**Chapter 1: King Zhou Makes an Offering at Nüwa's Temple**

Ancient Verse:  
When Chaos split, first came Pangu divine,  
The Great Ultimate hung with Four Images in line.  
In Heaven's hour man emerged between,  
While sage You Chao drove beasts unseen.  
Suiren brought fire, raw food to tame,  
Fu Xi drew Eight Trigrams, marking yin and yang's claim.  
Shennong ruled, tasting herbs with care,  
Huangdi joined rites and marriage fair.  
Through Five Emperors, the realm held peace,  
Yu's flood control brought troubles cease.  
Four centuries of peace did bide,  
Till King Jie's sins turned Heaven aside.  
Mo Xi's favor drove him wild with wine,  
Tang raised armies, his crimes to malign.  
Jie banished south, cruel rule undone,  
The realm restored, Su whole again won.  
Thirty-one kings till Zhou appeared,  
Shang's lineage like broken strings now feared.  
Court rules broken, virtue spurned aside,  
Wife slain, son killed, by slander's tide.  
Da Ji favored, court defiled within,  
Torture planned for loyal hearts therein.  
Deer Tower built while people mourned,  
Their sighs of grief Heaven's face adorned.  
Truth-tellers' hearts carved out with spite,  
Pregnant women slain at morning light.  
Evil counsel praised, good rule declined,  
Teachers banished, wisdom left behind.  
Temples empty, rites cast away,  
In vice and skill his heart held sway.  
With criminals close, no fear remained,  
Like hawk o'er hare his cruelty reigned.  
West Earl imprisoned at You Li's gate,  
Wei Zi fled, bearing vessels of state.  
Heaven's wrath descended, plagues unfurled,  
Like boundless seas that drown the world.  
The realm in chaos, people cried,  
Till Jiang Ziya, heaven-sent, arrived.  
Fishing daily for a worthy king,  
Till dreams of bears to Ji Field wing.  
To Zhou he went, its rule to aid,  
Two-thirds the realm his wisdom swayed.  
Wen's work unfinished when he died,  
Wu's virtue daily grew beside.  
At Meng Jin gathered kingdoms eight,  
To punish evil, set things straight.  
At Mu Ye's field when dawn was dim,  
Spears turned back, victory gained for him.  
Like thunder broke their battle-horn,  
Blood flowed like springs that fatal morn.  
War clothes donned, the realm made right,  
Shang's glory gained new splendor bright.  
At Hua Mountain showed peace restored,  
Eight hundred years for Zhou's reward.  
Great White Banner hung, the tyrant died,  
Fallen warriors' spirits far did glide.  
Heaven sent the Shang Fu wise and strong,  
Gods listed where their flowers belong,  
Great and small spirits ranked with care,

This tale of Shang and Zhou to share. On the divine altar, the roster is displayed like flowered notes, listing all immortals great and small in their proper ranks, telling the tale of Shang and Zhou through ages past and present.

Tang the Successful was a descendant of the Yellow Emperor, surname Zi. Earlier, when Lady Jian Di, a concubine of Emperor Ku, prayed at Mount Gao, a dark bird appeared as an auspicious sign, and she gave birth to Xie. Xie served the Emperors Yao and Shun as Minister of the Masses, teaching people with great merit, and was enfeoffed at Shang.

After thirteen generations came Tai Yi, who became Tang. Hearing of Yi Yin plowing in the fields of Youxin and delighting in the ways of Yao and Shun, Tang recognized him as a great sage. He sent envoys three times with gifts to recruit Yi Yin, but dared not employ him directly, instead recommending him to the Son of Heaven. When King Jie proved tyrannical and rejected worthy advisors, Yi Yin returned to serve Tang.

Later, as King Jie grew more depraved and executed the loyal minister Guan Longfeng, none dared speak truth. Tang sent people to mourn him. Enraged, Jie imprisoned Tang in the Xia Tower. After Tang's release and return to his domain, he saw a man setting nets on all four sides, praying to catch all creatures from sky, earth and four directions. Tang removed three sides, leaving only one, and changed the prayer: "Go left or right, high or low as you wish; only those who defy fate shall enter my net!" When people of Hannan heard this, they praised Tang's virtue, and over forty states submitted to him.

As Jie's tyranny worsened and people suffered, Yi Yin assisted Tang in overthrowing Jie, who was banished to Nanchao. At the great assembly of lords, Tang humbly took a lower position. The lords then elevated Tang as the Son of Heaven. Tang established his capital at Bo. In his first year, he abolished Jie's cruel policies and won people's hearts near and far.

During Jie's reign, there had been a seven-year drought. Tang prayed in the mulberry grove, and heaven sent great rain. He also used gold from Mount Zhuang to mint coins and save people's lives. He composed the music "Great Protection," signifying his benevolent virtue in protecting the common people. He ruled for thirteen years and died at age one hundred, with his dynasty lasting 640 years until King Zhou.

[The text then lists the succession of Shang kings]

King Zhou was the third son of Di Yi. Di Yi had three sons: the eldest Wei Zi Qi, the second Wei Zi Yan, and the third Shou Wang. Once in the royal garden, Prince Shou displayed incredible strength by supporting a falling beam, leading ministers to recommend him as crown prince. After Di Yi's death after thirty years of rule, Shou became king, known as King Zhou, ruling from Chaoge.

His administration had the great teacher Wen Zhong for civil affairs and General Huang Feihu for military matters. His three queens - Queen Jiang, Consort Huang, and Consort Yang - were all virtuous and gentle. Initially, Zhou's reign was peaceful and prosperous, with all eight hundred vassal states paying tribute to Shang.

In Zhou's seventh year, news came of rebellion in the North Sea region. While this was being addressed, one day during morning court, Prime Minister Shang Rong suggested the king visit the Temple of Nüwa on her birthday to offer incense. Though Zhou questioned Nüwa's merits, he agreed.

The next day, Zhou visited the temple with his officials. There, seeing Nüwa's beautiful statue, he was struck with improper desire and wrote a provocative poem on the temple wall, despite Shang Rong's protests about disrespecting a deity.

When Nüwa later discovered this sacrilege, she became furious at Zhou's impiety. Though she saw he still had twenty-eight years of mandate, she summoned three spirits - a thousand-year fox spirit, a nine-headed pheasant spirit, and a jade lute spirit - instructing them to take human form, enter the palace, and confound the king's mind, helping precipitate the dynasty's predestined fall to the Zhou kingdom.

After writing the poem, King Zhou became obsessed with Nüwa's beauty, losing interest in his queens and neglecting his duties. When confiding in his favored minister Fei Zhong, he was advised to issue an edict demanding each vassal state send a hundred beautiful women to the palace.

The chapter ends with Zhou preparing to issue this fateful command, marking the beginning of his descent into debauchery and tyranny that would eventually lead to the dynasty's downfall.

**Chapter 12: The Birth of Nezha at Chen Tang Pass**

Poem:  
In the Golden Light Cave lies a precious treasure,  
Descending to earth to assist the most benevolent.  
The Zhou house already shows auspicious signs,  
While the Shang dynasty's spirit shall fade.  
Great destiny has always needed strong pillars,  
Since ancient times prosperity comes with trials.  
In the hour of Wu-Wu meeting Jia-Zi,  
Don't lament as court and commons sink into chaos.

At Chen Tang Pass lived a general named Li Jing. From youth, he had pursued the Dao and studied under the True Master of Overcoming Calamity from Western Kunlun Mountains, learning the art of the Five Elements. Unable to achieve immortality, he was sent down the mountain to assist King Zhou, serving as general and enjoying mortal wealth. His wife, Lady Yin, had borne him two sons: the eldest named Jinzha and the second named Muzha.

Lady Yin became pregnant again, but after three years and six months still had not given birth. Li Jing grew increasingly worried. One day, pointing at his wife's belly, he said, "Being pregnant for over three years without giving birth - this must be either demon or monster." His wife also worried, saying, "This pregnancy surely isn't auspicious, causing me endless anxiety."

That night, around the third watch, Lady Yin dreamed of a Taoist priest with double hair buns entering her chamber. When she scolded his intrusion, he simply said, "Madam, receive your qilin child!" Before she could respond, he placed something in her embrace. She awoke with a start, covered in cold sweat.

She quickly woke Li Jing and told him of her dream. Before she finished speaking, she felt pain in her abdomen. Li Jing hurriedly went to the front hall to wait, thinking, "Pregnant for three years and six months, and now this - whether this birth brings good or ill fortune remains unknown."

While pondering, two servant girls rushed in, crying, "Master! The lady has given birth to some kind of spirit creature!" Li Jing rushed to the chamber with his sword drawn. Inside, he saw a ball of red qi and the room filled with strange fragrance. There was a sphere of flesh, spinning like a wheel. Alarmed, Li Jing struck it with his sword. The flesh ball split open, and out jumped a small child surrounded by red light. His face was as if powdered white, and on his right arm was a golden bracelet. Around his waist was a piece of red silk, emanating golden light.

[This divine being born at Chen Tang Pass was to become Jiang Ziya's vanguard officer - the incarnation of the Spirit Pearl. The golden bracelet was the "Heaven-Earth Ring," and the red silk was the "Universal Ring," both treasures from the Golden Light Cave of Mount Qianyuan.]

Li Jing watched as the child ran about on the floor. Though startled, he picked up the child and saw it was indeed a fine baby. Unable to treat it as a demon and harm it, he handed it to his wife. They both felt mixed emotions of joy and worry.

The next day, many officials came to offer congratulations. Just as Li Jing finished receiving them, a military officer reported, "Sir, there's a Taoist priest requesting an audience." Being a follower of the Dao himself, Li Jing immediately said, "Please invite him in."

The priest entered the main hall and greeted Li Jing, who returned the courtesy and invited him to sit. The priest accepted without demur. Li Jing asked, "Master, from which sacred mountain and cave do you come? What brings you to this pass?"

The priest replied, "I am the Supreme Master from the Golden Light Cave of Mount Qianyuan. Hearing of the general's newborn son, I came to offer congratulations. Might I see the child?" Li Jing had servants bring out his son. The priest took the child and asked, "At what hour was he born?"

"During the hour of Chou," Li Jing answered.

"Not good," said the priest.

"Can the child not be raised?" Li Jing asked anxiously.

"No, it's not that. Being born in the hour of Chou, he violates one thousand seven hundred taboos," the priest explained. "Has the child been named?"

When Li Jing said no, the priest offered, "Let me name him and take him as my disciple. How about that?"

Li Jing readily agreed. The priest asked, "How many sons do you have, General?"

"I have three sons," Li Jing replied. "The eldest, Jinzha, is a disciple of the Heavenly Master Manjusri of Cloud Cave on Five Dragon Mountain. The second, Muzha, studies under True Master Samantabhadra of White Crane Cave on Nine Palace Mountain. Please name this third child as you see fit."

The priest said, "Let this third child be named 'Nezha.'" Li Jing expressed his gratitude and ordered a feast prepared, but the priest declined, saying he had other matters to attend to. Li Jing saw him to the gate, and the priest departed.

Time passed, and Li Jing received news that four hundred feudal lords had rebelled. He immediately ordered the pass fortified, trained his troops, and kept strict watch over Wild Horse Ridge. Seven years passed swiftly. Nezha, now seven years old, stood six feet tall.

One day in the fifth month, during scorching weather, Li Jing was busy drilling troops because Eastern Earl Jiang Wenhuan had rebelled and was battling Dou Rong at Wandering Souls Pass.

Young Nezha, feeling restless in the hot weather, went to his mother and said, "Mother, I wish to play outside the pass. I came to ask your permission." Lady Yin, being very fond of her son, replied, "My child, if you wish to go out, take a household guard with you. Don't stay too long - return quickly before your father comes back from training."

"I understand," Nezha replied. He left the pass with a guard. The fifth month was indeed scorching hot. As the poem describes:

The true fire of the sun refines the dust,  
Green willows and tender grain seem to turn to ash.  
Travelers fear the heat and drag their steps,  
Fair maidens avoid the heat, reluctant to climb towers.  
Cool pavilions still feel like smoking kilns,  
Waterside chambers without wind seem buried in fire.  
Don't speak of lotus fragrance in curved corridors,  
Only light thunder and fine rain bring relief.

About a mile from the pass, Nezha was sweating profusely. He asked the guard, "Would those trees ahead provide good shade?" The guard went to check and reported back that the willow grove was indeed cool and suitable for escaping the heat.

Delighted, Nezha entered the grove, loosened his garments, and felt quite refreshed. Suddenly, he noticed rolling waves and flowing green water nearby, with willows swaying in the breeze on both banks and water trickling over scattered rocks.

Nezha stood up and walked to the riverbank, calling to his guard, "I'm extremely hot from our walk, covered in sweat. I'll take a bath here on these rocks." The guard cautioned, "Young master, please be careful. We should return soon, lest your father comes back." Nezha replied, "Don't worry."

He removed his clothes and sat on the rocks, dipping his seven-foot Universal Ring into the water to wash himself. Unknown to him, this was the Nine Bend River, which connected to the East Sea. When he put the treasure into the water, it turned the whole river red. When he swayed it, the river trembled; when he shook it, heaven and earth seemed to quake. As Nezha bathed, the Crystal Palace in the East Sea began to shake violently.

While Nezha was bathing, Dragon King Ao Guang sat in his Crystal Palace when he felt the palace shaking. He asked his attendants, "Why is my palace trembling when there should be no earthquake?" He ordered the sea-patrolling yaksha Li Gen to investigate.

At Nine Bend River, Li Gen saw the water had turned red with dazzling light, and a child washing himself with a red silk cloth. The yaksha parted the waters and shouted, "What devilry is this, turning the river red and shaking the palace?"

Nezha turned to see a creature with an indigo face, cinnabar hair, huge fangs, and wielding an axe. "What kind of beast are you to speak to me?" Nezha retorted. Enraged, the yaksha declared, "I am the sea patrol appointed by my lord! How dare you call me a beast?" He leaped ashore and swung his axe at Nezha's head.

Though naked, Nezha dodged and raised his Heaven-Earth Ring skyward. This treasure from the Jade Void Palace of Kunlun Mountain proved too powerful - it struck the yaksha's head, splattering his brains and killing him instantly. Nezha laughed, "You've dirtied my ring," and sat back down to wash it.

The Crystal Palace could hardly withstand the shaking from these two treasures and nearly collapsed. Dragon King Ao Guang said, "The yaksha hasn't returned from his mission - what evil is this?" Just then, a dragon soldier reported, "The yaksha Li Gen has been killed by a child on land."

Shocked, Ao Guang exclaimed, "Li Gen was appointed by the Celestial Palace - who would dare kill him?" He ordered his dragon army to mobilize so he could investigate personally. Before he finished speaking, his third son Prince Ao Bing appeared, asking, "Father, why are you so angry?" After hearing about Li Gen's death, the prince said, "Father, please stay calm. I will go capture the culprit."

He quickly assembled dragon troops and rode forth on his water beast, carrying his precious halberd. As they emerged from the Crystal Palace, waves rose like mountains and waters surged several feet high on level ground. Nezha stood up watching the waters, exclaiming, "What great waves!"

Through the waves appeared a water beast carrying a fully armored warrior who shouted, "Who dared kill my patrolling yaksha Li Gen?"

"It was I," Nezha replied. Ao Bing asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Nezha, third son of Li Jing of Chen Tang Pass. My father governs this area. I was merely bathing to escape the heat - the yaksha insulted me, so I killed him. It was nothing," Nezha answered.

Prince Ao Bing exclaimed in anger, "You insolent thief! Li Gen was appointed by the Heavenly Palace - how dare you kill him and speak so brazenly!" He thrust his halberd at Nezha.

Though unarmed, Nezha dodged and said, "Wait - who are you? Tell me your name first."

"I am Prince Ao Bing, third son of the East Sea Dragon King," he declared.

Nezha laughed, "So you're Ao Guang's son. You're too arrogant. If you anger me, I'll drag out that old mud eel father of yours and skin him too!"

"How dare you!" Prince Ao Bing roared, "Such disrespect!" He thrust his halberd again. Nezha, now angered, unfurled his seven-foot Sky-mixing Cloth into the air. Like a thousand balls of fire, it wrapped around the prince, pulling him from his water beast. Nezha rushed forward, stepped on Ao Bing's neck, and struck his head with the Universe Ring. The blow revealed the prince's true form - a dragon lying straight on the ground.

"So this little dragon's true form is revealed," Nezha said. "Well then, I'll take his tendons to make a belt for my father's armor." After extracting the tendons, Nezha returned through the pass. The household guard was so frightened his bones turned soft and legs weak as he stumbled back to the general's mansion.

When Nezha saw his mother, she asked, "My son, where have you been playing all this time?"

"Just wandering outside the pass," Nezha replied, "I lost track of time." He then went to the back garden.

Meanwhile, Li Jing had returned from military drills. After dismissing his attendants and removing his armor, he sat in the rear hall, worried about King Zhou's misrule and the rebellion of four hundred feudal lords, seeing the people's suffering.

Back in the Crystal Palace, when Dragon King Ao Guang heard the report that "Li Jing's son Nezha has killed the Third Prince and even extracted his tendons," he was shocked and enraged. "My son was a righteous deity who brought rain and nurtured all things - how could he be killed? Li Jing, you studied the Dao at Western Kunlun, and we were even fellow disciples. How dare you let your son commit such evil, killing my son - this is a grievance for a hundred generations! And to even take his tendons! It pains me to my bones!"

Furious and yearning for immediate revenge, Ao Guang transformed into a scholar and went directly to Chen Tang Pass. At the general's mansion, he told the gate guard, "Announce that an old friend, Ao Guang, is here to visit."

When informed, Li Jing said, "After many years apart, meeting my brother today is truly heaven's blessing." He hurriedly adjusted his clothes to welcome his guest.

After they exchanged courtesies and sat down, Li Jing noticed Ao Guang's angry expression. Before he could ask, Ao Guang said sarcastically, "Brother Li, you've raised quite a son!"

Li Jing smiled nervously and replied, "Elder brother, after so many years apart, this chance meeting is fortunate indeed. Why do you say this? I have three sons: the eldest Jinzha, the second Muzha, and the third Nezha. They all study under respected masters on famous mountains. Though they may not be outstanding, they're not worthless. Elder brother must be mistaken."

"Brother, you are the one who is mistaken!" Ao Guang retorted. "Your son was bathing in Nine Bend River, using some magic that nearly toppled my Crystal Palace. When I sent my yaksha to investigate, he killed him. When my third son went to look, he killed him too and even took his tendons..." At this point, Ao Guang's voice cracked with grief and rage: "And you still defend your ignorant child!"

Li Jing hastily replied with an apologetic smile, "You must be mistaken, brother. My eldest is studying at Five Dragon Mountain, my second at Nine Palace Mountain, and my third is only seven years old and never leaves home. How could he do such things?"

"It was definitely your third son Nezha!" Ao Guang insisted.

"This is indeed extraordinary," Li Jing said. "Please don't be hasty, elder brother. Let me call him out to see you." He went to the rear hall, where Lady Yin asked, "Who is in the hall?"

"It's my old friend Ao Guang. Someone killed his third son, and he says it was Nezha. I'm going to call him out to face Ao Guang. Where is Nezha?"

Lady Yin thought to herself, "He only went out today, how could he have done such a thing?" But she only said, "He's in the back garden."

Li Jing went to the back garden calling, "Nezha, where are you?" After calling for half an hour with no response, he went to the Crabapple Pavilion and found the door closed. Li Jing shouted at the door, and Nezha, hearing his father, quickly opened it.

"My son, what are you doing here?" Li Jing asked.

Nezha replied, "Today I went out to Nine Bend River to play and took a bath because of the heat. That insufferable yaksha Li Gen, whom I didn't provoke, cursed me and tried to split me with his axe. So I killed him with one strike of my ring. Then some Third Prince called Ao Bing came at me with a halberd. I wrapped him up with my Sky-mixing Cloth, stepped on his neck, and struck him with my ring, unexpectedly revealing his true dragon form. I thought dragon tendons were precious, so I took them to make a belt for father's armor."

Li Jing was struck dumb with horror, unable to speak for a long while. Finally, he cried out, "You troublemaker! You've brought endless disaster upon us! Quickly go see your uncle and explain yourself!"

Nezha said, "Father, don't worry. Those who act in ignorance aren't guilty. I haven't damaged the tendons - if he wants them, they're right here. I'll go see him now."

Nezha hurried to the main hall, bowed respectfully, and said, "Uncle, your nephew acted in ignorance. It was a moment's mistake - please forgive me. Here are the tendons, completely untouched."

Seeing the tendons, Ao Guang's grief surged anew. He turned to Li Jing and said, "You've raised such an evil son, and just now you claimed I was mistaken. Now he confesses himself! How can you justify this? My son was a righteous deity, and Li Gen was appointed by imperial decree. How dare you father and son kill them without cause! Tomorrow I shall report this to the Jade Emperor and demand an answer from your master!"

With that, Ao Guang stormed out. Li Jing stamped his feet and wailed, "This is no small disaster!"

Hearing the crying in the front courtyard, Lady Yin hurriedly asked her servants what happened. They reported, "The Third Young Master killed the Dragon King's son while playing today. The Dragon King just argued with master and will petition Heaven tomorrow. We don't know why master is crying."

Worried, Lady Yin rushed to the front courtyard. Seeing her, Li Jing tried to stop his tears and said bitterly, "I, Li Jing, failed to achieve immortality, and now you've borne this 'fine' son who brings destruction to our family! The Dragon King is a righteous deity of rain - killing him without cause... When the Jade Emperor approves the petition tomorrow, in three days at most, or perhaps just two, we'll all die by the sword!"

As Li Jing finished speaking, he burst into tears again, overwhelmed with grief. Lady Yin also wept, pointing at Nezha and saying, "I carried you for three years and six months before giving birth, enduring countless hardships. Who knew you would bring destruction to our entire family!"

Seeing his parents weeping, Nezha felt uneasy. He knelt on both knees and said, "Father, Mother, let me tell you something. I am no ordinary mortal - I am a disciple of the Supreme Master of Golden Light Cave on Mount Qianyuan. These treasures were all given by my master. How could Ao Guang possibly harm me? I will now go to Mount Qianyuan to consult my master. He will surely have a solution. As the saying goes, 'One who acts must bear the consequences.' How could I let my parents suffer for this?"

Nezha left the mansion, grabbed a handful of earth, and scattered it in the air. He vanished without a trace, using the Earth Escape technique he was born with to travel to Mount Qianyuan. A poem serves as proof:

On Mount Qianyuan I seek my origin's truth,  
To tell of Ao Guang's East Sea grief.  
Before the Precious Virtue Gate I'll show my might,  
Proving immortal arts are not just empty names.

Using his Earth Escape technique, Nezha arrived at the Golden Light Cave on Mount Qianyuan to await his master's instructions. The Golden Glow Boy hurriedly informed his master, "Senior brother awaits your guidance."

"Let him enter," said the Supreme Master. The Golden Glow Boy went to the cave entrance and told Nezha, "Master bids you enter."

Nezha went to the jade couch and prostrated himself. The Master asked, "Why aren't you at Chen Tang Pass? What brings you here?"

Nezha replied, "Master, by your grace I was born in Chen Tang seven years ago. Yesterday, I went to bathe in Nine Bend River, and unexpectedly, Ao Guang's son Ao Bing insulted me. In a moment of anger, your disciple took his life. Now Ao Guang plans to petition Heaven, my parents are terrified, and I am deeply troubled. With no other recourse, I've come to the mountain to beg your forgiveness for my ignorant crime and seek your help."

The Master thought to himself, "Though Nezha acted in ignorance when he harmed Ao Bing, this was Heaven's design. Though Ao Guang is King of Dragons, he merely controls rain and clouds. When Heaven shows its signs, how can one claim ignorance? To trouble Heaven's court with such a small matter shows he doesn't understand proper conduct!" He called out, "Nezha, come here and remove your clothes."

The Master drew a magic talisman on Nezha's chest with his finger and instructed him: "Go to the Gate of Precious Virtue... [do such and such]. After it's done, return to Chen Tang Pass and tell your parents that if anything happens, you still have your master - your parents won't be harmed. Now go."

Nezha left Mount Qianyuan and headed straight for the Gate of Precious Virtue. Indeed, the celestial sights were extraordinary, with purple mist and red clouds shrouding the azure sky. The heavenly realm was vastly different:

Upon first ascending to heaven, suddenly beholding paradise,  
Ten thousand rays of golden light spew rainbow hues,  
A thousand streams of auspicious energy spray purple mist.  
At the Southern Heaven Gate:  
Deep blue lazuli forms its structure,  
Bright precious cauldrons adorn its face.  
Four great pillars stand on either side,  
Where cloud-walking, red-bearded dragons coil;  
Two jade bridges span the center,  
Where rainbow-feathered, red-crested phoenixes stand.  
Bright aurora brilliantly reflects heaven's light,  
Blue mist hazily shields the sun.

In heaven there are thirty-six celestial palaces:  
The Lingering Cloud Palace, Sand Palace, Purple Void Palace,  
Solar Palace, Lunar Palace, Joy Transformation Palace,  
Each topped with golden xiezhi beasts.  
And seventy-two treasure halls:  
The Morning Court Hall, Void-Piercing Hall,  
Precious Light Hall, Immortal Gathering Hall, Memorial Hall,  
Each with jade qilin lining their pillars.  
The Longevity Star Tower, Prosperity Star Tower, Fortune Star Tower,  
Below them grow millennium-old rare flowers;  
The Elixir Furnace, Eight Trigrams Furnace, Water-Fire Furnace,  
Within them grow eternal embroidered grasses.  
In the Saint-Greeting Hall, crimson silk robes gleam golden;  
Below the vermillion steps, lotus crown caps shine gold and jade.  
The Celestial Treasure Hall with gold nails studding jade doors;  
Before the Sacred Tower, colorful phoenixes dance at vermillion gates.  
Covered walkways everywhere shimmer crystal clear;  
Triple eaves and quadruple clusters, layer upon layer of dragons and phoenixes soar.

Above are purple towering, brightly shining, round rolling,  
Brilliantly gleaming, clearly ringing gourd tops;  
On all sides are tightly clustered, densely layered,  
Tinkling dropping, clearly resounding jade pendants.

Indeed:  
Heaven's palace holds all manner of wonders,  
Each item rare in the mortal world.  
Golden towers, silver simurghs, and purple chambers,  
Strange flowers and rare herbs reach the jade sky.  
Jade rabbits pass by altars to greet the king;  
Golden birds fly low to pay respects to saints.  
If one is blessed to reach this heavenly realm,  
They'll escape the mundane world's filthy mire.

When Nezha arrived at the Gate of Precious Virtue, it was still early and Ao Guang wasn't there. Seeing all the heavenly gates were still closed, Nezha stood waiting beneath the Immortal Gathering Gate. Soon after, he saw Ao Guang approaching in his court robes, heading straight for the Southern Heaven Gate.

Finding the Southern Heaven Gate still closed, Ao Guang said, "I've come too early. The Yellow Turban Warriors haven't arrived yet. I'll have to wait here."

Nezha could see Ao Guang, but Ao Guang couldn't see Nezha. This was because the Supreme Master had drawn an "Invisibility Talisman" on Nezha's chest, making him invisible to Ao Guang.

Seeing Ao Guang waiting there, Nezha became furious. He took large strides forward, raised his Universe Ring, and struck Ao Guang in the back like a hungry tiger pouncing on its prey. Ao Guang fell to the ground. Nezha rushed forward and planted his foot on Ao Guang's back.

As for whether Ao Guang survived, let's wait for the next chapter to find out.

**Chapter 21: King Wen Flees Through Five Passes After His Promotion**

Poem:  
Lord Huang's kindness saves King Xi of Qi,  
With bronze tally and command arrow he leaves imperial bounds.  
You and Fei's slander pursues the sacred lord,  
In clouds appear transformations to aid the boat of mercy.  
Since ancient times great virtue finds no place in the world,  
From here the dragon's flight shows auspicious signs.  
The reputation of his son remains,  
To this day his legacy leaves lasting fragrance.

After leaving Zhaoge, King Wen traveled through the night, crossing Meng Ford, the Yellow River, and Mianchi, heading toward Lingtong Pass.

Meanwhile in Zhaoge, when the inn keeper noticed King Wen hadn't returned all night, he anxiously reported to Minister Fei's residence. When informed, Fei Zhong thought, "This affects me personally. How should I handle it?" He summoned Minister You to discuss the matter.

When You Hun arrived and greetings were exchanged, Fei Zhong said, "This Ji Chang - you recommended him and His Majesty made him king, which was fine. But who would have thought that after just two days of his three-day promotion celebration, he would flee without royal permission? This must mean ill intent. The southeast regions have been in rebellion for years, and now with Ji Chang's flight, His Majesty faces another crisis. Who will bear this responsibility? What should we do?"

You Hun replied, "Elder brother, don't worry. Our plan won't fail. Let's go to the inner court and suggest sending two generals to capture him. We'll execute him in the marketplace for betraying the emperor's trust. What's there to worry about?"

Having agreed on their plan, they quickly dressed in court attire and entered the palace. King Zhou was enjoying himself in the Star-Plucking Tower when courtiers announced, "Fei Zhong and You Hun await your command."

The king said, "Summon them up." After they paid their respects, the king asked, "What brings you two ministers here?"

Fei Zhong reported, "Ji Chang has deeply betrayed Your Majesty's great kindness. He defies the court's orders and shows contempt for Your Majesty. After just two days of promotion celebrations, without thanking your grace or acknowledging his royal title, he secretly fled. He must harbor evil intentions. We fear he will return to his land and spark rebellion. Since we recommended him, we might be held responsible later. We report this now for Your Majesty's decision."

King Zhou angrily replied, "You two claimed Ji Chang was loyal and dutiful, that he burned incense and prayed for favorable weather and national prosperity every new and full moon. That's why I pardoned him. Today's trouble is entirely due to your careless recommendation!"

You Hun said, "Your Majesty, human hearts are hard to fathom. People may comply in front but defy behind. We know their exterior but not their interior, their interior but not their hearts. As they say, 'The sea's bottom can be seen when dry, but a person's heart remains unknown even in death.' Ji Chang hasn't gone far. If Your Majesty orders Generals Yin Pobai and Lei Kai to lead three thousand cavalry in pursuit, we can arrest him and uphold the law against fleeing officials."

King Zhou approved the proposal and quickly ordered Generals Yin and Lei to lead the pursuit. The two generals received their orders and went to Wu Chengwang's mansion to mobilize three thousand mounted soldiers. They rode out through Zhaoge's west gate in pursuit. What a sight it was:

Banners unfurling like spring willows intertwined;  
Battle standards waving like colorful clouds across the sun.  
Swords and spears flashing like winter snow dancing in the sky;  
Weapons arrayed like autumn frost covering the ground.  
Drums thundering like spring thunder over vast seas;  
Gongs shaking like lightning striking before mountains.  
Men fierce as tigers fighting for food on South Mountain;  
Horses like dragons playing in the Northern Sea's waves.

While the pursuing army came like lightning through clouds, King Wen had passed Meng Ford, crossed the Yellow River, and was slowly making his way toward Mianchi, disguised as a night scout. King Wen traveled slowly while Generals Yin and Lei pursued swiftly, gradually catching up.

Looking back, King Wen saw dust clouds rising and heard distant shouts of pursuing soldiers. His soul nearly fled in fright as he looked to the heavens and sighed: "Though Wu Chengwang meant well for me, I failed to plan properly in my hasty night escape. The emperor must have found out through someone's report and, angry at my unauthorized departure, sent troops in pursuit. If I'm captured and taken back, there's no hope for survival. I can only urge my horse forward to escape this disaster."

In this moment, King Wen was like a bird lost from the forest or a fish escaped from the net, unable to tell south from north or east from west. His heart raced like an arrow, his mind rushed like clouds. Indeed:  
Looking up to appeal to heaven, heaven remains silent;  
Bowing down to plead with earth, earth gives no reply.

He could only spur his horse on repeatedly, wishing his mount could ride the clouds or sprout wings. Lingtong Pass was barely twenty li away, but the pursuing army drew ever closer. King Wen was in dire straits. Let us pause here.

Meanwhile, in the Jade Pillar Cave on Mount Zhongnan, Master Yunzhongzi was meditating on his jade bed when he suddenly felt a premonition.

The Taoist master calculated with his fingers and immediately knew the situation: "Ah! The Western Earl's tribulations are ending, but he faces immediate danger. Today is when father and son shall reunite, fulfilling my prophecy from Mount Yan."

He called out: "Golden Flame Boy, where are you? Go to the back peach garden and summon your senior brother."

Golden Flame Boy obeyed and went to the peach garden, where he found his senior brother and said, "Master requests your presence."

Lei Zhenzi met Yunzhongzi and bowed: "What are Master's instructions?"

Yunzhongzi said, "Disciple, your father is in danger. You must go rescue him."

"Who is my father?" Lei Zhenzi asked.

The master replied, "Your father is Western Earl Ji Chang, now in danger at Lingtong Pass. Go to Tiger Cliff and find a weapon. I will secretly teach you military arts so you can save your father. Today is destined for father and son to reunite, with a proper meeting to follow later."

Following his master's instructions, Lei Zhenzi left the cave and went to Tiger Cliff. He looked everywhere but couldn't find anything, not even knowing what kind of weapon to look for. Lei Zhenzi thought: "I was careless. I've heard weapons include spears, swords, halberds, whips, axes, hammers, and maces, but master just said 'weapon' - I don't know which one. I should return to ask for details."

Just as Lei Zhenzi was about to turn back, a strange fragrance suddenly filled the air, penetrating to his bones. He heard the gentle sound of flowing water and distant thunder from a stream below. Lei Zhenzi observed the extraordinary scene: vines wrapped around cypresses, bamboo growing on steep cliffs, foxes and rabbits darting about like shuttles, deer and cranes calling back and forth. He saw spiritual mushrooms among green grass and plums on green branches - endless mountain wonders.

Suddenly, he spotted two red apricots beneath green leaves. Delighted, Lei Zhenzi ignored the dangerous terrain, grabbed vines, and reached for the fruit. Picking them, he found they had an otherworldly fragrance like sweet dew touching his heart. Lei Zhenzi thought to himself: "I'll eat one and save one for Master."

After eating one apricot, he thought, "How delicious and fragrant! I want more." Without thinking, he took a bite of the second one. "Ah! I've already bitten this one. Might as well finish it." Just after he finished eating both apricots, there was a sudden sound from his left side, and a wing grew out, dragging on the ground.

Lei Zhenzi was terrified, his soul nearly flying to the heavens. "This is terrible!" he cried, trying desperately to pull out the wing with both hands. Unexpectedly, another wing sprouted from his right side. Lei Zhenzi was so panicked he fell to the ground.

The wings weren't the only change - his face transformed too: his nose grew higher, his face turned blue as indigo, his hair became crimson red, his eyes bulged, and his teeth grew outward beyond his lips. His body grew to two zhang tall. Lei Zhenzi sat dumbfounded.

Just then, Golden Flame Boy arrived and called out: "Senior Brother, Master calls for you."

Lei Zhenzi said, "Junior Brother, look at me - I'm completely transformed!"

"What happened to you?" Golden Flame Boy asked.

Lei Zhenzi explained: "Master sent me to Tiger Cliff to find a weapon to save my father. After searching half a day, I found nothing except two apricots, which I ate. How strange - now I have a blue face, red hair, protruding fangs, and wings on both sides. How can I face Master like this?"

Golden Flame Boy said: "Hurry! Master is waiting!"

Lei Zhenzi stood up and walked, feeling awkward, his wings dragging like a defeated rooster. Soon he reached the Jade Pillar Cave.

Seeing Lei Zhenzi, Master Yunzhongzi clapped his hands and exclaimed: "Marvelous! Marvelous!" He pointed at Lei Zhenzi and composed a poem:

"Two immortal apricots will pacify the realm,  
One golden staff will stabilize the cosmos.  
Wind and thunder wings surpass ancestors,  
Thousand transformations will raise future generations.  
Eyes like golden bells penetrate nine earths,  
Hair like purple grass in three tufts short.  
Secret transmission of profound immortal techniques,  
Forging an indestructible vajra body."

After finishing the poem, Yunzhongzi commanded: "Follow me into the cave." Lei Zhenzi followed his master to the peach garden. Yunzhongzi took out a golden staff and taught Lei Zhenzi how to use it. The staff moved up and down like wind and rain, advanced and retreated like dragons and snakes, turned like a fierce tiger shaking its head, rose and fell like a dragon emerging from the sea. It made whooshing sounds and flashed with brilliant light, creating patterns in the air like brocade, spreading flowers in all directions.

In the cave, Yunzhongzi taught Lei Zhenzi until he mastered the weapon. Then he wrote the character "Wind" on Lei Zhenzi's left wing and "Thunder" on his right wing, and chanted an incantation. Lei Zhenzi flew up into the sky, his feet touching the heavens while his head looked down. As his wings spread, the sound of wind and thunder filled the air.

Lei Zhenzi descended and prostrated himself, saying: "Master has taught me wonderful magical arts to save my father from danger - this is the greatest kindness."

The master said: "Hurry to Lingtong Pass to save Western Earl Ji Chang - your father. Go quickly and return swiftly, don't delay. After you help your father through the five passes, you must not follow him to Western Qi, nor harm any of King Zhou's soldiers. Once your task is complete, return quickly to Mount Zhongnan, and I will teach you more Taoist arts. Later, you and your brothers will have a time for reunion."

After Yunzhongzi finished his instructions, he said, "Now go!"

Lei Zhenzi left the cave and flew with his wings, reaching Lingtong Pass in an instant. He landed on a hillside and waited, but saw no sign of anyone. Lei Zhenzi thought to himself: "Ah! I was careless again. I didn't ask Master what Western Earl King Wen looks like. How will I recognize him?"

Before he finished this thought, he saw a man wearing a grayish-blue felt hat and black official robes, riding a white horse at full gallop. Lei Zhenzi wondered: "Could this be my father?" He called out: "Is that Western Earl Lord Ji below?"

When King Wen heard someone calling him, he pulled his horse to a stop and looked up, but saw no one, only hearing the voice. King Wen sighed: "My fate must be sealed! Why do I hear a voice but see no person? This must be spirits playing tricks on me." Actually, because Lei Zhenzi's blue face blended with the mountain's colors, King Wen couldn't see him clearly, hence his doubt.

Seeing King Wen stop his horse and look around before continuing on, Lei Zhenzi called out again: "Are you Western Earl Lord Ji?"

King Wen looked up and suddenly saw a figure with an indigo face, crimson hair, huge mouth with protruding fangs, and eyes like bronze bells flashing with light. He was terrified, his soul nearly leaving his body. King Wen thought to himself: "If it were a ghost or demon, it wouldn't have a human voice. Since I'm here, I can't avoid this encounter. Since he's calling me, I might as well go up the hill and see what happens."

King Wen rode up the hill and called out: "Noble sir, how do you know who I am?"

Lei Zhenzi prostrated himself and said: "Father, your son arrived late, causing you such fright. Please forgive my unfilial behavior."

King Wen replied: "Noble sir, you are mistaken. I, Ji Chang, don't know you. Why do you address me as father?"

Lei Zhenzi said: "I am Lei Zhenzi, who was taken in at Mount Yan."

King Wen exclaimed: "My son! Why do you look like this? You were taken up the mountain by Master Yunzhongzi of Mount Zhongnan, and should be only seven years old now. Why are you here?"

Lei Zhenzi replied: "Following Master's divine instructions, I came down the mountain to help father escape through the five passes and stop the pursuing army."

Hearing this, King Wen was startled. He thought to himself: "I am already guilty of fleeing my post and offending the court. Looking at my son's appearance, he doesn't seem peaceful. If he goes to stop the pursuing army and kills the soldiers, it will only add to my crimes. I should try to reason with him to prevent violence."

King Wen called out: "Lei Zhenzi, you must not harm King Zhou's soldiers - they are only following royal orders. I have fled my post, disobeying royal command, abandoning Zhou to return west. I have betrayed His Majesty's great kindness. If you harm the court's officials, you won't be saving your father but harming him instead."

Lei Zhenzi answered: "Master already instructed me not to harm any soldiers. I am only to help father through the five passes. I will simply persuade them to turn back."

Lei Zhenzi saw the pursuing army approaching, their banners waving, drums and gongs sounding, battle cries unceasing, and dust clouds obscuring the sun. After observing this, he spread his wings with a thunderous sound and flew into the air, holding his golden staff. The sight so frightened King Wen that he fell from his horse.

Let us pause that scene. Lei Zhenzi flew in front of the pursuing army and landed with a crash, planting his golden staff in his palm. He shouted: "Stop right there!" When the soldiers looked up and saw Lei Zhenzi's indigo face, crimson hair, and protruding fangs, they reported to Generals Yin Pobai and Lei Kai: "Lords, there's a fearsome demon blocking the road, with a terrifying appearance!"

The two generals shouted for their troops to fall back. They then spurred their horses forward to confront Lei Zhenzi. As for what happened to their lives, let us wait for the next chapter to find out.

**Chapter 70: The Sage Zhunti Subdues Kong Xuan**

The poem says:  
Bodhisattva Zhunti from the Western Paradise,  
Deep roots of virtue beyond measure.  
Lotus leaves stir with wind showing their nature,  
Lotus flowers stand as bridges without rain.  
Golden bow and silver halberd aren't for defense,  
The precious pestle and fish blade have other uses.  
Don't speak of Kong Xuan's transformations,  
Under the Bodhi tree sits the Bright King.

The story tells that Gao Jining battled the "Five Sacred Mountains" generals, his spear moving like a silver python, swift as wind and rain, truly frightening. How did this great battle appear? A praise verse describes it:

Ground-sweeping cold wind roars like tigers,  
Banners wave with flashing red.  
Flying Tiger wields his reed spear;  
Jining's spear strikes fierce and cruel.  
Wen Pin uses his heaven-reaching fork;  
Cui Ying's silver hammer falls like shooting stars.  
Black Tiger's axe spins like cartwheels;  
Jiang Xiong's divine claws grip golden ropes.  
Three armies cheer and wave their flags,  
As "Black Killer" meets the "Five Mountains."

After battling for a long time, Gao Jining's single spear could not withstand five different weapons, and he could not jump out of their encirclement. In his moment of panic, Jiang Xiong's golden rope suddenly went slack, allowing Gao Jining to spur his horse and leap out of the circle to escape. Chong Heihu and the other four gave chase.

Gao Jining shook his centipede bag, and wonderful centipedes emerged! They darkened the sky like storm clouds or flying locusts. Wen Pin was about to turn his horse to flee, but Chong Heihu said, "Don't worry. Don't be afraid, I am here." He quickly opened the red gourd on his back, and black smoke poured out, within which were a thousand iron-beaked divine eagles. How did they appear? A verse describes it:

Black smoke rises from the gourd,  
When smoke clears, spirits and ghosts are shocked.  
Secret transmission of mystic methods,  
A thousand divine eagles screech.  
Riding smoke they soar upward,  
Making soup of the centipedes.  
Iron wings like copper scissors,  
Sharp beaks like golden needles.  
Wings beat centipedes to powder,  
Beaks peck them to crystal water.  
Today the "Five Mountains" come to meet,  
"Black Killer's" fate will surely end.

When all of Gao Jining's centipedes were beaten and devoured by Chong Heihu's iron-beaked divine eagles, Gao Jining was furious: "How dare you break my magic!" He turned back to fight again. The five generals surrounded him once more. Huang Feihu's spear entangled Gao Jining. Meanwhile, Kong Xuan in the camp asked his scout officer, "Who is General Gao fighting?" The military officer reported, "He's fighting five great generals in the center of battle."

Kong Xuan was about to ride out when Gao Jining was pierced in the side by Huang Feihu's spear and fell from his horse. They had just taken his head and were about to return to camp with victory drums beating when suddenly a great shout came from behind: "You wretches, wait before returning! I am here!" When the five generals saw Kong Xuan approaching, Huang Feihu cursed, "Kong Xuan! You don't know the times, you're truly a brute!" Kong Xuan laughed, "I won't waste words with mere plants and trees like you. Don't try to leave, come face me!" He brandished his blade and charged at Wen Pin. Chong Heihu quickly raised his twin axes to strike, spinning like wheels, and six riders joined in battle, fighting until:

Birds in the sky fled into forests,  
Wolves in the mountains hid in their dens.

Seeing these five generals' weapons coming so fiercely, Kong Xuan thought, "If I don't act now, they might gain the upper hand." He flashed five rays of light from his back, and the five fighting generals instantly vanished without a trace, leaving only their five horses to return to camp. Jiang Ziya was sitting when the scout reported: "The five generals have been taken by Kong Xuan's divine light. Please issue orders." Jiang Ziya was greatly shocked: "Although we killed Gao Jining, we've now lost five generals! Let's hold our troops for now."

Meanwhile, Kong Xuan returned to his camp and shook out the divine light, causing the five generals to fall down unconscious as before. He ordered them to be confined in the rear camp. Seeing no generals left on his side, Kong Xuan had to manage alone. He didn't come to challenge for battle but just blocked the crucial pass, making it impossible for Zhou's army to advance.

When Yang Jian, the supply transport officer, arrived at the gate and dismounted, he was shocked: "Why are we still stuck here?" The military officer reported to Jiang Ziya: "Supply officer Yang Jian awaits orders." Jiang Ziya commanded: "Let him enter." Yang Jian went up to the tent, paid his respects, and reported: "Three thousand five hundred supplies have been delivered on schedule, awaiting your orders." Jiang Ziya said: "You have done well in transporting supplies for the country." Yang Jian asked: "Who is leading troops to block us here?" Jiang Ziya told him about Huang Tianhua's death and the capture of many officers.

When Yang Jian heard that Huang Tianhua was dead, it was truly:  
His dao heart sank into the vast ocean,  
While nameless anger rose to his head.

Yang Jian said, "Tomorrow let Prime Minister personally go to the battlefield. Let your disciple see what kind of creature is causing trouble, so we can deal with it properly." Jiang Ziya replied, "That makes sense." After Yang Jian left the tent, Nangong Shi and Wu Ji told him, "Kong Xuan has captured Huang Feihu, Hong Jin, Nezha, and Lei Zhenzi - no one knows where they are." Yang Jian said, "I have my Monster-Revealing Mirror here, which I haven't yet returned to Mount Zhongnan. Tomorrow when Prime Minister meets the enemy, we'll know the truth."

The next day, Jiang Ziya led his disciples out to meet Kong Xuan. When the patrol soldiers reported this, Kong Xuan came out to meet Jiang Ziya, saying, "You rebels started this without cause, spreading lies to confuse the world's nobles, recklessly raising armies, wanting to gather rebel forces at Mengjin. I won't fight you - I'll just block you here so you can't pass. Let's see how your gathering succeeds! I'll wait until your supplies run out before capturing you."

Just then, Yang Jian at the flag gate aimed his Monster-Revealing Mirror at Kong Xuan. In the mirror, he appeared like a piece of five-colored agate, rolling back and forth. Yang Jian wondered secretly, "What kind of creature is this?"

When Kong Xuan saw Yang Jian scanning him with the mirror, he laughed: "Yang Jian, come closer with your Monster-Revealing Mirror if you want to see clearly. A real man should act openly, not skulk in shadows. I'll let you look!" Yang Jian, having been called out, rode forward to the front lines and raised his mirror toward Kong Xuan, but saw the same thing as before. Yang Jian hesitated.

Seeing Yang Jian silent and continuing to scan him, Kong Xuan grew furious. He spurred his horse forward, brandishing his blade. Yang Jian quickly blocked with his Three-Pointed Double-Edged Blade. They exchanged blows, their horses circling, fighting for thirty rounds without either gaining advantage.

Yang Jian grew increasingly frustrated - first his mirror had failed to reveal Kong Xuan's true form, and now he couldn't gain the upper hand in combat. In desperation, he summoned his Howling Celestial Dog in mid-air. But just as the dog was about to descend on Kong Xuan, it unexpectedly floated away, caught in the divine light. Wei Hu came to assist Yang Jian, hurriedly throwing his demon-subduing pestle. Kong Xuan flashed his divine light again. Seeing the situation turning bad and knowing the power of the light behind Kong Xuan, Yang Jian escaped on a beam of golden light. Meanwhile, Wei Hu's demon-subduing pestle had already fallen into the red light.

Kong Xuan shouted, "Yang Jian, I know you have your eight-nine mystical transformations and are skilled in shape-shifting, but how dare you flee? Do you dare face me again?" Wei Hu, having lost his precious pestle, hid behind the flags, everyone looking at each other in dismay. Kong Xuan shouted, "Jiang Shang! Today let's settle who is superior!"

As Kong Xuan rode forward to fight, Li Jing at the back of Jiang Ziya's forces grew angry and cursed, "What kind of wretch are you to be so arrogant!" He charged forward wielding his halberd to meet Kong Xuan's blade. The two generals fought in this tiger's den and dragon's pool. Li Jing summoned his Thirty-Three Heavens Exquisite Golden Pagoda to strike down. Kong Xuan wrapped it in yellow light, and the golden pagoda vanished without a trace. Kong Xuan called out, "Li Jing, don't run! I'll capture you now!" Indeed:

Red light displays endless wonders,  
Revealing true mysteries within mysteries.

When Jinzha and Muzha saw their father captured, the two brothers flew forward with their four precious swords, cursing: "Kong Xuan, you rebel! How dare you harm our father!" The brothers raised their swords to strike.

Kong Xuan quickly raised his blade to meet them. After just three exchanges, Jinzha summoned his Dragon-Controlling Stake and Muzha summoned his Wu Hook Sword, both launching them into the air. But Kong Xuan treated these treasures as nothing special - they all fell into the red light. When Jinzha and Muzha saw the situation turning bad and tried to escape, Kong Xuan flashed his divine light again and captured them both.

When Jiang Ziya saw so many of his disciples lost in one battle, anger rose from his heart and hatred filled his gut. "At Mount Kunlun, I've met countless enlightened beings - how could I fear you, Kong Xuan, a mere mortal!" He spurred his Four-Directions Horse forward to fight Kong Xuan in rage. But before they had exchanged more than three or four moves, Kong Xuan cast down his green light. Seeing the dangerous divine light approaching, Jiang Ziya quickly waved his Apricot-Yellow Banner, which manifested a thousand golden lotus flowers to protect his body. The green light could not penetrate - this was indeed a treasure from the Jade Void, different from ordinary magical items.

Kong Xuan grew furious and charged forward on his horse. From Jiang Ziya's rear ranks, Deng Chanyu became angry. She turned her horse around and threw a Five-Light Stone. Indeed:

Red light flashed from her five fingers,  
Like a shooting star falling to earth.

The Five-Light Stone struck Kong Xuan in the face. As he turned his horse to flee back to his camp, Princess Long Ji unexpectedly summoned her Phoenix-Flying Sword, slashing at Kong Xuan from behind. Unaware, Kong Xuan's left arm was cut by the sword. He let out a great cry and nearly fell from his horse. Wounded, he retreated to his camp, where he quickly applied medicine to his injury, which healed instantly. He then shook out his divine light to collect all the magical treasures, and continued to hold Li Jing and the Jin-Mu brothers captive, grinding his teeth in deep hatred.

Jiang Ziya sounded the gong to withdraw his troops. Back in camp, he found Yang Jian already in the central tent. After ascending to his seat, Jiang Ziya asked, "All my disciples were captured, how did you manage to return?" Yang Jian replied, "Thanks to master's wonderful techniques and uncle-masters' blessed power, when I saw how dangerous Kong Xuan's divine light was, I transformed into golden light and escaped in advance."

Seeing that Yang Jian had avoided capture, Jiang Ziya felt somewhat relieved, but his heart remained deeply troubled: "My master's verse spoke of 'meeting the Execute Immortals at Jiepai Pass,' so why are we held up here for so long by these forces? What can we do about this?"

While Jiang Ziya was worrying, King Wu sent a messenger to invite him to the rear tent for discussion. Jiang Ziya hurried to the rear tent, exchanged greetings, and sat down. King Wu said, "I hear that for many days you have been unable to achieve victory, repeatedly losing troops and generals. Prime Minister, as the leader of all generals, you hold the lives of 600,000 soldiers in your hands. Now you have suddenly trusted the rebellious words of the world's nobles, gathering forces from all directions to meet at Mengjin, to observe the governance of Shang. This has caused the world to boil in turmoil, and the people to be in chaos. Now our army is blocked here, our generals are held captive, our 600,000 troops are separated from their parents, wives, and children - both sides worry, unable to live in peace. I too am far from my father's knee, unable to fulfill my filial duties, and failing my late father's words. Prime Minister, listen to me: why not withdraw our troops, fortify our territory, and wait for Heaven's timing? Let others act as they will - this is the best strategy. What do you think?"

Jiang Ziya thought secretly, "Though the King's words make sense, I fear violating Heaven's Mandate." King Wu said, "If Heaven's Mandate exists, why force it? How can everything be blocked and opposed like this?"

King Wu's words shook Jiang Ziya's resolve, and in this moment he couldn't hold to his original purpose. He went to the front camp and ordered the advance guard: "Tonight, reduce the cooking fires and withdraw the army." The officers prepared to pack up and retreat, not daring to advise against it.

At the second watch, Taoist Lu Ya arrived hurriedly at the gate, calling out: "Message for Prime Minister Jiang!" Just as Jiang Ziya was about to withdraw the army, the military officer reported: "Prime Minister, Taoist Lu Ya is at the gate requesting to see you." Jiang Ziya hurried out to welcome him.

The two joined hands and sat in the tent. Seeing Lu Ya out of breath, Jiang Ziya asked, "Brother, why are you in such a hurry?" Lu Ya replied, "Hearing you were withdrawing the army, I rushed here, hence my state. You absolutely must not withdraw! If you do, all your disciples will meet violent deaths. Heaven's numbers are fixed and will not err."

Hearing Lu Ya's words, Jiang Ziya was uncertain what to do, so he issued new orders: "Tell all troops to remain in camp as before." When King Wu heard of Lu Ya's arrival, he hurried out to meet him and ask for details. Lu Ya said, "My King does not understand Heaven's will. When Heaven creates a person of great methods, only another person of great methods can counter them. If we withdraw now, all the captured generals will have no chance of survival."

Hearing this, King Wu dared not speak of withdrawal again. The next day, Kong Xuan came to the gate challenging for battle. When the scouts reported this to central command, Lu Ya stepped forward and said, "I will go meet Kong Xuan and see what he's about."

Lu Ya went out the gate and saw Kong Xuan in full armor. Lu Ya asked, "Are you General Kong Xuan?" Xuan replied, "I am." Lu Ya said, "General, don't you understand the times and human affairs? Now King Zhou is without the Way, the world is falling apart, we wish to jointly attack this tyrant. Do you think you alone can turn back Heaven's will? The destined day for Zhou's destruction is set - how can you block it? If a truly enlightened being appears, and you make one mistake, you'll regret it too late."

Kong Xuan laughed and said, "You are nothing but an ignorant commoner of grass and wood - what do you know of Heaven's timing and human affairs!" He brandished his blade and attacked Lu Ya. Lu Ya quickly parried with his sword. After just five or six exchanges, Lu Ya reached for his gourd to release the Immortal-Slaying Flying Knife, but Kong Xuan cast his five-colored divine light toward Lu Ya. Knowing the divine light's power, Lu Ya transformed into a rainbow and fled back to camp, where he told Jiang Ziya, "Indeed he is formidable. I don't know what divine power this is. I had to transform into a rainbow to escape - we must discuss further plans."

Hearing this, Jiang Ziya became even more troubled. Kong Xuan remained at the gate refusing to leave, demanding "Jiang Shang come out to face me and decide who is superior! Don't make the armies suffer here!" When this was reported to central command, Jiang Ziya was at a loss for what to do. Kong Xuan shouted at the gate, "Jiang Shang has the name of Prime Minister but not the conduct - fearing blades and avoiding swords is not the way of a true man!"

While Kong Xuan was hurling insults at the gate, the supply officer Tu Xing Sun had just arrived. Seeing Kong Xuan's boastful words, he grew angry: "How dare this wretch belittle my Prime Minister!" Tu Xing Sun cursed loudly, "Which rebel dares to be so unreasonable!" Kong Xuan looked up to see a dwarf with an iron staff, no more than three or four feet tall. Kong Xuan laughed, "What kind of creature are you to speak up?"

Tu Xing Sun didn't reply but rolled under Kong Xuan's horse, swinging his staff to strike. Kong Xuan swung his blade to block. Tu Xing Sun's body was agile, jumping left and right. After three to five exchanges, Kong Xuan was struggling. Tu Xing Sun, seeing Kong Xuan's difficulty, jumped out of range and taunted, "Kong Xuan, it's not good to fight mounted. Come down and face me properly - I'll definitely capture you to show you my skills!"

Kong Xuan originally didn't take Tu Xing Sun seriously and believed his words, thinking secretly, "This wretch deserves death! No need for my blade - one kick will split him in two." Kong Xuan said, "I'll dismount to fight you - let's see what you can do!"

This was truly:  
You wish to succeed in supporting King Zhou,  
Not knowing you've fallen into a clever trap.

Kong Xuan dismounted, sword in hand, and slashed downward. Tu Xing Sun's staff rose to meet it. The two fought fiercely at the foot of the ridge. A messenger reported to central command: "Prime Minister, Second Supply Officer Tu Xing Sun has arrived with supplies and is battling Kong Xuan." Jiang Ziya grew worried that his supply officer might be captured and cut off their supply lines, so he ordered Deng Chanyu to watch from the gate. Meanwhile, Tu Xing Sun and Kong Xuan fought on foot. Tu Xing Sun was experienced in ground combat, while Kong Xuan was used to fighting on horseback. On foot, his movements were awkward, and Tu Xing Sun managed to strike him several times.

Kong Xuan realized his mistake and quickly cast down his five-colored divine light. Seeing the swift and strange light approaching, Tu Xing Sun knew its danger and quickly twisted his body, vanishing. As Kong Xuan looked down searching for him, Deng Chanyu threw a stone, shouting, "Rebel, watch the stone!" By the time Kong Xuan heard the sound and looked up, it had struck his face. With a cry of pain, he covered his face and turned to flee. Chanyu threw another stone, hitting the back of his neck, seriously wounding him as he fled back to camp. The husband and wife were overjoyed and returned to report their victory to Jiang Ziya, who was also pleased. Tu Xing Sun said, "Kong Xuan's five-colored divine light is indeed formidable, but we'll find a way to deal with it."

In his camp, Kong Xuan sat furious, his face wounded twice and his neck injured. In great anger, he took medicine to heal. The next day, fully recovered, he mounted his horse, seeking only the stone-throwing female general to avenge the three stone strikes. When this was reported, Deng Chanyu wanted to go out, but Jiang Ziya stopped her: "You can't go. You've hit him with stones three times - how could he let you off easily? If you go out now, you'll surely meet misfortune." Jiang Ziya ordered them to hang out the "No Battle" flag instead. Seeing this, Kong Xuan returned, his anger unabated.

The next day, Burning Lamp Taoist arrived at the gate. When informed, Jiang Ziya hurried out to welcome him, leading him to the tent with proper ceremony and seating him in the place of honor. Jiang Ziya addressed him as "Old Master" and explained everything about Kong Xuan. Burning Lamp said, "I know all about it. I've come specially to meet him." Jiang Ziya ordered the "No Battle" flag removed.

When Kong Xuan heard the "No Battle" flag was removed, he quickly mounted his horse and came to the gate for battle. Burning Lamp floated out to meet him. Kong Xuan recognized him and laughed, "Burning Lamp Taoist, you are a peaceful hermit. I know your Dao is deep, but why trouble yourself with this worldly conflict?" Burning Lamp replied, "Since you know my Dao is deep, you should surrender and join King Wu to pass the five gates and attack the tyrant. Why remain stubborn and still resist?"

Kong Xuan laughed heartily, "I hadn't met a kindred spirit, so I kept silent. You say your Dao is deep, but you don't know my origins. Listen:  
From chaos I emerged when it first split,  
Through yin-yang and supreme ultimate I freely roamed.  
Now I've completed the cycle of life,  
Not wandering in the Three Vehicles' mysteries."

After Kong Xuan's verse, Burning Lamp couldn't figure out what kind of being had attained the Dao. He said, "Since you understand rise and fall and deeply comprehend mysteries, how can you not know Heaven's Mandate and still defy it?" Kong Xuan replied, "These are just your deceptive words. How could there be a Heaven-ordained position that considers rebellion righteous?"

Burning Lamp said, "You monster! You rely on your strength and speak grandly without thought. You'll surely regret it!" Kong Xuan grew furious and swung his blade to attack. Burning Lamp uttered "Good!" and parried with his sword. After just two or three exchanges, Burning Lamp quickly summoned his twenty-four Ocean-Calming Pearls to strike Kong Xuan. Kong Xuan quickly absorbed them with his divine light, and the precious pearls fell into it. Burning Lamp was shocked and summoned his Purple Golden Bowl, which also fell into the divine light.

Burning Lamp shouted, "Where are my disciples?" Suddenly a great wind arose in the sky, revealing a great Peng bird. Seeing it approach, Kong Xuan quickly adjusted his helmet, sending a red light straight up to the stars, spreading across the sky. Burning Lamp looked carefully with his wisdom eyes but couldn't see clearly. He only heard sounds like heaven collapsing and earth splitting above. After two hours, there was a loud crash, and the Peng bird was knocked down to earth.

Kong Xuan quickly spurred his horse forward to cast his divine light at Burning Lamp, who escaped back to camp on a beam of auspicious light. He told Jiang Ziya of the formidable opponent, still not knowing what he was. The Peng bird also arrived at the tent. Burning Lamp asked the Peng, "What kind of being is Kong Xuan who has attained the Dao?" The Peng replied, "In the sky, I only saw five-colored auspicious clouds protecting his body, and he seemed to have two wings, but I don't know what bird he is."

While they were discussing, a military officer reported: "A Taoist has arrived at the gate requesting an audience." Jiang Ziya and Burning Lamp went to welcome him. They saw a man with double hair buns, yellow-skinned and thin, wearing two flowers in his hair and holding a tree branch. Seeing Burning Lamp, he smiled and said, "Greetings, fellow Daoist!" Burning Lamp quickly bowed and asked, "Where do you come from, brother?" The Taoist replied, "I come from the West, seeking to meet those with karmic connections in the East and South. Knowing Kong Xuan is blocking the great army, I've come specially to guide him."

Burning Lamp recognized him as a Western School Taoist and quickly invited him into the tent. Seeing the rolling dust and killing air, with murderous energy everywhere, the Taoist kept saying, "Good! Good!" After sitting down and exchanging greetings, Burning Lamp asked, "I've heard the Western Paradise is a land of ultimate bliss. You've come to the East to save beings - truly compassionate and skillful. May I ask your honored name?" The Taoist replied, "I am Zhunti of the Western School. The other day, fellow Daoist Guangcheng Zi visited our Western Paradise to borrow the Blue Lotus Banner and met me. Today Kong Xuan has karmic ties with our Western Paradise, so I've come specially to invite him to join us in the land of ultimate bliss."

Burning Lamp was overjoyed and said, "Brother, by subduing Kong Xuan today, you'll truly mark King Wu's time to advance east." Zhunti replied, "Not only will he advance east, but Kong Xuan's attainment of the Dao is profound, with deep karmic roots connected to the West." After speaking, Zhunti went out to meet Kong Xuan. As for the outcome of victory or defeat, listen to the next chapter.

**Chapter 79 Four Generals Captured at Chuanyun Pass**

The poem says:  
One pass after another they meet,  
With magical treasures more fierce than before.  
Law's soul-drawing makes past events,  
Dragon's bone-softening brings new strife.  
Through many dangers still comes fortune,  
When ability seems full, all is empty.  
Laughable is Xu Fang's defiance of fate,  
His wasted thoughts lead nowhere!

The story tells that Xu Gai quietly retreated to his rear hall that evening. The next day, Wang Bao didn't come to see his commander but directly led troops out of the pass to challenge the Zhou camp. When the report reached the central command, Jiang Ziya asked, "Who will meet this challenge?" Nezha responded, "I am willing." Jiang Ziya agreed.

Nezha mounted his Wind Fire Wheels and took up his Fire-Tipped Spear, rushing out of camp. Wang Bao saw a general approaching on Wind Fire Wheels and hurriedly asked, "Could you be Nezha?" Nezha replied, "Indeed." He brandished his spear to strike. Wang Bao quickly raised his decorated halberd to defend. Knowing Nezha was from the Xianshu School, Wang Bao thought to himself, "Strike first to gain advantage." During the battle, he released a thunderbolt aimed at Nezha's face. But this thunder could only harm others - Nezha, being born from a lotus flower, saw the thunder coming with its flames and simply rose higher on his Wind Fire Wheels, rendering the thunder ineffective.

Nezha then threw his Universe Ring, which struck Wang Bao's crown, knocking him unconscious from his horse. Nezha finished him with a spear thrust and took his head. Returning victorious to camp, he reported everything to Jiang Ziya, who was greatly pleased.

As for Xu Gai, when he heard Wang Bao had died in battle, he thought secretly: "These two generals didn't understand the times and brought death upon themselves. Better to send an official to surrender and spare the common people's suffering." While he was still worrying, suddenly it was reported: "A monk has come to see you." Xu Gai ordered, "Bring him in." The monk entered the fortress, bowed before the hall and said: "General Xu, I pay my respects." Xu Gai said: "Please! What brings the monk here?" The monk replied: "General doesn't know, but I had a disciple named Peng Zun who died at Lei Zhenzi's hands. I've come specially to avenge him." Xu Gai asked: "Monk, what is your name?" The monk replied: "My surname is Fa, given name Jie."

Seeing the monk had something of an immortal's bearing, Xu Gai hurriedly invited him to sit. Fa Jie didn't decline and took his seat readily. Xu Gai said: "Jiang Ziya is a man of great virtue from Kunlun, and he has disciples from the Three Mountains and Five Peaks - I fear we cannot defeat him." Fa Jie said: "General, don't worry. I'll capture even Jiang Shang for you, to make your merit." Xu Gai said: "If you can do that, it would be your great kindness to me." He quickly asked: "Master, do you eat meat or vegetables?" Fa Jie replied: "I keep a vegetarian diet. I don't need much." They spent the night without further words.

The next day, Fa Jie took up his sword and went straight to the Zhou camp, announcing he wanted to speak with Jiang Ziya. The scout reported to central command: "A monk requests an audience with the Prime Minister." Jiang Ziya gave orders and led his disciples out of camp to meet this monk. They saw that across from them were no soldiers, just one man alone.

When Nezha saw Fa Jie had intercepted the Demon-Slaying Club, his anger flared. He charged forward on his Wind Fire Wheels with his Fire-Tipped Spear. After just three or four exchanges, Yang Jian also arrived with supplies. Seeing Fa Jie had taken Jiang Ziya's treasure, Yang Jian likewise joined the battle. Together they fought fiercely against Fa Jie.

Three transport officials now fought Fa Jie together. By heaven's design, Zheng Lun also arrived with supplies. Seeing Earthly Officer and Yang Jian fighting the monk together, Zheng Lun thought to himself: "Today four people fight this monk without victory - he must be a practitioner of evil arts. I'm also a supply official - if they can achieve merit, so can I!" He spurred his Golden-Eyed Beast forward to join the fight, making Jiang Ziya overjoyed. Jiang Ziya turned his Four Directions Beast around and ordered the soldiers to "Beat the drums to support the battle!"

Fa Jie was surrounded by the three supply officials with no room to escape. Even with his magical treasures, how could he use them? Tu Xing Sun's iron staff struck several blows from below. As Fa Jie tried to escape, Zheng Lun, fearing he would get away, exhaled two white lights from his nostrils. Fa Jie heard something but didn't know what it was. When he looked up and saw the two white lights, his three hun and seven po souls scattered.

Fa Jie fell to the ground and was captured alive by the Crow Soldiers. Jiang Ziya used a charm to seal Fa Jie's Niwan Palace (third eye), then returned victorious to camp. When Fa Jie opened his eyes and found himself bound, he sighed: "Who knew I would meet such a fate here!" His regret came too late.

Jiang Ziya ascended his seat in the tent, and the three supply officials came to see him. Jiang Ziya said: "The three supply officials have achieved great merit!" He praised them saying:  
"Transporting military supplies,  
Cleverly capturing Fa Jie.  
Mysterious calculations,  
Extraordinary achievement!"

After Jiang Ziya's praise, the three officials thanked him. Jiang Ziya ordered: "Bring Fa Jie forward." The soldiers brought Fa Jie to central command. Fa Jie called out: "Jiang Shang, you need not speak. Today was fated to be thus. As they say, 'In the great sea one sees endless waves, who knew small tricks would capture me instead.' Know that this is Heaven's mandate. Quickly carry out your military justice!"

Just as they were about to execute Fa Jie, a Taoist appeared singing a song:  
"Good and evil are forgotten in an instant,  
Glory and decline concern not my heart.  
Through darkness and light I float freely,  
Drinking when thirsty, eating when hungry.  
Sitting quietly on my meditation mat,  
If confused, demons will invade.  
Why block the enlightened ruler with evil thoughts?  
Why suffer the blade in this mortal dust?"

After finishing his song, he called out loudly: "Stay the execution! Report to your Prime Minister that Zhunti has come to see him." Yang Jian quickly reported to Jiang Ziya: "The Western Zhunti Taoist has arrived." Jiang Ziya and his disciples went to welcome him at the gate. Zhunti said: "No need to enter the camp. I have one thing to say: Though Fa Jie opposed Heaven and blocked your way, Prime Minister, and deserves punishment, his name is not on the Investiture of the Gods list. He has karmic ties to our Western Paradise. I've come specially for this - I hope Prime Minister will show mercy." Jiang Ziya replied: "How dare I refuse Master's request?" He ordered: "Release him!"

Zhunti helped Fa Jie up and said: "Fellow Daoist, our Western Paradise has wonderful scenery. Please come with me:  
The Western Paradise is truly serene,  
Where pure winds blow and bright moons gleam.  
White clouds part to reveal auspicious light,  
Flowing waters murmur like valley echoes.  
Apes call and birds sing among wondrous flowers,  
The Bodhi path lined with fragrant orchids.  
Pines sway on cliff faces spreading mists,  
Bamboo brushes clouds beckoning phoenix.  
In the Seven Treasures Forest one roams free,  
By the Eight Virtues Pool all is peaceful.  
Distant peaks stand like folding screens,  
Winding valleys resound like jade chimes.  
Udumbara flowers fill seats with fragrance,  
Sharira relics transcend highest vehicles.  
Kunlun's earth veins birth dragons here,  
Better than Kunlun with no ordinances."

After Zhunti described the Western Paradise, Fa Jie had no choice but to submit. He left with Zhunti for the West. Later, Fa Jie would be reborn as Prince Jeta in Shravasti, achieve proper fruition, and return to Buddhism. During the Han Dynasty under Emperors Ming and Zhang, he would help spread the teachings to China. But that's a later story.

Meanwhile, when the commander of Chuanyun Pass saw Fa Jie had been captured, he quickly ordered Lei Zhenzi released from prison. He opened the gates and went with Lei Zhenzi to surrender at the camp gates. A scout reported to central command: "Prime Minister, Lei Zhenzi awaits orders at the gate." Jiang Ziya was delighted and quickly ordered: "Let him come." Lei Zhenzi came before the tent and told Jiang Ziya: "Xu Gai has long wished to submit to Zhou, but was repeatedly blocked by his officers. Now he specially comes with your servant to surrender the pass. Not daring to enter presumptuously, he waits at the gate for orders."

Jiang Ziya ordered: "Let him come." Xu Gai entered the camp in plain clothes, prostrated himself and said: "This humble servant intended to submit to Zhou, but was prevented by my officers, causing delays in my allegiance. I have committed grave crimes - I beg the Prime Minister's forgiveness." Jiang Ziya replied: "General Xu knows Heaven's Mandate belongs to Zhou - it's not too late. What crime is there?" He quickly ordered him to rise.

After Xu Gai gave thanks, he invited Jiang Ziya to enter the pass and pacify the troops and people. Jiang Ziya ordered the army to enter the pass. He ascended the Silver Peace Hall, sent for King Wu, and began checking household registers and treasuries. The next day, King Wu's carriage entered Jiepai Pass. All the generals welcomed King Wu to the Silver Peace Hall. After paying respects, the King said: "Prime Minister labors in distant campaigns, preventing me from sharing peace with you - my heart is unsettled." Jiang Ziya replied: "Your old servant considers the feudal lords of the realm most important. The people sit in fire and water, so I dare not defy Heaven to seek comfort."

Jiang Ziya presented Xu Gai to meet King Wu. The King said: "General Xu has merit in surrendering the pass. I order a feast to reward the three armies." After one night passed, the next day Jiang Ziya ordered: "Advance to take Chuanyun Pass." They fired cannons to begin the march. The three armies shouted war cries. It was only eighty li to the next pass. Forward scouts reported to central command: "The vanguard has reached Chuanyun Pass." Jiang Ziya ordered them to fire cannons and make camp.

The commander of Chuanyun Pass was Xu Fang, Xu Gai's brother. When Xu Fang heard his elder brother had submitted to Zhou, he was so angry his three souls nearly jumped out, and smoke rose from his mouth and nose. He cursed loudly: "This wretch disregards his parents, wife, and children, losing himself in rebellion, seeking rank and position - he'll leave a stinking name for ten thousand years!" He quickly sounded the drum to gather his generals. All the generals came to the hall to pay respects.

Xu Fang said: "Unfortunately, my brother has forgotten his family and betrayed his lord, seeking wealth and rank, surrendering the pass and submitting to rebels. Our entire family can hardly escape execution. Our current plan must be to capture these rebel officials completely to redeem our previous crimes." The advance general Long Anji said: "Commander, rest assured. Let me first capture several rebel generals and send them to the capital to seek pardon. Then we'll wait to capture their leader to redeem our crimes and show our loyalty. Then naturally the commander's entire family will be safe."

Xu Fang said: "These words match my thoughts exactly. I only hope the advance guard and all generals will work together with one heart to eliminate the rebels and repay our lord's kindness - this is my wish, and I care for nothing else." The generals discussed their plans.

The next day, Jiang Ziya ascended his command seat and asked: "Who will go take Chuanyun Pass?" Xu Gai immediately responded: "Prime Minister: The commander of Chuanyun Pass is my younger brother. Without drawing bow or arrow, I will persuade my brother to submit to Zhou, as a means of advancement." Jiang Ziya was delighted and said: "If General is willing to do this, it would truly be an extraordinary merit, not just advancement!"

Xu Gai mounted his horse and went to the pass, calling out loudly: "Guards, open the gate!" The gate guards dared not open it on their own authority and hurriedly reported to the commander's residence: "Commander, the elder master is at the gate calling to enter." Xu Fang was delighted: "Quickly open the gate and invite him in!" As the guards left, Xu Fang ordered his men: "Hide executioners on both sides, ready to act."

Soon the gates opened. Xu Gai, not knowing his own brother intended to capture him, entered the pass and came to the front of the residence. Dismounting, he went straight to the hall. Xu Fang didn't even rise, asking: "Who comes?" Xu Gai laughed loudly: "Brother, why do you pretend not to know me when I arrive?" Xu Fang shouted loudly, ordering: "Seize him!" Executioners rushed out from both sides and captured Xu Gai, binding him.

Xu Fang said: "You wretch who has disgraced our ancestors! You surrendered to rebels without regard for your family's fate. Today you come here yourself - truly our ancestors' spirits are at work, not letting the Xu family face slaughter!" Xu Gai cursed loudly: "You fool who doesn't understand the times! The world has already submitted to Zhou, King Zhou's destruction is imminent - how dare you, with your tiny territory, resist the army that punishes evil on behalf of the people! You want to play the loyal minister? How do you compare to Su Hu and Huang Feihu? To Hong Jin and Deng Jiugong? Though I am captured by you and death matters little to me, I wonder who will capture you to vent my anger!" Xu Fang ordered: "Imprison this treasonous wretch for now, until we capture King Wu and Jiang Shang, then we'll send them all to the capital for punishment." His men imprisoned Xu Gai.

Xu Fang asked: "Who will take the first battle for our country?" One general stepped forward - the official advance guard, Divine Smoke General Ma Zhong, volunteered. Xu Fang approved. Ma Zhong received orders, opened the gates, and amid cannon fire charged toward the Zhou camp. A scout reported to central command: "Prime Minister: A general from Chuanyun Pass challenges us to battle." Jiang Ziya said: "Xu Gai is finished!" He quickly ordered Nezha to take the pass and investigate what happened to Xu Gai.

Nezha received orders, mounted his Wind Fire Wheels, and left camp. He saw Ma Zhong in golden armor and red robe, looking impressive. Nezha approached the front lines. Ma Zhong asked: "Could you be Nezha?" Nezha replied: "Indeed. Since you know me, why not surrender?" Ma Zhong grew furious and said: "Ignorant wretch! You lot falsely claim kingship, rebel against Heaven, abandon your duties as subjects, and invade the king's territory - your crimes are unforgivable. Soon we'll capture you all and grind your bones to dust. Yet you still don't understand and dare to speak cleverly!"

Nezha laughed: "I see you're like earth frogs and rotten rats, soon to be crushed by Shang - not worth talking to!" Ma Zhong grew angry, brandished his spear, and charged forward to attack. Nezha's spear flashed with bright light. Their horses met, both spears raised, as they fought to Chuanyun Pass.

Ma Zhong knew Nezha was a person of great virtue with superior skills. He thought to himself: "If I don't strike first, I fear he'll make his move, and that wouldn't be good." Ma Zhong opened his mouth and released a black smoke that obscured everything, including man and horse. Seeing Ma Zhong's black smoke create a wall of darkness, Nezha quickly raised his Wind Fire Wheels, transformed his body to reveal eight arms and three heads, with a blue face and protruding fangs, rising into the air.

Ma Zhong couldn't see Nezha in the smoke. As he hurriedly withdrew his divine smoke and was about to turn his horse, he heard Nezha shout: "Ma Zhong, don't run! I'm here!" Ma Zhong looked up to see Nezha with three heads and eight arms, blue-faced with fangs, pursuing him in the sky. Ma Zhong was so frightened his soul nearly left his body, and he turned his horse to flee. Nezha quickly threw his Nine Dragons Divine Fire Net, which trapped Ma Zhong. With another hand gesture, nine fire dragons appeared within the net, and in an instant, Ma Zhong was burned to ashes.

A poem describes it:  
The profound mystery of Primal Origin was truly transmitted,  
With secret talismans and even more divine methods.  
Fire dates and jade nectar were naturally different,  
Ma Zhong was destined to turn to dust.

After burning Ma Zhong to death, Nezha retrieved his Divine Fire Net and returned victoriously to camp to report to Jiang Ziya, relating how he had burned Ma Zhong. Jiang Ziya was greatly pleased and celebrated the victory.

Meanwhile, a scout reported to the pass: "Commander, Ma Zhong has been burned to death by Nezha." Xu Fang was furious. From beside him stepped forward Long Anji, who said: "Ma Zhong didn't know his limitations and relied too much on his divine smoke, hence his defeat. Tomorrow I will achieve merit by capturing several rebel generals to send to the capital for punishment."

The next day, Long Anji rode out of the pass to issue a challenge. When the scouts reported this to central command, Jiang Ziya asked: "Who will go forth?" Martial King Huang Feihu stepped forward and said: "Your servant is willing." Jiang Ziya approved.

Huang Feihu mounted his five-colored divine bull and took up his spear, leaving camp. Long Anji saw a Zhou general approach - as described in this poem:

Skilled in battle, his spirit ever rising,  
A hero fierce with nature strong and bold.  
Loyal heart unchanged in joining Zhou's cause,  
Iron face unwavering in leaving King Zhou.  
True righteousness marks his name in history's blue scrolls,  
Pure goodness places his image in vermillion halls.  
Even now his deeds against Zhou are remembered,  
His fame lasting ten thousand years fragrant.

Long Anji called out: "Who comes?" Feihu replied: "I am King Wu Cheng." Long Anji said: "So you're Huang Feihu? Betraying the Shang Dynasty, source of all trouble, today I shall capture you!" He spurred his horse forward, wielding his axe. Huang Feihu quickly raised his spear to meet him. The two generals clashed, spear and axe crossing, fighting for over fifty rounds. These two were truly "chess players meeting their match, generals encountering their equal."

Long Anji saw that Huang Feihu's spearwork had no openings. He thought secretly: "No use wasting energy with him." He deflected the spear and took something from his brocade bag, throwing it into the air. There was a tinkling sound, and Long Anji called: "Huang Feihu, watch my treasure!" Huang Feihu, not knowing what it was, looked up and immediately fell from his saddle. The pass troops gave a great shout as they captured Huang Feihu alive, binding him with ropes and taking him into Chuanyun Pass.

A scout reported to central command: "Huang Feihu has been captured!" Jiang Ziya was shocked and asked: "How was he captured?" The observing officer replied: "During the battle, Long Anji threw something circular into the air that made a tinkling sound, and General Huang fell from his mount - that's how he was captured." Jiang Ziya heard this unhappily: "This must be some evil magic!"

Long Anji brought Huang Feihu before Xu Fang. Huang Feihu stood and said: "I was captured by evil magic. I am willing to die for my country." Xu Fang cursed: "True wretch! Abandoning your old master to join rebels, yet now you speak of 'dying for your country' - how backwards!" He ordered: "Put him in prison." When Xu Gai saw Huang Feihu arrive, he quickly consoled him: "My unworthy brother doesn't understand the times and relies on evil magic. I never expected general would also fall into this trap." Huang Feihu nodded silently, only sighing.

Xu Fang prepared wine to celebrate Long Anji's victory. The next day, Long Anji again went to challenge the Zhou camp. Jiang Ziya asked: "Who dares to go forth?" Hong Jin stepped forward. Arriving at the battle line, he saw Long Anji - who had once been a subordinate officer under Hong Jin's command. Hong Jin said: "Long Anji, seeing your former commander, why don't you dismount and surrender? Why do you still hesitate?"

Long Anji laughed: "Rebel Hong Jin, how dare you speak so much! I've been wanting to capture you all to send to the capital and uphold national law. How can you not know when to advance and retreat, yet still dare to speak cleverly?" He spurred his horse forward to attack, axe raised. Their weapons clashed as they fought to the base of Chuanyun Pass.

Long Anji knew his "Four Limbs Softener" had two parts, left and right turning like the Taiji symbol, interlocking like Yin-Yang linked rings. When this treasure moved, it made a tinkling sound. Those who heard and saw it would find their four limbs going soft, bones and tendons weakening. When Hong Jin heard the sound in the air and looked up, he could no longer stay mounted and fell from his horse. Long Anji captured him and took him into the pass.

Hong Jin thought to himself: "This villain was once under my command, yet I never knew he had such a thing. Now I've fallen into the hands of this petty man!" The guards brought Hong Jin before Xu Fang, who was delighted and said: "Hong Jin, you were ordered to fight rebels, yet you surrendered to them instead. What face do you have to see the Shang emperor now?" Hong Jin replied: "Heaven wills it so - what more is there to say? Though I am captured, my will remains unbroken. Death is all that awaits!" Xu Fang ordered: "Send him to prison for now."

When Huang Feihu saw Hong Jin also arrive in prison, they could only sigh together. Back in the Zhou camp, scouts reported Hong Jin's capture, leaving Jiang Ziya very unhappy. The next day, reports came that Long Anji was again issuing a challenge. Jiang Ziya asked: "Who will face him?" Nangong Shi stepped forward to battle Long Anji, but after several exchanges, Long Anji used his Four Limbs Softener to capture him as well and brought him before Xu Fang, who ordered: "Send him to prison too."

When the scouts reported this to Jiang Ziya, he was greatly alarmed. From beside him, the advance guard Nezha said: "What kind of evil magic does this Long Anji use to capture several generals? Let me face him and find out." As for Long Anji's fate, listen to the next chapter.

**Chapter 100 King Wu Enfeofs the Various Lords**

The poem says:  
Zhou's dynasty establishes imperial plans,  
Dividing lands to reward varied merits.  
Three grades of fields pass down through generations,  
Five paths of ranks mark official positions.  
Iron bonds and golden books stored in stone chambers,  
High officials with bronze seals gather.  
From now on, feudal lords spread like stars,  
Teaching and guidance bring peace to all people.

The story tells that Jiang Ziya gave orders to execute Feilian and E'lai. The gate officers brought the two men outside the camp gate, beheaded them, and reported back to Jiang Ziya. After executing these two treacherous ministers, Jiang Ziya returned to the Investiture Platform and shouted loudly: "Where is the God of Good Fortune Bai Jian? Quickly bring the souls of Feilian and E'lai before the altar for investiture!"

Soon, the God of Good Fortune led Feilian and E'lai's souls to the altar base, where they knelt to hear their mandates. Their souls prostrated themselves, filled with bitter sorrow. Jiang Ziya said: "By command of the Supreme Lord Yuan Shi: You, Feilian and E'lai, willingly served as treacherous ministers in life, misleading your sovereign, destroying the country and causing your lord's downfall, living dishonorably. You only knew to steal treasures for personal glory, not realizing the net of law has no gaps. Having faced righteous punishment, you shall now have positions in the dark realm. These are the sins you brought upon yourselves, also destined by fate. You are specially ordained as Gods of Ice Melting and Tile Breaking. Though evil stars, you should diligently fulfill your duties and not spread further harm. Respect this!"

After hearing their divine titles, Feilian and E'lai kowtowed in gratitude and left the altar. Jiang Ziya finished the investiture and descended the platform, leading all officials back to Xi Qi. A poem testifies:

Heaven's principles turn like a wheel,  
Success and failure follow without fail.  
The ebb and flow of things invites laughter,  
The ups and downs of fate deserve sighs.  
Xia Jie's south nest - a candle in wind,  
Shang Xin burned - a flower in waves.  
Ancient and modern fall just the same,  
Only loyal souls accompany the setting sun.

Jiang Ziya returned to Qi State, entered the capital, and rested in the Prime Minister's residence. All officials returned to their private residences. One evening passed.

The next morning at court, King Wu ascended the throne. As a virtuous emperor, the court ceremony was naturally different. Fragrant mists crossed the sky, auspicious smoke drifted hazily, the rising sun was encircled in yellow, and blessed clouds spread their colors. Jade pendants tinkled, officials' robes stirred in the pure wind, dragons and serpents cast their shadows. Imperial curtains around the four sides welcomed the dawn, three quiet whip cracks organized the court ranks, and civil and military officials called out "Ten thousand years!" How beautiful was the morning court scene! A Tang Dynasty poet described the splendor of morning court:

Red-capped roosters announce dawn's count,  
Royal robes bring in cyan cloud garments.  
Nine heavens' gates open palace halls,  
Ten thousand states' officials bow to crown tassels.  
Sunlight just touches immortal palms moving,  
Incense smoke floats by dragon robes.  
After court, five-colored edicts must be written,  
Pendant sounds return to phoenix pools.

King Wu ascended the throne, and the court official announced: "Those with matters may step forward to report. Those without may retire when curtains roll." Before the words ended, Jiang Ziya stepped out from the ranks, prostrated himself and addressed himself as "subject." King Wu said: "Prime Minister, what memorial do you have for me?"

Jiang Ziya reported: "Yesterday, following my master's command, I invested both loyal ministers and worthy generals, along with unrighteous immortals and treacherous officials, all according to their destined fates and jade edicts, with divine positions. Each has their duties, receiving worship and offerings, protecting the country and benefiting the people, controlling weather and rain, wielding power over fortune and misfortune. From now on, eternal peace is secured, and Your Majesty need not worry further.

However, the feudal lords, campaign generals, and disciples from famous mountains and caves who faced arrows and stones all have merit in bloody battles. Now that the realm is settled, we should divide lands and territories, enfeoffing them with ranks and stipends, letting their descendants inherit these lands forever, to show our respect for virtue and reward for merit. The royal princes and descendants should also be enfeoffed as protective screens to strengthen the royal house. The descendants of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of high antiquity should also receive land divisions to reward their ancestors' merit in establishing order. These are Your Majesty's primary duties that should be carried out immediately, without a moment's delay."

King Wu replied: "I have had this in mind for long. Only because Prime Minister was not finished with the divine investitures did I wait a while. Now that Prime Minister has returned, everything shall be done according to your and my royal brother's plans."

Jiang Ziya and Duke of Zhou thanked the king and left the hall to draft the enfeoffment ceremonies and rankings to submit for King Wu's approval. The next day, King Wu sat on his throne and commanded his royal brother, Duke of Zhou, to announce the enfeoffments from the golden hall. First, they posthumously honored the royal ancestors - Grand King, King Ji, and King Wen - all as emperors. The remaining meritorious officials and descendants of previous dynasties' emperors were ranked in five grades: Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, and Baron. Those below the five ranks became attached states. After the arrangements were complete, the Duke of Zhou began announcing the names.

List of Feudal Lords' States and Names:

Lu - Ji surname, rank of Marquis. Zhou King Wen's fourth son Duke Zhou Dan, who assisted Kings Wen, Wu, and Cheng with great merit for the realm. Later King Cheng appointed him Grand Minister, with fief in Feng County's Zhou City to the northeast. Called Minister Duke Zhou, he remained to assist the Son of Heaven, governing the feudal lords east of Shan. He enfeoffed his eldest son Boqin at Qufu, territory of 700 li, giving him precious jade and great bows, making him Marquis of Lu to support the Zhou house.

Qi - Jiang surname, rank of Marquis. Descendant of Emperor Yan's grandson Bo Yi who as Four Peaks minister helped Yu control floods with merit, granted surname Jiang, called Marquis of Lu. His state was west of Nanyang Wan County. From Jiang Taigong Lü Wang's rise at Wei River, serving as teacher to Kings Wen and Wu, titled Teacher Father, helping establish the realm with great merit, enfeoffed at Yingqiu as Marquis of Qi, ranked above the Five Marquises and Nine Earls. Now Qingzhou Prefecture in Shandong.

Yan - Ji surname, rank of Earl. Zhou kinsman named Jun Shuang, helped Kings Wen and Wu establish the realm with great merit, became Zhou Grand Protector, given fief at Shao, called Shao Kang. Remained to assist the Son of Heaven, governing feudal lords west of Shan. Enfeoffed his son as Earl of North Yan, in today's Ji County of Youzhou.

Wei - Ji surname, rank of Earl. Zhou kinsman named Bi Gong Gao, helped Kings Wen and Wu establish the realm with great merit, enfeoffed to guard Wei state. Now Gaomi County in Kaifeng Prefecture, Henan.

Guan - Ji surname, rank of Marquis. King Wu's brother Ji Shu Xian, enfeoffed at Guan to supervise Wu Geng. Now Xinyang County in Henan.

Cai - Ji surname, rank of Marquis. King Wu's brother Ji Shu Du, enfeoffed at Cai to supervise Wu Geng. Now Shangcai County in Runing Prefecture, Henan.

Cao - Ji surname, rank of Earl. King Wu's brother Ji Shu Zhen Duo. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed at Cao. Now Dingtao County in Jiyang.

Lang - Ji surname, rank of Earl. King Wu's brother Ji Shu Wu. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed at Lang. Now Wenshang County in Yanzhou Prefecture, Shandong.

Huo - Ji surname, rank of Earl. King Wu's brother Ji Shu Chu. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed at Huo. Now Pingyang Prefecture in Shanxi.

Wei - Ji surname, rank of Marquis. King Wu's younger brother from the same mother, appointed as Grand Justice, given fief at Kang, called Kang Shu, enfeoffed at Wei. Now Ji Prefecture in Northern Capital.

Teng - Ji surname, rank of Marquis. King Wu's brother Ji Shu Xiu. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed at Teng. Now Zhangqiu County in Shandong.

Jin - Ji surname, rank of Marquis. King Wu's youngest son, called Tang Shu Yu. Enfeoffed at Tang, later changed to Jin. Now Yicheng east of Jiang County in Pingyang Prefecture, Shanxi.

Wu - Ji surname, rank of Viscount. Descendant of Zhou Grand King's eldest son Taibo. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed as Wu. Now Wu Commandery.

Yu - Ji surname, rank of Duke. Descendant of Zhou Grand King's son Zhong Yong. After King Wu conquered Shang, sought descendants of Taibo and Zhong Yong, found Zhang Yi as Wu's lord; separately enfeoffed as Yu. Located in Taiyang County, Hedong.

Guo - Ji surname, rank of Duke. Son of King Ji, Guo Zhong, King Wen's brother. Zhong and Guo Shu served as King Wen's officials, with merit in the royal house recorded in the covenant archives. King Wen loved his two brothers, calling them the Two Guos. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed Zhong at Hongnong, at Guo City southeast of Shan County.

Chu - Mi surname, rank of Viscount. Descendant of Emperor Zhuan, named Yu Xiong. Served as teacher to Kings Wen and Wu, with diligent service to the royal house, enfeoffed in Jing Man territory, ranked above baron. Now Zhijiang County in Danyang South Commandery.

Xu - Jiang surname, rank of Baron. Descendant of Yao's Four Peaks minister Bo Yi. Due to ancestral merit, after King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed his descendant Wen Shu at Xu. Now Xu Prefecture.

Qin - Ying surname, rank of Earl. Descendant of Emperor Zhuan. Due to ancestral merit, after King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed his descendant Bo Yi at Qin. Now Xi'an Prefecture in Shaanxi.

Ju - Ying surname, rank of Viscount. Descendant of Emperor Shaohao. Due to ancestral merit, after King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed his descendant Zi Yu Qi at Ju City. Now Ju County.

Ji - Jiang surname, rank of Marquis. Second son of Taigong. King Wu, remembering Taigong's merit, divided land to enfeoff at Ji. Now Ju County in Dongguan.

Zhu - Cao surname, rank of Viscount. Descendant of Lu Zhong's fifth son Yan An. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed his descendant Cao Xia at Zhu. Now Zou County in Shandong.

Xue - Shi surname, rank of Marquis. Descendant of Yellow Emperor. Due to generational merit, after King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed his descendant Xi Zhong at Xue. Now Yi Prefecture in Shandong.

Song - Zi surname, rank of Duke. King Di Yi of Shang's eldest concubine-born son called Weizi Qi; due to King Zhou's misrule, Weizi took the sacrificial vessels and returned to Zhou. After King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed Weizi at Song. Now Suiyang County.

Ba - Si surname, rank of Earl. Descendant of Yu of Xia. After King Wu conquered Shang, sought descendants of Yu's lineage, found Donglou Gong, enfeoffed at Ba to continue Yu's sacrifices. Now Yongqiu County in Kaifeng Prefecture.

Chen - Gui surname, rank of Marquis. Descendant of Emperor Shun. His descendant Yan Fu served as King Wu's pottery official, skilled in making useful vessels, truly commanded by the king. The king gave his eldest daughter Da Ji in marriage to his son Man, and enfeoffed them at Chen, to continue Emperor Yu's sacrifices. The land was at Emperor Yao's former site, now Chen County.

Jiao - Yi Qi surname, rank of Marquis. Descendant of Shennong. Due to ancestral merit, after King Wu conquered Shang, enfeoffed at Jiao. Now Shan County in Hongnong.

Ji - Ji surname, rank of Marquis. Descendant of Emperor Yao. After King Wu conquered Shang, sought his descendants and enfeoffed them at Ji to continue Tang Emperor's sacrifices. Now Beijing's Shuntian Prefecture.

Goryeo - Zi surname, a worthy Shang minister named Jizi, also of Shang royal descent. Because he refused to serve Zhou, when King Wu requested to meet him, he presented the "Hong Fan Nine Categories" treatise and left for Liaodong. King Wu enfeoffed him with that territory. His descendants continue there to this day, now the country of Joseon.

In total, seventy-two states were enfeoffed among royal princes, meritorious officials, and imperial descendants. Here are recorded the most notable ones. As for the rest: Yue was enfeoffed at Kuaiji, Xiang at Qiao state, Fan at Ji Commandery, Bo at East Ping, Gao at Ji Yin, Deng at Lai Chuan, Rong at Chen Liu, Rui at Feng Yi, Ji as an attached state, Gu at Nanyang, Mou at Taishan, Ge at Liang state, Lang as an attached state, Tan at Pingling, Sui at Ji Bei, Hua at Henan, Zhang at East Ping, Xing at Xiang state, Jiang at Runan, Ji at Pi County, Xu at Xiapi, Shu at Lujiang, Xian at Yiyang, Geng at Langya, Li at Yiyang, Xiang at Ruyin, Ying attached to Chu, Shen at Nanyang, Gong at Ji Commandery, Yi at Chengyang and other states not detailed here.

Officials like Nangong Kuo, San Yisheng, Hong Yao and others were each given territories according to their rank. That day, a great feast was held to celebrate the meritorious officials, royal princes, and civil and military officials. The treasury was opened and gold, silver, and precious objects were distributed among the feudal lords. All drank deeply until thoroughly intoxicated before dispersing.

The next day, they all submitted memorials of thanks, bid farewell to the Son of Heaven, and returned to their respective states. A later poet wrote:

One military campaign established great Zhou,  
Dividing lands and territories among feudal lords.  
The Three Kings merely claimed to rule all under heaven,  
But truly relied on these protective screens in far-reaching plans.

The story tells that after everyone received their enfeoffment edicts and departed for their assigned posts, only the royal brothers Duke of Zhou and Duke of Shao remained at court to assist the royal house. King Wu said to Duke of Zhou: "Haojing is the center of the world, truly a fitting imperial capital." Thus he commanded Duke of Shao to move the capital to Haojing, now Xianyang County in Shaanxi's Xi'an Prefecture. King Wu said: "Teacher Father is elderly and shouldn't remain at court." So he bestowed generous gifts including palace ladies, gold, Shu brocades, and national treasures like the yellow battle-axe and white yak-tail banner, giving him independent military authority as leader of the feudal lords, and sent him to his state to enjoy peace and prosperity.

The next day, Jiang Ziya entered court to thank the king for his gifts and bid farewell to depart for his state. King Wu led all officials to send him off at the southern suburbs. Jiang Ziya kowtowed and said: "Your subject has received your command to go to his state and can no longer serve at your side day and night. Today we part, not knowing when I will see your face again!" As he finished speaking, he was overcome with emotion. King Wu comforted him: "Because Prime Minister is advanced in years and has labored much for the royal house, I wish you to go to your state to enjoy peace and comfort, rather than continue toiling here day and night."

Jiang Ziya repeatedly bowed in thanks, saying: "Your Majesty thinks of me so kindly - how can I ever repay your grace of recognition?" That day lord and minister parted; Jiang Ziya saw King Wu and the officials off into the city before setting out for Qi state. Upon reaching Qi, Taigong thought: "When I first came down the mountain to Chaoge, I received much kindness from Song Yiren, but due to pressing affairs of state, I haven't yet repaid him. Now that the realm is settled, if I don't send regards at this time, I would be an ungrateful person." So he sent an envoy with a thousand jin of gold, fine robes, jade, and silk, along with a letter to Chaoge to inquire after Song Yiren.

The envoy left Qi state and traveled until reaching Chaoge one day. By then, Song Yiren and his wife had died, leaving only their son managing the family fortune, which had grown several times larger than before. He received the gifts and sent a reply letter back with the messenger to Taigong. In Qi, Taigong governed the state with good laws, helping people according to the seasons. In less than five months, Qi state was well-ordered.

Later Jiang Ziya passed away, and Prince Zao succeeded him. By the time of Xiao Bai, who employed Guan Zhong as minister, Qi dominated the other states, as recorded in the Spring and Autumn Annals. Later under Duke Kang, the state was finally destroyed by the Tian family. But that's a later story we need not detail.

As for King Wu in the western capital Chang'an, he ruled with folded hands, bringing peace to all within the seas. The people enjoyed their occupations, and all under heaven was harmonious and prosperous, following the emperor's example. Truly with one military campaign the realm was settled, no less than Yao and Shun's yielding of power.

Later King Wu passed away and King Cheng ascended the throne. Duke of Zhou assisted in governing, quelled internal troubles, and the realm again saw great peace. From Taigong's founding and Duke of Zhou's support, the Zhou dynasty's eight-hundred-year foundation was established. The great achievements and grand merits of Jiang Ziya and Duke of Zhou filled all between heaven and earth.

A later poet wrote specifically praising Jiang Ziya's execution of generals and investiture of gods, establishing the Zhou dynasty's eternal foundation:

Precious talismans and secret strategies emerged from primordial heaven,  
Executing generals and investing gods resolved past karma.  
Fortunate to receive Kunlun's profound imperial grace,  
Names recorded in registers, noted in official rolls.  
Plague, thunder, and fire gods divided front and back,  
Spirits, ghosts, humans, and immortals arranged in reverse order.  
From then on cultivation relied on the forces of creation,  
Thus commanding the campaign against Zhou to cleanse the stench.

There is also a poem praising Duke of Zhou for assisting King Cheng, quelling internal troubles, being the primary founder, and having the Ten Disorders to assist him:

Heaven's lineage branches sufficiently continue the succession,  
Carrying on teachings and plans brings even more abundance.  
Not just official positions came from pioneering work,  
But also from sword and shoes serving the ancestral court.  
Harmonizing states and assisting could quell rebellion,  
Classical rites all praise good supplementing of royal robes.  
All because Zhou's house had such blessed shade,  
Heaven created Ten Disorders to work in harmony.

This completes Chapter 100 and the entire novel Fengshen Yanyi (The Investiture of the Gods).