**Chapter 1 of *The Investiture of the Gods* (Translation)**

**Ancient Verse:**

At the dawn of chaos, Pangu emerged,  
Heaven and Earth divided; yin and yang converged.  
The sky was born in Zi, the earth in Chou, and humanity in Yin,  
Nest-building sages drove away beasts of sin.  
Suiren brought fire to end raw food strife,  
Fuxi painted trigrams, illuminating yin-yang life.  
Shennong tasted herbs, governing the world,  
Xuanyuan united rites, music, and marriage unfurled.  
Shaohao and Five Emperors brought prosperity’s reign,  
Yu tamed the floods, calming waters' disdain.  
Four hundred years of peace, a nation in bloom,  
Yet King Jie’s debauchery sealed Heaven's doom.  
Obsessed with Meixi, lost in wine and lust,  
Tang of Shang arose to cleanse the unjust.  
Jie was exiled to Nanchao, his tyranny quelled,  
Under Tang’s rule, peace and justice swelled.  
Thirty-one kings ruled Shang,  
Until King Zhou, its lineage broke, fate rang.  
Chaos in court, laws disdained,  
Wives murdered, sons slain, trust profaned.  
Courtiers polluted, Jieji adored,  
Loyal hearts burned, truth ignored.  
Taxes hoarded in Lutai’s greed,  
Cries of the people reached Heaven’s heed.  
Honest words met death in flames,  
Pregnant women cut open, humanity shamed.  
Trust in traitors, the wise cast aside,  
Ancestors scorned, temples denied.  
Obsessed with debauchery’s artful charms,  
Tyranny spread, a nation in harms.  
West King knelt, imprisoned in chains,  
Prince Weizi fled through smoke and flames.  
Heaven’s wrath loomed, disasters poured,  
The sea of suffering knew no shore.  
All under Heaven groaned in pain,  
Jiang Ziya emerged, immortal, arcane.  
Patiently fishing, waiting for the wise,  
Dreaming of flying bears beneath Heaven’s skies.  
Together they returned to aid Zhou’s reign,  
Two-thirds of the world their rule would gain.  
King Wen laid the foundation but met his end,  
King Wu rose tirelessly, Heaven to mend.  
In Mengjin, eight hundred states allied,  
To punish Zhou’s crimes, justice applied.  
At dawn, in Muye’s bloody fray,  
Soldiers turned their blades, tyranny gave way.  
Horns broke, heads bowed; blood flowed in streams,  
Spears drowned in fat, battle’s grim dreams.  
Armor donned, peace was won,  
Zhou’s light brighter than Tang’s sun.  
Horses rested on Huashan’s peak,  
Opening Zhou’s eight-hundred-year streak.  
Venus shone, the tyrant fell,  
The dead found peace, freed from Hell.  
Heaven sent Jiang Ziya to lead,  
The investiture of gods, a celestial deed.  
Heroes, spirits, all enshrined,  
Shang and Zhou’s tale, eternally intertwined.

**The Rise of Shang and King Zhou's Accession**

Tang of Shang, a descendant of the Yellow Emperor, bore the surname Zi and family name Shang. His ancestor, Emperor Ku’s concubine Jian Di, prayed at a high altar and was blessed by the omen of a dark bird. She gave birth to Xie, who became a minister under the sage kings Yao and Shun, teaching the people and bringing them prosperity. Xie was enfeoffed in Shang, and over thirteen generations, the lineage produced Taiyi—known as Cheng Tang (King Tang of Shang).

Tang, a virtuous and wise ruler, heard of Yi Yin, a sage who farmed in the fields of Youxin and admired the teachings of Yao and Shun. Recognizing his talent, Tang sent gifts and emissaries three times to invite Yi Yin to serve him. Yi Yin initially declined but was later brought into Tang’s court during King Jie’s reign. Jie, a cruel and debauched ruler, expelled wise ministers and killed the loyal official Guan Longfeng, silencing all dissent. When Tang learned of this, he mourned the loss of righteousness.

Jie, angered by Tang’s criticism, imprisoned him in Xiatai. Upon Tang’s release, he encountered a man setting nets in all directions, praying, “May all creatures from Heaven, Earth, and the four corners fall into my net!” Tang corrected him, instructing, “Leave three sides open. Let those who wish to escape go free, while those who do not obey may enter.” The tale spread, and over forty states pledged allegiance to Tang.

As Jie’s tyranny worsened, Yi Yin advised Tang to lead a campaign. Tang deposed Jie, exiling him to Nanchao. The feudal lords rallied and declared Tang the Son of Heaven. He established his capital in Bo and began his reign. In the first year, Tang abolished Jie’s cruel policies, winning the people’s hearts. During a seven-year drought, Tang prayed in the mulberry forest, and rain fell. He also minted coins to aid the people in distress. His reign was marked by benevolence and justice, embodying the ideals of a sage king.

Tang ruled for thirteen years, living to the age of one hundred. The Shang dynasty lasted 640 years, passing through generations of kings until its decline under King Zhou (Di Xin):

**The Reign of King Zhou**

King Zhou, the third son of Emperor Yi, was chosen as heir due to his extraordinary strength and intelligence. Once, when an imperial pavilion collapsed, Zhou lifted a beam to replace it, showcasing his unmatched physical prowess. Upon Emperor Yi’s death, Zhou ascended the throne, with Taishi Wen Zhong as his chief minister and Huang Feihu as the martial general. Zhou initially ruled wisely, supported by his virtuous queen, Jiang, and consorts Huang and Yang, who embodied grace and virtue.

Under King Zhou, the Shang empire flourished. The people lived in peace, the land prospered, and vassal states paid tribute. Four great lords—East Marquis Jiang Huanchu, South Marquis E Chongyu, West Marquis Ji Chang, and North Marquis Chong Houhu—governed the realm’s eight hundred feudal lords.

**The Beginning of Calamity**

In the seventh year of King Zhou’s reign, rebellion erupted among the seventy-two lords of the North Sea. Taishi Wen Zhong was dispatched to suppress the revolt. Meanwhile, in the imperial court, the ministers gathered. Prime Minister Shang Rong presented a petition, reminding the king of the upcoming festival honoring Nuwa, the goddess who had mended Heaven. Zhou initially dismissed the idea but was persuaded to lead the court in offering incense at Nuwa’s temple.

At the temple, Zhou was captivated by the divine statue of Nuwa, whose beauty surpassed anything he had ever seen. Overcome with lust, he composed a blasphemous poem on the temple wall, praising her beauty and expressing his desire. Shang Rong, horrified by the sacrilege, pleaded with Zhou to erase the poem, warning of divine retribution. Zhou dismissed the warning, arrogantly declaring his admiration for Nuwa’s beauty as a mark of his literary talent.

Nuwa, upon returning to her temple and seeing the poem, was enraged. She cursed Zhou, vowing to bring about the fall of Shang. Summoning three demons—a fox spirit, a pheasant spirit, and a jade pipa spirit—she instructed them to infiltrate Zhou’s court, corrupt his heart, and hasten the dynasty’s demise.

**The King’s Obsession**

Since visiting the temple, Zhou was consumed by thoughts of Nuwa’s beauty. He found no joy in his palace or consorts, growing increasingly despondent. Seeking counsel from his treacherous adviser Fei Zhong, Zhou ordered a decree to collect the most beautiful women from across the empire to satisfy his desires. This marked the first step toward Shang’s downfall.

**The King’s Obsession Deepens**

After issuing the decree to gather beautiful women from across the empire, King Zhou returned to his palace. His mind, however, remained restless, consumed by thoughts of Nuwa’s divine beauty. While the court prepared to fulfill his order, Zhou summoned Fei Zhong one more time.

Fei Zhong, a cunning and sycophantic minister, delighted in indulging the king’s whims. Bowing before the throne, he reassured Zhou: "Your Majesty, given your divine mandate and unparalleled status, the most beautiful women in the land will soon grace your palace. The entire realm belongs to you; there is no desire beyond your reach." These words further pleased Zhou, temporarily easing his unease.

**Nuwa Summons the Three Demons**

Meanwhile, in her celestial palace, Nuwa was furious at King Zhou’s insolence. She declared, "This tyrant has defiled my temple with his blasphemous poetry. He has no regard for Heaven or virtue, and Shang’s mandate has clearly waned. I must act to bring about his downfall."

Nuwa summoned her attendants and instructed them to retrieve the magical *Golden Gourd*. When it was brought before her, she removed the lid and cast a spell. From the gourd emerged a beam of white light, stretching several feet into the sky. Within this light appeared the *“Summoning Demon Banner”* (*Zhaoyao Fan*), a divine artifact capable of calling forth all demons under Heaven.

With a wave of her hand, Nuwa activated the banner. A mournful wind swept across the land, and dark clouds gathered. From the far corners of the earth, countless demons and spirits were drawn to her palace. Among them, three stood out: a thousand-year-old fox spirit, a nine-headed pheasant spirit, and a jade pipa spirit. These three creatures, steeped in malice and cunning, knelt before Nuwa’s throne.

Nuwa addressed them sternly: "King Zhou’s time has come. His arrogance and wickedness have angered Heaven. I command you three to descend to the mortal world and infiltrate the Shang palace. Use your powers to corrupt the king’s heart and accelerate Shang’s downfall. However, you must not harm the innocent or disrupt the natural order. When the time comes, you will be rewarded with enlightenment and a place in the celestial hierarchy."

The three demons bowed deeply, accepting Nuwa’s orders. In a flash of light, they transformed into whirling gusts of wind and descended to the mortal realm.

**The Arrival of the Fox Spirit**

As the fox spirit approached the Shang palace, it sought refuge in an ancient burial ground known as *Xuanyuan Tomb*. This site, dedicated to the Yellow Emperor, was a place of great spiritual significance. The fox spirit used its powers to absorb the lingering energies of the tomb, strengthening its abilities and disguising its true form.

The spirit then made its way to the Shang court, assuming the appearance of an extraordinarily beautiful woman. Her elegance and charm were unparalleled, and her presence radiated an otherworldly allure. The fox spirit, now perfectly disguised, awaited the opportunity to enter King Zhou’s palace.

**King Zhou's Decree for Women**

The next day, King Zhou’s decree was carried out across the empire. Messengers were dispatched to the four great vassal lords—East Marquis Jiang Huanchu, South Marquis E Chongyu, West Marquis Ji Chang, and North Marquis Chong Houhu—demanding that each province send one hundred of their most beautiful women to the Shang capital to serve in the palace.

This decree caused widespread panic and resentment among the people. Families feared losing their daughters, and many cursed King Zhou’s tyranny in secret. However, no one dared to openly oppose the order, as the Shang dynasty’s power was absolute.

**The Fox Spirit Enters the Palace**

One evening, as King Zhou sat in his chamber, still restless and longing for beauty, a sudden report came from the palace guards. They announced that an extraordinary woman had arrived at the gates, seeking an audience with the king. Intrigued, Zhou ordered her to be brought before him.

When the fox spirit entered the hall, her beauty dazzled everyone present. Even the most exquisite concubines in the court paled in comparison to her ethereal grace. Her movements were mesmerizing, and her voice was soft and enchanting. King Zhou was immediately captivated.

The fox spirit knelt before the throne and introduced herself as *Daji*, claiming to be the daughter of a noble family who had come to serve the king. Overwhelmed by her beauty, Zhou declared, "You are Heaven’s gift to me!" He immediately appointed her as his favorite consort and granted her residence in the inner palace.

**Daji's Influence on the King**

Daji quickly gained control over King Zhou’s heart. Her charm and wit made her the center of attention in the palace, and Zhou began to rely on her for advice in both personal and political matters. However, Daji’s true intentions were far from innocent. Under Nuwa’s orders, she began to sow discord and indulgence in the court.

She encouraged Zhou’s worst tendencies, urging him to indulge in lavish banquets and cruel entertainments. The king, blinded by his infatuation, abandoned his responsibilities and spent all his time with Daji. Ministers who opposed her influence were silenced, and those who flattered her were rewarded with promotions.

**The Beginning of Tyranny**

Under Daji’s influence, King Zhou’s behavior grew increasingly erratic and cruel. He ordered the construction of the infamous *Lutai* (Deer Terrace), a massive palace adorned with unimaginable luxury. The people were forced to labor under harsh conditions, and many perished during its construction. Meanwhile, Zhou hosted extravagant feasts, where he indulged in wine and debauchery.

Daji introduced bizarre and sadistic forms of entertainment, including the infamous *Bronze Cylinders*. These were metal cylinders heated until they glowed red-hot, upon which prisoners were forced to walk, their screams providing amusement for the court. Such atrocities horrified the people, and resentment against the Shang dynasty began to grow.

**Heaven’s Warning**

As King Zhou’s tyranny deepened, Heaven began to send warnings. Strange omens appeared across the land: the rivers turned blood-red, the skies grew dark at midday, and earthquakes shook the capital. The people interpreted these signs as evidence that the dynasty had lost the Mandate of Heaven.

Despite these warnings, King Zhou remained oblivious. Daji continued to manipulate him, ensuring that his heart was consumed by lust, greed, and cruelty. The Shang dynasty, once a beacon of strength and prosperity, began its rapid decline.

**Closing of Chapter 1**

Thus, the stage was set for the fall of the Shang dynasty. King Zhou’s obsession with Daji and his descent into tyranny would soon provoke rebellion across the land. Heroes and sages, guided by Heaven’s will, would rise to challenge the corrupt regime. The battle between Shang and Zhou, mortal and immortal, had begun.

What follows is a tale of gods and men, of virtue and vice, as Heaven’s decree unfolds.

**Chapter 12: Nezha’s Birth in Chentang Pass**

**A Poem:**

*Within the Golden Light Cave lies a wondrous treasure,*  
*Descending to aid the benevolent ruler.*  
*The Zhou dynasty’s auspicious signs already shine bright,*  
*While the Shang dynasty’s spirit fades into the night.*  
*In times of great fortune, pillars of strength emerge;*  
*Yet in prosperous epochs, calamities often lurk.*  
*The year’s cycle brings destiny to bear,*  
*As dynasties rise and fall, plunging all into despair.*

**The Birth of Nezha**

In Chentang Pass, there was a general named Li Jing, who had trained in Daoist arts from a young age. He was a disciple of the Daoist master Du’e Zhenren from Mount Kunlun, where he learned the Five Elements Escaping Technique. However, as immortality proved elusive, Li Jing returned to the mundane world to serve King Zhou of Shang, attaining the rank of general and enjoying wealth and prestige.

Li Jing’s wife, Lady Yin, had already given birth to two sons: the eldest, Jinzha, and the second, Muzha. However, Lady Yin later became pregnant once again, and three years and six months passed without her giving birth. Li Jing grew increasingly anxious, often pointing to her swollen belly and saying, “You’ve carried this child for over three years now. If it isn’t a monster, it must be something unnatural!” Lady Yin was equally troubled, lamenting, “This pregnancy can’t be a good omen. It fills me with constant worry.” Li Jing’s concern deepened.

One night, at the third watch, Lady Yin was fast asleep when she dreamed of a Daoist entering her chamber. The Daoist, with his hair tied in two buns and wearing Daoist robes, walked into her room uninvited. Startled, she scolded him: “How dare you trespass into my private quarters! This is utterly inappropriate!” The Daoist replied, “Madam, I’ve come to deliver your auspicious child!” Before she could respond, the Daoist placed something into her arms, and she awoke with a start, drenched in cold sweat. Alarmed, she woke Li Jing and recounted her dream. Before she could finish speaking, she suddenly felt labor pains.

Li Jing, startled, hurried to the front hall to wait. While pacing back and forth, he thought to himself: “After three years and six months, could this finally be the birth? Whether it’s a blessing or a curse, I’ll soon find out.” As he pondered, two maidservants rushed in, exclaiming, “My lord! The lady has given birth to a monster!”

Shocked, Li Jing grabbed his sword and rushed to the bedroom. Upon entering, he saw a glowing red mist filling the room, accompanied by a strange fragrance. On the bed lay a round, flesh-like sphere, spinning like a wheel. Staggered, Li Jing raised his sword and struck the sphere. With a sharp sound, it split open, and out jumped a child. The room instantly filled with radiant red light. The boy’s face was as fair as powdered jade, and he wore a golden bracelet on his right wrist and a red silk sash around his waist. Both items glimmered with divine light.

This child was no ordinary newborn; he was the reincarnation of the spirit pearl (*Lingzhuzi*), sent ahead by Jiang Ziya to pave the way for the Zhou dynasty’s rise. The golden bracelet was the *Heaven and Earth Ring* (*Qiankun Quan*), and the red sash was the *Cosmic Silk* (*Huntian Ling*), both treasures from the Golden Light Cave of Mount Qianyuan. For now, we’ll set these details aside.

Li Jing stared in awe as the child, glowing with divine light, ran around the room. Despite his earlier fear, Li Jing hesitated to harm the boy, realizing he wasn’t a monster but a child of extraordinary beauty. Relenting, he picked up the boy and handed him to Lady Yin. The couple, torn between joy and apprehension, couldn’t bear to part with him.

**The Daoist Master’s Visit**

The next day, many officials came to congratulate Li Jing on the birth of his child. After receiving their well-wishes, Li Jing was informed by a messenger: “My lord, a Daoist has arrived and seeks an audience with you.”

As a Daoist himself, Li Jing never forgot his roots and immediately instructed, “Invite him in.” The Daoist was ushered into the hall and greeted Li Jing respectfully. Li Jing returned the courtesy and invited the Daoist to sit.

The Daoist introduced himself, saying, “I am Taiyi Zhenren of Mount Qianyuan’s Golden Light Cave. I heard that the general has been blessed with a son and have come to offer my congratulations. Might I take a look at him?”

Li Jing, hearing this, ordered a servant to bring the child. The Daoist took the boy in his arms and examined him closely. “At what hour was this child born?” he asked.

“At the hour of the ox,” Li Jing replied.

The Daoist frowned. “That’s not good.”

Li Jing grew anxious. “Does this mean the child cannot be raised?”

The Daoist shook his head. “Not at all. However, being born at the hour of the ox means he carries the burden of 1,700 karmic killings.”

Li Jing was shocked. “Has the child been named yet?”

“Not yet,” Li Jing replied.

The Daoist smiled. “Allow me to give him a name and take him as my disciple. What do you think?”

Li Jing, delighted, agreed. “It would be an honor for my son to study under a Daoist master.”

The Daoist asked, “How many sons do you have?”

Li Jing replied, “I have three sons. My eldest, Jinzha, is a disciple of Manjusri Bodhisattva at the Cloudy Sky Cave on Mount Wulong. My second, Muzha, studies under Samantabhadra Bodhisattva at White Crane Cave on Mount Jiugong. If you are willing to take my youngest as your apprentice, please give him a name.”

The Daoist declared, “This child shall be named Nezha.”

Li Jing expressed his gratitude. “Thank you for naming my son and accepting him as your disciple.”

After exchanging courtesies, Taiyi Zhenren declined an invitation to stay for a meal, saying, “I must return to my mountain immediately.” Despite Li Jing’s insistence, the Daoist took his leave.

**Nezha’s Childhood**

Years passed quickly, and Nezha grew into a spirited boy. By the age of seven, he stood six feet tall. One scorching day in May, the heat grew unbearable. Li Jing, busy training his soldiers to defend against rebellions, left Nezha to his own devices.

Feeling restless, Nezha approached his mother and said, “Mother, may I go outside the pass to play for a while? I won’t go far.”

Lady Yin, doting on her son, consented but warned, “Take a guard with you and don’t wander too far. Be sure to return before your father comes back.”

Nezha agreed and set off with a family guard. The blazing sun beat down as they walked, sweat streaming down their faces. Spotting a shaded area beneath some willow trees, Nezha suggested, “Let’s rest under that shade.”

The guard scouted ahead and found the spot cool and refreshing. Nezha, delighted, entered the grove, loosened his robes, and relaxed. Nearby, he noticed a clear river, its waters sparkling under the sun. Excited, Nezha exclaimed, “This heat is unbearable! I’ll take a quick bath in the river.”

Despite the guard’s protests, Nezha stripped down, sat on a stone by the river, and dipped the Cosmic Silk into the water. The river turned a brilliant red as the sash shimmered, causing waves to ripple far and wide. Unbeknownst to Nezha, this river led directly to the East Sea, and his actions disturbed the underwater palace of Ao Guang, the Dragon King.

**Ao Guang’s Wrath**

In the Crystal Palace of the East Sea, Ao Guang felt his palace shake violently. Startled, he summoned his attendants and demanded, “Why is the palace trembling? Investigate immediately!”

A sea patrol officer named Li Gen ventured to the river and discovered Nezha playing by the water’s edge. Furious, he shouted, “What is that child doing? He’s disrupting the river and disturbing the palace!”

Nezha, unbothered, retorted, “What kind of creature are you to shout at me?”

Infuriated, the sea patrol officer leapt out of the water, axe in hand, and attacked Nezha. Calmly, Nezha raised the *Heaven and Earth Ring* and struck the officer, killing him instantly.

The death of his officer enraged Ao Guang, setting the stage for further confrontation.

After killing Li Gen, Nezha returned to playing by the river, completely unconcerned. Back in the East Sea, the Dragon King Ao Guang was enraged upon learning that one of his officers had been slain. He immediately summoned Ye Sha, a yaksha (*water demon*) under his command, and ordered him to capture the perpetrator.

Ye Sha bowed and obeyed, rushing to the riverbank. When he arrived, he spotted Nezha sitting on a rock, splashing water with his feet. Drawing his weapon, Ye Sha shouted, “You insolent child! You dare disrupt the East Sea and kill our officer? Surrender now, or face death!”

Nezha laughed. “What nonsense! Your officer attacked me first, and I killed him in self-defense. Why don’t you call your Dragon King here, so we can talk this out?”

Ye Sha, filled with rage, charged at Nezha with a halberd. Nezha leapt up, dodging the attack, and countered by throwing the *Heaven and Earth Ring*. The ring glowed with a brilliant light as it struck Ye Sha’s head, instantly killing him.

Seeing his opponent defeated, Nezha laughed triumphantly and returned to the riverbank to rest. However, the deaths of Li Gen and Ye Sha threw Ao Guang into a fury. Unable to bear the humiliation, the Dragon King decided to take matters into his own hands. He transformed into a human figure, donned his armor, and ascended from the sea, bringing with him a massive tidal wave.

**Ao Guang Confronts Nezha**

Arriving at the riverbank, Ao Guang saw Nezha sitting in the shade, and his rage boiled over. “You impudent child! You’ve disrupted my river, killed my officers, and shown no respect for the East Sea Dragon King. Prepare to die!”

Nezha stood up and replied calmly, “You must be the Dragon King. Your officers attacked me first, and I merely defended myself. Why are you blaming me?”

Ao Guang sneered. “You’re just a child, yet you’ve committed such atrocities. Today, I’ll send you to the underworld!”

With that, Ao Guang summoned a storm, and the sky darkened as thunder roared and rain poured down. Nezha, undeterred, grabbed his *Heaven and Earth Ring* and *Cosmic Silk* and prepared to fight.

Ao Guang attacked first, unleashing a torrent of water to drown Nezha. But Nezha twirled the *Cosmic Silk*, which expanded into a barrier, deflecting the waves. Furious, Ao Guang transformed into his true dragon form, coiled his massive body, and lunged at Nezha.

Nezha leapt into the air, dodging the Dragon King’s attack, and hurled the *Heaven and Earth Ring*. The glowing ring struck Ao Guang on the head, sending him crashing to the ground. Wounded and frightened, the Dragon King reverted to his human form and begged for mercy.

“Spare me, young hero! I didn’t know you were so powerful. Please, let me live!” Ao Guang pleaded.

Nezha laughed. “If you want to live, you must go to Chentang Pass and apologize to my father. Otherwise, I’ll finish you off!”

Terrified, Ao Guang promised to comply. He transformed into a stream of water and fled back to his underwater palace.

**Ao Guang Seeks Help from His Brothers**

After returning to the East Sea, Ao Guang convened a meeting with his three brothers: Ao Qin of the South Sea, Ao Shun of the North Sea, and Ao Run of the West Sea. He recounted the events, lamenting, “That child is no ordinary mortal! He wields divine treasures and has already slain two of my officers. I’m too injured to confront him again. Brothers, I need your help to avenge this humiliation!”

Ao Qin frowned. “This child must be someone extraordinary. It’s unwise to act rashly. Let’s first investigate his origins.”

Ao Shun added, “If he’s connected to the heavens or a powerful immortal, we’ll only invite disaster by provoking him further. Let’s tread carefully.”

Reluctantly, Ao Guang agreed. “Very well, I’ll endure this humiliation for now. But we must find out who he is!”

The four Dragon Kings sent spies to Chentang Pass to gather information.

**Nezha Returns Home**

After defeating the Dragon King, Nezha returned to Chentang Pass, feeling triumphant. His mother, Lady Yin, saw him enter the house and asked, “Where have you been? Why are you so late?”

Nezha smiled. “I went to play by the river. Nothing much happened.”

Lady Yin, unaware of the chaos Nezha had caused, didn’t press further. However, Li Jing, Nezha’s father, soon returned home and noticed something was amiss. A servant reported, “My lord, the Dragon King of the East Sea has arrived at the gate. He demands an audience with you.”

Li Jing was startled. “Why would the Dragon King visit us? Quickly, invite him in.”

Ao Guang entered the hall, his face pale with anger and resentment. He bowed stiffly and said, “General Li, I’ve come to discuss a grave matter. Your son has caused great damage to my domain, killed two of my officers, and injured me in battle. As a representative of the Shang dynasty, how will you address this?”

Li Jing was shocked. “My son is just a child. How could he possibly harm the mighty Dragon King?”

Ao Guang replied, “See for yourself. Call him here, and you’ll learn the truth!”

Li Jing, suspicious but worried, summoned Nezha. The boy appeared, still carefree, and greeted his father and Ao Guang. “Father, why have you called me?”

Ao Guang pointed at Nezha and exclaimed, “This is the culprit! He killed my officers and attacked me. General Li, if you don’t hand him over, I’ll take this matter to the Jade Emperor himself!”

Li Jing turned to Nezha. “What is the meaning of this? Did you really harm the Dragon King?”

Nezha, unfazed, replied, “Father, they attacked me first. I only defended myself. If he dares accuse me, let’s fight again and see who wins!”

Ao Guang, enraged by Nezha’s arrogance, transformed back into a dragon and roared, “You insolent brat! I’ll have your head!”

Nezha smirked and summoned his *Heaven and Earth Ring* and *Cosmic Silk*. “If you want a fight, let’s go!”

**Taiyi Zhenren Intervenes**

Before the battle could escalate, a golden light filled the room, and Taiyi Zhenren appeared, riding a cloud. “Stop this madness!” he commanded.

Ao Guang, recognizing the immortal, immediately bowed. “Master Taiyi, this child is your disciple, isn’t he? He’s caused great harm to my domain. How will you resolve this?”

Taiyi Zhenren smiled. “Ao Guang, this child is indeed my student. He’s destined for great things and is not someone you can afford to offend. However, I’ll ensure he compensates you for your losses.”

Turning to Nezha, Taiyi Zhenren said, “Nezha, you must apologize to the Dragon King.”

Nezha resisted at first but eventually relented under his master’s stern gaze. Bowing slightly to Ao Guang, he said, “I’m sorry for any trouble I caused.”

Ao Guang, though still bitter, dared not defy Taiyi Zhenren. “Very well. I’ll let this matter rest, but I hope your disciple learns to control himself in the future.”

With that, Ao Guang left, and peace was temporarily restored.

Thus ends this chapter of Nezha’s mischief, setting the stage for even greater turmoil in the battles to come.

**Chapter 21: King Wen Escapes Through Five Passes**

**A Poem:**

*Huang Gong, with grace, saves the King of Qi,*  
*An imperial arrow and copper token set him free.*  
*Plots and schemes pursue the virtuous lord,*  
*But divine aid sails him past danger’s sword.*  
*True virtue struggles in a world unkind,*  
*Yet dragon signs of destiny align.*  
*Leaving behind a name of noble fame,*  
*To this day, his glory and honor remain.*

**King Wen's Escape**

After leaving Zhaoge, King Wen (*Ji Chang*, ruler of the western Zhou state) traveled through Mengjin by night, crossed the Yellow River, and passed through Mianchi, heading toward Lintong Pass. Let us set this journey aside for now.

Meanwhile, back in the city of Zhaoge, the official in charge of the guest lodgings noticed that King Wen had not returned that night. Alarmed, he immediately reported this to the residence of Fei Zhong, the treacherous minister. Hearing the news, Fei Zhong summoned the official.

The official bowed and said, “Your Excellency, the Western Marquis Ji Chang did not return to the lodging last night, and his whereabouts are unknown. This is a serious matter and must be reported immediately.”

Fei Zhong dismissed the official and began to reflect, thinking, *This could implicate me. How should I handle this situation?* He called for his colleague, You Hun, and together they discussed the matter.

Fei Zhong said, “Younger brother, when we recommended Ji Chang to the king, he was granted the title of King Wen. That was already a great favor. Now, though, after just two days of the three-day permission granted for his ceremonial release, he has fled without reporting back. This is clearly suspicious. He must have ulterior motives—likely returning to his homeland to stir rebellion. If the king learns of this, we will be held accountable. What should we do?”

You Hun replied, “Elder brother, do not worry. This is a minor issue. We should report to the king immediately, asking him to send generals to apprehend Ji Chang. Once he’s captured, he will be executed for deceiving the court and fleeing his duties. That will resolve the matter.”

Having agreed on this plan, the two ministers donned their court robes and hurried to the palace. They found King Zhou of Shang on the Star-Picking Tower, enjoying the view. The attendants announced, “Fei Zhong and You Hun seek an audience.” King Zhou allowed them to approach.

After bowing, Fei Zhong spoke: “Your Majesty, Ji Chang has betrayed your immense grace. He was granted the title of King Wen and permitted three days to perform the ceremonial rites, but he has fled without reporting back. This is a clear act of treachery. We fear he has returned to his homeland to incite rebellion. We petition Your Majesty to dispatch troops to capture him before he causes trouble.”

Hearing this, King Zhou grew furious. “You two once assured me of Ji Chang’s loyalty. You said he was virtuous, burning incense and praying for the kingdom’s prosperity and my reign’s stability. On that basis, I pardoned him. Now it seems he has betrayed me, and it is your fault for recommending him!”

You Hun quickly interjected, “Your Majesty, human hearts are difficult to fathom. While someone may seem loyal on the surface, they can harbor deception within. Ji Chang is not far from the capital. If Your Majesty orders it, generals can pursue and capture him immediately, ensuring he is punished for his crime.”

King Zhou agreed and immediately summoned two of his powerful military commanders, Yin Pobai and Lei Kai. He ordered them to mobilize 3,000 elite cavalry to pursue and capture Ji Chang. The generals accepted the decree and set out, their banners flying and weapons gleaming.

**The Pursuit Begins**

As the pursuit began, the army marched like a storm, their banners fluttering like spring willows and their drums echoing like thunder. The soldiers were as ferocious as tigers descending from the southern mountains, and their horses galloped like dragons playing in northern seas.

Meanwhile, King Wen, unaware of the pursuit, continued his journey at a slow pace after crossing the Yellow River. Dressed like a common traveler, he moved cautiously along the main road toward Lintong Pass.

However, as Yin Pobai and Lei Kai's forces closed in, the sound of drums and cries grew louder behind him. King Wen, seeing clouds of dust rising in the distance, realized he was being pursued. Terrified, he lamented, “The Marquis of Wu (Ji Fa, his son) helped me escape, but I failed to plan carefully. Now that the king has discovered my flight, his soldiers are chasing me. If I am captured, I will surely die. I must push my horse forward and escape this danger!”

Spurring his horse onward, King Wen fled like a bird escaping a forest fire or a fish slipping through a broken net. Yet as he approached Lintong Pass, the enemy forces drew closer.

**The Daoist Yun Zhongzi Senses Danger**

On Mount Zhongnan, in the Jade Pillar Cave, the Daoist immortal Yun Zhongzi was meditating when he suddenly felt a surge of unease in his heart. Performing calculations with his fingers, he exclaimed, “Ah! Ji Chang is in grave danger. His trials have reached their peak. Today, father and son are destined to reunite. I must act!”

He called for his disciple, the boy Jin Xia, and said, “Go to the rear peach grove and summon your senior brother.”

Jin Xia obeyed and found his senior brother, Lei Zhenzi, in the peach grove. “Our master summons you,” Jin Xia said.

Lei Zhenzi, a divine figure raised by Yun Zhongzi, immediately returned to the cave and bowed before his master. Yun Zhongzi said, “Your father, Ji Chang, is in danger near Lintong Pass. You must go and save him.”

Lei Zhenzi was surprised. “Master, who is my father?”

Yun Zhongzi replied, “Your father is Ji Chang, the Western Marquis. He is in peril. Go to Tiger Cliff and retrieve a weapon. I will teach you combat techniques to rescue him. Today is the day you reunite with your father.”

Lei Zhenzi accepted the command and headed to Tiger Cliff. However, after searching the area, he could not find the weapon his master spoke of. Frustrated, he decided to return to the cave to seek further instruction.

**Lei Zhenzi's Transformation**

As Lei Zhenzi was about to leave, he noticed a strange fragrance in the air. Following the scent, he discovered two bright red apricots growing beneath a green-leafed tree. Intrigued, he climbed up and plucked the apricots. “These must be unusual fruits,” he thought. “I’ll eat one and save the other for my master.”

After tasting one, he was amazed by its sweetness. Unable to resist, he ate the second one as well. Suddenly, a strange sensation coursed through his body. With a loud crack, wings sprouted from his sides, and his face began to transform. His skin turned blue, his hair crimson, and his eyes bulged like bronze bells. Terrified by his own reflection, Lei Zhenzi shouted, “What’s happening to me?”

When Jin Xia arrived to escort him back to Yun Zhongzi, Lei Zhenzi lamented, “Look at me! I’ve transformed into a monster. How can I face our master?”

Jin Xia reassured him, saying, “Master is wise and will explain everything. Let’s go.”

When Lei Zhenzi returned, Yun Zhongzi laughed and said, “Wonderful! Wonderful! The apricots you ate were divine fruits, granting you extraordinary abilities. Your wings will allow you to fly, and your body is now as strong as steel. With these powers, you are ready to save your father.”

Yun Zhongzi handed Lei Zhenzi a golden staff and taught him combat techniques. He also inscribed the characters “Wind” on one wing and “Thunder” on the other. Lei Zhenzi practiced diligently until he mastered the skills.

**Lei Zhenzi Goes to Save His Father**

With his training complete, Yun Zhongzi said, “Go now to Lintong Pass. Rescue your father from danger and escort him through the Five Passes. However, you must not travel with him to Xiqi, nor harm the Shang soldiers. Once your mission is complete, return here for further instruction.”

Lei Zhenzi bowed and departed. Taking flight on his new wings, he soared through the sky, reaching Lintong Pass in an instant. Spotting King Wen on the road below, Lei Zhenzi descended onto a nearby hill.

Seeing a man approach with wings and a fierce visage, King Wen was terrified. However, Lei Zhenzi introduced himself, saying, “Father, I am your son Lei Zhenzi, sent by my master Yun Zhongzi to save you.”

King Wen was stunned but accepted his son’s help. Yet he cautioned, “Do not harm the soldiers pursuing me. We must not deepen my offense against the Shang court.”

Lei Zhenzi agreed, and as the pursuing army approached, he took to the skies and confronted the Shang generals, Yin Pobai and Lei Kai.

Lei Zhenzi, standing tall and fierce, wielded his golden staff as he confronted the pursuing Shang army. His wings spread wide, creating gusts of wind that sent dust swirling into the air. The soldiers froze at the sight of this terrifying figure, his blue skin, crimson hair, and bulging golden eyes glowing with an unearthly light.

Yin Pobai and Lei Kai, the two Shang generals, rode forward to assess the situation. As they approached, Lei Zhenzi raised his staff and shouted, “Stop where you are! I am Lei Zhenzi, the son of Ji Chang, the Western Marquis. I will not allow you to harm my father. Turn back now, or face my wrath!”

The soldiers murmured in fear, and some began retreating, but Yin Pobai and Lei Kai, loyal to King Zhou, refused to back down. Lei Kai spurred his horse forward and bellowed, “Demon, how dare you interfere with the king’s decree? Step aside, or I’ll cut you down!”

Lei Zhenzi laughed. “You think you’re a match for me? Let’s see what you’ve got!”

As Lei Kai charged forward with his spear, Lei Zhenzi leapt into the air, his wings propelling him high above the battlefield. With a thunderous roar, he brought his golden staff crashing down, shattering Lei Kai’s spear and knocking him off his horse.

Seeing his comrade fall, Yin Pobai shouted orders to his troops: “Surround him! Don’t let him escape!” The soldiers hesitated, intimidated by Lei Zhenzi’s fearsome appearance and incredible strength. But when Yin Pobai led the charge himself, the soldiers reluctantly followed.

Lei Zhenzi, unperturbed, flapped his wings, creating a powerful gust of wind that scattered the soldiers like leaves. He pointed his golden staff at Yin Pobai and said, “You still dare to fight? Turn back now, or I’ll show you no mercy!”

Yin Pobai, furious but realizing he was no match for this supernatural being, reluctantly ordered a retreat. The soldiers, relieved, quickly withdrew, leaving Lei Zhenzi victorious.

**Lei Zhenzi Escorts King Wen**

After driving away the Shang forces, Lei Zhenzi returned to his father, who had been watching the battle from a safe distance. King Wen, though grateful, was also concerned. “My son,” he said, “you have displayed great power and courage, but I fear your actions may anger the Shang court even further. We must tread carefully.”

Lei Zhenzi bowed and replied, “Father, my master instructed me not to harm the soldiers unnecessarily. I only scared them off to ensure your safety. Now, let us continue our journey. I will escort you through the Five Passes.”

King Wen nodded, and they set off together. As they traveled, Lei Zhenzi used his wings to scout ahead, ensuring that no further threats approached. With his supernatural abilities, they were able to evade pursuit and make swift progress.

**The Five Passes**

The journey through the Five Passes was not without its challenges. Each pass was heavily guarded by Shang forces, and the commanders at each pass were under strict orders to capture King Wen if he attempted to flee. However, Lei Zhenzi’s presence proved to be an overwhelming advantage.

At the first pass, the guards attempted to block their way, but Lei Zhenzi flew above them, his wings stirring up a whirlwind that scattered their ranks. He landed in front of the pass commander and declared, “I am Lei Zhenzi, son of King Wen. My father has done no wrong and seeks only to return to his homeland. Stand down, or face the consequences!”

The commander, intimidated by Lei Zhenzi’s appearance and power, allowed them to pass without a fight.

At the second pass, a larger force awaited them, but Lei Zhenzi used his golden staff to knock down the pass gate, clearing the way for King Wen. The soldiers, awestruck by his strength, did not dare pursue.

At the third pass, Lei Zhenzi encountered a more formidable opponent: a Shang general known for his courage and skill in battle. The two clashed fiercely, but Lei Zhenzi’s supernatural strength and speed gave him the upper hand. After a brief but intense fight, the general was forced to retreat, and the pass was cleared.

At the fourth pass, the guards attempted to ambush King Wen, but Lei Zhenzi’s keen eyesight and ability to fly allowed him to spot the trap from afar. He swooped down and scattered the ambushers, ensuring his father’s safety.

Finally, at the fifth pass, the most heavily fortified of them all, Lei Zhenzi used both his wits and his strength. He created a diversion by flying high into the air and causing a thunderstorm with his wings, confusing the guards and creating chaos. Under the cover of the storm, King Wen was able to slip through unnoticed.

**A Father and Son Reunion**

Once they had safely passed through the Five Passes, King Wen and Lei Zhenzi paused to rest. King Wen looked at his son with a mixture of pride and sorrow. “My son,” he said, “you have saved me from certain death, and for that, I am eternally grateful. But your appearance and powers are unlike anything I have ever seen. What has happened to you?”

Lei Zhenzi explained, “Father, I was raised by the immortal Yun Zhongzi on Mount Zhongnan. He taught me many skills and bestowed upon me these wings and this golden staff. He sent me here to save you, knowing that we would be reunited at this time.”

King Wen nodded, his eyes filled with tears. “The heavens have truly blessed me by returning my son to me in my time of greatest need. But now, you must return to your master. The road ahead is still dangerous, and I cannot bear to see you risk your life further.”

Lei Zhenzi bowed deeply. “Father, I will obey your wishes. My master has instructed me to escort you only this far and then return to him. Please take care as you continue your journey.”

With that, Lei Zhenzi spread his wings and took to the sky, disappearing into the distance. King Wen watched him go, his heart heavy with both gratitude and sadness. He then turned his horse toward his homeland, determined to fulfill his destiny.

**The Aftermath**

Back in Zhaoge, news of the failed pursuit reached King Zhou. Yin Pobai and Lei Kai reported the appearance of a strange, winged warrior who had thwarted their mission. King Zhou, already suspicious of Ji Chang, became even more enraged. “Ji Chang has allied himself with demons!” he exclaimed. “This is an insult to my authority. I will not rest until he is brought to justice!”

Unbeknownst to King Zhou, however, the tides of fate had already begun to turn. King Wen’s escape marked the beginning of the end for the Shang dynasty, as the Zhou forces would soon rise to challenge the tyrannical rule of King Zhou.

Thus ends Chapter 21. **To be continued…**

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

**A Poem Says:**

Zhunti Bodhisattva comes from the West,  
Profound and boundless, his virtue the best.  
Lotus leaves wave in the breeze, serene,  
While blossoms bridge worlds, pure and pristine.  
Gold bows and silver halberds guard the way not,  
Treasured scepters and swords have a different plot.  
Think not Kong Xuan’s transformations supreme,  
Beneath the Bodhi tree, the truth will gleam.

The story continues with Gao Ji'neng battling the "Five Peaks" generals. His spear danced like a silver dragon, fierce and swift as storm winds. The clash was awe-inspiring. A poem captures the essence of this fierce battle:

Cold winds howl like tigers’ roars,  
Banners flash red as flames soar.  
Flying Tiger wields his spear with skill,  
Gao Ji'neng charges with fierce will.  
Wen Pin’s trident pierces the skies,  
Cui Ying’s silver hammer like meteors flies.  
Black Tiger’s axe wheels like a chariot’s spin,  
Jiang Xiong’s claws grasp with strength within.  
Cheers erupt as flags wave high—  
“Black Slaughter” meets the “Five Peaks” to vie.

Gao Ji'neng, though valiant, struggled to hold back five powerful warriors. His lone spear could not match their combined might, and he was unable to escape their encirclement. Just as desperation gripped him, Jiang Xiong’s golden rope weapon slackened. Seizing the opportunity, Gao Ji'neng spurred his horse and broke free, fleeing for his life.

The five generals pursued him relentlessly. In a panic, Gao Ji'neng unleashed his "Poisonous Wasp Bag." From it swarmed venomous wasps, darkening the sky like a storm of locusts. Wen Pin turned his horse to retreat, but Chong Heihu shouted, “Do not fear! They are no threat with me here.” He swiftly opened the red gourd strapped to his back. From it emerged a plume of black smoke, within which a thousand iron-beaked divine eagles flew forth.

A poem records the scene:

Black smoke rises from the gourd,  
Demons and spirits are struck in accord.  
A secret art of profound might,  
Summoning divine eagles in flight.  
Wings like iron shears, beaks like golden knives,  
They feast on venomous wasps, ending their lives.  
The Five Peaks unite to face the foe,  
Black Slaughter’s fate sinks ever low.

Gao Ji'neng’s poisonous wasps were devoured completely by Chong Heihu’s divine eagles. Furious, Gao Ji'neng screamed, “How dare you destroy my technique!” He turned back to fight, but the five generals surrounded him once more. Huang Feihu’s spear struck him in the side, knocking him from his horse. He was decapitated, and the Zhou army rejoiced.

Just as they were preparing to return to camp, a thunderous voice called out from behind: “Hold your retreat! Face me, for I have arrived!” It was none other than Kong Xuan, who had been observing the battle from his camp.

Kong Xuan asked his officers, “Which foe is Gao Ji'neng fighting?” They replied, “He is battling five generals in the center of the field.” Kong Xuan mounted his horse and rode out.

Seeing Gao Ji'neng’s death, Kong Xuan confronted the Zhou troops. Huang Feihu cursed him, “Kong Xuan! You are blind to the will of Heaven and stubbornly stand against it. You are no more than a petty brute!” Kong Xuan laughed and replied, “I have no time for the ramblings of such insignificant men. Come forth if you dare!” With a flick of his blade, he charged at Wen Pin.

Chong Heihu immediately swung his twin axes, their arcs like spinning wheels. The six combatants clashed fiercely, shaking the heavens and the earth. Yet Kong Xuan, seeing the ferocity of their combined attack, realized, “If I do not act decisively, they will gain the upper hand.”

Suddenly, Kong Xuan unleashed five beams of radiant light from his body. Each light struck with overwhelming force, swallowing the five generals whole. Their horses returned to camp, but the warriors were gone without a trace.

**The Zhou Army’s Dilemma**

Jiang Ziya was seated in his command tent when a scout rushed in to report, “The five generals have been captured by Kong Xuan’s divine light. Please issue orders for what to do next.”

Jiang Ziya was stunned. “Though we have slain Gao Ji'neng, we have lost five of our finest warriors. For now, we must hold our position and refrain from further attacks.”

Meanwhile, Kong Xuan returned to his camp and released the captured generals from his divine light. They fell to the ground unconscious, completely at his mercy. Kong Xuan instructed his subordinates to imprison them in the rear camp.

Kong Xuan, realizing he was now the sole guardian of the battlefield, resolved to block the Zhou army’s advance at all costs. The Zhou forces, unable to move forward, found themselves stalled.

**Yang Jian Arrives with Supplies**

At this time, Yang Jian, the officer in charge of transporting provisions, arrived at the Zhou camp. Seeing the situation, he exclaimed, “Why are we still stuck here?” After learning of recent events from Jiang Ziya, Yang Jian offered a solution:

“Tomorrow, Commander, let me confront Kong Xuan. I will determine what kind of creature he truly is and devise a way to defeat him.”

Jiang Ziya agreed, and the next day, Yang Jian took to the field. Using his "Demon-Revealing Mirror," he tried to discern Kong Xuan’s true form. However, all he could see was a swirling mass of five-colored light, resembling a jasper stone.

Kong Xuan mocked him, “Yang Jian, why do you keep your distance? Come closer if you wish to see clearly!”

Yang Jian advanced and raised the mirror again, but the result was the same. Frustrated, he resorted to combat. The two clashed for thirty rounds without a clear victor.

When Yang Jian summoned his divine hound, the creature leapt toward Kong Xuan but was instantly engulfed by the five-colored light. Realizing the dire situation, Yang Jian fled.

**Jiang Ziya Seeks Aid**

Jiang Ziya, increasingly desperate after repeated failures, consulted with his allies. Just as defeat loomed, a Daoist named Zhunti arrived at the Zhou camp.

Zhunti, a master from the Western Paradise, declared, “Kong Xuan is destined to find his path in the West. Allow me to handle him.”

With the arrival of Zhunti, hope stirred anew in the Zhou camp.

Zhunti Daoist left the Zhou camp and approached Kong Xuan. Upon seeing him, Kong Xuan asked, “Who are you? Why have you come to speak with me?”

Zhunti smiled and replied, “I am a Daoist from the West, here to resolve the conflict and bring peace. I urge you to stop resisting Heaven’s will. The Shang dynasty is fated to fall, and the Zhou dynasty will rise. Why persist in opposing this destiny? If you join us, you may find enlightenment and blessings in the future.”

Kong Xuan laughed coldly. “You speak of destiny and Heaven’s will, but I see only a band of rebels trying to overthrow a rightful ruler. I care not for your so-called enlightenment. If you wish to convince me, you must prove your strength in battle.”

Zhunti sighed. “You are blinded by your arrogance. Very well, I will show you the power of the Dao.”

Kong Xuan raised his five-colored divine light, which surged toward Zhunti. The light swirled and enveloped everything in its path, capable of capturing all weapons and leaving no escape for its target. Zhunti remained calm, raising the branch of a Bodhi tree in his hand. With a flick of the branch, golden light erupted, countering Kong Xuan’s attack.

The divine light and golden radiance clashed fiercely, shaking the heavens and the earth. For a time, neither side held the advantage. Kong Xuan grew increasingly frustrated, for his five-colored light had never been resisted so effectively before.

Zhunti spoke, “Kong Xuan, your cultivation is deep, and your powers are extraordinary. However, your attachment to the mortal world binds you. The West is your destined path. Why persist in this futile struggle?”

Kong Xuan roared, “Enough of your empty words! Let us see whose power truly prevails!” He summoned his full strength, and the five-colored light expanded, swallowing the golden radiance and surging toward Zhunti with unstoppable force.

Zhunti remained composed. He chanted a mantra, and the Bodhi branch shone with unparalleled brilliance. The light from the branch turned into a thousand lotus flowers, each radiating divine energy. The lotus flowers resisted the five-colored light, creating a barrier that Kong Xuan could not penetrate.

Seeing this, Zhunti raised his other hand and pointed to the sky. A massive golden bell appeared, descending from above. The bell was engraved with intricate patterns and radiated an aura of ancient power. As it descended, it trapped Kong Xuan within.

Kong Xuan roared in rage and unleashed his full power, causing the bell to tremble violently. However, Zhunti’s Bodhi branch struck the bell, stabilizing it and suppressing Kong Xuan’s strength.

Kong Xuan struggled within the bell, but he could feel his energy being drained. He shouted, “What are you doing? Release me, or I will never forgive you!”

Zhunti replied, “You are a being of great potential, but your arrogance and attachment to the mortal realm cloud your judgment. I will guide you to the Western Paradise, where you can achieve true enlightenment.”

Kong Xuan resisted with all his might, but the golden bell suppressed him completely. Zhunti then chanted another mantra, and the bell turned into a beam of golden light that carried Kong Xuan away to the Western Paradise.

**The Aftermath**

With Kong Xuan subdued, the Zhou army rejoiced. Jiang Ziya met with Zhunti and expressed his gratitude. “Master, without your intervention, we would not have been able to overcome Kong Xuan. His powers were beyond anything we had ever encountered.”

Zhunti smiled. “It was fate. Kong Xuan was destined to join the Western Paradise. His capture was not a defeat but a transition to a higher path. Now that this obstacle has been removed, you may continue your campaign without further hindrance.”

Jiang Ziya bowed deeply. “Your wisdom and power are unparalleled. We are forever in your debt.”

Zhunti did not linger. After offering a few words of advice, he departed, leaving the Zhou army to resume their march.

**Reflections in the Shang Camp**

Back in the Shang camp, news of Kong Xuan’s defeat spread quickly. The generals and officers were shocked, for they had believed Kong Xuan to be invincible. Without him, the Shang forces were left vulnerable.

Daji, the infamous consort of King Zhou, heard the news and was deeply troubled. She consulted with her demonic allies, who advised her to summon reinforcements from other realms. “If we do not act swiftly, the Zhou forces will reach the capital,” they warned.

King Zhou, however, remained oblivious to the growing threat. He dismissed the warnings and continued his indulgence in decadence.

**The Zhou Army Marches Forward**

With Kong Xuan no longer blocking their path, the Zhou army advanced toward the next stronghold. Jiang Ziya, however, remained cautious. “Though Kong Xuan has been subdued, the Shang forces still have many formidable warriors. We must not underestimate their strength.”

The army moved steadily, their morale high after the recent victory. Scouts reported that the next obstacle was the infamous Jiepai Pass, a heavily fortified location guarded by powerful Shang generals. Jiang Ziya began planning the next phase of the campaign, knowing that the battle for Jiepai Pass would be critical in their march toward the Shang capital. This concludes the events of Chapter 70.

**Chapter 79: The Four Generals of Chuanyun Pass Are Captured**

**Poem:**

One pass crossed, another lies ahead,  
Treacherous treasures bring a fiercer dread.  
Spells to summon souls turn to the past,  
Yet new conflicts arise—peace cannot last.  
At perilous turns, fortune must guide,  
Even triumphs, in time, turn to the void.  
Xu Fang defies fate, his efforts in vain,  
Labor wasted—what will he gain?

The story begins as Xu Gai retreats silently to the rear hall after the events of the night. The next day, another general under his command, Wang Bao, does not report to him but instead takes the initiative to lead troops out of the pass to challenge the Zhou army. A messenger delivers the news to Jiang Ziya.

Jiang Ziya asks, “Who will go forth to meet the challenger?”

Nezha steps forward. “I am willing to go.”

Jiang Ziya grants permission, and Nezha mounts his Wind-Fire Wheels, armed with his Fire-Tipped Spear, and rushes out of the camp.

When Wang Bao sees a figure flying on wheels of fire approaching, he exclaims, “Could this be Nezha?”

Nezha responds, “Yes, it is I.” Without another word, he raises his spear and charges. Wang Bao quickly raises his halberd to defend himself.

Wang Bao, knowing that Nezha is a disciple of Chan Sect, thinks to himself, *"The key to victory is striking first."* In the heat of battle, Wang Bao suddenly calls upon a lightning strike to attack Nezha. However, Nezha, being a reincarnation of the Lotus Spirit, is immune to such attacks. As the lightning roars and fire blazes, Nezha ascends into the air on his Wind-Fire Wheels, rendering the attack futile.

Nezha then hurls his Universe Ring, which strikes Wang Bao squarely on his forehead, knocking him unconscious and throwing him from his horse. Nezha swiftly follows up with a thrust of his spear, killing Wang Bao on the spot. He severs Wang Bao’s head, returns triumphantly to camp, and recounts the events to Jiang Ziya.

Jiang Ziya is delighted by Nezha’s success.

Meanwhile, back at Chuanyun Pass, Xu Gai hears the news of Wang Bao’s death. He sighs deeply, thinking, *"Two of my generals have now foolishly lost their lives. Perhaps I should offer my surrender to spare the people from further suffering."*

As he contemplates this, a Daoist arrives at the pass and requests an audience. Xu Gai orders him to be brought in.

The Daoist enters, bows, and says, “General Xu, I greet you.”

Xu Gai replies, “Greetings, Daoist. What brings you here?”

The Daoist introduces himself. “I am Fa Jie, a cultivator from Penglai Island. One of my disciples, Peng Zun, was killed by Lei Zhenzi. I have come here to avenge him.”

Xu Gai, noticing Fa Jie’s otherworldly demeanor, invites him to sit and offers his respects.

After a brief exchange, Fa Jie assures Xu Gai, “Do not worry, General. I will capture Jiang Ziya and his disciples for you. Victory will be yours.”

Xu Gai is overjoyed and expresses his gratitude. Fa Jie spends the night at the pass, preparing for the next day’s confrontation.

The following day, Fa Jie arrives at the Zhou camp, sword in hand, and calls out for Jiang Ziya. A messenger reports this to Jiang Ziya, who gathers his disciples and goes out to meet the challenger.

Fa Jie stands alone, without an army, as described:

A golden headband glints in the sunlight,  
His black robes billow like stormy clouds.  
Flames flicker from his crown,  
His talismans shimmer with divine might.  
Master of the Five Elements and Three Eliminations,  
His vast knowledge encompasses all mysteries.  
Born of deep roots in the Dao,  
Yet here, he descends into mortal affairs.

Jiang Ziya greets him, “Daoist, I welcome you.”

Fa Jie responds, “Jiang Ziya, I have long heard of your reputation. Today, I have come to test your skill.”

Jiang Ziya asks, “May I know your name and sect?”

Fa Jie introduces himself, “I am Fa Jie of Penglai Island. My disciple, Peng Zun, was killed by Lei Zhenzi. Bring him out to face me, and we can settle this without further bloodshed.”

Lei Zhenzi, standing nearby, is incensed by Fa Jie’s words. He shouts, “You arrogant Daoist! I am right here!” Lei Zhenzi spreads his wings and charges into the air, wielding his Golden Rod.

Fa Jie raises his sword to block Lei Zhenzi’s attack. The two exchange fierce blows for several rounds before Fa Jie suddenly leaps back and pulls out a magical banner. With a single wave of the banner, Lei Zhenzi is struck down and falls unconscious. Soldiers from Chuanyun Pass rush forward to capture him.

Seeing Lei Zhenzi bound and unresponsive, Nezha is enraged. He shouts, “Wicked Daoist! How dare you harm my elder brother!” Mounting his Wind-Fire Wheels, Nezha charges at Fa Jie.

Fa Jie waves his banner again, but Nezha, being a reincarnation of the Lotus Spirit and devoid of a soul, is unaffected. Fa Jie becomes increasingly flustered as Nezha remains unharmed. Nezha counters by hurling his Universe Ring, which strikes Fa Jie, knocking him to the ground. Before Nezha can finish him off, Fa Jie uses an earth-based escape technique to flee back to Chuanyun Pass.

At the pass, Xu Gai sees Fa Jie return injured and asks, “Master, how did you lose the battle?”

Fa Jie replies, “Nezha is the reincarnation of the Lotus Spirit and has no soul—my banner cannot affect him. However, this is only a temporary setback.” Fa Jie consumes a healing elixir and recovers his strength. He then orders Lei Zhenzi to be brought before him.

Using the banner, Fa Jie revives Lei Zhenzi, who opens his eyes and finds himself bound. Fa Jie curses, “You wretched creature! Because of you, I was struck down by Nezha!” He orders Lei Zhenzi to be executed, but Xu Gai intercedes, saying, “Master, it would be better to present him alive to the Shang king as proof of your victory.”

Fa Jie agrees, laughing. “That is reasonable.”

The next day, Fa Jie once again challenges the Zhou army. Jiang Ziya, determined to settle the matter, leads his forces into battle. However, Fa Jie’s skills and magical artifacts make him a formidable opponent.

Just as the situation becomes dire, three Zhou officers—Tu Xingsun, Yang Jian, and Zheng Lun—arrive with reinforcements. Together, they overwhelm Fa Jie and capture him alive.

Bound and defeated, Fa Jie laments, “I have been foolish to meddle in these affairs. Heaven’s will cannot be defied.”

Before Fa Jie can be executed, the Western sage Zhunti arrives, singing a verse and intervening on Fa Jie’s behalf. Zhunti persuades Jiang Ziya to release Fa Jie, revealing that Fa Jie is destined to join the Western Paradise.

Grateful, Fa Jie accepts Zhunti’s guidance and departs to the West, where he ultimately attains enlightenment.

Meanwhile, Xu Gai, seeing that Fa Jie has been captured and his own position is untenable, decides to surrender. He opens the gates of Chuanyun Pass and submits to Jiang Ziya, who spares him and his troops.

The Zhou army, victorious once again, sets its sights on their next target. This concludes Chapter 79.

**Chapter 100: King Wu Appoints the Feudal Lords**

**Poem:**

The Zhou dynasty begins, its imperial fate secure,  
Lands divided, rewards for merit pure.  
Farmlands are structured into three ranks,  
Five paths for officials, pillars of the state.  
Iron pledges and golden records are safeguarded,  
Commanders hold copper seals, banners unfurled.  
From now on, feudal states spread like stars,  
Civilization prospers, the people rejoice afar.

The chapter begins with Jiang Ziya issuing an order to execute Fei Lian and E Lai. The two traitorous ministers are dragged to the execution grounds outside the military gates. Their heads are severed, and the news is quickly reported to Jiang Ziya.

Having rid the world of these two corrupt officials, Jiang Ziya returns to the Fengshen Platform (Deification Altar). Striking the table, he shouts:

“Where is Bai Jian, the God of Clear Blessings? Quickly summon the souls of Fei Lian and E Lai to the altar to receive their appointments!”

Before long, the God of Clear Blessings arrives, escorting the spirits of Fei Lian and E Lai to the altar. The two kneel below, their expressions steeped in sorrow and regret.

Jiang Ziya proclaims:

“By the decree of the Most High Primordial Lord, Fei Lian and E Lai, during your lifetimes, you willingly engaged in treachery and deceit. You misled the Shang king, brought ruin to the nation, and pushed the dynasty to its downfall. You sought only personal gain and ignored the principles of righteousness, assuming the Heavenly Net would never ensnare you. Now, justice has been served, and your crimes have brought you here. However, as dictated by fate, you are appointed as the ‘Gods of Dissolution and Destruction.’ Though spirits of malevolence, you must diligently fulfill your duties and refrain from further evil. Take these words to heart!”

Upon hearing their fates announced, Fei Lian and E Lai kowtow repeatedly, thanking Jiang Ziya for the appointment before departing the altar.

Having completed this act of deification, Jiang Ziya descends the platform and leads the officials back to Western Qi. A poem commemorates this moment:

The wheel of Heaven’s justice turns with precision,  
Victories and defeats alternate without omission.  
Rise and fall, laughter and tears—they come and go,  
Kings and tyrants—like candles in the wind, they glow.  
Xia’s Jie lit his flame only to burn away,  
Shang’s Zhou perished, his flower swept by waves astray.  
From ancient times, dynasties rise and are undone,  
Only loyal souls linger beneath the setting sun.

Upon returning to the capital of Western Qi, Jiang Ziya goes to his residence to rest, while the other officials return to their respective homes.

The next morning, King Wu ascends the throne, his demeanor befitting a wise sovereign. The court scene is described in poetic imagery:

Fragrant mists hover in the air,  
Auspicious clouds shimmer, bright and rare.  
The golden sun rises, encircled by light,  
Benevolent omens grace the morning’s sight.  
Jade pendants chime with a gentle ring,  
Robes of officials sway like the breeze of spring.  
Dragons and serpents dance in royal shade,  
The dawn’s grandeur in majesty displayed.

This splendor of the early court is captured in a poem by a poet of the Later Tang dynasty:

The herald announces the dawn with a crimson cap,  
The royal robe of emerald clouds is brought forth at last.  
Palace gates open to the heavens, wide and grand,  
Ministers bow in reverence, their ranks well-manned.  
The sun rises, casting its glow on the imperial palm,  
Fragrant smoke curls, as if dragons float in calm.  
After court, decrees are written in five hues,  
The sound of jade pendants echoes as they leave, subdued.

King Wu takes his seat on the throne. An official announces:

“Those with matters to present, step forward; those without, the morning audience is adjourned.”

Before the official can finish, Jiang Ziya steps forward, bows, and addresses King Wu:

“Your Majesty, this humble servant has completed the task assigned by the decree of my master. I have appointed loyal ministers and generals, as well as the unrighteous and treacherous, to their respective divine roles according to the mandate of Heaven. They shall guard the nation, ensure favorable weather, and oversee the balance of blessings and calamities. Henceforth, the world shall remain stable, and Your Majesty need not worry over such matters.

However, the vassal lords who assisted in the campaigns, the warriors who risked their lives, and the disciples of the immortal sects who fought in the war have all rendered great service. Now that peace has been achieved, it is time to reward their efforts. I propose that they be granted fiefdoms and titles, ensuring their descendants will forever enjoy their lands. By doing so, Your Majesty will demonstrate gratitude for their contributions and establish a foundation for future prosperity. In addition, the princes and royal family members should be granted territories, forming a protective shield around the Zhou dynasty. This was the practice of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, who rewarded merit and distributed lands. Your Majesty should prioritize this task without delay.”

King Wu replies:

“I have long held such intentions. However, I waited until the deification was completed before addressing this matter. Now that the task is done, I entrust this important responsibility to you.”

As King Wu concludes his words, Li Jing, Yang Jian, Nezha, and the other immortals step forward. They bow and state:

“We are mere hermits from the mountains and valleys, who descended to the mortal world to fulfill our master’s command. Now that the war is over and peace restored, it is only proper that we return to the mountains to continue our cultivation. Wealth, fame, and titles hold no appeal for us. We humbly request that Your Majesty grant us leave to return to our secluded lives.”

King Wu responds with reluctance:

“You have accomplished the impossible, saving the world from chaos and restoring peace. Your contributions are immeasurable, and even lifelong gratitude would not suffice to repay you. How can I bear to part with you so soon?”

Li Jing and the others reply:

“Your Majesty’s kindness and virtue are deeply appreciated. However, we are content with our simple lives and cannot go against the will of our master. We implore Your Majesty to grant us leave.”

Though King Wu is deeply saddened, he reluctantly agrees and announces:

“Tomorrow, I shall personally lead the court to bid you farewell at the southern outskirts.”

The next day, the capital is abuzz as King Wu, accompanied by his ministers, oversees a grand farewell banquet. The immortals express their gratitude, and after much reluctance, they depart. A poem commemorates their departure:

Leaving the mortal world, they ascend to the heavens,  
Their hearts untainted by wealth or ambition’s leavens.  
With wings of immortality, they soar through the skies,  
Beyond the Nine Heavens, where yin and yang unify.

Jiang Ziya, after returning to Qi, reflected on his journey. He remembered the kindness of Song Yiren, who had provided him with shelter and support during his early struggles. Thinking to himself:

"When I first descended from the mountains and traveled to Chaoge, Song Yiren showed me great kindness. Yet, due to the chaos of war and my responsibilities, I never had the opportunity to repay his generosity. Now that the world is at peace, it would be ungrateful of me not to honor him."

With this in mind, Jiang Ziya sent a messenger to Chaoge, carrying a thousand gold pieces, fine silks, and a letter of gratitude. The messenger traveled swiftly and soon reached Chaoge. However, by this time, Song Yiren and his wife had passed away. Only their son remained, now managing the family estate. This son had not only preserved the family fortune but had expanded it significantly, making the household even wealthier than before.

The messenger presented Jiang Ziya’s gifts and letter, expressing the Prime Minister’s deep gratitude. Song Yiren's son humbly accepted the gifts and sent a letter of thanks back to Jiang Ziya, acknowledging his father’s friendship with the former sage.

Meanwhile, in Qi, Jiang Ziya ruled with wisdom and fairness. He implemented policies that aligned with the rhythms of nature and the needs of the people. Under his governance, the state flourished. Within just a few months, Qi became a model of prosperity and order.

**The Legacy of Jiang Ziya**

After many years of wise leadership, Jiang Ziya passed away peacefully. His son, Jiang Xiao, succeeded him. Jiang Xiao continued to govern Qi with diligence and integrity. Over time, Qi rose to prominence among the states, becoming a powerful kingdom.

In later generations, the famous Duke Huan of Qi, with the assistance of his chancellor Guan Zhong, achieved great dominance, becoming the first hegemon of the Spring and Autumn period. The legacy of Jiang Ziya’s foundational governance contributed significantly to this success.

However, as the centuries passed, the Jiang family’s rule in Qi came to an end during the time of Duke Kang. The powerful minister Tian Clan seized control of the state and established their own dynasty. This marked the rise of the Tian family in Qi, a story recorded in the annals of Chinese history.

**King Wu’s Reign and the Zhou Dynasty**

Back in the Zhou capital, King Wu ruled from his newly established seat in Haojing (modern-day Xi’an). His governance was marked by peace and prosperity, with the people enjoying stability and abundance.

The Zhou court, assisted by capable ministers such as Duke Zhou and Shao Gong, implemented policies that fostered unity and strengthened the central government. King Wu’s reign is celebrated as a golden age, with the Zhou dynasty firmly establishing its authority over the feudal lords.

A poem commemorates this period of harmony:

"One strike of the sword brought peace to all,  
The Zhou banner flies, its shadow tall.  
A kingdom united, the people sing,  
Grateful hearts praise the virtuous king."

However, after several years, King Wu fell ill and passed away. His young son, King Cheng, ascended the throne. Due to King Cheng’s youth, Duke Zhou assumed the role of regent, managing the affairs of the state and safeguarding the dynasty.

**Duke Zhou and the Mandate of Heaven**

Duke Zhou’s regency was not without challenges. Some feudal lords, including King Wu’s brothers, resented his authority and plotted rebellion. Duke Zhou, with his wisdom and strategic acumen, quelled the uprisings and restored order to the kingdom.

The most notable of these rebellions was led by the "Three Guards" (San Jian), including King Wu’s brothers Guan Shu, Cai Shu, and Huo Shu. They accused Duke Zhou of overstepping his authority and sought to overthrow him. Duke Zhou, however, remained steadfast. He composed the "Book of Songs" (Shijing) and the "Book of Documents" (Shangshu) to justify his actions and demonstrate his loyalty to the Zhou royal house. After a series of decisive battles, the rebellion was suppressed.

A poem honors Duke Zhou’s achievements:

"Stars align to guide the sage,  
Wisdom shines on history’s page.  
Rebels fall, the kingdom stands,  
Peace restored by steady hands."

Following the rebellion, Duke Zhou returned power to King Cheng once he came of age. His regency is remembered as a time of great stability and moral leadership. The Zhou dynasty, strengthened by his efforts, would go on to rule for over 800 years, becoming the longest-lasting dynasty in Chinese history.

**The Enduring Glory of the Zhou**

The Zhou dynasty’s success was built on the foundations laid by Jiang Ziya, Duke Zhou, and King Wu. Their wisdom, courage, and dedication to justice ensured the prosperity of the kingdom and the happiness of its people.

In the heavens, the gods and spirits appointed by Jiang Ziya continued to oversee the world, maintaining balance and harmony. The cycle of Heaven’s Mandate (Tianming) ensured that rulers who governed with virtue would prosper, while tyrants would fall.

A final poem encapsulates the legacy of these legendary figures:

"Heaven’s will unfolds through mortal hands,  
Heroes rise to unify the lands.  
Gods above and kings below,  
Together weave the world’s great flow.  
Jiang Ziya’s wisdom, Duke Zhou’s might,  
Their deeds shine on, eternal light."

Thus concludes the epic tale of the *Investiture of the Gods* (*Fengshen Yanyi*), a story of divine justice, mortal valor, and the eternal struggle between righteousness and tyranny.