

Three Realms 121

Chapter 121: I'm Telling You That You're a Frog at the Bottom of a Well

Although Jiang Chen didn't really want to receive the person from the Darkmoon Kingdom, he wanted to understand the movements of all sides given the current situation. Perhaps he could obtain a bit of intelligence from this Darkmoon envoy?

"Darkmoon Kingdom envoy Qi Can greets young master Jiang." The Darkmoon Kingdom envoy was short and looked like an ordinary citizen. There was nothing particularly remarkable about him.

This kind of person couldn't be identified if he was thrown into a crowd.

However, this person's nose was slightly flat, and his eye sockets were rather sunken. Judging from his appearance, he did indeed have a few traces of the traits from the Darkmoon Kingdom.

"Young master Jiang?" Jiang Chen's lips curled into a humourless smile.

"Heh heh, I've heard that the Jiang family has rejected the appointments and rewards of the Eastern clan and declined the title of first duke. So, if I guess correctly, the Jiang family doesn't hold any government positions anymore. Calling you young master Jiang seems to be the most fitting, is it not?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, "You're a smart man. What I don't understand however is: When did I, Jiang Chen, have any interaction with your Darkmoon Kingdom worthy of you taking the trouble to come visit me?"

"I'm here as a lobbyist to enlist your support."

"A lobbyist?" Jiang Chen's eyebrows creased slightly. "Could it be that you believe my Jiang family will betray the people of my own kingdom?"

"Heh heh! Although you say that, the Eastern clan is already on the decline. What reason is there for you to continue to profess your loyalty? Moreover, I've heard that on that day in the capital, Eastern Lu gave up on your Jiang family as though he was discarding a pawn without even the slightest bit of hesitation.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. How could such a minor character understand the lofty ambitions that he, Jiang Chen possessed?

"My Darkmoon Kingdom is not so, what we value the most are those with true skill and genuine knowledge. The Jiang clan is precisely the type of strong clan that the Darkmoon Kingdom admire the most. Our king is willing to invite the Jiang family over with the title of first duke. The land that the Darkmoon Kingdom will enfeoff is three times the size of your Jiang Han territory. As for gold and beauties, you'll have as much as you desire."

"Gold? Beauties?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"Indeed. The financial power of the Darkmoon Kingdom is something that the Eastern Kingdom can't even hope to match. With the selection of beauties in the Darkmoon Kingdom, we can find whatever type you can think of, whether coquettish or innocent. They're certain to be prettier than that Princess Gouyu and that Eastern Zhiruo. Sexier too!"

Jiang Chen found the sight of him waxing eloquently rather funny..

“Do you think that the males of my Jiang family live for wealth and beautiful girls?”

“The fine sons of the Jiang family naturally have their own aspirations. However, in this realm, wealth and beautiful women are the best representation of ability, and the best embellishments of power. Without the adornments of wealth and beauties, so what if one stands at the peak of power?”

“Besides, if your Jiang family continues to stay within the Eastern Kingdom, given the previous example of the Long family, the royal family will never grant you power. You may enjoy wealth and prosperity, but you’ll never grasp much power. The notion of rising to become a very high official will be nothing more than an extravagant hope for you.”

The envoy’s spittle flew with abandon as he brimmed with self confidence.

Qiao Baishi had long since been filled with flames of angry indignation as he stood to the side. Although he’d left the Hall of Healing, he was still a citizen of the Eastern Kingdom at heart.

Perhaps he didn’t have any loyalty to the royal family, but he had an exceedingly deep connection to the country and land that had given birth and nurtured him.

This envoy from the Darkmoon Kingdom dared to so eagerly advocate for a rebellion.

This was the height of humiliation for Qiao Baishi.

In this world, whether one was a practitioner or an average citizen, they all felt a sense of identity when it came to their own country and homeland.

This country could see internal strife, and dynasties could change.

But these were all internal issues for the kingdom.

This absolutely didn’t mean that they would accept the invasion of other kingdoms or humiliation from foreigners.

Although Jiang Chen’s soul was not directly connected to the Eastern Kingdom, he more or less had some feelings for this land after assimilating with the memories of the previous Jiang Chen.

Furthermore, if it were the past Jiang Chen, he would never have accepted such a thing as betrayal.

Therefore, the Darkmoon Kingdom’s planned mutiny was a complete joke to his ears. He hadn’t admonished or rejected this envoy was because he wished to hear what other interesting tidbits this person would reveal.

When he saw the envoy stop, Jiang Chen asked with a smile, “What else? Just this?”

The envoy had an odd expression on his face, “Isn’t this enough?”

Jiang Chen chuckled, “Allow me to summarize. First duke, wealth, and beauties right? But have you thought about the fact that if I so desire, I can also easily obtain these things in the Eastern Kingdom, and probably even more. Wouldn’t you say so?”

"The Eastern Kingdom?" The envoy revealed a trace of mockery in his smile. "Does young master Jiang think there's still a future for the Eastern Kingdom? The two greatest powers of the royal family and the Duke of Soaring Dragon have almost been completely exterminated in their conflict. This country is now an empty shell. It won't recover for at least dozens of years."

"So what?" Jiang Chen asked blandly.

"Heh heh, young master Jiang, you understand the situation but are just feigning the fool, right?" The envoy also laughed. "Then as you wish, I'll simply speak even more clearly. Your Jiang family will continue to enjoy wealth and prosperity if you flock to the Darkmoon Kingdom. If you remain within the Eastern Kingdom, you may very well be buried with it as well."

"Oh? Why do you say that?"

"Since things have progressed to this point, there's nothing to be further concealed. The news of your Eastern Kingdom's internal conflict has long since made its way back to the Darkmoon Kingdom. The armies of all the dukes within the Darkmoon Kingdom have now gathered and will mobilize their forces to conquer the Eastern Kingdom within ten days. With your Eastern Kingdom's current strength, just what will you bring out to obstruct the great armies of the Darkmoon Kingdom?"

"Our king has also heard that your Jiang family has a way to compel Swordbirds to battle. This is the reason why our ruler values your Jiang family. In the vast Eastern Kingdom, the only family to catch my king's attention is your Jiang family."

"So you are saying that my Jiang family should actually thank your king for his special regards?"

"There's no need for gratitude and the like. If we can work together in harmony and cooperate in service of my king, then that would be for the best. My king has exceedingly great ambition and his mind encompasses the world. Conquering the Eastern Kingdom is but the first step. His final goal is to unify all sixteen kingdoms. If we can obtain the Jiang family's aid, it will surely be like giving wings to a tiger for His Majesty's great plan."

"At that time, my king will become the great emperor who has unified the lands, and the Jiang family will certainly become a mighty family with your name engraved in glory and strength, remaining immemorial throughout the ages."

"Young master Jiang, a valiant man aims for lofty goals beneath the heavens. I believe a fine man like yourself should know what to choose? Is it to leave a legacy of eternal glory or be a good-for-nothing and follow a kingdom in decline to be buried alive with the dead? Do you need to give it anymore thought?"

One had to say, this envoy Qi Can was quite a smooth talker. A marvelous persuasiveness permeated his every sentence.

However, his eloquence was completely useless in front of Jiang Chen.

Whether it was unifying the land or having an immortal name throughout history, this was still the ambitions of an ordinary person at the end of the day. Jiang Chen's ambitions didn't lie in this realm at all.

“Young master Jiang, I’ve spoken all that I can, why don’t you consider it?” Qi Can chuckled.

“It does sound quite good.”

Jiang Chen chuckled and suddenly walked outside with regular, even steps. “Qi Can was it? Do you see this well outside the door?”

“I do, I saw it before I entered the door.” Qi Can was nonplussed.

“Have you heard of the story of the frog at the bottom of the well?” Jiang Chen asked again.

“Frog at the bottom of the well? It’s a story for educating children, right? How could I have not heard of it?”

Jiang Chen nodded and looked quite gratified. “That’s good. Let me put it this way, you’re currently like the frog at the bottom of the well. You’ve spent quite some time painting a picture, but those blueprints that you think are so magnificent are but a patch of sky as big as an opening of a well.”

“You... young master Jiang, what do you mean by this?” Qi Can’s facial expression changed.

“What does this mean? My house’s young master is calling you a frog at the bottom of a well, do you still don’t understand? If you don’t understand even this, how can you be a lobbyist?” Qiao Baishi smiled coldly as he walked up and berated him.

“A frog at the bottom of a well?” Qi Can couldn’t help but start laughing, “Young master Jiang, you simply think too highly of yourself! Your Jiang family does have some skills to its name, but you’ve only gained some prestige within the Eastern Kingdom. The strength of my Darkmoon Kingdom isn’t something that your Eastern Kingdom can measure up to.”

“Strength?” Jiang Chen’s tone was a bit melancholy as he recalled the experiences of his past life. He sighed lightly, “I have already seen the strongest existence there is, but the pity was that it was annihilated just like that.”

In his past life, Jiang Chen’s father had been the Celestial Emperor and he had been the son of the Celestial Emperor, ruling over the heavens and various worlds. And even then, so what? Wasn’t it all gone just like that?

The Darkmoon Kingdom was still nothing more than a stronger common kingdom. It was making a fool out of itself blowing its own horn in front of Jiang Chen and showing off its force.

How could Qi Can know that Jiang Chen’s current state of mind had already weathered a reincarnation between his current life and prior life? How would he comprehend the endless sorrow and desolation within Jiang Chen’s tone?

He laughed coldly and said with arms akimbo, “Young master Jiang, I’ve delivered all that I have to say. If you refuse to realize your error and persist in your stubbornness, there will be no room for you to negotiate when the great armies of my Darkmoon Kingdom arrive.”

Jiang Chen was recollecting the past events of his previous life and a sentimental air had wrapped itself around his heart when he suddenly heard Qi Can’s spirit dampening threats.

His face darkened, “Qi Can, go back and tell your king that although my Jiang family has nothing to do with the Eastern clan, this land has given birth to my Jiang family and nurtured it. If your Darkmoon Kingdom dares to set one filthy foot on this land, by my hand, you will be unable to return after your visit.”

It wasn’t that Jiang Chen was arrogant, or that he had any feelings of loyalty to the Eastern Kingdom.

It was that there was a type of emotion within Jiang Chen’s bones, an emotion reminiscent of pride, an emotion that evoked memories of old friendships.

This land had nurtured generations of Jiang family ancestors, and the body of him, Jiang Chen, had been nurtured and raised by this land.

At the heart of it all, his flesh and blood had already melded into this land.

Perhaps he would depart not long in the future, but he would never permit the footsteps of evil to trample this land. This wasn’t simply an invasion, but also blasphemy towards the emotions that Jiang Chen felt in his heart!

In addition, this Qi Can’s words were overtly and subtly filled with a sense of threat. This made Jiang Chen incredibly irate. He hadn’t been frightened even when a stronger sect than the Darkmoon Kingdom had sought to suppress him.

Even if this Darkmoon Kingdom was stronger than the Eastern Kingdom, how could Jiang Chen allow himself to feel threatened by them?

Chapter 122: Princess Gouyu’s Complex Emotions

One had to say, Jiang Chen’s emotions had also infected Qiao Baishi’s. Qiao Baishi widened his eyes and bellowed, “Qi Can was it? My house’s young master has already spoken his piece. Leave while you still can! Envoys can’t be slaughtered in the battle between kingdoms, otherwise I’d be the first to chop you up and feed you to the dogs.”

Qi Can was also dumbfounded. He had realised that in the eyes of others, his eloquent speech just now had been nothing but a joke?

Was this Jiang family crazy? Did they think that they could rely on their own paltry strength to defend against the entire Darkmoon Kingdom?

“Young master Jiang, you... really won’t consider it for a bit?” Qi Can still didn’t give up.

“Get out!”

Jiang Chen shouted softly as a current of true qi shot out. Qi Can’s entire body flew through the air as the formless current surged violently and washed him out of the door like a kite in the wind.

Just as he was about to gather his qi and fight back, his feet suddenly touched ground as he landed solidly on the road.

“Outward projection of qi, lifting heavy items as though they weigh nothing! Could he be... an eleven meridians true qi master?” Previously, Qi Can had still been a bit arrogant, but now he’d been frightened into breaking out in cold sweat.

How could he dare to continue behaving atrociously?

Jiang Chen’s strength had surpassed his imagination. A youth in his teens was actually able to utilize true qi so ingeniously!

Qi Can’s forehead broke out into a cold sweat when he thought of this and didn’t dare to voice any more foolish words. He cupped his hands and scampered off. Jiang Chen had let him go, but he was afraid that Jiang Chen’s underlings would be displeased and refuse to let him off the hook.

The news of an invasion from the Darkmoon Kingdom had indeed not been random drivel from Yue Qun.

“Honored master, what should we do about this?” Qiao Baishi also seemed to be at a loss. His chest was filled with the passion of patriotism but he also clearly understood that with the Eastern Kingdom’s current strength, at least half of the 108 dukes were without battle capabilities at the moment.

Of the remaining half, their hearts were jittery and they would be of not much use.

As for the royal family, their elites had almost all perished in the chaos caused by the Long family. The newly rebuilt royal strength was basically just the result of a hasty last minute effort. Their power was limited.

Observing the kingdom as a whole, there was almost no elite strength that could fight against the Darkmoon Kingdom on the front lines!

“What else can we do? When water rises, the earth will dam it. When enemy soldiers advance, the general will fend them off.” Jiang Chen wasn’t panicked. The battles and wars of ordinary kingdoms were not a great source of stress for him.

Even the experts of a sect hadn’t been enough for him to bow his head in submission. How would a mere Darkmoon Kingdom give him cause for concern?

“Baishi, accompany Song Tianxing and the others back to the capital with greatest haste. I don’t wish to have dealings with the royal family, but when it comes to a war between two kingdoms, they should still be informed of everything as soon as possible.”

Jiang Chen couldn’t help but sigh when he finished speaking. The Eastern Kingdom was really in quite a mess. The order of their entire system had collapsed in the wake of the chaos caused by the Long family.

Logically speaking, with the strength of the Eastern Kingdom, they were sure to have agents undercover in the Darkmoon Kingdom who could provide them with flows of intelligence.

However, after that battle, almost all of the strength of the Eastern royal family had completely perished. Even if they had intelligence networks, this network had almost all crumbled.

When its intelligence network broke, the entire country would be like a headless fly.

It would be impossible for normal operations to commence within three to five years.

If it wasn't for Jiang Chen accidentally obtaining this information, the royal family would likely still be in the dark when the Darkmoon armies appeared at the border.

Desperate times called for desperate measures.

Jiang Chen sent out two Goldwing Swordbirds to lead a flock of Silverwing Swordbirds and take the Hall of Healing retinue back to the capital at the fastest speed possible.

The speed of the Silverwing Swordbirds was quite astonishing. Coupled with the fact that the birds took turns to carry the riders, their progress was exceedingly fast and they made it back to the capital on the same day.

Song Tianxing and Qiao Baishi were both born and bred citizens of the Eastern Kingdom. Patriotic fervor flowed in both their veins.

They didn't hesitate and directly sought an audience with Princess Gouyu.

Logically speaking, they should've sought an audience with the king, Eastern Lin. But Eastern Lin was a teenaged youth and basically acted only as a figurehead at the moment.

Princess Gouyu was ruling in place of the king behind a screen.

If Song Tianxing had been alone, he might not have been granted an audience with Princess Gouyu. But Qiao Baishi was different. He was Jiang Chen's trusted subordinate, of that Princess Gouyu was well aware of.

She quickly dressed herself appropriately and summoned the two into the palace.

"We greet Princess Gouyu." Song Tianxing and Qiao Baishi came forward to pay their respects.

"How come the two of you are united again? You've come to find me in such a hurry, has something urgent happened?"

Song Tianxing looked at Qiao Baishi and indicated for him to speak.

Qiao Baishi didn't shirk either and said gravely, "Princess, we've received news this noon that the Darkmoon Kingdom has gathered a large army and will invade our Eastern Kingdom within ten days' time."

"What?" Princess Gouyu's face changed drastically. Recently, she had felt a vaguely foreboding sensation and had also held a certain anxiety.

Except till now, she had naively comforted herself that the Darkmoon Kingdom may not make a move, or that they may not move so quickly.

However, this kind of self comfort was in the end, just merely self consolation.

Not only had the Darkmoon Kingdom made their move, but the speed of their action had been faster than she'd anticipated.

"This news, are you certain?" Princess Gouyu had lost her composure slightly but immediately recovered the poise and calmness of someone in a superior position.

"Without a doubt." Qiao Baishi responded. "An envoy from the Darkmoon Kingdom came to the Jiang Han territory to recruit the Jiang family this morning. He promised countless wealth and prosperity and the vacant seat of first duke as an invitation to the Jiang family."

Princess Gouyu couldn't help but feel a bit frantic when she heard these words. She knew full well that Jiang Chen wouldn't be drawn by wealth and prosperity, but she still couldn't help but ask, "Did Jiang Chen agree?"

"My house's young master turned up his nose and berated the envoy harshly before rejecting him." Qiao Baishi held nothing back.

For some reason, Song Tianxing's heart contracted painfully when he heard Qiao Baishi voice the words, "My house's young master", as if he had suffered a loss.

Princess Gouyu was somewhat moved by these words as she looked deeply at Qiao Baishi. She then said, "Now that I know of this matter, I will immediately set off to see Jiang Chen."

"Alright!" Qiao Baishi nodded.

"Wait a moment, I'll bring Ruo'er with me." As though she was slightly unconfident, Gouyu suddenly thought of Eastern Zhiruo.

Perhaps, in Gouyu's heart, Eastern Zhiruo was the best emotional card she could play, and also the best chip to persuade Jiang Chen with?

When Gouyu had heard that the Darkmoon Kingdom was about to invade, she'd initially felt a bit panicked. But somehow, after a while, she relaxed internally for no reason at all.

It was as if she had received psychological support which made her feel that it was impossible for the Darkmoon Kingdom to invade the kingdom successfully.

As for this subconscious psychological reliance, she was no longer shy or embarrassed now to admit that it was naturally because of Jiang Chen.

The strong shock and impact of the battle of the Second Crossing had left an imprint on her heart that would be difficult to forget even in a hundred lifetimes. It was a type of mental brand that could never be erased.

Jiang Chen's mysticity, strength, enigma, guts, pride, and character had been thoroughly displayed without regret in that battle.

This kind of youth was a perfect man in the proud Princess Gouyu's eyes. He was the only man who could conquer her proud heart.

Eastern Zhiruo had already fallen asleep but was overjoyed upon hearing that they were going to see Jiang Chen. Her drowsiness was completely swept away and she chattered about, wanting to set out immediately.

Since this was a matter of grave importance, Qiao Baishi didn't hesitate as he brought Princess Gouyu, Eastern Zhiruo, and a crowd of royal personal guards along with him in his return to the southern border.

They flew all night and arrived back in the Jiang Han territory before daybreak.

When she saw Jiang Chen again, Princess Gouyu felt a mix of emotions. Strands of change seemed to have taken place on the youthful yet resolute face of the teenager.

This face wasn't strange to her and was as familiar as always.

But that feeling was as though the distance between the two had grown a lot longer again.

Truly, there was a type of bearing on Jiang Chen that made even Princess Gouyu feel ashamed of her unworthiness. It was an indescribable sort of nobility, an unspeakable kind of mysticism.

"Jiang Chen, you're already an eleven meridians true qi master?" As she recalled the rise of this youth, Princess Gouyu still felt that it was quite surreal.

Half a year ago, he seemed to have been someone who couldn't even pass the foundational exams of the Hidden Dragon Trials!

How could someone undergo such complete metamorphosis in half a year's time?

Princess Gouyu couldn't make sense of it, and neither did she want to.

Jiang Chen nodded his head slightly, "Let's not mention this small matter. Right, Gouyu, I've heard that your Eastern clan has an old ancestor? He hadn't appeared during the Long family's rebellion. Will he still fail to appear even when a strong enemy is about to invade?"

Princess Gouyu smiled ruefully, "The ancestor is undergoing closed door cultivation. But he should be coming out soon?"

She wasn't sure of herself when she said those words. Besides, the Eastern clan might have an ancestor, but so did the Darkmoon Kingdom.

If it came down to their elders facing each other, it was said that the ancestor of the Darkmoon kingdom was an old freak who had lived for a thousand years. Both his lifespan and level of cultivation were higher than those of the Eastern clan's ancestor.

Jiang Chen smiled and didn't speak further.

"Right, that girl Zhiruo has also come?"

"Yes, but we hurried here overnight so she didn't rest well. She should be catching up on sleep now. You've missed her?" Princess Gouyu's tone was a bit odd.

"Miss her?" Jiang Chen broke out in laughter. "You lass, your mind is always filled with random things. You don't mean to tell me that this time, the two of you have come here to fulfill your promise?"

Princess Gouyu's charming face reddened. Of course she knew what Jiang Chen was referring to. She had once promised that if he could suppress the Long family in the Hidden Dragon Trials, he could have his pick of either Zhiruo or her, or even both of them together.

Princess Gouyu herself didn't know where she'd gotten the courage then to say those words. To be honest, she felt extremely conflicted. She felt a bit embarrassed and afraid, but also vaguely felt that if that was really the case, it wouldn't be so bad.

However, hearing Jiang Chen bring up this matter when they were standing face to face, even the normally brash Princess Gouyu scrambled for a bit as a red blush danced across her cheeks.

"Jiang Chen... you... you... you..." Princess Gouyu really wanted to one up him and say something that would fortify her will. However, when her sexy lips parted, she didn't know what to say.

"See, you've regretted it haven't you? Pretend I haven't said anything then." Jiang Chen purposefully said with a dark look on his face.

"No, it's not that. Jiang Chen..." Princess Gouyu hastened to explain, her eyes sparkling with the light of shyness, a sight that would normally have been impossible to see. Her voice was so low that even she herself couldn't hear it. "Jiang Chen, you... don't misunderstand me. If you really desire it, you... you can... have me."

This headstrong woman immediately bit her lip afterwards and gathered her courage, "I know you... you may not think much of me. But, apart from you, I, Gouyu, will never look favorably upon any other man in this life."

Chapter 123: Will You Take Ruo'er as Your Wife in the Future?

Jiang Chen was stunned. He'd only been teasing Princess Gouyu and had cracked a joke with her, intent on intimidating her a bit. Who would've thought that with Princess Gouyu's personality, she'd take it so seriously?

This made it difficult for Jiang Chen to back down, like he was riding a tiger.

Chuckling, Jiang Chen walked forward, reached out his finger and lightly tweaked Gouyu's straight and sexy nose. "Alright, then I'll take this bit and call it even."

In the moment that Jiang Chen reached out, Gouyu's heart almost leapt into her throat. Although she possessed a strong personality and walked and talked like a man, in the end, she was still a lady.

She'd always concealed the shy bashfulness of a girl beneath a strong, dominant exterior.

When things really came to a head, the jade-like skin of the shy girl, whom no one had ever touched, still tensed up involuntarily.

At one point, she had really thought that Jiang Chen was really going to make a move.

Who would've thought that Jiang Chen would take such a serious attitude towards this simple matter and only superficially tweaked her on the nose. This situation was very much like a big brother doting on the little sister from next door warmly and innocently.

Gouyu's heart pounded furiously. Although she felt vaguely disappointed, she also seemed to feel a bit relieved. Her maiden heart was in a chaotic uproar.

"Let's go and see Ruo'er." Jiang Chen smiled, turned and took a few steps.

When Princess Gouyu saw that Jiang Chen truly didn't possess any ulterior motives, she exhaled a long, easy breath and strove to calm her emotions. She gathered up her courage again and walked in front of Jiang Chen.

Her clear eyes and white teeth was all the more comely beneath the morning sun. Her eyelashes fluttered lightly, as if she'd gathered all the strength in her body to say, "Jiang Chen, it doesn't matter how you view me, you're the first and only man to have touched me. From this day forth, I won't let a second man touch me."

Princess Gouyu felt almost completely drained after saying this. She had never thought that it would be tougher to say some words than it was to face a million strong army.

"Don't let your thoughts drift. If Ruo'er sees you like this later, she'll really think that I've done something to you." Jiang Chen chuckled.

A trace of a warm smile appeared on Princess Gouyu's lips. "Ruo'er is so innocent that her thoughts won't travel in that direction."

"Innocent indeed, she didn't even understand spitting blood from the mouth, haha."

Jiang Chen laughed heartily as all of a sudden, Princess Gouyu's face turned bright red again. She bit her lip lightly and stamped her foot, "Jiang Chen, you're such a rogue."

The allusion of spitting blood from the mouth originated from that banquet at the Soaring Dragon manor, when Jiang Chen had reposed against the heir of White Tiger, Bai Zhanyun.

He'd meant to allude to the scene of a woman giving birth, but Eastern Zhiruo hadn't taken the hint at that time and had even asked Jiang Chen what he meant.

Even Princess Gouyu had thought for quite a while before understanding.

Princess Gouyu hung back and kept a distance from Jiang Chen. Her emotions were complicated as she gazed upon the back of the teenager.

When Jiang Chen had tweaked Princess Gouyu's nose just now, the gesture had been warm, innocent and stirred up endless emotions from her.

Her elder brothers Eastern Jun and Eastern Lu, because they'd been born in a royal family, had been like machines with power and had never committed such an intimate act towards her.

Jiang Chen's motion had let Princess Gouyu vaguely feel the affection of an elder brother, the emotions that a little girl would have towards the big brother next door.

Except, this Jiang Chen was five or six years younger than her.

As soon as Eastern Zhiruo woke up, her first thought was to find brother Jiang Chen. She was very excited when she saw Jiang Chen and Gouyu arrive and pulled on Jiang Chen's hand, saying in her

charming and innocent voice, "Brother Jiang Chen, do you know? Nowadays, I don't like to ride a carriage when I travel in the capital."

"Why is that?" Jiang Chen was perplexed.

"I like riding the Goldwing Swordbirds." Eastern Zhiruo encircled her hands around Jiang Chen's arms and shook it lightly, pleading, "Brother Jiang Chen, how about you give me one of the Goldwing Swordbirds?"

It wasn't uncommon to see little girls attracted to pets and all sorts of cool looking things. Riding a Goldwing Swordbird was much cooler than riding a horse carriage.

"A Goldwing Swordbird is an intelligent and civilized spirit bird. I'm afraid you'll be unable to control it if I gave one to you. How about this, I'll give you a baby Greenwing Swordbird. You can raise it from young. I'll also give you a few pills so you can rear it slowly. It will surely evolve into a Goldwing Swordbird in a few years, and will be even more thoughtful towards you if you strike up a solid relationship with it."

For some reason, although Jiang Chen was sometimes brusque and impatient towards Princess Gouyu, he was always exceedingly patient towards Eastern Zhiruo.

In his heart, he truly did view Eastern Zhiruo as a little sister. Perhaps this was because Eastern Zhiruo possessed an yin constitution, the same condition that he had been afflicted with in his past life.

He played with and kept Eastern Zhiruo company very patiently all day.

During this day, Jiang Chen completely ignored all thoughts of an invasion by Darkmoon Kingdom and the situation of the Eastern Kingdom. He only accompanied Eastern Zhiruo on her random wandering all day.

Princess Gouyu also did the same.

Eastern Zhiruo still hadn't had her fill of fun when the sun had gone down but she was a docile girl and knew that her aunt must have had an urgent matter that made her travel such a great distance to the Jiang Han territory.

"Brother Jiang Chen, Auntie, let's go back. Ruo'er is also tired after playing all day."

Upon returning to the River Wave city and after eating dinner, Jiang Chen smiled faintly at Princess Gouyu. She'd been about to speak, but she bit her lip in hesitation. "Go to sleep, the Jiang Han territory is the place where my Jiang family has been born and brought up in. Unless I, Jiang Chen, am no longer here, the Darkmoon Kingdom's dirty iron hooves will never set foot on it."

Princess Gouyu's charming eyes moved faintly, as if water would drip out of them. She asked again, "What else?"

"What else?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly, "Isn't this reason enough?"

"Not enough." Princess Gouyu seemed to be feeling wronged.

"Then I'll add Zhiruo as well, is this reason enough?"

Princess Gouyu's gaze dimmed faintly, as if she seemed to have expected that Jiang Chen would say that, but she wasn't able to keep herself from asking.

She also couldn't help but feel a bit sad after asking.

"Ruo'er is innocent and kind. No one is willing to see her hurt in this world. Jiang Chen, you... will you take Ruo'er as your wife in the future?"

Princess Gouyu lifted her face as she stared unblinkingly at Jiang Chen, as if she would never let it rest until she received an answer.

"Just what are you thinking about everyday? Me taking Ruo'er as my wife?" Jiang Chen started laughing uncontrollably. "Ruo'er is innocent and naive, seeing her is like seeing my own sister. How could I have such weird thoughts?"

Jiang Chen wasn't putting on airs as he truly didn't have any other thoughts towards Ruo'er. Everything he'd done was because of Eastern Zhiruo's honest personality, as well as her innocent and naive character.

In addition, there was Eastern Zhiruo's innate yin constitution. Two similarly afflicted people could empathize with each other due to their shared emotional resonance.

Whenever he saw Ruo'er, Jiang Chen couldn't help but recall his past life. Protecting Ruo'er was a function of Jiang Chen protecting the complex knot of resignation he'd felt in his past life.

As for marriage, Jiang Chen actually didn't have the heart to speak on.

Whether male or female, once one had an yin constitution, they would then only give birth to generations of children with yin constitutions.

It was a tragic fate.

This was to say, if Ruo'er gave birth in the future, her children would also possess yin constitutions. It was unavoidable.

Although they would have to face this cruel reality sooner or later, Jiang Chen didn't have the heart to voice it so early. He couldn't bear for such an optimistic young girl like Zhiruo to shoulder a set of shackles upon her heart that didn't belong to her in the first place.

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The Darkmoon Kingdom, within the palace.

The king of Darkmoon Kingdom sat on his dragon throne as he surveyed his surroundings, full of an arrogant and haughty air.

Qi Can had already returned to the Darkmoon Kingdom. This unremarkable character was actually one of lobbyists that the king of Darkmoon Kingdom relied on most heavily. He appeared a bit bedraggled right now.

He crouched on the ground, thoroughly recounting to the king of the Darkmoon Kingdom everything that had happened to him in the Jiang Han territory.

The king of Darkmoon was around forty years old, and had a wispy beard on his chin. His looks were dignified and solemn, his aura uncommon. In particular, his eyes were as ferocious as a tiger's and they looked around brilliantly, appearing quite domineering.

His large hands grasped the dragon throne with vigor and force, giving others the ferocious feeling of being able to tear violent tigers apart and cleave through huge stone.

"Your Majesty, that Jiang Chen couldn't tell good from bad. Your subject brought to bear all sorts of skills but Jiang Chen would hear none of it. He instead humiliated your subject and said that your subject was a frog at the bottom of the well. He further held my Darkmoon Kingdom in all sorts of contempt and was exceedingly discourteous."

Qi Can also knew that it would be impossible to recruit the Jiang family. He decided to add fuel to the flames and fan up the flames of trouble, thoroughly exaggerating for a bit.

A trace of killing intent shot out from the Darkmoon monarch's tiger eyes. "This Jiang family lad is quite ungracious. It is his honor that we wished to recruit him. This brat is ignorant in his youth and has no respect for anyone after gaining a few tricks. The assembled, combined armies of my Darkmoon Kingdom will use this Jiang family to spill the first blood on the floor!"

"May our king live ten thousand years, may Darkmoon live ten thousand years!" The assembled nobles genuflected and called out.

The king of Darkmoon was greatly pleased and was in high spirits. "My Darkmoon Kingdom will begin its conquest of the sixteen kingdoms with the Eastern Kingdom!"

"Your Majesty, according to intelligence, the Jiang family is adept in compelling the Swordbird army. This type of aerial army poses great destructive power towards ground troops. The great armies of our Darkmoon Kingdom should prepare to face them seriously."

"Humph. Although the Swordbird Army is strong, it's not as if my Darkmoon Kingdom has no corresponding strategy. Firstly, my Darkmoon Kingdom also has the Black Riders, adept at aerial tactics. Although the fighting capabilities of the black crows are ordinary, when combined with a Black Crow Rider, their battle capabilities are quite astonishing. Three thousand Black Riders are sufficient to contend against an army of a hundred thousand Swordbirds. There will be various elite archer troops on the ground, combined with numerous formations, why would we fear the Swordbird army then? Not to mention, does this mere Jiang family intend to fight against the entire combined army of my Darkmoon Kingdom with just the strength of one family alone?"

It was shocking to think of the strength of a single family fighting against the elite armies of an entire kingdom.

The officials and courtiers of the Darkmoon Kingdom were all extremely optimistic as they engaged in heated discussions and debates with anyone who volunteered opinions.

The king of Darkmoon smiled, "We have also considered this point, so we have obtained the services of the first general of the kingdom, General Ren Feilong, to personally lead the armies."

Ren Feilong was hailed as the first general of the Darkmoon Kingdom. He had only risen to prominence within the last decade or so, but had accomplished countless achievements for the Darkmoon Kingdom.

What need did they have to fear from a mere Jiang family with him leading the armies?

This was practically a tiger hunting sheep, with no doubt about the conclusion at all.

Although the Jiang family was strong, and the rumors of them ending the Long family being quite miraculous, those of the Eastern Kingdom would be the only ones willing to believe and accept such legends.

To an enemy kingdom like the Darkmoon Kingdom, they subconsciously felt that the rumors had been exaggerated. From the bottom of their hearts, they did not believe that the Jiang family was as miraculous and strong as the legends said.

Chapter 124: I Make the Decisions in My Territory

On the Eastern Kingdom's side, Princess Gouyu made straight for the capital after spending one day in the Jiang Han territory. She sent an order to the dukes at the same time for them to combine all their armies and convene at the southwestern border.

The entire Eastern Kingdom sank into a panic the instant the order to the dukes went out. Everyone knew that the Darkmoon Kingdom was located at the southwestern border of the kingdom.

The Darkmoon Kingdom had always been a sworn enemy of the Eastern Kingdom, and the relationship between the two was famously acrimonious amongst the alliance of the sixteen kingdoms.

The two countries would wage a war against each other almost every ten or twenty years.

It'd either be a pitched full out battle or small skirmishes.

Hate and discord had been passed down through the generations for these two countries, and had reached the point of no possible reconciliation unless one side fell. Whether monarch or citizens, the two sides would grit their teeth with bone-deep hatred whenever the other country was mentioned.

Originally, although the Eastern Kingdom had been a bit weaker, it had never been so weak as to lose power and shame itself over the hundreds of years.

However, at this moment in time, after the two great powers of the royal family and the Long family had clashed with each other, the country's strength had been depleted by nearly one half.

This was precisely when the Eastern Kingdom was at its weakest.

The Darkmoon Kingdom taking advantage of this opening to swoop in was akin to robbing an owner when his house was on fire.

Even small tradesmen and porters would be able to grasp the truth of this. The current Eastern Kingdom truly had no ability to hold their ground against the Darkmoon Kingdom.

The most important thing was that the strongest and most mysterious Jiang family of the kingdom seemed to have turned down the royal family's rewards. This was to say that the kingdom's sole strong fighting force, the Jiang family, would very likely refuse to fight on the kingdom's behalf.

This despairing news spread out across the entire kingdom in waves.

However, at this moment, Princess Gouyu's charisma was brought to the fore.

She issued orders and simultaneously proclaimed to the land that the Eastern Kingdom had long since been prepared for the Darkmoon Kingdom's invasion, and that the elite troops of the kingdom had already been deployed to the southwestern border. They were on the alert and ready for combat.

As for the family that everyone followed with interest in the kingdom, the Jiang family would be fighting for the kingdom and wouldn't let the dirty iron hooves of the Darkmoon Kingdom set even half a step onto Eastern Kingdom territory.

One had to say, this kind of news was most invigorating at this time.

The entire Eastern Kingdom was astir. People were filled with joy and heartened when they heard that the Jiang family would protect the kingdom's frontiers.

The Jiang family hadn't been too extraordinary before, but they had managed to turn the tide against the Long family's rebellion in order to help the royal family solely based on their own power.

They had annihilated the Long family, exterminated their associates, and awed an army of a million strong.

After the embellishments and rumors of a few months, all of these legends had caused the Jiang family to completely replace the Long family's position and cement themselves as the true pillar of the kingdom.

When everyone learned that the Jiang family would still fight for this kingdom, a jubilant atmosphere prevailed throughout the country.

As for Jiang Chen, he kept his low profile as usual.

When he knew that the Darkmoon Kingdom was about to invade, Jiang Chen had once again contacted Mang Qi and asked him to send out a large flock of Swordbirds, as a provision in case of unexpected need.

It was a good thing that the Swordbird army within the Boundless Catacombs were as numerous as the hairs on an ox. The large army that Jiang Chen had brought last time had deployed only one tenth of its numbers.

Mang Qi sent out another large army, giving Jiang Chen a bit more reassurance.

He also knew that the Darkmoon Kingdom would've surely paid attention to the intelligence that he could compel the Swordbird Army.

That they still dared to boldly invade despite knowing so proved that they had some sort of plan in place for the battle capabilities of the Swordbird army.

This battle would possibly not be easy.

A shrill bird cry came from the air as a beam of gold light landed. It was a Goldwing Swordbird.

"Young duke." A man jumped down from the back of the Goldwing Swordbird. It was the captain of his personal guard, Xue Tong.

“Any news? What have you investigated?” Jiang Chen asked.

“Quite a bit. The Darkmoon Kingdom has gathered the armies of 36 dukes this time, and the general in charge is the first general of the Darkmoon Kingdom, Ren Feilong.”

“Ren Feilong?” Jiang Chen knew nothing of the Darkmoon Kingdom and had naturally never heard of Ren Feilong’s name.

“Yes, this man is not forty years old yet and joined the military when he was thirteen. His accomplishments out of a hundred battles have made him become the god of Darkmoon Kingdom’s armies. He’s revered as the first general within the kingdom, and is said to deploy troops like a god and emerge victorious from every battle.”

“Deploy troops like a god? Emerge victorious from every battle?” Jiang Chen smiled faintly. It was possible to emerge victorious when ordinary, common armies met in battle.

But if one were to say that another deployed troops like a god, Jiang Chen might not necessarily be willing to accept that. It wasn’t that he didn’t accept this on the basis of a difference in the skill of war, but that at the end of the day, core battle strength was what mattered when two countries engaged in battle.

It was important to observe the art of war, but in many times, there was simply no place for the art of war in the face of absolute strength.

“Young duke, your subject has investigated and obtained a bit of information regarding Ren Feilong. This person is the main general of the armies and it’s necessary for us to be on our guard.” Xue Tong was being quite cautious.

Jiang Chen accepted the information and started perusing it. This information was almost wholly concerned with Ren Feilong’s previous battles, and all sorts of examples and retellings abounded.

Almost all sorts of battles were covered.

Ren Feilong was an uncommon talent in the arena of deploying troops. However, this person was labeled as the first general and was the classic example of the blood of the rank and file winning the general his promotion.

This person was resolute and decisive with his troops. He gave no thought to costs and sacrifices in crucial moments.

His treatment of enemies, and even prisoners, was exceedingly cruel. It was said that during a particular battle, this person had actually killed three hundred thousand prisoners.

Therefore, Ren Feilong had another name, “the god of slaughter”.

“His many military accomplishments are but built on the back of slaughter and bloodshed. He kills even captives. This Ren Feilong is a mere butcher in the army.” Jiang Chen came to this conclusion.

However, a few more traces of wariness grew within his heart. He had to admit that this person’s leadership capabilities and skills in deploying troops were indeed unpredictable and mysterious.

Jiang Chen reflected that although his Swordbird army was great, it relied too heavily on primitive tactics of numbers after all. There was nothing of strategy and tactics at all.

If the Darkmoon Kingdom had made sufficient preparations in battle, it may have the means to fight against this tactic of a sea of numbers.

After all, his opponent was a famous general that ranked first in the kingdom.

Wouldn't it be playing into the other's hands if he were methodical in his actions?

"Xue Tong, if we fight seriously and conventionally against someone skilled at using weapons, we'd definitely be going with their wishes. What do you say?" Jiang Chen asked with a smile.

Xue Tong thought for a moment, and with some emotions flickering across his face, asked, "What do you mean, young duke?"

"If they want to talk strategy, then we won't talk strategy. If they like to use the art of war, then we're going to deploy unconventional tactics instead. This is my territory, I make the decisions here."

"Young duke, what wise ideas do you have?"

"It's not that they're wise ideas, but where are our advantages? They lie within the Swordbird's mobility. Instead of sitting here and waiting for the armies of the Darkmoon Kingdom to arrive, why not strike out proactively?"

"Strike out proactively?" Xue Tong arched his eyebrow, pondered, and then smacked his forehead.

"That's right, we seem to have sunk into an odd mental loop. Why must we sit here and wait for the Darkmoon army?"

Indeed, what was the advantage of a Swordbird Army? It was mobility. What was mobility? It meant that they could fight at any time and retreat at any time.

To fight and retreat, the initiative laid within their hands.

The Darkmoon Kingdom may have prepared many tactics to anticipate the Swordbird army's tactic of numbers, but these strategies would still require some time to set up.

But the Swordbird army was most suited for ambushes. My army would strike like the wind before your strategy had enough time to set up.

When your formation is set up, I would then retreat like the wind again.

These harassment tactics and guerrilla warfare may not result in high damage, but it could harass the opponent, impact their morale and make them too fatigued to respond.

Jiang Chen became more excited the more he thought. "Xue Tong, assemble all the troops and contact Princess Gouyu to have her send ten thousand practitioners who are adept at archery. It would be even better if they were in the advanced realm of true qi."

Ten thousand advanced realm practitioners would be very difficult to gather in the span of a moment.

But the grudge between the Darkmoon Kingdom and the Eastern Kingdom had pretty much reached the level of turning every citizen into a soldier of the Eastern Kingdom. When the order was issued, all sorts of experts mobilized immediately and set out on their way with the fastest speed possible to the Jiang Han territory.

On one hand, this was to protect the country and attack the Darkmoon invasion, this was the pride, duty, and obligation of all practitioners.

On the other hand, these practitioners also wanted to catch a glimpse of the legendary Jiang Chen, the genius who had suppressed the Long family's rebellion by his strength alone.

The resolution to defend one's home country and the emotions of personal admiration were combined. The number of advanced realm practitioners who surged into River Wave City within a single day was over six thousand.

There were around nine thousand on the morning of the second, and that number had increased to twelve to thirteen thousand by noon.

Even Jiang Chen hadn't expected the depth of their fervor.

He had to sigh with emotion, the loyalty of this world's practitioners to their country was absolutely no joke.

It was a good thing that as a duke, Jiang Feng wasn't short of people who could command troops. These ten thousand or so people were quickly divided into four great teams.

Every three thousand people was one great team, every three hundred one mid-sized team, and every thirty one small team. Each level would have a captain and vice captain.

Time was still of the essence.

The second batch of Swordbirds from Mang Qi's side had already arrived and lay concealed within the vast mountains.

Jiang Chen rotated out all the Goldwing Swordbirds and Silverwing Swordbirds from the second batch and combined them with the Goldwing and Silverwing Swordbirds from the first batch.

In this manner, he had roughly eight hundred Goldwing Swordbirds and more than ten thousand Silverwing Swordbirds.

Each of the four great teams had roughly two hundred Goldwing Swordbirds and three thousand Silverwing Swordbirds. This was to say that every practitioner who had answered the summons would be equipped with at least one Silverwing Swordbird.

"Everyone, the Darkmoon Kingdom has sharpened their weapons and watered their horses, their great army will charge into our land shortly. As practitioners of the Eastern Kingdom, since you've come here, you don't need me to exhort and rally your heart to protect our territory, right?" Jiang Chen rode a Goldwing Swordbird and hovered in midair, like the arrival of a god of war.

"You are all brave warriors of the Eastern Kingdom, protecting your home and country is your duty, and your utmost honor."

“The Darkmoon Kingdom is led by a man called the first general of their country, Ren Feilong. This person deploys troops like a deity. Our Eastern Kingdom doesn’t have the ability fight against them face to face.”

“However, if we allow this Darkmoon Kingdom army to invade, this Ren Feilong has another monniker of the god of slaughter. He’s a butcher. Not only will he trample our land, but he will also kill our citizens, kill your parents, your brothers, and your children.”

“Are you willing to stand here and wait for them to arrive on your doorstep to slaughter your kin, or are you willing to follow me and proactively meet the enemy in front of your country’s doors? Are you willing to use your blood and life to defy them, or are you willing to use the blood and bones of your kin to dye their medals of service red?”

Chapter 125: The Mysterious Visitor

One had so say, Jiang Chen wasn’t particularly well-versed in the area of boosting his troops’ morale, but these words were very direct.

Besides, the invasion of the Darkmoon Kingdom was the accumulation of generations of hatred between the two countries. He almost didn’t need to do anything to inspire everyone to fight to the last moment, bleed to the last drop of blood and kill to their dying breath.

Under Jiang Chen’s fortifying words, one by one, the practitioners all raised their arms to call out loudly and swear blood oaths that they would willingly follow Jiang Chen unto their deaths to keep the enemy at bay beyond the kingdom’s borders.

“Kill the enemy! Kill the enemy!”

More than ten thousand advanced realm practitioners roared in unison, their voices shaking the clouds.

“Hahaha, this is interesting, most interesting.”

Suddenly, a long laugh was heard from the empty air. This laughter actually pierced strongly through the shouts of ten thousand as though it was made from gold or stone, penetrating the air and stabbing into everyone’s eardrums.

“Who is it?” Jiang Chen’s brow furrowed as his Ear of the Zephyr moved slightly, his God’s Eye already shooting towards an empty patch of space to the east.

“Friend, come on out.”

A green figure broke through the sky like lightning in the air to the east.

The currents of air within the sky were suddenly separated swiftly into two sides, like a water surface that had been parted by a speedboat.

The green figure became bigger and bigger. It was actually a wild beast with wings on its back. Its fangs were hideous and it was many times bigger than a Greenwing Swordbird.

The meaty wings that covered the sky and blotted out the sun were even more towering and colossal than those of the Goldwing Swordbird’s.

A finely dressed youth sat on the back of this creature. His adornments resplendent, he was carefree and at ease even beneath the gazes of ten thousand people.

This person's bearing was extraordinary. Although he looked just one or two years older than Jiang Chen, he exuded a subtle hint of a mature manner.

Judging from the level of his training, he hadn't seemed to have broken through to spirit dao yet, but he was undoubtedly at the peak of the true qi realm and solidly an eleven meridians true qi master.

The youth's gaze was profound and deep. The ten thousand strong army were like clay figures in front of him as he ignored them completely. His target was clear as he flew towards Jiang Chen.

"You're Jiang Chen?" The youth with the extraordinary bearing smiled faintly as he looked at Jiang Chen, but a sense of friendliness permeated his smile.

"I'm Jiang Chen. Who might your esteemed self be?" Jiang Chen was a bit perplexed.

"Allow me to introduce myself, I'm called Ye Rong and I'm from the Skylaurel Kingdom." A type of confidence and ease that prompted subservience from others was continuously found in the youth's smile. The first impression he left on others was one able to generate a sense of affinity with them.

"The Skylaurel Kingdom?" Jiang Chen's face showed faint traces of emotion. "If I remember correctly, the Ye surname is the national surname for the Skylaurel Kingdom?"

"Heh heh, brother Jiang Chen speaks correctly. I am the fourth prince under the current king in the Skylaurel Kingdom."

"Fourth prince?" Jiang Chen smiled. "The Skylaurel Kingdom is hailed as one of the four great kingdoms in the sixteen kingdom alliance. Their strength is domineering and their existence amongst the pinnacle of the sixteen kingdoms. Why brings Prince Ye to this remote, backward place?"

Ye Rong chuckled. "Brother Jiang Chen is quite humble. There are currently many rumors and underground intelligence regarding Jiang Chen in the entire sixteen kingdoms. My avenues of intelligence are slightly broader so I've received my knowledge just a bit earlier than others."

"Heh heh, so even Prince Ye also believes these dubious rumors?"

Ye Rong smiled, "I'd half believed and half doubted them initially, but..."

Ye Rong paused and swept his eyes over the ten thousand strong army, the proud Goldwing Swordbirds and the Silverwing Swordbirds with their highly arched necks and highly spirited battle intent.

"I have no choice but to be a believer now that I've seen this." Ye Rong seemed to be quite glad. "To know a man by repute is not as good as seeing him face to face. It looks like not only have I arrived early on this trip, I've also come very aptly."

Jiang Chen faintly furrowed his brow. "Prince Ye, I'm not sure if you've come early or late, but I can be certain that you've come at an unfortuitous time."

"Haha, I rather think that I've come at a perfect time. Surely, the reason why brother Jiang Chen has called for this oath taking rally is to advantage of the Swordbirds' mobility to harass the armies of the Darkmoon Kingdom?"

"Hmm? How do you know this?" Jiang Chen truly did have this thought, but who would've imagined that this youth would reveal the secrets of heaven with one word?

"Heh heh, I would do the same if I were brother Jiang Chen. Great minds think alike."

Jiang Chen was a bit impatient, "Prince Ye, please speak directly."

"Heh heh, he who comes from afar is still a guest, right? I would like to request a cup of wine from brother Jiang." Ye Rong still remained unhurried and unflappable. "However, I won't just drink this wine and offer nothing in return. I'll gift brother Jiang a strategy to beat back the enemy. I'm sure you'll find it useful."

It was impossible for Jiang Chen to throw all his bearing to the wind now that these words had been spoken. After all, Ye Rong was the prince of a great nation at the end of the day, and his demeanor hadn't been haughty or overbearing.

He had been amiable and polite and his bearing was actually quite nice.

It would be shameful for Jiang Chen to reject such a person and shunt them a thousand miles away.

"In that case, you honor us, Prince Ye. I'm afraid there is no decent wine that is befitting your noble taste in such wild mountains and plains."

"When drinking with a bosom friend, even a thousand cups are still too little. When we drink wine, we are partaking in the mood. As I've seen brother Jiang today, I'm sure I'll be satisfied with even drinking village brew."

One had to say, this Prince Ye seemed to exude a manner that made others feel that they wished to follow him with every word he said. He was always able to speak to the heart of the listener.

"Prince Ye, I, Jiang Chen, salute you." Jiang Chen lifted his cup.

"Alright, to our great satisfaction!" Ye Rong threw his head back and drained his cup.

After they had drunk three cups, Jiang Chen set down his cup. "Prince Ye, the timing of battle cannot be delayed so let's cut a long story short."

"Alright, then I'll condense what I have to say. I've come here due to two matters this time. One, to help you beat back the enemy, and two, to invite you to develop your skills in my Skylareland Kingdom."

"Oh? How would you elaborate on these words?"

"These two items originally had no connection to each other. If we must define a relationship, then the first item can be viewed as the greeting gift for the second item."

Jiang Chen gazed indifferently at Ye Rong, "Is there a reason for this?"

“The reason is simple. I admire you and need you. And you need a bigger stage. I don’t want to voice alarmist words. I just want to say that going to the Skylaurel Kingdom is definitely at least ten times better than staying in the Eastern Kingdom.”

Of that, Jiang Chen couldn’t deny.

The Skylaurel Kingdom was one of the four great kingdoms in the alliance of the sixteen kingdoms. These four kingdoms were the apex of existence within the sixteen kingdoms, and were first rate kingdoms.

The Darkmoon Kingdom was roughly a second rate kingdom.

As for the Eastern Kingdom, it had always hovered between a second rate and a third rate kingdom. After this civil unrest, it was without a doubt, a third rate kingdom.

Therefore, there was truly no basis of comparison between the Eastern Kingdom and Skylaurel Kingdom.

“Jiang Chen, from my investigations I know that you’re a proud man. I invite you to the Skylaurel Kingdom not as a follower, but as a guest.”

“A guest?”

“Indeed. I know that proud men will never be willing to live under someone else’s roof. Therefore, our relationship can be defined as one of employer and employee, and not as master and servant.” One had to say, Ye Rong carried himself very humbly and he was full of sincerity.

“Why me?”

Ye Rong laughed meaningfully. “Jiang Chen, you’re the same as me — gold buried in sand, our shine temporarily hidden. To speak candidly, I’m only a second or third rate prince in the Skylaurel Kingdom. There are at least four or five princes that are much more superior to me. It isn’t that they’re better than me, it’s that their lives are good in the sense that they were born into a strong position. They have good mothers, whereas my birth mother doesn’t possess a high standing and lacks a prominent family background. I don’t have any sort of backer.”

“No backer...” Jiang Chen remembered the feud between him and the Long family and recalled Long Juxue. When one spoke of backers, he truly was similar to Ye Rong in this aspect.

“Jiang Chen, you have no backer either. I’ve heard that you’ve formed a blood feud with one of the genius disciples of the Purple Sun Sect. This is to say that in your lifetime, at least half of the great doors to the sects have been sealed off to you. If you stay in the Eastern Kingdom, it will be impossible for you to attract any attention from the sects. However, if you come to the Skylaurel Kingdom, everything will be different. As strong as the Purple Sun Sect is, they will not impact the Skylaurel Kingdom because the supporter of the kingdom behind the scenes is the Precious Tree Sect of the four great sects.”

The Precious Tree Sect was one of the few great sects that was on par with and advanced shoulder to shoulder with the Purple Sun Sect.

“This is to say, if you display exemplary performance in the Skylaurel Kingdom and attract the attention of the Precious Tree Sect, entering the Sect to train is also a path as well. This way, you won’t have to worry about being constantly surveilled by the Purple Sun Sect in the future. With the protection of the

Precious Tree Sect, it's of no matter that you've offended the disciple of the Purple Sun Sect. Within the alliance of the sixteen kingdoms, the disciples of the Precious Tree Sect are on par with the disciples of the Purple Sun Sect."

Ye Rong's tone was at ease as he smiled and continued, "Therefore, the two of us are the same. We both need each other. Brother Jiang, I've thoroughly gone through everything with you, please consider it for a bit."

Jiang Chen pondered silently for a moment and asked, "What strategy do you have to make the enemy back down?"

Ye Rong displayed a meaningful smile. "My strategy is quite simple and crude, and that is to kill the first general of the Darkmoon Kingdom, Ren Feilong."

"Obtain the head of the general of a million strong army? This... do you take me for a spirit dao expert?"

"I know you're not a spirit dao practitioner, but you've once fought against one. I have full faith in your abilities. However, you'll need some aid in assassinating Ren Feilong."

"What sort of aid?" Jiang Chen asked.

"A spirit weapon of course." In between Ye Rong's smiles, he suddenly brought out an inky black longbow as though he was demonstrating a trick.

This bow immediately exuded the tantalizing presence of spirit qi when it was placed on the table.

"A spirit bow?" Jiang Chen's brow arched slightly.

He was not lacking in theoretical knowledge of the world he'd reincarnated in, but was only short in matters of all sorts of hardware, weapons, pills, and various ingredients.

"This is a four-times refined spirit weapon with extraordinary power. If Jiang Chen possesses this spirit weapon, it would not be entirely impossible for you to fight against even Chu Xinghan."

Jiang Chen was tempted, but repressed his greed.

"If I accept this bow, does this mean I've agreed to be in your service?" Jiang Chen asked blandly.

"These two are separate matters. Borrowing the bow takes precedence, we can discuss later with regards to you being in my service. We can slowly mull over the various conditions."

"We don't need to discuss further, I agree." Jiang Chen had somewhat approved of Ye Rong after testing him for a few times. He could tell that Ye Rong was sincere.

The Jiang family would surely leave the Eastern Kingdom one day. As one of the strongest kingdoms in the sixteen kingdom alliance, the Skylaurel Kingdom would be quite a nice place to set themselves down in.

Chapter 126: Gold Buried in the Sand

Ye Rong was overjoyed to hear these words. "Brother Jiang, does this mean that you've accepted?"

“Well spoken, we’re all gold buried in the sand, our shine temporarily hidden. However, you and I are not the sort to accept being buried in the sand forever. Perhaps, you and I teaming up would be the ideal decision.”

Pa pa pa pa.

Ye Rong applauded and laughed heartily. “Good! Such satisfaction! Jiang Chen, I, Ye Rong, haven’t met someone as straightforward as you in a long time. Come, let’s drink!”

“Drink!”

Jiang Chen had been running about to and fro ever since he was reincarnated into this world. He’d had almost no chance to explore the outside world. Apart from Fatty Xuan and Hubing Yue who were left behind by his predecessor, he had almost no one who he could call a friend.

Princess Gouyu could possibly be counted as one, but the relationship between the two had basically exceeded the range of friendship.

As for the others, they were either his kin or his subordinates.

This Ye Rong was the first person that he felt he could get along well with, and someone that he could become friends with. At least, the two of them were birds of a feather.

“Brother Jiang, I feel like we’re old friends despite this being our first meeting. Take this Da Yu¹ bow and this quiver of arrows as my greeting gift. There are 36 arrows within it that form a set with the bow. Divine arrows must accompany a precious bow in order to deploy its greatest effectiveness.”

Ye Rong was in a great mood as he discovered the two had much in common after drinking a few cups of wine with Jiang Chen.

“Prince Ye, don’t call me brother Jiang. You should be a year or two older than me, you can call me Jiang Chen or lil brother Jiang.”

“Heh heh, then I shall call you younger brother Jiang or wise brother. Oh right, Jiang Chen, this Da Yu bow will only increase your chances by an additional ten percent. It won’t be able to guarantee your success in killing Ren Feilong.”

Indeed, even with a spirit bow in hand, Ren Feilong would have countless numbers of experts protecting him in an army numbering tens of thousands. It wouldn’t be simple to kill him.

“Unless, brother Ye do you have any other better ideas?”

“I do have other ideas, but they’re a bit ruthless.” Ye Rong was slightly hesitant.

“Ruthlessness is of no concern in a battle between two armies. If the Darkmoon Kingdom kills their way into the Eastern Kingdom, then with Ren Feilong’s nickname as the god of slaughter, he’ll be a full fledged butcher. The death toll of my Eastern Kingdom’s citizens will likely measure in the tens of thousands.”

Ye Rong nodded. “One truly can’t have so many reservations when two armies meet in battle.”

After he spoke, Ye Rong seemed to execute another trick as he reached out with his right hand. A snake dotted with green spots appeared on the back of his hand and it entwined around Ye Rong's arm.

This snake had a pair of thin and small eyes, the black, slitted eyes located on the two sides of its triangular head exuded a frightening sense of viciousness.

"Younger brother, this snake is called the Sevenstar Joined Moon snake. Its venom is quite strange. The blood of anyone poisoned with this venom will boil and their organs will undergo aberrations. They'll slowly change into bloodthirsty monsters. These monsters' appetites are bizarre as they'll have a primeval urge to feed and will lust after living people and fresh blood. Imagine this, if a batch of people were afflicted with this poison out of a million strong army and one bites another, then they'll be linked like a string of seven stars. They'll be interconnected, and it won't be long before the million strong army will fall apart without making battle."

"Sevenstar Joined Moon snake?" The memories of his past life floated up in Jiang Chen's mind. This snake did possess a strange venom that could spread continuously, like Ye Rong had said.

As long as someone afflicted bit another person once, then the person bitten would spread this poison. Following this train, one would infect ten, and ten would infect a hundred.

How much of this suffering would a million strong army be able to endure?

However, it was said that this venomous snake was very difficult to raise. How did Ye Rong acquire one?

"Younger brother, don't look at me that way. This snake isn't something that I can afford to raise. I've borrowed it from a friend in the Precious Tree Sect and only have fifteen days with it before I'll have to return it to him. If he knew that I used it to intervene in the battles of common kingdoms, I'd likely be incriminated."

Ye Rong seemed troubled as he spoke these words. It could be seen that he had truly spent a large amount of capital to recruit Jiang Chen and gain his friendship.

"Brother Ye need not worry. The venom of the Sevenstar Joined Moon snake can be refined into a completely different poison, so that others won't be able to recognize that it's the Sevenstar Joined Moon venom."

"Refined?" Ye Rong blinked a bit in disbelief. "Younger brother, you know how to refine poison?"

Jiang Chen laughed heartily. "It looks like your intelligence gathering wasn't thorough enough. I actually do know a thing or two about this unconventional method of poison."

"Oh? This is a pleasant surprise. The roots of the way of poison ultimately originates from the dao of pills. Younger brother, can it be that you've carried out some research on the dao of pills?"

"I know a thing or two about it." Jiang Chen smiled humbly.

"Younger brother, if you truly are talented in the field of pills, then your chances of entering the Precious Tree Sect will greatly increase. The Precious Tree Sect heavily emphasizes potential in the dao of pills. The Precious Tree Sect exists at the apex of the four great sects of the sixteen kingdom alliance in the area of pills."

Jiang Chen was immediately inspired with the Sevenstar Joined Moon snake and he combined the various methods in deploying poison in his past life to instantly brainstorm many more tactics.

When Jiang Chen reappeared the next day, a few more traces of a confident smile was on his face.

After a day and night of refining, he had already refined great batches of the Sevenstar Joined Moon venom into mutated forms of venom.

This venom was poured into several hundred small flasks and passed out to the captains of the great, middle, and small teams.

...

It was the seventh day since the Darkmoon army had left the capital of the Darkmoon Kingdom.

On this day, the great army had chosen to convene in an empty mountain valley. They only started making camp after ensuring that their lines and formations were arranged properly.

They would arrive at the border after two more days of marching, and then the Eastern Kingdom would be visible in the distance.

The Eastern Kingdom's fertile lands, sexy beauties, and countless wealth seemed to be waving at them.

Ren Feilong had summoned all the high ranking officers within the army to the tent of the commander-in-chief.

"Everyone, we'll be arrive the frontier of our Darkmoon Kingdom after crossing this Bayun Valley. We'll split the army into two, one to take the Eastern Kingdom's Westcreek territory, the other to make a feint at the Eastern Kingdom's Jiang Han territory."

"Make a feint at the Jiang Han territory?" A highly ranked officer asked out of curiosity.

"Yes. The Jiang family has a grip on the Jiang Han territory, and are versed in compelling the Swordbird army. If we attack them head on, although we have many methods to counter them, it will still be a war of attrition in the end. They won't care no matter how many Swordbirds die, but we'll have to use the lives of our soldiers and generals. It's not worth it."

"The commander-in-chief speaks truly. There's no need to expend ourselves against the Swordbird army. As long as we create an opening in the Westcreek territory and have the great army pour in, the troops can follow from behind in an unending stream. Our army will have already surged into the Eastern Kingdom before the Jiang family reacts. At that time, they'll be hard pressed to attend to two fronts. We'll then employ a pincer move and surround them with several squadrons from different sides. They'll be unable to focus on one thing without losing sight of another, and hence will be defeated without even battling."

The person speaking was another high ranking officer, and one of the more renowned Dukes from the Darkmoon Kingdom.

The first part of his words had grasped Ren Feilong's invasion strategy, but the second part still didn't comprehend the latter's intent.

"It's undoubted that our great army will pass through the Westcreek territory to enter the Eastern Kingdom, however, this is only one of our many plans. Our real ace in the hole is to come in through the southeastern part of the Eastern Kingdom. We'll take a roundabout path for a couple thousand li² and then turn to slip into the Jiang Han territory."

"Ace in the hole?" The crowd of officers showed some skepticism.

"Indeed, our great army is only preparations on the surface. The real trump card to deal with the Jiang family isn't us. We're just posturing. I'd like to ask everyone, even if we have an army a million strong or even more, how much would we lose in a direct confrontation to destroy the Swordbird army? Thirty percent, or even fifty? If our casualties reach fifty percent, then our morale will be such that we are unable to continue fighting. The Eastern Kingdom ultimately still has some fighting capabilities, so at that point, it would be difficult to determine who is the victor or loser if we fight to the death. Therefore, to capture the Jiang family, we must spring a surprise attack."

"A surprise attack?"

"Indeed, a surprise attack." Ren Feilong brimmed with confidence. "The trump card I'm sending out is comprised of true qi masters. They'll infiltrate the River Wave city in the Jiang Han territory, and we're sure to have long since made preparations for our Darkmoon Kingdom spies within the city. We'll work in collusion, one from outside and one from within to sneak into the River Wave city, then strike swiftly to attack the Jiang Han manor, like a sudden clap of thunder leaving no time to cover one's ears. Our target is Jiang Feng."

"Jiang Feng?"

"Yes, as long as we capture Jiang Feng and the Jiang family clan members, then Jiang Chen will hold back from taking action for fear of involving his kin. He'll lose his fighting capabilities. As fierce as he is and even if he can compel the Swordbird army, there's no way that he would sacrifice his clan for the Eastern Kingdom. Therefore..."

All the other officials were suddenly enlightened when Ren Feilong's words traveled across the room. They all praised him highly, "The commander-in-chief is undoubtedly great. This sort of arrangement that mingles true and false truly makes one gasp in admiration."

The army's various maneuvers, all sorts of attacks and feints were all actually illusions. Their true goal was to provide cover for the trump card and to numb Jiang Chen as they made a surprise raid on the Jiang Han manor.

One had to say, Ren Feilong's strategy arrangement was unconventional, but it happened to be the most appropriate and one most likely to succeed.

If they didn't use this method, the Darkmoon Kingdom would pay a heavy toll to defeat the Swordbird army.

"Alright, everyone make your preparations. The army will continue to move forward tomorrow and split into two on the border. We'll follow the battle plan, with no mistakes allowed."

With Ren Feilong's arrangements, these officers were in even higher spirits. Their emotions had been a bit complicated originally.

After all, they'd never experienced fighting a Swordbird army. They felt that it was quite a sticky situation when they thought about it.

Even if they won, it would be a pyrrhic victory since they would pay a heavy cost.

If the commander-in-chief's tactics worked, then they would be able to capture the Jiang family with unstained swords. It would be absolutely perfect.

Just as the officers were about to head back to their camps, a shrill horn sounded from the outskirts.

This meant an enemy was attacking them.

"Everyone get ready! Enemies approach!"

Just as this voice rang out, countless winged birds suddenly appeared in the night sky beneath the rays of the moon. They were akin to an enormous black curtain, covering the sky and blotting out the moon, making furiously for this part of the mountain valley.

"It's Swordbirds, Swordbirds!"

Some in the great army started calling out and shouting.

"Why are you panicking? Set up the round shield formation."

The round shield formation was the best way to fight against high aerial attacks. The round shield formation could guarantee that the momentum caused by diving from the air would have almost no damage.

"Arrow formation, ready!"

"Long spear formation, ready!"

These two formations were part of the same formation system that the round shield formation belonged to.

If the round shield formation was to defend against high aerial attacks, then the arrow and long spear formation was the set up to attack the Swordbirds.

One had to hand it to them, the Darkmoon Kingdom troops had made a significant amount of close knit preparations for the Swordbird army.

Just as everyone stood stiffly at attention on the ground and prepared to fight, the Swordbirds actually flew over in the air above them and didn't even want to dive down. They whooshed past like an enormous black curtain being drawn swiftly through the sky. They came fast, and they left fast.

Chapter 127: Toying with the Darkmoon Kingdom Army

"Damn it, are they playing a joke? I thought they were going to ambush us!"

"These dumb feathered beasts can only scare the people of the Eastern Kingdom. They're aren't much in the face of our mighty Darkmoon Kingdom army."

The soldiers and officers of the Darkmoon Kingdom all cursed loudly. They'd spent quite a while setting up their formation, but this flock of Swordbirds had just flown by without dropping even a single feather.

"What the hell!"

But, the officer in charge of directing the formations didn't dare to lower his guard and didn't dare to disperse the formation. He only gave the order a full fifteen minutes later when he saw that the Swordbird army wasn't going to make a return.

"Retreat!"

The formation was taken down amidst a clatter of complaints and curses. Everyone sat down again in pairs, back to back, intending to rest where they stood.

After all, this was marching and fighting. They had to march during the day, so even if they couldn't lie down on the ground at night, they still had to sit down and rest for a bit.

It hadn't been even fifteen minutes after they'd sat down when the shrill horn call sounded again.

"The enemy's attacking again, get up! Set up the formation, set up the formation!"

It was happening again with another batch of Swordbirds flying over from the direction of the Eastern Kingdom. This time, there were roughly several thousand Swordbirds. They were all Silverwing Swordbirds under the leadership of the Goldwing Swordbirds, with not a single Greenwing Swordbird in sight.

"There are people on the back of the Swordbirds! It's a real ambush this time!"

"Set up the formation and the long spear formation, prepare to attack!"

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

Chirp, chirp, chirp!

The dense black Swordbird army had once again deceived on the Darkmoon Kingdom army. Although there were riders on the backs of the Swordbirds this time, they still didn't commence any attacks and just glided past high up in the air. Even the strongest archers couldn't shoot to that altitude.

Tricked once again.

The soldiers and officers of the Darkmoon Kingdom were a bit inflamed with irritation. They'd just closed their eyes for a bit when two batches from the Swordbird army had flown by. It seemed like they were going to fight, but then they hadn't. Just what the hell did they plan to do by flying back and forth like this?

The formation was taken down. This time however, a half hour passed by before the shrill horn sounded abruptly, once again shaking the soldiers out of their sleep.

"The enemy approaches, the enemy approaches! Get up! Set up the formation, set up the formation!"

The formation was once again set up with everyone in a fluster. It was a good thing that these were highly trained and disciplined soldiers. Even if they were rubbing the sleep out of their eyes, the speed and efficiency of which they set up their formations wasn't delayed in the slightest.

The formation was quickly set up again amidst a clatter of noise. The Swordbird army that had been detected once again flew over from the direction of the Eastern Kingdom.

"It's probably just harassment again this time right? There's only a few thousand Swordbirds, they're not capable of doing that much damage. If it really comes down to a fight, the exterior formations will be enough to destroy them."

"They won't fight for sure. These dumb beasts are just here to make trouble so that we can't get a good night's sleep!"

"Damnit, the Eastern Kingdom has no strength and can only pull these stinking tactics!"

"They don't properly fight in a battle between two armies and only use these little tricks. How shameful!"

The soldiers railed their enemy with insults but were also full of resignation. Who had made the rule that base tactics were off the table when two armies fought? This was labeled 'all is fair in war'.

After all, their Darkmoon Kingdom commander-in-chief was a god of the army who was also well versed in using devious tactics.

"Sigh. Take down the formation. It's all just harassment after all. They don't have the courage to fight face to face with the brave warriors of the Darkmoon Kingdom!"

"The Eastern Kingdom is filled with cowards!"

"Useless scum of the Eastern Kingdom, come down and fight if you dare! What skill do you have in just flying back and forth over our heads?"

The soldiers beneath called out invectives and attempted to infuriate the Eastern Kingdom practitioners riding the Swordbirds.

"Since you want to fight, then let's fight!"

A response traveled down from the air and suddenly all the practitioners on the back of the Swordbirds took out the longbows behind them. Arrowheads with fire and oil tied to them suddenly rained down onto the camp beneath them.

When several thousand people fired at the same time and each shot out twenty arrows, that still made for a total of ten thousand arrows.

When ten thousand arrows descended on such a small space, their destructive power was quite great.

Although the formation beneath them blocked most of the arrows, a minority of the arrowheads still landed on the tents.

When the flaming arrowheads landed on the tents, they began to burn furiously.

After that, some soldiers caught on fire.

After a round of furious shooting, the Swordbird army didn't linger at all as they left with great fanfare, leaving behind a sea of fire beneath them.

"Put out the fire! Hurry up and put out the fire!"

Even though a great majority of the ten thousand flaming arrows had been destroyed, several thousand had still landed on the ground, enough to ignite a large swath of fiery ocean.

The internal organization of the great army was a bit bedraggled for the moment because of the fire.

Ren Feilong immediately gave the order, "Black Riders ready! Guard the skies, if you meet the Swordbird troops, fight immediately! You are only allowed to win and not allowed to lose!"

The Darkmoon Kingdom had actually prepared an aerial army as well, named the Black Riders.

However, the Darkmoon Kingdom had limited resources in this area and had managed to scrape together an army of only three thousand strong. The black crows were far fewer in number when compared to the Goldwing Swordbirds so they could at most be on par with the Silverwing Swordbirds. But the men of this troop were all of the advanced realm of true qi and had met rigorous selection criteria. Their system of training was also exceedingly robust.

They were truly much stronger compared to the hastily assembled Swordbird riders that Jiang Chen had put together.

Another wave of the Swordbird army arrived not long after the Black Riders had taken to the air. In this way, the anticipated battle in mid-air started taking place.

Whether in terms of tactics or training, the Black Riders were truly much stronger.

However, the Swordbird riders also had an edge, and that was the natural advantage of the Swordbirds themselves. The Swordbirds were fierce spirit beasts and their defensive capabilities were astounding, and absolutely not something that the Black Riders could hope to measure up to.

When all these advantages were cancelled out, the fighting capabilities of the two were roughly on par with each other.

However, the Swordbird riders obviously didn't have the desire to stay fighting. After they exchanged several rounds with the Black Riders, they left with great waves of their wings.

The Black Riders even started suspecting the number of waves this Swordbird army had. Could it be the same flock of Swordbirds circling in the surroundings and flying back and forth?

After all, flying in the air was different to walking on the ground. One could just make a circle and come from the east, make another slight circle and come from the east again.

With just this type of circling, they would mislead others that there seemed to be many waves of Swordbird riders.

However, no one would be able to be certain whether it was one wave or multiple waves of Swordbird riders. Therefore, the Black Riders captain decided to follow this wave and see just what the Swordbird riders were up to.

The pursuit had just started when suddenly, great waves of Swordbirds surged out from the three directions of east, west, and north.

“Damn it, we walked into a trap. That was inducing us to leave our home base! Set up the formation, ground army, set up the formation!”

The Black Riders had been diverted to the south, completely taking out their aerial defenses. In this manner, the people below couldn’t concentrate on dousing the fires, and had to set up formation to be on their guard against attacks from the sky.

However, since the fire had started burning, the soldiers couldn’t set up the formation however much they wished to. Although they all wore armor, they were made of blood and flesh after all. No one could withstand the strong momentum of the fire.

At this time, the three Swordbird squads in the sky attacked in unison. Countless arrows rained down like rainwater splashed from a gourd ladle, pouring down from the sky.

Due to the raging fire below, the defensive formation was not as solid as before.

As soon as the round shield defensive formation became unsteady, many gaps would then appear. In the face of such a densely packed hail of arrows, any gaps would be fatal.

Agonized screams rang out all of a sudden, to be followed up with even more painful cries.

Those who were hit screamed and those who were burning cried out. The great army sank into a chaos of movement in the span of a moment.

It was a good thing that the army was highly trained and they immediately found their footing after temporary unrest. Those in charge of dousing the fire and those in charge of setting up formation each focused on their tasks. Everything was in good order and well arranged.

Except, after this round of attacks, even though the main strength of the army hadn’t been harmed, but several thousand soldiers were still more or less injured by the arrows.

After all, the arrows shot down by the three squads of more than ten thousand people still made for twenty to thirty thousand arrows. Even if they didn’t pierce anyone to death, it was enough to bombard many to their deaths.

The effectiveness of harassment tactics and guerilla warfare apparent, the Swordbird army didn’t stay and fight. They left with great fanfare once again, leaving the great army beneath them screaming out curses.

The altitude of the Swordbird army had made it impossible for them to fight back.

When travelling from high to low, even if the force of the arrows were weak, they still at least had the potential to injure and kill. But when they shot into the air from the ground, the force of their arrows was naturally greatly decreased.

Even the practitioner with the best arm strength could barely manage to cover the distance with his shooting range. But how would something that just managed to reach them be enough harm to the Swordbirds?

The feathers on the Swordbirds were as tough as iron and steel, a perverted existence.

Therefore, the battle had resulted in a furious Darkmoon Kingdom army with no outlet to vent their anger.

However, no one within the Darkmoon Kingdom army could have anticipated that the true disaster was only just about to begin.

A soldier who had been injured by an arrow suddenly crawled up stiffly and pounced, biting down on another soldier's throat.

"Ah!" A ghastly cry rang out, with the bitten soldier clasp his throat painfully. Fresh blood splurged profusely out from his throat.

Shortly afterwards, another soldier whose wounds were being tended to by his comrade had his eyes suddenly turn blood red and his teeth chatter. He extended his head, and bit down viciously on the back of the hand of the comrade bandaging him up.

"You... you're freaking crazy! I'm dressing your wounds and you bite me?!"

However, these sort of scenes was only the beginning.

One, two...

Bizarre screams and cries broke through the calm of the army. All sorts of wails, heckling, and curses spread throughout the mountain valley.

The enemy's ambush had ended, but why did these shrill cries and curses ring out continuously?

The great army in the mountain valley suddenly sank into a perplexed panic. The panicked feelings spread outwards like an epidemic.

However, once the frightening poison had any sort of momentum, the speed of its spread wasn't any slower than the spread of those frightened feelings.

After an hour, the great army in the valley had already completely dissolved in chaos. In the beginning, the captains, lieutenants, and various sorts of generals had been able to keep order.

However in the end, this sort of situation became completely out of control and slowly spiraled into pandemonium.

Once fear spread, even a rock solid army would be overcome, not to mention that this type of fear wasn't brought by the enemy, but appeared from within the camp itself.

Internal panic was much more frightening and damaging than an external enemy.

Chapter 128: Killing the First General

“Commander-in-chief, something’s gone terribly wrong. The army is in complete chaos. The injured soldiers are all leaping on each other and biting their own comrades. Those who were bitten went on to bite others after a short time as well. One passed it onto ten others, ten passed it onto a hundred others. Even if we were to kill them now, we wouldn’t be able to get rid of them all. The soldier’s hearts are all jittery, and they can’t find it within themselves to kill their comrades.”

In the beginning, within the commander-in-chief’s tent, Ren Feilong had thought that it was merely some small scuffles and fights. He actually hadn’t wavered in the slightest when the battlecries shook the sky just now.

He knew very well that these Swordbird riders were just here for harassment, and would never dare to cross swords with the bulk of their power here. The Eastern Kingdom didn’t possess such fighting capabilities, and this truly wasn’t a place that was suited to be a battlefield either.

However, Ren Feilong’s confidence this time had been that of overconfidence.

“Commander-in-chief, we really can’t keep things under control anymore. The great army has already fallen into disarray. We need to stem the chaos or the great army will completely collapse.”

Ren Feilong viciously smashed the teacup in his hand onto the ground. “Useless! A bunch of useless trash! A couple thousand Swordbirds are enough to disturb my million strong army?”

“Commander-in-chief, it’s different this time. Who would have thought that our soldiers would suddenly attack each other? Additionally, they seem to be under some sort of magic spell. The soldiers are constantly biting each other and not open to reason at all. It’s like they’ve all fallen victim to some bizarre poison and are already as good as dead.”

“Bizarre poison?” Ren Feilong’s eyes widened. “Can it be... this is bad!”

Ren Feilong suddenly recalled a frightening possibility and hastily gave an order, “Draw in the army and count off. Anyone who’s been bitten is to be immediately executed. Draw in anyone who hasn’t been bitten and prepare to break through the various camps. Look over each other and surveil each other. Not a single person who’s been bitten is allowed to slip through the cracks.”

Ren Feilong was truly a bit shaken this time. He’d been a part of the army for thirty years, accomplished countless achievements, and seen numerous battles of life and death.

However, the battle of tonight was absolutely different when compared to anything before. It could be said that it wasn’t a battle at all, but a disaster.

“Commander-in-chief, your subordinates will cover your retreat.”

“Commander-in-chief, come this way. Everyone open your eyes and look carefully! Those who are bitten are to be executed with no exception.”

It was a chaotic mess at the scene and the surroundings of Ren Feilong’s camp were no exception.

There were almost no complete squads remaining now that the situation had developed to this point. The squads had all been completely separated and it was pure luck as to whether or not someone had been bitten.

It was a good thing that this area was filled with the army's experts. Those who hadn't been bitten congregated in groups of several hundred, with ten thousand being gathered before long.

They dashed left and right and finally carved out a path of blood.

At this moment, the illumination of the moon in the night sky suddenly dimmed again, as if something was covering it.

Countless numbers of Swordbirds suddenly appeared again in the next second, and another round of frightening arrow attacks rained down like torrential rain.

"Kill! Kill the Darkmoon Kingdom robbers, kill Ren Feilong!"

"Ren Feilong, you're called the first general of the Darkmoon Kingdom, but you'll probably have to title yourself the unlucky butt-head of the Darkmoon Kingdom after today's battle, right? Hahahahaha!"

Ren Feilong almost vomited blood in anger after hearing these words.

This battle had truly been too depressing. He had almost been continuously toyed by his opponents and hadn't had the slightest ability to fight back.

All of his preparations, all of his so-called battle tactics had been completely useless.

Yes, he'd truly been played with.

When it came down to it, the Swordbird army of the Eastern Kingdom hadn't killed that many in the Darkmoon Kingdom. The Darkmoon Kingdom's injuries were almost all a result of internal strife.

Ren Feilong's face was darkened as he fled in a panic into the night, beneath cover from his subordinates.

At this moment, whether it was the round shield formation, the arrow or long spear formation, all of them had completely collapsed and couldn't be formed at all.

Without these great formations, it would require much more effort to fight against the Swordbird army.

In the beginning, the Swordbird army had only served as harassment. Without the cover of the great formations, the altitude of the Swordbird army had moved lower and lower and some had even dived down to engage the soldiers in close combat.

"What's the hold up with the Black Riders? Why haven't they returned to protect the commander-in-chief yet?"

"Commander-in-chief, we can't run around randomly like this without a goal. We need to find cover and avoid these aerial troops. Otherwise our advantage in numbers will slowly be whittled down by them."

"Commander-in-chief, the shrubs and trees over there are thick, why not we..."

Ren Feilong broke out in loud curses, "Thick growth of shrubs and trees, are you trying to head to your deaths? Most of our soldiers have been turned into biting demons, how will we break free in the trees in which vision is limited? Besides, this is a season of dry and withered grass and trees. If the enemies once again attack with fire, then we'll truly be at the end of our rope."

Entering the woods would make it inconvenient to evade the biting soldiers and one would have to be on guard against fire attacks from the enemy.

If they didn't enter the woods, they'd have to face pursuit from the Swordbird army.

They were in a bind.

...

High up above in the sky, two Goldwing Swordbirds flew side by side. There were people riding on their backs. One of them was Jiang Chen, while the other was Ye Rong.

Ye Rong had his own mount to begin with, but he didn't wish to draw undue attention to himself in the battle between the Darkmoon Kingdom and the Eastern Kingdom. Therefore, he didn't ride his own mount and rode a Goldwing Swordbird instead.

"Younger brother, do you see that? There, right there, the one in the silver armor and white robe is Ren Feilong. Do you see the soaring dragon¹ embroidered on his white robe? That's his unique trademark."

"This Ren Feilong still keeps up his appearances even when death is staring at him in the face? What's he doing in not ripping off that white robe of his when escaping?" Jiang Chen truly did suspect that there were a few screws loose in the head of this so-called first general.

"The so-called first general is just a mortal after all. He's no better than ordinary people in the face of great disasters and calamity. This time, he's facing a perverse person such as you, it's fated that he will lose. Alright, let's not idly chit chat. I'll make an empty show of strength to create an opportunity, but you'll have to be the one to land the fatal shot, for both your archery skills and equipment are superior to mine."

Ye Rong chuckled, patted the Goldwing Swordbird and suddenly dived straight towards Ren Feilong.

"Ren Feilong, do you know who I, Jiang Chen am?" Ye Rong called out in a strange voice, bluffing on purpose as the long bow in his hand was drawn back.

Whoosh!

The bow was as if it were a full moon, while the arrow as if a shooting star.

"Protect the commander-in-chief, protect the commander-in-chief!"

The personal guards of the general below all flung themselves at Ren Feilong, without a thought of their own lives, seeking to block the arrows descending like shooting stars with their own bodies.

Ye Rong may have falsely offered Jiang Chen's name, but his training at the level of a eleven meridians true qi master was true and solid. Adding the diving force of a Goldwing Swordbird onto that, the momentum of these arrows was truly imposing.

Pfft!

The arrow transformed into an air current and hurtled downwards, piercing through more than ten people.

It was a good thing that the personal guards next to Ren Feilong were all unafraid of death and that there were sufficient numbers of them. That meat shield formed from a mass of humanity was more useful than any armor.

The charisma of the first general wasn't empty bluster. One could glean a thing or two from these personal guards' death defying actions in blocking arrows.

Ye Rong continuously shouted out and his arrows didn't halt, pouring down continuously without a hitch. His skills were actually so good that they weren't any less than Jiang Chen's at all.

In the span of a moment, a sky full of arrows had turned into beams of light, covering nearly all possible angles of attack.

This type of archery skill could only be described as marvelously divine.

Jiang Chen was also mesmerized in that moment. He'd almost forgotten that Ye Rong was making space for him and the final lethal blow had to be executed by him, Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen also itched to display his skills when he saw Ye Rong's dazzling performance.

Hoisting the Da Yu bow in his hand, the solid feeling unique to a spirit weapon immediately surged upwards. Even his breathing was at one with the rhythm of this spirit weapon in that moment.

With an arrow in hand, he notched it to the bowstring!

Jiang Chen suddenly compelled the Goldwing Swordbird to dive downwards like a streak of golden colored light, like a white rainbow piercing through the sun.

At the same time, the Da Yu bow was as if an awakening monster, its frightening power shot out with a roar under Jiang Chen's control, accompanying the the golden light's momentum.

A golden colored current appeared in the sky, more resplendent and dazzling to the eye than the bright moon.

"Oh no! Protect the commander-in-chief!"

All creatures between heaven and earth seemed to awaken in that moment, as if this arrow was the morning sun, causing all creatures to wake and take control of this world of darkness.

There were no frills or flourishes to this arrow, but it uniquely held the essence of the dao of the bow.

It was swift, accurate, vicious, and wily.

The golden colored light was like a meteorite that could destroy cities, a flame sent by heaven that could ignite the very air.

Whoosh!

The arrow found that tiniest sliver of empty space in the midst of Ye Rong's multitude of arrows.

Whoosh!

The golden colored light was like sunlight piercing through a transparent item as it pierced through Ren Feilong's face. Ren Feilong's entire head suddenly caved in, and a large, black hole appeared on his face. From forehead on down, an empty, large and black hole was scooped out of his helmed head. The golden colored light completely obliterated everything between his forehead and his chin.

The most stunning thing was that this featureless head was still wearing a helm. This made the situation even more bizarre.

The great army stopped in that moment. Everyone's eyes shot out looks of disbelief. Their hearts seemed to stop beating in that instant.

The commander-in-chief, dead?

The first general of Darkmoon Kingdom, the pride of the kingdom, had died such a strange death on this bizarre night?

Bam!

Ren Feilong's body fell down with a loud crash.

When he fell, the morale of the Darkmoon Kingdom utterly collapsed.

"The commander-in-chief is dead, everyone flee for your lives!"

"No! How can the commander-in-chief be dead? The commander-in-chief is the first general of our Darkmoon Kingdom, the god of war of our kingdom, the god of the army! How can he possibly be dead?"

In the armies of the Darkmoon Kingdom, Ren Feilong was god, the true god. However, this god had fallen just like this.

This scene undoubtedly destroyed everyone's faith and belief.

They couldn't accept this truth. As the god of the army and the commander-in-chief, how could Ren Feilong just die in the wilderness of this mountain valley?

This all looked so ridiculous, like it was a nightmare.

With Ren Feilong's death, Jiang Chen's plan was pronounced a thorough success. This plan of ambush could be labeled as perfect. It'd actually succeeded in one stroke with the combination of all sorts of odd tactics and the ingenious Ye Rong factor. Even Jiang Chen felt that this was a bit incredulous.

Ren Feilong's life had been filled with stunning military accomplishments. He'd killed countless people, held the titles such as the god of the army, the first general, the butcher, god of slaughter, etc.

Yet in this moment, all these titles became history with his crashing thud.

This night was destined to become the Darkmoon Kingdom's nightmare and would truly lead the Darkmoon Kingdom to walk into a night of long-lasting darkness.

Chapter 129: Gouyu's Astounding Decision

In the battle of Bayun Valley, two thirds of the Darkmoon Kingdom's army were either injured or dead, and commander-in-chief Ren Feilong had been shot and killed in front of the formation by Jiang Chen.

The Darkmoon Kingdom's vitality was greatly injured and the kingdom's strength greatly decreased after this battle.

The Bayun Valley became an unlucky place for the Darkmoon Kingdom, with its citizens forever prohibited from entering.

As for the Eastern Kingdom, it had made a clean sweep, and all practitioners who had participated in this battle received the title of Brave Dragonslayer.

The battle was destined to go down in the annals of history, but it would be retold with two completely different moods in their respective histories.

When they learned of Darkmoon's defeat in battle, the Eastern Kingdom had felt a bit baffled instead. One had to know that on the Eastern Kingdom's side, various dukes had all gathered together and the great army had assembled, but no battle had been fought. They hadn't even seen the enemy before the war was over, with even the enemy's commander-in-chief Ren Feilong being shot and killed.

This battle caused Jiang Chen's reputation to spread throughout the surroundings kingdoms. His name finally entered the horizon of the senior levels in the alliance of the sixteen kingdoms.

Even the first general of the Darkmoon Kingdom, Ren Feilong, had perished at the hands of this person. This caused the senior levels of the sixteen kingdoms to place a high importance on Jiang Chen.

The Darkmoon Kingdom didn't rank amongst the top of the sixteen kingdoms, but Ren Feilong, the genius of troop deployment, was universally renowned throughout the lands.

Who would've thought that this publicly acclaimed god of the army would die so ignobly.

An awe inspiring life story and the reputation of a lifetime was wiped out in a single day, in this battle, on his deathbed.

...

River Wave City gradually recovered its calm half a month after the battle of Bayun Valley. The pack of true qi master practitioners that the Darkmoon Kingdom had sent out had planned on ambushing River Wave City, but received the grievous news of the end of the war, and the death of Ren Feilong as soon as they snuck into the city.

When this trump card received news of even the commander-in-chief passing away, they naturally lost all will to fight and retreated back to the Darkmoon Kingdom with dust on their faces.

They also knew that if they were to make a move now, they would undoubtedly be heading to their deaths.

On this day, Jiang Chen assembled all of the Jiang clan members and made a frank statement without any reservations.

“Everyone, my Jiang family has set down its roots in the Jiang Han territory for hundreds of years. Today, I, Jiang Chen, have made my decision to leave. I will support those of you who are willing to stay, and will not object if there are those of you who wish to follow me.”

“Young duke, you’re leaving? Where to? Will you come back in the future?”

“In the future?” Jiang Chen chuckled. “The world is so vast, and the Eastern Kingdom is but a small corner of this world. It would truly be a difficult thing to say whether I will return or not.”

“Chen’er, third uncle and Xiaoyu will absolutely go with you.” Jiang Tong expressed his stance.

However, the other elders were a bit hesitant. Although they knew that Jiang Feng and son were very strong, and that they would have a greater future if they followed the two, but they still had other thoughts.

Besides, they also felt that as opposed to leaving, why not remain in the Jiang Han territory, and continue to indulge in wealth and prosperity?

The most important thing was, if the Jiang father and son left, then the kingdom’s bestowment would fall onto their heads. Who knows, maybe they could strut around for a bit and enjoy the trappings of a duke of the first rank.

The clan members may have all originated from the same lineage, but as subsequent generations diluted their heritage, differences in intimacy between relations would naturally surface.

Jiang Tong was Jiang Feng’s younger brother, brothers from the same mother, and would naturally leave with Jiang Feng.

Jiang Yu was Jiang Chen’s younger cousin and was considered as his younger brother as well. He’d always been quite reliant on Jiang Chen, so it wasn’t a strange thing to him to leave as well.

As for the others, their blood ties to the Jiang father and son weren’t that strong. They were merely members of the same clan. They wouldn’t necessarily be willing to steadfastly follow Jiang Chen in drifting about.

At the heart of it, different people had different aspirations.

Jiang Chen knew what these people were thinking when he looked at them. In all honesty, he hadn’t planned on bringing all of them with him either.

Despite these people being his clan members in name, truthfully speaking, Jiang Chen didn’t feel much of a connection to them. Since all of them had their own selfish motives, Jiang Chen wasn’t at liberty to say anything. He couldn’t very well force them now, could he?

“Elder Xi, your status will be the highest in the Jiang family once my father and I leave. Our Jiang family has been good to the kingdom and good to the royal family. We’ve accomplished our share of achievements. If there are bequeathments, it’s alright if you want to divide it up. But remember this, family members cannot point swords at each other and brothers cannot harm each other. Otherwise, I will tell the royal family to withdraw all the honor and prosperity and have the family be a free and leisurely aristocratic family.”

Elder Xi chuckled, "With this old man here, how would they dare create trouble and point swords at each other?"

Elder Xi beamed delightedly upon hearing Jiang Chen's promise. Who would've thought that he'd have the chance to enjoy the feeling of being a duke in his old age?

"Since this is the case, we'll leave in a few days. The Jiang family will be in your care in the future."

Elder Xi sighed, "Must you really go?"

This was already mere empty pleasantries. To be honest, he couldn't wait for the Jiang father and son to leave. Only with the departure of Jiang Feng and son, as well as Jiang Tong and son, would he have the right to inherit the dukedom!

Although they were of one clan, everyone had at least this bit of selfish motive.

Jiang Chen shook his head inwardly when he saw how Elder Xi was and how no one else ventured any particular thoughts on this matter. A selfish nature alright! They immediately itched for us to be gone when they heard that we were leaving, so that we could hand over all honors and prosperity to them.

With this temperament, I wouldn't take them even if they wished to leave with me, Jiang Chen thought privately. He was too lazy to bother with whether the spirit land in the Redbud Tribe region was a harbinger of fortune or disaster. People had their own destinies.

Since these clan members couldn't let go of the prosperity in front of them, then Jiang Chen naturally would not worry about what disasters might befall them in the future.

...

Princess Gouyu arrived with Eastern Zhiruo two days later.

She'd come with the medallion of a dukedom from the royal family to once again, confer the Jiang family the title of a duke of the first rank, and to use the dukedom to protect the southern frontiers of the kingdom.

As the elder with the longest record of service, it was right and proper that Elder Xi became the new Duke of Jiang Han. He was absolutely bursting with happiness.

The bestowment was just a ceremony, Princess Gouyu was completely unconcerned with who would be the next Duke of Jiang Han. Her heart had been in complete disarray over the past couple of days.

When she learned that Jiang Chen would leave the Eastern Kingdom, she'd been in a state of utter stupefaction.

Although she'd also known that Jiang Chen wasn't born to remain in a small pond, that he would be off to ride in the wind and clouds sooner or later and transform into a dragon that soars through the nine heavens, but she still found it hard to bear when this day finally arrived.

She knew very well that this could possibly be the final farewell. From henceforth, Jiang Chen would set foot on a great avenue of sunshine, while she, Gouyu, would be as if a flower in full bloom, with only a slow wither and droop left to her after blossoming to the perfection of beauty.

"Jiang Chen, must you really go?" Princess Gouyu held onto her last trace of hope. She really wanted to pray for Jiang Chen not to leave, but reason told her that the Eastern Kingdom truly couldn't contain Jiang Chen.

"If I don't go, I'll bring disaster to the Eastern Kingdom sooner or later. The feud between Long Juxue and I will remain unresolved for every single day she remains alive."

Jiang Chen knew this was a slightly cheap excuse.

"I so dearly hope that time can linger and stop at when we first met. Even if you scold me again, even if you scold me every day, that... that would be good as well."

Gouyu's tone was a bit sentimental. Tears actually started plopping out dispiritedly as this headstrong girl spoke.

She didn't wipe them off, and only squeezed out a smile, smiling through her tears. "Alright, Jiang Chen, I know that you've always thought that I have a weird temper, that I'm violent, unreasonable, and a tomboy. Alright, I won't conceal it any further today and let you see my weak side, and let you know that all girls shed tears... Actually, it's really tiring for me to act like that everyday. I also rather envy Ruo'er, envy her light heartedness and naive innocence... Jiang Chen, I no longer have such pure unsophisticatedness, and will never be able to obtain it again... Would you say that it's truly not that good for a girl to be so headstrong?"

Jiang Chen sighed lightly, "Everyone's personality is different. There's nothing wrong with keeping true to yourself and maintaining a resolute heart like you do."

"Really?" Prince Gouyu's beautiful eyes oscillated, a few traces of joy encompassed in her crystalline tears. This was the first time that she'd heard Jiang Chen compliment her.

"Of course it's true. Although I yell at you often, but I'm yelling at the cocky side of you. In actuality, I rather admire your strong adherence to martial dao and the sacrifices you make for your family."

Jiang Chen had no need to purposefully humor her with lies.

"Jiang Chen, do you know that I've waited half a year for a compliment from you? Are you purposefully amusing me now that you're leaving?"

"Do you think I'm that superficial?" Jiang Chen smiled ruefully. "Alright, wipe off your tears. I'm seriously not used to the sight of you crying. If I must chose, I'd rather see the Princess Gouyu in high and vigorous spirits, with a sense of unwilling to admit defeat perpetually permeating about her."

Gouyu wiped at the corners of her eyes, her beautiful eyes sparkling with light, "Do you mean that?"

"Absolutely, I guarantee it."

Princess Gouyu broke out in a smile. "Alright, I've decided."

"Decided what?" Jiang Chen was startled.

"I've decided not to be Princess Gouyu anymore. I've been a princess for three generations of the Eastern clan. It's time to throw this identity away and truly live for myself."

“Very good! Returning to your roots. This is as you should’ve been!” Jiang Chen laughed heartily.

“Princess Gouyu winked, “I’ve also made another decision.”

“And what have you decided?”

“Jiang Chen, listen up. From now on, I’m not a princess, but a martial practitioner of eleven meridians true qi. I want to be your follower.”

“What?” Jiang Chen was flabbergasted. He truly hadn’t anticipated this move by Gouyu.

“You haven’t misheard. I want to be your follower on your path of martial dao, just like your personal guards.” Gouyu drew up her well rounded bosom, gazing firmly at Jiang Chen with her beautiful eyes, as if not permitting Jiang Chen to voice a single word in protest.

“Is... is everything alright with your brain?”

“Cut your blather, I’m wide awake. Jiang Chen, you just told me to be true to myself and maintain a resolute heart, and return to the real me. Being your follower is my own intent. Don’t let your mind wander, although I’m treating you as my only man, but the reason I want to follow you is not to pester you, but to pursue the paramount of dao.”

“Paramount of dao? Do you think that’s something I sell in my family store? Do you think it’s something you can pursue just because you want to?” Jiang Chen rubbed his nose.

“Keep pretending. Don’t think I don’t know anything. Jiang Chen, there’s countless secrets on you. When you gave me a few pointers and helped me enter the ranks of the eleven meridians true qi masters, I had the vague inclination to hail you as my master. Now, this impulse has finally materialized into reality. I feel quite at ease and very happy.”

Chapter 130: A Generous Jiang Chen

One had to say, when a woman became stubbornly willful, even the strength of ten oxen wouldn’t be able to get her to change her mind.

This was even more so for someone with as resolute a heart as Princess Gouyu. She had utterly freed herself from the identity of a princess the moment that she’d fully understood her own thoughts, and voluntarily adopted the identity as Jiang Chen’s follower.

She was unwavering in her intent no matter what Jiang Chen said.

“Say no more Jiang Chen. Even if you hit me, yell at me, or drive me out, I would still be thick skinned and hard to shake off.” Gouyu had actually started pulling out these underhanded moves.

“Alright, you win.” Jiang Chen understood Gouyu very well. Once this woman went nuts, she would be like a wild horse that’d slipped its harness. No matter whether you yelled at her or drove her away, all of it would prove to be useless.

The only thing to be done was to let her behave as she would.

Three days later, Jiang Chen's entourage officially set off. Jiang Chen's eight personal guards numbered amongst his followers, but he didn't take the four Sheng battalion brothers with him and sent them back to the Tiandu army instead.

After many experiences and much training, the four Sheng battalion brothers all successfully made it into the senior ranks of the Tiandu army and had become personnel that the royal family relied on.

Jiang Feng brought the head of his personal guard, Jiang Ying and a few of his trusted followers.

Jiang Tong and son brought a few family members with them. The entourage totaled to around twenty or thirty people. Of course, this also included Gouyu and Qiao Baishi.

When they heard that Gouyu was willing to become Jiang Chen's follower and accompany him in his travels, Jiang Feng and Jiang Tong both felt rather taken aback. They both suspected: Just what was so alluring about Jiang Chen that even a lofty princess would give up endless wealth and prosperity to become his follower?

It was a good thing that Jiang Chen thought highly of Gouyu and made her the captain of his guard, placing her in charge of training his eight personal guards. With Gouyu's level of true qi master, she did indeed have the qualifications to do so.

As Jiang Chen's disciple, Qiao Baishi was naturally a close follower.

As for Jiang Chen's steward, Jiang Zheng, Jiang Chen had arranged for him to be in the Hall of Healing at the side of Ying Wuyou. Since he also had ten percent dry shares, his days within the Hall of Healing could be considered very leisurely and enjoyable.

Jiang Zheng's life goal could be counted as having been reached its peak, the three realms characteristic of a greatest steward had all been materialized.

Jiang Zheng actually wished to keep following Jiang Chen, but he knew that he wasn't a practitioner. If he continued to hang around the young master, not only would he not amount to much, but he might even become a burden for the young master.

This kind of arrangement was actually the best.

When they left, Eastern Zhiruo had been quite depressed and kept kicking up a fuss that she wanted to go with Jiang Chen. However, Jiang Chen knew that Eastern Zhiruo's body was fragile and not suited to long distance travel at all.

Jiang Chen had also left special instructions with the Hall of Healing with regards to Eastern Zhiruo's condition and made many preparations, ensuring that Eastern Zhiruo wouldn't have any anxieties regarding her life.

Although an entourage of twenty or so people looked quite small, no one dared rob them no matter where they traveled to once they learned that it was Jiang Chen's group.

Everyone knew that there was a million strong Swordbird army at Jiang Chen's beck and call. When that black, dense mass surged out, one wouldn't even know how they'd died.

Jiang Chen especially took the time to visit Mang Qi when he passed by the Boundless Catacombs.

When Mang Qi saw Jiang Chen, he sighed. "Master, I could sense that you had met danger, but sadly, I had no way to leave. I'm incredibly sorry."

"This matter isn't your fault. Now that I think about the situation, I rejoice in my narrow escape."

However, Mang Qi scoffed and took exception to Jiang Chen's words, "Master, you were born with great fortune and won't die that easily. Although I was a bit worried, I also knew that you would definitely turn calamities into blessings. At most, it'd be a fright without danger. "

"Oh? You have that much confidence in me eh?"

Mang Qi laughed heartily, "I do indeed have more and more faith in you. Oh right, you should still take the Swordbird army with you. If laid out appropriately, it will still give you a helping hand in moments of need."

"I won't take the large army. The Goldwing Swordbirds will be enough."

Eight hundred Goldwing Swordbirds would be enough battle strength. If he brought the rest of the Swordbird army with him, the numbers would be too overwhelming and shocking. It would be easy to incite national panic whenever he crossed borders.

It would be better to avoid such incidents as much as possible.

When he heard Jiang Chen say this, Mang Qi also nodded. "The battle capabilities of the Goldwing Swordbirds are not bad. The strength of the Greenwing Swordbirds only lies in numbers. If you truly need them, contact me at any time."

"Naturally."

Mang Qi nodded, thought for a bit and said, "Right, so are you headed to the Skylaurel Kingdom? The Boundless Catacombs runs through the underground world of the entire alliance of the sixteen kingdoms, and extends even beyond the range of the sixteen kingdoms. If you meet any danger within the Skylaurel Kingdom, you can find a way to make it to the Boundless Catacombs there and mention my name. Perhaps you'll receive some help from the outskirts of the Catacombs."

Mang Qi's influence existed only in the outskirts of the Boundless Catacombs.

...

The Skylaurel Kingdom was located in the center region of the sixteen kingdom alliance. Its position was slightly to the south, its territory was vast and resources abundant.

In terms of territory, the Skylaurel Kingdom was at least the size of three Eastern Kingdoms.

In terms of resources, it wasn't a level that a third rate kingdom like the Eastern Kingdom could even aspire towards.

The Skylaurel Kingdom was at the apex of the sixteen kingdom alliance for all sorts of training resources. After all, there was the huge backer, the Precious Tree Sect, standing behind the Skylaurel Kingdom.

The Precious Tree Sect was one of the four great sects within the alliance of the sixteen kingdoms, and a heavyweight that could throw its weight around with the Purple Sun Sect.

Riding on the backs of the Goldwing Swordbirds caused the journey to be quite easy. Jiang Chen and his group transversed the lands of three or four kingdoms and finally arrived within the borders of the Skylaurel Kingdom after roughly ten days.

They had just entered the borders of the Skylaurel Kingdom when their Swordbird army was halted by a Wyvern Knight who served as a frontier guard.

“Who are you? How dare you fly within the borders of the Skylaurel Kingdom?”

Wyverns were a common sight within the borders of the Skylaurel Kingdom. Actually, Ye Rong had also been riding a variation of the wyverns, but its pedigree was much more noble.

Jiang Chen wasn’t irritated when the Wyvern Knight stopped him and brought out the medallion that Ye Rong had given him. “I’m a friend of Prince Ye.”

“Mm. The medallion is real. Since you’re a friend of the prince, you do have the right to fly within the Skylaurel Kingdom. However, please proceed according to this flight path. Remember, don’t fly around randomly. There are many powers within the kingdom and they’ve defined many forbidden zones. If you follow the wrong flight path, you may cause plenty of unnecessary trouble.”

This Wyvern Knight was rather responsible and warm hearted as he gave Jiang Chen’s group a few key pointers.

Jiang Chen nodded and brought out a bottle of pills. “Thanks brother, here are a few qi replenishing pills named the Vast Ocean Pill. You will be able to instantaneously recover fifty percent of your true qi. Treat it as a token of my appreciation and thank you for your tips.”

The Wyvern Knight started and automatically caught the bottle that had been flown over. When he pulled open the stopper and held it up to his nose for a sniff, his facial expression immediately changed slightly.

He had thought that the other was joking and had carelessly given him some non mainstream pills.

But who would’ve thought that this truly would be qi replenishing pills with such high potency. They would be ranked as precious items even within the marketplace of the Skylaurel Kingdom!

The Wyvern Knight was overjoyed, “As expected of an honored guest of the prince. By what right do I have to accept such a rich reward? I am not worthy of it!”

Although he said he was unworthy, but the hand grasping the pill bottle was clasped firmly around it, as if afraid that the wind would blow it away if he loosened his grasp. He looked like he had received a precious treasure.

It was no wonder that he had lost his composure like this. His status as a Wyvern Knight patrolling the borders looked illustrious on the surface but his position wasn’t actually that high.

His income was even more pitiable. Although he could occasionally seize a few items, they were but a drop in the bucket when used in martial dao training.

A precious qi replenishing pill on this level was truly a luxurious item for him. He’d never even dared think of it before, much less actually purchase it.

"I've traveled the various kingdoms and have seen many border patrols. It's quite rare to meet someone as warm hearted as you." Jiang Chen smiled. "Tis but a small gift that's not worth mentioning."

The Wyvern Knight chuckled and scratched his head, a bit embarrassed. "Right, since you're not in a hurry, I'll tell you a few more prohibitions."

"After you enter from here and fly out a distance of roughly twelve hundred li along this path to enter this region, you must be on your guard. If you see someone wearing a red robe embroidered with blue lines, you must be absolutely careful. That kind of person is not someone you should provoke."

"Oh? What kind of strong person is this?"

"That would be someone of the Azure Heaven Northern Palace. The Azure Heaven Northern Palace is one of the secular locations of the Precious Tree Sect within the Skylaurel Kingdom where rites are performed. They're located in the northwestern region of the Skylaurel Kingdom and have absolute influence!"

"Azure Heaven Northern Palace." Jiang Chen silently committed these four words to memory.

"Then here, this secluded valley with dense and thick mist. Do not linger here at all costs. Although the people here aren't as domineering as those of the Azure Heaven Northern Palace, it's also a place where one is likely to get into trouble. If you don't handle things properly, then you'll be seized to become a medicine slave. They won't kill you or beat you, but instead, just make you toil for ten, twenty years. This place is called Qingyang Valley."

"Qingyang Valley..." Jiang Chen committed this name to memory as well.

"Once you have crossed the Qingyang valley, there are still some powers but they're not enough to endanger your life. Even if there is any trouble, the identity of the fourth prince will be enough to resolve it. In conclusion, be extra cautious when you're around the Azure Heaven Northern Palace and Qingyang Valley as you head to the capital."

"When you arrive at the capital, then it goes even more without saying that everyone you meet within the kingdom is somehow related to royalty if you really dig into their background. Therefore, try not to offend anyone. It looks like that you're friends with the prince but most of the time, this identity won't be useful. It isn't that the prince's identity isn't enough, but that his identity is too sensitive. There are more than ten princes within the capital and they all keep an eye on each other, attempting to find shortcomings that can be exploited. They attack each other and seek to crush each other. Every prince within the capital handles himself with utmost care, as if treading on thin ice. Therefore, when you arrive at the capital, don't go barging in flying through the air. You must enter the capital on foot, otherwise you'll have violated a huge taboo!"

One had to say, the Wyvern Knight was an honest man. He'd tried his best to come up with ideas for Jiang Chen after benefitting from him.

"Haha, thank you brother for going to the trouble of giving us this overview. I feel much more confident."

The Wyvern Knight chuckled. "No problem, not a problem. Right, my name is Tang Long and my home is also in the capital. Since you're going to the capital, can you take a few things back for me?"

“Of course, this is but a small favor.”

Tang Long hesitated for a moment and then spoke seriously, “I... it’s not that I don’t trust you guys, but I just want to repeat myself. Don’t get into trouble in those places. In addition, the items I wish to send home are urgently needed and must arrive within seven days. It would be quite troublesome if it’s tardy, so...”

“Be at ease, tell us the address. We will definitely not offend anyone and delay your matters.”

Tang Long chuckled as he handed over an address to Jiang Chen.