

LONGEVITY CHRONICLES

Chapter 6 5 Ancient Mystery Boxes

The scowling old clerk kept spouting words of ill fortune, so much so that Tao Qian immediately lost face.

He snorted coldly, tossed out the words "unreasonable" and left with a swish of his sleeves and brisk steps, resembling an old-fashioned scholar who had lost his dignity.

However, no one noticed the complex expression that surfaced in Tao Qian's eyes, a mix of helplessness, relief, and anger.

His wish to redeem the heroes' heads for burial was not an impulsive act, nor was it because he had received the memory and fragmented formula of a hero, at least that wasn't the main reason.

What drove Tao Qian to act was ideological recognition.

Regrettably, the timing wasn't right.

The "unintentionally" leaked information by the old clerk was already a lifesaving hint.

"Ha, fishing?"

"Either there were people who escaped when the base was taken, and the dog official of Seeking Immortal County wants to set a trap, wait for the rabbit. Or it's a bigger ambition, having taken the Seeking Immortal base and now coveting the heroes from other places, hoping to lure the snake out of its hole."

"The latter is more likely, but no matter which it is, with my current identity, I temporarily can't make an appearance."

"Let's wait and see. The Soul Summoning Pole will eventually need updating and there will undoubtedly be another chance, at most, it'll just cost me some money."

With thoughts churning, Tao Qian temporarily suppressed his unwilling ideas.

Thinking of "losing money," Tao Qian quickly realized he was truly poor.

He had only a little over nine silver coins in his possession, his entire wealth.

According to his memories, a strong, diligent porter at the Seeking Immortal Pier earned around six yuan a month, and the monthly salaries of shopkeepers in silk shops, pawnshops, and pharmacies in the city were also around eight or nine yuan. If they met a generous boss, even more than ten yuan was possible.

At this thought, Tao Qian's once straight back curved a little, and he couldn't help but sigh.

Blending into the crowd, Tao Qian headed towards his destination while pondering his money-making schemes.

To be honest, the money-making tips generously shared by Li Sanyu and Jia Qiang, these two crafty merchants at noon, were nothing special, not very dominant or exclusive techniques.

But as the owner of Chengyou Bookstore, Tao Qian had to admit the methods were effective.

According to the two of them, making enough money for basic needs was not difficult at all.

Tao Qian, not as old-fashioned as his predecessor, had no intention of rejecting the lovely entity of "silver coins," so without even a moment's hesitation or struggle, he headed straight for the book market near the pier.

He planned to try every strategy—first and second.

Human-demon-ghost romances, mythological and fantasy novels would be the first wave; a complete set of vulgar banned books would be smuggled in sneakily; if available, magazine girls collected, and translations of Western barbarian works would be sourced too... He wouldn't stop until he spent all his money today, saving at most a few copper coins for buying steamed buns.

As for the promised lamb hot pot at Taian Inn tomorrow with the two gentlemen... It would be a reasonable matter for a poor scholar like me to put it on credit, wouldn't it?

Thinking this, Tao Qian couldn't help the smirk that curled the corners of his mouth.

But soon, Tao Qian remembered his identity as a transmigrator, and his thoughts became even broader.

"Right, I am a transmigrator, aren't I? I've only heard of transmigrators living it up, never of one dying poor."

"Let me think, in a world with this historical backdrop, what are the best ways to make money?"

"Selling stockings? No, no, that would only be feasible if I also became a warlord, and who knows where the Western people have climbed on their technology tree in this world. What if they've already casually fitted garter lace, black silk, white silk?"

"A Copycat? That seems possible, though history is entirely different here, so books like 'Rise of Great Nations,' which can gain fame, are out of question, but fantasy and mystical fiction still hold great promise."

...

After a fanciful daydream, Tao Qian had already left Vegetable Market Street, crossed half of the town, and quickly arrived at his destination.

Seeking Immortal Pier!

Even though Tao Qian had previewed the pier in the original owner's memory, the actual sight still involuntarily brought out an expression that was unique to a country bumpkin.

Due to things like the execution ground on Vegetable Market Street, the living conditions of ordinary people in the county, etc., Tao Qian assumed this world was far too backward compared to his previous life.

But what he saw before him made him feel like he'd been wrong.

Before him, where the river met the port, hundreds of boats sailed, thronging with crowds.

Apart from the various big and small sailboats, there were also steamships spouting black smoke in the deeper waters in the distance.

The bustle on the pier was far beyond what Vegetable Market Street had to offer: there were porters in short clothes or bare-chested, various vendors, all sorts of rich merchants, people from the worldly society, officials and soldiers, and even quite a few blonde and red-haired Western barbarians.

"If Seeking Immortal County is like this, what about the provincial city, not to mention Demon City and Imperial City that the original owner heard about but never visited?"

Tao Qian suddenly felt his blood boil with excitement.

This world might be more magnificent and vast than he had imagined.

It would be a great loss not to thoroughly explore and experience it since he was here.

With this thought, Tao Qian smiled and discontinued his observation of the grand scene before him.

Following the memories in his mind, he walked towards a side of the pier.

Seeking Immortal County, being no small port town, reserved the main area of the pier for big business like salt, iron, coal, and so on.

Book Ships and flower boats, on the other hand, could only be tucked away in little nooks.

Yes, these two were put together.

As Tao Qian approached the place, he hadn't yet reached the big Book Ships, but he first caught sight of about seven or eight extravagantly decorated, flamboyantly alluring "flower boats" moored in the river bay.

As he drew closer, his eyes were treated to a feast.

On one of the boats, a scantily clad woman was having her hair washed with the assistance of a maid.

The woman, at most twenty years of age, was draped in a thin purple veil with an intricately embroidered corset barely visible underneath. When she bent over with her back towards the shore, the curve of her waist and abdomen was exceedingly striking.

Hissing sounds of drawn breath echoed around Tao Qian.

Looking around, he noticed that the men beside him, regardless of their wealth or age, all shared an expression of painful helplessness, bending down.

Even so, they stubbornly raised their heads to sneak a peek, like turtles stretching their necks out.

Tao Qian became engrossed in his act, glancing hurriedly at that ship and noted the name "Huanxi" before he left.

Turning his head, he swept disdainful eyes over the group of lascivious old men, then tossed out a comment:

"How disgraceful to the scholarly name!"

As his words fell, he didn't look back and headed towards those few large ships on the left side of the river bend that sat deep in the water.

Those who were the targets of his backhanded snipe didn't take offense; instead, they watched nostalgically for a few moments before many followed him.

Among them, not one was poor.

Judging by their attire, each was much wealthier than Tao Qian, and unlike common merchants like Li Sanyu and Jia Qiang, those who came here all carried a scent of scholarly elegance, dressed neatly and acted cultured.

The rules of the Book Ship: to board, one must possess a "book token."

This wasn't something exclusive to bookstore owners like Tao Qian; in fact, many people were eligible to get them.

For instance, officials, scholars, and such.

As well as sons of prominent local families, great scholars, and masters of calligraphy, among others.

Apart from bookstore and bookshop owners, the rest could be collectively referred to as "Book Collectors," who were actually also the Book Ship proprietors' most welcome wealthy customers.

On the other hand, owners of small bookstores like Tao Qian, despite holding a wholesale title, were penny-pinching with not much purchasing power, which is why they were at the very bottom of the Book Ship's disdain hierarchy.

Logically, Tao Qian should have been acting timidly, hiding until the end.

But the original body's occupant wasn't that kind of person.

So Tao Qian could only follow suit, striding brazenly over to choose the largest ship named "Top Scholar," showed an official book token he had, and climbed the ladder with several confident steps to get on board.

He had barely settled himself when a teenaged Attendant Student approached to greet him.

This young Attendant Student, although youthful in appearance, had a keen eye and instantly discerned Tao Qian's status and financial capacity.

The radiant smile that had spread across his face upon approaching suddenly turned and was offered to the group following Tao Qian, led by an elderly man with a long beard, likely a Great Scholar, flanked by seven or eight sons of prominent families.

While there were other welcoming Attendant Students on deck who swarmed around, their reactions were the same, all going to greet the big bookstore owners, generous Book Collectors, and reputable scholars and such.

A poor scholar?

Please, help yourself.

Luckily, Tao Qian wasn't one for niceties.

He directly grabbed an Attendant Student, snatched a stack of book lists from his hands, and without looking back, headed toward the main cabin where guests were received.

He walked along, eyes lowered to the catalog.

The book list was organized by categories such as classics, historical and philosophical texts, literature, plays and verses, and miscellaneous essays. In addition to major categories, it further divided into various subcategories, with different printing editions indicated.

Had it been his original self, there would have been no need to delve deeper.

Just standing on deck, placing an order and paying would have been enough; before long, one could leave the ship carrying a big package. If bought in larger quantities, the owner would even specially hire a porter to help deliver.

But this time, it was Tao Qian himself.

"A Book Ship is equivalent to a small-scale library."

"Moreover, apart from selling normal books, these ships also send people out to purchase books, especially eyeing those poor households' rare books and Secret Books passed down from ancestors, so these ships often have some valuable, rare and special finds."

"Human-demon-ghost love stories, vulgar banned books, magazine girls – those can be bought at any time. Since I'm here, let's first see if I can pick up a bargain, and incidentally verify some things."

"If traces of immortals, extraordinary cultivation, and other existences can be left behind on the pages... there should be a good chance to come across them here, right?"

Tao Qian's eyes flashed with an ambiguous light, his gaze still unconsciously scanning through the book list.

Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks.

His gaze landed at the end of the book list, where a line of red text obviously added later read:

Wenqu Fortune Box!

Tao Qian's eyebrows furrowed slightly, and he immediately pulled over another Attendant Student who was enthusiastically introducing a new series of educational books to a bookstore owner.

Pointing directly at those four words, he asked:

"I know Wenqu, but what's the meaning of 'Fortune Box'?"

The Attendant Student, although quite dissatisfied with being pulled away, seemed to be assigned a task.

Seeing that a customer had finally inquired about the new sales project, his eyes immediately lit up; he enthusiastically introduced it to everyone around, including Tao Qian:

"Dear guest, you've spotted a good thing at once."

"This is the newest project launched by our proprietor, 'Jueshi Biao Officer'. You all are aware that our Top Scholar ship goes around purchasing rare and Secret Books."

"When it comes to the amount of books collected, in this province and even the neighboring several provinces, apart from the official libraries, we claim second place, and I fear no other dares to claim first."

"Our proprietor, appreciating your love of books, has specially designed an intriguing game."

"For this trip, we have prepared a total of one thousand Wenqu Fortune Boxes, each containing ten unknown books. There are regular books, as well as precious, rare Secret Books, and promotional magazine pages."

"The Fortune Box price is divided into three categories: one silver coin, two silver coins, and five silver coins."

"Ladies and gentlemen, our proprietor guarantees that even if you don't uncover a rare Secret Book worth a hundred yuan or thousand yuan, the value of the other books inside will surely not be less than the price of the Fortune Box itself."

"Wow"

After the Attendant Student's blood-pumping sales pitch, Tao Qian immediately saw many people around him with bright eyes, their breathing growing quicker.

As for Tao Qian himself, he could no longer suppress the desire to snark.

"That 'Jueshi Biao Officer' is really something."

"God damn Wenqu Fortune Box; isn't this just an ancient version of a blind box?"