

LONGEVITY CHRONICLES

Chapter 17 16: Forbidden Immortal Hall and the Devil God Army

When the distant whistles of the massive steamships at the pier echoed through the air, the porters began their workday, vegetable vendors from the suburbs hurried into the city, and various breakfast stalls steamed up as they opened for business, door panels of shops on Vegetable Market Street swung open one by one... Seeking Immortal County awakened from the deep night, and its residents started a new day.

The young owner of Chengyou Bookstore got up early today, or maybe he hadn't slept at all through the night.

Still brimming with energy, he first cleaned the store with a rag, then neatly arranged several sets of magazine girl picture reports and novels that he had gathered from Cedar the previous day in the most conspicuous position.

A few sets of vulgar banned books like "Yulou Spring" and "Nine-tailed Turtle" were tucked away in a hidden corner under the counter.

Those goodies, they needed a genuine customer to handle the transaction.

Rules were similar, be it in his past life or here, keep it low-key just like Tao Qian.

After finishing his arrangements, Tao Scholar clapped his hands with a satisfied smile.

"All set, today will surely bring in a good amount of silver coins."

Proud of himself, Tao Qian caught a whiff of the fragrant aroma from the street corner, chuckled, and turned to go outside.

Soon enough, he returned holding a big bowl of wontons topped with a dollop of spicy sauce, which he stirred in with a soup spoon and devoured hungrily.

After returning the bowl to the eatery, Tao Scholar went back behind the counter.

He took out a thick tome entitled "Longevity History," placed it on the counter, casually flipped it open, and began to read.

Clearly, Tao Qian truly possessed the qualities of a newbie.

Not only was he a newcomer to the Cultivation World, but to this world as well, he was without a doubt a rookie.

To avoid future embarrassment and mistakes, despite having the memories of the original body, Tao Qian still planned to read up on the history of this world during his spare time.

"As a bona fide underachiever in studies, I actually prefer treasure hunting and picking up bargains over reading."

"My weird Extraordinary Perception could totally be used as an 'Extraordinary radar,' and although its range is limited, the success rate is nearly a hundred percent."

"The most suitable place for me to leverage my skills is naturally within the trading markets of the Cultivation World. Knowledge imparted by Wu Ming

and Lin Xiaohua indicates no shortage of such places, but getting an entry ticket isn't that simple."

"However, for the time being, I can still try my luck at places like 'book markets' and 'temple fairs.'"

"Why not give it a shot today when I have some free time?"

As these thoughts settled, Tao Scholar officially began reading the history of this new world.

With the two sets of memories in his mind, he soon gained some understanding of the world's history.

Of course, what he cared about most were the historical records related to the supernatural and Cultivation.

To Tao Qian's surprise, descriptions on this subject were quite plentiful.

The history detailed that the land's past could be roughly divided into several eras:

In ancient times, humankind emerged and struggled to survive amidst numerous Demons and Ghosts, Immortal Gods, Exotic Beasts, and supernatural phenomena.

In ancient times, humanity gradually rose. Some humans gained Power from those indescribable entities and no longer revered them. Instead, they began to turn the tables, eroding the supernatural phenomena. During this, humans themselves started to divide and fierce super-wars erupted, sweeping across the land with great momentum, writing epic tales of heroes.

Until the Ancient era, humans continued to multiply and engaged in constant civil wars. Oddly enough, humanity did not decline but grew even stronger, gradually defeating many supernatural entities that dominated the Shen Zhou Holy Land, achieving a comprehensive victory, and fully entering the human era.

And then came the Ancient period.

This stage isn't much to talk about, and yet, there's so much to say.

"The Ancient period is essentially the entire history of the Longevity Heavenly Dynasty."

"This Dynasty was established at the end of the Ancient period by an Emperor with illustrious military achievements. He conquered all quarters, completely ended the reign of supernatural beings."

"For more than two thousand years after that, despite ongoing chaos, wars, uprisings, natural disasters, and constant changes in the ruling clique in this land, which is similar to the dynastic changes in my past life, what's incredible is that every time a new ruler overthrew the predecessor, they invariably chose to continue with the name 'Longevity Heavenly Dynasty.'

"That is to say, this Dynasty has actually lasted for more than two thousand years, continuing to the present day."

Having received nine years of compulsory education in his previous life, Tao Scholar couldn't hide his astonishment.

Too normal. In his past life, he knew about the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, and also the common course of long periods of division followed by unification and vice versa.

But he had never heard of any feudal dynasty that managed to extend its reign for more than two thousand years.

Although the rulers on the throne changed generation after generation, this still left Tao Scholar incredulous.

While he was staring at "Longevity History" with an expression like a country bumpkin, a customer suddenly arrived.

A short, elderly man dressed in a robe and jacket, wearing a pair of glasses.

Tao Scholar looked up and recognized him as a familiar face—the owner of the "Seeking Immortal Leather Store" down the street, known only by the surname Ma, his first name unknown.

As soon as Boss Ma walked in, his eyes locked onto the New Arrival section.

He strolled over, waving his hand at Tao Scholar, "Tao Scholar, no need for formalities. I heard you got some new books, so this old man came to pick a few to pass the time."

After saying that, the old man indeed casually flipped through the picture reports and albums.

His eyes flickered behind his glasses as he browsed.

Suddenly, he grabbed a whole set of magazine girls, tucked them under his arm, and fished out some Silver Coin from his chest, placing it directly on the counter in front of Tao Scholar.

With a slick turn, he headed out of the store.

Smooth as flowing water, without the slightest hint of hesitation.

Only when the old man was far gone did Tao Scholar react, collecting the money and lamenting, "What a sly old fox, stylish to the core, truly an example for all of us."

Tao Qian had hardly finished speaking when two more customers arrived arm in arm.

They were also familiar faces from the street, one was Boss Xu, and the other was Boss Zhou, the owners of Xu's Roast Meat Shop and Zhou's Silk Shop, respectively.

These two followed the same process, each taking a set of magazine girl albums.

Boss Xu, who was still a bachelor, was a bit bashful as he requested a set of vulgar banned books, the illustrated edition, from under Tao Qian's counter, which was quite pricey.

For the rest of the morning, Tao Qian couldn't find a complete stretch of time to read.

The number of customers buying books was unexpectedly high.

The albums and books that he had gathered from Cedar the day before had almost all sold out.

Not only had he recouped his costs, but he had also netted a solid ten silver coins, and Tao Qian's purse swelled up once again.

Tao Qian could easily guess the reason for this situation, someone must have been helping to promote in the background; otherwise, it wasn't likely that so many books and magazines could have sold out in just one morning.

Therefore, he didn't sell all his inventory, leaving two complete sets, just waiting for those two to come and claim credit.

Sure enough, as noon arrived.

Two figures swayed and walked into the Chengyou Bookstore.

As soon as they entered, the strange stone shop owner, Li Sanyu, who strongly resembled Lin Yongjian, had a brilliant smile on his face and, pointing to the now empty new products area, proudly said,

"I've seen it, Tao Scholar. Your shop was brimming with distinguished guests this morning. You must have made a tidy sum of silver dimes, right? Was it thanks to the idea I gave yesterday?"

"Don't try to take all the credit, Boss Li. I heard from Old Ma that the main idea for Tao Scholar's new stock was mine. You should have seen it; among the magazines Old Ma bought, there were a few with Hua Rongrong wearing some sort of 'bikini' outfit. Good lord, all the arms and thighs were exposed, white as can be."

"I can already imagine the popularity of these albums. If they're a hit in the provincial capital, they will surely be a sell-out in Seeking Immortal County the moment stock arrives."

"If I hadn't trusted that Tao Scholar would reserve a set for me, I would have snatched them from Old Ma's hands long ago."

Jia Qiang, with a cunning look on his face, retorted.

While speaking, he almost seemed like he was drooling.

Seeing this, Tao Qian didn't interrupt but smiled and directly took out two sets of books and albums from under the counter.

First he stuffed them into the arms of the two men, then bowed his hands and said,

"All thanks to the two brothers' advice and strategies, my shop has finally made some profit."

"As for today's promised Taian Inn mutton hotpot, both brothers know my nature as Tao Scholar, do not refuse, let's go."

While speaking, Tao Qian directly pulled the two men out the door.

With his purse now bulging, Tao Qian was exuding confidence.

He closed the shop and pulled the two business advisors towards a nearby restaurant.

With the body and memories of his previous life, Tao Qian acted completely natural.

He was confident that even those most familiar with his former self, even his dearest friends and relatives, would find it hard to tell that within the lean and handsome scholar's body, the soul had changed.

The three of them went to Taian Inn, and the mutton hotpot, pricey as it was, was served.

With a certain goal in mind, Tao Qian also thoughtfully ordered some wine.

With cups clinking, under Tao Qian's deliberate guidance, the two soon began discussing grand schemes in detail and briefed him on political affairs.

Tao Qian was familiar with this, but in his previous life, he didn't need wine to get people to talk; a keyboard would do.

There might be some exaggeration in their speech, but it was enough to let Tao Qian understand the general economic, political, and military landscape of the current Longevity Heavenly Dynasty.

After all, his former self was a pedantic scholar, and these were his weak spots.

Though Tao Qian could collect newspapers for self-study, listening to the explanations of local business owners was a better way.

However, as the two continued to talk, they seemed to touch upon a certain topic, and both of their faces suddenly showed a look of concern as they said,

"Boss Li, Tao Scholar, you both heard about the strange events at the docks yesterday, didn't you?"

"What with the man eating his wife, a child offering his flesh, father and son committing murder, people transforming into bloody creatures... it's all the work of demons. Recently, it's been said that throughout the provinces and counties, demons and ghosts have been particularly active, causing a

plethora of terrifying incidents and making life increasingly difficult for the common people."

"Isn't that the truth? These are tough times."

"However, I've heard that the court has built a new government office to deal with these demons, called the Forbidden Immortal Hall. They've gathered various experts, as well as military executioners from the army, to exterminate these divine and immortal beings."

"If local government offices need assistance, they can also apply for people from the Forbidden Immortal Hall to be stationed locally all year round."

At this point, Jia Qiang, the more well-informed drugstore owner, suddenly turned his head to glance outside the private room.

Seeing no one else was around, he "shushed" the other two.

Then, in a lower voice, he disclosed,

"I have some inside information for you two, but keep it under wraps for now."

"Actually, the authorities in Seeking Immortal County have long since requested the presence of experts and strong warriors from the Forbidden Immortal Hall. Moreover, the county magistrate has asked for a battalion of the new-style army to be dispatched from the provincial capital."

"It's not for dealing with those Cao Gang members who practiced Evil Techniques, but rather for the... Devil God Army!"

"Hiss"

As Jia Qiang uttered those three words, both Tao Qian and Li Sanyu immediately showed shock on their faces.