

Tome of Troubled Times

Chapter 6: Beimang

In just a few days, news of the illustrious Luo family being purged by the Four Idols and Blood God cults spread far and wide, shocking all who heard it.

Even though Zhao Changhe had heard people saying that these were troubled times, things were not *completely* out of control just yet. Bandits were running amok, different clans eyed each other with hostility, great families claimed pieces of land as their own, and the ambitious were restless... However, there was still a nominal empire ruled by the great Xia dynasty. These were clearly the twilight years of the dynasty, but it had not yet devolved into a period of different powers striving for control over the country.

There were those who occupied parts of the realm, acting as kings within their territory. Yet, at least, there was still no one openly raising banners of rebellion. They remained at the level of bandits and cultists.

The dividing line between this political situation and truly troubled times would be crossed when government officials started being killed in revolt, and cities besieged. Only then would the imperial court have lost all its authority.

The Luo family was not a particularly major power, but they had been around for a long time and could be considered a great clan. Furthermore, they were special for their alleged ties to the Imperial Clan.

Since he had arrived in this land, Zhao Changhe had already heard Yue Hongling say it as such. While no one could know exactly what kind of relationship the Luo Family had with the Imperial Clan, it was not necessarily hearsay. The fact that First Seat Tang had rushed over to the village in the dead of night without waiting for her army to arrive even when she was sick was clear evidence of this.

A family with ties to the Imperial Clan being exterminated by cultists overnight was undoubtedly a slap to the Imperial Clan's face. It was a prelude to the arrival of troubled times. The rain had yet to come, but winds were already rattling the palace.

Amidst all this, a name hitherto unheard of was beginning to spread through the entire country through wanted posters.

Zhao Changhe the Manslayer!

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A thousand *li* away, Beimang.

As far as the eye could see, snow covered the mountains in a sheet of pure white.

Zhao Changhe, whose reputation was growing, found this to be a pain in the ass.

He stood on the peak of a mountain, trembling in the cold. His clothes were thin; he felt like he was about to freeze to death. By his side stood Luo Qi. The two were expressionless.

In addition to being sick, First Seat Tang was alone that night and had no way of forcefully claiming Zhao Changhe's head while surrounded by enemies. She could only leave with Luo Zhenwu's corpse. Due to his show of dedication, Zhao Changhe was brought here by the Blood God Cult. They thought that Luo Qi was Zhao Changhe's accomplice, so he was also brought along.

Luo Qi had clearly never planned on joining any demonic cult, but neither could he run. He had no choice but to remain where he was. His life had been turned upside down; naturally, for the whole journey, his face was sour.

Zhao Changhe could sympathize with Luo Qi, but he did not feel that he had dragged Luo Qi down into a pit. After all, the entire Luo Family Village was dead. If Zhao Changhe had not done what he had done, the two of them might have been killed. Even if First Seat Tang had managed to save Luo Zhenwu, she could not look after a few outer sect disciples. Zhao Changhe was ninety-nine percent sure she would have been unable to protect all of them alone. To put it bluntly, Zhao Changhe had saved both Luo Qi and himself; they would have also been killed by the cultists had things gone differently.

Luo Qi was upset, but he understood all of this, and consequently stuck with Zhao Changhe. The latter was happy with this. In any case, Luo Qi was the only person he was familiar with here...

Zhao Changhe had no qualms about joining the cult. Things had already progressed this far, so he might as well. How much worse could a demonic cult have been compared to the Luo family? On the road, the cultists had shown no hostility. They had kept a low-profile as they brought the two of them back, and all approved of Zhao Changhe's actions. They were even quite cordial with him, calling him a good man. However, Zhao Changhe found all of this to be a pain in the ass.

Beimang, Beimang[1]... It existed in Zhao Changhe's world and was quite famous, so when he first heard the name, he thought that this was ancient China. It turned out this was not the case. This Beimang and the Beimang he was familiar with were completely unrelated. This mountain was devoid of people and covered in ice and snow for a thousand *li*. The city located near the mountain was also small and out-of-the-way. This was clearly not Heluo[2].

This was not ancient China. No, this was, in every respect, a different world. Zhao Changhe had no idea what relation ancient China had with his dream, if any at all.

Is this world similar to ancient China and do its inhabitants speak modern Chinese because everything is actually inside my own dream?

Zhao Changhe did not have an answer and found the whole thing difficult to bear. After sleeping and waking up multiple times on the road these past few days, he had never once returned to the real world. In other words...there was likely no possibility of returning.

He never had any desire to transmigrate to another world. *I still have my parents at home. Why the fuck would I want to go to another world?* At this moment, he thought most of home.

Zhao Changhe was not concerned with whether slaying the witch would allow him to go back. If the fortune teller had the ability to send him to another world, this meant that it was possible to obtain the power to return. It was clear to Zhao Changhe that gaining strength was his number one priority. For example, by opening his own Profound Gate. Only then would he have a chance of finding out how to go back.

Nothing else mattered. Forget about returning; if he did not manage to pick up martial arts, it was likely he would freeze to death here.

Luo Qi suddenly asked, "Did you do something that audacious to learn the cult's martial arts?"

Zhao Changhe looked at the expressionless Luo Qi and shook his head, "There's no audacity to speak of. I was simply taking revenge for the innocent people of the Zhao House and out of concern for my own safety. We might have both died if I didn't do what I did."

Luo Qi said, "Then you should have given a fake name! Why did you so bravely declare yourself 'Zhao Changhe the Manslayer'?"

Zhao Changhe smiled. "What if I told you Zhao Changhe was a fake name? If I change my name, who's gonna know who I am?"

Luo Qi almost choked. He looked away, and Zhao Changhe found his reaction sort of cute. He then continued, "Nah, it's my real name."

"What the fuck?!"

"I'm too lazy to conceal my identity. A man of character never changes his name." Zhao Changhe smiled widely. "Besides, don't you think what I did was pretty badass?"

Luo Qi was speechless. *He did this to show off?!*

Zhao Changhe finally heaved a sigh. "Anyway, my wanted posters have been put up everywhere. As long as the drawing of my face matches, it's all the same whether I use my real name or a fake one... Uh...yeah. I hope First Seat Tang isn't a good artist."

Luo Qi laughed coldly. "First Seat Tang is an expert of the four arts of the zither, Go, calligraphy, and painting. She is both beautiful and well-educated, and her name is known throughout the great Xia."

Zhao Changhe shrugged. "Well, whatever. What's done is done. What else can I do about it?"

Luo Qi did not bother himself with this any longer and changed the topic of conversation, "There's nothing strange about seeking out greater heights... But you might be disappointed to hear that it was the Blood God Cult that took us in, not the Four Idols Cult. The Blood God Cult is not much better than the Luo family. In some regards, it might actually be worse."

Zhao Changhe had initially thought he would be able to join the Four Idols Cult. It was Venerable Vermillion Bird of the Four Idols Cult that had the ability to purge the Luo family, not the Blood God Cult. The latter merely played a supporting role. Thus, once First Seat Tang left, Venerable Vermillion Bird also took her leave without saying anything. The others were mostly disciples from the Blood God Cult, so it was no surprise that Zhao Changhe was taken in by them.

Moreover, he was not even brought to the main headquarters with Cult Leader Xue. He was brought to a small outpost in Beimang. The Blood God Cult clearly did not consider him very important.

There was nothing strange about this. He was a traitorous man who had never practiced any martial arts, so what kind of future could he have? However, a demonic cult needed to recruit members. With his show of dedication, the cult naturally saw Zhao Changhe as one of them. If they did not even let *him*

in, where else were they going to find members?

If Zhao Changhe was a few years younger or had a strong cultivation, he might have been given a good position in the cult, unlike now when he and Luo Qi were not even permitted to head inside and observe the sacrificial rites. They had to wait outside in the cold.

"There's nothing to be disappointed about. As long as there's somewhere to go, it's fine. In any case, we would've been killed if we stayed in the Luo family. What choice was there?" Zhao Changhe spoke no more about this. "Are you still angry at me? It's already been a few days. When are you going to get over it? And to be clear, I wasn't the one

who wiped out the Luo family. If I didn't kill Luo Zhenwu, do you think you'd be alive right now? Don't tell me you still harbor some blind loyalty for him and you want to take revenge."

Luo Qi sighed. "It's as you said. The ones who wiped out the Luo family were the Four Idols Cult and Blood God Cult. Why would I blame you? It's just that my life has just been turned upside down. The future is uncertain and I'm not in the best mood. It's not that I'm being nasty intentionally. I hope you can understand."

Zhao Changhe very much *could* understand. He asked, "Then do you hate the Blood God Cult? You're a member of the Luo family. Your parents... Were they present during the raid?"

"Heh..." Luo Qi shook his head. "My parents left this world a long time ago... I just think it's strange. Why did they want to exterminate the Luo family?"

The reason behind the attack was of great importance. Zhao Changhe thought again of the second card that he had drawn. Since the Back Eye card had turned out to be the real thing, it was more likely than not that the position card had some relation to the Luo family. *Maybe I can ask around after joining the cult...*

Luo Qi said, "The Blood God Cult is not as mysterious as the Four Idols Cult. Many things happen in this world. Cults commonly recruit bandits of all stripes to loot for them... That's why members of a cult are split between official disciples and outsider bandits. I don't know how they'll treat us... If you can officially join the cult as a disciple, remember to share some of the benefits with me."

Of course, this was Luo Qi's motive for easing the relationship between Zhao Changhe and himself. Zhao Changhe was the one who had distinguished himself. It was he who had a real chance of joining the cult as a disciple, not Luo Qi.

Yue Hongling had mistaken the black-clothed men responsible for slaughtering the Zhao House for bandits belonging to the Blood God Cult because their level of martial arts was too crude; she was unable to figure out who they were. Zhao Changhe knew that if he was to be put in the same position as them, there would be no point in joining the cult.

The secret door behind opened, revealing a small entrance. Someone from within shouted, "The Branch Master wishes to speak to the two of you."

Both Luo Qi and Zhao Changhe knew their chance had come. They looked at each other before entering.

Within a small depression in the mountain, underneath the ice and snow, was a secret door. Behind it lay a winding pathway leading downward into the belly of the mountain. At the end of the pathway, there was a fairly spacious hall hosting a pool of blood with a

ceremonial platform in the middle. There was enough space by the sides to allow hundreds of people to join in on the sacrificial rites.

This was where the sacrificial altar of this branch of the Blood God Cult was located, and the outsider bandits were barred from entering. They could only remain within the outpost, outside on the cold and windy mountain.

The torches surrounding the pool of blood were brightly lit. More than a hundred disciples quietly sat in prayer around the altar in a strange formation. The branch master was on the ceremonial platform, mumbling to himself. From what Zhao Changhe could make out, he was wishing for protection from the Blood God, and for their operations to go smoothly.

This was a cult, not a clan.

But to Zhao Changhe, there did not seem to be anything supernatural about the billowing waves of blood. On the contrary, he found it merely superstitious.

“Are there gods in this world?” Zhao Changhe asked softly.

“Yes.” Luo Qi answered confidently. “I’ve never met a real god, but you know there are divine traces everywhere... Everyone believes they exist.”

“What divine traces?”

Zhao Changhe felt that this world was not the kind that only had low-level special abilities. Otherwise, how could the blind woman have the power to send him here?

Luo Qi looked at him, perplexed. “Wait, you don’t know?”

“I really don’t.”

“I can’t fucking believe it. There’s actually someone who’s never seen the Tome of Troubled Times!”

1. A mountain in Henan province, China, near Luoyang city. 📍

2. Region in China where the Yellow River and Luo River meet. 📍