

## T. Times 581

### Chapter 581: A Worthy Death

Zhao Changhe had explored many secret realms till now, but this one was very particular.

Unlike before—when he entered a fragment of space—it seemed that this time they were still within the main dimension, just that they had been transported to an incredibly distant location.

The location was an island, complete with mountains, water, and trees. Well... perhaps it would be better described as a peninsula. It was surrounded on three sides by the sea, and to the east, the sky seemed to stretch endlessly. Yet at the eastern end, there was nowhere left to go. There was an impassable boundary that could not be crossed.

Xia Chichi traced her hand along the invisible barrier in front of her. It was like touching the very edge of the sky itself, with the stars shining right before her eyes. They seemed close enough to touch yet remained unreachable beyond the invisible wall.

This was the end of the world—the easternmost extremity, the boundary between sea and sky.

This was the so-called edge of the sea and sky.

If an ordinary person were to set sail eastward indefinitely, they would never reach this place. It was not merely a matter of the limitations of navigation technology or supply issues. Even if all those challenges were someday overcome, this place would remain forever out of reach.

The distorted light earlier was a precursor of the twisted space itself. Just as no one could ever reach the “island” where the previous statue had stood, only finding themselves moving farther away, the same principle applied here. There was no way to arrive here by normal means—the only way was through the teleportation facilitated by that statue.

This feature had likely existed since the beginning of the previous era. Zhao Changhe had wondered why their seafaring adventure was linked to the Azure Dragon, and now it was clear. One of the core concepts of the four idols was the four cardinal extremes of heaven and earth—this was the easternmost extremity, the essence of the Azure Dragon.

This was not the inheritance of the ancient Azure Dragon; rather, it was where the ancient Azure Dragon had attained enlightenment. All the principles related to the Azure Dragon resided here.

Thus, the level of conflict was beyond extreme. This had nearly become a battle of the gods, and those on the Ranking of Heaven were only fit to ambush from the sidelines. Yet in the end, it was they who had arrived here...

At the core of it all was Xia Chichi's cultivation. She had been the one to first determine where the key should be placed, using the markings on that spot to deduce that the key was the Azure Dragon Seal. The Sea Emperor had no such knowledge—he took the Azure Dragon Seal and simply inserted it into a square-shaped hole at the top of the statue's head, and that had clearly failed to do anything.

Lady Three had not become the protagonist either. This was ultimately still Xia Chichi's stage.

Xia Chichi had been drawn by an instinctive attraction to the principles and laws connected to the Azure Dragon, drawing her to focus on the easternmost extremity. Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe, Lady Three, and Hai Pinglan all had their eyes fixed on the golden scroll that floated not far away.

It was the Heavenly Tome, or at least a page of it.

It was highly likely that the very formation of this island they were currently on was due to the accumulation of energy from the Heavenly Tome over countless years. Otherwise, the boundary between the sea and sky would have needed nothing more than the sea—there was no necessity for an island to be here.

Perhaps neither Hai Pinglan nor Lady Three knew what the Heavenly Tome contained, nor could they determine what this page was about. But Zhao Changhe understood quite well. He believed there to be a high likelihood—about eighty to ninety percent—that this page was related to light and darkness, or perhaps to space. If he wished to transcend the realm of martial arts entirely and reach into the mystical and metaphysical, it all depended on the changes this page would bring.

Lady Three shifted silently, positioning herself to block Hai Pinglan's view of the Heavenly Tome.

Hai Pinglan's gaze landed on her, and father and daughter stood silently, eyes locked.

Hai Pinglan asked, "Do you want it?"

Lady Three did not respond, her expression stern.

Whether she wanted it or not was a separate matter. An artifact of this caliber had the potential to ignite infighting within any group, and Hai Pinglan was clearly the one most likely to stir up trouble.

Hai Pinglan simply looked at her quietly, then suddenly smiled.

Lady Three asked, “What are you smiling about?”

Hai Pinglan chuckled. “You’ve grown so calm, so dignified, so immovable... Even though I’ve heard countless stories of Black Tortoise, I never truly believed them until now. Seeing you now... You’ve truly grown up.”

Lady Three could not care less for his words and frowned slightly. “Your voice doesn’t sound right...”

Zhao Changhe sighed. “Uncle is at his limit.”

Lady Three was taken aback, her eyes widening in shock.

Hai Pinglan did not seem bothered at all. He casually sat down, a nonchalant expression on his face. “Old is old. After such an intense battle, I never expected to survive... All I wanted was to destroy the Sea Emperor’s body, to ruin everything that he’s built up over the years—that alone is enough.”

Lady Three bit her lower lip, recalling Hai Pinglan’s earlier conversation with the Sea Emperor. Now, in retrospect, it was clear—Hai Pinglan had never intended to slay the Sea Emperor.

That was impossible.

His plan from the very beginning was to at least take down the Sea God with him—well, at least, the body that the Sea Emperor possessed.

Seeing Lady Three remain silent, Hai Pinglan glanced at Zhao Changhe, his expression turning a bit peculiar. His gaze shifted back and forth between the two of them, and then he could not help but glance over at Xia Chichi. He held back a lot of thoughts, unsure if he should speak them.

Is my daughter... a mistress? Damn it, aren't you supposed to be the Black Tortoise of the Four Idols Cult! How did you end up like this?!

The old man felt a lump stuck in his throat, and it seemed that his already fragile life had been shortened by yet another few minutes.

After a long moment of pressing her lips together, Lady Three finally spoke to Zhao Changhe in a low voice, "You... have the Rejuvenation Art, and medical skills... Can you save him?"

Hai Pinglan blinked, a glimmer of hope briefly lighting up his clouded eyes.

Zhao Changhe said quietly, "He's beyond my saving. I suspect that Uncle breaking through to the Profound Control Realm was made at the cost of his lifespan, which is why he has aged so much. It's a sacrifice of his body's very foundation. Even if I could manage to keep him alive, his lifespan has reached its end. He wouldn't last another month..."

Hai Pinglan burst out laughing. "Why bother prolonging my life?"

He turned to Lady Three, his voice softening. "It's nice to know you still care."

Lady Three snapped, "Mind your own business! If I saw an old beggar on the street, I'd want to help him too!"

"Hah... Right, right..." Hai Pinglan laughed until he began to cough. "I just thought of something."

Lady Three responded coldly, "What?"

Hai Pinglan said, "Once this page of the Heavenly Tome is taken, the coverage blocking the Tome of Troubled Times from recording those at sea will disappear, and the rankings will change. I was wondering—after one of you takes that golden scroll, why don't you kill me to secure a spot on the Ranking of Heaven?"

Zhao Changhe's eyes widened.

Lady Three shouted angrily, "Are you insane?!"

Hai Pinglan smiled slightly and said, "How else can you vent your anger?"

Lady Three sneered. "I have no anger to vent"

Hai Pinglan said softly, "I once spoke to the saintess of your cult. The reason I suppressed you back then was a misunderstanding, but the nature of that misunderstanding was twofold—half because I feared you might have been taken over by the Sea Emperor, and the other half because, well, I feared you would take the opportunity to seize power. Perhaps that latter part weighed even more heavily, especially since you had gathered quite a following. Two suns cannot coexist, and at that time, I could not tolerate it. Ordering Changkong to hunt you down, promising him the position of crown prince—all of it was real, none of it was merely to deceive the Sea Emperor."

Lady Three's expression calmed, and she slowly said, "It doesn't matter now."

"I think it does." Hai Pinglan's voice grew weaker, but he continued smiling. "It shows that, at least back then, I saw you as an enemy... The saintess of your cult was right to curse me. I believed I could always have another daughter... Perhaps even a son, which might have been better."

Lady Three fell silent.

"But later, as I got entangled with the Sea Emperor, I had no time to think about having more children, and even if I did, I wouldn't have been able to protect them. When I eventually got in touch with Hai Qianfan and resolved the misunderstanding, I still didn't send anyone to find you. When you met Hai Qianfan after setting out to sea, I also ordered him not to explain any of this to you... partly because killing intent couldn't be easily washed away, and partly to convince the Sea Emperor that you and I were truly at odds, so his focus wouldn't be on you."

From that point onward, Hai Pinglan had prioritized protecting Lady Three. The lack of explanation was primarily for Lady Three's protection. If he had been thinking like an emperor, he would have cleared the misunderstanding, roped the Four Idols Cult in, and collaborated against the Sea Emperor. But he chose not to, preferring that Lady Three stay comfortably in the Central Plains as a leading figure of her cult, away from the murky waters of the sea.

Zhao Changhe sighed inwardly, realizing how truly complex people were. Thoughts and motives shift across different stages of life, and a definitive label attached to a person would never be able to capture the whole truth. Hai Pinglan was like this, and Xia Longyuan was likely even more complicated.

Lady Three remained silent for a moment before she said softly, "I told you, it doesn't matter now. I'm too lazy to hold grudges."

"I'm saying all these things because I hope that you do hold a grudge. Regardless of my own wrongdoings, the root cause was always the Sea Emperor's invasion of your mother's soul. And even now, he hasn't truly perished. I had originally hoped for Changkong to be the one to continue my will, but now that you're here, it's yours to take."

"Of course. You don't need to tell me to do that."

"Then that's enough." Hai Pinglan removed the ring from his hand and tossed it to Zhao Changhe. "You've done great work, young man. I have nothing to repay you with, so take what's in there as a gift."

As he spoke, he cast a meaningful glance at Lady Three. Lady Three had remained expressionless, but now a faint blush crept onto her face. She glanced over at Xia Chichi, almost out of instinct.

The gesture and the exchange had a certain air about it... almost like a dowry.

Xia Chichi was lost in thought and did not notice.

With a smile lingering on his face, Hai Pinglan slowly closed his eyes. "In the Central Plains, I carved out territory in the south, reigning over half of it. In the Eastern Sea, I roamed freely, establishing the kingdom of Penglai. In the latter half of my life, I contended with the gods, shattered their faith, and destroyed one's body. Having lived such a life, I have no regrets.

"My only regret is falling out with my daughter, perhaps never seeing her even at the end... But when you told Wang Daoning that he was attacking your father... that was the moment when I knew I had no more regrets left in this life. I can die now. I should go keep your mother company... She's waited for me for so, so many years... She has a fiery temper, so she's definitely still on Road of the

Yellow Springs. She must be stubbornly waiting on the road, wanting to ask me if it hurt to kill her... Then she'll swing her sword at me and say, 'Hai Pinglan, you bastard...'"

His voice grew softer and softer until it could barely be heard.

Lady Three stared at his aged face, eyes closed in death, and she continued to look for a very long time. Suddenly, she spoke up in a low voice. "Take the Heavenly Tome. I want to see what the Tome of Troubled Times has to say."

Zhao Changhe quietly took the golden scroll.

A golden light flashed across the sky, and whether on the sea or far away in the Central Plains, people looked up.

It all began in tragedy with the Sea Emperor harming Dragon King Hai Pinglan's beloved in Penglai. For sixteen long years, Hai Pinglan endured, raising pirates for his cause, rousing the Xia Emperor to attack his enemy, burning his lifespan to break through to the next realm, and destroying the Sea Emperor's temple to sever the other party's roots.

In one sudden storm, the sea and sky howled in tandem, a tempestuous symphony of life and death.

The Sea Emperor's flood dragon body exploded, leaving his remaining soul weak and damaged. Hai Pinglan, smiling in front of his daughter, peacefully passed away.

In one day, the raging waves of the furious sea surged, the ruthless sea burying a god beneath its depths.

There were many more details that followed, detailing how the inclusion of the figures of the sea had shifted the rankings and describing the roles of Black Tortoise, Zhao Changhe, and Xia Chichi in the battle.

But for the moment, no one paid attention to those parts. Instead, everyone simply looked up, staring at the reappearance of Dragon King Hai Pinglan who had disappeared from the rankings for thirty years, lost in silent reflection.

Chapter 582: The Dragon King Returns to the Edge of the Sky

If previously Zhao Changhe merely suspected the announcements of the Tome of Troubled Times to be written by the blind woman, this time, it was nearly confirmed.

Even though she claimed that the announcements were simply the feedback of the Heavenly Dao, implying that once something was observed, it had to be recorded or reported—claiming that it had nothing to do with her—there was still clearly someone orchestrating how things were worded and what was included in the rankings.

Why would it display things like this otherwise?

The Sea Emperor commands the Eastern Sea with the body of a flood dragon, supported by his notable protectors and generals.

The protectors are divine constructs created by the Sea Emperor through his mastery over water. Each of these constructs possesses power comparable to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries. These constructs are artificial and can be replicated. Thus, they are not considered true lifeforms and are ineligible for the rankings.

His generals, on the other hand, are sea creatures such as whales and sharks, now awakened and able to take on human forms. They possess power equivalent to those at the second layer of the Profound Mysteries. The numerous shrimp and crab soldiers are too many to list. They are to be ranked with discretion.

In the middle of the ninth month, a protector and a shark general led a force of the Sea Tribe in a nighttime raid on the Heavenly Origin Pirates. Black Tortoise of the Four Idols Cult defeated the protector and slew the shark general with her bare hands, later joining Zhao Changhe in pursuit of the protector to a remote island.

Late into the ninth month, Zhao Changhe fought Penglai's Marshal Hai Changkong at Dongan Island, defeating him in three strikes. Later, Hai Changkong and Zhao Changhe together killed the leader of the Heavenly Origin Pirates, Hai Qianfan, and Black Tortoise once again defeated another protector of the Sea Tribe.

Hai Changkong and Hai Qianfan are both adopted sons of the Dragon King Hai Pinglan, each carrying significant duties and responsibilities. Both possessed power at the second layer of the Profound Mysteries.



At the beginning of the tenth month, Hai Changkong led an attack on the Sea Emperor's temple. After trading blows and injuries, he ultimately managed to slay the Sea Emperor's whale general in the chaotic battle. Unexpectedly, the Tang Clan's warships joined the fray, resulting in Penglai's forces decisively defeating the Sea Tribe, slaughtering thousands of their members, and destroying the temple. Tens of thousands of the Sea Tribe's members perished in this battle, their corpses floating for many li, while Hai Changkong's reputation spread across the Eastern Sea.

Meanwhile, Hai Pinglan drove the tiger against the wolves. Xia Longyuan faced three opponents alone, firmly defeating Tngri, gravely wounding the Sea Emperor, leaving all sides battered and exhausted. His position as number one on the Ranking of Heaven remains unshakable.

Hai Pinglan fought a decisive battle against the Sea Emperor, during which Wang Daoning launched a surprise attack. Black Tortoise of the Four Idols Cult intercepted him, and White Tiger Saintess Xia Chichi harried him. Wang Daoning was defeated and forced to retreat. Zhao Changhe then attacked the Sea Emperor's underbelly, disemboweling him. Black Tortoise joined in, leading to the Sea Emperor's detonation of his flood dragon body.

In this battle, heroes arose, and the seas and skies were overturned.

With the Dragon King's death, the Ranking of Heaven shifts.

Black Tortoise of the Four Idols Cult, at the third layer of the Profound Mysteries, effortlessly defeated the shark general, and two protectors of the Sea Tribe, drove away Wang Daoning, and wounded the Sea Emperor, attaining high merit in this battle. She is worthy of succeeding Hai Pinglan's position.

Ranking of Heaven, Rank 7: Four Idols Cult's Black Tortoise!

Zhao Changhe, during his three battles with the protectors of the Sea Tribe, held his ground. He gravely injured the Sea Emperor's underbelly, establishing the turning point of the battle. His contribution is immense. The feat of harming a god or demon as one on the Ranking of Man is unprecedented.

Ultimately, however, having not directly fought those on the Ranking of heaven, and given that much of his role in this battle was supportive, his ranking is difficult to determine. With Black Tortoise's ascension to the Ranking of Heaven, Zhao Changhe shall temporarily occupy the last position on the Ranking of Earth.

Ranking of Earth, Rank 36: Blood Asura Zhao Changhe.

Marshal Hai Changkong of Penglai, having killed the Sea Tribe's whale general, should have earned a place on the Ranking of Earth. However, having once been defeated by Zhao Changhe, he shall occupy Zhao Changhe's previous position.

Ranking of Man, Rank 1: Hai Changkong.

One could only wonder what Hai Changkong would feel upon seeing himself suddenly at the top of the Ranking of Man. Previously, he had longed for a match with Zhao Changhe, who had been ranked at the top of the Ranking of Man. But now, despite his ambitions having been crushed by Zhao Changhe, he suddenly finds himself ranked at the top of the Ranking of Man, even taking the title of King of Man. It could truly be considered an unintentional triumph.

It was as though the Heavenly Dao were encouraging him: A warrior's heart is not one to falter. To fight the Sea Tribe as a human, successfully driving them back with the corpses of his enemies littering the sea, he certainly did earn the title of King of Man.

But while the narrative of this battle was portrayed as fierce and grand, with encouragement for Hai Changkong, it was also quite clear that Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi were being suppressed.

Although Zhao Changhe played a mostly supportive role in this battle, his contributions and strength were far beyond what the lowest place on the Ranking of Earth warranted. Even those observing the rankings from the Central Plains could deduce as much. After all, he had managed to hold his own against the protectors of the Sea Tribe, water constructs with power comparable to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries, repeatedly. That feat alone warranted one of the higher positions on the Ranking of Earth. Furthermore, Hai Changkong, who defeated the Sea Tribe's whale general, was defeated by Zhao Changhe in three strikes—what did that imply?

With the achievement of injuring a god, how could Zhao Changhe possibly be merely on par with someone like Wang Daozhong? Could Wang Daozhong have broken through the Sea Emperor's defenses?

Likewise, Xia Chichi was barely mentioned, with only a passing note about her ambush on Wang Daoning contributing to Black Tortoise's victory. But the logic applies here as well—would an ordinary person have been able to intervene in a battle between those worthy of being on the Ranking of Heaven? Go ahead, try ambushing Wang Daoning—if Wang Daoning even acknowledges you with a glance, that's his loss!

It was apparent that Xia Chichi had also reached the second layer of the Profound Mysteries. In previous years, that alone would have guaranteed a spot on the Ranking of Earth, yet now she remained on the Ranking of Man, her position unchanged.

Of course, the Tome of Troubled Times followed a set of basic rules: If someone had not fought against those on the ranking, they could not be arbitrarily placed on the ranking. It was unlike the system by which the Ranking of Hidden Dragons operated, and this much was understandable. But if the supposed set of basic rules were to be followed, then fairness should apply across the board. How then did Black Tortoise directly replace Hai Pinglan? Should she not have taken Wang Daoning's place instead? And even that would be debatable, given Xia Chichi's assistance... But to go straight to replacing Hai Pinglan—what was the deeper meaning there?

Hai Pinglan passed away in front of his daughter... who's his daughter?

Most people would not think that deeply, but Zhao Changhe knew immediately that this was undoubtedly the deliberate handiwork of a sentimental author or editor. It represented the inheritance between father and daughter—a partial fulfillment of Hai Pinglan's wishes. He even wanted Lady Three to kill him to claim the position... If Lady Three had not been given the seventh rank, that particular blind woman would have perhaps been left feeling incredibly uncomfortable.

Are you seriously trying to tell me this is an impartial reflection of the Heavenly Dao? Who are you trying to fool?

This also showed that the blind woman had grown more human. This ranking inheritance that defied the usual principles was an acknowledgment of the father-daughter bond and a gesture of respect toward Hai Pinglan himself. It was also a chance to put Zhao Changhe down, suppressing him, and taking a jab at Xia Chichi while she was at it, not even bothering to give them a concluding remark.

It was blatantly obvious.

Moreover, the page of the Heavenly Tome shrouding the Eastern Sea had only just been taken, the concealment only now disappearing—only now were the events of the sea supposed to be officially incorporated into the records of the Tome of Troubled Times. So, how had these earlier battles been recorded? Every detail of Zhao Changhe's battles since his departure was known, and even Hai Pinglan's years-long plans were observed clearly, showcasing the Heavenly Dao's supposed omniscience. If it was so all-knowing, why had any of this not been reported earlier?

It was all about what Zhao Changhe had witnessed. The Eastern Sea was vast—was there really no one else beyond his range worthy of being mentioned on the Ranking of Man or even the Ranking of Hidden Dragons? Not a single person worth a mention? That was simply impossible.

The answer to this, then, was simply that the blind woman had not seen them. Her eyes were right here, right on him—perhaps even focused entirely on him. What other explanation could there be?

Oh, I guess there's the battle at the Sea Emperor's temple. I hadn't seen that event myself... But who knows when that took place? It would be more likely that she only saw it after this golden scroll was taken. From that moment onward, she was probably able to see everything that's been going on here in the Eastern Sea. She just deliberately put the retelling of Hai Changkong's battle at the front to make it seem as though she had seen it earlier. Fool others if you will, but you think you can fool Zhao Changhe?

So, the thought that he was a mere camera was absolutely correct—he had been the blind woman's camera all along.

The observer shall eventually be observed—mark my words.

Zhao Changhe vented in his mind, but he did not bother to examine the new page of the Heavenly Tome in his possession. Instead, he carefully observed Lady Three's profile.

With such a grand recounting, Hai Pinglan had become immortalized in history, passing away with a smile, seemingly without regrets. But for Lady Three, her father was still gone, and the entangled feelings of grudges and affection were far from being resolved... He could not begin to imagine how Lady Three—slow as she was to process emotions—was feeling at this moment.

Lady Three withdrew her gaze from the sky, focusing it back on Hai Pinglan's face. She stared for a long while before murmuring, "There's soil here... That's good. Although they called him the Dragon King of the Sea, he'd hate a burial at sea. He was a man of Jiangnan through and through, believing in the peace of being laid to rest in the earth."

Zhao Changhe exchanged glances with Xia Chichi, both of them saying, "Then we'll help you dig him a grave."

"No need." Lady Three brushed a stray lock of hair behind her ear, then turned and smiled. "Chichi is badly hurt, and you're practically paralyzed on one side. Yet here you both are, calmly sitting around. Neither of you have even taken a single medicinal pill nor have you even bandaged your

wounds. You've just been watching us father and daughter have our talk for half the day. And you even took the time to look at the announcements of the Tome of Troubled Times. What's so interesting about that lousy tome?"

"Uh..." It just ranked you seventh on the Ranking of Heaven... You better be careful or that blind woman might make things more difficult for you in the future.

Lady Three suddenly clenched her fist and slammed it into the ground. "Do you really think I need your help to dig a grave?"

With a thunderous sound, earth and stones scattered as a perfectly neat grave, a good ten zhang deep, appeared in the ground, showcasing Lady Three's extraordinary cultivation and exquisite control.

Lady Three bent down, lifting Hai Pinglan's body and placing it in the grave. She quietly filled it with earth, then picked up a piece of wood, sliced it smoothly with her palm, and carved a few words onto it.

Dragon King Hai Pinglan, returning to the edge of the sky.

#### Chapter 583: The Kind-Hearted Venerable

With everything settled, Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi finally began to tend to their wounds.

Lady Three's scolding had been right on target. Both of them were so badly injured, yet they had the leisure to watch other people's family drama and even read the announcements of the Tome of Troubled Times. It seemed that gossiping was truly a human instinct, something regarded more important than tending to one's injuries.

Zhao Changhe paid a painful price for his indulgence.

Thanks to the Blood Asura Body, which had assimilated the regenerative abilities of the Eternal Blood Demon Body, Zhao Changhe was only really vulnerable to injuries of the soul or internal damage; external wounds were not much of a concern for him. His bones had been fractured, his muscles torn from being crushed by the Sea Emperor, but he still saw it as a superficial injury that would heal itself over time. He thought he was tough enough to endure it.

But he had forgotten about one thing—his body wouldn't just magically regenerate. The healing process was accelerated, but perfectly ordinary otherwise: blood would coagulate and his wounds would be covered in clots that would later scab. And this process had practically glued his clothes to his body. Trying to tear his clothes off now was no different from going through torture. The agony was unbearable.

Zhao Changhe cried out in pain as he tore his shirt off, nearly shedding tears from the pain. The simple removal of his shirt actually hurt worse than having his bones shattered.

Xia Chichi, on the other hand, had it even worse. At least Zhao Changhe, while watching the drama, had managed to score some dowry. Xia Chichi had gotten nothing out of it. The aftermath of the blow she had taken from Wang Daoning now surged through her body, and her eyes rolled back as she directly fainted.

Lady Three, who was quietly paying her respects at the grave, kept her gaze straight ahead. "I refuse to acknowledge her as fit to be our cult leader."

Zhao Changhe grimaced as he shuffled over, lifting Xia Chichi and cradling her in his right arm. He glanced over at Lady Three, who still had her back turned, then quickly lowered his head and pressed his lips to Xia Chichi's, discreetly feeding her a pill.

All of his original medicine had been used up back on that deserted island. The pill he was using now was from the dowry Hai Pinglan had given him. Zhao Changhe's medical skills were decent, and he had quickly identified the uses of each type of medicine, deciding this pill was one that Chichi needed.

And he did this right next to Lady Three—if that was not a bold move, then what was?

Thankfully, Lady Three at least had her back turned and was not directly watching him...

He forgot, however, that while those at the third layer of the Profound Mysteries could not directly see behind them, if they expanded their senses on purpose, they essentially had a view as clear as his bird's eye view.

Lady Three, expressionless, "watched" Zhao Changhe feed the pill to Xia Chichi via a kiss, clenching her fists so hard they cracked. "Couldn't you have just used your hand?"

“Huh?” Zhao Changhe jumped, startled. “You can see...?”

“Is that the issue here?! I asked you why you couldn’t have just used your hand!”

“Uh... my right arm is holding her, and I can’t move my left arm.”

Lady Three: “...”

His reasoning was so... reasonable that she could not figure out how to vent her anger. Her head was practically steaming from frustration.

If it were Vermillion Bird here, would you dare to kiss Chichi right in front of her? Or am I just too much of a pushover? Lady Three held back her fury for a long while and finally managed to spit out, “Don’t you dare kiss me with the same lips you used to kiss her. Do you think I have no temper at all?”

“Ugh...” Xia Chichi groaned as she woke up.

Lady Three immediately shut her mouth.

Xia Chichi had no idea what the two were arguing about. In her grogginess, she caught the last few words, only really catching on that the venerable seemed angry. She pieced things together, guessing it was because Changhe was holding her, and the venerable was not pleased with it.

Xia Chichi offered a placating smile. “Venerable...”

Lady Three looked skyward. “How are your injuries?”

Xia Chichi did a quick internal scan. “Changhe’s medicine worked wonders. I’m already feeling much better...”

Lady Three’s fists cracked. Changhe’s medicine, huh?

“Mm. Since you’re feeling better, shouldn’t you get off that man?” Lady Three snapped her head around, her voice harsh. “Is this what Vermillion Bird taught you? As a saintess of our cult, should you really be lying in a man’s arms?”

Zhao Changhe covered his face, while Xia Chichi looked like she was about to cry.

She always knew Venerable Black Tortoise to be easygoing, seeing her as someone who rarely got involved in cult matters big or small. She had always thought her to be much more easy to deal with, so she was confused as to why the other party was acting so fierce now. Is that stupid rule really that important? Is it really so important for the saintess to not have any romantic entanglements?

She could only try to reason with Lady Three, “But Changhe isn’t an outsider. Venerable, you personally accepted him into the cult. He’s directly under you as the Fire Pig of Shi.”

Lady Three choked for a moment, then snapped angrily, “The saintess of our Four Idols Cult cannot be claimed by a pig! Do you have no respect for our hierarchy?!”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

You’re not wrong. I guess the Fire Pig of Shi can only indulge in the venerable, and with full effort too, right?

Xia Chichi, however, straightened up and hardened her stance, pushing herself to sit upright from Zhao Changhe’s embrace. She said earnestly, “Venerable, you shouldn’t insult your own subordinate.”

Lady Three: “...”

The two of them stared each other down, big eyes glaring at smaller ones, until Zhao Changhe finally raised a hand to mediate. “Um...”

Lady Three crossed her arms and cast him a glare. “Do you think you have any right to speak here?”



Zhao Changhe sighed. "I'd just like to ask something. What does the saintess need to do to become the Cult Leader? As one of the Twenty-Eight Mansions, I think I should be entitled to know matters of such importance to the cult."

Lady Three held back for a long moment before reluctantly saying, "The original concept was that one must possess the inheritance of all four idols to become the cult leader."

Zhao Changhe said, "Isn't that unrealistic? If someone managed to do that, they wouldn't just be the cult leader, they would be the Night Emperor. The Night Emperor is a god, while the cult leader should merely be representative of a god. Are you saying your cult leader must be equivalent to a god?"

"Which is why I said it was just a concept, something passed down from many generations ago."

"No wonder the Four Idols Cult used to be so weak. Setting an impossible goal like that as the requirement. I mean, it's just completely out of reach. Why not be a bit more realistic?"

Lady Three's face was expressionless. "Are you asking for our cult's doctrine or are you offering your unsolicited advice on it?"

Zhao Changhe gave a sheepish grin. "I'm simply praising the wisdom of the current generation of venerables for improving things..."

Lady Three suddenly realized that scolding Zhao Changhe while he played the role of an obedient subordinate was strangely satisfying. Looking at his sheepish grin, Lady Three's mood, soured by her father's passing and the complicated emotions surrounding Chichi, began to improve. She said, "Still, even if embodying all four idols is unrealistic, the cult leader must at least surpass the representatives of the four idols in some way. In order to command respect, they must possess abilities we do not have. Even if we set aside the doctrine, speaking purely of practical leadership, the minimum requirement is that the candidate must embody at least two of the four idols, right?"

Both Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi nodded. "That's fair."

"Chichi has inherited both the Azure Dragon and the White Tiger, and we're naturally ecstatic about it. But her comprehension is still shallow, thus only worthy of being the saintess for the time being. To become the cult leader, she must at least understand one of the idols' power to the same level as Vermillion Bird or myself. Is that really too high of an expectation?"

Xia Chichi humbly replied, “No, that’s perfectly reasonable.”

Lady Three continued, “And have you reached that level?”

Xia Chichi answered honestly, “No, I haven’t.”

“Why do you think Vermillion Bird treats this trip with such great importance? Why do you think I traveled all the way from Huangsha to go out to sea? It wasn’t to find my father; it was to take care of you.” Lady Three sighed. “We want you to achieve a breakthrough during this opportunity, perhaps even surpass us... We’ve been anticipating a cult leader for a long time, Chichi. Don’t let us down.”

Xia Chichi hesitated, then cautiously asked, “If I become the cult leader... does that mean I wouldn’t be forbidden from marriage anymore? I didn’t see anything in the doctrine about how a cult leader should behave.”

Lady Three choked at her words, then snapped in anger, “Is that seriously all you care about?”

Xia Chichi shrank back.

Initially, it was not something she really cared all that much about. But being constantly bossed around by these two fierce women had given rise to her rebellious nature. Now, it really was all she cared about.

Lady Three scolded, “When you truly have the qualifications to be the cult leader, then you can do whatever you want! When you have the power to command everyone’s respect, I’ll kneel before you myself! You could write anything you wanted about the cult leader into the doctrine, and no one would dare say a word against it!”

With that, she stormed off, her sleeve flicking in frustration. “This place is the source of the Azure Dragon’s power. Focus on comprehending it well! No distractions! As for you, Fire Pig of Shi, come with me!”

The venerable was angry, but somehow Xia Chichi felt oddly reassured.

She watched Zhao Changhe get pulled away by his collar, helplessly trailing behind the venerable into the woods, and she clenched her fist in determination. Don't worry, Changhe. I can already sense the power in this place. It won't be long before I meet the requirements. When that day comes, I'll marry you in a grand fashion and rescue you from the clutches of these fierce women!

There was no denying that this place was truly sacred. For one, the essence of rejuvenation grasped by the Azure Dragon in the surrounding flora was already healing her wounds, which otherwise would have needed a long recovery. And beyond that, Xia Chichi believed that Zhao Changhe's Rejuvenation Art had the potential to flourish here.

She, too, had learned the Rejuvenation Art, taken from the abstract notes Zhao Changhe had copied down for Lady Three. Of all the members of the Four Idols Cult, she was the only one who could make any sense of it and grasp its essence. That was the privilege of the Azure Dragon Saintess. Xia Chichi closed her eyes, deciding to begin by understanding the principle of rejuvenation through the flora, gradually grasping the full extent of laws and principles held by the Azure Dragon. She was confident that this time, she would gain significant insights.

Despite the scolding, Xia Chichi knew deep down that Lady Three truly cared for her. She was genuinely invested in helping her improve, and Xia Chichi could not afford to let her down.

In the small forest...

Zhao Changhe was pinned against a tree by his collar, and the so-called kind-hearted venerable was violently shaking him. "I've protected her, taught her cultivation techniques, hoped for her growth, and supported her to become the cult leader. And yet, she has the audacity to ask me—right to my face—about being with her man, and I can't even argue back. Can I kill that brat? She's driving me crazy!"

Zhao Changhe was not sure who had it worse—him or Xia Chichi. At this point, he felt that even facing off against the Sea Emperor seemed much easier.

#### Chapter 584: We Have a Strategy

Although Lady Three scolded Zhao Changhe, deep down, she knew that Xia Chichi was technically the first to come along. If it was not for Vermillion Bird's disapproval, the two would have happily married long ago.

This meant that, ultimately, she was the one playing the role of a meddling fox spirit stealing someone else's man.

The more she thought about how she had just reprimanded Xia Chichi with all that stern authority, the more she dreaded the prospect of her inevitable social death once Xia Chichi eventually found out. And, sure, while Vermillion Bird's social death might be even more mortifying, but who was really keeping score in such scenarios?

And it's all because of this stupid pig—stranded on some remote island, talking about sheltering me from the storm, offering me a so-called home.

"It's all your fault, you stupid pig!" Lady Three fumed, her fists pounding against Zhao Changhe's chest. "It's all your fault..."

Forget about a home, she had even lost her father. She had always held out hope for some hidden reason, an explanation for his actions that would justify everything. She had never dared, nor had the energy, to confront it. In the end, she just let things unfold, numb and passive, until it was all finally revealed. Yes, there had been misunderstandings, but there had also truly been coldness and cruelty.

Should she then be grateful or resentful?

Even now, she did not know.

And before she could make up her mind, her father was gone.

He passed with a smile, but Shelly's heart remained hollow. She kept up the pretense of the serene Venerable Black Tortoise, dealing with his passing seemingly calmly, but in reality, her mind was a mess.

As she angrily pounded Zhao Changhe's chest, tears began to fall. She placed her head on his shoulder, sobbing softly. "It's all your fault..."

The grief of losing her father, the loneliness and resentment accumulated for over a decade, finally caught up to her at this moment. It was only when she was alone with the man she cared about that that vulnerability finally surfaced.

Zhao Changhe endured the blows, knowing that even if it hurt like hell, he had to take it.

Having a thirty-year-old expert on the Ranking of Heaven crying in front of you, what did that signify?

He carefully moved his not-yet-healed left arm, wrapping it around Lady Three's waist, saying nothing to comfort her, just letting her vent until, slowly, the sobs subsided.

After all, she was Venerable Black Tortoise, not some young girl.

She did not cry for long. Eventually, she grew quiet, but she did not lift her head. Instead, she remained nestled against his shoulder, whispering, "You're not allowed to laugh at me."

Only then did Zhao Changhe reply, "All I feel is heartache..."

"Cut it out. I don't need your pity, do I?" Lady Three sniffled, finally pulling away from his shoulder. "Did it hurt when I hit you?"

"I have the Eternal Blood Demon Body. It didn't hurt."

"You're always acting tough." Lady Three sniffled again, then reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck. She stood on the tip of her toes, her lips gently meeting his as she whispered softly. "Thank you..."

Zhao Changhe really wanted to say that there was nothing to thank him for, but his lips were still sealed with hers.

Lady Three whispered against his mouth, "I was going to reward you... you could have me right here, against this tree or something. Wouldn't that be exciting?"

Zhao Changhe: "?"

Lady Three chuckled softly and pushed him away a little. "But I thought that would be too unfair to someone. You'd probably feel conflicted too, so forget it. If she really does end up becoming the cult leader, she might end up banishing me to some faraway land if she finds out."

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Lady Three turned around leisurely, pulling her scattered hair into a ponytail while taking in their surroundings.

The energy of the plants and trees here was extraordinarily rich, making the trees lush and verdant. From their previous experience building a cabin, Zhao Changhe could easily throw together a small hut for the three of them once his arm healed.

But the thought of staying here made Lady Three uncomfortable, and she did not want to do so. She asked, “How beneficial is this place to you?”

“For the Rejuvenation Art, extremely so. As for anything else, I’ll have to see after studying the Heavenly Tome. Why? Are you reluctant to stay long?”

“Mm-hm.” Lady Three took a deep breath, her expression serious. “The Sea Emperor’s detonation of the flood dragon body should have destroyed years of his accumulation, but none of us have actually witnessed the process of a god or demon exploding and recovering. If it’s not as weakened as we think and recovers faster than we expect, we’ll regret delaying here, especially if we encounter a nearly-recovered Sea Emperor.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. “You’re right. The idea that the Sea Emperor would become extremely weak was just your... was just the Dragon King’s estimate. That doesn’t necessarily mean it’s true.”

Lady Three said, “So, seeing as I’m not that injured, once you recover, then the both of us could go and finish the job together. That would probably be the best solution. Chichi still isn’t strong enough at the moment, so she should stay here and continue cultivating.”

Zhao Changhe looked her up and down but said nothing.

Lady Three fumed, “What are you looking at? I’m not trying to ditch her on purpose!”

I never said you were... Zhao Changhe thought. He realized that Lady Three, though uninjured, was suggesting they tackle the Sea Emperor together—a far cry from the independent Venerable Black Tortoise of the past. It was a sign of her acknowledgment of his strength, and also her desire to stay close to him.

Zhao Changhe sighed. “I understand your feelings, but, Lady Three...”

“Yeah?”

“Can we even leave this place? How do we go back to where we came from? Or were you just planning to head west until who knows when?”

Lady Three froze.

Zhao Changhe patted her shoulder sympathetically. “Let’s heal and cultivate for now. Sharpening the axe doesn’t delay the chopping of firewood.”

Lady Three nearly stammered, “C-cultivate? But this is the Azure Dragon’s domain. It has nothing to do with the distorted space we’re in... How long do you think we’ll have to cultivate before we can leave?”

Zhao Changhe waved the Heavenly Tome. “Don’t worry, my lady. Let me study this thing first, and we actually do have a strategy we could—”

Lady Three scoffed and said, “Who’s your lady?”

Zhao Changhe blinked, glancing toward the edge of the forest.

Lady Three, furious, snapped, “It’s me!”

Well, at least her reaction was pretty quick this time... It looks like all of you perform best during these tense situations.

Zhao Changhe sighed and sat cross-legged under a tree. “Then, please, my lady, guard me while I meditate.”

\* \* \*

In reality, there was no need for any guarding to be done. This place was so safe it did not even have wild animals.

If there was any danger, it was Zhao Changhe worrying he might get beaten for provoking the blind woman again. “Hey, blind woman.”

There was no response.

“Stop pretending to be dead. Why did you suppress me so harshly? Aren’t you going to explain yourself?”

“What do you mean?” the blind woman replied bluntly. “As per the rules, you can’t just take a higher ranking. If you’ve got what it takes, then go knock down those ahead of you on the ranking. Don’t come whining to me. And if you keep pestering me, should I add that your grand duel with Venerable Black Tortoise on that remote island, your duel so intense that she even bled all over the ground? I could amend the announcement right now.”

“Don’t, don’t...” Any notion Zhao Changhe had of provoking her got completely suppressed by that remark. He had no choice but to swallow his frustration. “So you’re admitting it now, huh?”

The blind woman let out a dismissive harrumph. The events at sea had been concealed for so long, but as soon as the Heavenly Tome was removed, all the details were clear. It was too obvious, and she knew she could not hide it from Zhao Changhe, so there was no point in hiding it anymore.

The two of them fell silent. Bringing up this topic also meant another thing had come to light: Zhao Changhe really had applied that “skincare ointment” on the blind woman.

Zhao Changhe felt that this revelation was perhaps even more dangerous than his earlier attempts to provoke her. He quickly changed the subject and said, “Since it’s confirmed, there’s something else...”

The blind woman cut him off directly, “I already said, don’t come to me for guidance.”

“And you also said the Tome of Troubled Times had nothing to do with you... Can I really trust anything you say?” Zhao Changhe retorted. “Listen, blind woman, surely you don’t want people finding out—”



“Even if I don’t want people to know, you can’t use that to threaten me. I have far more leverage over you than you over me.”

Hanging out in the modern world had really made her bold. She knew all the comebacks and even preempted his arguments. Zhao Changhe was helpless. “Can’t I just ask you about how to leave this place?”

“No. Whether you live or die has nothing to do with me.” The blind woman’s voice was icy. “The fact that I haven’t killed you myself already showcases how merciful I am...”

Zhao Changhe shifted his approach again. “You said that there are two pages of the Heavenly Tome at sea. Based on what we know now, the other page should be with the Sea Emperor, right? And you want me to get it?”

“Indeed. What are you suggesting?”

“If he has a page of the Heavenly Tome, his recovery can’t be gauged by common sense. We must leave as soon as possible. And even aside from that, I suspect there’s no way to kill him by conventional means. The spirit bag we used to seal Xue Wu and Duoluo’s yin spirits won’t work on him, right?”

“Correct. Without a specialized approach, you can never kill a god or demon of his level.”

“So, how do we deal with him? Can’t you at least give me some advice on that?”

“Didn’t you say my words couldn’t be trusted? Aren’t you worried I’ll lead you into a trap?”

“When it comes to the Heavenly Tome, I trust you’re sincere.”

The blind woman was silent for a moment, seemingly weighing the pros and cons. And ultimately, her desire for the other page of the Heavenly Tome made her relent.

“None of you possess the ability to obliterate a soul, so you need a special weapon capable of doing so... and, conveniently, there’s something here that could serve that purpose. You’ll have to find it

yourselves, and I won't be telling you anything else. As for leaving this place, the page of the Heavenly Tome that you have is the key. How long it takes is up to your own comprehension."

## Chapter 585: Light and Water

The supposed method for leaving the place they were stuck at was apparently to be found through the golden scroll, evidently because this page of the Heavenly Tome was related to light.

To put it bluntly, the mirage surrounding Skyrim Island had always been refracted images of the firmament in this place, a quintessential effect of light.

The distortion that blocked the blind woman's perception and what ultimately transported them to this place was all based upon the manipulation of light. Zhao Changhe had suspected the teleportation to have involved spatial manipulation, but it turned out that a spatial transfer could also be achieved by using arrays not based on high-level spatial laws. This particular page of the Heavenly Tome had nothing to do with space, only light.

Yet knowing it was about light and being able to use that knowledge were two different things entirely.

Luckily, Zhao Changhe had already dabbled in the usage of light. He had learned the Water Mirror Technique, so it was not like he was starting from scratch. In other words, there was no major barrier to his understanding of the concept behind this page of the Heavenly Tome.

At times, Zhao Changhe felt that he truly did have a rather mysterious fate, and he knew that the events he came across were far from being orchestrated by the blind woman. For example, although she pointed out that there was a page of the Heavenly Tome to be found here, she had never mentioned its nature.

As it turned out, this page was related to light, and he had coincidentally just studied the applications of light when he met with water with Lady Three. And Lady Three had gleaned insights for the matter from studying the crystal core of the Sea Emperor's water construct, something that had no connection to the blind woman. There was simply no way she could have interfered with what Lady Three comprehended from the crystal—it was almost as if everything were truly moving according to heaven's will.

Zhao Changhe immersed his consciousness into the Heavenly Tome, and the first thing he noticed was that even the plants here had become more lush. The Heavenly Tome was constantly evolving, reflecting his observations of new techniques, species, and phenomena. Now that he was at the

verdant peak of Azure Dragon's domain, the Heavenly Tome transformed accordingly, being filled with unusual new plant species. Finding items with special soul-destroying properties did not require scouring the entire island as he could easily use the Heavenly Tome to cheat and directly identify them.

However, that was not of great import for the moment. What was important, though, was figuring out how to leave.

Zhao Changhe raised his head and looked toward the sun and moon within the illusory world created by the Heavenly Tome.

The world within the Heavenly Tome had always been subject to constant daylight, but sure enough, there was now a cycle of day and night within.

For a moment, Zhao Changhe felt a pang of confusion.

Is this illusory world changing because of each new page of the Heavenly Tome that I get, or is it changing because my understanding of the world is evolving?

Before, when he had not considered having natural landscapes in the illusion, the scenes he would witness would simply be a solitary figure demonstrating martial arts techniques. When he obtained the second page, the page related to nature, the illusory world began to feature natural landscapes. But even before he had the page, he already knew it was a page of nature, so naturally, when entering the illusion, he would think in that direction. So, did the vision change because of the page of nature, or because he knew it was a page of nature and expected it to change as such?

Before obtaining the page of life, Zhao Changhe had never even considered that the visions might contain living creatures roaming around. But after he acquired it, the illusory world began to feature birds and beasts. And it was the same this time—he had never thought about the sun and moon needing to rise and set within the illusory world. In the past, he assumed there was nothing wrong with perpetual daylight. But now that he knew of the page of light and had acquired it, the cycle of day and night came to be.

As before, what appeared in the visions was predetermined, but how it operated and changed was directed by his mind. If he wanted flowers to bloom and wither, they did just that. If he wanted day to turn to night, it did. And if he wanted to return to daytime, it did.

Zhao Changhe looked up, constantly watching the transformation of day into night and back again. He thought, This must be the ultimate form of controlling light, though for now, I can only achieve it in here.

The reality of reaching such a level was still very far away. Even if he understood the essence of light, he could not harness it yet—every aspect of the Heavenly Tome was meant to relate to cultivation. It was not meant to simply display a more vivid VR experience. The pages of the Heavenly Tome were meant to inspire cultivation. He had to think about how to apply the relevant concepts on his own.

With a thought, the sunlight transformed from invisible rays into a multi-colored spectrum. A beam of seven-colored light shot out from the sun, refracting in the water, forming the rainbow bridge above Skyrim Island.

Zhao Changhe could see clearly how the spectrum refracted on the water's surface: the angles, the details, and the final impact points—it was all crystal clear to him.

He was analyzing and reconstructing how the environment around the island was formed—the paths of the light, the points of contact. In order to leave the place they were stuck in, he would have to rely on this.

And when he mastered this, he would truly understand light.

For some reason, at that moment, a thought passed through Zhao Changhe's mind, Once I master this, I'll return and teach you the Spring Water Sword art.

\* \* \*

While Zhao Changhe was studying light, Xia Chichi was meditating on the laws and principles of the Azure Dragon.

Lady Three sat in meditation nearby, recovering from some of her minor injuries. She then opened her eyes.

She saw her man sitting cross-legged, his eyes closed, his expression serene.

Lady Three's beautiful eyes lingered on his face for a while, then shifted to his hand. Originally, he wore only one ring, but now he had two.

Lady Three pouted slightly. Both of those rings were supposed to be mine. One originally belonged to the ancient Black Tortoise and the other belonged to my father. It's pretty strange how the connection between him and myself seems to be completely encapsulated by those two rings.

Is it implying that having him allows me to stop using my own fingers[1]?

Not that I've ever... used my fingers that way. Besides, he's the one wearing them... Should he be the one to quit using his fingers? No way, foreplay is still important.

Just what was my father thinking? What if the ring contains a journal or other personal things? Instead of passing them down to his daughter, he actually gave them to someone else. I really want to ask for it back, but it feels like doing so would be like reclaiming a dowry and asking to break up...

Well, now that he's meditating, maybe I can sneak a peek. That should be fine, right...

Lady Three quietly moved closer, her hand gently resting on his, fingers brushing the ring. She cautiously allowed her consciousness to probe within.

The contents of the ring were surprisingly simple, not at all what one would expect from a king—it lacked the wealth expected of a king. Well, Hai Pinglan, ruling Penglai, had never needed to carry money. Besides some medicinal pills, there was an old saber from his early days. Though the material was decent, by their current standards, it was unremarkable, more sentimental than practical. Perhaps it still had some symbolic or commanding value in Penglai.

Everything else was books, various records of a lifetime of martial arts: cultivation techniques, fist techniques, saber techniques, movement techniques, and even a set of archery techniques. Archery was an exceedingly rare thing, and very few martial artists in the Central Plains practiced it. It simply was not as convenient or portable as hidden weapons, and although Zhao Changhe enjoyed it, he had rarely found suitable opportunities to put his archery skills to good use. Archery was typically used in the military, but there, it was all about strength and precision, with hardly any focus on specific techniques. Only someone like Hai Pinglan, who had fought in naval battles for years, would develop a unique archery art.

It was the lifetime legacy of a martial artist, nothing more. In his final days, Hai Pinglan had fully returned to his roots as a martial artist, all thoughts of empires and conquests left behind.

It was thus no wonder that he had refrained from giving it to her. He must have feared that, as the Four Idols Cult's Venerable Black Tortoise, she would refuse his legacy, making things awkward. So, feeling uncertain, he had given it to her man instead, a more indirect solution.

Lady Three felt a pang of regret. Had she known, she would not have looked. It only added to her melancholy.

Caught up in both the ring's contents and her own sadness, she forgot to stay alert.

A head peeked out from behind a tree not far away. "V-venerable, are you sneaking a feel while he's meditating?"

Lady Three jumped up in shock. "Did you not see I was trying to steal his ring?! Stealing a ring doesn't count as sneaking a feel, does it?!"

Xia Chichi eyed her suspiciously before responding with a simple "Oh."

Lady Three tried to regain her composure. "Why are you back so soon? Did you comprehend something?"

Xia Chichi hesitated. "I've learned quite a lot, but I've hit a bottleneck and can't break through."

"What kind of bottleneck?"

"To grow wood requires water, and to establish wood requires earth. I feel like to break through this bottleneck, I need to connect with the water element, so I came to ask for your guidance..." Xia Chichi continued. "I've always used Iceheart, drawing on its sharpness to understand water, but I never quite got it. That's why when you brought back the ancient sword Dragon Emperor back then, I didn't ask for it... Ah, wait, I saw Changhe using Dragon Emperor during the fight earlier. Why does Changhe have it?"

Lady Three's mind went into overdrive again. You came looking for guidance, and now you're back to catching me red-handed... Thankfully, on the topic of Dragon Emperor, her conscience was clear.

“Dragon Emperor was lent to him back in Kuaiji to settle some debts. What, are you upset I gave it away because it should belong to you?”

“My sword is his sword.”

“...Xia Chichi, are you under the impression that I’m easy to deal with?”

“N-No...”

“Anyway, when it comes to your problem with the water element, it’s simply that your foundation is still quite weak. You need to start from the basics... and luckily, we have something good here.”

Lady Three tossed her a book. “This is the Dragon King’s accumulated wisdom from decades of sailing the seas. His insights into the nature of water have already reached the level of the divine. Study it carefully... and copy it ten times, just to make sure that you have a good understanding of it.”

#### Chapter 586: Caught in the Act

Xia Chichi went off to copy the book, but the look she gave before leaving made Lady Three’s heart race with anxiety, feeling as if she were about to be exposed.

It was not until Xia Chichi’s figure disappeared from view that Lady Three suddenly realized something.

It seems that this obedient and dutiful girl is actually quite bold. She’s been deliberately using Iceheart, using its frosty sharpness as a substitute for the White Tiger’s edge, purely so that she could gain a glimpse into the water element.

In the past, Xia Chichi had not yet known that Vermillion Bird and Black Tortoise had already adjusted their expectations. Now, mastering two elements was enough to become the cult leader. According to tradition, becoming the cult leader required the mastery of all four elements. So, back when she had only just started making her way up the Ranking of Hidden Dragons, Xia Chichi had already begun to dabble in a third element. Naturally, this was difficult, and she likely had not succeeded, but at least she had laid the groundwork. This made her current endeavor to push water to nourish wood much easier.

This devious woman must have been planning to become the cult leader from the very beginning. All her obedience and compliance is nothing but a facade; beneath it, deep ambition and rebellion.

If she truly ascends one day, Vermillion Bird and I might end up suffering greatly under her rule... As expected of Xia Longyuan's daughter, the darkness and fierceness hidden inside her are far beyond those of ordinary people.

But so what if you're full of ambition? At the end of the day, it's not going to be cult business but family business that you'll have to deal with. What are you going to do then?

Besides, do you really think that Vermillion Bird dropped the old standard of needing to master all four elements, deciding that two would be enough, for no reason? She's supporting your ascent to cult leader purely out of guilt, and I was just too lazy to argue. She's already gone that far—what more can you do to her?

Lady Three snuggled comfortably into her man's embrace, took his wine gourd, and took a sip.

I heard this gourd used to belong to you, right, Xia Chichi? Your aunt-master will be borrowing it for now.

That said, even though her ambitions are only suited for some petty in-house drama, those ambitions inadvertently laid the groundwork for her to now build upon the idea of nourishing wood with water. I guess this is just karma. Who knows, in this holy land of the Azure Dragon, she might really rise to prominence, perhaps even break through to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries.

Lady Three was well aware of just how dense the wood element energy was in this place. Even though she herself did not utilize the wood element much, the pure energy that was present in this place was still incredibly beneficial for her cultivation. She knew that if she was not in a hurry to kill the Sea Emperor, and stayed here for a year or so, she could very well break through to a higher realm.

Even just a short time spent cultivating here would ensure that upon leaving, Wang Daoning would be no match for her.

This was indeed a land of profound opportunity, one that defied conventional logic.

Perhaps, when the time was right, she could return here to further her cultivation, though that all depended on the situation in the Central Plains. It depended on whether the situation would permit her to shirk her duties and hide out in this remote corner of the world. Furthermore, having now come to learn that a holy land like this existed, she wondered if there were three other holy lands



that corresponded to the three idols of their holy cult. Could she and Vermillion Bird ascend to even greater heights? This might even become the future priority for the Four Idols Cult.

For once, Lady Three found herself full of thoughts about cult matters, during which the man she was leaning opened his eyes.

She was leaning against him, drinking, and before she could react, she was swept into his embrace.

Lady Three instinctively glanced toward the woods, struggling a bit. “Hey, your little white tiger is done meditating. Don’t be reckless... Mm~ Don’t lick my neck...”

Zhao Changhe hesitated and let her go. The thrill of sneaking around like this—it was something hard to put into words. He pondered for a moment, then whispered, “Lady Three, how about we just be honest with Chichi?”

Lady Three shivered slightly. “Be honest about what? I want to retain some dignity!”

Zhao Changhe wanted to say that it would be even more embarrassing if they were found out later. I really don’t think Xia Chichi would care that much. It’s just you two venerables that have kept on giving her a hard time...

Before he could say anything, Lady Three quickly changed the subject, “Anyway, why did you wake up so fast? Have you figured out how to leave this place?”

Zhao Changhe replied, “I understand the basic principle, but my cultivation isn’t quite there yet. I may not be able to allow us to leave just yet. I need a bit of time.”

Lady Three fell silent.

Zhao Changhe pulled her into his arms, helping her stand up. “Don’t look so anxious. Isn’t my Shelly supposed to be as steady as a mountain, lounging around all day?”

Lady Three shot back, irritated, “My parents died because of him! I have a deep grudge against him, while you don’t, so of course it’s easy for you to say such things.”

“They’re my parents, too,” said Zhao Changhe, pulling her into the dense forest. “Come with me.”

Confused, Lady Three followed him, watching as he knocked on various trees and examined their quality as if assessing wood. “What are you doing?”

“Here.” Zhao Changhe stopped in front of a massive tree, inspecting it closely. “Do you feel anything special?”

Lady Three was taken aback and then reached out to touch the trunk. Suddenly, she felt a surge of trepidation. The massive tree held a unique and intense power. She felt as if a roaring azure dragon had pierced through her spiritual platform, its soul-shaking roar sending chills down her spine.

“What... What is this?” Lady Three was stunned. Just touching it evoked such a reaction. What would happen if it was used as a weapon against someone?

“This is called Dragon Soul Wood. The roar of the dragon’s spirit devours the soul,” Zhao Changhe explained. “Its structure, however, isn’t as hard as steel... well, maybe comparable to ordinary weapons, but ultimately, it’s still wood, not exactly ideal for direct confrontation.” He studied the Dragon Soul Wood thoughtfully. “I’m not sure what kind of weapon it could be made into... Maybe a spear shaft?”

A spear shaft would be quite fitting, but as Lady Three observed the tree, another idea occurred to her. “What about making it into a bow? And arrows. Wouldn’t you prefer that?”

Zhao Changhe’s eyes lit up. “That’s a brilliant idea! My Shelly is so smart!”

Lady Three looked away, a slight blush dusting her cheeks. “I’m just thinking about what you like—you’re the one who likes bows. Do you even know how to use a spear?”

Zhao Changhe glanced around and then lowered his voice. “Do you really not know whether or not I’m good with a spear?”

“Get lost!” Lady Three snapped, kicking him hard. “In any case, you don’t even have any bowstrings. Figure that out yourself. I’m not helping you!”

“I can take the string from my old bow and just make do with that for now. Maybe I can find a proper replacement some other time...” Zhao Changhe said, grinning with excitement as he drew out Dragon Bird. He sliced off a section of the wood and began carving out a bow frame enthusiastically.

He had always loved archery. It was something he enjoyed even before transmigrating to this world, and ever since he arrived in this world, there had been several key moments when the bow had turned the tide of battle. However, as his cultivation progressed, the bow became less and less relevant. It long since stopped from being able to match the explosive force of a direct strike of his supported by true qi. A perfect example of this was how Lady Three and those of her level rarely required weapons in their duels; their fists and palms often outperformed blades.

But that did not mean weapons were useless. Zhao Changhe knew that his power was completely different when he was using Dragon Bird compared to when he was not. If using the saber could provide such a powerful boost, so could a bow—of course, as long as it was of the right caliber.

And this wood before him was the perfect material for the creation of such a divine weapon.

Seeing Zhao Changhe’s excitement, Lady Three’s heart softened. In moments like this, she could sense that, at heart, Zhao Changhe was still just a young man. He looked just like a child who had gotten his favorite toy.

She settled herself down beside him, taking a piece of wood and carving it into an arrow shaft, mumbling softly, “For the arrowheads, I have some forging materials. I can pick some out for you... Honestly, this is so frustrating. Forging and tempering should be the White Tiger and the Vermillion Bird’s jobs. Why does it fall on the Black Tortoise to do all this? The ancient Black Tortoise must’ve been an all-purpose workhorse—it’s so unlike the Black Tortoise at all...”

Watching her sit there, carving arrows while rambling on, Zhao Changhe could not help but think of a countryside couple sitting together in their courtyard, working on handicrafts. It was even more vivid than their time surviving on that remote island.

Lady Three seemed to get the same feeling. She looked up at him, their eyes meeting. The atmosphere was so thick with the saccharine sweetness that it felt like it could be smelled from miles away.

In the dense forest, from behind a tree, Xia Chichi’s little head peeked out.

Out on the beach, ten vines autonomously traced words into the sand—all ten at once. This was a sign that Xia Chichi had truly mastered Azure Dragon's power over plant life; the vegetation had become sentient and obeyed her command.

But Xia Chichi was not using such a powerful ability to slack off. No, she was much too diligent for that.

It was to spy on them.

She had been secretly following them for quite some time... In the lush forest, her presence merged entirely with the surroundings, undetectable to anyone.

She had already sensed something suspicious between them. And now, having followed them, it was all confirmed—not only were they holding hands, but also talking like “My dear Turtle” and “Your parents are my parents.”

That was bad enough, but now they're even acting like an old married couple. How long have they even been together?

Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe was saying to Lady Three, “Speaking of which, remember when you mentioned forging the Night Emperor's sword blank? You taught me the forging techniques, but since I had no basic knowledge, I ended up barely understanding anything... Should I also copy down the books a few times to improve my understanding?”

“I was just messing with that little white tiger. You actually took it seriously?” Lady Three laughed playfully. “If you want to learn the basics, why don't we go and forge some arrowheads together later? It's hands-on practice that really matters...”

The mention of “hands-on” seemed to remind them of something else, and the look in their eyes as they gazed at each other grew more... suggestive.

Xia Chichi's face turned red, then green, and the leaves atop her head grew even lusher, a vibrant green.

Messing with me, huh? Hands-on, huh? And what kind of “hands-on” experience are you planning on having?

Lady Three bit her lower lip. “We’ve hidden ourselves pretty deep. She definitely won’t be able to find us and show up unannounced. Just give me a kiss.”

Zhao Changhe, ever obliging, leaned in without hesitation.

A fragrant breeze swept by, and another delicate face appeared before him. Caught off guard, Zhao Changhe kissed Xia Chichi square on the cheek.

For a moment, silence fell over everything.

Lady Three held an arrow shaft in her hand, completely stunned, her mind going blank.

It’s over.

#### Chapter 587: Chichi’s Clever Plan for Peace

Shelly, with her rather slow wit, was simply unable to understand how Vermillion Bird could keep things secret for so long, while she herself had gotten exposed after just a few hours.

She could not even blame Zhao Changhe—she was the one who insisted on a kiss.

We’re both venerables, so why do I have it so much worse?

Shelly absolutely refused to admit that it was because she was too impulsive, unlike Vermillion Bird, who knew when to bend and stay hidden and who would instead let herself be teased by Chichi but never make an inappropriate move. Of course, with Vermillion Bird being so patient and careful, it would be much more difficult for her to be exposed. On the other hand, when it came to Shelly... She wore no mask, had no alias to hide behind, and was casually fooling around right in the same area. Despite that, she still dared to act recklessly.

Is it all because I don’t have a mask as an extra layer of cover?

Or is it that Chichi, whenever she’s dealing with me, suddenly becomes much sharper? Was she pretending to copy the book while secretly tailing us? And since when was Chichi so skilled at concealing herself? Why must she pick on me...

While Lady Three was still in a daze, Zhao Changhe, trying to retreat, had his collar grabbed by Xia Chichi, who yanked him back. “Why are you hiding? Keep kissing! You were happy enough to kiss her with that pig snout of yours, but now you’re avoiding me?”

Zhao Changhe, holding up the half-carved bow in front of his face, said, “No, Chichi, listen to my excuse... I mean, I can explain... Listen to my explanation...”

As soon as the two started talking, Lady Three finally snapped out of her daze. She immediately threw down the arrows she had been making and bolted away.

Her speed was astonishing. While she was a tortoise at rest, she was much more like a dragon or snake when in action. In the blink of an eye, she was out of sight.

This was the terrifying might of the seventh on the Ranking of Heaven!

Xia Chichi did not bother chasing after her. She knew that she had no way of catching up. She folded her arms and sneered. “Venerable Black Tortoise, where can you even run to? Even if I can’t catch you here, once we’re back at the cult, I can call for a council and maybe even ask Venerable Vermillion Bi—”

Lady Three, who had already run quite a distance, suddenly stopped in her tracks. “Ask who? No! Don’t!”

Xia Chichi: “...”

Wait, why does it seem like you aren’t afraid of this matter being discussed by the cult but rather of Master finding out?

Lady Three then reappeared slowly, walking back with a casual stride. “Saintess, um, I just remembered something. You’ve got the wrong person. Everyone knows it’s normal for the four idols to have five entities, like how the Black Tortoise is the fusion of tortoise and snake...”

Is it too late to start making a clone like the Fire Serpent of Yi?

Xia Chichi nearly laughed in anger. “So what you’re saying is, you’re not Venerable Black Tortoise?”

Lady Three nodded vigorously. “No, I’m not Venerable Black Tortoise. I’m her little sister, Unvenerable Lack Tortoise[1].”

Zhao Changhe facepalmed.

Xia Chichi felt a mix of anger and amusement. Her anger was almost dispelled by Lady Three’s absurdly serious nonsense. Of course, Xia Chichi was not one to let things go so easily. She soon began cracking her knuckles as she walked over. “Oh, where did this imposter come from? I don’t remember there being any venerable like you in the Four Idols Cult.”

Lady Three said, “I already told you that I’m unvenerable. Who said anything about me being a venerable?”

Xia Chichi responded, “If you’re not a venerable, but claim to be from our cult, then why aren’t you kneeling before the saintess?”

Lady Three froze. She realized she could not bring herself to be as shameless as Vermillion Bird.

How could this be? Am I really more concerned about saving face than Vermillion Bird?

Oh, right... Vermillion Bird was moving as the Fire Serpent of Yi back then, and Chichi assumed that to be true. So Vermillion Bird hasn’t technically lost face yet. But how can I just kneel? Chichi knows full well that I’m Black Tortoise!

Wait... Since she knows I’m Black Tortoise, what’s the point of continuing this act?

Lady Three finally realized and snapped. “Xia Chichi, you’re getting bold, disrespecting me like this! Who should be kneeling to whom?”

Zhao Changhe nearly buried his face in his hands. He wished he could just disappear right now.

“Oh? Dropping the act now, huh?!” Xia Chichi snapped with even greater rage. “All that fake guidance, making me practice, punishing me by making me copy books—it was all just so you could sneak around with my man?! You’re unworthy of being a venerable of our cult. I had so much respect for you! Have you no shame?”

Lady Three instinctively wanted to cover her face but forced herself to stop. “How is he your man? Have you married him?”

Xia Chichi was livid. “Why do you think I haven’t married him yet? Do you really not know? You keep talking about tradition, but it was all just to steal him from me, wasn’t it?!”

Lady Three, knowing she was in the wrong, could only try to deflect. “When did I stop you from doing anything? Go blame whoever did! Was it me who got in the way?!”

Far away in the capital, Huangfu Qing suddenly shivered.

Xia Chichi, however, suddenly smiled, her tone turning sweet. “So, you’re not against me finding a man, right, Aunt-~~aster~~?”

“I... I...” Lady Three stammered. Ultimately, she forced herself to say, “I never stopped you!”

“Well, that’s wonderful then.” Xia Chichi immediately spun around and slipped into Zhao Changhe’s arms, standing on the tip of her toes with lips puckered. “Kiss me.”

Zhao Changhe, his face frozen with awkwardness, could not even begin to move.

Xia Chichi’s eyes gleamed dangerously. “Hmm? Have you really changed your heart? Fine then, enjoy being with that old woman. I’m leaving.”

Hearing this, Zhao Changhe could not hold back any longer and leaned down to kiss her.

Xia Chichi wrapped her arms around Zhao Changhe’s neck, whispering seductively, “You were supposed to kiss me right in front of the venerables of the cult, making them furious yet having no choice but to relent... Although the way things have turned out is a bit strange... so strange I almost want to bite you... I guess you did somewhat accomplish what I had in mind...”



Zhao Changhe: “...”

Technically, that might be true, but still, this feels really weird...

He stole a glance at Lady Three. He saw her face turn completely green with anger, and steam was practically rising from her head.

This really is “making them furious yet having no choice but to relent...” Fuck, Chichi is ruthless.

Luckily, despite her mischievous streak, Xia Chichi was still a young maiden. Even though her mind was running wild with the idea of having Zhao Changhe take her right there, she could not bring herself to say it out loud. Deep down, she was still wary of Vermillion Bird finding out... She kissed Zhao Changhe passionately for a while, casting sidelong glances at Lady Three, who looked so angry she had seemingly shut down. Finally, Xia Chichi pulled back a little and asked, “So, venerable, do you understand how I felt now?”

Lady Three finally came back to her senses. “Why would I share the same feelings as you? Do you think I’m so dependent on a man? Ridiculous.”

With that, she turned and began walking away.

Zhao Changhe panicked, ready to call out to her, but Xia Chichi shot him a look, smiling slyly. “Go on, then, have your way with me.”

Lady Three paused mid-step, steam rising from her head.

That victorious tone—is she really suggesting that I’ve just become some defeated dog? Is she declaring she’s won? This is unbearable!

But she had just thrown out the words, “Do you think I’m so dependent on a man? Ridiculous.” How could she possibly swallow her pride and turn back after that?

Xia Chichi kept giving Zhao Changhe meaningful looks.

In a flash, Zhao Changhe used his movement art to appear right in front of Lady Three, blocking her path. “Lady Three...”

Lady Three’s heart leaped, but she kept her face stern with a scowl. “Why are you stopping me? Go be with your little white tiger. She was with you first anyway!”

Zhao Changhe immediately embraced her. “I know that you can do without a man, but I can’t do without you, Lady Three.”

Lady Three did not resist, but she shot a glance at Xia Chichi as if challenging her. “And what about her?”

Zhao Changhe knew Lady Three did not care how many women he had. When they had first gotten together, she had even asked him who was prettier between her, Vermillion Bird, and Xia Chichi, and occasionally brought up Yue Hongling and Tang Wanzhuang. She knew exactly how many women he had, but she had never been bothered by it. If anything, her problem was not sharing him with others—it was getting caught red-handed and losing her dignity. Xia Chichi’s smug attitude did not help make her less angry either.

So he just needed to say the right thing: “Chichi was my first moonlight, and she always will be, but you are my partner—the one who built a little home with me, side by side. Lady Three, if you leave me now, I’ll never sleep soundly again...”

“Even with her by your side?”

“...Right.”

Xia Chichi, as if right on cue, snapped, “Zhao Changhe!”

Lady Three chuckled, hooking her arm around Zhao Changhe’s, letting his arm sink deep into her bosom. “This is my top general, saintess. You can’t raise your voice at him whenever you want. Since you’re his moonlight, I shall make an exception and loosen the rules, allowing you to be together for a while. I won’t hold it against you.”

Xia Chichi stared blankly at where Zhao Changhe’s arm was nestled, then reflexively glanced down at her own chest. Originally, this whole act was to help Zhao Changhe get Lady Three’s acceptance,

to ease the venerable into having her around as well, preparing for the future... but right now, she could not help but feel a pang of jealousy. Her expression darkened.

Lady Three, basking in her satisfaction, held Zhao Changhe close and puckered her lips. “Kiss me.”

Poor Shelly had completely forgotten that just a few hours ago, she had said, “Don’t you dare kiss me with the same lips you used to kiss her...”

Chapter 588: Extreme East Dao Fruit

Night fell, and the warmth of the campfire enveloped them.

After the storm of emotions passed, the three of them—now oddly like a small family—gathered around the fire to spend the evening together.

There was no point in causing a scene now. No matter who might want to leave, they could not actually leave this place. Staying alone just to watch the others share their affection would only make them look like the defeated party, so it was better to just join in and face the tension head-on.

The two women sat on either side of Zhao Changhe, each helping him make arrow shafts. Every so often, they would glare suspiciously at the other as if to say, “I’m watching you. Don’t you dare make any sneaky moves.”

Shelly was not entirely sure how things had escalated to this point. By the time she realized it, the situation had already become such.

And, upon reflection, she realized that maybe it was not all that bad. She had always known about their relationship; there would come a day when she would have to face it. With Xia Chichi’s talent, her becoming the cult leader was just a matter of time, and even Vermillion Bird could not stop her forever. By dealing with it now, she figured that she only lost a bit of her dignity as a venerable, which was better than the chaos of being discovered later, especially when it came to a situation like Vermillion Bird’s.

At least now, she did not have to hide or sneak around. She could express herself freely.

Lady Three’s gaze then shifted to Xia Chichi’s chest, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

The little white tiger is definitely not flat, but compared to mine, hers are clearly modest. I heard that Chichi used to disguise herself as a man, and that alone speaks volumes. Heh, I even caught her envious look earlier; she probably wishes she could cut mine off.

With a chest like that, what's the point of even having them? A man can't use them for a pillow, and they're no help for raising children! If it weren't for the fact that you met him first, who would even care about those?

With a smug sense of superiority, Shelly lifted her head proudly.

Xia Chichi, meanwhile, gritted her teeth in secret, pulling out a small mirror and checking her face as if inspecting for crow's feet around her eyes.

Lady Three caught on immediately, and she began grinding her teeth in anger.

This little vixen! Is she telling me I'm old by hinting that I've got wrinkles?!

One had to admit, youth certainly had its edges. No matter what anyone said, a young girl—even if she looked like a pig—could still have people falling for her. And Xia Chichi, with her flawless (except for being a bit flat) beauty, was already renowned across the jianghu. She captivated everyone's hearts, with even figures like Wang Zhaoling, Yang Bugui, and Huangfu Shaozong unable to forget her.

This little vixen, always attracting admirers.

Lady Three snorted, focused on making her arrow shafts, deciding not to speak anymore. As long as I'm here, you won't get to flaunt that youthful body—what's there to be smug about?

To think that the previously united Four Idols Cult would descend into internal strife over such an affair, with the saintess and a venerable glaring daggers at each other... It was truly a tragedy.

Zhao Changhe, caught in the swirling vortex of tension between the two women, tried to stay silent and go unnoticed. But even the quietest person would eventually make some noise. As he fitted the string onto the bow, adjusting it carefully, the sound of the bowstring rang out, breaking the silence of the night.

Both women turned to look at him, speaking in unison, “How is it?”

“The string isn’t quite right... I feel like it might snap under too much force. For now, it’ll do, but I’ll need to find a better one eventually.” Zhao Changhe forced himself to stay on topic, trying to break the strange tension between them. “Lady Three, you mentioned forging, but is that possible here? We don’t have the tools for it, do we?”

Lady Three had really just been boasting earlier, and indeed, she realized that they did not have the means to set up a forge. However, after crafting so many arrow shafts, she realized that it might not even be necessary. “This wood is far sturdier than I originally thought. Just sharpening the ends makes for excellent arrowheads—about as strong as iron. We could just keep it simple and use them as they are. Speaking of that, there are no fletchings for these arrows, will your accuracy be fine without them?”

Zhao Changhe hesitated for a moment, then said, “I’ll have to test it out.”

Lady Three, clearly pleased with herself, said, “In the ring my father gave you, there’s a manual on archery. See if it’s of any use to you.”

Xia Chichi turned her head slightly, amused at how her aunt-master was really treating the ring her father had given Zhao Changhe as a dowry now.

Alright, alright, when I become the cult leader, I’ll use the entire Four Idols Cult as my dowry, with Venerable Black Tortoise as part of it. How’s that?

Far away in the capital, Huangfu Qing sneezed yet again.

Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe had already opened the archery manual and was skimming through it. His eyes lit up with excitement. “This is incredible. Truly amazing!”

He picked up one of the bare arrows, with no fletching or arrowhead, and nocked it onto the string, aiming at a distant branch high up. “I’m going to shoot that twisted little branch at the top, shaped like a Z.”

Both women turned their heads, squinting into the distance. The branch he was talking about was hundreds of paces away, hard to even make out in the dim light of the night. Before either of them could properly spot it, the bowstring twanged, and the arrow flew.

The snap of the bowstring and the impact of the arrow hitting its distant target happened nearly simultaneously... no, if anything, the latter seemed to happen even earlier by a split second.

This arrow had unquestionably surpassed the speed of sound, reaching a level not unlike Cui Wenjing's sword strike when Zhao Changhe first witnessed it.

Looking over at the targeted branch, they saw a strange sight—the point of impact immediately began to wither, and the effect spread down the entire branch until, eventually, the whole tree began to shrivel and decay.

The tree had no soul, yet this arrow still seemed to annihilate its soul.

Lady Three and Xia Chichi exchanged glances, both gasping inwardly.

This arrow... If Zhao Changhe manages to find an opportunity to attack from a distance, even those among the top on the Ranking of Heaven would be in trouble! It wouldn't even have to be a direct hit—just a graze could prove fatal. The lack of fletching or arrowhead didn't even diminish its power in the slightest. If he finds a proper bowstring...

Zhao Changhe caressed the bow and arrow in his hands, smiling. "This wood has soul-extinguishing properties. The leaves could probably be refined into something to nourish the soul as well. And there's more treasure here, not just this. Many things here are of extraordinary value. You two take a rest. I'll go explore and see what else I can find."

The two women spoke in unison, "Why should we rest?"

Zhao Changhe froze for a moment. Of course, I want to escape this tense battlefield... Do you have any idea what it feels like to sit between you two, with the tension swirling like a vortex ready to tear me apart?

But he knew there was no way for him to actually get away, especially since this place was meant to be Xia Chichi's holy land—a perfect place for her to cultivate. Earlier, they had blindly settled down without knowing what was where. In reality, if they used the information from the Heavenly Tome, there were designated areas for various purposes.

With a resigned sigh, Zhao Changhe decided to be bold. He extended both hands, one to each of the women, and grabbed their wrists. “Follow me.”

With that, he pulled them along as he started running.

True enough, with the urgency of the situation, neither woman threw a tantrum. Instead, they each looked down at their held hand, then glanced at the other. Their expressions were complex, to say the least.

\* \* \*

The island was not particularly large. If one were to walk along the coastal edge of the forest, it would probably take about a day to circle the entire place and return to the point where the sea and sky met. However, the dense central forest, teeming with a chaotic diversity of flora, could easily take one or two months to fully explore and understand the potential uses of every plant, herb, and tree.

Lady Three had previously voiced her concerns, urging them to leave sooner rather than later, knowing that this place was filled with treasures—an abundance that might trap Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi in a cycle of exploring and cultivating while giving the Sea Emperor the chance to regain strength. She felt it was better to deal with the Sea Emperor first and return later.

But now she realized this supposedly labyrinthine forest was like a mere backyard to Zhao Changhe. He led them around effortlessly, weaving through the undergrowth, identifying each plant’s value with an offhand comment, and harvesting the things he needed with ease.

In just a short time, his ring was filled with an assortment of treasures of heaven and earth, leaving Lady Three in a daze, as if in a dream.

If only I had known your nose was as sharp as a dog’s... Why did I bother trying to make money the hard way before?

In truth, Zhao Changhe’s sense of smell was not that sharp—he still could not differentiate the scents of the perfumes used by the two women. But the Heavenly Tome acted as his cheat sheet. It could tell him what types of plants existed here, what effects they had, and which types of cultivation or injuries they were especially effective for.

What it could not do was tell him where exactly those treasures were located. But Zhao Changhe had another cheat—the ancient Black Tortoise’s Atlas of Mountains and Rivers. The atlas provided descriptions of items and their properties, although not in as much detail as the Heavenly Tome. Its true advantage lay in its value as a map.

Since the ancient Azure Dragon had been here, it made sense that the ancient Black Tortoise would have been familiar with the place as well. They made detailed annotations of the area, allowing Zhao Changhe to easily locate each item within the densely packed forest. All of this left Lady Three and Xia Chichi in utter bewilderment as to how he was managing to find all these things so precisely.

After emerging from the dense forest into a clearing, a shimmering pond appeared before them.

In the middle of the pond stood another statue of Azure Dragon, even larger than the one they had encountered before. The Azure Dragon rose from the water, roaring skyward, hidden beneath the cover of towering trees.

The energy of the wood element here was so intense that Xia Chichi almost felt light-headed, and even Lady Three found it hard to breathe.

The statue from their earlier battle had clearly been an imitation of this one, suggesting that it truly was meant to lead them here. However, due to the distortion of the Heavenly Tome, they had first ended up at the boundary of the sea and sky.

If there was a way out, then it would logically be found here. But the Azure Dragon Seal had been left outside, so how were they to activate this statue?

As Xia Chichi pondered this, Zhao Changhe said, “Don’t bother looking at the statue. It’s not the way out... I already told you, this place is for treasure hunting.”

“What treasure?”

“Have you noticed that while the forest has all kinds of plants and trees, something’s been missing?”

Xia Chichi blurted out, “Fruits.”



“Exactly,” Zhao Changhe pointed to the water. “None of the plants here bear fruit because all the energy meant for bearing fruit is drawn here and converges in that one single fruit.”

Xia Chichi looked closely. Scattered across the pond were five plants, their leaves resembling lotus pads, arranged in an unassuming plum blossom formation—though it was unclear what deeper mystery might be hidden in the design.

At the center of this arrangement lay a fruit resembling a twisted lotus root, except it was not a simple segmented piece but was instead sinuous and serpentine, almost dragon-like.

Zhao Changhe began to explain, “This is called the Extreme East Dao Fruit. It does not heal wounds or increase cultivation—it has two effects. First, it extends lifespan and preserves youth. Second, consuming it helps clarify and simplify the laws of this place, making them easier to grasp. Essentially, it assists in comprehending the essence of the extreme east. Because of it, nothing else here bears fruit. The ancient Azure Dragon and Night Emperor both ate it, and now it’s your turn.”

Lady Three and Xia Chichi were both stunned. “How do you even know such things? Isn’t it a bit too outrageous for you to even know what the Night Emperor ate?”

Zhao Changhe paused, then said, “If I told you I was the Night Emperor’s cook, would you believe me?”

#### Chapter 589: The Door to the Third Layer of the Profound Mysteries

Lady Three and Chichi did not quite understand Zhao Changhe’s joke, but only he himself knew that it was a subtle test aimed at the blind woman.

He had two main theories regarding her identity: one was that she was a spirit of the Heavenly Tome, and the other was that she was... the Night Emperor.

The fact that she was responsible for the words in the announcements of the Tome of Troubled Times had already been confirmed. This seemingly confirmed the first theory and should have ruled out the second. Still, Zhao Changhe could not help but probe further. By claiming to be the Night Emperor’s cook, he was more so referring to his feeding her the cosmetic elixir. This was a line only he and she would understand, and he wanted to see how she would react.

She showed no reaction.

So, it seemed she really was just the spirit of the tome.

If that was indeed the case, it made sense. It would explain why she was bound by rules such as being unable to reveal the affairs of the world and forbidden from engaging in worldly disputes. When the ancient god or demon at Kunlun was stunned by her involvement, that made more sense now, too. If the Heavenly Tome represented the utmost treasure of the Heavenly Dao, then the spirit of the tome was, in a way, a manifestation of the world's will. Who had ever heard of the world itself growing hands to beat someone up and snatch something away? The god or demon's shock was thus understandable.

There was, however, one thing that still puzzled Zhao Changhe. Normally, an item's spirit was passive, existing solely for the sake of the item—like how Dragon Bird had no will of its own, no personal intent or goals. For her to intervene directly and gather the fragments of the Heavenly Tome could be explained as her trying to reassemble herself or restore her body, but if there was no master directing her, it was odd that she would even be actively dragging people from another world or other worlds to this one. That part remained a mystery.

Of course, given that the Heavenly Tome was of such an extraordinary level, one could always justify it by saying that its spirit was unique, above all others. There was no need to overthink it.

Zhao Changhe did not offer the two women any explanations. Instead, he said, "Chichi, go ahead and pick the fruit. Remember to circulate your energy according to the Azure Dragon's cultivation art. Otherwise, the fruit will reject you, and you won't be able to pick it."

Xia Chichi hesitated, feeling a bit awkward. She glanced at Lady Three out of the corner of her eye. "There's only one fruit... Is it really alright for me to have it all to myself? Isn't that a bit..."

Lady Three sighed and rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Xia Chichi! I've already told you, my sole purpose in coming out to sea was to act as your escort. Now stop hesitating and focus on advancing your cultivation!"

Xia Chichi muttered, "You're actually kind of nice, huh."

Escort, sure—but it seems you've been spending quite a lot of time escorting my man instead. Could you get off him, please?

Ultimately, though, she let it go. With more pressing matters at hand, Xia Chichi put aside her jealousy. She knew that there was no point in quibbling over the fruit, and she carefully stepped onto the surface of the pond.

Her inheritance of the White Tiger's legacy had come entirely from her mother. She had not had to seek it out herself, and she did not know much about the legacies of the Vermillion Bird or the Black Tortoise. In contrast, the Azure Dragon's legacy had been something she had sought herself, beginning at Beimang, and her understanding of it was much more complete. From looking at this pond, it became clear that the pond at Beimang was an imitation of this very place, while the star chart was a reflection of the boundary of the sea and sky seen here.

Xia Chichi felt as though she had returned to Beimang with Zhao Changhe... Everything seemed to have come full circle, beginning and ending seamlessly. In this way, the journey of seeking the Dao also became a circle.

She plucked the Extreme East Dao Fruit effortlessly, experiencing no resistance whatsoever. The pursuit of beginnings and ends formed a perfect harmony with the fundamental laws of existence. If the fruit had a consciousness, it would recognize that she was indeed the destined one.

As the fruit slid down her throat, a cooling sensation spread throughout her body, reaching her spiritual platform and bringing profound clarity.

It was as if she herself transformed into the Azure Dragon. Emerging from the waters as the sun ascended over the Eastern Sea. With her surging into the sky, she felt like the blazing sun illuminating the world at midday.

Force, nine in the fifth place, flying dragon in the heavens.[1]

It was not merely a dragon. It was the fundamental law of the world, the Dao itself.

Nearby, Zhao Changhe was reading the records in the Atlas of Mountains and Rivers concerning this Azure Dragon statue rising from the water.

“Force, nine in the fourth place, wavering over the abyss. Rigid yet impartial, it lies not in the heavens, nor on the earth, nor among men—hence uncertainty. It is uncertain, and therefore without blame.”

This entry explained why this place was connected to the mirages, the refraction of light, and why the page of light had fallen here.

The essence of this image carried an inherent sense of illusion. Its position was inherently ethereal—neither in the heavens, nor on the earth, nor among men.

So how were they to leave this place? The answer was also embedded in these words.

When the aspect of wavering over the depths transformed into the dragon soaring into the heavens, that was when they could leave.

And how was this transformation to take place? Well, the statue itself would not transform, but the environment and the people would. Once Xia Chichi fully comprehended it, they would be able to leave.

This understanding transcended mere martial arts, becoming deeply esoteric. From this point on, cultivation would become increasingly obscure, no longer as straightforward as before. Perhaps reaching the third layer of the Profound Mysteries may still be done through brute force, but achieving the Profound Control Realm would always remain as challenging as ascending the heavens.

Lady Three seemed to sense something too. Gazing at Xia Chichi, who sat before the statue on a lotus leaf, meditating and absorbing the effects of the fruit, she murmured, “Its meaning seems deeply esoteric. Do you think that Chichi can really break through?”

Zhao Changhe glanced at her, thinking that despite their squabbles, the unity of the Four Idols Cult was undeniable. Deep down, Lady Three genuinely hoped for Xia Chichi to succeed.

The Four Idols Cult is destined to accomplish great things.

Lady Three merely voiced her concern, not expecting Zhao Changhe to provide an answer—yet he did. “I can’t speak for reaching the Profound Control Realm, but reaching the third layer of the Profound Mysteries is certain. Even if she doesn’t break through now, it’s merely a matter of time. There will be no further obstacles obstructing her from reaching the third layer.”

Lady Three did not question how he could be so certain. Instead, she asked, “And you? Have you found your path to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries?”

Zhao Changhe nodded pensively, then shook his head. “I’ve made some progress, but it’s still vague.”

Lady Three said, “This place doesn’t belong to you or me, so what we gain is naturally less than Chichi. But it’s not entirely without benefit. The four idols have always been interconnected—what’s yours is mine, and what’s mine is yours. I have also gained some sense of the Profound Control Realm while here, and you can at least improve your Rejuvenation Art, can’t you? While Chichi absorbs her insights, let’s not waste time.”

Zhao Changhe nodded in agreement and handed her some herbs he had picked along the way. “At the very least, there are herbs here that can aid cultivation...”

Apart from the godlike Extreme East Dao Fruit, the lush vegetation here meant it was a haven for other miraculous herbs that could enhance cultivation and heal injuries. Insights into the Profound Control Realm might still be distant, but the tangible benefits of advancing their cultivation were undeniable. They could even gather enough to share with others later.

Lady Three accepted the herbs and, with a sigh, stretched herself out on another lotus leaf, lying down. “Honestly, the best part about this place is that it’s got a bed... Want to join me?”

Zhao Changhe could not help but chuckle, shaking his head. He took his own share of the herbs, then sat by the pond to meditate.

His path to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries was progressing, but there was still something missing.

He had made significant progress in the Rejuvenation Art, experienced considerable growth in both spiritual energy and life force, and his recent comprehension of controlling water and light had all greatly enhanced his combat power compared to before setting out to sea. But ultimately, these were peripheral gains. They served as reference points rather than directly advancing his Vicious Blood Art.

Breaking through to the next level had to come from his fundamental cultivation path, similar to how the first layer of the Profound Mysteries required him to seek guidance from the Blood God Cult, and advancing to the second layer involved developing the Blood Asura Body—both being unrelated to any peripheral skills or auxiliary cultivation.

Reaching the third layer of the Profound Mysteries was clearly no different. Light and water had little to do with his Vicious Blood art.

But now, unlike before when he could not even identify what was missing, Zhao Changhe had a much clearer understanding of what he needed.

The first layer of the Profound Mysteries was about beginning to touch upon the forces of nature, learning to harmonize and draw on the power around him. The second layer was about tempering his body, adapting and mastering the changes in power—in his case, forging the Blood Asura Body and learning to control his strength fluidly, moving from brute force to precise control.

Since these thresholds were not strictly defined and varied from person to person, mentors like Vermillion Bird, Tang Wanzhuang, and Yue Hongling could offer experiences but could never provide clear, definitive guidance.

Now, after all these experiences, even a complete dumbass would understand—reaching the third layer of the Profound Mysteries involved the soul. At the Profound Control Realm, the yin spirit could leave the body, so naturally, the third layer was about strengthening and cultivating the soul.

Vermillion Bird had broken through to the third layer by conquering the heart flame, thereby healing her heart and soul. Unfortunately, Zhao Changhe still did not know anything about that...

Thus, aside from accumulating cultivation, he also needed to temper his soul. The means were very clear. The wood and leaves of the Dragon Soul Trees had soul-tempering properties. These were his external aids. In addition, working within the illusory world of the Heavenly Tome to understand and manipulate light was an excellent way to refining his soul since his own spiritual sea bore similarities to the Four Idols Cult, being filled with starlight. This matched his cultivation perfectly, and this page of the Heavenly Tome felt like a pillow handed over to someone who was sleepy.

If there was any threshold here related to his Vicious Blood Art, it was that he very likely needed to have spiritual means to kill a powerful soul.

Killing to nurture vicious qi, it remained a stark truth, even now.

Slowly, Zhao Changhe opened his eyes.

The pond was enshrouded in spiritual mist, encircling Xia Chichi, who sat on the central lotus leaf. The moonlight bathed the scene in a hazy, dreamlike beauty.

She looked like a dragon maiden emerging from the water—or perhaps like Senior Brother Luo stepping into the pond in their youth.

Sensing his gaze, Xia Chichi opened her eyes as well, her gaze meeting his.

They looked at each other for a moment. Xia Chichi smiled, and then, with a spin, she moved effortlessly to Zhao Changhe's side, bringing with her the coolness of the pond and her mild fragrance.

She sat down beside him, leaning naturally against his shoulder, her eyes turned upward to the faint, elusive moonlight filtering through the dense foliage. "Changhe..."

"Hm?"

She murmured, "It's strange. I'm cultivating here in this blessed place, my strength soaring by leaps and bounds. Yet, I still feel as though you're somehow slightly stronger than me..."

Zhao Changhe chuckled. "It's just your imagination."

"Regardless of whether that's true or not..." Xia Chichi whispered. "All I know is that the time when we can openly sit together under the moon is approaching..."

Zhao Changhe could sense that Xia Chichi was at least in the middle of the second layer of the Profound Mysteries—after only a single night.

When they set sail, she had just entered the second layer of the Profound Mysteries... Now, reaching the third layer was only a matter of time.

Chapter 590: Controlling Light, The Flying Dragon in the Heavens

By now, the moon had passed its zenith; it was already the latter half of the night.

When Xia Chichi first arrived at Skyrim Island and the final battle commenced, it had also been midnight. They had fought until dawn, moved here, and now it was night again. It had only been one day and one night, yet it felt as if ages had passed—a vast shift akin to oceans turning into mulberry fields.

Gods had been defeated and a figure on the Ranking of Heaven had fallen. The world was set to undergo an immense upheaval, whether on the seas or land. The power dynamics of the Wang Clan, the Grasslands, Penglai, and the Sea Tribe would all undergo changes. The mere thought of all that might transpire gave one a headache, and Zhao Changhe could not be bothered to think too deeply about it.

The most obvious change, however, was that for the first time, Xia Chichi could sit openly next to Zhao Changhe, under the moonlight, in front of one of the Four Idols Cult's venerables.

The last time they had done anything befitting a young couple was back in Kunlun. They had merely taken a stroll, had some wontons, and bought a gourd... and that was a year ago.

Other than that, they had never really spent much time together. Whenever they met, it was because of circumstances that brought them together, and as soon as the issue was resolved, they would part ways again. They never had the luxury of even spending an extra night together. At times, they were surrounded by others, and they could hardly find even a private moment to be affectionate.

Xia Chichi often wondered if, out of all Zhao Changhe's women, she was the one who had spent the least amount of time with him. If her time spent disguised as a man did not count, then it was likely true.

Perhaps this was why, whenever the opportunity arose, things always ended up heading in that particular direction. In truth, with her unique cultivation techniques and years of using weapons like Iceheart, she did not have much of a natural inclination for such desires. Zhao Changhe, similarly, was not always ruled by that urge. Yet, it always seemed as if the circumstances pushed them there.

So, she never regretted letting her defenses down before him. On this long and unpredictable journey through the jianghu, she truly believed that she had no right to expect him to remain all in his lonesome waiting for her.

Even if it did make her jealous.



But this was nice. The two of them, leaning against each other under the moon, with a gentle night breeze and the sweet scent of flowers all around. It was left unspoken, but Zhao Changhe certainly would not do anything indecent. That was never meant to define their relationship.

“Changhe, how long has it been since we first met?” Xia Chichi asked softly, looking up at the moon, her voice as light as a dream.

“It’s been exactly two years. I left Zhao Village two years ago in the tenth month, and it’s that same month of the year yet again.”

“Really? All I remember is that it was just the start of winter, and by the time we reached Beimang, it was already very cold. How do you remember the exact date so clearly?” Xia Chichi sounded surprised.

Zhao Changhe smiled. “How could I ever forget the day I first saw you?”

“Yeah, right...” Xia Chichi was skeptical, not buying a word of that sentiment. “You’ve changed, you know? These days, you’ve got all these cheesy, cliché lines ready at the tip of your tongue. And if that’s not enough, you don’t even try to be like those elegant, refined young gentlemen who wrap their words in clever innuendos—you just go straight for the sappiest stuff.”

Zhao Changhe laughed. “I’m afraid I can’t do that. Even though I know some poetry, I can never recall a single line when I need it. I’ve completely wasted all that time learning them.”

“I don’t need you to recite poems. Save that for Tang Wanzhuang,” Xia Chichi said wistfully. “Two years... When you think about it, it isn’t that long. There are people who leave to take the imperial exams, and they’re gone for two or three years. So, in that sense, our time apart wasn’t so long at all.”

“Yeah...” Zhao Changhe mused inwardly. Though two years was not an eternity, it felt far richer and more transformative than the first twenty years of his previous life.

Now, he was a completely different person. If he were to return home, his family and old classmates might not even recognize him.

The saying that once you step into the jianghu, time seems to fly by really does seem to ring true.

“You’ve been cultivating so quickly... How much of that is just to be with me openly?” Xia Chichi asked, her voice carrying a hint of playfulness. She quickly added, “No sappy love lines this time. Even when you thought I was a man, you were serious about your training. I know it’s not all about me.”

Zhao Changhe paused for a moment to think. The main reasons for his intense cultivation were to eventually return home—or to put it differently, to free himself from being a mere pawn in the blind woman’s game, to take control of his own fate, much like Xia Longyuan. But to say that Xia Chichi had not been a motivator would be untrue as she had been a significant part of what motivated him to get stronger faster.

Who could stand by while their girlfriend was threatened by a fearsome figure like Vermillion Bird, with talk of serving gods and forcibly tearing them apart? If he could take on Vermillion Bird, he would have confronted her long ago.

In a way, one of his key milestones in cultivation had become overcoming Venerable Vermillion Bird herself.

So he answered honestly, “To be honest, at least half of it is because of you. I want to make sure that Venerable Vermillion Bird can’t stop us, that she has no choice but to watch me hold you right in front of her.”

A soft giggle came from the middle of the pond. Both Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi looked over to see Lady Three sprawled out in a starfish position, sound asleep atop the giant lotus leaf, even smiling in her dreams.

They could not quite decide whether her position made her look more like a tortoise or a frog.

Seeing her like this, Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi both could not help but chuckle, their expressions full of a gentle, amused fondness. Xia Chichi said, “You know, I don’t think you need to use your blade to win over the venerables anymore. Just use your... uh... spear instead.”

Xia Chichi had never imagined that gaining the tacit acceptance of the esteemed Venerable Black Tortoise could happen in such a way. On the surface, Lady Three seemed fierce and imposing, but behind that, she clearly had her own vulnerabilities.

Looking at Lady Three's unusual sleeping posture, Xia Chichi's expression turned a bit quirky. "Hey, is she sleeping or cultivating like that?"

Zhao Changhe shrugged. "I really don't know. It seems like that's just how she cultivates..."

"I never imagined that the legendary, mysterious, dignified Black Tortoise could look like this..." Xia Chichi mused, an incredulous look on her face.

"When I first met her, she was very seductive and mysterious," Zhao Changhe admitted honestly. "She was fierce and impressive in battle—every bit as dashing as Hongling. But lately, she's been acting more and more like a tortoise. It feels like the difference between how she acts in front of others and how she is in private is really extreme. Sometimes I even worry she might be splitting into different personalities. She once mentioned something about cultivating through splitting her soul... Do you think that kind of thing is reliable?"

"That's only how she acts in front of you," Xia Chichi sighed. "Maybe you're the only one in front of whom she can truly be herself."

"And what about you?" Zhao Changhe asked. "I can't even tell if the real you is the one who gets jealous or the one who gives me a knowing look to calm her down."

"Of course, the jealousy is real. Getting you to calm her down is for the future. If I truly pushed her too far, our lives would be difficult in the future... If I really drove her away, you'd be upset too, wouldn't you?"

"Uhh..."

"This arrangement works out perfectly," Xia Chichi said with a mischievous smile. "Now she and I can cover for each other, and it will be harder for Venerable Vermillion Bird to catch me."

A soft giggle echoed once again from the lotus leaf.

Zhao Changhe sighed helplessly, "Are you awake?"

Lady Three pretended to talk in her sleep, "I'm dreaming. Just go on."

“There’s no need to continue,” Xia Chichi said. “The venerable is right—no matter how wonderful this place is or how much I wish to spend some leisurely time here with you, we can’t stay here for long... I’ve already gotten most of what I can from this place, and what I need now is time to digest it all. I can do that anywhere. If the venerable has finished her cultivation too, it’s time we prepare to leave.”

Whoosh!

Lady Three, who had claimed to be dreaming, suddenly appeared right beside them. “How do we leave?”

Xia Chichi slowly rose from Zhao Changhe’s arms, turning her head to look east.

Almost as if responding to her movements, the stars of the mansion of Jiao, the “horn” of the Azure Dragon’s seven mansions, seemed to shine through the treetops to the east.

Lady Three’s heart stirred.

No wonder Chichi said she’s already gotten most of what she could from this place. She really has grasped the essence of this place, this profound resonance between the heavens and earth... It’s almost like the Azure Dragon itself is raising its head.

“Come on, let’s go take a look outside.” Zhao Changhe also recognized the significance, taking both of their hands and leaping over the trees, heading straight for the boundary.

Arriving at the place where they had earlier buried Hai Pinglan, they could clearly see the Azure Dragon constellation slowly rising from the east. The mansion of Xin shone like a small sun, gradually emerging from below the horizon—just as Xia Longyuan had once shown Xia Chichi.

As the Azure Dragon constellation emerged fully, it looked like a dragon surging out of the abyss.

Zhao Changhe thought of Xia Longyuan’s name—Long and Yuan, literally meaning “dragon” and “abyss”—and how fitting it was for this place. Perhaps the blind woman’s choice had carried this intention all along. It seemed likely that Xia Longyuan had been here before, which explained how he wielded Azure Dragon’s power and used it to charm Chichi’s mother.

But that did not matter now.

What mattered now was the celestial phenomenon before them. It was a reflection of the stone sculpture in the pond. The fourth line of the hexagram: nine in the fourth place, wavering over the abyss.

This seemingly slow process was actually quite swift. As the three of them watched, they could clearly see the entire Azure Dragon constellation rising from the waters, reaching higher and higher, with the mansion of Xin's radiance passing over the thick forest, illuminating the ocean surface in shimmering waves.

Even the distant sky seemed to reflect its light.

"It's time." As the mansion of Xin rose before them, Xia Chichi quickly reached out and pressed her hand against the heavens.

The power of the Azure Dragon, resonating between this place and its distant reflection, seemed to create a bridge. A beam of light arced across, forming a radiant rainbow.

Xia Chichi spoke swiftly, "Changhe, you know what to do, right?"

"Yes." Zhao Changhe held both their hands and stepped directly onto the rainbow.

Lady Three stomped her foot in astonishment.

It's clearly just some fake and illusory light beneath our feet, so how is he walking on it? Is this some control over light that the Heavenly Tome granted him?

She looked up to see the Azure Dragon constellation still rising, approaching the zenith. Meanwhile, the three of them were being pulled along by the shrinking rainbow bridge, gradually drawing closer to where its reflection touched the ocean—as if they were treading across the rainbow.

When they finally reached the site of the earlier battle, the Azure Dragon constellation had reached its zenith, now spanning east to west, surveying the earth below.

Nine in the fifth place, flying dragon in the heavens.

The rainbow bridge contracted to its end, and the three descended directly to the sea, landing atop a shattered fragment of flood dragon scales—the remains of the Sea Emperor's body.

In the east, the sky was beginning to lighten, the sun slowly rising as the stars vanished.

The day and night spent in the land at the edge of the sky had ended as suddenly as it had begun, fading like a dream, and they had abruptly returned to reality.