hongling laughed, "Of course, I'm not saying I'll leave right now. I'll obviously stay until I'm fully recovered, and besides, I have plenty of martial arts insights I want to test with you. But honestly, you don't seem surprised by the idea that I might want to leave again."

"Well, should I be? You've never been one to stay in one place for long. Seeing something like this, something that doesn't quite align with your heart, it's only natural for you to feel the urge to leave." Zhao Changhe tilted his head and kissed her on the cheek. "But don't run off too fast. I

haven't spent much time with you this time, and most of it was in battle. Now that everything's settled, I want to spend some quality time with you."

"I thought you'd be eager for me to leave so you could enjoy your maid all to yourself."

".....Hey, where did that come from? To be honest with you, I don't dare get too involved with her. I couldn't even handle that Pain Transfer Gu she used on me. If she uses some Heart-Bonding Gu on me out of nowhere, I'd be done for..."

Yue Hongling chuckled. "Poor thing, so close yet so far."

Zhao Changhe did not deny his desire to have her. With Sisi's allure, who would not be enchanted by her? Perhaps only a eunuch would be able to refrain from doing so. It was strange to discuss such things so openly with his own woman, especially after she clearly admitted to being a bit jealous. Yet, with Yue Hongling, it felt perfectly natural.

Yue Hongling did not dwell on the topic either, instead saying, "So, would you like to hear about my experience with the second layer of the Profound Mysteries?"

"Yes."

The blind woman, listening from afar, was moved to tears. Finally, you two are getting to business.

Yue Hongling said, "Honestly, I was at least three steps away from the second layer of the Profound Mysteries. But after meeting you, I covered those gaps in such a short time."

"What were those three steps?"

"The first was my physical foundation; my body was far from tempered enough, and my blood and qi were lacking. But with the baptism of the Heavenly Blood Jade, that was resolved," Yue Hongling explained. "As for you, it's the opposite. Your physical training is already solid, but your internal energy still needs work."

"Mm-hm." Zhao Changhe nodded. "I understand that myself. What's else?"

“I’m getting there,” Yue Hongling said. “After reaching the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, I noticed that internal and external power start to merge, with the power of my body and my internal energy flowing together, indistinguishable from one another. Perhaps when this stage is complete, I can start to approach the third layer of the Profound Mysteries.”

Zhao Changhe paused, realizing the insight was invaluable as it provided a roadmap for his path ahead.

So I can’t just cultivate internal and external energy separately but must merge them into one seamless flow? If that’s the case, then I might have an advantage. The Six Harmonies Art is fundamentally designed for something like that.

“That covers the physical foundation. The second step is a broader understanding of martial arts. This time, watching you act has had a profound effect on me. We talked about it before: the idea of the individual’s sword versus the sword of the world, right? Now my sword intent has expanded. Once my perspective widened, I found myself at the threshold of the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, almost there but not quite. For you, it’s a similar journey—from relying solely on brute strength to developing a more refined sword intent. You’re on a path that’s becoming broader as well.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. “I’ve felt that too. What’s the third step?”

“The third is an insight I gained from that page. Is it the setting sun illuminating a solitary bird, or is a goshawk challenging the setting sun? This may represent moving from sensing and utilizing the energy of heaven and earth to controlling and mastering it. Like ascending toward the heavens, gradually looking down from above,” explained Yue Hongling. “The first two steps are more tangible. Once you achieve them, you’ve achieved them. But for this last insight, perhaps you can rely on that page?”

Zhao Changhe thought to himself that this page, representing the path of life, was likely the most aligned with his cultivation path, even more so than the second page he got that was related to nature.

The first step, improving his internal energy, might also be closely linked to this page.

That was probably why the blind woman kept steering him toward Miaojiang.

But perhaps the second page was a prerequisite for this one. Otherwise, he might have ended up like Duoluo and Shi Wuding, taking on some monstrous state.

Yue Hongling continued, “By the way, the sword arts you taught me... The more I practice them, the more I feel they’re converging with the fragmented techniques I picked up in the past. From what Venerable Duoluo mentioned, the sword arts we practice seem to be techniques of the Sword Emperor. What you taught me might be from his earlier years, while the fragments I found seem to reflect his later insights. When I head back, I’d like to explore some old secret realms again. I might uncover something new.”

Zhao Changhe snapped out of his reverie and asked, “Where is that?”

Yue Hongling bit her lip, her voice barely a whisper, “If... if you can find it on your own, then...”

Zhao Changhe blinked in surprise.

Yue Hongling murmured, “Maybe then, I won’t be able to leave, even if I want to...”

Chapter 496: Respect Power, Embrace Virtue

This time, they did not make any promises; it was simply not necessary.

There was no need to discuss settling down, starting a family, or living a conventional life. Zhao Changhe had never planned for that, and their path had always been about traveling the world together.

When one was tired of flying, they would need a place to land.

Just like now, with her nestled against him, neither of them moving from the position the entire time.

He held her, his chin resting on her shoulder, listening as she shared her insights, feeling a deep sense of peace.

She, nestled in his embrace, felt just as much at peace.

“This banquet really isn’t to my liking. Why don’t we head back once we’re full?” Yue Hongling stared down at the bonfire for a while, then pursed her lips. “It’s really boring. We might as well go back and dual cultivate.”

It was hard to tell whether she was truly bored or if, after being in his arms for so long, she simply wanted to feel even closer but found this setting inconvenient.

Zhao Changhe grinned. Hearing this kind of talk felt as routine as discussing daily chores now... But it was still early, and the Pain Transfer Gu was still active, so it would not be particularly satisfying for him.

Extending his senses, he spotted Sisi standing near a statue, holding a staff, sternly addressing her maidens. It seemed she was setting up a personal guard, picking out sharp and trustworthy women. The serious, disciplined look on her face was entirely unlike her.

Zhao Changhe stretched his hand and gave his own backside a smack.

Yue Hongling raised an eyebrow in confusion.

In the distance, Sisi suddenly covered her buttocks, glancing around with surprise, and her serious demeanor vanished instantly.

Yue Hongling, unaware of any of this, asked, “What are you doing?”

”Ah.” “Uh...” Zhao Changhe coughed awkwardly. “A mosquito bit me.”

He then pinched himself.

Sisi nearly jumped.

Zhao Changhe stifled a laugh, finally understanding why Lady Three always seemed to be grinning to herself. Some things really were just privately amusing.

Still clueless, Yue Hongling mused aloud, “Never mind. We just dual-cultivated, and I don’t want to seem insatiable. I’m not Sisi, pretending to be someone else.”

Zhao Changhe: “Erm...”

Honestly, he was the one feeling unfulfilled. With the gu transferring most of his sensations, he had not been as satisfied as usual. If it were not for the real benefit that it brought him for his injuries, he would hardly feel like the whole afternoon was worth it.

Yue Hongling moved out of his embrace, smiling as she said, “Thinking about it, maybe it’s best if I leave. They’ll probably need you here—you’re the true sacred envoy, after all. I have no patience for this stuff, so I’ll just head back to rest and consolidate my breakthrough to the second layer of the Profound Mysteries.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. She had a point. Yue Hongling was disinterested in all political aspects, preferring to go back and rest. She could afford to be absent, but he needed to stay on hand to deal with anything that came up.

Already, with his heightened senses, he overheard people discussing the possibility of the saintess becoming their queen, wondering, “What will the sacred envoy say?”

So, Sisi wants to be queen? Interesting.

Having eaten her fill, Yue Hongling gracefully left to rest and recover. As soon as she left, Sisi slipped in, giving Zhao Changhe a sulky glare. “What are you doing?”

“Huh?”

“Don’t ‘huh’ me,” Sisi muttered, biting her lip as she moved closer. “Got the nerve to tease me but not to go through with it, huh?”

Zhao Changhe looked up at the sky.

Sisi’s voice was soft and seductive as she asked, “Do you like my outfit today?”

He sneaked a glance and had to admit that her formal attire added a sense of regal dignity that was quite different from her usual look of a mischievous temptress, when her midriff was bare and so was her feet.

With the staff in hand, she had an additional sense of authority.

“Is this your royal robe?”

“More or less... Anyway, did you overhear their conversations?”

“Hm?”

“Well, what do you think? Do you approve?”

Zhao Changhe was momentarily taken aback, then chuckled. “Do you really need to wait for my approval? I already told you I wouldn’t control you. You should make your own decisions.”

It should have been a reassuring statement, yet Sisi’s eyes held a fleeting hint of disappointment before she forced it back, murmuring, “But I’m willing to listen to you, Master.”

Zhao Changhe asked, “Really?”

Sisi sighed. “Yes.”

She realized she was reaping the bitter fruit of her own half-truths. This was the backlash of having once tried to control him—now Zhao Changhe did not quite trust her words, always assuming there was some hidden agenda behind them.

But at this moment, she truly meant it. A man who had willingly suffered so much to save her... Which woman would not be moved by such a person?

Yet she could not blame him for not trusting her. This was nothing more than the outcome of crying wolf too many times.

A woman who had been acting and playing games from the very moment they met, and again after they reunited... Sisi was not even sure herself if there was still some part of her trying to manipulate him.

“Then just do it,” Zhao Changhe said. “I hadn’t thought it through before, but seeing it now, it makes sense... And while a monarchy may seem backward, when compared to the tribe system, it’s a significant step forward. There’s no reason for you to hold back.”

Sisi: “?”

What is he talking about? Backward? A step forward?

Zhao Changhe explained, “Now I get why this banquet feels so heavy. It’s actually a precursor to your coronation, isn’t it?”

“Yes, the ancestral and divine rites, the prayers... Everything is done. We’re only waiting for the sacred envoy’s word.” She pointed toward a statue. “See that statue over there?”

Zhao Changhe nodded. It was an abstract statue, a combination of various animals. It did not seem to be an ancient artifact—likely a new creation. The original statues from the previous era were probably destroyed in the collapse of the era.

Sisi said, “That’s the Ancestral God statue, and our sacred temple is there. If you agree, we can head over, make the announcement, and then create a spectacle of light around the statue. After that, I’ll be crowned. Perhaps, to Xia people, this might seem a bit hasty.”

“More or less, but it’s all the unnecessary formalities that are what’s ridiculous,” Zhao Changhe remarked. “Even now, we still need some flashy spectacle?”

“There are still conservatives and those who resist change. We need something to silence them, or else there might be bloodshed. They may not fully believe in such phenomena, but their tribes certainly will.”

“Fair enough,” Zhao Changhe nodded, then took her hand. “Let’s go. Let’s get this coronation over with. Hongling already thinks this whole setting is boring. The sooner it’s done, the sooner we can celebrate tomorrow with songs and dancing. Wouldn’t that be better?”



Sisi glanced at his hand holding hers and smiled sweetly.

It was not about him making a move on her. They had simply grown so close that it had become second nature.

When they arrived at the statue, a number of the tribespeople were already waiting. As soon as they saw the two approach, they kneeled in reverence.

Zhao Changhe noticed that the eyes of some still held a trace of defiance. Sisi had not fully explained this—it was not necessarily stubborn conservatism or rebellion against her specifically. In fact, they seemed to respect Sisi, but the discontent seemed to be directed at him, the sacred envoy... Is it because I'm from Xia?

He thought of the Xia reinforcements still camped at the base of the mountain, none of whom had been allowed to ascend. That was likely the root of the issue.

Zhao Changhe felt a pang of annoyance. The affairs of tribes and nations could not be resolved solely through kindness or benevolence.

Kindness is easily forgotten, there are always those who see it as something they naturally deserve. They probably feel resentful at being ordered around, or perhaps because their saintess was taken by a man from Xia like me.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, Sisi stepped forward, raised her staff up high before the statue, and declared loudly, "The sacred envoy conveys the will of the Ancestral God. From this day onward, the Spirit Tribe shall be recognized as a nation!"

At the same time, she had arranged for some of her maids to do something behind the scenes with the statue, and radiant light burst into the sky, illuminating the night.

Some in the crowd frowned and glanced at Zhao Changhe.

Where's the supposed will of the Ancestral God? Such tricks, who do they think they're fooling...

Just as someone was about to speak up, Zhao Changhe, with a calm expression, quietly connected the third page of the Heavenly Tome he got to the statue.

Suddenly, the light revealed images of dragons, phoenixes, qilins, vermillion birds, black tortoises, and even their tribe's sacred beast, the Blood Ao. A primordial vitality and immense power spread across the land.

Those who had been frowning were left utterly speechless, their words stuck in their throats.

The area in front of the temple fell into complete silence. It was as if a domino effect of silence rippled through the crowd—from the mountaintop to the middle of the mountain and down to the base. The entire Spirit Tribe, tens of thousands of people, kneeled in stunned silence, all eyes fixed on the miraculous phenomenon in the sky.

Why were they called the Spirit Tribe? It was not because of the Blood Ao nor the gu.

It was because they were in communion with the spirits of beasts.

This vision of auspicious beasts—if this was not a sign from the Spirit Tribe's ancestral god, then what was?

After being stunned for some time, an elder finally called out, “We obey the divine decree!”

Instantly, a wave of voices echoed up and down the sacred mountain, “We obey the divine decree!”

Sisi raised the staff high.

“All hail Her Majesty!”

“All hail Her Majesty!”

“Your Majesty, please enter the sacred temple!”

Boom!

With a rumbling sound, the grand golden doors opened, revealing a vast hall filled with dazzling luminous pearls, illuminating the space as brightly as daylight.

Sisi, with her long gown trailing behind her, slowly entered, followed by a retinue of followers, each kowtowing with every step.

Zhao Changhe glanced around and saw that the temple was filled with statues of various sacred beasts. At the center, there was a throne made of pure gold, gleaming brightly.

Sisi whispered, "This temple was once used by our chieftains for important rites. Ever since the forbidden land enslaved us, the temple has remained closed... for fear of offending the forbidden land."

Zhao Changhe thought to himself, That's not what I wanted to know—I'm wondering how a small tribe like yours has such luxury. All this gold, these luminous pearls... It's just amazing. Perhaps this is what it means to be a king.

With a quick decision, he strode forward and boldly took a seat on the central throne.

Bestowing favor indiscriminately only makes people take it for granted. One must have authority. The reverence they showed when I was pretending far exceeded what they show now, it's ridiculous.

Sure enough, as he was seated high on the throne, watching the Spirit Tribe members kowtowing as he and Sisi entered, he could tell none of them dared to object. Not a single one spoke up.

Sisi looked surprised for a moment, then seemed to understand, a small smile appearing on her face. She knelt before him. "May the sacred envoy bestow his blessing."

Zhao Changhe said coolly, "Everyone else, wait outside."

At that moment, only Sisi was inside. The others were still before the entrance of the temple. Hearing his command, they looked up in shock.

Zhao Changhe raised his hand and, with his Crane Controlling Art, activated the stone door's mechanism.

With a deep rumble, the doors closed, leaving the people kneeling outside, watching as the man sat upon their sacred throne and their newly crowned queen kneeling before him, slowly lowering her head.

Boom!

The stone doors sealed shut, blocking their view entirely.

Chapter 497: This Is Not an Act

Inside the sacred temple, the warm light from the luminous pearls filled the space.

Sisi, dressed in her grand ceremonial attire, kneeled before Zhao Changhe, looking up at him with a subtle hint of allure in her eyes.

Her outfit, her posture, the setting, all of them combined to was more enticing than any of their previous playful encounters, even without a single word exchanged.

The outfit, her posture, the setting... Without even having to say a single word, she was already far more enticing than she usually was when she would flirt with him.

Zhao Changhe felt his throat tighten.

He intended to discipline the people outside. He planned on having them kneel and letting them see how their queen served their sacred envoy—delivering a blow to the psyche and pride of the entire tribe.

However, he did not truly intend to go through with it. After all, it was those people who he wanted to punish, not Sisi. Using her in that way would be cruel.

Sisi's kneeling was originally just a ceremonial gesture for others to see. Between them, they never had such formalities. Even earlier, when she came to call him for dinner, Sisi would pull up any maid that kneeled, showing she did not care for such customs.

By reason, Sisi was clever enough to understand his intentions. She only needed to put on a show, and once the door was closed, she could get up.

Yet she did not stand up... Not only did she remain kneeling, but she also looked up at him with such alluring eyes. What man could resist such an experience?

Inevitably, Zhao Changhe began to think that if she was willing, there was not much need to pretend otherwise, right?

We've already been in each other's arms, and she even tended to me with her feet... And when I was having those nightmares, when vicious qi was plaguing me, it seems like she already...

The words "Get up, you don't need to act anymore" stuck in his throat, and he could not bring himself to say them.

Seeing his hesitation, Sisi revealed a slight smile, and she actually slowly...

“Hiss...”

This witch...

This was not Zhao Changhe's first time experiencing something like this. He had done similar things with Chichi and Huangfu Qing before. To them, it was just bedroom pleasure, without much deeper emotional meaning. This time, however, he did not feel much as the sensations he was supposed to experience seemed to have been transferred over to Sisi herself.

Yet, the sense of conquest was overwhelming.

Perhaps he really could not be as pure and upright a hero as Yue Hongling... In this moment, what flashed in his mind was Vermillion Bird's red lips and Huangfu Qing's words about what if Vermillion Bird kneeled before him.

Sisi blinked and realized that he had become more...

She herself was struggling to maintain her composure. Earlier, when she used her feet, her entire body hurt, and she was not much aware of anything else. But now that the pain was gone... She found that this approach could make a man feel this good. It was clearly better than the dual cultivation with Yue Hongling that afternoon.

With an amused look in her eyes, Sisi thought to herself, "Is this considered self-study?"

Just as she thought that, the sensation disappeared.

The effect of the Pain Transfer Gu lasted exactly a day and had just ended.

Zhao Changhe nearly convulsed from the sudden shift in his sensations.

Sisi quietly raised her eyes to observe Zhao Changhe's expression. Their eyes met, and both of their expressions were peculiar.

Sisi lowered her head again.

Zhao Changhe: "..."

He wanted nothing more than to pull this enchantress up and press her down on the throne.

He even reached out his hand, but then paused.

Can I really do that?

He had just talked to Yue Hongling about this earlier. This Pain Transfer Gu could not even be detected by the Qinghe Mirror. If he really got affected by a Heart-Bonding Gu or something similar, who knew what the outcome would be? That would truly mean being at the mercy of a woman...

Sisi seemed to understand his hesitation. She lowered her gaze, her head silently bowed.

There were indeed some types of gu that required intimate relations to take effect. But not all of them were necessarily harmful...

Yet he could not be blamed for being cautious, since he could not even fully trust himself.

\* \* \*

After spending roughly half an hour in silence, Sisi, who was sitting on Zhao Changhe's lap and leaning against his chest, muttered, "It was clearly much faster before. You did it on purpose, didn't you?"

Zhao Changhe himself did not know, so he could only say, "I was injured back then, so I was low-energy..."

"Hehe..."

"What's so funny..." Zhao Changhe felt a bit conflicted, unsure of how to respond, but he unconsciously lowered his head and kissed her forehead gently. "You've been exhausted all day, more than anyone else. Get some rest."

Feeling his tenderness, Sisi was pleasantly surprised. She looked up at him for a while, her eyes blinking, and finally smiled.

So he really does like me... He just doesn't dare to admit it.

Smiling, Sisi wrapped her arms around his neck, murmuring in his embrace, "That bit of exhaustion is nothing compared to what you've endured, Master... Besides... I deserve punishment."

Her voice became softer when she mentioned "deserving punishment," and it was unclear if she was referring to bearing the punishment for her tribe or something else entirely.

Zhao Changhe was lost in thought, but Sisi interrupted his thoughts, speaking softly, "This servant does not need rest. We can go out now... Hmm, let this be a plea for them as well—they've been kneeling for a long time... Watching their queen be played with and chastised inside is already humiliating enough..."

"...Did I chastise you?"

"No, but Sisi wants Master to chastise her."

"..." Zhao Changhe cleared his throat and stood up with her in his arms. "Alright, let's go out."

As Zhao Changhe was about to set her down, Sisi held onto him tightly, whispering into his ear, "Carry me out. Let them see."

Zhao Changhe obligingly carried her and strode out of the temple.

The temple doors slowly opened. Outside, it was still nighttime, with bonfires flickering and countless people kneeling in neat rows. Hearing the sound of the doors opening, they all looked up.

The newly crowned queen, with her disheveled hair ornaments and flushed face, weak and powerless in the arms of a man, looked as though she had been thoroughly worn out.

It was strange, really. One might think there should be feelings of shame or anger, but oddly, instead, it felt like this was how it was supposed to be. Some even seemed to feel a sense of relief.

Since the queen had offered herself in sacrifice, the god would not punish anyone else.

Perhaps the relationship between humans and gods was slightly different from that between people. This was a symbol of divine power—people's initial faith in deities stemmed from their fear of the power of heaven and earth.

If a god was too approachable, it diminished their authority.

And regarding this queen who served the god with her own body, no one looked down upon her; instead, everyone felt a deep sense of indebtedness to her. After a brief silence, they all called out in unison, "Greetings, Sacred Envoy. Greetings, Your Majesty."



Only then did Sisi step down from Zhao Changhe's arms. She still leaned weakly against him, speaking calmly, "I am tired. Let's end it here for tonight. Tomorrow at dawn, we shall enter the temple to discuss matters."

"Yes," everyone responded, kowtowing in respect before dispersing.

As Sisi watched the crowd ebb away like a retreating tide, she sighed softly and said quietly, "I need some time to reorganize the kingdom. For our next moves, I would like your advice."

Zhao Changhe didn't say the usual "you can decide for yourself" and simply responded, "Alright, tell me."

Sisi was completely serious now. "I'm not boasting, but if the Spirit Tribe emerges from the secret realm in full force, we could sweep through Miaojiang. The Black Hmong are far from our match. However, the old beliefs of most in the tribe can't be changed overnight, and I cannot act too unilaterally. Second, if the Spirit Tribe really does reveal its full force, I can't be sure whether there might be harmful consequences. Third, the reaction of the Xia people is unpredictable, and it might bring us disaster. And fourth, I am not sure whether you'd like that."

Zhao Changhe looked at Sisi in surprise for a while and then suddenly smiled. "It's like I'm getting to know you all over again."

Sisi smiled. "We were both putting on an act before. It's time to step off the stage, Master."

"Then why do you still call me master?"

Sisi's gaze softened as she whispered, "Because this isn't an act."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Sisi continued, "So, what do you think, Master?"

Zhao Changhe said, "Whether I like it or not is not what's important. What matters are the real issues. There are indeed many problems with the Spirit Tribe leaving the secret realm en masse, so it's better to take it slow. Those who are willing to move out may do so, and the chaos in Miaojiang should also come to an end. As for the empire's reaction... I suggest that you submit a memorial to

Wanzhuang at that time, stating that the Spirit Kingdom is willing to serve as a southwestern vassal of the Great Xia Empire. In return, the Great Xia should formally recognize it, allowing for peace."

Sisi laughed, knowing that if Tang Wanzhuang were to learn of these events, her eyes would probably brim with tears. Zhao Changhe said that he was not the crown prince, yet he was acting more like one than any crown prince would.

Especially considering that the loyalty of such a vassal state was far from guaranteed; the only thing that could command the loyalty of this nation was Zhao Changhe himself.

She simply said, "Sisi will listen to her master."

Zhao Changhe gave her another strange look. "I'm really going back to rest now."

Sisi replied indifferently, "If you don't intend to summon me to the bedchamber, then there's no need to tell me that."

Zhao Changhe pursed his lips, unsure how to respond, and awkwardly left.

Sisi stood on the mountain peak in the night breeze, watching his figure gradually disappear into the distance, and sighed softly.

#### Chapter 498: Meridians Reshaped

Zhao Changhe returned to the courtyard and looked over at Yue Hongling's room through the bamboo screen. The lights were already out, indicating she must have gone to rest.

The past few days had been filled with intense battles, leaving both of them battered and exhausted. Even after the effects of the gu had worn off, Zhao Changhe still felt very tired, and it seemed that the afternoon of dual cultivation had not been very effective.

After some thought, he decided not to disturb her. He returned to his room and began doing what the blind woman believed any proper martial artist would have done as soon as possible.

The blind woman watched with tears streaming down her face as Zhao Changhe took out the Heavenly Tome.

Looking at the pages that had increased from two to three, it felt at least a bit better—now, it did not resemble a pamphlet as much. Well, pamphlets or manuals could also be tri-fold, and it still felt somewhat unworthy of the Heavenly Tome's reputation. Truth be told, even nine pages would look crude, like a cheap erotic book from a street vendor. Who knows if the tome would someday transform into something more grand once fully assembled?

But regardless of how unimpressive it appeared visually, its overwhelming aura was undeniable. It was far more powerful than it had been with just two pages. The moment it was taken out, it exuded an aura so intense that it felt oppressive, a pressure that would make it difficult for others to even approach.

Zhao Changhe did not dare to recklessly let the Heavenly Tome's aura be released. He quickly stored it in his ring and focused on sensing it with his mind.

Luckily, this is the Night Emperor's ring. If it were just a regular storage ring, it probably wouldn't have been able to contain the Heavenly Tome's aura.

His consciousness entered the ring, and he found himself in that familiar illusory landscape of beautiful mountains and clear waters. However, this time, there was a difference. Previously, there had only been flowers, grass, and occasionally the imagery of white cranes flying past. But now, he could clearly see phoenixes soaring, dragons roaring, and all sorts of rare and mythical beasts roaming freely.

The aura of the Heavenly Dao lingered indistinctly, and countless ineffable insights flowed through his heart.

Being immersed in it felt like truly returning to the primal wilderness of the previous era.

It was in this kind of environment that the ancients rose, comprehended the heavens and the earth, learned from the divine beasts, and began the path of martial arts.

Theoretically, these three pages could already be said to encompass the entirety of martial arts. Zhao Changhe found it difficult to imagine what content the subsequent pages might have.

The second page, which he had acquired earlier, could be called the page of nature, and the blind woman's primary introduction of it had been related to helping Tang Wanzhuang's condition. It had

definitely been useful—at least her life had been extended. Otherwise, Zhao Changhe would have fully expected her to have left this world by the time he returned.

As for the effects it had on him, they were not as significant. It merely helped him learn to sense and use his surroundings when breaking through the first layer of the Profound Mysteries. While it had also benefited his masteries of the Spring Water Sword Intent and the Thief Saint's movement art, it mainly impacted his sensing of the surrounding vicious qi, though that was not even particularly related to the Dao of nature itself.

Of course, since it had helped him break through to the first layer of the Profound Mysteries, it was still incredibly significant.

But the third page, the page of life, was of unparalleled importance to Zhao Changhe. It was practically tailor-made for him.

For now, the Blood Asura Body could be set aside, but as he continued to make breakthroughs, he would certainly need the support of this page. It was clear the two were strongly connected.

The most pressing issue was still the problem with his meridians.

Having narrow and rigid meridians was a significant issue as it was practically the foundation of a person's martial arts aptitude, and it was rare for any treasures to be capable of altering that. However, it was fundamentally still a basic problem, and there was surely a way to solve it—after all, Kou Zhong and Xu Ziling<sup>[1]</sup> had managed to solve their issues through the jade of the He family<sup>[ref]</sup> Also known as Mr. He's Jade and He Shi Bi (和氏璧). It served as both a catalyst and a symbol for their ambition and journey to become able to contend for the highest power in the land. The jade also has a very interesting history in real life Chinese legends.<sup>[/ref]</sup>

Venerable Dulou's Eternal Blood Demon Body was a great example—he could quite literally regenerate an entire body from just a single drop of blood. The problem with Zhao Changhe's meridians could not be worse than that, right? After all, Venerable Duoluo didn't even have any meridians left. He developed an entirely new body from scratch.

Of course, Venerable Duoluo could only achieve that by relying on this very page of the Heavenly Tome. Now that the Heavenly Tome was right in front of him, Zhao Changhe did not believe he would not be able to overcome this particular shortcoming.

But one thing did seem strange: while Venerable Duoluo had been able to draw on the power of the Heavenly Tome, Zhao Changhe, despite having carried the Heavenly Tome with him for so long, had not found a way to harness its power for himself.

Even now, though he could use it to create a vision that compelled the Spirit Tribe to kneel, harnessing its power to reshape his meridians was beyond reach. He could not even locate where its energy was.

Could it be possible that while the Heavenly Tome is yet to be fully collected, its energy can be used by anyone, but once it's collected, the blind woman siphons all of its energy for herself?

That must be it. If all the gods and demons across the heavens are in a weakened state, then the blind woman must be as well. With that being the case, what is she relying on to recover?

Damn it.

“Hey, blind woman.”

The blind woman played dead and did not respond.

“You were urging me to get the Heavenly Tome even when I was injured, even entering my dreams, yet now that I've got it, you're playing dead?” Zhao Changhe said. “You said that getting the Heavenly Tome was for my own benefit, but what good does it really do me? If you don't give me something worthwhile, I'm not getting the next page. Just let someone else do it.”

The blind woman remained silent.

What good does it do you? I was actually planning to push you to look at the Heavenly Tome sooner, so you'd get a taste of its sweetness and be more eager for the rest. But you decided not to taste the sweetness. Well, suit yourself.

The two of them remained in a stalemate for a while. Zhao Changhe was quite surprised that even after making such a harsh threat, the blind woman still did not respond.

Could she really not be here? If she isn't here, there's nothing I can do...

Zhao Changhe reluctantly began exploring on his own, hoping to find a way by combining the three pages of the Heavenly Tome. After all, the second page could provide guidance on medicine, the third page could serve as a reference for the body and its blood, and he also had the Rejuvenation Art. He should thus be able to manage even without the blind woman.

Zhao Changhe tried to channel his true qi into the ring, using the Dragon Capturing Art to maintain the connection between the true qi and his body. He used the true qi as a substitute for his hand to lightly caress the Heavenly Tome.

The blind woman: "..."

Of course, Zhao Changhe was not just caressing her. He wanted the Heavenly Tome to perceive the state of his true qi. Based on his understanding of the Heavenly Tome, it should reveal the issues he had and provide a solution.

As expected, before long, large words began appearing in the virtual reality landscape: "A newly created divine art of the current era... self-titled as the Six Harmonies Art. This cultivation technique is righteous and grand, embodying an imperial intent of unifying the six harmonies and internalizing the concept of all rivers converging into the sea. It accommodates the blending of all energies, righteous and incorruptible, repelling all evil."

After all that, it was just analyzing the Six Harmonies Art.

Zhao Changhe continued reading patiently, and soon the Heavenly Tome began its critique: "However, the meridians of the user are frail, the true qi is feeble, and vicious blood qi hangs overhead, suppressing it. It is like Mount Tai suspended upside-down, an emperor dwelling in the underworld, with beasts adorning the walls of the palace."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

The blind woman crossed her arms. This truly was not her critique. If it were her, she would have said "the fool with his frail meridians is the real beast."

"The meridians are difficult to expand perfectly, and thus it is better to simply rebuild them. The Eternal Sword Body, the Eternal Demon Body, the Creation Sacred Body, the Sun-Changing Divine Art... all can accomplish this..."

The Heavenly Tome then went on to list more than thirty different applicable methods.

Zhao Changhe's lips twitched. "What's the point of giving me all these names? How about providing me with an actual cultivation technique or body-tempering technique that I can practice?"

"Nothing can be created from nothing."

Zhao Changhe moved his true qi and pressed a spirit bag against the Heavenly Tome. "What about now?"

Inside the spirit bag was Venerable Duoluo's remnant soul. Since Venerable Duoluo had the Eternal Blood Demon Body, all the Heavenly Tome needed to do was analyze it, and that should settle things.

The blind woman watched Zhao Changhe's sequence of actions quietly, feeling somewhat conflicted inside.

This guy really didn't keep asking for help. He actually managed to come up with something on his own using his resources.

And sure enough, the way to cultivate the Eternal Blood Demon Body began to appear word by word on the Heavenly Tome.

Zhao Changhe pondered as he read the technique. It was originally the White Lotus Sacred Body of ancient Buddhism, which primarily had a strong healing ability and did not inherently possess the ability of indestructibility or rebirth... After Venerable Duoluo merged with the Blood Ao, which itself was a species of longevity, he seized and integrated its powerful immortal bloodline, acquired numerous Spirit Tribe flesh and blood witchcraft manuals, and drew upon the vitality of many innocent boys and girls. Combining all this with his original cultivation technique, he finally transformed it into this unique demon body.

The prerequisites for practicing it were very high. First, one needed the level of a yin spirit. The soul needed to be stable enough to reside in an object without easily dissipating. Without even reaching that point, there was no need to talk about rebuilding a body.

Furthermore, Venerable Duoluo also relied on the energy of the Heavenly Tome to complete the process. Without such divine power, the so-called eternal or indestructible aspect of the physique was pure exaggeration.

It seemed like it would not be directly useful for himself. However, the specific method for the reconstruction of the body still held considerable reference value, and parts of it could be incorporated into his Blood Asura Body, granting it a characteristic of rapid recovery.

Ultimately, it was all about manipulating blood and qi. Venerable Duoluo's attack patterns, which were derived from merging with the Blood Ao, were actually quite similar to Lie's Vicious Blood Art. They could be traced to the same origin for reference. Plus, Zhao Changhe also had the Rejuvenation Art...

Zhao Changhe stood still for a long, long time before suddenly leaving his room and heading beyond the mountain.

On the previous battlefield, the Blood Ao's corpse still lay on the ground, guarded by a group of Spirit Tribe members. Sisi had so many things to deal with that she had forgotten to arrange for the handling of the corpse.

Seeing Zhao Changhe approach, the Spirit Tribe guards all kowtowed and said, "Greetings, Sacred Envoy."

Zhao Changhe nodded without saying much to them. He drew Dragon Bird and cut off a piece of meat from the Blood Ao, then headed toward the mountain that had the Ao Pool. There, he jumped straight in.

The longevity factor within the flesh of the Ao could be analyzed and extracted under the influence of the right cultivation technique.

The life bloodline power within the pool of blood could also be sensed and absorbed with the right method.

Zhao Changhe tried taking out Dragon Bird and cutting open his own arm. He simultaneously activated the Rejuvenation Art and part of the restructuring method of the Eternal Blood Demon Body, and in an instant, the wound on his arm healed visibly, growing new flesh.



Zhao Changhe took a deep breath, a fierce glint flashing in his eyes. Suddenly, he gathered his power and violently exhaled, shattering a section of the meridians in his pinky finger—the endpoint of the small intestine meridian, Hand Taiyang, specifically the Shaoze acupoint[2].

The blind woman's eyes widened in shock.

How ruthless. He really went ahead with experimenting on himself, shattering a small part of his own meridians just to see if they could be rebuilt!

Even if a person lost their pinky, it would not affect them much, so breaking this small section of a minor meridian certainly would not have any significant impact. It was just a question of whether he had the nerve to do it.

Zhao Changhe was drenched in cold sweat from the pain, but his eyes grew sharper and more focused.

All of his knowledge and experience began to work in unison. The wild energy of the blood pool surged into him, and within his inner vision, the shattered meridians started to regenerate little by little, forming brand-new meridians.

Compared to the original, they were three to five times thicker.

Chapter 499: Changing Muscles and Forging Bones

It actually works!

For a brief moment, Zhao Changhe even had an outlandish thought... If I cut off certain body parts and regrow them, will they also grow back three to five times bigger?

He quickly dismissed this absurd idea. After all, he had just made a cut on his arm earlier, and his arm had not grown any thicker.

The reason he needed to reshape his meridians was simply that his meridians were incompatible with his cultivation. Reshaping them was like melting down an old weapon and recasting it in a new mold to match the current state of his body.

This process utilized the vast vitality present within this place. He could not afford to waste any of it, lest he end up needing more.

Besides, his little brother down there was already unmatched in the world, so was there really a need to regrow it? That would be overkill.

Zhao Changhe took a few deep breaths, feeling a sense of joy at experiencing the newly formed meridians. Though the pain had been excruciating, the sense of satisfaction that came right after was something nobody else would be able to understand.

Many might think that Zhao Changhe was already an unstoppable force, having advanced faster than anyone else, thereby inferring that having weaker meridians did not matter that much. However, only a handful understood how long Zhao Changhe had been tormented by this issue from the moment he had transmigrated into this world. This very issue had almost become a nightmare for him.

If it were not for his inadequate meridians... With a wondrous cultivation technique like the Six Harmonies Art, he could have advanced much faster. Coupled with the Sword Emperor's legacy, the Tang Clan's sword art, or even Xia Longyuan's personal instruction, he would have been just as powerful and handsome but without any drawbacks.

Instead, he had to cling bitterly to the Vicious Blood Art. He could not take full advantage of the opportunities he found with the various experts, and his cultivation faced constant barriers, needing various rare herbs or medicines, many of which were nearly impossible to obtain. At the same time, he also had to endure the agonizing backlash of vicious blood qi. If it were not for certain fortunate circumstances, it would not have been possible to get this far using just the Vicious Blood Art—as evidenced by Cult Leader Xue.

Even after all those fortuitous opportunities he came across, he was still mocked by the Dragon Bird as a fool.

Moreover, every time it came time for a breakthrough—from the layers of the Profound Gate to the present—it was always his internal cultivation that held him back.

The transformation effect of the Zhenwu Sword Stone in the Black Tortoise Secret Realm had alleviated this problem somewhat, allowing him to progress through the later stages of the Profound Gate to the Profound Mysteries without further obstacles. For a long while, even Zhao Changhe himself had stopped worrying about it, since the Vicious Blood Art had become deeply ingrained as his main cultivation technique, and he no longer wanted to switch.

But before long, the same problem reared its head again. Yue Hongling's experience made it clear that without addressing the issue with his meridians, his internal and external cultivation would remain uncoordinated, preventing him from breaking through to the second layer of the Profound Mysteries... In other words, the issue that had once held him back had resurfaced and needed urgent resolution.

If he did not completely solve this problem with his meridians, there was no telling how much trouble it would cause in the future.

And now, the solution was right in front of him!

Even though it definitely hurt, and he no longer had someone to transfer the pain he was feeling to, so what?

Having coming this far, he had already inflicted pain on himself countless times. One more time would not make a difference!

With a soft crack, the Hand Taiyang meridian shattered from his pinky and began to reform, little by little.

Beads of sweat as large as beans dripped into the blood pool, dissolving without a trace.

The blind woman stood silently at the side, and for the first time, she felt a bit of admiration for him

The pain of breaking and reshaping meridians was even more intense than death by a thousand cuts. And the human body was filled with meridians. This was not an ordeal that would just be one and done.

He really is a man of iron.

Nobody knew that when she set up the trial involving repeated death and resurrection for the candidates through their nightmares, there were multiple layers of reasoning behind the setup... One of those layers was to see their resilience and how ruthless they could be, particularly to themselves.

The experience of dying and coming back to life, over and over again, was not just a simple dream. The sensations that the candidates felt matched what they would have felt in reality had they truly experienced it. Some went mad, and some jumped to their deaths... The ones who went mad, she cured; those who jumped, she brought back. In the end, very few managed to pass.

Zhao Changhe had endured such torment for ten days, longer than even Xia Longyuan had.

His resilience was reflected in every aspect of his life since he arrived in this world. Sure, it was often said that a man under the influence of vicious blood qi acted as such, but Zhao Changhe was rarely influenced by vicious blood qi. On the contrary, he even had a bit of cunning. Even at this moment, he was deliberately using the state induced by No Man's Land to dull the pain, essentially administering himself anesthesia.

But vicious blood qi could never be a true anesthetic. He could still feel everything—after all, if he had lost all feeling, how could he carry out the delicate task of recreating his meridians? The vicious blood qi merely slightly reduced the pain. The blind woman admitted that she herself would not be able to bear such pain, and she would not even dare to consider doing something of the sort.

She had no idea if Zhao Changhe would be able to endure to the end or if he would faint from the pain. But if he did make it through to the end, it would mean more than just improving his meridians.

In fact, there was a technical term for his actions: Changing Muscles and Forging Bones[1].

The new meridians would be beyond human; they would be the precursor to the body of a god or demon.

This was a path to ascension, a path to godhood.

There were many paths, and this was certainly the most difficult one, but he had already set foot on it without realizing. And if he crossed this hurdle, he would find that this path was wide and unobstructed.

Crack...

The blind woman came back to her senses and immediately checked on his progress.

Zhao Changhe's small intestine meridian had been completely reshaped.

The actual time it had taken was not long... But for Zhao Changhe, who had experienced it, it must have felt like an eternity had passed.

He gasped heavily, shakily taking out a pill and swallowing it to regain some energy. After resting briefly, he moved on to another meridian. This time, it was a major one—the Conception Vessel.

The Conception and Governing Vessels were the body's main energy pathways. They were essential for the breakthroughs associated with the nine layers of the Profound Gate. Such crucial meridians had to be prioritized while his mental state was still relatively intact

Being tough was one thing, but he was also extremely rational in his approach.

The blind woman sighed. If someone like him failed, it would truly be a cruel hand by fate.

The blind woman watched quietly as sweat poured down Zhao Changhe's twitching face. After a moment of hesitation, she gently flicked her fingers.

A unique energy quietly protected Zhao Changhe's spiritual platform.

It would be too much of a pity if such a monumental effort ends in failure simply because he faints from the pain...

This act had already violated her principle of not actively aiding any mortal, but perhaps this could be considered a gray area. Was it really helping? He was doing everything himself—he had not even asked for the method to improve. He had pieced together how to move forward by passively extracting information from the Heavenly Tome, combining the Blood Asura Body, the Eternal Blood Demon Body, the Rejuvenation Art, and the Blood Ao. In a sense, it could even be called his own creation.

He didn't know how time passed.

The moon was high in the sky when Zhao Changhe's consciousness began to blur. At this moment, he only had one meridian left to reshape, the Foot Taiyin spleen meridian, but he had no energy left.

The exhaustion from enduring pain not only clouded his mind but also sapped his energy.

No pills could help him now. Consuming too much energy and medicinal pills in such a short period had reached its limit; nothing more would help.

He was so disoriented that he did not even notice that the energy in the blood pool had been completely depleted. What was left now was a crystal-clear pool... It had been reduced to pure water. All impurities and filth had been cleansed by the once-immense vitality, and now, the pool was purer than anything modern technology could produce.

With the vitality depleted, Zhao Changhe grew weaker, leaning against the edge of the pool in a daze. It felt like there was a lazy voice in his mind, telling him that missing just one meridian would not change much, and maybe he could just be a cripple?

He was so exhausted that he did not even want to move anymore...

Yet, he was unwilling to give up.

In his muddled state, Zhao Changhe still slowly attempted to continue the reshaping process. He tried, but he was so powerless that he could not even shatter the remaining meridian.

The blind woman hesitated, unsure whether she should give him another push... Is this Heaven's Will? This heaven has no Dao, so what even is Heaven's Will?!

At that moment, the blind woman's expression suddenly shifted—someone was approaching.

A faint voice could be heard in the distance. "The sacred envoy took the meat of the Blood Ao and went to the Ao Pool?"

"Yes... He's been on the mountain for a long time now. Everyone clearly heard screams coming from inside every now and then... We were worried something might have happened, so we reported it to Your Majesty. We apologize for having disturbed your rest."

“You did well in reporting this, and you will be generously rewarded. Now, stay at the foot of the mountain, and don’t let anyone come up.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Under the hazy moonlight, Sisi approached, walking along the moonlit path. From a distance, she noticed the clear water in the pool and was startled. Immediately afterward, she saw Zhao Changhe leaning lifelessly against the edge of the pool. Forgetting her astonishment at the change to the pool, she rushed swiftly to his side and immediately examined him

“He’s exhausted himself?” The result left Sisi deeply puzzled. “He’s so exhausted that he’s on the verge of unconsciousness? Who was he fighting so intensely against? The blood of the Ao Pool? No... His meridians...”

Sisi’s eyes widened in shock. “Changing Muscles and Forging Bones!”

She examined him carefully for a while and confirmed that he was indeed undergoing Changing Muscles and Forging Bones, and he was almost finished. Only one meridian remained weak, standing out amongst the surrounding robust and radiant meridians.

Energy was still flowing within Zhao Changhe, attempting to shatter this last meridian—a final, stubborn struggle. Unfortunately, he had no strength left and could not manage...

Sisi tried to feed him a pill, but found that his body was no longer absorbing its effects... Is it because he’s ingested too much in such a short time that his body is now rejecting it?

Sisi stared blankly at Zhao Changhe’s face and gently bit her lip.

There was another way to replenish energy and restore strength besides medicine. Sisi had once disguised herself as a celestial maiden of the Maitreya Cult and was no stranger to the Pure Bliss Art.

She was willing, but what about him?

While she was hesitating, Zhao Changhe's eyelids twitched slightly, as if he was trying to open his eyes.

Startled, Sisi instinctively hid behind a nearby rock. Then, she mockingly tapped her own head. What am I afraid of? Am I seriously afraid that he would see me and refuse me?

But I really like him...

Leaning against the rock, Sisi stood there, lost in thought for a long while. She then smiled to herself mockingly, slowly taking out a set of red clothes from her ring and some disguise materials she had not used in a long time. She applied them to her face.

Zhao Changhe, having sensed someone examining him, managed to open his eyes with difficulty but saw no one. In his daze, he saw Yue Hongling appear from behind a nearby rock.

"Hongling..." Zhao Changhe murmured weakly. "I can't hold on anymore... Help me, I'm so close..."

"Yue Hongling" slowly undressed and entered the water, her voice soft, "I've examined you. I know... It's okay, I'm here."

Zhao Changhe completely relaxed, soon feeling a warm sensation on his lips as they were kissed gently.

The aura of the Pure Bliss Art entered his body, gradually stirring his depleted dantian, reigniting the warmth in his lower abdomen.

The demonic arts of evil cults were such that even if you were drained dry, they could make you a man once more.

"Yue Hongling" wrapped her arms around his neck and slowly sat atop him.

Energy began to circulate, yin giving rise to yang.



Before long, Zhao Changhe felt energy being generated within him again, and strength returning to his body.

Gathering his last bit of determination, he fiercely shattered the final meridian.

The hazy moonlight hid in the shadows of swaying trees.

Crack...

No one knew how much time had passed, but the last of the Foot Taiyin spleen meridian was finally reshaped, and the process of Changing Muscles and Forging Bones was now complete.

Zhao Changhe opened his eyes. The scent of perfume still lingered, but “Yue Hongling” had disappeared.

The sky was already beginning to lighten. The last events of the previous night seemed unreal, like an ethereal dream.

Chapter 500: Tell Him Later

Zhao Changhe got up from the pool and directly used the Six Harmonies Art to dry his clothes.

With a loud boom, his clothes were almost turned to ash by his true qi.

Even Zhao Changhe was startled. Upon inspecting himself internally, he saw vast and boundless true qi surging like a rushing river, almost creating an illusion of roaring waves.

He had grown several times stronger than before!

The once weak and secondary Six Harmonies Art had now risen fully, standing toe to toe with the power of the Blood Asura Body.

He had already cultivated the Blood Asura Body to the second stage, yet it could not suppress the Six Harmonies Art. The intent to break free and claim dominance over the vicious blood qi was apparent.

But for now, neither could fully suppress the other. They were evenly matched, caught in a stalemate, intertwining and even beginning to spiral together.

Zhao Changhe clenched his fist and then opened it, staring at his palm in a daze. He could feel the surging power within himself. He had never felt this strong before.

In terms of sheer power, he was likely already comparable to those at the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, or at least very close.

All that was left was that final insight, the last step before breaking through to the second layer. His current state was similar to Yue Hongling's before she defeated Shi Wuding.

Previously, the gap had seemed immense, but in just two days, he had reached this point.

I should be half a step into the Ranking of Earth now, right?

If Wang Daozhong were to come now, Zhao Changhe felt that he could take him on even without relying on Dragon Bird's power, though whether he could kill him was another matter.

He let out a long sigh and began descending the mountain.

Figuring out how to take that final step was not something to worry about now. For the moment, he needed to find Yue Hongling. What happened last night? Why did she leave like that?

\* \* \*

Yue Hongling was not resting in her room.

After Zhao Changhe had completely reshaped his meridians and fallen asleep in exhaustion, Sisi quietly left. Halfway down the mountain, she saw a figure in a red dress standing silently, as if waiting for her.

The guards at the foot of the mountain had been ordered not to let anyone up, but that meant nothing to Yue Hongling.

However, she had stopped halfway up the mountain, not proceeding further. It was as if she understood what was happening above and chose not to interfere, choosing instead to stay and keep watch.

Sisi hesitated slightly, then eventually lowered her head and walked over. “Big Sis Yue... I didn’t use any gu.”

Yue Hongling felt a pang of heartache upon hearing this. She looked at Sisi for a while. There were a thousand things she wanted to say but found herself unable to voice them out. Finally, it all condensed into two words, “Thank you...”

Sisi was surprised. “You’re thanking me? Does disguising myself as you give you some sense of participation? Is that really fine with you? Well, I guess you once pretended to be me and, well, hmm-hmm-hmm with him.”

“...” Yue Hongling’s sympathy almost vanished at that moment. She did not know whether to laugh or cry. Even now, Sisi could not help but be provocative.

Nonetheless, it did not change the fact that the first time she gave herself to him, Zhao Changhe did not even know it was her.

She could have taken the opportunity to use a gu to control him, but she did not do anything of the sort—she gave up her purity for practically nothing.

Watching Sisi remove her disguise, Yue Hongling sighed. “When he wakes up, should we tell him?”

Sisi looked up, considering it. “Can you do me a small favor?”

“What is it?”

“Tell him after you two leave.”

Yue Hongling was puzzled. “Why? We’re clearly going to stay here for some time. Do you really want to remain in a position where he hesitates and only sees you as a servant?”

“I’m fine with it.”

“...”

Sisi pouted. “It’s not like I’m asking you to lie to him forever, just tell him a few days later. Can you do me this favor?”

Yue Hongling felt that even if Sisi were to make a mistake in front of her at this point, she would still indulge her. This small request seemed harmless, so she nodded.

Sisi smiled and finally changed back into her royal attire, gracefully passing by Yue Hongling as she descended the mountain. “It’s settled then—don’t spill the secret just yet... Ah!”

Perhaps a sudden movement caused her some pain—Sisi nearly stumbled, then quickly ran away, embarrassed, while avoiding looking at Yue Hongling, lifting her skirt as she dashed off.

Yue Hongling was both amused and angry, unsure of what that little enchantress was thinking.

The mischievous girl hurried back to her own sacred temple, recalled Yue Hongling’s bewildered expression, and muttered quietly, “Because that way, he’ll think of me more often. My dear Big Sis Yue, you’re so straightforward—how will you ever compete with those crafty witches who are also after him?”

Meanwhile, Yue Hongling climbed back up the mountain to check on Zhao Changhe. As she reached the summit, she saw Zhao Changhe coming down. The two stared at each other for a moment and then they both smiled.

“Did it work?” Yue Hongling asked.

“It did.” Since Yue Hongling was here, Zhao Changhe did not ask where she had disappeared to earlier. He strode forward and hugged her tightly, giving her a fierce kiss. “My dear big sister, you truly are my goddess.”

Yue Hongling felt extremely conflicted. She had not realized when she agreed to Sisi's request that taking credit for someone else's deeds would feel so uncomfortable. She had no idea how she was supposed to respond to him.

As she struggled with her thoughts, she noticed Zhao Changhe's muscles stiffen slightly.

She quickly changed the topic. "What's wrong? Is there still some misalignment? Do you need to inspect your body and make some adjustments?"

"No..." Zhao Changhe hesitated. He felt that her scent did not quite match the one from last night. But since he had been in a daze, he could not trust his perception entirely.

He did not think much of it, and he just took Yue Hongling's hand and led her down the mountain. "It's already dawn, let's go. I want to check on Wubing's condition to see if I can help him with my current abilities. Also, today should be a key day for Sisi in establishing her new kingdom's structure. I want to observe and maybe provide some suggestions. Would you like to come along? Watching a queen hold court could be quite an experience."

Yue Hongling did not refuse, even though she knew nothing of these sorts of matters and was not particularly interested either. After this recent experience, she felt that she needed a broader perspective, and that she should learn when given the opportunity.

Hm, it's strange. How come Zhao Changhe has such a broad perspective? Is he really the same person I rescued from Zhao Family Village...

After searching around for some time, the two of them failed to find Han Wubing. It was only after searching around that they came to be informed that he had already left the previous night, departing the secret realm with the Xia soldiers who entered.

However, he left a note for Zhao Changhe, which a maid handed over.

My sword qi is already recovering and should be back to normal in a few days. There's no need for you to worry about me.

The Sword Hut is where I come from, and no matter how things end, the past ties remain. Now, with the Snow-Listening Pavilion's involvement in the background, I'm uneasy and can't bear to stay here and heal, so I'm leaving to investigate.

I wanted to say goodbye to you, but they said you were in the sacred temple. Receiving the Spirit Tribe and stabilizing Miaojiang are indeed important matters for the world. I don't understand these kinds of things, so I won't disturb you. The Xia soldiers are leaving, and I'm going to be heading out with them. Once I'm out, I'll stay in Taoyuan Town for a while. Perhaps I can help the Spirit Tribe in Miaojiang as a show of support.

As for encountering some exotic girl here, I gave it some serious thought and realized I can't do it. It would just interfere with my sword. Everyone has their own path, so just forget it.

Once my sword has improved, I want to fight you again. Just how are you progressing so fast, damn it.

Anyway, that's all. Goodbye.

Zhao Changhe: "..."

He turned the note over and read it several times, quite surprised. "Putting aside the arrogance in his words, I'm honestly quite surprised that he actually wrote a letter to say goodbye... The old Han Wubing would have just left without a word. He's really changed a lot..."

Yue Hongling said, "The whole incident with Shi Wuding would have been impactful to anyone, and all the more to someone like him. Han Wubing has always been solitary. It's always been hard for him to make friends. You are an exception to him, so of course, he cherishes your friendship."

Zhao Changhe nodded, his gaze lingering on the words "I want to fight you again" for a long time, a smile forming on his face.

It seemed the hearts of warriors were all like this—truth be told, he also wanted to fight again but was just too embarrassed to say it.

Back then, the duel they had agreed upon at Sword Lake had too many interruptions, and the fight had been far from satisfying.

Hopefully, when they fought again, they would both be at the pinnacle of this world, creating a tale worth remembering.

In good spirits, Zhao Changhe put the note away, gently swinging Yue Hongling's hand as they walked together to the sacred temple.

Before they even entered, they heard Sisi's cold, dignified voice inside: "...Establish a Bureau of Beast Control. We shall be appointing Mu En, the former sacred mountain guardian elder, as the temple minister. He will be tasked with organizing the secret arts of various tribes and searching for the texts taken by Duoluo, focusing on the ancient spirit-taming techniques of our tribe."

"Tiger Roar Village holds the merit of guiding the sacred envoy. They are hereby promoted to a protectorate tribe of the sacred temple and are granted mountain forest lands..."

"Thousand Snakes Village holds the merit of slaying Shi Wuding. They are granted..."

It was unclear how many other changes had already been made, but it was evident that Sisi had been deliberately collecting references from the Great Xia Empire's governance and the former Black Hmong Kingdom's system during her time outside. Before their eyes, an amalgamation of the ancestral sacred temple and a governing structure was taking shape for an exotic nation.

But Zhao Changhe found himself unable to pay any attention to her words. He stood there, staring at Sisi on the throne, his expression gradually becoming dazed.

The Pure Bliss Art included a technique for observing women. In the past, he could tell that although Huangfu Qing was a concubine, she was still a virgin.

And at this moment, he noticed that the imposing Sisi on the throne... was no longer one.

Am I seeing something wrong?

Wait... Last night... Maybe that really wasn't Hongling?

---

Overview of Zhao Changhe's current state and abilities:

Overall Cultivation Level: Half a step into the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, just one final push away from breaking through.

External Arts: Vicious Blood Art and Blood Asura Body (second stage) External Traits: Greatly enhanced strength and slight improvement in durability. High offense, moderate defense. The previous focus on raw destructive power has been refined into a sharper, more concentrated force (related to mastery of the sword). Recently, after integrating the Eternal Blood Demon Body, Zhao Changhe has also gained a much faster recovery speed.

Internal Arts: Six Harmonies Art (second layer of the Profound Mysteries) Internal Traits: High compatibility with other energies, strong ability to simulate various energy types, great endurance, and strong resistance to abnormal states (such as poisons). The simulation and endurance traits, previously underdeveloped, are now beginning to show their full potential.

Skills:

Saber Arts: Vicious Blood Saber Art (Second Layer of the Profound Mysteries)

Scattering the Gods and Buddhas A jumping chop. High power burst with a fear effect. This move has gone from having to be carried out with a “frog jump” to being usable in normal attacks, though the jumping strike is still the most powerful form. A con: Dragon Bird complains that it makes Zhao Changhe look like he has pink eye.

No Man’s Land A power-boosting buff that enhances all stats and greatly reduces pain sensitivity. Previously, it caused Zhao Changhe to lose control of his mind, but now he is able to retain full clarity while using it. At the second layer of the Profound Mysteries, it can even affect the opponent, causing them to lose focus. Zhao Changhe often feels weak and fatigued afterward, and it makes him susceptible to backlash from vicious qi. Dragon Bird mocks him for looking bloated and paralyzed after using it.

Hell on Earth A horizontal slash. A surprise attack skill, fast and silent. When combined with the Spring Water Sword Intent, Zhao Changhe unleashes his self-created move, humorously named Listening to the Spring Rain in a Little Pavilion at Night, though it’s essentially just a variant of Hell on Earth with the brutal nature concealed, allowing him to launch stealthy attacks.

Bloodied Mountains and Rivers An area-of-effect attack that manipulates surrounding vicious qi to form a mountain of blades and a sea of blood. The more hostile the environment, the greater the power that’s unleashed. It can also be used to target a single individual and force their internal blood and qi to violently rupture, displaying better effects on those filled with intense hostility.



## Army Breaker

A technique taught by Dragon Bird. It involves a crescent-shaped saber slash with immense power, requiring the support of Dragon Bird to be effective.

Yellow Sand Saber Art and Spirit Fox Saber Art Only the intents of these saber arts were taken, learned through the Heavenly Tome by secretly observing Hu Lie and Chi Li.

Sword Arts: His sword arts mainly come from the Sword Emperor's legacy.

Underworld River Surges Each strike drains part of the opponent's energy. The longer the fight lasts, the more Zhao Changhe's power builds up like a raging river.

Sword of Primal Slaughter A focused, high-speed thrust that is nearly unstoppable. Note: Zhao Changhe has distilled three techniques from this legacy. Tang Wanzhuang incorporated them into her saber techniques, leaving only two sword moves. These have been passed on to Yue Hongling.

Spring Water Sword Art A technique learned through the Heavenly Tome and taught by Tang Wanzhuang. He hasn't learned the sword moves themselves, only the sword intent, particularly the reflective and refractive nature of water. This intent is now infused into Listening to the Spring Rain in a Little Pavilion at Night.

Sunset Divine Sword Taught by Yue Hongling during their dual cultivation in Miaojiang, though Zhao Changhe hasn't used it yet. It is believed to be part of the Sword Emperor's later legacy. Additionally, Yue Hongling passed down a large collection of basic sword arts from Luo Family Village, which Zhao Changhe has mostly learned.

Sea-Suppressing Sword Art A technique stolen from the Wang family via the Heavenly Tome. Zhao Changhe has only grasped the basics, primarily using it when impersonating Wang Daozhong.

Fist and Palm Arts: These are rarely used due to him always having a weapon

Azure Waves Clear Ripples A graceful grappling technique taught by Tang Wanzhuang. It's difficult to defend against but comes across as somewhat feminine.

Divine Brilliance Wind and Lightning Palm A defensive palm technique taught by Situ Xiao, capable of generating a mighty thunderous burst upon impact.

Heavenly Sea-Suppressing Palm The Wang Clan's palm art, said to rival the ferocity of the Black Tortoise's fist art. Unfortunately, Zhao Changhe only knows the basics and uses it when impersonating Wang Daozhong.

Crane Controlling Art A method of manipulating objects from a distance, taught to Zhao Changhe by the Thief Saint.

Movement Arts: Zhao Changhe makes use of all three of the below movement art, though he has yet to develop his own unique style.

Blood God Cult's Traceless Soaring Blood

Tang Clan's Water Treading Art

Thief Saint's movement art

Special Abilities:

Rejuvenation Art A healing art originally belonging to the Azure Dragon. It makes use of the fundamental principles of the world. Zhao Changhe's recent improvements, especially after integrating the Eternal Blood Demon Body, have significantly advanced his mastery of this art.

Astral Resonance Art A secret method from the Four Idols Cult, passed down by Vermillion Bird. It involves harmonizing all the body's acupuncture points. It was initially used to break through bottlenecks but may have other future applications.

Disguise Art Taught by the Thief Saint

Pure Bliss Art's Dual Cultivation Technique: Self-explanatory

Pure Bliss Art's Women Observation Technique: Self-explanatory

Pure Bliss Art's Bewitchment Technique: Self-explanatory