

My System 161

Chapter 161: The Struggling Old Father _5

“Your grandfather, the Duke of the State, controlled a million-strong army at the Border Area; even without a hint of treasonous thoughts, such military power is a presence that cannot be ignored in any dynasty.”

“What’s more, that million-strong Northern Expedition Army only follows commands from our Duke Zhen’s Mansion. Even if Emperor Zhou himself were present, the Northern Expedition Army wouldn’t bother with him. Therefore, the Emperor has always maintained a degree of vigilance towards our Duke Zhen’s Mansion.”

“Additionally, due to the actions of the Bureau of the Lamp, the court officials have grown increasingly resentful of Duke Zhen’s Mansion, and it’s not just that they’ve submitted memorials to Emperor Zhou suggesting the reduction of our family’s power.”

“Since he can’t touch your grandfather, the Emperor has thought about making a move against my side instead.”

“Therefore, it was within my expectations that the Emperor would want to replace me. Luckily, he still took my dignity into account and gave me a bit of a chance.”

Having said that, Cheng Zhihai looked at Cheng Guang with an affectionate smile, stretching out his hand and ruffling Cheng Guang’s hair.

“So, Guanger, you can rest assured. Although the Bureau of the Lamp is a government organization, it’s one I created. The Emperor won’t easily take away this foundation meant for your future.”

Cheng Guang wasn’t particularly concerned about that. The name of the Bureau of the Lamp wasn’t so important, as long as its people were still around.

Even if Emperor Zhou took over the Bureau of the Lamp, as long as its people were still there and willing to follow Cheng Zhihai, the spirit of the Bureau of the Lamp would remain.

In Cheng Guang's view, what truly gives an organization its soul isn't just an empty title or vast power, but people are the key.

Of course, power is also very important. Without it, even if you have people, if there's no power to carry out commands, few would be willing to listen, rendering it fairly useless.

Cheng Guang picked up his teacup, poured himself a sip of tea, and after a silent nod said, "Father, haven't I already passed the Bureau of the Lamp's entrance exam? I want to join and carry out some missions."

Upon hearing Cheng Guang's words, Cheng Zihai's eyes widened in astonishment, his normally authoritative gaze seeming a bit dazed.

Clearly, he hadn't expected Cheng Guang to say such a thing.

"Guanger... you... why do you suddenly want to carry out missions?"

"I've already prepared the tasks for you to take on next, but you haven't completed any missions yet. Just wait a little longer. Let your father pave the way for you first, then you can walk it."

You're not thinking of having me just lie down all the way and climb directly to the top ranks of the Bureau of the Lamp, are you?

Cheng Guang's mouth twitched slightly. He had underestimated Cheng Zihai's excessive doting on him.

Seems like he didn't want me to suffer even a little.

He wanted to handle the Bureau of the Lamp's missions himself and then let me come in to take the credit afterwards.

Although this would indeed be thrilling, had it not been for the matter involving the crown prince, or rather King of South Ming, Cheng Guang wouldn't want to make unnecessary trouble.

Why not just practice at home obediently, improve my cultivation and strength, and wait for Cheng Zhihai to wrap up the missions before coming in to take the credit and get a promotion?

Cheng Guang sighed. The situation at hand no longer allowed him to continue being idle.

Cheng Guang faced Cheng Zhihai, shook his head, and said, "Father, no."

"I want to complete the missions of the Bureau of the Lamp on my own. I also want to help you look into the crown prince's whereabouts."

Upon hearing Cheng Guang's words, Cheng Zhihai's mouth couldn't help but twitch.

The Bureau of the Lamp, renowned for overseeing justice across the world, couldn't even guarantee to find the crown prince's whereabouts. And here you are, my boy, meddling needlessly.

Cheng Zhihai was about to refuse Cheng Guang's offer outright, but when he saw the determination in Cheng Guang's eyes, it seemed that if he didn't agree, Cheng Guang wouldn't just let it go today.

Seeing Cheng Guang's expression, Cheng Zhihai froze for a second.

He had never seen such a look in Cheng Guang's eyes before.

Could it be that Cheng Guang really wanted to help him find the crown prince's whereabouts and wasn't just thinking it might be fun?

After pondering for a moment, Cheng Zhihai slowly nodded.

"Alright, since you, Guanger, want to investigate, then go ahead. I'll assign some people to you. Consider looking for the crown prince as your first mission after joining the Bureau of the Lamp."

As he spoke, Cheng Zhihai pulled out a black iron token of the Bureau of the Lamp.

"Our Bureau of the Lamp is divided into three levels. Excluding external personnel for now, among the official staff, there are three ranks: Black Lantern Catcher, White Lantern Catcher, Silver Lantern Catcher, and, at the top, Gold Lantern Catcher."

"Above those are the Director and Deputy Director."

"You've just joined the Bureau of the Lamp, so you are still a Black Lantern Catcher, meaning you don't have many people at your disposal. For now, just take a few young, external members with you to investigate the crown prince's whereabouts."

"Once you find anything, report directly to me, understand?"

Cheng Zhihai, at his last sentence, could no longer suppress a smile. His stern face broke into a radiant grin.

It seemed, in his view, that it was impossible for Cheng Guang to find the crown prince.

Cheng Guang too knew what Cheng Zhihai was thinking; it was obvious that his father didn't trust him.

Cheng Guang didn't need Cheng Zhihai's trust; he just needed such a channel.

Let Cheng Zhihai or, to be precise, let Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou and other related parties know that he was investigating.

That way, even if he didn't uncover anything, he could just fabricate a suitable reason, report the crown prince's whereabouts to Cheng Zhihai, and complete the mission.

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It could also disrupt the Crown Prince's plans.

No matter the process, his goal had at least been achieved.

Cheng Guang cared little for the process.

After taking the token from Cheng Zhihai's hand, he left the hall directly.

He was somewhat reluctant to talk to a Cheng Zhihai who did not trust him.

This old man had become inexplicably unlovable.

Sigh.

Cheng Guang shook his head with a sigh.

After he left the hall,

Cheng Zhihai also withdrew his gaze from Cheng Guang.

He picked up the teacup, gently swirled the clear tea inside, blew the mist from the rim, took a sip, and moistened his throat.

He appeared contemplative, a mysterious glimmer in his eyes.

"Yes, why didn't I think of that? If I could uncover the whereabouts of the Crown Prince, it would be a great achievement. If I could transfer the credit for finding the Crown Prince to Guanger, just with this merit alone, he could be directly promoted to Silver Lantern Catcher."

“I will strive some more, and direct promotion to Gold Lantern Catcher isn’t out of the question.”

“Heh! In one fell swoop, with some more effort, it’s not impossible for Guanger to be promoted to my position within two or three years.”

“At that time, I will hand over the Bureau of the Lamp to Guanger, and I will go elsewhere to shine and heat for Guang’er.”

Saying this, Cheng Zhihai’s face revealed a hint of a smile, which gradually became more intense.

As he smiled, he began to go through the intelligence information reported from various branches of the Bureau of the Lamp across the land.

To find the Crown Prince who had not appeared for decades within the vast territory of the Great Zhou Dynasty was almost like finding a needle in a haystack.

Now, Cheng Zhihai could only put his earnest efforts into searching and seeking.

He refused to believe that a Crown Prince could hide anywhere that he wouldn’t be able to find, even if it was the ends of the earth; he would unearth the Crown Prince.

Cheng Zhihai flipped through the books rapidly, time swiftly passing as he browsed through the intelligence from various places, periodically taking a sip from his teacup.

A cup of tea.

A whole day.

— “The Striving Father”

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Cheng Guang knew nothing about Cheng Zihai's actions; he too had begun his own moves.

With his new identity as a Black Lantern Catcher, Cheng Guang first went to the Bureau of the Lamp's registration office to collect a uniform.

The clothes of the Bureau of the Lamp were exquisite, mainly in dark tones, made from rare silks and unique fabrics, embroidered with intricate patterns that emitted a faint light at night, as if stars were shining in the darkness, faint and elusive.

The detailing on the clothes was meticulous, each piece crafted by hand with care.

The collar was trimmed with silver satin, the cuffs were edged with gold thread, and a broad leather belt was tied around the waist, featuring a lantern-shaped buckle with a black border, which was the symbol of the Bureau of the Lamp.

The Black Lantern Catcher's buckle had a black border, the White Lantern Catcher's a white one, and so forth, according to the type of lantern.

The highest rank of Director and Deputy Director wore the understated yet noble color of white gold flame.

Cheng Guang found a place to change into the uniform, and after sizing himself up, he thought he looked quite handsome.

Already handsomely featured, he looked good in any attire, but wearing the clothes of the Bureau of the Lamp added an indescribable air of temperament to him.

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It's worth mentioning that although Cheng Guang was just a Black Lantern Catcher, even the occasional White Lantern Soldier Catcher or a Silver Lantern Catcher didn't look down on him or show any disdain.

This wasn't because Cheng Guang was the Princely Heir; rather, it was because within the Bureau of the Lamp, people didn't scorn or belittle anyone else based on their position.

Cheng Guang thought this was pretty good.

Though the Bureau of the Lamp was a small bureaucracy, it was somehow distinctly different from the Court's bureaucracy.

There wasn't any struggle for power. In the Bureau of the Lamp, if you wanted to get promoted, move up in ranks, and obtain more resources and power, you had to work hard to complete tasks and gather more intelligence.

Everything was determined by your efforts.

So everyone was busy with tasks, without any time to look down on one another.

Today you might be a White Lantern, and I a Black Lantern, but perhaps tomorrow I'll be a White Lantern, and the day after, even a Silver Lantern.

It changed every day.

This was in stark contrast to the internal factional struggles and nepotism within the Great Zhou Court.

In the Bureau of the Lamp, such things were nonexistent.

Cheng Guang made his way to the main hall of the Bureau of the Lamp where tasks were assigned and entered the hall filled with various mission briefs; the one at the forefront was to locate the whereabouts of the Crown Prince.

Moreover, this task was placed at the highest level, in the most prominent position.

Anyone could take it on.

As long as you could provide information about the Crown Prince's whereabouts, even if it was vague and not specific, that would be acceptable.

You could still obtain a great number of merits for it.

Therefore, most of the Bureau's constables had taken on this task and received some intelligence related to the Crown Prince.

Even if it wasn't completed later, it wasn't a big deal—it was good to chase a dream.

What if by chance?

If by chance you did learn about the Crown Prince's location, you could be the first to submit this information and gain a great amount of merits.

Merit was quite important in the Bureau of the Lamp.

It could not only be used to improve one's rank but could also be exchanged for resources.

Cheng Guang approached the counter and looked at an exhausted old clerk, and before he even had a chance to speak, the old man tossed a scroll to Cheng Guang.

"Alright, no need to say anything, old man knows you're here to take on the Crown Prince's task."

"Sigh, young people these days, one more rash than the next. Is the Crown Prince that easy to find?"

“The Director released the task more in the hopes of a ‘needle in a haystack’ approach; he never really expected you Black Lantern lads to find him. You’d do better to focus on other tasks and leave this one to Gold or Silver Lantern Catchers.”

The old clerk didn’t even lift his head, and after he finished speaking, he waved his hand, signaling he wanted to dismiss Cheng Guang.

Seeing this, Cheng Guang couldn’t help but chuckle wryly, “Old man, I want to ask, where should a Black Lantern Catcher like me go if I need assistance with manpower?”

As soon as the old clerk heard Cheng Guang call him ‘old man,’ he got annoyed.

“Hey! You young person, where are your manners? Even though I’m old, that doesn’t mean you can just call me ‘old man.’ At the very least, you should address me as ‘elder uncle’ or something of the like, got it?”

After the old clerk said this and lifted his head wanting to say more, he caught a glimpse of Cheng Guang’s face and his expression instantly froze.

His eyes widened, and a choking sound of “uh uh” came from his throat.

He was rendered speechless.

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The old man’s expression froze for a long while, until Cheng Guang grew a bit impatient. When Cheng Guang asked again, the old man finally snapped out of it.

“Princely... Princely Heir...”

The old man’s expression was stiff as he swallowed nervously, feeling inexplicably terrified about the offense he had just committed.

Cheng Guang, however, had no intention of taking him to task over it. He waved it off and asked once more.

“Old uncle, where should a Black Lantern Steward like myself go to gather personnel?”

The old man quickly stood up, bowing respectfully, “Princely Heir, just call me ‘old man’ is fine.”

“When constables from the Bureau of the Lamp go out to handle cases or carry out missions and need manpower, they usually draw from within the organization. A White Lantern Catcher can command ten Black Lantern Catchers. As for the Black Lantern Catchers who are the lowest ranked, they can only be assigned some extra-institutional members.”

“However, for you, Princely Heir, even the Gold Lantern Catchers are under your command...”

The old man promptly added, “Princely Heir, there are only three Gold Lantern Stewards in the organization at present. I’ll call them all over...”

Cheng Guang quickly shook his head, declining the old man’s kind offer, “Just assign me a few extra-institutional members.”

For Cheng Guang, he didn’t actually need powerful subordinates. If he needed someone with high Cultivation Realm, he needn’t look within the Bureau of the Lamp; he already had countless strong guards by his side.

Right now, he just needed people who could help him investigate and handle cases. Whether they were powerful or held high status was unimportant. What was important was that they could be obedient and sensible.

To perfectly go through the motions and find a perfect reason to relay the intelligence he knew to Cheng Zihai.

Seeing Cheng Guang say this, the old man didn’t persist. He took out several sheets of paper filled with information from a drawer beneath the desk and handed them to Cheng Guang.

Cheng Guang looked at them briefly and saw they were indeed the profiles of extra-institutional personnel, with portraits, names, Cultivation Realms, and so on.

Cheng Guang noticed that even the Bureau of the Lamp's extra-institutional members had high Cultivation Realms. The lowest among them had reached the Fourth-grade Divine Realm, stronger or no less formidable than Lin Cheng.

Lin Cheng's status -1

The thought crossed Cheng Guang's mind, and he couldn't help but chuckle to himself.

The old man handed another stack of papers to Cheng Guang. This paperwork was filled with information relating to the crown prince. Naturally, if he was going to investigate the crown prince, he first needed to know all the related information.

The range of information included was extremely broad, covering everything from the crown prince's birth to his subsequent disappearance. Not all the records were complete, or else there wouldn't be the current state of affairs.

Cheng Guang estimated that if the crown prince's information were more detailed, the thickness of this file would at least increase tenfold.

"Princely Heir, if you need extra-institutional members, you can just go to the Human Resources Temple to find some. These extra-institutional members still need to complete a few missions to be promoted to official members and become a Black Lantern Catcher, so they are very eager to complete missions..."

"This mission of yours, Princely Heir, looking for the crown prince, is extremely difficult. Wouldn't you rather choose some simpler task?" the old man inquired with a hint of concern, and while speaking, he pulled out some tasks from the side, whispering, "Princely Heir, these are tasks I've summarized that offer a lot of merits for little trouble, which I don't normally share with just anyone. Princely Heir, why don't you choose from these instead?"

Upon seeing this, Cheng Guang couldn't help but smile wryly. So you really think I'm here to accomplish tasks and elevate my own position.

If Cheng Guang truly wanted to complete tasks and ascend in rank by merit, he wouldn't need to personally visit the Bureau of the Lamp—Cheng Zihai would take care of everything for him.

All he would have to do is lie back and relax.

Cheng Guang politely declined the old man's kind offer with a smile, said nothing more, and offered no explanation. He took the information and walked out of the mission hall.

After a short while, he arrived at the Human Resources Temple as the old man had mentioned.

The officials from the Bureau of the Lamp at the Human Resources Temple tensed up upon seeing Cheng Guang arrive, their every action stiffening a bit.

Once Cheng Guang handed over the personnel files to the officials of the Human Resources Temple, they hurriedly set about finding people for him.

The members of the Human Resources Temple were very efficient. Cheng Guang only waited the time it took to drink a cup of tea before the extra-institutional members assigned to him appeared before his eyes.

There were five in total.

Three men and two women.

The highest in Cultivation Realm was at the Prime God Realm, and the lowest was at the Fourth-grade Divine Realm.

When these five arrived at the Human Resources Temple, they had all thought that the one summoning them for a mission was just an ordinary Black Lantern Catcher.

But when they saw the peerless noble young master sitting quietly beside a desk, waiting for them and realized it was Cheng Guang,

They were all stupefied.

All five of them instantly became somewhat restrained, and their postures, regardless of gender, turned a bit awkward.

However, they did not dare to be disrespectful. Even though they were visibly nervous, they still came forward and greeted Cheng Guang respectfully.

“Princely Heir.”

Cheng Guang nodded in response.

“Princely Heir, may I ask what mission we are to undertake this time?” A tall and well-built man among the five cautiously inquired.

His name was Xu Hongfei, and not only was he the tallest and most well-built, but his Cultivation Realm was also the highest among them.

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Fifth Grade of the Prime God Realm.

Cheng Guang passed the information about the crown prince to them, stood up, and lazily stretched, “Our mission this time is to find the crown prince. You five, follow me closely, and let’s aim to find the prince’s whereabouts within a month.”

As Cheng Guang spoke, he smiled at the five people, revealing a faint and incredibly gentle smile.

However, upon hearing Cheng Guang's words, Xu Hongfei and the others were so scared that their faces turned a shade paler.

"Ah???"

Their mouths hung open in shock, their eyes nearly popping out, somewhat reminiscent of a minor demon in 'Journey to the West' being ordered by the demon king to capture the Tang Monk.

Who was the crown prince?

The deposed prince of the former dynasty, who had contended with Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou for decades and still managed to exist unscathed, was not someone easily apprehended.

The Princely Heir must be out of his mind...

To actually consider leading them, a group of non-regular members, to find the prince...

Xu Hongfei's lips moved hesitantly, unsure of what to say, but after a moment's hesitation, he couldn't help but speak up:

"Princely Heir, forgive my directness, but the task of finding the crown prince is not something we can touch. It's a challenge only for those above a Silver Lantern Catcher..."

"If we were to complete this mission, I'm afraid we wouldn't be able to locate the crown prince within a month, wasting both time and effort."

Xu Hongfei dared not offend Cheng Guang, so he was extremely cautious with his words, carefully watching Cheng Guang's expressions to avoid angering him.

Cheng Guang wasn't as sensitive as Xu Hongfei feared. It was entirely within his expectations for them to think this way.

Regarding Xu Hongfei and the others, he was indifferent to whether they participated or not; it was merely a formality. Therefore, he immediately responded with a smile:

"I don't insist that you join me in this mission, as it might indeed waste a month's time without gaining anything. So I'll leave the decision to you; decide for yourselves whether you want to join me."

"I won't hold it against you."

Upon hearing Cheng Guang's words, the faces of Xu Hongfei and the other four became much more conflicted.

They really didn't want to waste time.

Time was even more valuable than money for these non-regular members.

The reason was simple: the more missions they could complete, the sooner they could officially join the Bureau of the Lamp and become a Black Lantern Catcher.

There, they could take on missions themselves, earn merits, and exchange them for various resources to further enhance their strength.

Moreover, the salary of a constable from the Bureau of the Lamp was not low. Just being a Black Lantern Catcher guaranteed thirty taels of silver a month, which was equivalent to a commoner's annual income.

Without a doubt, the remuneration of a constable from the Bureau of the Lamp was indeed very tempting to ordinary people.

These two factors combined left few non-regular members willing to waste their time on a futile month-long venture to seek the elusive crown prince and attempt to complete this intangible mission.

However, undertaking a mission with someone as distinguished as the Princely Heir, even if it didn't make any progress in the end, securing his favor would be extremely beneficial.

But was someone as important as the Princely Heir approachable by non-regular personnel like them?

If a mission turned out fruitless, displaying their incompetence, not only would they fail to gain the Princely Heir's favor, but he might even blame them.

Nobody could bear the Princely Heir's blame.

For a time, all five fell silent.

Cheng Guang didn't rush them and simply continued to drink his tea quietly.

After a while, someone hesitantly stepped forward.

He was rather thin and his face was somewhat sallow as if suffering from malnutrition.

He looked timidly at Cheng Guang and said softly, "Princely Heir, I, Chen Qing, am afraid I cannot join you on this mission. My mother is currently seriously ill, and each month requires a large sum of silver for treatment, so I need to complete more missions as quickly as possible to accumulate enough merits and advance to become a Black Lantern Catcher. I simply don't have the time..."

"I'm sorry."

After Chen Qing finished speaking, Cheng Guang's expression remained unchanged, with a gentle smile still on his lips, "Who else wants to drop out?"

Following Chen Qing, several more non-regular members stepped forward.

They were the two women among the remaining five.

Actually, they were a little envious of Cheng Guang's physique, their gazes sneaking glances at him from the beginning. Although they coveted Cheng Guang's body, they didn't dare go on this mission to find the crown prince directly with him.

Even many Gold Lantern Catchers lacked confidence in finding the crown prince.

How could the Princely Heir, who had never handled a case and had little information gathering ability, lead them to find the prince?

It was essentially an impossible task.

To find the crown prince relying only on these non-regular members, plus the Princely Heir alone, was downright fantasy.

Thus, the two women quickly stepped forward as well, their voices soft and somewhat delicate.

"Princely Heir, we can't do it either. With our poor family backgrounds, we don't have so much time to waste."

At the same time, aside from the two women and aside from Xu Hongfei, another male member also stepped forward.

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The words they spoke were of a similar sentiment to those before them.

It was nothing more than feeling that following Cheng Guang to search for the whereabouts of the Crown Prince would be a complete waste of time.

They would waste a period of time without any reward.

Cheng Guang wasn't too surprised by this, just felt it was a bit of a shame.

Not a shame for himself.

But he felt sorry for those who had just rejected them.

Just now, the gears of their fate had begun to turn, but they actively stopped it.

“I gave you an opportunity, but you don’t make use of it.”

Cheng Guang sighed inwardly and his gaze then fell onto the last person.

If the last one, Xu Hongfei, also didn’t want to take on this task with him, then he would truly be alone.

This really screwed things up.

Cheng Guang even doubted whether the words he had said about letting them freely choose to stay or go were wrong and should not have been said.

Once spoken, those words, like spilled water, could not be taken back.

It didn’t matter if there was no one else; he couldn’t rely on the Bureau of the Lamp’s external personnel, so he could simply join a group of White Lantern Catchers if need be.

Cheng Guang stroked his chin, pondering this.

Just when Cheng Guang thought that Xu Hongfei, who had been skeptical from the start, would also refuse, leaving him to go solo, Xu Hongfei’s face showed a flash of struggle before he walked over to Cheng Guang and bowed earnestly.

“Princely Heir, if they do not wish to follow you, I, Xu Hongfei, am willing to follow you to the death!”

Cheng Guang was a bit surprised and let out a soft “huh” as he looked at Xu Hongfei.

Xu Hongfei, noticing Cheng Guang’s gaze, didn’t know what Cheng Guang was thinking, and with an unchanged expression, respectfully bowed his head.

“Princely Heir, the questions I asked earlier were not because I doubted that the Princely Heir could not complete the task, but rather to see how confident the Princely Heir was in the task, which is why I have been observing the Princely Heir since the beginning.”

“I noticed that the Princely Heir, from the very start, has never shown much panic on his face, even when facing my doubts and the departure of Chen Qing and the other four, the composure on the Princely Heir’s face has not changed one bit.”

“Therefore, I believe that the Princely Heir can complete the task, not simply take a risk.”

After Xu Hongfei finished speaking, Cheng Guang was a bit surprised.

This Xu Hongfei...

He is astute...

He even observed his head.

Having heard Xu Hongfei’s words, Cheng Guang started to wonder if Xu Hongfei was just trying to gauge how confident he was in finding the Crown Prince by deliberately saying what he said earlier to test him.

The test worked indeed, and at the same time, it led his other team members to leave.

Including Chen Qing, the four of them changed their faces instantly after hearing Xu Hongfei’s words.

Their expressions turned dark as iron.

They almost pointed at Xu Hongfei and cursed, "Are you for real, dog?"

Mostly because of what Xu Hongfei had said, they had little confidence in this mission, thinking that following the Princely Heir to find the Crown Prince would just be a waste of time.

And now, upon reflection...

It didn't seem like such a waste of time.

In the midst of their contemplation, Chen Qing and the others suddenly realized, is the Princely Heir not just that, a Princely Heir? What kind of member could he not find?

Why bother with them, these auxiliary constables?

Moreover, the Princely Heir being who he is, wouldn't likely want to undertake a mission out of the blue; there might be some internal intelligence.

Perhaps...

Director Cheng had already paved the way for the Princely Heir.

In the hearts of the four, speculations arose.

They now believed that Cheng Guang might indeed be able to complete the task, and the certainty was beyond their expectations.

But they could not be sure of a hundred percent certainty, at least there had to be more than half.

If the Princely Heir was absolutely sure of success, countless Gold Lantern Catchers would probably be begging to join the Princely Heir's team, where would that leave them, the ones who could not even be counted as Black Lantern Catchers, but as external personnel?

And if they managed to complete the task with the Princely Heir and find the whereabouts of the Crown Prince, even if they couldn't confront the Crown Prince, it could still earn them a great deal of merit.

That great merit could not only elevate them from auxiliary members of the Bureau of the Lamp to Black Lantern Catchers, but with a bit of boldness, perhaps even a promotion directly to White Lantern Catchers wouldn't be impossible.

For Cheng Guang, such a leap in rank meant little.

But for Chen Qing and the others, it was akin to a sky-rocketing ascension.

With this realization...

Chen Qing and the others almost turned green with regret.

Damn it.

They had refused the Princely Heir too quickly!

Even though Cheng Guang said nothing at the moment, still smiling as he looked at them, that faint smile felt more painful than mockery.

The greatest opportunity of their lives had been squandered by them.

Only now did they come to a stark realization that even if they did not find the Crown Prince or complete the task with the Princely Heir, it wouldn't really be bad at all.

Having the chance to join the Princely Heir on a mission was an opportunity in itself.

If they could hold on tight to the Princely Heir's coattails during this period, wouldn't that mean direct flight?

As they thought more about it, the expressions on the faces of Chen Qing and the others became instantly pitiful.

Especially the two women, whose eyes turned red in no time.

They soon looked like they were about to drop precious tears.

Cheng Guang, however, didn't look at them much; they had left, and he wasn't going to ask them back.

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Cheng Guang took a few extra glances at Xu Hongfei and realized that this Xu Hongfei was much smarter than the other four, and it seemed that even just this one person was enough.

He stood up, took the documents, and walked out of the hall.

Xu Hongfei hurried to follow, trailing behind Cheng Guang, and they left the Bureau of the Lamp.

Meanwhile, Chen Qing and the other four left behind watched as Cheng Guang and Xu Hongfei departed, their faces a bit pale and grimacing as they exchanged glances.

They felt that the greatest opportunity of their lives had just been pushed away by their own hands.

Initially, they thought it was a waste of time, that searching for the crown prince was futile.

But now, they suddenly felt that the Princely Heir might still have a chance to find the crown prince.

Although this was just speculation without any evidence, it still made them feel miserable for a while.

“Sigh, don’t think too much, what’s done is done; next, we should just quietly wait for others to come and find us to complete the task.”

“It’s all because of that Xu Hongfei. We initially didn’t think about leaving the Princely Heir’s team. After all, being a Princely Heir means something, if he hadn’t mentioned it, we wouldn’t have dared to leave.”

“What else is there to say? We didn’t believe that the Princely Heir could complete the task, could find the crown prince. It doesn’t matter anymore.”

“By the way, what do you think are the chances that the Princely Heir can complete the task?”

“Logically speaking, a Black Lantern Catcher and that Xu Hongfei searching together don’t stand much of a chance, but the Black Lantern Catcher is the Princely Heir, so the odds are pretty good. We hadn’t snapped out of it just now, but upon further reflection, even if the Princely Heir doesn’t complete the task, Director and the others, upon finding the crown prince, might still credit the Princely Heir with the completion of the task...”

The four of them kept discussing without end.

For a moment, they nearly turned green with regret.

At this time, Cheng Guang had already left the Bureau of the Lamp with Xu Hongfei in tow.

Lin Cheng was waiting outside and, upon seeing Cheng Guang leave the Bureau of the Lamp, promptly greeted him, “Princely Heir.”

Cheng Guang gave a slight nod, mounted his horse, “Let’s go.”

Lin Cheng quickly followed and asked, “Princely Heir, where are we heading now?”

Without answering, Cheng Guang looked at Xu Hongfei instead.

“Xu Hongfei, do you know the places where the Devil Clan has been frequently showing up recently?”

Upon hearing Cheng Guang’s question, Xu Hongfei immediately responded, hurriedly saying:

“Princely Heir, the Devil Clan has been showing up frequently near Xiaobai Village, Creek Carp Pond, six miles from Cold Pavilion, and around Nanping Village.”

As he spoke, Xu Hongfei’s brows furrowed, “Princely Heir, speaking of which, there have been more and more cases of the Devil Clan’s smuggling recently. It’s unclear where they’re smuggling from. Director previously said they were investigating, but nothing has been found out.”

“Now with the matter of the missing crown prince coming up, I fear everyone will have even less time and energy to investigate where the Devil Clan is smuggling in from. As long as those devils show themselves, we’ll just need to quickly head over and exterminate them.”

By the end of his speech, Xu Hongfei’s face showed some doubt as he looked toward Cheng Guang.

“Princely Heir, why do you ask this? Does the Devil Clan’s smuggling have something to do with the crown prince?”

Xu Hongfei wasn’t too slow on the uptake and immediately realized that Cheng Guang’s question might be related to their mission.

Although he guessed that Cheng Guang’s question was probably connected to their mission to find the crown prince, he couldn’t figure out what the Devil Clan’s smuggling had to do with the crown prince.

Could it be that the crown prince was involved in the Devil Clan’s smuggling operations??

That thought crossed Xu Hongfei's mind, but he quickly shook his head as if trying to persuade himself to dismiss the notion.

It seemed implausible, too absurd.

How could the Devil Clan get in touch with the crown prince, and even if they did, how could they cooperate with the crown prince...

The Human Race and the Devil Clan were like oil and water, archenemies upon sight.

Cooperation seemed impossible.

Xu Hongfei tried to convince himself, but he found it difficult to believe.

After all, improbable events were not impossible when it came to a desperado like the crown prince.

After asking his question, Xu Hongfei fell silent.

Cheng Guang didn't confirm or deny it, just smiled faintly and turned to look at Xu Hongfei again, asking, "Those places you mentioned, where are they exactly, and how far are they from the canal?"

After pondering the question, Xu Hongfei responded, "Those places are not beside the canal; they are actually quite far from it."

Hearing this, Cheng Guang's brow quirked, finding it rather interesting.

"None of them are near the canal?"

Xu Hongfei nodded, but quickly seemed to realize something as he took out a map from his bosom, looking at it with an expression of surprise.

“Princely Heir, look.”

Xu Hongfei held the map up for Cheng Guang to see clearly.

“Princely Heir, these are the likely spots where the Devil Clan would appear, according to what I just listed. While they are not beside the canal, there are tributaries of the canal passing by them...”

Cheng Guang looked at the map and immediately came to a conclusion.

These devils weren’t entirely foolish.

They still knew not to cluster near the canal to avoid exposing their stronghold.

Chapter 167: I Found a Blind Spot _5

But they weren’t that smart either.

They had assumed that as long as they followed the canal and ran a little further along its tributaries, they could completely avoid the investigations of the Bureau of the Lamp, but what they didn’t realize was that there was someone like me, so perceptive and ahead of the curve.

Just one glance was all it took to spot the peculiarity.

Cheng Guang planned to follow the tributary where the Devil Clan had been seen to see if he could find any clues and then track them down to the canal.

He knew that the Spacetime Rift used by the Devil Clan to smuggle themselves was near Crane-Crying Island, but how far it was from the island, he had no idea.

With a seal in place to isolate their presence, even if he passed right over that Spacetime Rift, he might not be able to pinpoint its exact location.

He still had to determine a rough area first, and then look for the specific spot.

Once he found the specific location, Cheng Guang felt that what came next wouldn't require his involvement.

The rest could be entirely left to Cheng Zihai.

With that thought, Cheng Guang didn't hesitate. He immediately wanted to take Lin Cheng and Xu Hongfei away from the Capital city and head to the place they had mentioned.

But before they could leave the Capital city, he sensed the troubled gaze of Song Yunqi.

This time, the place Cheng Guang was going to was too far from the Capital city, and Song Yunqi was afraid that something might happen to him.

Song Yunqi hesitated for a moment, ultimately saying nothing. He sighed, led several other guards, and followed behind Cheng Guang.

The Princely Heir was now a Black Lantern Catcher of the Bureau of the Lamp, so the Director should allow the Princely Heir to leave the Capital city, right?

Besides, with him, a Gold Lantern Catcher, following behind Cheng Guang, safety should be assured.

One would think that nothing unexpected would happen.

Song Yunqi reassured himself with these thoughts, but still remained highly alert, carefully watching over Cheng Guang.

If anything were to happen to the Princely Heir, Song Yunqi felt that even a hundred heads would not be enough to atone for such a failure.

After leaving the Capital city, they hastened on their way.

Approximately three hours later, Cheng Guang arrived at Xiaobai Village as Xu Hongfei had described.

Xiaobai Village, nestled against a mountain with water in front, had a serene environment. Walking on the village path, one could see houses with white walls and black tiles, ponds with rippling green waves, and brooks covered with patches of moss.

Ten miles from Xiaobai Village, a river flowed by.

The river water babbled and surged, larger in volume than ordinary rivers as it emerged from the canal.

Following the river towards Xiaobai Village, Cheng Guang noticed that many trees along the way were broken and toppled, with signs that the Devil Clan had wreaked havoc here.

Upon reaching Xiaobai Village, the courtyard walls of every household were in disarray and mottled. The once tranquil environment appeared as if it had been ravaged by some fierce storm or hurricane, completely devastated.

A faint scent of blood still lingered in the air.

As Cheng Guang entered Xiaobai Village, it seemed that some villagers noticed their arrival and peeked out timidly.

Upon seeing Cheng Guang and his companions, they immediately relaxed, hurried out, and bowed to them, saying,

“We weren’t aware that officials from the Bureau of the Lamp were coming our way. We failed to welcome you from afar. Please, sirs, forgive us for this oversight.”

Cheng Guang sized up the newcomer.

Most of the villagers were elderly, with gray hair, dressed in simple garments, the typical image of rural farmers.

Dozens of old people gathered at the village entrance, curiously examining Cheng Guang.

In the entire Xiaobai Village, aside from these elders, no young faces were to be seen.

Xu Hongfei saw the villagers and frowned, asking, “Elder, why are you still here? There are traces of the Devil Clan’s presence; if they attack again, what will you do?”

After Xu Hongfei spoke, the village head of Xiaobai Village grimaced and said, “Sir, we’re aware of the risk of further Devil Clan attacks on Xiaobai Village, but now is the seed-sowing season of February and March. If we leave now and do not cultivate the land, there will be no harvest next year. Dozens of households in our village will have no food to eat—we would starve to death.”

“But please rest assured, noble officials, we have already sent the young people, women, and children of the village into the city. Only we old folks remain here. Even if we die, we aren’t worth much, so don’t worry on our account.”

Having said that, the village head of Xiaobai Village instead comforted Cheng Guang and his party, inquiring, “Why have the officials revisited Xiaobai Village? Could it be that Devils are afoot nearby again?”

“Alas, these cursed Devils, we don’t know when they suddenly appeared, but upon their arrival, countless lives were lost. We are fortunate to have the Bureau of the Lamp; otherwise, with just us villagers, how could we stand against those ferocious Devils?”

“However, officials should still be cautious. It would be terrible if you were injured by a Devil.”

The village head of Xiaobai Village seemed to be quite a chatterbox, able to keep talking incessantly even without any response from Cheng Guang and his group.

Hearing the words of the village head, Xu Hongfei wanted to say more, but upon glancing again at the villagers within Xiaobai Village, faces weathered by hardship, covered in the dust of their fields, he didn't quite know what to say.

Chapter 168: I Found a Blind Spot _6

He was born in the countryside, a person from a humble family, and he had empathy for these farmers living on the bottom rung of the Great Zhou, knowing that even if their actions did not comply with rules, he could not force them to do anything.

If they were really forced to leave Xiaobai Village, they wouldn't be able to plant this year's crops. Without a harvest next year, even if they weren't harmed by the Devil Clan, they'd still be starved to death.

At this moment, Cheng Guang also slightly furrowed his brow.

After all, Xiaobai Village was still under the Emperor's feet, and yet, life was so difficult here. Survival was a struggle, and for the sake of livelihood, all the elderly of the village came out to farm, risking their lives...

This...

Cheng Guang was at a loss for words for a moment.

He dared not imagine what life was like for those living on the bottom rung of Great Zhou in other remote villages far from the Great Zhou Capital.

This era was just like this.

Under Emperor Zhou's rule, things had improved a lot.

In the past, the farmers' living conditions were even more difficult, constantly oppressed by the powerful and government officials. Ninety percent of their annual harvest would be skinned off layer by layer.

The remaining ten percent was barely sufficient to sustain the most basic livelihood of a family.

If the overall harvest was poor in a year, then inevitably someone in the family would die of starvation.

This had already become the norm.

Apart from Cheng Guang, who felt uncomfortable about this, others also felt that it was not worth it for the elderly farmers to risk their lives, yet they didn't have the same strong feelings as Cheng Guang did.

"My lords, would you care for a few cups of cold tea in the village? Although our village is poor and has little to offer, we still manage to have simple meals and tea. If the lords do not mind, please come inside for a bite and some tea, and take a rest."

Cheng Guang shook his head, "There's no need, village chief. Do you know where those members of the Devil Clan appeared?"

As soon as Cheng Guang posed the question, the village chief of Xiaobai Village pointed towards a spot on the distant riverbank, saying, "The Devil Clan that the lord mentioned suddenly emerged from that direction, abducting many of our village's young people."

With that, the village chief of Xiaobai Village showed a sorrowful face: "So many people, eaten by the Devil Clan, captured. If it hadn't been for the timely arrival of the officials from the Bureau of the Lamp, our Xiaobai Village would probably have been completely destroyed by now."

Cheng Guang was silent for a moment upon hearing this.

Before even approaching Xiaobai Village, he had smelled that strong stench of blood, and he suspected that the situation in Xiaobai Village was not good, but he did not expect it to be this severe.

"Let's go take a look," he said.

Cheng Guang headed towards the direction indicated by the village chief of Xiaobai Village.

Lin Cheng and Xu Hongfei followed closely behind him.

The village chief of Xiaobai Village took the initiative to lead the way for Cheng Guang.

After walking for a short while, they arrived at the riverbank.

There, the river's edge bore the huge footprints of a Devil Beast, and the level of Devil Qi was the most intense that they had felt all the way here.

Even though some time had passed, the Devil Qi in this area was still very conspicuous.

This Cultivation Realm must be at least Fourth Rank...

Not particularly powerful.

Cheng Guang stroked his chin, speculating quietly.

He knew.

The Devil Clan that appeared here and attacked Xiaobai Village was not to satisfy their hunger but rather to coincide with Bai Shuxuan's assassination attempt on him in order to divert Cheng Zhihai's attention.

To lure Cheng Zhihai out of the Capital City, far away from where Cheng Guang was; the farther Cheng Zhihai was, the greater the chance of successfully assassinating Cheng Guang.

But in the end, they had failed.

Even though Cheng Zhihai had started an investigation into how the Devil Clan had smuggled themselves into Great Zhou and from where, before he could figure it out, the unforeseen events at the Great Zhou–Great Wei martial competition disrupted his plans.

The investigation into the Devil Clan's smuggling had been delayed.

And now, the matter concerning remembrance of the Crown Prince had emerged.

Cheng Zhihai, as well as the entire Bureau of the Lamp, were already unable to focus all their thoughts on investigating the Devil Clan's smuggling, having cast it aside, and started to investigate the matter concerning the Crown Prince with all their might instead.

The priority of the matters had naturally changed.

Compared to the issue of the Crown Prince's remembrance, the Devil Clan's smuggling seemed too insignificant to capture the full attention of the Bureau of the Lamp.

If it weren't for Cheng Guang's current investigation, I'm afraid no one would have come to care about the smuggling of the Devil Clan on this side.

Cheng Guang mulled over in his mind as he walked to the riverbank and squatted down.

The Devil Clan had swum along the riverbank, leaving not many traces in the water, making it quite unrealistic to trace their path all the way to the canal, let alone pinpointing the exact location of the spacetime rift within it.

But at least, he could pinpoint a general direction.

Cheng Guang stood up and said with a smile to the Village Chief of Xiaobai Village, "Chief, if all goes well, there shouldn't be any more appearances of the Devil Clan nearby. You can rest a bit easier. If there are any unexpected incidents, just report them to the government promptly, and let us from the Bureau of the Lamp handle them."

The Village Chief of Xiaobai Village nodded hurriedly in response.

His face was a portrait of sincerity and fear.

For them, the government was an entity best avoided if possible.

It was only when they were left with no choice that they would go to the government and ask for the help of the Bureau of the Lamp.

The Bureau of the Lamp's people were not a problem.

Some of the government officials were even more frightening to them than Demon Beasts and ghosts.

Cheng Guang read such information from the Village Chief's expression.

He sighed inwardly, unsure of what to say. After wandering around the vicinity, he moved on to investigate the other villages Xu Hongfei had mentioned where Demon Beasts had appeared.

After spending several days, Cheng Guang traversed thousands of miles around the Capital, covering the entire canal basin.

Having ascertained the general strength of the Demon Beasts appearing in each village, as well as their rough distance from the canal, he had come to a conclusion.

Generally speaking, the weaker the Demon Beast, the shorter the distance from the spacetime rift in the canal.

Their cultivation realm could not support them to travel too far.

The stronger the Demon Beast, the farther they could travel, preventing the Demon Beasts from being too concentrated.

Basing on this pattern, Cheng Guang found that the Demon Beasts around Xiaobai Village actually had the lowest strength.

The farther away from Xiaobai Village, the stronger the Demon Beasts became.

Doesn't this mean that among all the villages around Xiaobai Village, where Demon Beasts appeared, Xiaobai Village was the closest to the spacetime rift?

Thinking further, Xiaobai Village indeed was quite close to the Crane-Crying Island, separated only by a short distance, much of which was due to the detours caused by the tributaries of the canal.

Realizing this, Cheng Guang's brows involuntarily twitched slightly.

Damn it, after all the searching, it turns out we're back to square one.

So it's right here, huh.

Cheng Guang felt he had found a blind spot.

It's just that the spacetime rift is a focal area of the Devil Beasts, most of them with no simple strength; there might even be traces of the Devil Emperor, and he really couldn't afford to provoke them now.

When in doubt, don't panic, go back and get backup first.

Chapter 169: Discussing the Wedding Date!

After the dark clouds had passed, the evening sky seemed even clearer than before, not dim but a lucid blue.

Outside the Capital city, the Thousand-mile Canal, under the sunset, was tinged with a layer of faint shimmer.

Cheng Guang glanced at the glimmer on the canal, unable to penetrate the hidden demonic spirits within it, and took Lin Cheng and Xu Hongfei, along with the others, back to Duke Zhen's Mansion.

The Entrance Hall of Duke Zhen's Mansion had an unusual air this evening.

On a normal day, there were only two guards at the door, but today there were four more.

Moreover, these four were clearly not guards of Duke Zhen's Mansion, but rather they seemed like veterans straight from the battlefield. Although they wore plain clothes, decked in black, each carried a Horse-slicing Sabre on their back. Even from a distance, Cheng Guang could feel the chilling aura emanating from those sabres.

"These are all veterans who have survived the battlefield, with outstanding martial cultivation skills, each of them a warrior of great valor."

Cheng Guang knew that these guards were all war generals who had survived the battlefield, and it was very likely they were under Duke Zhen, Cheng Shiyuan. Did the presence of these guards indicate that Duke Zhen, Cheng Shiyuan, had returned?

Cheng Guang pondered for a moment and thought it unlikely; in general, Duke Zhen was often stationed near the Border Area, and would not leave the frontier without special circumstances.

So why were these veterans here?

Could there be some other reason?

Cheng Guang couldn't figure it out, nor did he care much about it. His mind was entirely focused on the Devil Clan and the crown prince. The circumstances of these veterans seemed rather insignificant now.

Upon entering the Mansion, those guards watched Cheng Guang with sharp eyes, as if probing or observing. Faced with their piercing gaze, Cheng Guang showed not the slightest timidity, instead meeting their stare with calmness.

These guards didn't seem like his own people, yet they dared to look at him in such a manner.

While Cheng Guang was thinking this, the four veterans in front of him suddenly relaxed their gaze, faces showing a look of admiration, and their bodies slightly bent with a sense of respect.

“Princely Heir, General Qin has arrived at the mansion to discuss the wedding date with you,” one of the old soldiers said respectfully, stepping aside to let Cheng Guang enter.

General Qin?

Wedding date?

Were these veterans brought by that General Qin?

All of a sudden, Cheng Guang remembered the marriage arranged for him by his parents, to that woman called Qin Yanqiu—a big block of ice.

So that meant...

This General Qin was his future father-in-law?

And these veterans were the people brought by General Qin?

Ideas churned in Cheng Guang's mind, and he quickly grasped the situation.

Since General Qin had come to discuss the wedding date with Cheng Zihai and others, it seemed that the marriage was confirmed, and it was set.

For such matters, Cheng Guang didn't feel the need to interfere—as was the custom of the era, marriage arrangements were often entirely managed by the parents, and all he had to do was wait for the wedding.

Cheng Guang nodded slightly in acknowledgement and continued into the Mansion, where the same old soldiers who had scrutinized him now respectfully made way for him.

When Cheng Guang returned to Million Specie Garden, he saw Qing Luan already busy in the side room, apparently preparing some food for him.

Having been running about these past few days in pursuit of the Devil Clan, he hadn't spent much time with Qing Luan, but she hadn't complained, just quietly prepared his meals and the hot water needed for washing upon his return.

A warmth embraced Cheng Guang's heart, "Qing Luan, there's no need to busy yourself, it's enough to have the servants bring over some food."

Having entered the courtyard, Qing Luan fetched some hot water for him to wash his hands.

Cheng Guang then responded with a smile, "These past few days I've been out working on a case, so there's no need for you to wait for me. Sleep early if it's getting late."

Qing Luan stubbornly shook her head, "How could Qing Luan possibly sleep before the Princely Heir has returned? At least, I must attend to the Princely Heir's washing before I can rest at ease."

Cheng Guang, at a loss for words, could only respond with a sheepish grin.

Instead, Qing Luan came up with a suggestion, her eyes sparkling as she regarded Cheng Guang.

"How about this, Princely Heir, next time you go out on a case, take Qing Luan with you, would that be okay?"

Upon hearing this, Cheng Guang was both amused and exasperated, "What are you saying? How can I bring a lady like you with me when I'm working on a case? Everyone there is rough and tough, and having a lady along would be inconvenient."

"However, after several days of investigation, I've garnered some clues about the whereabouts of that Devil Clan. This matter should soon come to an end."

Hearing this, Qing Luan's delicate face showed a hint of surprise as she tilted her head and curiously asked, "Oh, you've been investigating the Devil Clan these past few days, Princely Heir? I thought you were looking for the crown prince."

"What does investigating those smuggled Devils have to do with fondly remembering the crown prince?"

"Don't tell me, Princely Heir, you're intending to look for Bai Shuxuan?"

Cheng Guang laughed, "You don't understand."

Qing Luan hummed softly, her eyes still twinkling as she looked at Cheng Guang, seemingly waiting for him to explain and resolve her curiosity.

However, Cheng Guang had no interest in answering anymore and once again acted the Mysterious Oracle.

Qing Luan, frustrated, puffed up her cheeks, her lips pursing into a pout. She wanted to pinch Cheng Guang's waist, but ultimately didn't dare, only able to sulk silently.

Chapter 170: Discussing the Wedding Date! _2

Cheng Guang couldn't help but laugh at the situation, but just as he was about to say something else, Steward Wang's voice came from outside the room.

"Princely Heir, the Family Head is summoning you to the main hall. General Qin has mentioned he'd like to meet you," he said.

After hearing Steward Wang's voice, Qing Luan was clearly startled, but quickly regained her composure and urged Cheng Guang to get up.

"Oh dear, Princely Heir, I almost forgot, General Qin came over early this morning. You weren't aware since you were out handling a case at that time," she said.

"It seems that General Qin has come specifically to discuss your marriage with the Family Head, and he has been waiting for you all day," she added.

"Hurry up and meet General Qin. If we wait too long, it wouldn't be proper," she urged.

As she spoke, Qing Luan continued to push Cheng Guang towards the door.

Cheng Guang felt helpless, thinking to himself that he'd hardly had a chance to settle in.

He knew that General Qin was still in the mansion, but he hadn't expected the man to have arrived so early nor to have stayed just to see him, his potential future son-in-law.

As soon as he had returned to the mansion, someone was sent to call him over.

Qing Luan helped Cheng Guang tidy up his clothes. There was no time to change out of his Bureau of the Lamp attire, so he decided to go meet General Qin as he was.

The clothing of the Bureau of the Lamp wasn't unseemly; there was nothing inappropriate or disrespectful about wearing it to meet guests.

After leaving the courtyard, Cheng Guang headed straight for the main hall.

By this time, in the guest reception courtyard of Duke Zhen's Mansion, many people were already seated in the Youtai Hall.

"Please wait a moment, General Qin. Guanger has been sent for and should arrive shortly," Wu Yuemei spoke softly from the head seat.

Next to Wu Yuemei, Cheng Zihai was also all smiles as he said to General Qin, "Speaking of which, this is your first time meeting my Guanger, isn't it, Qin Beifeng?"

"Lately, Guanger has been quite prominent. I don't know if you've heard, but at the martial contest between Great Wei and Great Zhou, my Guanger stood out, even more, than some of the competitors from the Martial Academy," he boasted.

Cheng Zihai shamelessly lauded Cheng Guang's achievements without blushing in the slightest.

In the hall, the middle-aged man addressed as General Qin and also known as Qin Beifeng nodded occasionally.

He wasn't really listening to Cheng Zihai; his gaze was fixed on the entrance of the hall, as if he was waiting for someone.

When he saw a tall figure approaching from outside the hall, his eyes brightened, and he stood up involuntarily, walking toward the newcomer.

"Ah, this must be Guanger. Indeed, an extraordinary appearance, many times more handsome than your father. When I first saw your portrait, I couldn't believe you were the grandson of the old Duke, the son of Cheng Zihai," Qin Beifeng remarked as he sized up Cheng Guang.

Noticing that Cheng Guang's gaze didn't falter even when facing him, steady and neither servile nor overbearing, Qin Beifeng felt immediately satisfied.

What pleased Qin Beifeng even more wasn't just Cheng Guang's appearance but his demeanor.

Despite being the Princely Heir of Duke Zhen's Mansion and standing among the most powerful in Great Zhou, he didn't exhibit any traits of an arrogant young master. Instead, his smile was gentle and welcoming, like a refreshing spring breeze.

Seeing this, Qin Beifeng's satisfaction grew.

If the Princely Heir had been shallow and frivolous, even if he had agreed to marry his daughter to the Duke's grandson, he would still feel as though he was sending his daughter into a pit of fire.

But now, he felt that his choice might not be too bad after all.

Qin Beifeng was very enthusiastic; while he was sizing up Cheng Guang, Cheng Guang was also evaluating him.

Qin Beifeng appeared to be in his thirties, tall and straight like a proud pine tree, standing firmly with an imposing and resolute air.

He dressed simply, in black and green armor adorned with gold patterns, a sword with traces of dried blood hung at his waist, the blade gleaming in the setting sun with tiny, luminous flecks.

An extraordinary demeanor and impressive strength.

Qin Beifeng seemed to be around the same age as Cheng Zihai, yet his Cultivation Realm appeared to exceed Cheng Zihai's by quite a margin...

As Cheng Guang appraised Qin Beifeng, he thought that having this man for a father-in-law wasn't just due to his daughter's unmatched grace, but also because this man himself was worth allying with.

"Mr. Qin," Cheng Guang greeted after a moment, avoiding too deep a scrutiny as it would be impolite, he bowed slightly to Qin Beifeng.

Qin Beifeng wasn't arrogant either, promptly offering his hand to steady Cheng Guang.

The two exchanged pleasantries, with Qin Beifeng complimenting Cheng Guang's looks and in turn, making Cheng Zihai's seem worth little.

Cheng Zihai wasn't offended and watched with a cheerful smile.

He too believed his son was significantly more handsome than he was.

At the same time, Cheng Guang was commending Qin Beifeng's distinguished presence, fitting of a great general.

Having honed the skill of flattery among his many peers in his previous life, surpassing even the slick old hands in the Court, Cheng Guang showered Qin Beifeng with praise until the general was grinning from ear to ear, unable to contain his joy.

Meanwhile, Wu Yuemei covered her mouth to stifle laughter, hastily interrupting them.

She knew if the mutual compliments continued, they could forget about discussing any other matters and simply carry on with the praises.