

My System 121

Chapter 121: Old Man, You're Exposed!

The Great Zhou Capital.

Duke Zhen's Mansion.

Cheng Guang rose early, having just left Million Specie Garden with Bai Shuxuan, he hadn't yet left the mansion when he encountered Mrs. Wu, Yuemei, heading straight towards him.

Wu Yuemei knew that today Cheng Guang was supposed to be at the martial arts competition to carry out a task for the Bureau of the Lamp.

Although she also knew that Cheng Zhihai had already completed the task for Cheng Guang in advance, he just needed to show up to finish this initial mission and become a member of the Bureau of the Lamp.

Taking the first step in inheriting the family business.

It was simple, but still quite important.

Besides, the competition would take at least three or four days, meaning Cheng Guang might not return to the mansion for three or four days.

Wu Yuemei was quite concerned about his absence for so long.

Cheng Zhihai had been busy with something early in the morning and had not been seen, otherwise Wu Yuemei would have certainly dragged him along.

Where was there ever a child who went away on a long journey without his parents seeing him off?

Yuemei was a bit angry, but it was not appropriate to show it in front of Cheng Guang; she managed to maintain a gentle smile on her face.

“Guanger, why did you get up so early? It’s not as if you’re competing in the martial arts competition, so arriving early or late would make no difference.”

Cheng Guang had gotten up early purely because he was worried that if he arrived late, once the man in the black robe set up the restriction, he wouldn’t be able to enter.

And he’d miss his chance.

But such matters were not easy to explain to Mrs. Wu, so he could only nod obediently and not respond.

Seeing Cheng Guang like this, Wu Yuemei laughed helplessly, her gaze turning to Bai Shuxuan by his side, and she was taken aback.

She hadn’t paid much attention to Cheng Guang for just a few days; this young man had already brought back a girl from who knows where.

And this girl was so beautiful—her eyes were completely fixed on Guanger.

Yuemei was first startled, then a bit of a headache began to form.

Previously, she had worried that Cheng Guang showed no interest in women, which is why she arranged for Qing Luan to be by his side.

Now, however, she suddenly feared that Cheng Guang was too interested in the opposite sex.

She didn’t want it to come to pass that, before the marriage she had arranged for him could result in anything, the child would bring home a dozen girls to the family.

Although this was a positive thing, after all, for Duke Zhen's Mansion, being fruitful and multiplying was beneficial.

But still.

Wu Yuemei felt it was necessary to consider the girl's feelings.

Before getting married, it was better to be restrained.

Yuemei intended to nag a little, but as the words reached her lips, she became concerned again.

"Guanger, this time the martial arts competition between Great Zhou and Great Wei is being held on Crane-Crying Island, several hundred miles away from the capital city. It's a bit of a journey, so you must be careful."

"The mansion's guards can't enter Crane-Crying Island, and only the members of the Bureau of the Lamp can ensure your complete safety. You must look out for yourself and if you encounter any danger, seek refuge behind them immediately, you understand?"

As she spoke, Wu Yuemei's jade hand lightly flicked Cheng Guang's forehead.

"Don't feel embarrassed about it; it's better to live and admit fear than to worry about losing face. Survival is all that matters."

Cheng Guang nodded obediently and replied, "Mother, do not worry."

Having said this, Yuemei seemed to realize she might be overthinking things, and she chuckled while shaking her head.

"It's just Mother being overly concerned."

“With the martial arts competition capturing the attention of countless people in the capital city, and both the Emperor of Great Zhou and the Empress of Great Wei present in the capital to watch, it’s unlikely anything untoward will happen.”

Wu Yuemei straightened Cheng Guang’s collar, smiling tenderly, “Before I knew it, Guanger has grown two heads taller than me and I can no longer pat your little head like I did when you were small.”

“Go on, then.”

“If I keep talking, you’ll start to find me tiresome.”

Yuemei’s voice fell, and she stepped aside, clearing the path.

Cheng Guang, for some reason, felt a warmth in his heart, but the thought of the upcoming events, which might cause her unnecessary worry, gave him a lump in his throat.

Although she was not his biological mother, her concern was genuine and palpable, leaving him with mixed emotions.

“Mother, shall I go now?”

Yuemei smiled and nodded. Just then, Steward Wang came over and respectfully said to Cheng Guang,

“Princely Heir.”

“The Jade Carriage is ready.”

Cheng Guang was taken aback.

Clearly, the Jade Carriage was prepared by Wu Yuemei for him.

Even though she was worried, she would not stop him; instead, she silently took care of the details for him.

At this moment.

A gentle breeze arose.

It stirred Cheng Guang's hair, and for some reason, he suddenly remembered his parents from his past life, who worriedly nagged about whether he could take care of himself while quietly packing his bags as he prepared to go to school.

A sour sensation tingled in his nose.

Feeling Wu Yuemei's affection, his mood became complex.

After bowing, he turned and led Bai Shuxuan into the Jade Carriage without a word.

The Jade Carriage set off.

Cheng Guang sat in the Jade Carriage, lifted the curtain for a glimpse, and looked back at the people who cared for him—they were still standing at the gate, refusing to leave even though he had traveled quite a distance.

Until the mansion gate was no longer visible, it seemed Yuemei still stood there.

Cheng Guang lowered the curtain and took a deep breath.

Since his arrival in this new world, he had never considered himself a part of Duke Zhen's Mansion, treating himself merely as a substitute, with the detached attitude of an outsider, especially towards Wu Yuemei and Cheng Zhihai.

Due to what had happened to his former self, he harbored certain emotions towards the household of Duke Zhen.

But, if truth be told.

Apart from the Princely Heir who played with his life, Yuemei of the Wu Family and Cheng Zhihai had treated Cheng Guang exceptionally well.

If in the future, Cheng Guang had to raise his sword against Yuemei and the rest of Duke Zhen's family because of issues relating to his predecessor, he would not be able to do it.

Chapter 122: Old Man, You're Exposed! ' _2

Enjoying their kindness means accepting their favor,

Killing their son in the future means avenging the evil.

Thus balancing sin with sin.

As for the destruction of Great Chu all those years ago, it seems there was more to it...

The Duke of the State was but a knife.

But who was the one wielding the knife?

Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou, or someone else?

Cheng Guang's mind was a tangled mess.

His feelings towards the Wu Yuemei couple were also quite complicated.

As long as my identity isn't exposed,

what's the harm in continuing to be their son?

But if my identity is revealed, it becomes a life-or-death situation.

By that point, Cheng Guang would have no choice in the matter.

Cheng Guang slowly closed his eyes.

He felt a renewed sense of urgency about dealing with that true Princely Heir.

Even if the real Princely Heir were placed before Cheng Zhihai now, he might not recognize him, but a silent dead man is undoubtedly the safest.

"A body double's life is still a life..."

Cheng Guang opened his eyes and looked out the window, murmuring to himself.

He didn't know whether he was speaking to himself or to the Princely Heir who toyed with his life in the palm of his hand.

The carriage moved on.

An hour later.

They had left through the city gates.

Outside the city gates, on the main road of Great Zhou, the procession stretched like a long dragon.

Apart from students of the Martial Academy participating in the Martial Cultivation Competition, there were also many merchants headed for Crane-Crying Island.

Within the capital city, commoners could, for a fee, watch the projected images of the competition by means of Different Treasures.

But those without money who still wished to watch had to go to the mountains near Crane-Crying Island and sit at the high peak to watch the scenes within the island from afar.

The main road of Great Zhou, usually unobstructed, was now crowded with people.

One is akin to watching from outside the venue, and the other is like live broadcasting.

Cheng Guang couldn't help but suspect that within the capital, those who were broadcasting the martial arts competition, might still be the work of Emperor Zhou, that back-stabber.

Probably knowing that Great Zhou was bound to lose, he began to think of ways to make money back from other aspects.

Profit-making schemes followed one after another.

Cheng Guang truly had to admire it.

"Sigh, it's the quadrennial Martial Arts Competition again. Can the Great Zhou Martial Academy even compete? They don't stand a chance."

"Your Majesty should not have supported those from humble backgrounds, dividing the resources of us nobles."

“How many years has it been? We’ve already lost three times in a row. If we lose again this time, it’ll be a disgrace that we can’t live down.”

“Today we lose to Great Wei, tomorrow who knows which minor nation we’ll lose to. Can’t the students of the Great Zhou Martial Academy show some spirit? They seem to have no shame left.”

“I’m used to it; losing has become normal. I have no expectations for their victory anymore.”

On the way to Crane-Crying Island, Cheng Guang listened to the discussions of passersby by the roadside, his thoughts scattered as he pondered. This scene somehow seemed like *déjà vu*, akin to the feeling when facing the national soccer team.

The Martial Academy of Great Zhou was an official martial institute established by the Great Zhou court to promote martial prowess, gathering many of the elite students from the top and bottom of Great Zhou.

The establishment of the Martial Academy by the Great Zhou court was a severe blow to many martial sects of the Martial World.

Young people, lacking martial virtue, directly launched surprise attacks on various ancient sects.

Their slogan was “Education for all without discrimination.”

Anyone could learn martial arts as long as they paid.

The academy took no responsibility for one’s talent or achievements, but just graduating from the academy guaranteed at least a minor official position in the local counties.

Among the martial sects, people work their bones tired for a single Cultivation Technique, and after all that effort, there’s still sectarian strife, exclusion, and oppression—by comparison, the academy was much better.

Even though there were distinctions between nobles and commoners within the academy, under Emperor Zhou's control, nobles and commoners started on the same line within the academy.

Whoever could obtain more resources in the academy depended solely on their own abilities.

No matter how powerful one's family was at home, they shouldn't expect to take shortcuts within the academy.

Speaking of which, Cheng Zhihai didn't send Cheng Guang to the Great Zhou Martial Academy because there were no shortcuts to be taken.

If you can't take shortcuts, then what kind of nobility is that?

Many nobles wanted to overturn the tables in frustration and quit on the spot.

But then they'd see Emperor Zhou's 40-meter-long great sword in his hand and quietly shove their food back into their bowls, their faces beaming with bright smiles.

—"Heh, such accurate judgment of people"

Many noble families also became wise, either deciding not to send their children to the Martial Academy and cultivate them at home with their own resources and strength, not caring about official titles, or obediently sending them to the academy to compete with the children from humble backgrounds.

It's called fair competition, but where in the world is there true fairness?

Allocation within the academy might be fair, but outside the academy, everyone's family circumstances were different. Those with money could afford private martial tutors, and some might even learn martial arts passed down through their family.

The children from humble families mostly didn't have this privilege.

Even so, Emperor Zhou still paved a way for children from humble families throughout the land,

Meanwhile, he also suppressed the various martial sects of the Martial World.

After all, everyone knows that martial artists are the least manageable; if Great Zhou were to falter, the happiest would not be enemy nations but the various martial sects within Great Zhou.

It was truly killing two birds with one stone, achieving two aims with one action.

Emperor Zhou, that old strategist, was not ordinary in his cunning.

But the Martial Academy of Great Wei was different; their academy was essentially the army, and martial sects and the court did as they pleased, separate from each other.

The divisions between the noble and humble within Great Wei weren't as stark either.

The conflict between the noble and humble wasn't as noticeable.

Chapter 123: Old Man, You're Exposed! ' _3

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Conflicts with foreign nations occupied the majority of their troubles.

Mainly because they were too poor.

The powerful elites could not be too much richer than the commoners, just having a bit more here and there, which the commoners despised.

Is this what they call powerful elites?

The situations of the two countries were different, after all

Cheng Guang mused to himself as he sat in the carriage, and before long, they arrived near the ferry port close to Crane-Crying Island.

The figure of Qiao Songshan appeared in front of him, standing at the street corner, looking around. When he saw Cheng Guang, a look of joy crossed his face, and he waved to signal him.

“Boss, over here.”

Cheng Guang, followed by Bai Shuxuan, got down from the carriage and looked at Qiao Songshan, “Why are you still waiting for me?”

“Aren’t you going to attend the assembly exam? Shouldn’t you board the island early to take the lead?”

Qiao Songshan chuckled, “No rush at the moment. The rules of the martial competition haven’t been announced yet.”

“I was thinking since you, Boss, need to get onto the island for the Bureau of the Lamp’s mission, I’d wait for you here.”

Heh, to think you have some filial piety, I am comforted.

Cheng Guang nodded and chatted idly with Qiao Songshan.

“Boss, I heard the rules of this assembly exam have changed. They are different from the past, not a one-on-one platform match, but a melee battle.”

“Melee battle?”

“Right. They say that after each scholar boards the island, they will be blindfolded and taken to a cabin. Once the martial competition begins, they can remove their blindfolds and act freely.”

“Apparently it’s not just about martial strength, but also about judgment and survivability, how to survive on a small island swarming with Exotic Beasts and surrounded by enemies.”

“After three or four days, whichever side, Great Wei or Great Zhou, has more students remaining will be victorious.”

“Oh, that rule is quite interesting,” Cheng Guang’s eyes narrowed slightly.

This kind of chaotic situation indeed intrigued him.

It oddly resembled a battle royale from his previous life.

But it’s no longer a solo fight, it’s team combat now.

“Yeah, this change in rules is said to have been fought for by the dean of the Great Zhou Martial Academy. Our Great Zhou Academy students might not be a match for those from Great Wei in single combat, but in a group fight, we might have a chance,” said Qiao Songshan, rubbing his head.

Cheng Guang shook his head, “Hard to say.”

Even without those black-robed individuals meddling in the martial competition, Great Zhou might not necessarily win.

Great Wei is originally located in a desolate land, its ancestors were once called barbarians, inherently martial, with a reputation for battling foreign tribes.

Even a three-year-old child who has just learned to speak could ride a horse and pretend to slay enemies with fierce cries.

Even a seventy-year-old granny with no teeth would dare to take up a sword and go into battle without a hint of fear.

Great Wei reveres martial prowess, and its obsession with becoming stronger and acquiring resources is much fiercer than other kingdoms.

Located in a desolate area,

If they don't become stronger, if they don't plunder, they won't have resources.

Without resources, the nation's power will wane.

It's practically a dead end.

Thus, three years ago when the Emperor of Great Wei withdrew and power was seized by Empress Wei, the dissenting voices lasted only a while before being suppressed, and now, the vast majority of Great Wei's populace has accepted this Empress Wei.

In these three years, Great Wei's populace has been self-sufficient under the rule of Empress Wei, beginning to try to grow their own Spirit Food while excavating current resources.

They also continued to extract resources from surrounding smaller countries.

Even managing to bite a chunk of flesh from the enormous Great Zhou Dynasty.

Living under the rule of Empress Wei is much more relaxed than under the rule of Emperor Wei.

Previously, people from Great Wei's Martial Academy were still able to suppress Great Zhou's students beneath them, this time under the leadership of Empress Wei, those students from Great Wei's Martial Academy might become even more fierce.

Although Cheng Guang did not know why the Great Zhou and Great Wei held martial competitions, it was certain that the resources at stake were not particularly important to Great Zhou.

Great Zhou is rich in resources, not caring about these trifles.

But these trifles are the lifeblood of Great Wei.

The standpoints and attitudes of both sides are different.

One regards them as expendable, while the other fights for them as if their life depends on it.

This is how the martial competition between the two sides has evolved.

Cheng Guang couldn't help but suspect whether Emperor Zhou had set up this martial competition to avoid pushing Great Wei into desperation, which could lead to a cornered dog's leap over the wall, and to find a reasonable excuse to avoid bloodshed and yield resources to Great Wei.

If they had just handed them over directly to Great Wei, one feared the imperial censors would have made enough noise to disturb Emperor Zhou's sleep.

By holding the martial competition, firstly, it appeases Great Wei, preventing them from attacking Great Zhou out of desperation, thus sparking a war and plundering Great Zhou's goods.

Secondly, it could motivate the students of Great Zhou's Martial Academy.

To let them know what real bloodthirst and the nature of a wolf are.

Compared to the students of Great Wei's Martial Academy, those from Great Zhou's Martial Academy are mostly just a bunch of sheep bleating.

Even in terms of momentum, they are much weaker.

The more Cheng Guang thought about it, the more ingenious he found Emperor Zhou's arrangement.

As he pondered, they quickly reached the ferry.

Cheng Guang, along with Bai Shuxuan, Qiao Songshan, and a group of Martial Academy students, boarded the ship to the island.

Once on the island, Qiao Songshan and the other Martial Academy students were blindfolded by the academy's instructors and taken away.

"Princely Heir, it's going to be chaotic on the island soon. Please come to the building with me to rest. Mr. Qian is also there. Something seems off about this martial competition," said a member of the Bureau of the Lamp who suddenly appeared beside Cheng Guang.

Chapter 124: Old Man, You're Exposed! ' _4

Cheng Guang nodded and followed the member of the Bureau of the Lamp towards the center of the island.

Yet, his thoughts began to churn silently in his mind.

So Qian Siyuan was also on this island, could it be that the Bureau of the Lamp had already discovered something?

Cheng Guang's eyes narrowed slightly as he looked at the Bureau of the Lamp member beside him and asked indifferently, "Is something amiss?"

The Bureau member didn't think too much and respectfully answered, "I don't know why, but the Heavenly and Earthly Qi here is much thinner than before. Recently, many of the Bureau's secret agents have lost contact, and Mr. Qian fears that something might go wrong during the martial arts competition. He specifically instructed his subordinates to bring the Princely Heir to the center as soon as you set foot on the island."

Cheng Guang slowly nodded in acknowledgment.

Yet his gaze became somewhat strange.

He had thought, with the Heavenly and Earthly Qi almost cut off, how did that Princely Heir in the system task manage to survive.

It turns out the Bureau of the Lamp had already sensed something amiss beforehand. It was all because of these back-stabbers hidden in the shadows, so cunning and deeply concealed that even Qian Siyuan, upon sensing something wrong, could not respond effectively.

Especially since the other party had used prohibitions.

These exceedingly rare and unusual Different Treasures.

Even Qian Siyuan, a strong man of the Eighth-Rank King Realm, couldn't do much with the Heavenly and Earthly Qi nearly severed.

He could only silently protect Cheng Guang.

It seems that only a powerhouse like Qian Siyuan, who still possessed formidable martial prowess even without the empowerment of Heavenly and Earthly Qi, could protect him under those circumstances.

Otherwise, those clad in black robes would definitely take the opportunity to deal with him as well.

In the eyes of those in black robes, Cheng Guang was a delivered surprise.

Cheng Guang exhaled quietly, suppressing the complex thoughts in his heart, and scanned his surroundings.

Crane-Crying Island was shaped like an ellipse, like a shimmering pearl floating on the rippling blue lake.

The island's perimeter was encircled by a stone wall made of huge boulders that, despite countless storms, stood unyielding. The wall was covered in moss and vines, adding a sense of depth and mystery to the island.

Upon entering the island, the first thing that caught the eye was a towering stone stele at the center, detailing the identity information and vital statuses of all the Martial Academy students.

The martial arts competition was indeed a contest, but it was still conducted with real swords and spears. Even with numerous Martial Cultivation teachers from the Great Wei and Great Zhou Martial Academies guarding the island, it was not guaranteed that they could protect every individual in time.

The center of the island was a grand complex of ancient buildings made from large logs and stones, placed in a harmonious arrangement.

After the students from the Martial Academies arrived on the island, they were not taken here, and this place could very well become part of the battlefield.

So there weren't many places to hide.

The Central Loft was one of them.

The majority of the staff, along with the deans of the Great Wei and Great Zhou Martial Academies, stood in this location, supervising and overseeing the martial arts competition.

"Princely Heir, Mr. Qian only asked me to bring you here. There are many teachers from the Martial Academies here, and the deans of the Great Wei and Great Zhou Martial Academies are also here. It's very safe. You can find a place on your own in the loft to watch the competition."

"This is your Token. If you wish to leave the Central Loft, hang the Token on your waist. Those participating in the martial arts competition wouldn't dare to attack you at will."

The Bureau of the Lamp member only brought Cheng Guang here, and after speaking, he respectfully bowed and then his figure disappeared.

Cheng Guang took the Token and weighed it in his hand several times, finding it to be quite heavy.

It was marked with the insignia of the Bureau of the Lamp.

Qian Siyuan had indeed provided him with an additional layer of insurance, fearing that some reckless Great Wei Martial Academy students might attack him.

After hanging the Token on his waist, Cheng Guang did not greet the people from the Martial Academy; instead, he went alone to the top floor of the Central Loft and sat down, surveying the full view of the island.

A considerate Attendant beside him brewed a cup of tea for Cheng Guang and brought it over.

He didn't know who had arranged this.

While he was pondering this.

An aged yet friendly voice reached his ears.

"Crown Prince, I did not expect you to come here as well. Are you on a mission with the Bureau of the Lamp?"

Cheng Guang turned to look.

He saw an old man.

His white robe was like jade washed by time, pure and profound, blending into the surroundings and offering a sense of tranquility that seemed detached from the mundane world.

The elder's face was like fallen leaves of autumn, his skin marked with the traces of years, his eyes sunken yet shining with a keen light.

Cheng Guang recognized the person.

The Dean of the Great Zhou Martial Academy, Qiu Zhiman.

The Great Zhou Martial Academy itself was a force at the pinnacle of power in Great Zhou, holding sway over nearly all Martial Arts of Great Zhou. After numerous sects were eradicated by the Bureau of the Lamp, the Martial Cultivation Techniques confiscated were partially kept by the Bureau, but the rest were sent to the Great Zhou Martial Academy.

It could be said that the Great Zhou Martial Academy was the greatest source of new forces for the Bureau of the Lamp.

And the Bureau itself also continuously aided the growth of the Great Zhou Martial Academy.

The Great Zhou Martial Academy, within the Great Zhou Dynasty, was beyond comparison with ordinary sects.

The relationship was intimate, and the connections quite close.

It was not unexpected for the other party to recognize Cheng Guang, but it was a surprise for him to come over to greet him specially.

After all, this was a figure standing on the same level as Cheng Zhihai.

Although Cheng Guang's status was prestigious, this Qiu Zhiman could have chosen not to regard him at all, to ignore him.

This time, he specifically came to greet me and even had an attendant make him a cup of tea.

It was strangely abrupt.

Although Cheng Guang was puzzled, he didn't say anything and just nodded, "Yes, I have a mission."

Qiu Zhiman smiled, "It's good to have a mission, which means Cheng Zihai has already started cultivating you, Princely Heir. He is deliberately nurturing you to gradually take control of the Bureau of the Lamp."

His voice was gentle like a stream, flowing slowly, yet it was crystal clear to the listener.

Such a voice seemed to possess a magical power that could soothe the restlessness and anxiety in one's heart, leading to an unprecedented sense of tranquility and serenity.

Qiu Zhiman's demeanor was affable and approachable, as if he was always warm and polite to everyone.

His manner was filled with wisdom and grace, giving people a feeling of being respected and understood.

He was so approachable.

Yet to Cheng Guang, it felt too fake.

This Old Man, acting like a weasel paying New Year's respects to a chicken, clearly harboring no good intentions.

Cheng Guang knew there would be unexpected events at this martial arts competition, and he looked at everyone around him with suspicion.

He naturally became cautious around Qiu Zhiman as well.

“Hehe.”

Cheng Guang responded to the other party with a forced smile, offering no rebuttal.

Qiu Zhiman smiled and looked at Bai Shuxuan who was by Cheng Guang’s side, feigning surprise in his expression.

“Princely Heir, who is this lady?”

Cheng Guang looked up at Qiu Zhiman.

He instantly wanted to retort, what does it matter to you who she is?

Isn’t it a bit presumptuous to ask such a question?

But not knowing Qiu Zhiman’s purpose yet, Cheng Guang decided to play along for now, to see what Qiu Zhiman was up to.

“An attendant, what about it?”

“Attendant.”

Qiu Zhiman murmured, then quietly glanced at Cheng Guang and looking at him, said,

“Since she is an attendant of the Princely Heir, I won’t inquire further.”

“Princely Heir, this tea is excellent for calming the mind. You should drink more of it. I must preside over the martial competition, and His Majesty as well as the Queen of Great Wei are watching. I cannot neglect my duty, so I must excuse myself.”

After saying this, Qiu Zhiman left with a smile.

Before leaving, his eyes swept over Bai Shuxuan in a way that was subtle yet discernible, his brow furrowing ever so slightly as he casually closed the door.

Up until the door shut, his expression remained as cordial and friendly as could be.

However, as soon as the door was shut, Cheng Guang slowly furrowed his brow.

There was something definitely off about Qiu Zhiman.

Cheng Guang eyed the cup of tea that Qiu Zhiman had sent over, and just when he was about to pour it out, Bai Shuxuan suddenly spoke,

“Princely Heir, there seems to be something dirty in this tea.”

Dirty?

Did this Old Man Qiu Zhiman secretly poison me?

Cheng Guang’s eyes widened slightly as he carefully inspected the tea cup.

He couldn’t see anything wrong with it.

Bai Shuxuan nodded slightly, a glimmer of light in her eyes. With a gentle tap of her finger, she drew out a nearly invisible tiny bug from the hot Bishui Qingliang Tea inside the cup.

The bug's form looked like a liquid, transparent and nearly invisible.

If it was hidden in this tea cup, Cheng Guang probably wouldn't have noticed the bug without Bai Shuxuan's earlier warning.

Cheng Guang's expression turned dark, thinking, damn it.

This Old Man is a pure wolf in sheep's clothing.

Qiu Zhiman, the headmaster of Great Zhou's Martial Academy.

The strongest and most stable defense on the island lay with both academy headmasters overseeing it; no mishaps should occur.

But now, Qiu Zhiman had shown his true colors.

The other headmaster of Great Wei's Martial Academy might have problems as well.

Cheng Guang felt he was really screwed.

Qiu Zhiman was a Ninth-order Martial Emperor Realm powerhouse, only one step away from the Heavenly Human Realm. It wasn't just him, a lowly card player, even if Qian Siyuan himself were here, they wouldn't be able to defeat him.

If it were not for the seals being activated and the Qi being blocked, Qiu Zhiman's strength probably couldn't be fully utilized, and even with Qian Siyuan's protection, Cheng Guang might still not survive an encounter with Qiu Zhiman.

Phew...

Cheng Guang slowly exhaled a breath, a sheen of sweat forming on his forehead.

If Qiu Zhiman had wanted to attack him just now, he probably would have been dead by now.

But thankfully, it seemed that Qiu Zhiman intended to kill two birds with one stone, aiming to get rid of him while also disrupting the competition.

He hadn't made a move.

Cheng Guang's mouth twitched slightly. Old Man, after all this time of pretense and deep concealment.

You've finally shown your true colors!

If I hadn't known in advance there was going to be trouble at this martial competition, I might have really thought you were a good person.

Cheng Guang ascended a tall building, surveying the entirety of the island, examining the students with blindfolds being led by one Martial Academy teacher after another to designated spots.

This time, watching others fight while being the judge felt pretty good.

The only regret was that his role as a judge was nominal; his main job was to loaf around, and his side gig, while loafing, was to give those hidden in the shadows in black robes a shock.

"Princely Heir, what do we do now...?"

Bai Shuxuan looked at Cheng Guang with what seemed like concern.

The pressure from Qiu Zhiman was simply too great.

The fleeting glance he had cast over her had made her feel an incredibly terrifying pressure.

Moreover...

Bai Shuxuan oddly felt that Qiu Zhiman gave her a strange sense of familiarity.

As if she had seen him somewhere before.

But her head ached slightly, and she couldn't remember anything.

Chapter 126: Old Man, You're Exposed! ' _6

The more she reminisced, the paler her pretty face became, her heart felt like it was ripping apart, so she dared not think about it anymore.

When Cheng Guang heard Bai Shuxuan's words, he pinched her cheek in a soothing manner, "Don't worry, Old Deng will lose patience soon."

After speaking, Cheng Guang caressed Bai Shuxuan's cheek like one would stroke a cat, feeling the smooth touch she brought to his hand, while pondering that since Qiu Zhiman had already revealed himself, he must be the biggest mastermind behind the scenes.

Why hadn't the system quest indicated that he had completed it?

Cheng Guang closed his eyes and carefully recalled the situation.

This time the system quest had two objectives, one was to find the mastermind, and the other was to give the mastermind a profound lesson.

Although his system was a bit dim-witted, there would be no errors in issuing the quests.

So...

That is to say...

In the eyes of the system, discovering the mastermind and teaching them a lesson were of the same difficulty.

Qiu Zhiman might be part of the mastermind, but he definitely wasn't the whole picture.

Behind him...

There were more people, or rather, some kind of force.

Once Cheng Guang thought of this, his back was instantly soaked in cold sweat.

Damn it.

Fuck.

Qiu Zhiman, standing at the pinnacle of Great Zhou's power, could actually be willing to listen to others and betray Great Zhou was already unbelievable.

And now you're telling me, behind Qiu Zhiman, there's someone else, or some force.

This is fucked up.

It's not tangled up with some Sky-Man realm, is it??

Cheng Guang was dumbfounded.

Unconsciously, he seemed to have fallen into a huge vortex once again.

The Princely Heir in the system quest didn't know anything, surviving in a muddle-headed way, and later even becoming a Heavenly Human was definitely considered incredibly fortunate.

Thinking of this, Cheng Guang suddenly paused again.

That genuine Princely Heir, so immensely fortunate.

But now, with the Princely Heir's Primordial Spirit thoroughly washed by him, all memories erased, and meridians entirely destroyed, there wouldn't be any more unexpected developments, would there?

Cheng Guang's eyelids twitched slightly, and he suddenly had a bad premonition.

Fortunately, Lin Cheng was still guarding the Princely Heir at White Deer Manor; there shouldn't be any accidents for the time being.

Otherwise, Cheng Guang would really have jumped with fury.

Damn it, I'll finish him off when I get back.

The Princely Heir's fortune was amiss; allowing him to live another second was Cheng Guang's disrespect towards the Princely Heir.

While Cheng Guang contemplated this.

An ancient bell started ringing, deep and profound, permeating the air.

The sound of the bell seemed to be the curtain pull for something significant.

A voice, laden with a rolling Qi, emanated in all directions.

It was Qiu Zhiman's voice.

"The competition rules for the martial trial between Great Wei Dynasty and Great Zhou Dynasty are as follows."

"Rule one: Participants are restricted from leaving the island; leaving will result in a declaration of death."

"Rule two: All students may engage freely in combat, with no restrictions on multiple combatants or team battles; those who faint or exhaust their strength will be deemed dead and removed from the island."

"Rule three: The trial will last for thirty-four hours; at the end of that time, the competition will end, and the victor will be determined by the number of surviving students from both dynasties' Martial Academies within the island. The one with more survivors wins; if the numbers are equal, the trial will be extended by one hour until a winner emerges."

"Rule four: Deliberately lethal attacks are prohibited; violators will be executed on the spot."

The voices rang out, like invisible ripples echoing across the island skies.

The expressions of the students from the Great Zhou Martial Academy and the Great Wei Martial Academy showed little surprise as they quietly removed the blindfolds obscuring their vision and rubbed their arms.

They knew that within the Capital city, Emperor Zhou and Empress Wei, along with envoys from various minor countries, high officials, and countless citizens, were watching their martial trial.

On this grand stage, exhibiting their skills would instantly bring them fame and recognition.

Many faces revealed expressions of excitement and anticipation.

Simultaneously.

In the Great Zhou Capital.

Within the majestic Imperial Palace, there was tranquility and solemnity.

Exquisitely carved jade columns supported the towering dome, and opulent golden tapestries covered the walls, adding splendor to the entire hall.

In the morning, as the first rays of sunlight hit the colored glass windows of the grand hall, envoys and dignitaries from all over the Great Zhou Capital began to arrive in droves.

The martial trial between Great Wei and Great Zhou was an event they could not afford to miss.

This was not merely about watching the excitement.

It was also an opportunity for them to observe this martial competition and assess the strength of the young generations of Great Wei and Great Zhou.

The strength of each generation, in a sense, represented the future power of the two great dynasties.

Looking up and reflecting on what was witnessed, it could dispel unwarranted thoughts some people back home might harbor.

Being a vassal state in good order was quite acceptable.

Many envoys, having spent a long time in Great Zhou, couldn't help but think this way.

Emperor Zhou sat on his jade throne, dressed in a dragon robe and wearing a golden crown, his face not wearing a smile, as his awe-inspiring gaze swept over everyone, calmly accepting the salute of the envoys and nobles from various countries.

Step, step, step.

At that moment.

Sounds of footsteps came from outside the hall.

The eunuch's high-pitched voice rang out.

“Empress Wei has arrived!”

As the voice fell.

Empress Wei proceeded slowly.

She wore an elaborate purple-black long gown that was meticulously tailored to perfectly outline her slender figure.

The complex golden embroidery on the robe shimmered in the dazzling sunlight, adding a mesmerizing beauty to her.

Her face was as beautiful as the moon, breathtaking in its beauty. Her long hair flowed naturally like a black waterfall over her delicate shoulders, complementing her profound eyes.

In those eyes, purple-black ripples shimmered like the starry sky on a dark night, deep and enchanting.

Supreme in stature, her nobility need not be spoken.

Empress Wei looked directly at Emperor Zhou, her young and stunningly beautiful face showing no trace of fear.

The rulers of the two great dynasties, meeting for the first time, simply gazed at each other so calmly.

Emperor Zhou sized up Empress Wei; initially, he had looked down on this woman, but as he watched Empress Wei approach, he suddenly realized that this overly young woman seemed to be somewhat different from what he had initially imagined.

Within her young and pretty frame seemed to reside a strength not inferior to his own.

A Sky-Man?

A hint of surprise flitted through Emperor Zhou's majestic eyes; it was clear that he had not expected this Empress Wei, no more than twenty years old, to have cultivated to the Heavenly Human Realm.

If she were indeed a Sky-Man, then she would indeed be capable of controlling the Great Wei dynasty.

Emperor Zhou pondered inwardly, his expression icy, his surface demeanor revealing none of his inner thoughts.

The two rulers looked at each other, and the air seemed to freeze for a moment.

The once noisy hall instantly fell silent.

The officials clamped their mouths shut.

Only the envoys of Great Wei, looking at their Empress, straightened their backs slowly.

Proud of their Empress.

A Sky-Man in her twenties!

Have you ever seen one?

Our Empress is just that!

That's probably what they were thinking.

Quite a few envoys from Great Wei attracted many clenched teeth and envious glances.

After a long while.

Emperor Zhou slowly raised his hand and pointed to the side, "Sit."

Empress Wei walked leisurely to the side of Emperor Zhou and seated herself smoothly.

Following this, Emperor Zhou didn't let his gaze linger on Empress Wei, did not engage the young woman who could lightly hold the power of Great Wei in any further conversation, nor did he show any obvious neglect.

After his awe-inspiring gaze swept around the circle.

It seemed the time had come.

He lifted a hand, took out a crystal-like stone, placed it next to him, and gently tapped it.

The crystal emitted a clear ringing sound.

The bright sun shone through the crystal, refracting a rainbow of light.

Above the great hall, beams of golden light began to appear out of thin air, coalescing into the form of a scroll.

The scroll slowly unfurled, and a projected image appeared within it.

It was Crane-Crying Island.

From it came the elderly yet gentle voice of the head of the Martial Academy of Great Zhou, explaining the various rules.

Many envoys, hearing this voice, couldn't help but sit up slightly and look towards the projected image in the air.

Anticipating.

Wondering whether the disciples of the Martial Academies of Great Wei and Great Zhou could stand out in this martial arts competition.

Chapter 127: Not a Single One Left!

“

The martial arts tournament began.

Cheng Guang stood atop the Central Loft on Crane-Crying Island, overseeing everything from his high vantage point.

At this moment, Crane-Crying Island seemed to truly awaken, as powerful bursts of Qi roared from all directions.

Many students from the Martial Academy had already made contact and started fighting.

Even though there were fewer students near the Central Loft, there was still a feeling of bustling activity.

Cheng Guang did not see Qiao Songshan anywhere and had no idea to which corner the simpleton had been thrown.

After watching the fight below for a while, Cheng Guang found it rather uninteresting.

He had originally thought that, as soon as the martial arts tournament began, Qiu Zhiman would instantly cast a banishment, isolating Crane-Crying Island from the outside world.

But Qiu Zhiman clearly had not done so immediately.

As for the reason, Cheng Guang had more or less guessed it: it was simply to plan their escape later on.

Cheng Guang stood bored at the top of the loft, silently observing the movements on the island.

This time, the martial arts tournament saw hundreds of participants from both Great Zhou and Great Wei.

About a thousand martial artists, if placed in an outside army, could stand on their own and sweep across the wastelands.

The noise of battle had not ceased since it began.

Those who acted now presumably had no issues with their status; later, when the bans were set up, the more Qi they wasted now, the greater their regret would be.

Just as Cheng Guang was contemplating this,

a strange purple light suddenly bloomed from somewhere within the island.

It spread rapidly like a ribbon, resembling a purple Great Wall, encircling the entire island.

The purple light solidified, forming an inverted bowl, firmly covering the island, isolating it from the outside world.

At the same time, the instant that purple light appeared,

Cheng Guang inexplicably felt that the circulation of Qi in his body became much heavier and slower, as if a mountain range was pressing down on him, making even the summoning of a trace of Qi exceedingly difficult.

If Cheng Guang was feeling this way, Bai Shuxuan's complexion also didn't look too good.

She seemed to be affected as well, but to a limited extent.

After a few vibrations of demonic power throughout her body, her color returned to normal.

As a member of the Devil Clan, Bai Shuxuan's strength was probably equivalent to that of a human race Martial Artist at the Prime God Realm.

In a situation where Bai Shuxuan could use demonic power, but a Martial Artist at the Prime God Realm could not use Qi, there was absolutely no way they could beat Bai Shuxuan.

Cheng Guang glanced at Bai Shuxuan, then shifted his gaze from her to the many academy students who were still fighting on the island.

They were previously fighting enthusiastically, politely inquiring about each other's family health while crossing swords.

But at the moment the purple light appeared,

their complexions changed.

Without the support of Qi, let alone levitating, even stepping on a bird was a struggle.

Many who were fighting either fell flat on their faces or plummeted from mid-air, stumbling in their movements.

Crane-Crying Island, which had been tumultuous and noisy, suddenly became extremely quiet.

In the quiet, there was a mix of odd colors.

After an almost eerie silence,

many of the Martial Academy students from Great Zhou, as well as those from Great Wei, began to smile brightly.

It turned out they didn't even wait to speak before they turned tail and ran.

Damn, it was too weird!

Not a trace of Qi could be used!

Was this caused by that purple light?

Was it a part of the martial arts tournament? Or had something unexpected happened?

At this time, many academy students felt an inexplicable sense of alertness.

The current situation was too dangerous.

Unable to use Qi, their strength had taken an enormous hit; it was better to meet up with others.

The students from the Martial Academy felt confused and struggled to understand what they were witnessing, instinctively wanting to gather where there were more people.

It wasn't just the Martial Academy students who felt bewildered; inside the Central Loft, where many academy teachers and officials were overseeing the martial arts tournament, their faces changed upon seeing the resplendent, crystal-like purple light that suddenly rose from the island.

They instinctively wanted to go and investigate.

A distance of ten miles was usually covered in a few breaths for them.

But now, under the illumination of the purple light, it was as if their Qi had been locked in place.

They couldn't move at all.

They had to run to get there.

"What the hell is this thing!?" an academy official exclaimed in shock.

"I've found we can't use any of our Qi at all."

"Damn it!"

“What is that purple light enveloping the sky?”

Inside the Central Loft, where the academy officials were usually so composed, they now showed a slight change in color.

Whether from the Great Wei Martial Academy or the Great Zhou Martial Academy, everyone felt somewhat bewildered at this moment.

Clearly,

this purple light was not something they had arranged.

No way, no way,

someone really dared to interfere with the martial arts tournament watched by the two great empires of Great Zhou and Great Wei?

The officials couldn't believe it, but the scene before their eyes was unfolding for real.

Reality told them that all of this was happening.

Everyone's Qi had been shackled.

It's not that the stronger a martial artist is, the stronger their physical constitution would be.

It might even be the opposite.

When martial cultivation reaches a profound level, the need for Qi and Blood isn't as high; higher realms tend to focus more on the will of heaven and earth and the comprehension of Divine Powers and Martial Arts.

Upon reaching the seventh rank of the Spirit Communication Realm, the Martial Artist would engage in Mark Spirit Communication; every action could stir the Heavenly and Earthly Qi, causing terrifying phenomena and achieving integration with Martial Arts.

Chapter 128: Not a Single One Left! _2

Their dependence on Qi was even greater.

Without Qi, they were no different from ordinary martial artists.

At the moment, many officials from the Martial Academy were starting to panic.

The inexplicable suppression of Qi left them unable to muster even a trace of Qi, even if they exerted all their strength.

In the Central Loft, a group of officials gathered to discuss what should be done.

A hubbub arose.

It was then that a gentle voice sounded.

“This is an enchantment!”

It was Qiu Zhiman.

The aged face of Qiu Zhiman seemed to be shaken by the scene, with a slight tremble in his eyes.

His trembling hand rose, stroking his pale beard, he said, “This is a Forbidden Artifact! Extremely rare, once the enchantment is enacted, it’s already too late to stop it.”

“An enchantment?” Several officials’ complexions changed slightly.

They didn't know much about enchantments.

But they were aware that Forbidden Artifacts were very rare, so rare that only the royal families of the great dynasties might possess one or two for use in solemn ceremonies.

A Forbidden Artifact appeared at the Great Wei and Great Zhou martial arts competition?

Qiu Zhiman, looking at the purple light in the sky, seemed no longer as amiable and affable as before, becoming melancholic.

"Once this enchantment has been cast, it cannot be forcibly shattered. Otherwise, if the power of the enchantment goes out of control, all of us here will die."

"Headmaster Qiu, what should we do now?" Many of the Martial Academy officials from Great Zhou looked to Qiu Zhiman for guidance.

Qiu Zhiman was an old-timer and elder of Great Zhou's Martial Academy, having been there since its inception.

From being an ordinary lecturer in martial cultivation to becoming the headmaster of Great Zhou's Martial Academy, it took him less than thirty years.

The speed of his promotion was extremely fast.

His cultivation realm was also rapidly improving.

In just two hundred years, he had already broken through to the Ninth-order Martial Emperor Realm, just one step away from the Heavenly Human Realm.

Unless something unforeseen happened.

Qiu Zhiman would become the third publicly acknowledged martial cultivator to break through to the Heavenly Human Realm in the future of Great Zhou.

For various reasons, many officials of Great Zhou had absolute trust in Qiu Zhiman.

Several teachers and officials from Great Wei's Martial Academy could not help but turn their eyes toward their own leader.

The headmaster of Great Wei's Martial Academy was a lean old man.

Dressed in a green robe, he sat in a corner.

Lin Qingye, headmaster of Great Wei's Martial Academy.

Although he was lean, his gaze was as firm as steel, like glaciers that never melt.

Compared to the panic of the officers from Great Wei's Martial Academy, he seemed very calm, sitting quietly in the corner, sipping tea from the cup in his hands.

Gently blowing on the rising steam of the tea, his eyes fell on the officials of Great Wei's Martial Academy as well as those from Great Zhou's Martial Academy, and he couldn't help but shake his head with a wry smile.

"What are you all so nervous about? It's just Qi that has been suppressed, it's not a big deal."

"There aren't many in this world who would dare to make a move under the eyes of Great Wei and Great Zhou."

"Even if they were crazy, they couldn't pull off something like this."

“Perhaps it’s just an accident, don’t panic.”

Lin Qingye was quite nonchalant, pointing outside the window, “We just need to find the martial artist who enacted the Forbidden Artifact. Either kill them or have them retract the artifact voluntarily, and the enchantment will break itself.”

Lin Qingye’s words gave many of the officials present a dose of reassurance.

Indeed.

After all, the martial arts competition was so significant and took place under the watchful eyes of Emperor Zhou and Empress Wei; nothing else should go wrong now...

Perhaps it was merely a student from the Martial Academy who had inadvertently come across a Forbidden Artifact and treasured it, deciding to use it at the martial arts competition.

Little did he expect, using it at the competition would really stir things up.

Maybe this was just a big misunderstanding, a farce.

The officials present breathed a sigh of relief; they quickly composed themselves.

Qiu Zhiman timely spoke, “Great Zhou’s officials, pacify your students. Great Wei’s officials, do the same, bring them all to the Central Loft, gather them together, so everyone can look out for each other.”

“Also, where are the people from the Bureau of the Lamp? Don’t they know what’s going on? Such a big incident has occurred and they haven’t noticed. Go and see if you can find any student who has secretly used a Different Treasure.”

Qiu Zhiman issued orders in an orderly fashion.

The officials from both nations' Martial Academies didn't dare delay, and slowly left the loft to meet with their respective academy students.

Seeing everyone heed his words, Qiu Zhiman's mouth curled into an almost imperceptible smile, his gaze then settling on Lin Qingye.

"Headmaster Lin, come with me. I seem to have a lead on the person who enacted the enchantment."

Lin Qingye had been contemplating who could be behind the enchantment, considering the Bureau of the Lamp wouldn't find the culprit in such a short time.

Why would Qiu Zhiman know?

Moreover.

If Qiu Zhiman had known, why hadn't he said anything before? Now that most of the officials had nearly left, why was he telling him alone?

Lin Qingye's brows furrowed lightly, and although his lean face showed some confusion and puzzlement, he didn't think too much of it; after all, everyone's Qi had been suppressed.

Even Qiu Zhiman was no exception.

If there was any scheme, it would be well-intentioned but futile.

Best to follow and see for himself.

Lin Qingye nodded.

He followed Qiu Zhiman into a side room.

Once inside the room, Qiu Zhiman didn't engage in much conversation with Lin Qingye but began to stoop down, searching for something.

Chapter 129: Not a Single One Left! _3

Lin Qingye's expression froze slightly, but he said nothing, silently watching Qiu Zhiman.

It was only when he became somewhat impatient that he finally spoke,

"Director Qiu, you said you have found the person who cast the restriction magic, who is it? Since you know, why didn't you say it in front of everyone just now?"

Lin Qingye voiced his doubts.

However, Qiu Zhiman still wore a smiling expression, "Just wait for me, I'm looking for it, I remember it was just hidden here... Without Qi, I can't find it for the moment... Eh, right, right, here it is, this..."

Qiu Zhiman pulled out a crystal ball from a corner, shrouded in a faint purple halo, its surface smooth as a mirror, cold as ice, each facet sparkling with rainbow light.

Upon closer inspection, one could faintly see the layout of Crane-Crying Island within the crystal ball.

Lin Qingye's face showed a trace of shock, then he looked at Qiu Zhiman with surprise.

"This..."

"This..."

"This..."

He pointed at Qiu Zhiman with his hand and then glanced at the crystal ball he was holding.

How could he not see that the crystal ball in Qiu Zhiman's hand was the true culprit that restrained everyone's Qi?

"Qiu Zhiman, could this all be your arrangement? Or is it Emperor Zhou's arrangement?"

"Even if you've lost three times, there's no need to flip the table."

After the initial surprise, Lin Qingye's lean face was filled with boundless anger.

He truly couldn't understand why Qiu Zhiman would cast a restriction on this island.

Was it for the competition?

There was no need for that, and Empress Wei of Great Wei was also watching. If one wanted to flip the table, they wouldn't do so overtly, right?

So, was this mocking Great Wei?

Lin Qingye immediately stepped forward, his eyebrows and eyes angry, wanting to ask something, but in the next moment, the Qiu Zhiman before his eyes suddenly vanished.

His shoulder was touched by a hand from Qiu Zhiman.

Hair-raising.

Lin Qingye shuddered instantaneously, his aged face slightly stiff, slowly turning his head to look at Qiu Zhiman beside him.

This Qiu Zhiman...

Could use Qi?

The only thought left in Lin Qingye's mind was this.

And no other thoughts.

At this moment, looking at Qiu Zhiman's amiable and kind face, his mouth gradually splitting into a smile, his aged eyes seemed to hold immense joy.

"Originally, if you had been on guard, I wouldn't have been able to succeed so easily. Ninth-order Martial Emperor Realm, such prime fodder."

As he spoke, under Lin Qingye's terrified gaze, a hand glided over Lin Qingye's forehead, Qiu Zhiman bit his fingertip, and gently pressed it against Lin Qingye's forehead.

The blood streaming from his body carried several transparent parasites.

These parasites seemed to have a symbiotic relationship with Qiu Zhiman and did not attack him actively, but upon seeing Lin Qingye, the transparent parasites became agitated.

Eager to burrow out from Qiu Zhiman's blood and into Lin Qingye's flesh, gnawing at his blood vessels, meridians, and bones.

The body of a Ninth-order Martial Emperor Realm martial artist, long-nourished by Qi, was almost comparable to some spiritual medicines.

But unlike spiritual medicines, the Human Race's body doesn't benefit from consumption, Qi can only be improved bit by bit, drawing from the world to strengthen oneself.

Otherwise, the Four Directions Mortal World wouldn't be as peaceful as it is.

However, this common sense scene, when it fell onto Qiu Zhiman, seemed a bit off.

Some of the transparent parasites gnawing on Lin Qingye, after gorging themselves, lazily returned to Qiu Zhiman's blood.

The transparent parasites digested the freshly consumed flesh and blood bit by bit.

Aside from the energy needed for survival and reproduction, the remaining energy and the so-called "impurities" of Qi were all incrementally expelled from the body, merging into Qiu Zhiman's own.

Gradually, Lin Qingye's face turned pale, devoid of any color, the terror in his eyes hadn't faded before it solidified completely.

He never would have imagined.

Why this Qiu Zhiman could still use Qi.

Why this Qiu Zhiman's blood contained those peculiar transparent parasites.

What exactly were those transparent parasites?

In the midst of countless confusions and reluctance, Lin Qingye's eyes lost their color.

Qiu Zhiman, his interest waning, collected all the transparent parasites back into his body, took out a brocade handkerchief, and meticulously wiped his fingers.

He closed his eyes and felt for a while.

He discovered that the "life" within him had increased.

At the same time, he had taken another small step towards the Heavenly Human Realm.

Qiu Zhiman's smile slowly faded, his facial expression returning to its amiable and kind state.

When he stepped out slowly once more,

At this time, outside the house,

Nearly a hundred black-robed people were already standing around the Central Loft, some on the rooftops, some on the loft, all looking at Qiu Zhiman respectfully.

Qiu Zhiman took out a black robe from nowhere, slowly draped it over his body, concealing his amiable and kind face, his voice turning cold and solemn,

"It's time to act, kill everyone above fifth grade! Leave no one alive!"

The black-robed person standing on the rooftop, gazing at this senior whose cultivation seemed to have improved yet again, had envy flickering in his cold eyes from time to time.

"Yes."

The silent acknowledgement spread through the area like ripples in water.

In just a moment, the black-robed people charged into the Central Loft.

Most of the officials hadn't even realized what was happening before the black-robed people drew their swords and beheaded them.

Chapter 130: Not a Single One Left! _4

In just a brief moment, aside from the many officials who left the Central Loft to collect students from the Martial Academy, the majority of those who stayed behind were tragically killed on the spot.

Qiu Zhiman slowly walked along the corridor of the loft, silently crossing several pathways and heading towards the top floor.

At the top floor.

The Princely Heir was there.

If this Princely Heir of the Great Zhou's Duke of the State were to die, his master's plan could be advanced by a step earlier.

Thinking so, Qiu Zhiman pulled his black hood down a bit.

As he proceeded with unhurried steps.

The surrounding officials were still fighting fiercely with the robed figures.

Even with their profound cultivation, without Qi, they were no different from an ordinary Martial Artist in the Physique Realm.

All along the way, there were continuous screams.

Continuous shouts of questioning.

Qiu Zhiman wasn't affected by his surroundings and made his way to the top floor at an even pace.

When he pushed open the door to the top floor, that familiar and honorable silhouette was not there.

A breeze blew softly.

Only the curtains shattered by the sunlight swayed.

Had the Princely Heir left?

Qiu Zhiman was stunned for a moment.

Was he taken away by that Fox Tribe Saintess by his side?

Or was it Qian Siyuan who took him away?

Qiu Zhiman muttered to himself.

“Could this youngster have sensed something?”

“First he didn’t drink the tea I offered, and then suddenly he left the Central Loft without my notice...”

Murmuring so, Qiu Zhiman soon chuckled and shook his head, then looked up at the purple barrier above the sky.

“Impossible, the Bureau of the Lamp hasn’t noticed anything; what could a young lad like him possibly discern.”

“No worries, no worries, he can’t escape.”

“Even with Qian Siyuan protecting him, he won’t be able to leave the island. We will eventually find him.”

“It’s just Bai Shuxuan who’s a bit tricky, seems to be controlled by the Princely Heir. If not... find an opportunity to send her back to the Devil Region...”

As Qiu Zhiman spoke, his voice gradually faded to an inaudible whisper.

...

While Qiu Zhiman began his maneuver.

The moment the purple light barrier appeared over Crane-Crying Island,

Inside the Imperial Palace's grand hall, there was no longer a trace of sound.

The projection in the sky was enveloped in a purple halo, obscuring the scene within.

But it was clear to anyone.

There had been an accident.

Emperor Zhou remained silent, expressionlessly staring at the barrier on the screen, eyes slightly closed as if sensing something.

In the eerily quiet great hall.

Besides the barely discernible sound of breathing, there was not a whisper to be heard.

“It’s either a ban from a Forbidden Artifact of Heavenly Grade or above, or if someone from outside attempts to break through forcefully, everyone within will die.”

“Zhihai, what has happened this time?”

After a moment, the Emperor’s majestic voice finally sounded, his gaze falling on the person closest to him below the dais.

Cheng Zhihai gazed at the purple light for a long time, pushing down the worry in his heart, and after bowing, he respectfully said:

“Your Majesty, according to the investigation by the Bureau of the Lamp, near Crane-Crying Island, the Heavenly and Earthly Qi seems even thinner than normal. To be precautious, I have already sent Qian Siyuan with a team of subordinates to the island.”

“The emergence of this prohibition may be related to this matter. Whether it’s a natural disaster caused by the descent of Different Treasures or a man-made disaster, we can only know after it ends.”

Emperor Zhou nodded slightly, acknowledging with a hum.

He didn't ask further.

He trusted Cheng Zhihai.

Whatever he found, he would never conceal it. But for this current situation, even Cheng Zhihai did not know what had happened...

Could it really be a natural disaster caused by the descent of a Different Treasure?

Emperor Zhou couldn't be certain, this Heavenly Grade ban from Forbidden Artifacts appeared neither earlier nor later, but precisely during the martial arts competition between Great Zhou and Great Wei.

More coincidentally, it appeared just on Crane-Crying Island.

Too coincidental.

Yet no one had any prior indication that this scene would unfold.

Emperor Zhou himself had not anticipated that anyone would dare to pull such a stunt right under his nose, almost making him laugh out loud.

Subsequently, as if suddenly remembering something, his gaze shifted to Cheng Zhihai.

“Guanger, that boy, is said to be on that island as well?”

Emperor Zhou didn’t care about the court officials or Empress Wei of Great Wei or any envoys from the smaller nations; he brazenly chatted with Cheng Zhihai about family matters.

Cheng Zhihai’s face showed concern, revealing his worry for his children, and he slowly nodded.

“Yes, I wanted him to join the Bureau of the Lamp, so I assigned him the task of investigating the Great Wei students, but I didn’t expect he would encounter such an incident.”

Cheng Zhihai did not conceal anything.

His Bureau of the Lamp was an intelligence organization. While monitoring all officials, it was normal to collect information from enemy states.

In essence, all four great dynasties, except for the rather unique Great Li Dynasty, had an organization similar to the Bureau of the Lamp.

Empress Wei of Great Wei heard this, but showed no reaction.

She had no interest in meddling in the casual conversation between Emperor Zhou and Cheng Zhihai, silently watching the barrier in the sky.

Within that barrier, the purple color was faintly dissipating a bit, making the scene slightly clearer. Perhaps before long, the situation on Crane-Crying Island would be crystal clear.

Empress Wei was unconcerned, continuing to watch calmly.

Meanwhile, Emperor Zhou continued chatting with Cheng Zhihai, and upon hearing that Cheng Guang was still on the island, he felt reassured.

“With Qian Siyuan there, there’s no need to worry about Guanger’s safety.”

As he spoke, Emperor Zhou seemed to remember something and, with a light tap on the tabletop, said, “After this matter is resolved, have Guanger come to the Imperial Palace for a visit.”