

## T. Times 86

### Chapter 86: Ancient Sword Lake

Zhao Changhe said “I won’t hide my tracks on this journey” on purpose.

When he made that agreement with Han Wubing, everyone in the temple had been killed. Other than Yangyang, no one else knew of it. Han Wubing also had no reason nor energy to spare to tell other people about the meeting he had arranged with Zhao Changhe. Thus, outsiders were not supposed to know where Zhao Changhe was headed after he left the Cui Clan. In fact, outsiders should not have even known when he left.

So how was it that in such a short time after he left the Cui estate, a group of people had already found out he was headed to Ancient Sword Lake? Assassins had come after him. The Demon Suppression Bureau had also come, and they even knew of his plans, handing him information on Han Wubing.

How considerate of them.

There was only one possibility. Yangyang was not very vigilant when speaking to her family members and had ended up carelessly revealing to them where her Big Brother Zhao was heading. Afterward, this information was surreptitiously leaked to the outside world.

After all, Cui Wenjue had betrayed the clan, and he was a powerful man. It was thus not unthinkable for him to retaliate in secret. Just because he was unable to take revenge on the Cui Clan did not mean that he could not exact his revenge on a runaway bandit like Zhao Changhe.

Perhaps other than the Blood God Cult, Cui Wenjue and his side of the clan had raised some people outside to do their bidding. After all, trying to use a rope to trip his horse like that was not the kind of thing that people of jianghu would do.

That should be how things played out.

His enemies already knew his plans, and so did the Demon Suppression Bureau. Furthermore, he was carrying Dragon Bird on his back. Even if others did not recognize the outrageous saber on his back, would First Seat Tang be unable to tell what it was? Zhao Changhe’s heart was in great turmoil at this very moment.

First Seat Tang probably thought that Zhao Changhe would opt against continuing on to Ancient Sword Lake. After all, as long as he avoided that place, others would quickly lose track of his whereabouts, and it would be much more difficult for anything untoward to happen to him.

When men arrange meetings, they will go through hell on earth if that is what it takes to see things through. Women know nothing! “What? You’re not going to hide your tracks? What if you attract the attention of enemies you are unable to deal with?” Seriously now, that was for others to hear!

Zhao Changhe rode his horse haughtily on the government road. When he saw that his pursuers had already been thrown out of sight by Snow-Treading Crow, he suddenly pulled on the reins and dove straight into the wilderness.

Soon, it was already dusk. The sun slowly melted below the horizon to the West. Zhao Changhe lay hidden in the reasonably dense thicket to the side of the road.

Blood God Cult Leader Xue Canghai said with a gloomy face, “You said that he claimed he would not hide his tracks and that he rode straight along the government road?”

“Y-yeah, that’s exactly what he said.”

“I’ve been waiting here for three full hours. It will soon be dark, so where is he?”

“I, I don’t know. Maybe he took a nap in the woods by the side of the road somewhere?”

Sharp cracking sounds echoed as Xue Canghai angrily whipped his subordinate. “You fucking idiot! He fooled you! What a waste of my time!”

A familiar face watched him from behind. Instructor Sun was leaning against a tree trunk; his arms were crossed and his head raised upward as he watched the birds. A faint smile emerged on his lips.

“Old Sun.” An elder of the Blood God Cult who was right next to him asked in a hushed voice, “According to your knowledge of that traitor, where do you think he is right now?”

Instructor Sun was not strictly within the Academic Administration System of the Blood God Cult; instead, he was regarded as a direct subordinate of the Elder Chuangong. Since his immediate superior had spoken, he swiftly swept away his earlier lackadaisical look, stood at attention, and said with a smile, “I am truly unable to tell you. That little brat was a very polite young man initially. I was the one who pushed him to show some of that bandit spirit. I always told him that he has to speak louder. That’s how he became a man recognized by the entire world today, but who knows what kind of cunning rascal he actually was from the very beginning?!”

“Tsk.” Elder Chuangong whispered in a somewhat pained tone, “Do you not know that many in the cult are blaming you for this...”

“They’re blaming me?” Instructor Sun’s voice became louder as he said, “I simply fulfilled my responsibilities as an instructor and guided students on their cultivation. Those bandits I instructed can now use a saber properly. Does that not show my attitude toward my responsibilities?! So why are they not praising me for doing a good job?! Preaching is not my fucking job and neither is attracting believers! That is none of my business! I never fault others when their preaching is horrible and we lose out on some good seedlings, so what right do they have to fault me for doing my job well?!”

When Xue Canghai heard them, he turned to look at them. He also felt that Instructor Sun could not be blamed for his actions. In theory, the stronger Zhao Changhe was, the more it proved that Instructor Sun performed his duties well. And if he performed his duties well, he should indeed be praised, but that did not mean that he should go around boasting about his deeds like that. You can’t just brag about your performance when your performance is what created this massive problem.

This whole thing is seriously a huge fucking pain in the ass.

“Is that not unfair?! Huh? Have I ever filed a complaint against any of you? Are you telling me that I should do my job worse and delay the growth of new recruits? Also, did I not push for Zhao Changhe to come to the Head Altar? If things had gone the way I wanted, how could this mess have even happened?! Yet now that things have come to this point, you blame me? Seriously, what the fuck is wrong with you?!” Instructor Sun’s voice grew louder and louder.

“That’s enough.” Elder Chuangong glanced at Leader Xue’s increasingly darkening face. If you continue like that, you’ll only make it seem like the leader didn’t do his job. At the end of the day, the leader could not withdraw an entire branch like that just because you filed a complaint.

He could only lower his voice as he said, “Even with all that in mind, you cannot deny that your disciple has gone rogue. For that reason, we must still bear the responsibility of dealing with him.

No one here is more familiar with his methods than you. If you can catch him this time, you will naturally receive the rewards you deserve when you come back.”

Instructor Sun snorted and said nothing.

Deep down, he did not believe that Zhao Changhe could beat him. The limestone on Fang Buping’s face could still be seen when he went to get checked up. That at least showed that Zhao Changhe wasn’t some incomprehensible monster. As long as they were careful in dealing with him, capturing him should not be that difficult. But what can I say... I would really rather not do this kind of work.

No matter what, Zhao Changhe was indeed his proud disciple whom he had taught step by step. He had corrected the young man’s every move with his own hands. The relationship between them was not superficial. The better Zhao Changhe performed on the battlefield, the more impressive he would appear as his teacher. Not to mention that the others in the cult had their own selfish designs. In fact, a large number of them were just envious, and this could even be heard in their voices.

What are you all striving for? Are you all merely living to earn money in a cult?

“Alright.” Xue Canghai said calmly, “Sun Hengchuan cannot be held responsible for this matter. However, as Protector Ding said, Hengchuan should bear more responsibility for arresting that traitor. That traitor is clearly playing dirty. No one knows where he’s gone, and he may not even head to Ancient Sword Lake. Hengchuan, you know him the best out of all of us. Where do you think he’s headed?”

Sun Hengchuan felt that Zhao Changhe would definitely head to Ancient Sword Lake, but he still said, “Besides us, there are others who are messing with him along the way. He should know better by now... If I were in his position, I would definitely not continue that way. A martial arts agreement is not a big deal, so why risk your head over it? Of course, that’s what I would do. I’m not so sure what he would choose to do.”

Everyone could not but laugh, seeing how Sun Hengchuan immediately pushed the blame away from himself. But after being tricked by Zhao Changhe, most people here did believe that he would not make his way to Ancient Sword Lake anymore. They found what Sun Hengchuan said made sense.

Xue Canghai pondered for a moment and then said, “Right now, many of the higher-ups of the Four Idols Cult are at Ancient Sword Lake. It is not suitable for me to join in the fun there.”

In fact, I just don't want to show myself before them only for them to order me around like a dog.

Then he added, "However, I believe that we should still leave some eyes at Ancient Sword Lake. It's possible that Zhao Changhe will actually go there. This matter will be left to Protector Ding and Hengchuan. You can lead a few people and station yourselves in Sword Lake City."

Elder Chuangong and Instructor Sun both cupped their hands and replied, "Duly noted."

"As for the rest, scatter around and search for that traitor's whereabouts. That's all. I still have other matters to attend to." After Xue Canghai finished speaking, he disappeared, leaving behind the members of the Blood God Cult gazing at each other at a loss.

At different intersections on different government roads, people who had waited in agony for a whole day finally dispersed, heading out to search the surroundings.

Zhao Changhe headed east through the wilderness and mountains, circling around two cities he encountered along the way. By the time he had gotten past the two cities, the sky had already gone dark.

Under the moonlight, Snow-Treading Crow looked up to the sky and neighed, then it suddenly turned south and ran toward Ancient Sword Lake.

Buzzzz~

At this moment, Dragon Bird lightly vibrated, and an overbearing murderous intent emanated from it once again.

As long as there were people who believed that he would go to Ancient Sword Lake, it was naturally impossible for him to shake all of his enemies off. If they were willing to stand guard at every passage, he would eventually run into them.

Of course, it was incredibly unlikely for those who waited in such a way to be at Xue Canghai's level. And thanks to that, certain death turned into nothing more than a great opportunity to hone his own skills.

He had only just acquired Dragon Bird. In fact, regardless of what saber he acquired, it was impossible for him to grasp it perfectly right away. After all, even one's arms and fingers must be honed through all kinds of training.

Zhao Changhe did not heed Dragon Bird's warning and continued speeding along.

A blade of sword qi suddenly came slashing from his right.

In an instant, Zhao Changhe slid along the side of his horse, supporting himself in one stirrup and using the horse as a cover.

Just as the assassin rushed over his horse, Zhao Changhe silently raised his broad saber.

Snow-Treading Crow continued to gallop under the moonlight as the two halves of a corpse thudded to the ground.

Who said that you can only swing a saber like a club?

I hope that by the time I arrive at the sword lake, my horse will have become an extension of my legs, and my saber an extension of my arms.

## Chapter 87: Two Fools

Half a month swiftly passed.

Zhao Changhe sat by a stream. He drank water while feeding his horse, looking down at his reflection in the stream.

His beard had grown coarse once more, and the warrior uniform given to him by the Cui Clan now had several holes in it. Additionally, his once-shiny black hair had now become a dirty gray. When he had left the Cui Clan, he had left a dashing young man on a majestic horse, and others who saw him would immediately think he was some respected young master. Not much time had even passed, yet his appearance had already returned to that of a barbaric brute.

He had much less fighting to do over the past month after he managed to shake off his pursuers. Moreover, the encounters were far less intense and strenuous than when he had been escorting Cui Yuanyang.

But this time, he had to travel much farther, which inevitably meant that the battles kept piling up. Furthermore, he was constantly wary of being discovered. He could not afford to engage in guerilla warfare as readily as he used to; this time, he had to do his best to kill the enemies he faced to the last man. Unfortunately, it was easier said than done. From time to time, his enemies greatly outnumbered him, making it ridiculously difficult to make sure that none of them got away.

This world really is stupid. They always say “a thousand li apart” or “a distance of a thousand li” when things are far apart, but when the hell is it ever an actual thousand li?! Going by the actual calculations, the trip to take Cui Yuanyang home wasn’t more than five hundred li. On the other hand, this trip to the Ancient Sword Lake is at least two thousand, basically a road trip from Hebei to Jiangbei. And that’s just the straight road...thanks to all these freakin’ detours, it’s a lot farther.

Fortunately, I have plenty of time. Otherwise, it would be really embarrassing if I ended up getting there late just because of this stupid reason.

When I meet Han Wubing, I seriously have to ask him who the fuck told him that two thousand li can be called a thousand li.

He traversed a distance of a thousand li—well, two thousand li—while braving the wind and rain, while also being hunted down and intercepted all throughout his journey, just to fulfill a martial arts agreement. Zhao Changhe had no idea what others would think of him for doing such a thing. Maybe they’d think he was an idiot? As for the man himself, he actually found the journey quite enjoyable.

As he picked up his jug and drank by the stream, his mind unconsciously wandered to Yue Hongling. She was probably the only one who would tell him that his actions were “as one should.” There was absolutely no way that Chichi and Yangyang would say the same.

In fact, perhaps finding this journey even more enjoyable than him was Dragon Bird.

When Cui Wenjing had made it so that the murderous aura of Dragon Bird no longer leaked out, he had also made it so that it no longer looked as shiny and sharp, even making it a bit rusty, which caused it to look rather unsightly. But after being handed over to Zhao Changhe, and after Dragon Bird experienced these days of battle and bloodshed, the rust on its blade began to turn dark red.

What were originally stains of rust on the saber condensed into dark patterns that resembled the wings of a Vermillion Bird wrapped around the entire blade. The blade was initially low-key, unsightly even, but with these patterns, its aura turned vicious and even ancient, as if it was imprinted with the patina of countless years and wars.

Zhao Changhe was quite dumbfounded by these changes, but he had no intention of covering it up. Divine artifacts had souls, and even though they were not necessarily alive, they still had to be respected.

After these days of wielding Dragon Bird, I've become a lot more familiar with it, and I've become a lot better at using it.

Everyone thinks that such a massive saber must be slow, and even has to be wielded with both hands, just like I did in that dream. Well...

Zhao Changhe held the saber in one hand and swung it casually at his chin. Snow-Treading Crow's eyes widened in horror when it saw this.

However, nothing horrific actually transpired. A few tufts of beard fell off, and his chin became cleanly shaven. It was an exceptional display of his control over Dragon Bird.

"The saber is sharp, the sword lake in sight." Zhao Changhe patted Snow-Treading Crow's head. "The closer I get, the more likely that there will be others who block me. Are you afraid?"

Snow-Treading Crow snorted with disdain.

"Hyah!" Zhao Changhe got on his horse and said, "Let's go, this is the last leg!"

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By the Ancient Sword Lake.

Clink!



The tip of the sword broke. Han Wubing covered the wound on his shoulder and retreated a few steps, still grasping the broken sword.

Though he was surrounded by countless enemies, his gaze remained steady.

“Others have said that your name describes you poorly... I can’t help but agree. Han Wubing, I think you are indeed sick[1],” someone said incredulously. “Sacrificing blood for an old friend, slaying all of your enemies, and then walking away, how romantic. We saw the Tome of Troubled Times and made our way here. Honestly, we didn’t expect to still be able to catch you here. So what are you doing? Are you really just going to stay here? Why?”

Another person laughed and said, “He may have thought that he would have no other enemies after killing those from Sword Hut.”

“Fresh 66th Hidden Dragon, I honestly didn’t think that you were this stupid. Hahaha...” Everyone was laughing. “You received so much bounty from both the orthodox and unorthodox sides, and you’ve killed so many people. Did you really think that you have no other enemies?!”

Han Wubing finally spoke. “I’m waiting for someone.”

“Were you waiting for us? Hahaha...”

“I simply killed some insects. I did not expect for the Tome of Troubled Times to even record such a thing... In the end, it attracted others. It really was something I did not expect,” Han Wubing said slowly. “But that was my miscalculation. It has nothing to do with the person I made an appointment with. Anyway, since I made an appointment with him, I have to wait.”

Everyone’s smiles slowly disappeared as their jaws dropped. “This is all just because you made an appointment with someone? Are you seriously just waiting here for someone?”

“Indeed.”

“What if you end up dying here?”

“Then so be it.”

“What if the person you made an appointment with doesn’t come at all? Will you regret it?”

“Then it would be him who broke the promise, not me. Why would I regret it?”

The way those surrounding him looked at him changed. Some looked at him with even greater disdain, while others looked at him with appreciation.

But whether it was disdain or appreciation, enemies were enemies, and they would not hold back just because of this smidge of appreciation that they felt for a respectable character.

The atmosphere turned chilly yet again.

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Less than ten li away, on a trail everyone had to take to reach Ancient Sword Lake, several people were sitting on the edge of a bamboo forest, chatting amongst themselves.

The sound of horse hooves came closer and closer, and all of their expressions changed slightly. They all drew their long sabers and stood up.

From the distance, where the smoke and dust rose, Zhao Changhe came on horseback wearing ragged clothes and fresh blood stains all over his body.

Seeing the people blocking his path, Zhao Changhe was stunned for a moment before he reined in his horse and looked away.

The person in front of him sighed. “You’re really here...”

“Mm-hm.”

“Why did you come?”

“I have an appointment with someone.”

There was silence for a few seconds, and then the other party yelled, “Are you fucking stupid? Just because of that, how many life-and-death battles have you fought along the way? Look at all the blood all over you. You can barely even catch your breath. Do you really see yourself as some kind of god? You think you’re some kind of hero and we’re just random obstacles?”

Zhao Changhe dismounted silently. He patted Snow-Treading Crow, and it cleverly scurried into the bamboo forest.

Zhao Changhe stood quietly with his saber behind his back and sighed: “You should know my—”

“Know what? I know shit! I know you are a smart person, but how did that turn out? What’s the use of spreading a little smoke? We’re blocking your way to Ancient Sword Lake just like others did when you escorted Cui Yuanyang all the way home! If you weren’t so damn stubborn, you wouldn’t have to fight so much. Don’t you understand such a simple thing?!”

Zhao Changhe said, “It’s because someone with a status like Cult Leader Xue would not be stupid enough to sit around and wait for more than half a month. Those who would be made to do such a thing are definitely those without status, so I would definitely be able to handle them.”

The other man’s eye twitched. “Are you insulting me again?”

Zhao Changhe let out another sigh. “It’s just that I really did not want to bump into you on such an occasion.”

“Oh, now you’re even using honorifics!”

“I don’t want to fucking fight with you! Can’t you go hide and save your own life?!”

Instructor Sun: “...”

The other members of the Blood God Cult present were also dripping with cold sweat.

Zhao Changhe scanned the cultists opposite him and asked curiously, “Why are you the one leading this group here?”

Sun Hengchuan said, “Actually, my boss, Protector Ding, is supposed to be leading this group. But as soon as we arrived, Saintess Xia sent him away on whatever odd jobs, so I pretty much ended up becoming the leader here.”

“Oh, then you really can’t beat me. Anyway, if you’re the one leading this team, then I really don’t want to fight. Let’s just talk things through. How about you just let me through?”

Sun Hengchuan laughed angrily. “You think I don’t know how strong you are? Do you seriously think you can beat me? You must be jo—”

Before he could finish speaking, his eyes bulged out of their sockets.

Zhao Changhe held a four-chi broad saber in one hand and pointed it horizontally to the right.

One person and one saber blocked the entire road.

Coupled with the wet blood covering him, his aura was as straight as that of a dragon or a tiger. It was a breathtaking sight with just him standing there.

Sun Hengchuan was stunned. Is that a saber or a door panel? How can he hold that thing in one hand?!

“I’m at the fourth layer, not the third layer as the Tome of Troubled Times reported a while back. My saber is also different from what you think. It’s not the one I used before, and I also don’t use it like before. I walk a different road now,” Zhao Changhe said slowly. “You said that you’re also at the fourth layer. I’m not boasting, but so far, no opponent of the same level has managed to survive a third swing of my saber, so I sincerely suggest you not to try.”

Sun Hengchuan: “...”

Finally, a member of the Blood God Cult next to him seemed to have become impatient. “You’re so tired that you can’t even catch your breath. You’ve long since run out of rations, but here you are still acting all tough. I can squash you myself if I want to!”

Right after he said that, he swung his saber diagonally, striking at Zhao Changhe's left shoulder.

Zhao Changhe coldly watched the other party charge at him. It was only when the saber was about to hit him that he suddenly moved.

Zhao Changhe swiftly grabbed onto the cultist's wrist tightly. Then, in the next moment, Dragon Bird came whistling through the air and stopped right on the other party's neck.

Everyone from the Blood God Cult was silent.

This power, this speed, this control...

It was the Blood God Saber, no question about that, but at the same time...it seemed entirely foreign to them.

The look in Sun Hengchuan's eyes also became very complicated. No matter how many times he read the Tome of Troubled Times, no matter how outrageous the rumors got, he had always seen Zhao Changhe as the young man he had taught himself. He could never believe these exaggerated rumors. Deep down in his heart, he still thought that he could capture this young man alive, and then go back to plead for mercy, asking the leader to let him off...

To this moment, this had been the impression in his heart.

But in actuality, Zhao Changhe was a rising star who had experienced hundreds of battles. He had reaped countless lives with his saber. His reputation on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons had never been undeserved. Among those at the same level, he could do things that others could not. That was precisely what made him worthy of becoming recognized as a hidden dragon...

Sun Hengchuan felt like a father whose child had grown up enough to beat him up. However, he could not help but feel that it was also a very honorable matter. The feeling was indeed extremely ambiguous.

Zhao Changhe let go of the saber and pushed the cult member back. "I have no enmity with the Blood God Cult. In fact, I am even indebted to them for taking me in. The so-called grievances between me and the Blood God Cult are nothing more than an injustice caused by one person to another. Even if my teacher were not here, I would not have been willing to kill other members of the Blood God Cult. I hope that you can convey this to Cult Leader Xue. Farewell."

As his voice was growing faint in their ears, he had already jumped over all of their heads. Snow-Treading Crow scurried out from the bamboo forest, and Zhao Changhe landed right on his horse. In the blink of an eye, man and horse were gone, leaving behind only dust and smoke.

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On the bank of the sword lake, Han Wubing's broken sword was covered in blood.

People were injured, and swords were broken. Despite being outnumbered, he still killed many people with his sword. The besieging enemies were a little frightened, but for that precise reason, they knew they could never let someone like him escape.

His sword was so fast that almost nobody could defeat him alone.

If they did not take advantage of the moment when he was exhausted to surround and kill him, they knew that he would become their greatest nightmare in the future.

Clang!

A heavy saber came at him. Han Wubing was exhausted and could not move away in time, so he had no choice but to block it with his sword.

The long sword that was already missing its tip lost another good chunk. This time, only the length of a dagger was left...

"Han Wubing, you are indeed very strong... but that's all there is for now. Go and wait for the person you want to meet." The man with the saber laughed ferociously and swung his sword again.

Suddenly, the sound of horse hooves came from afar. A moment or two after, a horse's neigh sounded right by them, and the neigh was like the roar of a dragon.

The saber wielder was stunned for a moment, then turned around to see a man leaping from a horse with a saber drawn, charging toward their formation.

Whenever the broad saber in his hand rose, the weapon of the one in front of him would fly away, armor would be cleaved apart, and blood would spurt out. A swordsman subconsciously glanced at his opponent's heavy saber and suddenly thought, Is that still a fucking saber?

The besiegers were in chaos. "Who is it?! Why are you causing trouble?!"

"I fought through wind, frost, snow, and rain, and I rode a thousand li, just for a promise. Damn it, and you guys are fucking killing him right when I got here! Has all my work this month been in vain? Piss off!"

Han Wubing, who was covered in blood and holding a broken sword, looked at Zhao Changhe, who was similarly covered in blood, and a huge smile suddenly bloomed on his face.

Zhao Changhe looked back, and the first thing he said was, "Who the hell told you that you can say 'a thousand li' to mean two thousand li?!"

Han Wubing pointed at him, a large smile on his face. "Hah! Didn't you just say so yourself?!"

Zhao Changhe: "Fuck!"

Xia Chichi was standing quietly on the treetops in the distance. As her clothes fluttered with the wind, a small smile formed on her lips.

"You fools."

## Chapter 88: Sword Lake City

Zhao Changhe suddenly charging into their formation completely overwhelmed those who were besieging Han Wubing.

While Han Wubing had been able to kill a ridiculous number of enemies even while being greatly outnumbered, he was now incredibly exhausted. He was having a hard time even catching his breath. Sensing that Han Wubing was reaching his limits, Zhao Changhe felt like he had no other choice but to simply grit his teeth and charge onward.

What his opponents saw was a wild, ferocious warrior barrelling into their formation and fearlessly charging into battle. The momentum of his saber alone made others' legs go numb, and he wildly swung it wherever he passed...

None of them noticed that Zhao Changhe himself was extremely exhausted. In the end, they lost the will to fight. They swiftly called for a retreat and ran away, fearing for their lives.

Zhao Changhe had originally thought that he would have to engage in bitter combat, so he was left dumbfounded at the sight of the enemies scampering away. He stood with his saber raised without a clue as to what he was supposed to do. "Am I really that scary?"

Han Wubing smiled. "Yes, you are very scary."

"What a group of idiots. They dared to come and besiege someone at the fifth layer of the Profound Gate, yet they immediately fled in fear at the arrival of someone at the fourth layer. Tsk." Zhao Changhe got off his horse and sat on the ground, exhausted. "Hey, how many more days are there until the start of summer?"

Han Wubing also sat weakly right beside him and counted in his mind. "There should still be seven days until then. You actually came really early."

"Seven days, huh?" Zhao Changhe turned his head and scanned Han Wubing for a few moments. "How do you think you'll be in seven days?"

"Oh, these are all just flesh wounds. They look pretty bad, but with good medicine, they'll be fine in no time. I'll probably be back in top shape in three days."

Zhao Changhe smacked his lips in pain. "So what you're saying is, after you recover from your injuries, we'll have four days of nothing to do? Summer feels quite late—ugh..."

As soon as he uttered those words, he could not help but think of his girlfriend and cut himself short. [1]

The peeping Xia Chichi suddenly smiled.



Han Wubing had no idea why Zhao Changhe suddenly stopped talking. “These four days don’t have to be as boring as you might be thinking. Sword Lake City is just nearby, so you can go shopping or even just stroll around there if you’ve got nothing else to do. Or if you want to find the sword... Oh, wait, you use the saber, so you probably won’t be that interested in it.”

“So just because I don’t use the sword, I can’t be interested in it? Well, anyway, Yangyang said that even the Cui Clan could not find it, so who could possibly find it so easily? Those idiots just now? As if.” Zhao Changhe paused for a moment. “Wait, you want to find it so you can replace the one you broke just now? Don’t even bother. Just go to the city and buy yourself a new one.”

Han Wubing said, “I didn’t intend to look for it in the first place.”

“Alright.” Zhao Changhe stood up and said, “Get on. I’ll take you to the city so that you can rest up.”

Han Wubing mounted the horse without any pretense.

It would be difficult for others to tell that the two people riding together, who appeared to be on excellent terms with one another, had the intention of holding a fierce duel in just a few days.

However, what was even more bizarre was that the two fools never entertained the thought of simply moving the date of their duel earlier since they had already both arrived.

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Sword Lake City.

This city had once been just a modest lakeside town. Needless to say, it was now a massive city that was even more prosperous than the province’s official capital. However, it was structurally still a town, and it had neither city walls nor guards. It did not even have an entry fee.

This actually played a part in how it had managed to become so prosperous.

Zhao Changhe rode in and looked around on the streets like a child, curious to see how it compared with Qinghe. An aromatic scent drifted from close by, filling his nose.

A well-dressed madam came up to him and said, “Oh, my. Sir, would you like to come and rest at our Myriad Flowers Tower? We have the most beautiful girls in the city, and they are excellent in the four arts...[2]”

Zhao Changhe stopped. “...Do you have anyone whose mastery of the four arts is on par with First Seat Tang’s?”

The procuress[3] was dumbfounded. “We do not.”

Zhao Changhe nodded. “Forget it then. Tell them to practice more.”

Han Wubing laughed out loud.

Zhao Changhe rode his horse forward and said, “The brothels here are honestly quite special. We’re all covered in blood, but they don’t care at all and they still try to solicit us.”

“Hah, you’ll get an even better idea of how things are after staying here for two days.”

Zhao Changhe did not, in fact, need two days as he was getting to see how things were right now.

There was another brothel up ahead, and people were fighting directly at the door. By the time Zhao Changhe came close enough to watch the fun, some people had already been beaten to death.

Several procuresses came out to carry the unconscious away, and the brothel continued to operate as if nothing had happened.

This time, it was Zhao Changhe’s turn to be dumbfounded. “What is this place’s yamen[4] doing?”

Han Wubing said leisurely, “The regulations here are still that of a small town. Who knows what His Majesty is thinking?”

“...With how prosperous the place is, why don’t they collect taxes? It’s such a waste.”

Han Wubing now also found himself at a loss. I am just a man of jianghu; I don't know either.

Zhao Changhe's head ached. "Is there a Demon Suppression Bureau here as well?"

Han Wubing knew a bit about this. "On the surface, they do not have an office, but in fact, there is one. However, I don't know which residence or even which brothel it is."

Zhao Changhe nodded. "Where did you live before?"

"I didn't live in the city. I was afraid that you wouldn't be able to find me, so I built a hut right next to the grave in the bamboo forest by the lake."

"Does that mean you'd be fine with wherever?" Zhao Changhe glanced at a larger inn at the end of the street. The boss's plaque read "A Home Away From Home," and someone was leading a horse through the side door. It looked like there was a stable behind it.

He went straight over and said, "This place looks good. Innkeeper, do you have a private courtyard? Help me take care of my horse."

The young waiter came up to them and said, "Sir, you've got great eyes. We have the best stables and the best fodder! I'm not just talking about the horses you ride on the street, but also the horses you ride in bed! I promise that you'll have a great time!"

Zhao Changhe: "?"

Han Wubing: "..."

The young waiter carefully observed them, then said with a smile: "Sir, you want to find a place without horses? You can't find that. Everyone has horses. Without horses, how can they attract customers? Hah, when you are away from home, there are—"

"Okay, okay." Zhao Changhe knew that he might not be able to find a horseless place here, so he asked, "Is there a private courtyard?"

"Yes, sir, come this way. Please rest first. I will ask the girls to come over and show you the horse."

Zhao Changhe said angrily, “No, we’re good. We don’t want anyone to disturb us.”

The young waiter’s eyes suddenly began wandering back and forth between Zhao Changhe and Han Wubing. Then, he showed an ambiguous smile and said, “I understand.”

Zhao Changhe was stunned for a moment. Before he could say anything else, the young waiter had already left.

He turned to look at Han Wubing numbly. “What does he mean?”

Han Wubing said expressionlessly, “It’s nothing important.”

“Fuck.” Zhao Changhe pointed to the room next to the private courtyard: “Damn it, my reputation is going to be ruined because of you. How unlucky.”

Han Wubing entered the room with a straight face. Damn it, if this really spreads, do you think it’s only your reputation that’s going to be ruined?

I heard that women who get involved with Zhao Changhe are unlucky. Who would’ve thought that even men can’t escape the same fate!

Anyway, even though Zhao Changhe looks like a wild brute, it turns out that he’s so pure that he doesn’t even dare let brothel girls touch him. His face turned red just from looking at them.

Han Wubing found it a bit funny. He seemed like an aloof person, but in fact, when he was lonely, he was not beyond visiting a brothel. Unexpectedly, Zhao Changhe, who everyone thought was a bandit, turned out to be the purest visitor of jianghu.

While he was applying medicine to his wounds and resting, Han Wubing’s ears suddenly twitched. He stretched out his hand and grabbed his broken sword.

There were very light footsteps outside, and he could even smell a faint fragrance.

An enemy? Is...

Han Wubing quietly glanced out of the window, but he saw an extremely graceful female figure standing outside Zhao Changhe's room, knocking on the door softly.

Zhao Changhe's angry voice came from inside the room, "Damn it! I told you not to disturb people's purity, get out of here!"

The woman whispered softly, "I know that you are not a womanizer, respected sir, so this little brother does not feel any reservations about wearing female clothing in front of you."

Han Wubing's hair stood on end.

However, it was what followed that was truly hair-raising. A loud roar came from the room, followed by the sound of someone running into a table. Right after that, the door of the room swung open with a loud bang, and Zhao Changhe stuck his head out, showing an expression of extreme surprise. Then he glanced at Han Wubing's room with some caution, then suddenly stretched out his hand and pulled the "little brother wearing women's clothing" into the room.

Han Wubing hugged his knees and sat beside the bed, feeling that the place he was currently at was more dangerous than the sword lake back when he was being besieged.

I thought everyone was merely being victimized by rumors, but I didn't expect yours to be true!

## Chapter 89: Choosing How to Die

What actually happened inside the room was not as Han Wubing imagined, nor was it even what Zhao Changhe expected to happen.

Right as he closed the door, he immediately wanted to hug her, kiss her, and tell her that he missed her after half a year of separation.

But as soon as he raised his arm, when he caught sight of Xia Chichi's half-smiling eyes, Zhao Changhe froze in place.

Just half a month back, he had been hugging a little girl and telling her to wait three years for her Big Brother Zhao.

Because of that, now that Xia Chichi was right before him once again, he could not help but have a guilty conscience.

Besides, her eyes did not seem to be as warm as he initially expected. Furthermore, her half-smiling smile appeared to be far less excited and joyful than his own—how are events like this in the jianghu supposed to go?

Xia Chichi smiled and said, “What’s wrong? Big Brother Zhao? Why did you suddenly turn mute and become as red as a tomato after seeing a woman?”

It’s over. The sourness in her words can probably drift all the way to the lake. How does she know how Yangyang calls me?

Zhao Changhe was trying to figure out what to say when he suddenly saw a cold flash of light—the edge of a dagger was getting a bit too close to his neck.

His first reaction was to dodge and, interestingly enough, he felt that he really was able to dodge this strike. He consequently could not help but wonder whether it was because the gap in strength between himself and the thirteenth Hidden Dragon was not that large...or because she was showing him mercy.

With that in mind, despite feeling that he could dodge, he did not move in the slightest. He simply allowed the dagger to reach him.

He could not sense any murderous intent from Xia Chichi, and Dragon Bird did not react at all... Regardless, he could see the apparent anger in her eyes. In the end, he simply resigned himself to his fate, stopped resisting, and decided to let her do whatever she wanted with him until she was satisfied.

Xia Chichi noticed the signs of Zhao Changhe instinctively moving to dodge but ultimately stopping himself from doing so. She harrumphed and said, “Is this how vigilant you are in the jianghu? You just let random people in, and you don’t even dodge when they raise their weapons against you? What gives you the confidence that I won’t kill you?”

Zhao Changhe then blurted out, “How are you ‘random people’?!”

“Oh? Am I not? Then who’s Cui Yuanyang?”

“About Yangyang...” Zhao Changhe wanted to say that he had tried to refuse her by telling Cui Wenjing that he already had a girlfriend, but the old fox had ultimately tricked him into this situation.

But then, after giving it some thought, he realized that while he may have been deceived initially, he had still fallen victim to Yangyang’s cuteness. Even though what he felt for her was more like a family member than a partner, the same could not be said for Yangyang’s feelings for him. So was it even a good argument to make? Moreover, he did indeed consider waiting for her to grow up, so it really was as if he had cheated on Xia Chichi.

After his thoughts reached this point, he decided to no longer even attempt to argue and simply admitted in a low voice, “It was my fault. I was unable to control myself.”

“When a woman chases after a man, merely a veil separates their union. Not to mention, the woman in this scenario is Cui Yuanyang, who’s so incredibly cute and rich. Even I would have probably done the same if I were in your position, much less our dear Big Brother Zhao.”

“No, I...”

Xia Chichi slightly increased the pressure she placed on his neck with the dagger. “So I am indeed an outsider. Right now, I am none other than the saintess of the sect superior to the Blood God Cult. I am merely acting to purge the traitors of the sects subordinate to mine. For the sake of our friendship, I can make an exception and let you choose to die on your own terms. Tell me, how do you want to die?”

“...Hm, could you bite me like how you did back in the cave? It’d be nice if you could suffocate me to death like that.”

Xia Chichi said coldly, “You are a traitor to our cult, yet you still want to relive your old dream with the saintess? Sorry, but to be a saintess requires renunciation and devotion to the idols of our worship. I have long since forgotten you. I came here to see you so that I could put a definitive end to our past relationship. In addition, you even have a new love, so what have I to lose?”

“Luo Qi—”

“My name is Xia Chichi.”

“Chichi.”

Xia Chichi forcefully held back the emotions she was feeling and glared at him angrily.

“The Blood God Cult is a subordinate of the Four Idols Cult. Since when was it the duty of the Four Idols Cult’s saintess to come out and help the Blood God Cult purge its traitors? Are they even worthy of such favor?” Zhao Changhe sighed. “Did you come here to look for the ancient sword? Do you need help?”

“...”

Do I need help?

Just this simple sentence of his shattered the psychological barrier that Xia Chichi had erected. She gritted her teeth and said, “I have plenty of subordinates, and all of them are at the eighth or ninth layer of the Profound Gate. Do you seriously think you can compare to them?!”

“Outsiders may think that when you became a saintess, it was as if a little sparrow jumped from a branch and transformed into a phoenix. But I know that you haven’t had it easy in the past six months,” Zhao Changhe said softly. “A completely unfamiliar environment, a dark, demonic cult, without anyone to talk to, unable to express your true feelings...”

Xia Chichi shouted, “I had someone!”

“While you were indeed given the power to order others around as per the rules of the cult, once you make a mistake, even if it was ever so trivial, such as going out to look for a man, that mistake could well lead to you being banished. I have no idea how many people there are who are jealous of your position and are secretly trying to pull you down. You walk on ice as thin as paper, and you probably never had a good night’s sleep in Beiman.” Zhao Changhe sighed. “I understand. You should not even have come to see me today...”

Xia Chichi looked at him steadily and said nothing.



He was right. She terribly missed him, which was what had led to her impulsive actions. She truly should not have come looking for him in the first place...

She knew deep inside her that she was not doing the right thing. Otherwise, why would she have always been hiding in the trees and secretly peeking at him from afar? While she reasoned it as observing the traitor...

The truth was that she just could not hold herself back.

As soon as she had left him, Yue Hongling had appeared. Then when he later ventured into the jianghu, Cui Yuanyang had appeared.

After being away from him for half a year, she could not help but wonder if, while she had not forgotten him, he had forgotten her.

In fact, the cult's degree of penetration into society was quite ridiculous. The Four Idols Cult even had people within the Cui Clan. Although Xia Chichi did not know the details of the conversation between the rumored father and son-in-law, she could figure out from other people's descriptions that Zhao Changhe truly did hold Cui Yuanyang dear, in a way similar to their relationship back then. While such a relationship was still different from that of lovers... she still felt uncomfortable with the fact.

Additionally, she could not deny that Cui Yuanyang was frankly more suitable for Zhao Changhe than herself. She was just a saintess who was supposed to not show any emotions, so how could she drag someone around for the rest of her life? On the other hand, Cui Yuanyang was kind and lovely, and her family was rich. The help she could give him was much greater than what Xia Chichi could.

So shouldn't I be happy for him?

But I just can't help feeling angry, I really just want to poke him with the dagger and ask the heartless asshole how he wants to die!

But when I saw him in Ancient Sword Lake...

I even came to see him even though I shouldn't have. And even with my dagger against his throat, he still asked me if I wanted his help.

It was just like back then; when I came back home exhausted and saw the food ready at home, it was like an arrow piercing my heart, and I could not dodge it.

Xia Chichi looked at him dumbly, watching helplessly as he stretched out his hand, easily pushed away the dagger on his neck, and then took her into his arms.

Xia Chichi, who was much stronger than him, actually failed to get out of the way.

The dignified thirteenth Hidden Dragon was oh-so-vulnerable at this moment.

When he hugged her, Xia Chichi still felt nostalgic for a moment, and then she sobered up in horror and pushed his chest. "If someone finds out, you and I will both die."

Zhao Changhe dragged her hand, raised the dagger to the side, then raised Dragon Bird, and chopped down on the dagger. "Look, the saintess is fighting the traitor."

Xia Chichi nearly burst out in laughter.

"Chichi." Zhao Changhe was chopping down on the dagger while looking at Xia Chichi, but his eyes slowly turned warm...and blurry. "No matter how you look at me, no matter how ungrateful you feel Zhao Changhe to be, I.... Really, after you left, I really never shared that kind of intimacy again.... You have always remained my girlfriend in my heart. I've always been waiting for the day I get to truly see you again, and kiss you however I want...."

Xia Chichi's mind blanked. She did not know whether or not Zhao Changhe had kissed Yue Hongling and Cui Yuanyang, but she felt that he was speaking the truth.

Earlier, he would even blush from the mere provocations of the brothel madams.

He... He's really been waiting for me?

When she came to her senses, her lips were already sealed.

The saber and dagger were lying on the side. Meanwhile, his left hand held her thin waist tightly, and he kissed her domineeringly.

He seems to really be suffocating... Xia Chichi thought drowsily.

But what about me?

How many midnight dreams have I had of the man who touched my heartstrings, that fierce and domineering kiss, over and over again. I never forgot it either.

This is so weird... I mean, he's my man, but for some reason, I feel like we're having an affair.

The chivalrous is detached, while the noble is reserved. They are merely suppressing Changhe...and I am just a witch of a demonic cult, what's wrong with me having an affair?!

All these thoughts flashed through Xia Chichi's mind in an instant. In the end, she closed her eyes and accepted the kiss enthusiastically.

Anyway, I've already decided to let him choose how he wants to die, so be it if he suffocates to death!

## Chapter 90: Chichi's Mission

As that blind man had said, Zhao Changhe, who now seemed to be all over the jianghu, had always held himself detached from this world. The entire time he's been in this world, he's always subconsciously seen himself as a modern university student.

In the same way, he stubbornly believed that he and Xia Chichi were in a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, even if neither party had explicitly said so.

Because he inwardly saw Xia Chichi as his girlfriend, he never had any thoughts about Yue Hongling or Cui Yuanyang. It was only when he was facing Xia Chichi that he felt free. As he felt that she was his girlfriend, he felt that he could kiss her and touch her.

And perhaps even further.

When he realized that Xia Chichi had not lost her feelings for him despite her having become a saintess and being separated for half a year, Zhao Changhe felt so happy that he just wanted to take her tightly into his arms and pour out his feelings, resulting from their reunion after a long separation.

Both sides were confused and infatuated, and the atmosphere gradually heated up.

But then, the door suddenly swung open as Han Wubing rushed in with his broken sword. “I heard some fighting! I’m here to help... Oh, uh... It’s okay. You guys continue.”

Han Wubing slowly retreated one step at a time, only to then suddenly see the witch rushing out the window and fleeing. The sound of her gnashing her teeth could then be heard as she escaped. “This damn traitor, he actually has a helper! Hmph! Make sure to wash your neck! I’ll be coming to kill you soon enough!”

Her voice grew fainter and fainter, and her figure was soon nowhere to be seen.

Whoosh!

Several high-level members of the Four Idols Cult flew over from the distance. “Has the saintess ever suffered a loss? Should we...”

“No need!” Xia Chichi’s face turned red, and a “very angry” expression emerged on her face. “That traitor’s life belongs to me! No one is allowed to take action without my permission!”

“...Understood.” The members of the Four Idols Cult looked at each other and felt relieved. It seemed that the speculations regarding whether or not their saintess still had unresolved feelings for that traitor could now be put to rest. She was clearly gnashing her teeth from how much he hated him, and she did not seem to be faking the anger on her face.

Well, it isn’t really strange for this to be the case. After all, the saintess even witnessed him and Cui Yuanyang hugging each other.

However, Zhao Changhe and Han Wubing really do seem quite powerful. Even in the condition they’re in, they were actually able to force the saintess to retreat. It appears that their strength needs to be re-evaluated...

Meanwhile, Han Wubing carefully retreated to the door. He could not help but find what the other party said to be rather odd. Were you really fighting just now? With your mouth? Am I just too tired? Was I just seeing things?

Well, I can at least be sure of one thing: that person was a witch and not some cross-dressing man.

Han Wubing took a deep breath. “Well, Brother Zhao, I won’t be interrupting your rest any further. If a witch attacks you again, you can call me...”

At this moment, Zhao Changhe wanted nothing more than to strangle him to death. He said blearily, “Alright... I have to thank Brother Han for scaring away that witch.”

Han Wubing felt that Zhao Changhe was squeezing out his words through his teeth, so he quickly left the room.

Zhao Changhe went to the side of his bed and landed back on his bed butt-first.

Although he spoke through gritted teeth, his words were not completely empty. He really did get carried away in his passion. When he calmed down, he realized he really could not be having an affair with Xia Chichi given the current situation. If some elder from the cult had come and seen what they were doing, both their lives would be over.

Judging from what Chichi said when she was leaving, she must have noticed someone coming this way. Han Wubing’s interruption was timely, and he did have good intentions... But why do I have such a strong urge to beat him up...

At the beginning of summer, just you wait![1]

\*

“Saintess, after conducting long hours of research these past few days, we have garnered information relating to the emergence of the sword.”

Once she returned to the private residence where the Four Idols Cult was currently staying, Xia Chichi took the seat of power and listened to the report somewhat absent-mindedly. “Mm, tell me then.”

The elder reported, “We have inferred from the records of our Holy Cult over the years that the true appearance of the ancient sword should be related to the seasons. After scouring through the records tirelessly, we have pinpointed the date of its most likely appearance to be the beginning of the 7th solar term.”

Xia Chichi nodded. “Indeed, that is precisely why we came here this time.”

“There is still a need for relevant ceremonies that the sword must recognize before it reveals itself. However, at the instance when someone was closest to succeeding in acquiring the ancient sword, it suddenly grew uncontrollable at the last moment, killing everyone involved before escaping. It had clearly approved of the person at first, but it ultimately turned against them. We are still having some difficulties ascertaining the exact reason for its sudden outburst. If we don’t manage to understand the reasoning behind it, it is highly probable that we face failure at the last step numerous times.”

Xia Chichi asked, “So what clues have you gathered regarding this?”

The elder replied, “We searched for information about all those who sought the sword but ultimately died under its sword qi. After thoroughly analyzing them, we finally discovered something they had in common.”

“Oh? What is it”

“It seems that the sword kills all those who are heartless and unjust, as well as those who break promises.”

Xia Chichi’s expression finally turned serious. She sat up straight and said, “Is that really the case?”

“Yes.” The elder found himself slightly uncomfortable.

The Four Idols Cult is a demonic cult. No matter how much it claimed to be holy and orthodox, its behavior still leaned toward evil and they had committed all sorts of atrocities. In such an environment, who would dare call themselves kind, righteous, and keep to their promises? Even the

followers believe themselves to have no other advantages and place a lot of importance on promises would not dare say they were confident in their character. With that being the case, who would dare gamble their head to the recognition of the ancient sword?

Even Xia Chichi felt a little uncomfortable. She was confident that she was definitely not heartless. She loved a man dearly in this life. It was even to the point where, despite the cult not allowing it, her love was so deep that she even went and kissed the man she loved.

However, she was similarly confident in the fact that she had done things like breaking promises over the past months. It has already been half a year. How can a demonic cult's witch not deceive others... Whether it be a demonic cult's saint or saintess, what was the difference between lying and breathing to them?

At this moment, a scene flashed in Xia Chichi's mind. The scene was the one she saw when she was hiding on the treetops by the ancient sword lake, the scene of two fools smiling at each other. It was difficult to find any fault in these two who remained righteous and stayed true to their promise.

It's just that I really don't know if the man I love among the two is a heartless person or not. This is something that can be reasoned either way. I wonder how the ancient sword will judge it... If I really do let him go, then if he gets cut down by the ancient sword, there's no longer any need to question it.

Eh, why am I having such thoughts? They aren't going to be involved in the matters of the Four Idols Cult anyway, so what's the point of thinking of all this?

Another elder sighed and said, "Of course, the brothers of our Holy Cult are kind, righteous, and keep to their promises. But firstly, we are not sure whether or not there are any other conditions that the ancient sword looks at. Secondly, it would not be advisable to simply gamble our lives in such a way. This is still only my opinion, though. What do you all think we should do?"

Xia Chichi nearly laughed out loud when she heard the elder's words. Impressive, as expected of my Azure Dragon Protector. He really is shameless. Despite thinking this, she maintained a calm and serious demeanor. "I concur. However, I would also like to hear your opinions."

Someone hesitated and said, "From what I understand of the past attempts, the person who performs the ceremony does not necessarily need to meet the requirements of the ancient sword. The key is the person who ultimately takes hold of the sword. I think we can do it like this. We can still hold the ceremony and simply trick an outsider into taking hold of the sword. If he dies, at the worst, we simply need to come back next year; if he succeeds, we simply take him away."

Everyone nodded. "Elder Qian's words make sense."

Hmph, what happened to the fellow cult members being kind and righteous? Xia Chichi wanted to laugh even more when she heard this. She then said lazily, "Then who do you think would be suitable to use?"

"Han Wubing. He is currently staying by the lake. There's no need to consider anyone else."

While she also clearly felt that Zhao Changhe was an unsuitable candidate, Xia Chichi still felt very unhappy when she heard this. What do you mean there's no need to consider anyone else? Are you saying that my Changhe isn't good enough?

In the end, she could not help but ask, "What about Zhao Changhe? He traveled thousands of li just to keep his promise. He also seems to be an honest person."

Elder Qian glanced at her and then turned his head away.

You've clearly already got your answer written on your face, so why ask? Are you just trying to make things difficult for me?

Xia Chichi, who was regarded as a heroine who was abandoned in the end, gritted her teeth. After a while, she managed to squeeze out a smile. "Han Wubing is not easy to fool. You can try using him, but at the same time, you should look for an alternative. There's no harm in having a backup plan."

Everyone agreed. "Yes."

"In addition, I feel that the Demon Suppression Bureau has strengthened its manpower recently. For some reason, named experts have arrived at a mere brothel." Xia Chichi's expression became solemn. "If the imperial court wants the ancient sword, we should just give it up first."

"That does not make much sense, though. If the imperial court really wanted it, they would have no need to act so secretly... Besides, they do not have divine guidance like us. They had found the wrong path. Otherwise, they would have taken it away a long time ago. And if not for that, how could they have allowed for unrestricted access to the Ancient Sword Lake?"



“Don’t be careless. We must always remain cautious. This is my first major mission. There is no room for error!”