

FROM BESTSELLING AUTHOR ARISE ZHANG, ALSO KNOWN AS

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Book  
2

DINGHAI  
FUSHENG  
RECORDS



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# DINGHAI FUSHENG RECORDS

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# DINGHAI FUSHENG RECORDS

2

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## Chapter 27

**O**N THE ENDLESS, barren plains outside of Tongguan County, some six thousand people were spending the night out in the open.

A gust of wind blew by. It was early summer, but the night still held a hint of spring chill; it went unnoticed by the people from the Sixteen Hu, though, who had already nodded off in the cradle of the surrounding rivers and distant mountains. Under the moonlight, those mountains cast a curtain of shadows over them all. The plains echoed with the howls of wolves, and the Big Dipper hung low in the night sky. The starry river above created a brilliantly shimmering backdrop to the summer night, like drops of light splattered across a black canvas.

On the ground, Chen Xing was lost in thought, bundled up in a blanket and staring into the campfire. Xiang Shu had been silent since they left Epang Palace. None of his subordinates dared to disturb him, Chen Xing, or Feng Qianjun. They left the three of them sitting quietly by themselves and started a bonfire under the lone tree in the wilderness. In doing so, they made it even less likely that anyone would try to cozy up to Xiang Shu.

Feng Qianjun lifted the cloth that covered the corpse, revealing the stooped body of his elder brother, Feng Qianyi. Feng Qianyi's legs had been amputated below the knee, and his years of using a wheelchair had weakened his lower limbs, giving him a childlike stature. On the banks of the Tong River, Feng Qianjun stacked up a pile of firewood and set fire to his brother's corpse.

As the fire blazed brightly and swallowed Feng Qianyi's body, another gust of wind blew past, catching the ashes and scattering them into the sky. Chen Xing noticed a faint wisp of light that rose with the ashes and flew toward that starry river above. Following his gaze, Xiang Shu saw a second



expansive, dazzling band of light set against the brilliance of the galaxy above. It looked like a massive river flowing across the night sky.

“Do you see it?” Chen Xing asked. When Xiang Shu frowned slightly, he went on, “The divine veins. The final destination of all dao in the world. Laozi said that that which is spiritual, existing above the tangible, is called the dao. That which is tangible is called the vessel. All things that live in the human world will one day leave their vessels, their physical forms, and return to the Great Dao.”

“Is that the Spiritual Qi of the Heavens and Earth?” Xiang Shu asked.

“No. The divine veins and earth veins are higher-level streams than spiritual qi.”

Feng Qianjun returned to Chen Xing and Xiang Shu with the box he’d gathered his brother’s ashes into and a small jade plaque. He wiped the plaque clean and turned it over, studying it under the light of the fire. A few words were carved on it: Great Han Exorcist Feng.

“The Xifeng Bank’s largest stronghold was in Luoyang,” he said. “When my dage took over the family business from our father, I was learning how to keep the accounts. From the time I was seven until the year I turned sixteen, I only saw my dage once every two to three years.”

Still wrapped in his blanket, Chen Xing kept silent. He knew that this was the kind of situation where Feng Qianjun needed to talk to relieve the distress he was feeling.

“Back then,” Feng Qianjun continued, “Luoyang was still under the Yan State established by the Murong clan.”

The Xifeng Bank had established itself in Luoyang, a capital city of great renown, with the wealth to rival an entire nation. The bank maintained secret connections to the Jin State in the south, though, awaiting an opportunity to welcome the Jin army in to recover the country they’d lost. Later, Fu Jian sent people to conquer the Great Yan, and the city fell in the



span of a single night. Every member of the imperial Murong clan was taken prisoner, and in the end, the clan surrendered to Fu Jian.

During this battle, Feng Qianyi had fled with his family. Unfortunately, it was a time of great turmoil. His family's soldiers died in battle, his wife was killed by enemy soldiers, and he lost both of his children. And to add insult to injury, a war chariot ran him over and crushed both of his legs.

When Feng Qianjun received this grievous news, he immediately headed north to find his older brother. It took several years, but he finally found Feng Qianyi in Chang'an. When they reunited, Feng Qianyi had not spoken much of the past; he'd dismissively told Feng Qianjun that such things simply had to be endured on the path to greatness. The Great Yan had fallen, so their new target was to be Fu Jian. They could also try to cozy up to the Murong clan, the scions of a fallen nation, and use them as necessary.

"I still remember the day I first met Qinghe," Feng Qianjun said, sounding dazed. "She and her younger brother, Murong Chong, had been confined deep in the palace. Gege sent me to deliver her some jewelry we'd bought. Murong Chong didn't like to talk, but Princess Qinghe was elated, and she asked me what my name was... She wanted to know if Luoyang's peonies had bloomed, and she had a lot of questions about the goings-on in the north."

Feng Qianjun came back to himself and forced a smile for Chen Xing. "After the demise of the Great Yan, I hadn't returned to Luoyang for three years, so I had to come up with some lies," he said. "When I went home and told Dage, he said, 'Luoyang, Guanzhong, Youzhou, Yongzhou—these places all belong to us Han. What right do the Xianbei people have to claim Luoyang as their home?'"

At this point in the conversation, Xiang Shu got up and left to give the two Han men some privacy.

Feng Qianjun smiled helplessly. "But it was a Han who destroyed the Great Yan's Murong clan. Under Fu Jian's orders, Wang Meng won the war and plunged the people of the four passes into misery. The Murong clan



despises Wang Meng for taking a position as Fu Jian's official. Tianchi, do you hate them?"

Chen Xing thought of his father's death. He looked off into the distance at Xiang Shu, who was sitting on the ground, leaning on a piece of rock.

Slowly, he said, "Before he died, my father said that it doesn't matter if you're Hu or Han; we're all residents of the same vast Divine Land. When the Five Hu moved south, many people ended up dead or wounded, and many innocent people died in the war. But was that not also what happened during the Jin Dynasty's War of the Eight Princes? The aristocratic Han who fled south wanted revenge, but what about the soldiers and civilians who died during the mayhem of the Eight Princes? Who were they supposed to ask for a reason for their deaths?" He sighed. "Ultimately, the problem is war. War needs to end. And if we can't get to the root of this drought fiend chaos, there will be a massive outbreak, and neither the Hu nor the Han will be able to continue fighting. They'll all meet the same fate. Death."

Feng Qianjun was silent for a moment. He looked down at the Saber of Harmony and Life, hefting it in his hand. "Do you plan to head north with the Great Chanyu?"

"I don't know," said Chen Xing, worry bleeding into his voice. "Time's running out, but I still don't have a clue what caused the Silence of All Magic. At the very least, I have to find the lost mana in the next three years. After that, even if I washed my hands of all of it, there will still be other people out there who can fight the 'master' Feng Qianyi was talking about. We definitely aren't the only two exorcists left in this world. There must be others who inherited that legacy..."

Chen Xing had his first clue: the Dinghai Pearl. He still wasn't sure what the truth was, but the records stated that in the year following the Silence of All Magic, the Dinghai Pearl had still had a vast amount of power stored within it. It had to be related to the Silence of All Magic somehow.

Unfortunately, the world was vast. Where was he supposed to look for it?

“Leave investigating the drought fiends to me,” said Feng Qianjun. “I’ll set out first thing tomorrow morning.”

“Where are you going?”

“I might sneak back into Chang’an. I could also make a trip to Luoyang or go searching for the tombs of the Eight Princes... In any case, I will investigate the people my dage worked with before he died and figure out how he obtained the secret to controlling resentment. You should focus on searching for your Dinghai Pearl.”

“Feng-dage, this isn’t something that should be rushed.”

“I can basically control the Saber of Harmony and Life,” Feng Qianjun added, musing aloud, “albeit in a different way.”

It had been news to Chen Xing that an artifact once powered by the Spiritual Qi of the Heavens and Earth could also absorb resentment and be used that way. It was as if fate was saying that darkness should counter darkness. The thorns surrounding them, the black vines and withered tree yao, had been quite powerful; by calling upon the ancient art of harmony and life, Feng Qianjun had awoken the forests and led them to victory.

Using the saber this way had also transformed Feng Qianjun. He had become a dark exorcist. If he repeatedly drew resentment to himself to activate the Saber of Harmony and Life, it would take a great toll on his body. Chen Xing reminded Feng Qianjun of this again, but Feng Qianjun said, “Don’t worry. If there’s no resentment, I won’t be able to call upon it.”

That was true. To wield the Saber of Harmony and Life and summon those withered tree yao and bloodthirsty vines, Feng Qianjun had to be in a place where resentment was abundant. If he wasn’t in a region where lots of people had died, he would have no way to activate the saber.

“Give me a bit more time,” said Chen Xing. “Let me think this through.”



Seeing that Chen Xing would not be convinced so readily, Feng Qianjun nodded and gestured for him to rest. Chen Xing wanted to just sleep under the tree, but Feng Qianjun nudged him and gestured to Xiang Shu. Taking his hint, Chen Xing went over to Xiang Shu.

Xiang Shu's eyes were shut, and he didn't say a word as Chen Xing approached. When a crow cawed hoarsely above them, however, he startled awake. Chen Xing watched curiously as Xiang Shu looked up with a hint of fear and panic in his eyes, but he quickly recovered his composure when he saw a flock of crows flying overhead.

"I have to go find the Dinghai Pearl," Chen Xing whispered, "but all the records we took out of the Yin Yang Mirror are gone."

"I know the place they mentioned," Xiang Shu said. "Come with me."

Chen Xing was taken aback. The map on the last page had had the word "lake" written on it. Chen Xing had come up with lots of guesses as to what that might refer to—maybe it was Yunmeng Lake? But that place only existed in legends, and no one knew its exact location. "Is it in the south?" he asked.

Xiang Shu didn't answer him at first. He moved aside a little to make space for Chen Xing. "Let's go back to Chi Le Chuan first," he said when Chen Xing joined him. "There are a lot of things that require the support of the tribes."

Chen Xing did some quick calculations. When he left Mount Hua, he'd still had four years left. Now, summer was dawning over the Divine Land, which meant he was down to three years; he was short on time. He just nodded, though, deciding not to hurry Xiang Shu.

Late that night, in the silence of the plains, Xiang Shu suddenly opened his eyes and looked out into the distance. Feng Qianjun had already gotten up from under the tree. With his older brother's ashes, he mounted his horse and wound around the periphery of their temporary campsite. When he saw Xiang Shu awake, he raised his hand in farewell.

Xiang Shu shut his eyes again, and Feng Qianjun slipped away into the darkness.

It was the zi hour, and Huanmo Palace was filled with a blood-red light. A heart the size of a house hung suspended in midair, slowly bobbing up and down. Countless blood vessels wound around that strange, immense heart, creating a web of veins that spread to all corners of the phantasmal palace. Thousands of blood vessels burrowed into the walls, where they drew resentment from the earth itself as nourishment. They converted the brilliant glow of the earth vein into an endless stream of purple-black energy, then injected that energy into the heart.

A masked scholar in a black robe walked slowly into the palace, carrying Princess Qinghe's corpse bridal-style. As the scholar approached, the heart itself spoke in a hoarse voice. "This mortal was resistant to my control."

"Feng Qianyi was too eager for revenge," the scholar replied, "and the wielder of the Heart Lamp broke his array. Our plans were disrupted."

"Foolishness!" The heart's voice was furious. "You have utterly wasted the elite demonic troops you were given!"

Placatingly, the scholar said, "Feng Qianyi has been burned to ash, so that can be considered his punishment. My lord, please, quell your rage. There will always be humans to use. There are still hundreds of thousands of nomads in the Ancient Chi Le Covenant, more than enough to fill this gap. But that Shulü Kong..." He fell silent for a moment. "The greatest warrior outside the pass... Even if he was chosen as the exorcist's protector, that does not explain his preposterous strength. Very strange. And why did the Heart Lamp choose him?"

"He is but a mortal. He has limits, no matter how strong he is. Why do you fear him?"



“My lord may not know this,” the scholar said in a respectful tone, “but despite the limited number of people who live as part of the Chi Le Covenant, they remain a force that we must not underestimate. If they were easily overcome, we would not have gone to so much trouble. Capturing Shulü Kong and instrumentalizing him would save us a great deal of trouble.”

“Do not concern yourself with that right now,” came the hoarse voice of the heart. “How should the Ten Thousand Spirits Array be dealt with? After so many years lying in wait, it would be a pity to let all our efforts go to waste over this one accident. Counting Zhou Yi, the exorcist has already managed to kill two of your subordinates!”

“Now that Fu Jian has single-handedly ruined the Great Wall and banished Shulü Kong, Chang’an poses no immediate threat,” said the scholar. “We are still hidden. Chen Xing has fled beyond the pass with Shulü Kong, so it will presumably be some time before he returns to the Central Plains. I shall send Zhou Zhen to deal with them and ensure they pose no further threat to our lord’s resurrection. And of course, with the Silence of All Magic, only the Heart Lamp can cause any sort of a stir. Even if we left them be, they could not accomplish much. My lord...” The scholar set Princess Qinghe’s body on the altar situated right below the massive heart. “Please grant this woman a new life. She is the crux of the Ten Thousand Spirits Array in Chang’an.”

The heart let out a cold laugh. A congealed drop of blood trickled languidly down its membrane and landed with a soft plop on Princess Qinghe’s corpse, which took on a reddish glow as resentment curled around it.

As summer gave way to fall, the Sixteen Hu, led by Xiang Shu, left the Great Wall behind and entered the sea of grass, which stretched for miles around them in all directions. Chen Xing had never seen such an extensive and majestic grassland, and he found this northern side of the Divine Land

imposing to behold. With the sky arching far above them, the sprawling land before them, and flocks of birds circling overhead, it was a far cry from the prosperous cities within the pass.

On their journey north, more and more families had joined them. The Qiang and Di tribes had lived in Guanlong for a long time, but they hadn't received any preferential treatment; like the other tribes, they'd been sent out on expeditions with long, drawn-out battles, and they were taxed heavily if they requested reinforcements. After years of severe droughts, the people no longer had any way to make a living, and they had to give up the lands they farmed. They decided to follow the Great Chanyu north to seek a new means of supporting themselves.

By this point, the procession was made up of more than ten thousand people. It was a magnificent thing to behold. Xiang Shu and his troops procured some carriages and purchased all the necessities on the way. When they passed through the Great Wall, the Qin generals dared not try to stop them; they just opened the gates and let the procession through. As they left the Great Wall behind and entered the grasslands, eventually they formed a convoy headed toward the ends of the earth: Chi Le Chuan.

Chen Xing had asked Xiang Shu's entourage what kind of place Chi Le Chuan was, and they had told him that it was the northernmost region of the Divine Land—the last habitable region. North of it lay a vast tundra; endless snowfields buffeted by harsh winds and snowstorms. It was a barren wasteland. Very few people who ventured out there ever returned.

The major branches of the Five Hu who lived within the pass originated from areas like Mount Paektu, the Xing'an Mountains, and Xiliang. They formed the Ancient Chi Le Covenant at Chi Le Chuan. Chi Le Chuan was where the Xiongnu and Tiele peoples came from, and it was the shared homeland of all the peoples that the Han dubbed "Hu."

The landscape before Chen Xing was just like the lyrics in the song: *Chi Le Chuan, under the Yin Mountains; the sky is like an arched yurt covering the plain whole.*<sup>1</sup>

“The people living there are mainly nomads, and there are very few doctors,” Xiang Shu said. “We should acquire some medicines of the Central Plains along the way to take back to Chi Le Chuan.” Chen Xing wrote out a list of medications, which Xiang Shu’s subordinates purchased.

Chen Xing had some spare time now, and he sat in the carriage and watched Xiang Shu write and draw on a piece of parchment. Feng Qianjun’s sudden departure worried him, but a more urgent matter was at hand: finding the whereabouts of the Dinghai Pearl as soon as possible. Returning mana to the Divine Land would halve Chen Xing’s heavy burden. He was confident that one day, not too far in the future, the ancient profession of the exorcists would recover enough to gather a tremendous force. Then they could fight the mastermind behind Feng Qianyi, and the drought fiends that mastermind had created.

For now, he just hoped that Fu Jian would rein in his resentment a little and lay off the large-scale massacres.

“I really have no clue where the lake mentioned in the books is,” Chen Xing mused aloud.

Xiang Shu’s fore and middle fingers were hooked gently around a stick of charcoal. The way he held a writing implement was different from how a Han would, but his slender fingers made it look elegant. On a piece of parchment paper, he sketched an outline of meandering mountains and rivers. A terrain took form under his fingers.

“Oh!” Chen Xing exclaimed.

From the single glance he’d taken at it, Xiang Shu had managed to memorize the map on the last page of the ancient book in the Exorcism Department. Now he showed his recreation to Chen Xing. “Here?” he asked.

The map showed a lake that lay before three disconnected peaks, which rose into the clouds. The lakeside was generously studded with forests. What a strange topography; there were lakes on the plain and mountains by the lake. The map was annotated in the Tiele language.



“Yes, yes, yes!” Chen Xing felt like he had just obtained a great treasure. He took the map from Xiang Shu. “You actually remembered it all!”

“It’s not Yunmeng Lake, and it’s not in the south,” Xiang Shu explained. “Legend has it that it’s north of Chi Le Chuan—far, far north. Its Tiele name is Erchilun, and it’s called Carosha in the Xiongnu language. The name refers to the place where the dragon fell to its death.”

“You’ve been there?” Chen Xing asked, surprised.

“I saw it in a book an old man gave me when I was a kid.”

Chen Xing looked down at the map, then up again at Xiang Shu, who had picked up a new piece of parchment as he thought back to what he saw on the book’s second to last page. “You guys have books too? Where are your ancient records stored?”

“Why?” Xiang Shu asked coldly. “Are you Han the only ones worthy of reading and writing?”

That wasn’t what Chen Xing had meant, and he quickly explained as much. He’d only wanted to take a look, thinking perhaps he could find clues in the place where the Chi Le Covenant stored their ancient texts.

The carriage forged ahead through the grasslands. Off in the distance, the vague outline of a mountain range shrouded in mist appeared on the horizon—the moment it came into view, everyone in the procession cheered. Chen Xing looked up. They rounded the hillside to find a great number of tents set up across the sweeping plain, against a backdrop of mountains and rivers. An end-of-summer wind began to blow, and Chen Xing felt as if a striking picture scroll was slowly unfurling before his eyes.

They had arrived in Chi Le Chuan.

The scene before him was stunning. Under the shadow of the Yin Mountains and in the gentle embrace of the Kundulun and Dahei Rivers, the grasslands stretched for thousands of miles, like a rug upon which nearly two hundred thousand herders made their living. Innumerable tents dotted the land, stretching from the hillside all the way to the foot of the mountains! At the start of autumn, almost all the nomads outside the pass migrated to the Yin Mountains, which were sacred to the Sixteen Hu, to worship the range with the Ancient Chi Le Covenant.

A child spotted the convoy from the bank of Kudulun River and shouted, "The Great Chanyu is back!"

A beautiful woman who had been washing clothes by the river stood up and started to sing in a resounding voice. The warriors in the convoy responded with a hearty song of their own. Xiang Shu remained seated in the open-air carriage, but he stowed the sheepskin parchment away. His long legs dangled off the edge of the carriage as he adjusted his posture, shifting so he was half lying down.