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In the waiting room, Wu Bozhong (Dorwin), who was the first to be notified that he could board the plane, was planning to go to Kathmandu.

A pretty ground staff member approached and respectfully said in fluent Chinese, “Mr. Wu, your plane is ready for boarding. We have a car to take you to the gate. Would you like to depart now or wait a while?”

The three elders of the Wu family were all from the Qing Dynasty. After a century of seclusion, although they had made up for a lot of common knowledge about the world, they really couldn’t learn foreign languages in a short time. Fortunately, Jadel was considerate of these seniors and had arranged for Chinese-speaking staff to serve them in advance.

Wu Bozhong (Dorwin) asked the staff member, “What’s the latest I can wait?”

The staff member said, “Your flight has just started announcing boarding for business and first class passengers. Economy class passengers are expected to board in ten minutes. We will proceed from the VIP terminal through the VIP passage, which will take you directly to the aircraft jet bridge. So you can spend a maximum of twenty more minutes with your friends.”

Wu Bozhong (Dorwin) nodded and said, “Then come pick me up in twenty minutes.”

“Okay.” The staff member said respectfully, “Mr. Wu, please have a seat for a moment. I will come back in twenty minutes.”

After the staff member finished speaking, he turned and left. Wu Bozhong (Dorwin) looked at the boarding pass in his hand, which was full of English and Arabic numerals, and sighed to the other two elders: “The world is changing so fast. In the past, when we traveled from Suzhou and Hangzhou to the capital by canal, we would leave Hangzhou in early March and arrive in the capital at the end of June. It was a two-thousand-mile waterway that took three or four months. Now, we can fly there in two hours.”

Wu Bowen smiled and said, “Back then, we didn’t even know the Earth was round. Later, Tianlin told me that the Earth is a big sphere. Even if you go further and further away by going in opposite directions, you can eventually come back from the other side of the Earth. I thought that bastard was just teasing me. If it really is a sphere, wouldn’t people on the other side of the Earth fall off? But after I took a plane ride last time and saw it with my own eyes, I was truly impressed.”

After saying that, he looked at Wu Bolin and said with a smile, “Senior Brother, now that you’re going to Antarctica, once you’ve passed that South Pole, will you be able to return to China?”

Wu Bolin smiled and nodded, saying, “I swiped around on the globe a few times. Roughly speaking, the Earth looks like a red lantern hanging up. The South Pole is at the bottom, like where the tassels are hanging, and the North Pole is at the top, like the end of the rope that hangs the big red lantern. No matter which pole you stand at, as long as you choose the right direction, you can go anywhere.”

Wu Bowen gave a thumbs up: “It has to be our senior brother. He can always be more diligent than us.”

“Heh.” Wu Bolin waved his hand modestly: “It’s not really a study. Tianlin just happened to give me a globe, and I fiddled with it a bit like a toy.”

Wu Bozhong (Dorwin), who was standing nearby, said, “Senior Brother, the Antarctic you’re going to this time isn’t too far away, but it’s said to be the harshest place on Earth, bar none. You have to be extra careful!”

Wu Bolin smiled and said, “With the cultivation levels of the three of us, as long as we don’t go to the Ten Thousand Mountains or provoke the armies of those countries, we should not encounter any danger anywhere.”

Wu Bozhong (Dorwin) sighed, “Speaking of the army, the artillery these days is so much more advanced than the artillery of the Eight-Nation Alliance back then. With our current level of cultivation, resisting the old cannons would be a piece of cake, but the artillery fire these days is so cunning and deceptive. I heard that those high-temperature armor-piercing shells can melt even the best steel when they explode. No matter how thick your steel is, they can still burn a hole in it. Even if we had three heads and six arms, we couldn’t withstand that thing. Even a wise ruler couldn’t do it, right?”

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Wu Bolin nodded and instructed, “You must be extra careful when you enter the world this time. It is said that a certain earl was blown to pieces by close-in weapon systems. That thing can chase after people and is not only as fast as lightning, but it can also predict your trajectory. Before you even arrive, it will fire dozens or even hundreds of shells toward where you are going. There is no way to defend against this kind of thing.”

The two nodded vigorously.

In fact, the more the three of them learned about modern society, the greater their sense of disillusionment became.

Wu Bolin murmured with a sigh: “To be honest, before I went into seclusion, I thought that after I came out, I would be able to roam the world without fear. I never expected that in the past hundred years, although our cultivation has improved a lot, the world has improved even more. Think about it, a hundred years ago, a cannonball could only destroy a small boat or a house at most. But in 1945, 80 years ago, an atomic bomb could destroy a city. Fifteen or sixteen years later, a Soviet hydrogen bomb was equivalent to two or three thousand of those nuclear bombs from 1945. It is said that this was a castrated version they made because they were afraid that the power would be too great, and the power was only 30% of the original plan...”

At this point, Wu Bolin retorted, “You tell me, in the face of such a world-destroying weapon, what the hell are cultivators? Even before the end of the Dharma era, if all the cultivators from all the sects were gathered together, after one hydrogen bomb, let alone anyone surviving, having a whole corpse would be considered a sign of their extraordinary cultivation.”

Wu Bowen chuckled and said, “Perhaps those ascended cultivators can also destroy the heavens and the earth, but we were born at the wrong time. In this Dharma-ending Age, we will never be able to cultivate to the day when we transcend tribulation and ascend.”

Wu Bolin countered by asking the two, “What do you think ascension was before the Dharma-ending Age?”

Wu Bowen said, “What else could it be? Just like the Western Paradise that Buddha talked about, you go directly to another world.”

Wu Bolin then asked another question: “Where is the other world after ascension?”

Wu Bowen spread his hands: “Who knows? We’ve never been there. Maybe to another planet.”

Wu Bolin shook his head: “Astronomers have also studied this. Not to mention Earth, there is no other place in the entire solar system where humans can live. The nearest star is four light-years away from Earth. Even if the world after ascension is there, how many years do you think it would take for them to undergo tribulation on Earth and fly all the way there?”

The two looked at each other in bewilderment.

Unlike Wu Bolin, they hadn’t crammed on so much modern knowledge, so they didn’t know how to answer this question.

Wu Bolin said with a serious expression, “Even if they can fly at the speed of light after they ascend, it will still take four years to get there. Besides, there’s some relativity theory that some scientists have researched, which says that no object can exceed the speed of light.”

Wu Bozhong (Dorwin) blurted out, “Scientists study ordinary people, which is definitely not the same as ascending cultivators.”

Wu Bolin nodded and said, “You have your reasons, but let me ask you, if ascension really exists, which is more powerful, the ascended cultivator or Sun Wukong from Journey to the West?”

Without hesitation, Wu Bozhong (Dorwin) said, “If Journey to the West is true, then Sun Wukong must be the most powerful. He was already an immortal when he graduated from his apprenticeship, and later he became a Buddha, which is a god.”

Wu Bolin agreed, saying, “That’s right. If Sun Wukong is real, then he is a god or Buddha, even higher than an immortal.”

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After saying that, he changed the subject and said, “But have you two thought about it? Sun Wukong’s somersault only covers a mere 108,000 li, which is about 60,000 kilometers according to the Chinese li of that time. Even if he did one somersault per second, covering 60,000 kilometers each time, it would only be about one-fifth of the speed of light. In other words, even if Sun Wukong, who had already become a god, did one somersault per second and kept doing it, it

would still take him forty or fifty years to complete the journey. Even cultivators who ascend to immortality on Earth are not considered to have reached the ranks of immortals, so no matter how strong they are, they can't be stronger than Sun Wukong, who has become a god or a Buddha, right? Their speed is definitely not as fast as Sun Wukong's. They might even spend hundreds of years on the road to ascension. So tell me, is spending hundreds of years on the road a blessing or a torment?"

The two men's heads were buzzing from what he said. Wu Bowen rubbed his temples and said, "Senior Brother, you're going too far off. It's all baseless stuff. How are we supposed to figure out if it's right or wrong? And to be honest, I've never thought about ascending to immortality in my life. I'd be content if I could eat an elixir of eternal life like the wise ruler and live for another five hundred years. Who cares how far Sun Wukong can somersault in one go?"

"Yes," Wu Bozhong (Dorwin) said with a smile, "Even wise rulers don't dare to dream of ascension, so we shouldn't even think about it. Didn't you yourself say that there's no place near Earth where anyone can live? Maybe ascension is a hoax from the beginning."

As he spoke, he suddenly realized something and exclaimed excitedly, "I think the stories about ascension are just like those about Sun Wukong—they're all made up by later generations! As for the so-called 'Dharma-ending Age,' I think that's pure nonsense! It's very likely that Earth has been like this since its birth. For thousands of years, cultivators have been hoping to ascend, but no one has been able to fly away. Everyone thought about it and realized, 'This doesn't make sense. Everyone says they can ascend, but why hasn't anyone flown away?' So, to comfort themselves, they fabricated the 'Dharma-ending Age,' saying that things are different now than before. They said it's the Dharma-ending Age, and in the past, even dogs could ascend. It's like in the late Qing Dynasty, when the old folks always said that the world was going downhill and that people weren't as good as they used to be. I think that's just something to fool children. Maybe things weren't much better before, maybe even worse than now. It's just that we weren't born in that era, so whether something is good or bad is all based on what they say."

Wu Bowen's eyes lit up, and he exclaimed, "Junior Brother is right! The highest realm of cultivation is probably just to live for a thousand or eight hundred years, like the master of the wise ruler. As for ascension, it's all just the conjectures and wishes of cultivators. Look at scientists nowadays, they keep talking about interstellar travel and interstellar migration, right? But as Senior Brother just said, even light takes several years to travel to the nearest star. Humans might not be able to live to get there even in ten thousand years. Ascension might be the same, just a theoretical height that can never be reached in reality."

Wu Bolin chuckled self-deprecatingly and said, "What you say makes sense. It's very possible that ascension was just a pie in the sky that cultivators painted for future generations years ago, a pie that can never be eaten."

While saying this, Wu Bolin had his own calculations in mind.

He knew that ascension could not be interstellar travel.

Before the Dharma-ending Age, it was impossible for cultivators who had successfully transcended tribulations to act like idiots every now and then, flying all the way from Earth to outer space, flying through the universe for tens, hundreds, or even thousands of years just to go to another world. Wouldn't that be just plain crazy?

He prefers to believe that ascension is actually a teleportation mechanism.

In his theory, ascension was more like an invisible imperial examination.