

# Tome of Troubled Times

## Chapter 8: Tome of Troubled Times

The past few days on the road, Zhao Changhe had indirectly asked Luo Qi and other disciples of the cult about some basic information about this world.

There was a certain level of similarity between this world and the real world. Martial arts were split into internal and external arts, and it was known that “internal arts temper the breath; external arts temper the flesh.” Whichever one trained in, after reaching a certain level, they could attempt to open the mysterious Profound Gates.

Practicing both internal and external arts was definitely possible, so long as one was fortunate enough to be able to learn them. Cultivating in such a way made opening a Profound Gate much easier and one would be much stronger in battle. Among the famous masters, there was not one who did not practice both internal and external arts.

External arts were not as profound as internal arts, but there were plenty of them. For example, the Iron Sand Palm required one to know what type of iron sand to use, how to train with it, what sort of medicines to soak one’s hands in, and so forth. In addition to this, one needed to drill specific movements and learn how to properly direct their strength. A normal person would never have the opportunity to learn any of these things. If one managed to pick up a few of these skills, they could very loosely be considered part of the *jianghu*.

People like this formed the backbone of the *jianghu*, and external arts themselves were the very basis of all martial arts. Actually, internal arts also required one to build a physical foundation by practicing the horse stance and other such techniques that were within the scope of external arts.

Internal arts were much harder to find. They were usually tightly kept secrets, cornerstones that propped up entire sects. The reason not many practiced internal arts was not that people didn’t desire mystical internal force, but that internal arts were simply too difficult to acquire.

The Luo Family was one that practiced internal arts. Their core cultivation method was split into nine levels. As long as one managed to reach all nine, they could in principle break through the nine layers of the Profound Gate. Yue Hongling had recommended Zhao Changhe to learn martial arts from the Luo Family precisely because this would give him better future prospects.

Unfortunately, the shitty internal art from the outer sect in Luo Qi's possession was not of much use to him. He did not know if there would be a chance to acquire the real thing in the future.

Compared to usual fantasy *wuxia* worlds, the level of martial arts he'd seen so far was rather low. Zhao Changhe could not help but feel that something was amiss...

Furthermore, the Vicious Blood Art was the archetypal external art.

It did not require one to train their breath. Even if Zhao Changhe practiced it to death he would not obtain even a modicum of the strength gained from internal arts. He would also be unable to direct his internal force to heal other's wounds with the Vicious Blood Art. With that said, at least it was not a purely physical martial art; it also tempered Zhao Changhe's blood qi.

The Blood God Cult believed that the blood within the human body had tremendous amounts of energy and vicious qi. By raising the speed at which blood flowed through blood vessels, making it boil and surge through the body, one could channel the vicious qi into their muscles and bones to unleash the violent energies within the blood. If one were to obtain a deep understanding of this martial art, they could throw all of an enemy's blood vessels into disarray, causing them to burst from head to toe. This was an incredibly cruel way to die—in other words, something typical of demonic arts.

The Vicious Blood Art naturally had some prerequisites for practicing it. Since it relied solely on the blood qi in the body, it was optimal for powerful young men. The more strength they possessed, the more vigorous their blood qi would be.

Compared to the malnourished masses in this world, who lived in destitution, Zhao Changhe had always enjoyed abundant nourishment. He was tall and well-built, and in school, he was a top-level athlete. All this gave him a natural affinity for training external arts.

The Vicious Blood Art suited Zhao Changhe very well. In fact, it was probably the martial art that most suited someone in his position. It did not require practicing from a young age, and did not require comprehending any profound knowledge. It even allowed him to build a foundation for practicing the Blood God Art, a true martial art with both internal and external aspects.

There could be some side effects, though. For example, going down this path could damage Zhao Changhe's potential... But all demonic arts basically came with some kind of drawback, just like how all orthodox martial arts were fundamentally slow to progress. *Want to have your cake and eat it too? Now that's the truly divine art that only the main characters of novels are qualified to obtain.*

Zhao Changhe suddenly thought of Yue Hongling. *Is she a main character?*

He broke out in involuntary laughter and continued flipping through the manual.

When Zhao Changhe opened the main instructional text of the Vicious Blood Art, it clearly stated in the beginning that one first needed to temper their flesh and bones, in addition to drilling their horse stance, lunges, and other fundamental techniques. There were even some illustrations, but the horse stance and lunges depicted in them differed from what Zhao Changhe was familiar with. *Perhaps this is the special characteristic that allows one to direct their qi and blood using these techniques.*

Zhao Changhe felt there was a disparity between the Vicious Blood Art and what he imagined would be an esoteric martial art. However, he thought that this made the Vicious Blood Art feel real. *When You Tanzhi obtained the Yijinjing or the Shenzujing[1] did he also feel this way?*

Zhao Changhe thought for a while before getting up. He proceeded to follow the movements depicted in the illustration and took the horse stance.

*Since I've decided to practice this thing, I might as well start now.*

Luo Qi lay on the bed, sizing up Zhao Changhe in amazement.

*So energetic... But how long will he last?*

Zhao Changhe could not persist for very long. Whoever practiced holding the horse stance or lunge for more than a minute or so would understand the ridiculous soreness they caused. Naturally, Zhao Changhe would not become proficient at this overnight. This was something that required him to train over a long period of time to build a sturdy lower body, as immovable as mountains.

Just as Zhao Changhe was about to fall asleep, a ray of light suddenly flashed across the black of night. It looked as if a page of a book was slowly opening up in the sky. Its golden words were blindingly bright.

Zhao Changhe looked outside in astonishment. "What's this? Why can I see what's up in the sky from inside the building?"

Luo Qi asked curiously, "You've never seen it before?"

Zhao Changhe felt the thumping of his heart and attempted to cover up his blunder. "I've always seen it from outside. Never inside a building."

"Everytime there is a change in the Rankings of Troubled Times, the heavenly Dao records it for all to see no matter where they are," Luo Qi explained casually. He could not continue sleeping and went outside the building to look at the sky.

*Rankings of Troubled Times? What's that?*

Zhao Changhe looked for a while. That blinding feeling was gone and he could finally see the words clearly.

**Tenth month, Slight Snow[2]. Yue Hongling pursued Xue Canghai over a thousand *li* and battled with him outside of Wenshan City. Xue Canghai walked away in defeat.**

**The Ranking of Hidden Dragons has changed.**

**Rank 2: Yue Hongling!**

**Trying to stop her is like trying to stop the sun from rising.**

Zhao Changhe was dumbstruck. *What's this? A server-wide announcement in a game?*

*I was just thinking that it's a bit off for this to be a low-level martial arts world. Just what kind of fucking world am I in?*

Luo Qi sighed faintly by the side. "Yue Hongling... At the eighth layer of the Profound Gate, she defeated someone at the ninth layer. Indeed, she is a proud daughter of heaven. Ordinary people cannot compare to her."

Zhao Changhe asked, "Who is Xue Canghai? He's reached the ninth layer of the Profound Gate? Was he the one who started the fight? Challenging someone of lower cultivation.... Pft, what a scrub. Or did Yue Hongling decide to kill him herself?"

Luo Qi cast a sidelong glance at Zhao Changhe. "He's our Cult Leader."

Zhao Changhe: "?!"

"What do you think?" Luo Qi found the whole thing amusing. "The leader of the cult you worked so hard to join couldn't even defeat Yue Hongling, who brought you to the village. How do you feel about it?"

"Eh, whatever. I already knew the Blood God Cult wasn't anything to write home about..." Zhao Changhe composed himself and said softly, "Actually, I'm feeling a little uneasy about this. At such a young age, she's already making big waves in the *jianghu*. It's easy to rouse the envy of others like this."

Luo Qi found this even funnier. "You? Worrying about her? What's there to be uneasy about?"

"That Ranking of whatever. I heard previously that she was only ranked fifth. Now she's taken second place. The person originally ranked second has been pushed down to third place. Won't they feel unwilling to accept this and give her trouble? Moreover, Cult Leader Xue was challenged by someone with a lower cultivation than him and his

defeat was broadcasted to everyone under heaven. This is definitely incredibly humiliating, right? I'm afraid the cult leader might hunt her to the ends of the earth."

Luo Qi finally broke out in laughter. "Are you serious? You're just a lowly bandit who's just begun learning the Vicious Blood Art. What do you think you're doing worrying about a woman who's able to defeat your cult leader? Is it because she's pretty?"

Zhao Changhe made a serious expression. "She's my benefactor. If it wasn't for her, I would've died at the Zhao House."

*Actually... Could Yue Hongling pursuing Xue Canghai for a thousand li to kill him have anything to do with me? Maybe she thinks that I died at the Luo Family Village and feels responsible for it. Or perhaps she knows about Zhao Changhe the Manslayer and wanted to confront my superiors for answers.*

Of course, Zhao Changhe was not narcissistic enough to try and confirm this train of thought.

Luo Qi had also thought this far and stopped teasing Zhao Changhe. Luo Qi said lazily, "It makes sense that you're worried about her... Why do you think these Rankings are known as the Rankings of Troubled Times? It's the source of much conflict. Just how many battles have been fought over them?"

Zhao Changhe had an epiphany and looked at Luo Qi. "So this Tome of Troubled Times..."

Luo Qi nodded. "That book in the sky is split into the Ranking of Heaven, Earth, and Man, and the Ranking of Hidden Dragons. Together they form the Tome of Troubled Times."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

*No wonder Luo Qi looked at me like I was some kind of alien when I said I'd never seen it before.*

*As long as one exists in this world, how can they miss this type of server-wide announcement!? Though the Ranking of Heaven, Earth, and Man do sound a bit crass...*

Zhao Changhe coughed dryly as he attempted to provide a cover-up story. "So this is what you meant by the Tome of Troubled Times. You should have just told me it refers to this. In the mountainous region where I'm from, we've never heard it called this way."

Luo Qi accepted this explanation. He already thought that this was the case beforehand. He did not fret over it and laughed. "Since you've seen it before, don't you

think it counts as a trace of the divine? How can there be any doubt about the existence of gods then?”

Zhao Changhe remained silent.

Modern man was experienced and knowledgeable and thought differently from primitive peoples. To Zhao Changhe, this was not necessarily the work of gods. For example, this could be a video game world. This could not be confirmed either; there were plenty of other possibilities. And even if there was a higher life form controlling everything in this world, it was not necessarily “the” God.

The visage of the blind woman appeared in Zhao Changhe’s mind. He was feeling a little gloomy. *If she’s so powerful, how am I supposed to return...*

Luo Qi asked curiously, “What’re you thinking about?”

“Oh.” Zhao Changhe snapped out of it and casually found an excuse. “I was thinking that Yue Hongling is only at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate, but you weren’t much surprised when she was able to defeat someone at the ninth layer... Is it common for people of lower cultivation to win against those of higher cultivation?”

Luo Qi sneered, “Having a higher cultivation does not necessarily mean that one is stronger, that they have more sensitive reflexes, or are more perceptive. They may indeed have a big edge in battle, but it’s not enough to guarantee an easy victory. Otherwise why would people bother to practice their bladework or hone practical combat skills? Luo Zhenwu reached the third layer of the Profound Gate, or so they say, but he died at your hands. For a person of higher cultivation to die like this is not unheard of.”

“Well, yeah, it’s not like he’s invulnerable to swords and spears. It makes sense that some people die from schemes like this. By the way, why couldn’t I enter the Ranking by killing Luo Zhenwu? Is it because his cultivation is too low?”

“The Tome of Troubled times doesn’t look at cultivation level. It looks at one’s accomplishments in battle. What sort of cultivation you have doesn’t matter. All eye-catching feats performed in battle can be recorded down, especially in the Ranking of Hidden Dragons, which is concerned more with one’s potential. What you did can’t even be considered fighting a battle. The Tome of Troubled Times wouldn’t have any reaction to it. If you had slain Luo Zhenwu in a fight, perhaps there would have been a chance for you to enter the Ranking...”

“If it’s like this...” Zhao Changhe rubbed his chin. “If I blind my enemy with dust then kill him, does that count?”

“As long as it takes place during a battle, it doesn’t matter what methods you use. All of it is part of one’s experience and wisdom in battle. To be able to defeat someone

stronger than you is a result of your own skill. The great people of the *jianghu* may consider you despicable, but the Tome of Troubled Times thinks differently... As the saying goes, 'the way of Heaven is eternal. It does not exist because of Emperor Yao's benevolence, nor does it perish with Emperor Jie's despotism.[3]'"

Zhao Changhe: "Huh?"

"What's with that look?"

"How is it possible that you guys have an Emperor Yao and Jie?"

"...What do you mean, 'you guys?' If even you and your mountain village have heard of them, why is it so strange for me to also know them?" Luo Qi asked incredulously.

"That's not it. This... Nevermind." *This world is bizarre. I'm not sure if there are history books in the mountain stronghold. I'll need to find time to flip through a few.*

Luo Qi returned to the topic. "Anyway, what's this all about? You talk as if you're interested in entering the Ranking."

Zhao Changhe had no interest in competing with others for whatever ranking. He just wanted to know more about this to understand the world he was in. Of course, when asked this by Luo Qi, he could only follow along and answer, "Who wouldn't be eager to enter the Rankings? Anyone who denies it is lying..."

Luo Qi smiled as he pat Zhao Changhe on the shoulder. "The ten ranks of the Ranking of Heaven, the thirty-six ranks of Earth, the seventy-two ranks of Man. The Ranking of Hidden Dragons does not record down anyone older than twenty-five. Good luck. You've only just started practicing your horse stance at nineteen, brother Zhao."

Zhao Changhe cast a sidelong glance at Luo Qi, smiling as he said, "You're smiling more and more. Is this who you really are?"

Luo Qi immediately put on a serious face and angrily returned to the wooden hut to sleep.

1. Famous character from the Jin Yong novel *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils* who finds the *Yijinjing*, a manual containing techniques to strengthen the body. In the novel he also obtains the *Shenzujing*, which is a yoga manual. 📖

2. 20th solar term. The solar terms are 24 periods that the ancient Chinese used to guide agricultural affairs. Slight Snow is the latter half of the tenth month. 📖

3. This is a well-known line from *Xunzi*. Yao and Jie were rulers in ancient China. The former was a benevolent ruler while the latter was a cruel tyrant. 📖