

LONGEVITY CHRONICLES

Chapter 18 17: Tao Qian's Practical Goals

Tao Qian had time-traveled and been reborn for three days and, due to his initiative, had already fully mastered many of the basic pieces of information and common knowledge of this world.

As such, Tao Qian understood very well the meaning of the three words "Devil God Army."

The court defined it as: a rebel army.

But in the eyes of the common people, it was, and it was not.

At least it wasn't at the beginning. Later on, after growing stronger, most indeed evolved into brutal and chaotic bands of homeless rebels, while a small portion held on to their bottom line.

In the early days, the Devil God Army gathered forces and rose up in the Tang County area of Ancient Yu Province, and then due to a major drought in Northern Anhui, a large number of refugees joined, allowing it to grow rapidly.

Days later, this rebel army's numbers reached tens of thousands, and they directly breached Ancient Yu Mafu City, becoming a force to be reckoned with from then on.

In the following years, the Devil God Army rapidly expanded at an insane speed, sweeping through several provinces and consecutively capturing dozens of cities.

Within this army were not only soldiers who were refugees, but also a vast number of heterodox mages and worldly society sorcerers.

It was precisely because of these people that the Devil God Army was able to repeatedly break through the encirclements of the court.

Although the Devil God Army's momentum was no match for the "Taiping Army" that had already swept through more than a dozen provinces, many of the court's top generals and officials found the Devil God Army more difficult to deal with.

The people of the Taiping Army cared about the bigger picture, often coercing hundreds of thousands of refugees to proceed and clashed head-on with the court's armies.

The Devil God Army, however, due to differences in "ideology," actively split into hundreds or thousands of groups that scurried about individually yet maintained contact with each other and would occasionally assist one another.

Furthermore, with those heterodox mages who possessed various methods, the government saw this rebel army as maggots gnawing at bones; disgusting and painful and hard to eradicate.

For ordinary citizens, the significance of the Devil God Army had to be considered separately.

In places where natural disasters and human calamities occurred frequently, causing the common people to chew on tree bark and resort to a desperation as extreme as trading children for food, everyone would eagerly await the arrival of the Devil God Army.

Starving people on the brink of death would be eager to hear the crude and easy-to-understand rebellion song:

Bozhou City square on all four sides, where the rich and government swagger through towns;

The poor's food is coerced away, leaving families young and old to cry to the heavens in dismay.

Bozhou City square on all four sides, the Devil rises up by Guo River tides;

Kill the wealthy, strike the government, every household, big or small, will have grain.

In places where this song was heard, it meant complete collapse of order—the Devil God Army would annihilate the court's influence, then open government granaries and distribute food, loot the wealth of rich families, and give it to the people... At such times, no starving person would care about the precondition of having to join the Devil God Army.

To have something to eat and get hold of some copper coins was a blessing too great to refuse, who could say no?

But for counties like "Seeking Immortal County" where order was still temporarily stable, where people still had food and life was relatively peaceful.

The Devil God Army was truly, and indisputably, a rebel army.

Once they came, everything would be doomed.

Therefore, as Jia Qiang finished speaking, Li Sanyu, the small businessman, also revealed a horrified expression.

Obviously, he was afraid that if the Devil God Army attacked Seeking Immortal County, his fortunes would be the least of his worries—his family's lives might very well be lost as well.

Jia Qiang also had a concerned look on his face as he continued,

"Not long ago, Mr. Ji, the Governor of Southern Yue, exterminated a branch of the Devil God Army that had roamed in from the Ancient Yu region and even received a promotion from the court for his achievement."

"Unexpectedly, the main forces of the Devil God Army learned of this and sent an even more troublesome rebel force over here. It is said that the leader of the rebels is a ruthless character who has been invincible in battle, causing the court to retreat step by step."

"Originally, the Governor intended to lead a large army to face them in a decisive battle outside Nan Zhao City."

"But who would have thought, that person actually employed cunning strategies and led a band of rebels around Iron Chicken Ridge. Now they are crossing mountains and hills to get here; if they manage to break through, they will sweep through at least a dozen counties and cities including our own Seeking Immortal County. If they capture the large ships, even the provincial capital will suffer."

"The Governor is extremely angry; he has directly beheaded the intelligence officer and then sent new-style troops to some key counties, such as ours here."

"As soon as there is any sign of disturbance, I'm afraid it will truly signify the start of war."

With that said, Jia Qiang's worried expression deepened.

Li Sanyu, who had been listening for a while, was concerned about the impending war, but seemed to remember something and suddenly let out a heavy sigh.

Without waiting for Tao Qian to ask, he directly addressed Jia Qiang:

"Boss Jia, let's put the matter of the rebel army aside."

"What we truly need to worry about is the extortion that will follow from the lords."

"Be it the Forbidden Immortal Hall or the new-style troops from the provincial capital, these prestigious gentlemen and soldiers will need to eat, drink, and have their needs provided for."

"Logically, this money should come from military expenditures, from the court."

"But as you and I both know, the rules have long changed. They are stationed locally, and the expenses will definitely be drawn from local resources, which will all have to be provided locally."

"Will those officials and wealthy households contribute? They won't. They will even take this opportunity to amass a fortune."

"And in such situations, the lords typically have one common tactic."

As he said this, Jia Qiang and Li Sanyu almost simultaneously spat out the same two words.

Tao Qian on the side had guessed it as well.

"Raise taxes!"

Upon uttering those two words, including Tao Qian, the expressions of all three men turned sorrowful.

The mutton pot before them, fragrant and bubbling, suddenly lost all its appeal.

Due to words like taxation, county officials, and rampant extortion, memories that both the scholar's and the hero's original identities shared began to churn in Tao Qian's mind.

He couldn't help but speak them out loud.

"I have heard that in some places, before the rebel army's arrival, corrupt officials had already tormented the locals with all manners of exorbitant taxes until everything was in ruins."

"In those areas, the common people were like fish on a chopping block, completely at the mercy of the slaughter."

"As soon as a baby is born, birth taxes are due; to get married, new marriage taxes; upon death, coffin taxes; and if you raise chickens, ducks, pigs, sheep, or cows, there are livestock and slaughtering taxes waiting for you."

"To watch or perform in a play, there are play taxes; if one becomes a prostitute, there are prostitute taxes; stonecutters pay rock breaking taxes; if you go fishing on the river, you also have to pay rowing taxes."

"Even if you dig out feces, beg, or sell grass shoes, you cannot escape the feces taxes, beggar taxes, and grass shoes taxes."

"If you lose your will to strive, lie down to smoke opium and wait for death, even then there are opium and idleness taxes waiting for you."

"In short, they won't rest until they've drawn the marrow from your bones and eaten you clean."

"There is nothing more absurd in the human world than this."

As Tao Qian released these words, he seemed to have frightened Li Sanyu and Jia Qiang as well.

Though the two had seen more of the world than Tao Qian, they hadn't read as much as he had, not to mention that he also had the memories of a hero.

That hero's hometown was further south in Southern Yue, where he joined a movement to resist the court's tyranny after being driven to ruin by local gentry, witnessing countless human tragedies firsthand.

In some severely afflicted areas, those gentry, wealthy families, and corrupt officials really didn't see the common people as human beings.

Before the rebel army arrived, those places were already ravaged by those wolves in human clothing.

After processing the hero's memories, Tao Qian knew this all too well.

"Our Seeking Immortal County is an open port town with convenient transportation and thriving commerce; although many citizens can hardly make ends meet, compared to other regions, it is already a blessed place."

"Beyond Southern Yue, numerous provinces have seen military warlords rise to partition the land; along with the Taiping and Devil God armies causing havoc, to say that life is suffering is an understatement."

"Add to that the floodings, droughts, earth dragons turning, dust storms, acid rains, and blood moons, these terrible natural disasters."

"And those increasingly brazen demons and ghosts, strange immortal gods."

"In such a world, to say that the dynasty is in its twilight..."

Speaking to this point, Tao Qian realized something and promptly stopped talking.

Li Sanyu and Jia Qiang understood as well and fell silent in turn.

By this point, none of the trio had any appetite left.

Tao Qian settled the bill and then escorted the slightly intoxicated two back to their respective places.

Tao Qian himself originally intended to return to the bookstore, but halfway there, he suddenly heard another commotion.

The source was still in the core area of the vegetable market, near the "Soul Summoning Pole."

However, this time, the root of the noise was not a beheading or the like.

It was the "Announcement Board" to one side, around which a large crowd had already gathered.

As soon as Tao Qian approached, he immediately heard a constable loudly proclaiming the announcements, as well as reading out warrants.

"Residents of Seeking Immortal County, from today onward, take heed."

"News from the provincial capital says that a large number of ruthless bandits and murderous thieves, as well as some evil Heterodox Mages, have recently appeared in Southern Yue, and neighboring counties and cities have already

seen many victims. With the convenient transportation in Seeking Immortal County, I fear we will not be spared."

"These are all warrants from the provincial capital; the names listed are the most vicious of criminals. Make sure you all look and remember them well."

"If anyone spots them, report it immediately."

"If confirmed, there will be a silver grain reward."

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Hearing this, Tao Qian seemed reminded of something, his eyes suddenly shining with determination.

Many thoughts began whirling in his mind:

"Last night, I obtained the Bo Dragon Pearl Fragment and entered the 'Energy-Introducing Realm.' According to the Record, although I am still a

newcomer in the Cultivation World, in terms of combat power, I am most likely much stronger than most novices."

"Especially the Power of the Bo Dragon Bloodline within me, along with the Sound Attack Divine Skills, they have been described as incredible, but I lament the lack of opportunity to experience them."

"As the saying goes, no matter how tall the tales, if there is no actual combat, what use are they?"

"If I'm determined to get involved in that dark and cruel world of cultivation, it's inevitable that one day I will have to fight and compete with other Cultivators. If I don't start with real combat experience early, I could easily capsize later."

"But let's not start with proper Cultivators just yet; how about looking for some disreputable, nefarious worldly society sorcerers to test my skills?"

"Now, it seems a good opportunity has presented itself?"

Before his thoughts could even settle, Tao Qian had already weaved through the crowd like a nimble eel, easily reaching the very forefront.

In the next second, he saw the Announcement Board before him densely plastered with a multitude of warrants.

On each page, besides the portraits, there were also short descriptions of the lives and evil deeds of these ruthless bandits and Heterodox Mages.