

My System 171

Chapter 171: Discussing the Wedding Date! _3

Qin Beifeng halted his steps, yet his expression lingered with a sense of unfinished business, as if he had met Cheng Guang too late in life and wished he could take him aside to talk for three days and nights.

“Guanger, this is your Mr. Qin, a great general who serves beside your grandfather. His daughter, Qin Yanqiu, is your fiancée.”

Wu Yuemei softly added, “We have just discussed and settled on the wedding date, deciding that it will take place one month from now, after the royal ceremony.”

“Before the royal ceremony, it wouldn’t be appropriate for Duke Zhen’s Mansion to celebrate excessively. If we were to overshadow the royal event, even though the Emperor might not say anything, others, or rather, the various ministers at the Court, would likely gossip.”

Having said this, Cheng Guang nodded, indicating his understanding.

Cheng Zhihai smiled and asked, “Guanger, do you have any questions about the wedding date?”

“If you think it’s too soon, we can delay it. Today was actually meant for you to meet Yanqiu a bit earlier, but unfortunately, the child Yanqiu couldn’t make it.”

“It’s because the situation in the Border Area battlefield has been unstable recently due to the Devil Clan, so it couldn’t be helped. General Qin took time out of his schedule to come and discuss the wedding date with us.”

Cheng Guang shook his head, indicating he had no objections.

Qin Yanqiu was indeed a match that could be considered well chosen by the system: her talents, character, and looks were all extraordinary. To marry such a woman was already a stroke of great fortune; having the wedding earlier would not be an issue either.

Meanwhile, Qin Beifeng sighed and frowned, his eyes filled with a touch of helplessness.

“Yanqiu does not take after us. Guanger, after you are married, you must be more considerate of her. Her absence this time, I think it’s merely due to shyness, not a lack of desire to come.”

Although Qin Beifeng was making an excuse for his daughter, he still felt embarrassed, his old face flushing red.

When the two families were setting the wedding date, propriety dictated that the bride’s side, even if not showing their face, should make an appearance, yet she was unwilling to come.

“It’s alright, I’m aware of Yanqiu’s temperament: cold on the outside but warm inside. Her not coming must be due to some pressing matters, and not intentional negligence towards us.”

Wu Yuemei was unperturbed by this issue. Seeing Qin Beifeng a bit ashamed, she promptly voiced her reassurance.

“She wouldn’t dare to neglect us. If she did, I’d break her legs!”

Qin Beifeng’s eyebrows shot up as he said this at once.

Wu Yuemei chuckled and shook her head, “That won’t be necessary; after all, she is to be Duke Zhen’s Mansion’s future daughter-in-law. We can’t let you harm her.”

Cheng Zhihai burst out laughing, “Oh come on, Qin Beifeng. Do I not know what sort of person you are? You cherish Yanqiu so much that you’d like to keep her by your side at all times, spoiling her rotten. If you could actually break her legs, that would truly be a sight as rare as the sun rising from the west.”

Having his thoughts exposed, Qin Beifeng took it in stride and simply laughed it off without a word.

He didn’t genuinely want to break Qin Yanqiu’s legs; it was enough to just make Cheng Zhihai and Wu Yuemei aware of his stance.

After some more idle chat, as the sky was about to turn fully dark, Qin Beifeng rose to take his leave.

Before leaving, Qin Beifeng seemed to remember something and looked at Cheng Zhihai, "Have you encountered some difficulties lately?"

"Can you resolve the matter with the crown prince?"

"If you need my help, just say the word."

Upon hearing this, Cheng Zhihai couldn't help but laugh in frustration, pretending as though he was about to start a scuffle.

"Hey! You, Qin Beifeng, don't you know it's the Bureau of the Lamp that excels at investigating and handling cases? You're just a brute who knows how to fight; what help could you possibly provide? Stop meddling."

Qin Beifeng kept his good humor, unoffended, "That's for the best. Just don't let the Emperor strip you of your position and confine you to your home with nothing to do in the end."

"But, on second thought, it might be a blessing in disguise. You could spend more time with my future grandchild, which would be nice."

Hearing this, Cheng Zhihai's face turned dark, and he seemed less inclined to speak.

With a smile, Qin Beifeng thought for a moment, then turned to Cheng Guang and pulled out a token from his chest, handing it to him.

"Princely Heir, this token allows you to contact Yanqiu at any time, even across great distances. You two should get to know each other over the next few days, so that by the time the wedding arrives, there won't be any awkwardness."

After these words, Qin Beifeng turned and walked out the door, ready to leave.

Cheng Zhihai and Wu Yuemei, along with Cheng Guang, went to the door to see him off.

Qin Beifeng always moved with urgency. His return to the Capital city this time was solely to discuss the wedding date with Duke Zhen's Mansion, and with that settled, he was eager to return to the Border Area battlefield.

Qin Beifeng held a pivotal role in the Northern Expedition Army, and even the entire Border Area battlefield; without him, the Army would not necessarily grind to a halt, but it would surely be impacted to some extent.

Cheng Guang guessed that his upcoming marriage to Qin Yanqiu might be due in part to her role in the Northern Expedition Army, and her father Qin Beifeng's unique position therein.

If Cheng Guang were to inherit command of the million-strong Northern Expedition Army in the future, even without any significant personal strength, with his father-in-law Qin Beifeng's assistance, the succession would pose little difficulty.

Qin Beifeng departed swiftly, accompanied by several veteran soldiers.

Mounted on an Exotic Beast that galloped like a black storm, he soared into the sky and disappeared into the horizon in the blink of an eye.

His cultivation level might not yet be Heavenly Human Realm, but he was certainly at the peak of the Martial Emperor realm, perhaps just a step away from the Heavenly Human Realm.

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If it weren't for Qin Beifeng holding a position within the Northern Expedition Army, relying on his profound abilities, he would at least be a Minister of War at court.

After Qin Beifeng left, Cheng Guang followed Wu Yuemei and Cheng Zhihai back home.

Wu Yuemei was still expressing regret, "It's a pity that Yanqiu didn't come over; otherwise, I really wanted to see the child. It's been many years since I last saw her with my own eyes."

Cheng Zhihai, on the other hand, didn't care about that. Instead, he was stroking his chin, apparently deep in thought, and merely responded vaguely to Wu Yuemei's comments.

The two chatted intermittently. Just as they were about to return to the small courtyard, Cheng Guang, who had been following behind them, called out to Cheng Zhihai.

Cheng Zhihai turned his head, looked at Cheng Guang with a puzzled face and said, "Guanger, why are you still following us? Do you want to sleep with mom and dad? You're such a grown-up."

While saying this, Cheng Zhihai showed a disgusted expression, giving off a vibe as if to say 'kid, don't bother your parents when they are having a good time.'

There was an odd sense that their child was an accident, and that they two were the true lovers.

Cheng Guang didn't mind and waved his hand at Cheng Zhihai, "Dad, I have something to discuss."

Hearing Cheng Guang say this and seeing his serious demeanor, Cheng Zhihai grew curious. After telling Wu Yuemei to go back to her room, he took Cheng Guang to sit down in a nearby pavilion.

Cheng Zhihai poured a cup of hot tea for Cheng Guang and asked, "Guanger, what's the matter?"

Cheng Guang did not drink the tea. His gaze fixed on Cheng Zhihai's face, he said, "Dad, I may have discovered where the Devil Clan has been sneaking across."

"This matter is not so simple behind the scenes; it may even be related to the man in the black robe, that is, to the crown prince."

As soon as Cheng Guang said this, Cheng Zhihai's face changed.

He knew that the Devil Clan's frequent smuggling was intended to draw him away from the Capital city, to facilitate their plan to assassinate Cheng Guang behind the scenes.

Only, they had not succeeded that time.

Then the disturbances at the Great Wei and Great Zhou martial competition arose, and for a time, he had no time to deal with the Devil Clan's smuggling, planning to investigate thoroughly how and from where they were coming after recent events had settled.

However, in these matters, the figure of the crown prince had emerged.

Now, his whole attention was on how to locate the crown prince and where he might be hiding.

It felt as if he had entered a maze and was stuck in a dead end.

Now that Cheng Guang brought it up, he suddenly realized with a start.

Indeed, if the person who attempted to assassinate Guanger was the same one behind the disturbances at the Great Wei and Great Zhou martial competition,

Then it would mean...

The frequent smuggling incidents involving the Devil Clan, the crown prince, and those men in black robes could very well be deeply interconnected.

Recalling the information on the crown prince he had been scrutinizing these past few days, an idea flashed through Cheng Zhihai's mind, as if he had grasped something, yet as if he had not grasped anything at all.

In any case,

These smuggling Devil Clan members certainly had a connection to the crown prince.

Cheng Zhihai had already formed a plan in his mind and then looked at Cheng Guang again, “Guanger, where did you discover the Devil Clan’s smuggling route?”

Seeing Cheng Zhihai’s interest, Cheng Guang suddenly became less urgent, picked up his tea, took a light sip, and said, “At the canal!”

“The canal?” When Cheng Zhihai heard the word ‘canal’ from Cheng Guang’s mouth, his brow furrowed slightly.

It seemed that the word ‘canal’ touched upon an area of ignorance for him.

In the past, although he had not begun to investigate the Devil Clan’s activities, his subordinates had done some looking.

But...

No one had ever discovered that the Devil Clan’s smuggling routes were within the canals.

After all, the places where the Devil Clan appeared and attacked people were quite distant from the canals.

Could it be that these Devil Clan members deliberately traveled far along the canal, avoiding linkages the Bureau of the Lamp might make between them and the canal?

Then again, thinking about it, the places where the Devil Clan appeared, although far from the canals, were near tributaries of the canal.

Despite the vastness of the canal and its many tributaries, ordinary people wouldn’t associate the appearance of the Devil Clan with the tributaries of the canal.

Now with Cheng Guang's reminder, Cheng Zihai noticed something was off.

If the Devil Clan appeared near canal tributaries once or twice, it could still be coincidental.

But when it happened frequently, it was unlikely to be an accident.

Cheng Zihai pondered carefully, tapping the table gently with one hand, oddly resembling Cheng Guang's thoughtful pose.

Cheng Zihai was not dense. On the contrary, a person who could control the Bureau of the Lamp was far from ordinary in intelligence.

He had not uncovered the Devil Clan's activities before simply because he had not given it attention. Now that he was focused and with Cheng Guang's prompt, he immediately realized that the Devil Clan's smuggling was very likely linked to the canals.

"Did you find out how far away their location is?" Cheng Zihai asked Cheng Guang softly.

Cheng Guang nodded, "I've identified a rough area."

Hearing Cheng Guang say this, Cheng Zihai couldn't help but take a sharp breath, his eyes revealing admiration.

He hadn't expected Cheng Guang actually to have found the specific location.

Although it was unknown how the Devil Clan employed their methods to smuggle, with their high concealment, even if Cheng Guang knew they were hiding in the canal, it wouldn't have been easy to pinpoint their precise location.

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Cheng Zihai merely pondered for a moment before he also figured out how Cheng Guang had deduced the general area where the Devil Clan was smuggling through.

Even so, he was still shocked by Cheng Guang's actions.

Within the Bureau of the Lamp, there were people investigating the Devil Clan's smuggling, but the outcomes and results had not been too good.

Cheng Zhihai truly had not expected that Cheng Guang, who had only joined the Bureau of the Lamp for a mere week, would achieve such a feat.

If the general area that Cheng Guang mentioned was indeed the location of the Devil Clan's smuggling, then this would be a great accomplishment.

Even if he did not pave the way for Cheng Guang, with just this merit alone, Cheng Guang could be directly promoted to a White Lantern Catcher.

With more effort, if he could also uncover leads regarding the crown prince from this smuggling affair, being directly promoted to a Silver Lantern Catcher or even a Gold Lantern Catcher was not impossible.

Cheng Zhihai sighed with emotion, and under the surge of his feelings, he could not help but grow excited.

"Where?"

Cheng Zhihai asked.

Cheng Guang took out a map he had prepared in advance from his chest, spread it out on the stone table, and then drew a circle at one location on the canal on the map.

"It's right here."

"Eh, here?" Cheng Zhihai looked at that particular spot, revealing a look of surprise and skepticism.

It wasn't that the location Cheng Guang pointed out was too remote, but rather...

It was too conspicuous.

The location on the canal was extremely close to Crane-Crying Island and not far from the Capital city; he had even casually passed over this stretch of canal several times.

But...

He had never found anything secretive beneath this canal.

Nothing at all.

If Cheng Guang hadn't brought it up, he might never have suspected that anything was hidden within this section of the canal.

Even less so, that the Devil Clan's smuggling operation was so brazenly concealed right under the noses of the Capital city.

Could this be the so-called "darkness beneath the light"?

Cheng Zhihai stroked his chin, his expression turning grim.

He felt as though the Bureau of the Lamp had been greatly insulted without reason.

The planner behind this Devil Clan smuggling held great confidence, confident that they would not be discovered by the Bureau's members, and even more confident that they could elude detection by the Bureau and the multitude of strong beings in the Capital city.

Even Emperor Zhou would be fooled.

Based on what??

Right now, Cheng Zhihai only wanted to ask one question, why was this person behind the Devil Clan smuggling so confident?

Even if this matter was related to the crown prince, the crown prince was not an especially powerful Cultivator, so how could he be so confident that the Devil Clan would remain hidden within a hundred miles of the capital and go undetected by the countless powerful beings?

Could it be that there's more to this than just the crown prince's involvement?

Was the crown prince not only colluding with the Devil Clan but even with the Devil Emperor??

The more Cheng Zhihai thought about it, the more his scalp tingled.

He hastily shifted his gaze onto Cheng Guang, staring at him intently and gripping his arm tightly.

"Guanger, you didn't actively investigate, did you? That kind of place is not something you should be meddling with!"

Cheng Guang shook his head, "I didn't investigate; after I discovered their general area, I didn't pursue further."

Cheng Zhihai, upon hearing Cheng Guang say this, couldn't help but sigh with relief.

He was also worried out of overwhelming concern. If Cheng Guang had actively investigated, those Devils hiding beneath the canal would not have let Cheng Guang go easily.

If it really came to that point, it wouldn't be Cheng Guang coming to report the matter to him, but rather he would discover Cheng Guang's disappearance and have to find out about the situation on his own.

Cheng Zhihai furrowed his brow in thought.

The relationship between the crown prince and the Devil Clan, with the possibility of the Devil Emperor being involved, their ability to hide beneath the canal without leaving, was their goal really to draw him away from the Capital city to facilitate their assassination of Cheng Guang?

Perhaps this was part of their plans, but it definitely wasn't the crown prince's ultimate goal.

What were they really after??

Many doubts and mysteries now shrouded Cheng Zhihai's heart.

For a time, he could not figure out what the crown prince and his Devil Clan backers wanted to do or what they planned to do next?

First, they attempted to assassinate his Guanger, then they caused a disturbance at the martial contest between Great Zhou and Great Wei; all their actions aimed to throw Great Zhou into chaos.

What comes next that is especially critical for Great Zhou??

With these thoughts, a term suddenly surged into Cheng Zhihai's mind.

The Imperial Ceremony...

The crown prince's next move was to act during the Imperial Ceremony.

It was for this reason they had chosen to situate the smuggling route within the canal, hidden beneath the surface and so close to the Capital city...

Upon reaching this conclusion, Cheng Zhihai's scalp trembled. With the Devil Emperor's involvement and the intention to disrupt the Imperial Ceremony, at that time the restrictions might not function effectively.

If the Devil Clan attacked during the Imperial Ceremony, strong Cultivators might be unscathed, but others with little strength in cultivation, such as Wu Yuemei and others, would probably be unable to escape.

With numerous deaths, Great Zhou would truly be thrown into disorder!

As Cheng Zhihai connected the dots, he no longer had the desire to return home to spend a tender moment with Wu Yuemei.

Even though they had not yet located the crown prince, he now knew what the crown prince was planning to do next.

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He had to prepare early.

Cheng Zhihai quickened his pace as he left.

Cheng Guang sat in the pavilion, slowly sipping his tea, observing the moonlight from inside the pavilion.

The cool moonlight scattered down from the vault of the sky.

With no clouds in the sky, the moonlight could fall directly, unobstructed, draping the earth in a layer of silvery white gauze.

“The issue of the Devil Clan’s smuggling has been resolved, which will definitely affect the plan regarding the crown prince to some extent. At the very least, there will be less chaos at the royal ceremony. However, to thoroughly root out the crown prince won’t be so easy.”

“If I were to directly visit the King of South Ming and seize him forcefully, it would be fine if I could prove he is the crown prince. But if he has some means to hide his identity, and in the end I can’t confirm his identity as the crown prince, I’m afraid it won’t be easy to settle the matter.”

“The court officials are already terrified of the Bureau of the Lamp. If the bureau extends its hand directly to the royalty now, it would certainly be pointed at by all the officials.”

Cheng Guang considered how he might find a better way to make contact with the King of South Ming first to see if there was any opportunity or evidence that could directly identify him as the crown prince.

If there was no way to do so, Cheng Guang guessed that he could only wait until the royal ceremony to see if the King of South Ming would reveal any flaws.

After pondering for a while in the pavilion, Cheng Guang rose and returned to Million Specie Garden, washed up simply, ate nothing, and prepared to sleep.

For the past few days, in his investigations into where in the canal basin the Devil Clan was smuggling, he hadn’t had a proper sleep.

Now that most of this matter had been resolved, the remaining tasks could be completely left to Cheng Zhihai to handle, and he didn’t need to do much more.

As Cheng Guang gradually drifted off to sleep.

Things at Cheng Zhihai’s were already not so peaceful.

When he knew that the canal might involve the participation of the Devil Emperor from the Devil Clan, he couldn’t sit still. If he were to rashly take Qian Siyuan and Li Zhengyang from the Bureau of the Lamp with him, he was afraid they might not be able to suppress the Devil Emperor.

He must ask a Sky-Man to make a move.

And in the Great Zhou, the only known Sky-Men were but two or three people.

The only Sky-Man in the Capital city was Emperor Zhou.

Even though Cheng Zhihai wasn't keen on disturbing Emperor Zhou, the current situation no longer allowed him to make decisions on his own.

He had to ask Emperor Zhou to take action himself.

Cheng Zhihai went to the Imperial Palace through the night, requesting an audience with Emperor Zhou and roused him from his dragon bed.

Emperor Zhou, with his clothes in disarray and his face still bearing traces of red lipstick, looked utterly displeased, giving off an impression that his mood had been disturbed.

After tidying up his clothes somewhat, his expression turned grave as he looked at Cheng Zhihai who had pulled him from his dragon bed.

"Zhihai, on this late night, instead of staying home and accompanying Yuemei, you come to the Imperial Palace seeking me for what reason?"

Emperor Zhou was puzzled!

At this moment, he was even beginning to doubt whether Cheng Zhihai resented the fact that the Bureau of the Lamp was to be stripped from his control, and that's why he came to disrupt his mood in the middle of the night.

However, the solemn expression on Cheng Zhihai's face dispelled that thought, yet he could not imagine what else could make Cheng Zhihai disregard the etiquette between sovereign and subject, burst into the Imperial harem, and come directly to him.

Cheng Zhihai, not caring about Emperor Zhou's expression, immediately saluted and said, "Your Majesty, the matter of the Devil Clan has been investigated!"

After finishing, Cheng Zhihai added another sentence, "Guanger investigated it!"

In speaking, he also wore a look of pride.

Emperor Zhou was speechless.

The Devil Clan matter has been investigated?

The recent smuggling by the Devil Clan?

To Emperor Zhou, resolving those Devil Clan members sooner or later didn't make much difference; they were all small-fry. Seeing Cheng Zhihai's solemn manner, he thought the crown prince had been found.

Emperor Zhou yawned, his interest waning, and was about to gesture for Cheng Zhihai to leave when.

He heard Cheng Zhihai continue, "Your Majesty, this smuggling by the Devil Clan is not so simple, the crown prince is involved, and behind the scenes of this smuggling, there might be the shadow of the Devil Emperor."

At these words from Cheng Zhihai, Emperor Zhou's face began to change.

The smuggling matter of the Devil Clan involved the crown prince??

The crown prince was colluding with the Devil Clan??

Emperor Zhou pondered, feeling that, although absurd, it wasn't impossible.

The crown prince really could do anything.

However, what he hadn't anticipated was that the Devil Emperor might be involved in this matter.

What is the Devil Emperor?

A powerful being among the Devil Clan, equivalent to the Sky-Men of the Heavenly Human Realm.

Typically, such high-level beings would not take action lightly.

“

However, this time, there even seemed to be the shadow of the Devil Emperor involved.

No matter what the Devil Emperor was thinking, his presence within the borders of Great Zhou surely meant no good.

He must be dealt with!

Otherwise, who knew what hidden dangers would be planted.

Upon hearing this, Emperor Zhou had already lost much of his desire to return to bed and consort with his Noble Consorts. Instead, he had a solemn expression as he asked a question.

“Where?”

Cheng Zhihai pulled out a map, pointed to a location on it, and said, "Here."

Emperor Zhou nodded slightly, without speaking further. He changed into a different set of clothes and immediately strode out.

"Let's go and see."

Cheng Zhihai followed closely behind.

At the same time, within the capital city, figures large and small soared into the sky, bearing heavy pressures, rushing toward the canal basin.

There was no longer any calm in the Bureau of the Lamp, as countless constables were urgently summoned, riding horses toward the canal basin.

In an instant, the situation changed dramatically.

Many elite families and high-ranking officials in the capital city were awakened by the commotion.

Dressed in haste, they ran out of their homes and looked up at the sky.

"What has happened?"

"It's one thing for Bureau of the Lamp officials to be on the move, but the Emperor as well?"

"Which Duke has committed treason? No, that can't be right. Even if a Duke had committed treason, it wouldn't cause such a major commotion, and the Emperor wouldn't need to take personal action..."

"Look! The direction of the Emperor and the Bureau of the Lamp's departure seems to be the canal..."

“What are they doing at the canal???”

“I have no idea!”

Everyone was utterly confused at this moment.

Meanwhile, among the company of the Bureau of the Lamp.

Chen Qing and the other three were also following a group of constables from the Bureau of the Lamp to the canal basin. At this moment, they had no idea why, but they all felt that this sudden emergency call-up had a great deal to do with the Princely Heir.

It had only been a few days since the Princely Heir had started investigating the case, and now such a huge disturbance had arisen.

It was hard to say it had nothing to do with the Princely Heir.

By chance, Xu Hongfei was also nearby.

So they all cast their gazes towards Xu Hongfei.

“Xu Hongfei, what’s this emergency summons about? Does it have to do with the Princely Heir?”

Chen Qing asked the question that was on everyone’s mind.

Not only was Chen Qing aware that Xu Hongfei had been following the Princely Heir to investigate cases recently,

although they did not know what he was investigating, they all believed that Xu Hongfei had stumbled upon good fortune.

Being able to accompany the Princely Heir, even doing nothing, was a huge opportunity just by clinging to the Princely Heir's coattails.

What they actually didn't realize was that Chen Qing and the others initially had the same great opportunity but had personally let it slip away.

Every time they remembered this, Chen Qing and his companions nearly died of regret.

But there was no way back now.

They could only grit their teeth and swallow their pride.

Facing everyone's curiosity, Xu Hongfei had a mysterious smile on his face, "Cannot say, cannot say."

"You all underestimate the power of the Princely Heir."

Having spent so much time with Cheng Guang, Xu Hongfei had also developed the potential to speak like the Mysterious Oracle.

The Bureau of the Lamp officials around Xu Hongfei, hearing him say this, were grinding their teeth, half-tempted to bite him to death.

But before they could say anything,

they had already left the capital city, and the voices of the senior silver-and-gold constables reprimanding them reached their ears.

"Silence!"

They shut their mouths and silently rushed toward the direction of the canal.

Chapter 175: One Wrong Step Leads to Miscalculation at Every Turn!

This night, the evening breeze brought many clouds and mist.

Above the canal basin.

The curtain of darkness enveloped everything, the great night was vast, and the moon revealed half its face from behind the clouds, its mottled light scattering over the surface of the river. Beneath the cover of night, the waters of the canal flowed quietly like black silk adorned with specks of starlight.

On both sides of the canal, ancient trees towered to the sky, lush and dense. Beneath the shroud of night, their full shapes were indiscernible, resembling distorted phantasmal creatures struggling and crawling through the shadows.

Upon the canal, fishing boats, passenger boats, and cargo ships—all brightly lit—could be seen. People on board were chatting idly, singing, or drinking alone, all enjoying the tranquil and beautiful night.

The river breeze was gentle, carrying with it a hint of moisture and the fragrance of earth, brushing against people's faces, refreshing them.

Suddenly, a series of hoofbeats from afar disrupted the serene night.

A group of constables from the Bureau of the Lamp rode swiftly on their horses, galloping towards the scene.

Dressed in black brocade uniforms, they had stern faces, and the weapons in their hands flashed with a cold light under the moon. It seemed they were responding to some urgent matter, speeding along the canal.

"Are those the people from the Bureau of the Lamp?"

“To see so many constables from the Bureau of the Lamp gathered together is indeed a rare sight. What could they be doing here at the canal?”

“Who knows! But with that formation, it seems like something significant has happened.”

“No, look up at the sky, there are many people floating up there as well!!”

“Hiss! Don’t those people look like the Emperor Zhou and Cheng Zhihai from the Bureau of the Lamp??”

“Not just them, it seems that a considerable number of court officials have followed behind as well...”

“They have actually come...”

The appearance of this group immediately filled the originally calm canal with a tense atmosphere.

The people on the boats hid themselves, daring not to make a sound.

All they were just ordinary fishermen of the canal, unable to bear such a fright.

Usually, just a regular constable from the Bureau of the Lamp could scare them half to death, but now, almost the entire Bureau of the Lamp from the capital city was in action, and even Emperor Zhou himself had come along.

Who could this person be, to warrant such a substantial commotion from both the Bureau of the Lamp and Emperor Zhou?

The fishermen couldn’t figure it out, each shrinking their heads down, not daring to reveal themselves, while at the same time, quickly urging their boats to leave this area of the river.

Above the canal, Emperor Zhou and Cheng Zhihai stood on the water's surface, their feet treading upon the shadowy and formless river, eyes intently peering into the depths below.

"Is it here?"

Emperor Zhou's majestic gaze was fixed on the water beneath him, as if he too could not see clearly through the chilly and deep blackness, the hidden demons lurking underneath.

Cheng Zhihai nodded slightly, without any hesitation, "It should be right here."

In fact, Cheng Zhihai was also unable to see through what was hidden beneath the canal, though he had passed over this section of the canal basin several times but had never detected any anomalies.

Had it not been for the warning from Cheng Guang, he would never have imagined that the Devil Clan's covert route would be hidden within the canal so close to the capital city.

Emperor Zhou did not say much more. After nodding his head in agreement, the overwhelming Power of the Primordial Spirit, as vast as an ocean, surged forth from within him.

Like a storm sweeping across, the black waters of the river began to churn violently, raising towering waves—the canal was no longer at peace.

The search lasted only a breath's time when Emperor Zhou's originally casual expression abruptly turned solemn.

He softly uttered, "Huh," his gaze fixed on the river below, "It really is hidden here. Such a method of concealment is not like any ordinary restriction. Zhihai, it seems you were right, the Devil Emperor must be involved..."

Emperor Zhou's authoritative eyes continued to stare at the river's surface, addressing Cheng Zhihai with a comment, and then suddenly reached out his hand, which was enveloped in strange light, as if grasping at something, then clenched tightly.

“Crack, crack...”

Below the silent night, suddenly there was a sound like glass breaking.

That shattering sound, like falling dominoes, triggered a chain reaction, growing more and more dense, the noises louder and more intense.

Eventually...

Boom!!!

A column of eerily blood-red light burst forth from beneath the canal, shooting into the sky!

Suddenly, the river water surged, waves roiling violently, raising huge swells.

The previously calm surface of the river instantly became tempestuous and restless; the water thrashed like a giant dragon, struggling uncontrollably, crashing against the banks with deafening sounds.

Waves danced through the air, crashing into each other; the river rolled and tumbled, wave after wave, as if it sought to devour the entire world.

Above the canal, boats that had sailed some distance away were now pitching and tossing in the water, like small vessels struggling in the giant waves, at any moment at risk of being engulfed.

The wind howled, dancing wildly over the river's surface along with the waves.

A powerful shockwave spread outward in all directions, and many of the constables from the Bureau of the Lamp along the bank struggled to keep their footing against the force of the wave, swaying side to side, nearly toppling to the ground.

At the same time, underneath the canal, a series of panicked and inhuman howls erupted.

A dense Devil Qi, so thick it almost materialized, spread as the blood-red pillar of light exploded into the air.

Many constables from the Bureau of the Lamp, having just felt that almost tangible Devil Qi, all changed their expressions.

“How many of the Devil Clan could be hiding beneath this canal!?”

Chapter 176: One Wrong Step Leads to Miscalculation at Every Turn! _2

“So many of the Devil Clan hidden beneath the canal, and we never discovered them all this time?”

“Hiss... so many of the Devil Clan, lurking below the canal, what is their purpose?”

“If we hadn’t discovered these devils and had let them hide here, who knows what kind of consequences would have brewed...”

The numerous constables of the Bureau of the Lamp stood by the canal, their faces turning slightly pale with shock as they discussed nonstop.

At the same time.

This sky-high Devil Qi also caught the attention of many powerful individuals within the Capital city, each of them extending their gazes and staring above the canal, equally shocked.

“Previously there were incidents of the Devil Clan smuggling themselves, but this time, it’s not just smuggling—have they moved here!?”

“There was already a fox devil in the Capital city before; I thought it was just an accident, but I didn’t expect that so close to the Capital city, within the canal, so many of the Devil Clan were hidden.”

“It’s good that they were discovered in advance, otherwise who knows what kind of consequences would have occurred.”

Inside the Capital city, the sudden explosion of sky-reaching Devil Qi stirred up wave after wave of clamor.

The entire Capital city was now in chaos.

Meanwhile, inside Duke Zhen’s Mansion, Cheng Guang, the instigator of it all, had already entered his dreams, unaware of the outside world’s affairs.

.....

Below the turbulent pitch-black waters of the wide canal.

Suddenly, beams of silver light spilled out from the water, and numerous tall men with dark green skin emerged, exuding a strong presence, their fierce eyes flashing with brutality, and their longswords emitting a chilling light.

Their gazes were tightly fixed on Emperor Zhou above them.

In front of the imposing and powerful Emperor Zhou, high-ranking members of the Bureau of the Lamp like Cheng Zhihai and Qian Siyuan were subconsciously ignored by them.

It wasn’t that Cheng Zhihai and others didn’t exert enough oppressive feeling on the Devil Clan, but because the oppressive feeling given by Emperor Zhou was too overwhelming that they couldn’t take their eyes off him.

At the same time, below the surface of the water, numerous eyes emitting a strange light faintly appeared. Countless Devils of all sizes, all possessing not-so-low cultivation levels, were lurking.

Emperor Zhou's dignified eyes swept around and his brow slightly furrowed, seemingly dissatisfied with the scene before him.

Just as he was about to say something, suddenly a round of clapping echoed from beneath the surface of the water.

The water was now like silk, automatically parting.

Several figures slowly emerged from beneath the surface.

The leader among them, a man dressed in a white moon-colored coarse linen robe, had an extraordinary handsome face with a strangely alluring beauty. With every gesture, he seemed to exude a strong sense of charm.

He smiled and looked towards Emperor Zhou.

"Impressive, impressive, indeed worthy of being Emperor Zhou, to actually have discovered our presence. I wonder how you managed to find us?"

"By rights, my arrangement and concealment were both extremely perfect."

As the man spoke, he slowly stepped out of thin air, his whole body's Devil Qi concentrated but not released. Facing Emperor Zhou, his face still bore a smile without any hint of panic or confusion.

Emperor Zhou watched the man before him, and his previously furrowed brow somewhat relaxed, as he coldly said:

"Green Hill Fox Clan? You, a mere Devil Emperor of the Green Hill Fox Clan, dare to come to Great Zhou? If you had run away, that would have truly been troubling for me."

Emperor Zhou said that, then with a wave of his hand dismissed Cheng Zhihai and the others behind him, and took a step towards the man in white.

The man in white still wore a smile, not changing his expression even in the face of Emperor Zhou's robust aura, but simply took a step back.

"Emperor Zhou, no need to be hasty, we harbor no ill will."

As he spoke, a strange gleam blossomed in his eyes, attempting to envelop Emperor Zhou in its light.

Emperor Zhou, paying no heed, formed seals with his hands, each movement seemingly able to draw upon the power of heaven and earth. His powerful Primordial Spirit manifested behind him like a divine general from the nine heavens, bearing down on the man in white.

Although Emperor Zhou didn't know what support or purpose this Devil Emperor of the Green Hill Fox Clan had to venture alone into Great Zhou, he could feel a sense of unease from the aura emanating from this person.

Even as a Sky-Man, facing this Fox Devil Emperor, he could still sense a feeling of insecurity. If this Devil Emperor was left to hide beneath the canal unchecked, who knew what kind of disaster would eventually brew!

Emperor Zhou's eyes turned icy, and the intent to kill surged within him.

The man in white's eyes, flashing with a devilish luster, showed a trace of surprise.

What surprised him wasn't just that Emperor Zhou had suddenly discovered their hiding place but that Emperor Zhou's cultivation was so profound.

He felt the killing intent and nearly overwhelming aura radiating from Emperor Zhou.

Once the royalty of the Four Directions Mortal World reached the Sky-Man Realm, they weren't comparable to ordinary Sky-Men.

Even though he was a Devil Emperor, having stepped into this supreme realm of heaven and earth hundreds of years earlier than the young Emperor Zhou, he might not be a match for Emperor Zhou.

As the man in white acted to defend himself, Emperor Zhou's Proving Dao Map came bearing down, and he felt, apart from the world-ending pressure it contained, that it also pulsed with an extremely pure Power of the Primordial Spirit.

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The Power of the Primordial Spirit condensed together without leaking the slightest bit, concentrating in one place like a sharp spike attacking him. Around him, the clouds were light and the breeze gentle, to the extent that even the river under his feet did not ripple in the slightest.

The Primordial Spirit was true and concentrated, returning to one place, each and every movement could move the power of heaven and earth, the ability of the gods.

This was precisely the Heavenly Human Realm of the Great Zhou Imperial Family's Spirit Dao in the Four Directions Mortal World.

If he were to forcibly fight against Emperor Zhou, not to mention whether he could gain any advantage, the least that would happen was he wouldn't be able to return to the Eight-layered Devil Realm safely. If the battle dragged on a bit longer, he might even be slain here.

At that time, it would truly be a case of 'trying to steal a chicken only to end up losing the rice.'

The thoughts of the man in white flickered like lightning and fire, and in his heart, he already harbored the intention to retreat.

With a wave of his hand, a crescent-shaped jade disk suddenly hovered in front of him, emitting a faint glow that enveloped him like tassels.

The divine attack, laden with the pure and vast power of the Primordial Spirit, when it struck his light shield, it was as if it encountered something extremely slippery and slid off without any force.

In a flash of lightning, Emperor Zhou's expression remained unchanged, and he pointed his finger.

A speck of golden starlight shot from his fingertip.

It was tiny, like a grain of gold sand drifting away from between his fingers.

Deities appeared, their forms massive like mountains, radiating intense light, their dignified faces covered in flowing radiance, too dazzling to gaze upon directly, filled with majesty and sanctity.

He formed hand seals, and intense energy fluctuations suddenly surged around him, powerful currents spraying out from within his body like a galactic waterfall, tumultuous and surging.

Beams of divine light burst forth from his body, like brilliant stars falling from the heavens.

Upon seeing this, the man in white's complexion changed drastically.

This Path of the Primordial Spirit, this might of deities, was enough to slay gods and exterminate immortals!

This Emperor Zhou doesn't play by the rules of martial conduct, huh!

He didn't even test the waters; he went straight for the kill from the start!?

The man in white desperately channeled the demonic power throughout his body, and a black saber formed from the turbulent demonic power instantly condensed in his hand, but with a "puff," the divine form and his black saber merely touched, and after a chilling sound of explosion, not only the black saber but also his entire arm burst into indistinct fragments of flesh and bone, a horrific sight to witness!

At this moment, the man in white's face was devoid of its usual composure, and sweat dripped like rain.

His Green Hill fox clan was originally not particularly skilled in offensive combat, and he had assumed that facing Emperor Zhou, even if he couldn't gain the upper hand, he should at least be able to hold his own. But he didn't expect Emperor Zhou's cultivation strength to be so formidable.

"The royal bloodline of the Four Directions Mortal World is indeed impressive," he said.

The man in white took a deep breath, and while his shattered arm wasn't visibly healing to the naked eye, it did quickly stop bleeding and began to close the wound.

His strength was actually not weak, and he could even fight against ordinary Heavenly Human Realm martial artists, but he never expected to be no match for Emperor Zhou within a few exchanges.

The royal bloodline of the Four Directions Mortal World...

Those who step into the Heavenly Human Realm with Spirit Dao are not ordinary in strength.

"Emperor Zhou, can we let this matter go?" the man in white waved his hand, and his robe returned to its pristine state, he looked toward Emperor Zhou who stood out of nowhere in the distance, his dignified expression like that of a deity, and he asked with a smile and in a soft voice.

"Even though I have stepped into your Great Zhou, I haven't caused any significant incidents, and you haven't suffered any losses. Can't we just let bygones be bygones?"

Emperor Zhou faced the man in white's words with no excessive reaction. The faint light enveloped him, making it impossible to discern Emperor Zhou's expression.

"End it yourself. Since you've trespassed into my Great Zhou, this matter cannot be let go. You're at least a Devil Emperor; I'll allow you to end your life here. If I have to take action, your spirit and form will be completely destroyed."

Upon hearing this, the man in white's mouth twitched slightly, and he couldn't help but retreat step by step.

His mentality was no longer as composed as it was at the beginning, and his mind began to curse silently.

He truly did not know how Emperor Zhou had discovered his location.

From the start, their plan was executed perfectly. Logically, even Emperor Zhou shouldn't have been able to detect his presence so quickly.

The group of devils hidden in the canal had been strictly controlled by him. Except for the time when some of the Devil Clan went out to assassinate the Princely Heir of Duke Zhen's Mansion to attract Cheng Zhihai's attention, at no other time were they supposed to be discernible under their concealment.

It should've been impossible for them to be detected.

The man in white couldn't understand!

His mind then flashed to a thought—could it be that a member of the Human Race leaked their whereabouts??

No...

It shouldn't be the case; that human had already been at odds with Emperor Zhou long before he colluded with the Devil Clan.

It was impossible for him to betray them.

So how did Emperor Zhou suddenly discover them and pinpoint their location so accurately??

The man in white had always thought of himself as a Devil Emperor, smarter than the vast majority of the Devil Clan, but at this moment, he found that his brain was not quite functioning well enough.

He just couldn't figure it out.

How Emperor Zhou had discovered their whereabouts.

And as Emperor Zhou closed in step by step,

The man in white felt a headache coming on but showed no excessive panic. He took a jade disk from within his bosom with one hand, and the jade disk began to spin rapidly around him, casting thousands of lights.

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In an instant, he and the many members of the Devil Clan behind him were enveloped within it.

Within just a few breaths, their figures had already started to blur.

Emperor Zhou's gaze remained unchanged, but he raised an eyebrow with interest, "Great Migratory Treasure? Treasures capable of breaking the Border Area are rare. It seems that after living for hundreds of years, you, the Devil Emperor, have amassed quite a collection of good items."

As Emperor Zhou spoke, he extended his finger, and a glint of golden light shone at its tip.

"Emperor Zhou, we shall meet again if fate allows. But, is it not excessive for you to attack me before I depart?"

The man in white paled slightly, although he had anticipated this, he was unable to stop it.

The power of Emperor Zhou had surpassed his imagination.

If he had taken Emperor Zhou by surprise and launched an attack when he was unprepared, perhaps he could have seriously wounded him in one fell swoop. But now, in this straightforward confrontation without any tricks, facing Emperor Zhou, the man in white only felt an overwhelming sense of powerlessness.

A green radiance in front of him surged as he marshalled all his strength to resist Emperor Zhou's attack.

All he could do now was to protect himself and the few individuals beside him; as for the other members of the Devil Clan, he was powerless to assist them.

Dealing with Emperor Zhou alone was already strenuous enough, let alone facing the surrounding constables from the Bureau of the Lamp, and the likes of Cheng Zhihai, who sent shivers down his spine.

One wrong move, and all subsequent ones could be missteps.

They had hidden themselves exceedingly well, but had been suddenly exposed, pulled from the shadows into the sunlight, their overall combined strength no match for Emperor Zhou and his allies' homeground advantage.

Being able to escape back to the Eight-layered Devil Realm was already quite a feat.

As for whether the other Devil Clan members and Devil Emperors would mock him afterward, the man in white thought it was of no great consequence.

Normally collected, his face now spread with a hint of hatred in this moment.

"Who exactly discovered our whereabouts? Who??"

"Find him! Find him, flay his skin, extract his bones!"

The man in white thought to himself, as a thunderous roar filled his ears.

Divine suppression from Emperor Zhou had already reached in front of him.

A torrential power with a deep aura of annihilation rushed towards him.

“Shuxuan, come to my side.”

The man in white pulled the startled and confused girl next to him to the front, sheltering her beneath him.

Brilliant lights shone between heaven and earth, the aura of destruction spreading out like invisible shockwaves in all directions.

Waves upon waves surged across the surface of the canal.

After the white brilliance dissipated,

Emperor Zhou slowly lowered his hand, his majestic gaze sweeping across the surroundings.

Many of the Devil Clan’s attempts to teleport were disrupted, and they fell from the sky like dumplings.

The man in white and many members of the Devil Clan next to him had vanished without a trace, clearly having all escaped back to the Devil Region.

Emperor Zhou’s brow furrowed slightly, his fists tightened and then slowly relaxed.

The pressure the man in white exerted was also considerable; had it not been for the fact that this man in white belonged to the Green Hill Fox Tribe, if another Devil Clan Emperor had come, perhaps he might not have dealt with him so easily.

Although this time he let the Devil Emperor escape, at least no major disaster had occurred.

“Great Migratory Treasure, huh, next time you come to Great Zhou, I would like to see how many treasures of this caliber you have...”

Emperor Zhou’s face turned slightly cold. He waved his robes and, stepping through the air, headed towards the Imperial Palace.

“Zhihai, I leave the remaining members of the Devil Clan to you. Interrogate them thoroughly and see if you can find any trace of the crown prince.”

“Colluding with the Devil Clan, the crown prince really has fallen.”

Emperor Zhou’s voice rang in Cheng Zhihai’s ears.

Having said that, Emperor Zhou’s figure disappeared from sight.

Cheng Zhihai watched the remaining Devil Clan members, who were floating in the canal in a panic, a hint of murderous intent crossing his solemn face.

“Keep those with strength above the sixth rank for interrogation at the Bureau of the Lamp; the rest are to be executed on the spot!”

Along the canal, constables from the Bureau of the Lamp uniformly acknowledged the order.

They had been eager and impatient for the command.

Upon receiving Cheng Zhihai’s command, the constables hesitated not a moment before stepping into the canal, treading upon the water’s surface, engaging in battle with the Devil Clan.

Qi surged powerfully, sharp and fierce, as if intent on completely tearing apart the Devil Clan.

The sounds of battle could not be quelled in an instant.

Even from afar in the Capital city, one could faintly see intense bursts of Qi light emanating from the canal's direction outside the Capital city.

Amidst the frequent flashes, vast waves of Qi fluctuated outward.

Even without being close to the vicinity of the canal, the intense fluctuations of Qi and the fierceness of the battle could still be felt.

The next morning, at sunrise, a mist and a faint blush of dawn hung over the canal.

The sun rose slowly, illuminating the stretch of canal once shrouded in darkness.

Sunlight reflected off the river's surface, creating streaks of golden light.

The canal still bore a strong scent of blood; the corpses and severed limbs of the Devil Clan floated on the surface, tinting the water red with blood.

But under the sunlight, the canal that had been bloodstained and gloomy was instantly transformed into a warm and tranquil place.

The constables of the Bureau of the Lamp, after a night of battle, showed no signs of fatigue, quite the opposite; they were all invigorated.

Why?

The reason is simple!

Because all these Devil Clan members represented merit!

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Ordinarily, to gain some achievements, one had to either investigate cases or gather intelligence, most of which were time-consuming and involved meticulous work. However, at this moment, during such a large-scale battle, killing or capturing a member of the Devil Clan was considered an achievement.

The tasks varied in difficulty, but they had the advantage of being straightforward and quick!

Many constables from the Bureau of the Lamp, in just one night, had accumulated more achievements than they had in the first half of the year. Despite their injuries, they were all smiles.

After tidying up, they escorted the valuable devils towards the Capital city.

Along the way, the appearance of the devils attracted many onlookers. Even after reaching the Capital city, those who had been following the battle over the canal basin since last night rushed to the city gate at dawn to await the return of the Bureau of the Lamp's constables.

Under the watchful eyes of the public, many constables from the Bureau of the Lamp couldn't help but raise their heads higher and puff out their chests. This was a rare opportunity for them to show off in front of others and was quite treasured.

While the constables of the Bureau of the Lamp were escorting the devils back to the Bureau, on the opposing street, a Luxurious Jade Carriage slowly approached.

Heading straight toward the line of people from the Bureau of the Lamp.

Many noticed the oncoming carriage and their expressions shifted subtly.

"Is that... the Queen of the South Ming's carriage?"

“Why is the Queen of the South Ming out? Doesn’t she usually stay within her residence and seldom goes out?”

“Maybe she’s in high spirits and wants to see what’s going on at the Bureau of the Lamp.”

“Everyone, please step aside and don’t block the Queen of the South Ming’s path.”

The crowd hurriedly cleared the way.

Standing at the forefront of the Bureau of the Lamp’s troop, Qian Siyuan also noticed the South Ming Queen’s carriage slowly approaching from the distance. He made no attempt to avoid it even though it was heading straight for the group of constables.

Qian Siyuan’s brows furrowed slightly as he didn’t understand why the South Ming Queen, who usually kept a low profile in the Capital city, would suddenly appear and block the Bureau of the Lamp’s path.

“Does the Princess have any matters?”

Qian Siyuan asked loudly.

“Nothing important, it’s just that last night, when I saw the commotion at the Bureau of the Lamp across the canal basin, curiosity got the better of me and I came to have a look,” said the Queen of the South Ming.

“Where did you find out that there were such devils hidden within the canal? I too have passed through there before, and in hindsight, it’s quite frightening.”

The autumn wind was bleak, the weather cool, and the grass withered with frost.

The Luxurious Jade Carriage slowly approached, its bead and brocade curtains gently lifted by a jade hand, and a pleasing voice reached Qian Siyuan’s ears, leaving him uncertain about how to answer for a moment.

In theory, he ought to respond to the questions of the Queen of the South Ming.

But as a member of the Bureau of the Lamp, these matters were a secret, not to be disclosed.

Not to answer would be disrespectful.

To answer, inappropriate.

Qian Siyuan's complexion darkened a bit, like dew-covered frosty grass, obscured and indistinct.

"It was discovered by our Princely Heir, but how the Princely Heir came to know of it is not within my knowledge."

Qian Siyuan answered ambiguously.

The Queen of the South Ming waited quietly for a moment, hoping to hear a more detailed explanation from Qian Siyuan, but seeing his tight-lipped demeanor, she seemed to lose interest and let the curtain fall back, "It seems Mr. Qian does not wish to bother with the matters of a lady like myself. Let it be then."

With that, she instructed her bearers to drive the Jade Carriage away, opening up the path.

Qian Siyuan let out a sigh of relief and respectfully nodded to the Queen of the South Ming. He led the constables of the Bureau of the Lamp, escorting the devils back to the Bureau.

The King of South Ming was the Emperor Zhou's half-brother, not assertive or competitive, content with a life as a leisurely Prince.

As such, he enjoyed the trust and affection of Emperor Zhou.

Though powerless and without influence,

his status within the Great Zhou Dynasty was incomparably honorable.

Given the esteemed status of the King of South Ming, his Princess was naturally no ordinary figure. While outsiders didn't know the background of the Princess of South Ming, she was known for her stunning beauty and was a hidden gem within the Capital city.

However, for some unknown reason, the Princess had lately come to the Capital city for a visit and had not yet returned to the territories of the King of South Ming.

And now she had even begun inquiring about the affairs of the Bureau of the Lamp.

Although it seemed like a casual inquiry, Qian Siyuan still had the faint feeling that the South Ming Queen's sudden interception of the Bureau of the Lamp was not so simple.

Yet he could not fathom any deeper reasons behind it.

After pondering it for a while without coming to any conclusion, he decided not to dwell on it any further and led everyone back to the Bureau of the Lamp.

Now that the devils within the canal had been uncovered, the most pressing matter was whether it was possible to extract information about the whereabouts of the crown prince from these devils.

It was confirmed that the crown prince had certainly colluded with the Devil Clan.

The nature of their mutual benefits and their collusion, as well as their purposes, Qian Siyuan felt it needless to delve deeper. They were undoubtedly planning treason, nothing surprising there.

And just as Qian Siyuan and the others from the Bureau of the Lamp had returned,

within the Great Zhou Imperial Palace,

Taihe Hall,

a solemn and majestic atmosphere pervaded the grand hall of the Imperial Palace. The towering dome overhead was adorned with glittering decorations that complemented the hall's luxurious and exquisite furnishings.

The golden curtains above the throne cascaded down like a flowing waterfall of gold. The throne itself was carved from precious sandalwood, elaborately sculpted with intricate patterns, and the seat was covered with luxurious silk cushions.

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Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou sat upright on his throne.

His expression was majestic, stern, and he did not engage in careless chit-chat.

One hand supported his chin as he silently watched the countless court ministers below him.

The massive columns of the hall were carved with ancient inscriptions and deep, meaningful patterns. Sunlight streamed through the glazed tiles on the roof, casting light in every corner of the hall, making the entire space even more resplendent with gold and jade.

The court officials stood solemnly on the red carpet, aligned in neat rows like silent statues.

Under the bright light, their faces appeared even more solemn and focused. Though they were silent, the slight shaking of their forms and the beads of sweat rolling down their foreheads betrayed the immense pressure they were feeling.

As time ticked away, Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou did not say anything to the ministers; his gaze drifted outside the hall.

Tap, tap, tap.

Outside the hall.

Cheng Zhihai walked with measured steps, appearing respectfully and greeting Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou with a bow.

“Your Majesty.”

Emperor Zhou subtly nodded and asked, “Have you found out anything?”

Cheng Zhihai slightly shook his head.

“The barriers constructed beneath that canal are not something that the Devil Clan could accomplish overnight. Someone was involved. However, the Devils have been there for quite a while, and almost all traces of the person who helped the Devil Emperor with the barrier have been erased. It’s almost impossible to confirm who assisted the Devil Emperor.”

Emperor Zhou wasn’t surprised and nodded in acknowledgement. His majestic gaze swept across the assembled officials. The grand hall returned to a state of eerie silence, yet the pressure was even more palpable than before, bearing down on every official’s heart.

Emperor Zhou looked at the officials for a long while before waving his hand, “You all may leave now. Zhihai, come with me.”

Emperor Zhou stood and walked towards the side chamber.

Only when Emperor Zhou’s figure disappeared from the grand hall did the officials feel a weight lifted from them; they exhaled in relief and the chatter began.

“What’s wrong with His Majesty? Why such a gloomy face this early in the morning?”

“His Majesty is very unhappy about last night’s incident with the Devil Emperor. Just by himself, the Devil Emperor wouldn’t have been able to set up those barriers beneath the canal, nor could he have hidden so many of the Devil Clan under the canals near the Capital city without being detected for so long.”

“Does that mean we have a traitor from the Devil Clan here in the Capital city?”

“It seems so. His Majesty just doesn’t know who it is yet. It’s likely the crown prince.”

“But wasn’t the crown prince reported missing?”

“Yes, and that’s why the most urgent task at hand is to find the crown prince. Look, His Majesty has just summoned Cheng Zhihai again.”

“Speaking of which, how were the Devil Clan exposed?”

“It wasn’t the Devil Clan who exposed themselves, but Cheng Zhihai who took the initiative to report to His Majesty. It’s said that the Princely Heir of Duke Zhen’s Mansion discovered the whereabouts of the Devil Clan...”

“Hiss... The Princely Heir of Duke Zhen’s Mansion? Can that Princely Heir really be so capable...?”

“That’s what I’m saying. I just heard it from others. The Bureau of the Lamp wouldn’t lie about this. Perhaps it really was the Crown Prince’s doing...”

The court officials chattered endlessly, many glancing at Cheng Zhihai’s departing figure, feeling a mix of emotions as he walked towards the side chamber.

“If Cheng Zhihai manages to find the whereabouts of the crown prince, his power and influence are certain to increase.”

“But if Cheng Zhihai fails to find the crown prince, I’m afraid the situation won’t end so easily.”

“Considering that the Town-Nation Duke’s Heir managed to detect the Devil Clan’s movements this time, who’s to say he won’t be able to locate the crown prince in the future?”

“That’s impossible. How many years has it been since the crown prince was last seen? Even we court officials have almost forgotten his face. He’s been gone for so long that if it hadn’t been recently mentioned, I would have thought the crown prince was already dead.”

“Perhaps Qian Siyuan and others from the Bureau of the Lamp might still have a chance to find him, but the Crown Prince likely doesn’t have much opportunity. Let’s hope they find him soon, or else the skies over Great Zhou may well change.”

“Hush! Watch your words!”

The murmuring of the court officials gradually subsided as they each left the grand hall.

Meanwhile, amidst the discussions of the court, Cheng Zhihai entered the side chamber.

Inside the side chamber.

Emperor Zhou of Great Zhou sat at a tea table, pouring steaming hot tea. The clear water sent forth a unique fragrance of tea leaves, which diffused into the surrounding air.

“Zhihai, come, have a seat.”

Emperor Zhou gestured with his hand.

After respectfully bowing, Cheng Zhihai sat down.

Emperor Zhou sipped his tea, his authoritative gaze resting on Cheng Zhihai's face.

"Who do you think could have been involved in this matter with the Devil Clan?"

"And which of them might be connected to the crown prince?"

Upon hearing this, Cheng Zhihai's face showed a hint of surprise; Emperor Zhou's questioning was too sharp.

Cheng Zhihai suspected that as soon as he uttered a name, Emperor Zhou would immediately have him raid homes and conduct investigations, preferring to wrongly kill than to let anyone slip through.

Cheng Zhihai's brows furrowed tightly as he pondered for a long time. Slowly lifting his head, he replied, "Your servant, does not know."

Emperor Zhou's majestic gaze flicked over Cheng Zhihai's stern and respectful face and couldn't help but shake his head with a chuckle.

"Zhihai, you are too cautious. In the current situation, without breaking, nothing can be established. The crown prince has hidden too deeply, and there must still be those within the court who are loyal to him."

As he spoke, a sorrowful expression crept into the imposing eyes of Emperor Zhou.

"My father chose the crown prince to be the emperor, but under his leadership, Great Zhou almost perished. If it weren't for Duke Zhen and the Empress Dowager's support for me as emperor, how could Great Zhou be in its current state?"

"Since ascending the throne, I have been diligent and devoted to the country and its people, never slacking off in the slightest. Yet, there are still those in the court who do not accept me."

“They all think that I am not the true Son of Heaven.”

Upon hearing these words, Cheng Zhihai felt a jolt in his heart and hastily stood up, respectfully saying, “Your Majesty, you mustn’t think such things.”

Emperor Zhou’s brow softened slightly as he raised his hand gently, pressing it down, “Sit.”

Cheng Zhihai reseated himself.

Emperor Zhou took another sip of his tea, closed his eyes, and took a moment to collect himself. The expression on his face slowly turned icy.

“However, I am ultimately the emperor of the Great Zhou Dynasty, the ruler of the Great Zhou Imperial Family.”

“The crown prince, a dead man who refuses to collapse, has come back to ally with the Devil Clan and cause chaos in Great Zhou. I cannot tolerate this.”

“Zhihai, in your investigation of the crown prince, do not overlook anyone related to him. Find one, exterminate ten clans, extend the punishment to all associated. Leave none behind!”

Cheng Zhihai felt a slight shock but nodded slightly in agreement.

“A month’s time, and the Imperial Family’s ceremonial rites will soon begin.”

Emperor Zhou said, opening his eyes slightly and looking towards Cheng Zhihai, his tone becoming a bit more lenient.

“If you resolve the matter of the crown prince before then, I will not move against your Bureau of the Lamp.”

By saying this, Emperor Zhou effectively provided Cheng Zhihai with a reassurance.

As long as the matter of the crown prince is resolved before the Imperial Family's ceremonial rites, as long as Cheng Zhihai is around, the Bureau of the Lamp shall remain under Cheng Zhihai's control.

Zhao Jin, who stood by Emperor Zhou's side, also glanced sideways upon hearing this, observing Cheng Zhihai a few more times.

But he didn't dwell on it too much.

In Zhao Jin's view, Cheng Zhihai had already been extremely fortunate to uncover the affair of the Devil Clan. The Devil Clan's hiding place was so deeply concealed, that if it hadn't been for the Crown Prince's coincidental discovery of the Devil Clan's location, Cheng Zhihai might still be unaware of the anomaly in that place.

Waiting for Cheng Zhihai to find the crown prince by himself, well, that probably wouldn't happen.

Perhaps they would have to rely once more on Cheng Guang, the Princely Heir.

To see if the Princely Heir could have another stroke of great luck...

Thinking this, Zhao Jin almost imperceptibly shook his head with a wry smile.

Having one stroke of luck was already quite difficult for the Princely Heir; how could he be fortunate twice over?

Within a month's time, it was simply impossible to find the crown prince.

Speaking of which...

Why did the crown prince collude with the Devil Clan? Was it just to assassinate the Princely Heir and disrupt the Great Zhou and Great Wei's martial competition?

Or was there another purpose?

Zhao Jin was no fool and had already begun to ponder this.

While Zhao Jin mused, Cheng Zhihai, after hearing Emperor Zhou's words, remained unflustered and simply nodded slightly in acknowledgment.

Seeing Cheng Zhihai's respectful demeanor, Emperor Zhou sighed, aware that there was already some estrangement between him and Cheng Zhihai.

Such is the way of emperors.

Emperors have no friends.

Cheng Zhihai is his subject, his brother-in-law, and also his friend.

The relationships compounded.

Yet the bond as a subject took the greater part.

Emperor Zhou waved his hand, "You may leave."

Cheng Zhihai bowed respectfully once more and then turned to depart.

After Cheng Zhihai had left.

Emperor Zhou stood up, his hands clasped behind his back as he gazed toward the slowly rising sun in the east, silent.