

PARAGON OF SIN

Chapter 16 - 16: Task Force

While they soared through the skies, Elder Ji informed him that the others within the sect were still ignorant of his exact cultivation base. There were quite a few speculations, but no one had any real, concrete idea.

This brought him some comfort. If there was a scheme being laid out with him as a target, he would be underestimated and thus more likely to overcome the threat.

However, Elder Ji also stated that the mission was legitimate, and no one had doctored any information within. After all, three of the Five Great Sects were working in concert. It was best not to throw in junior rivalry or petty schemes that could lead to all sorts of unwanted conclusions.

Elder Ji similarly explained to him the various changes within the sect since he went into seclusion. "There had been a few new developments. Firstly, Mei Mei had healed her injuries sustained during the competition and regained her spot as a Core Disciple. Not many are aware as to how she recovered so quickly, but she did and her strength seemed to have surged, ascending to the third phase."

"Jiu Lang and Lang Yi have also ascended to the third phase as well. Shu Yin absorbed Shu Yang's faction into her own and has been looking for a way to help him repair his cultivation. She requested to be a part of the task force because of the great amount of rewards for its completion. I don't know how likely she's to succeed at her goal, but she's relentless and determined."

"Xing Fu, Jiang Wei, and Jiang Bai were elected as the new core disciples, replacing Tao Gui, He Long, and Shu Yang."

Wei Wuyin's eyebrow rose slightly, "the Jiang Brothers?" Wei Wuyin had known these two deeply as they were elite members of Mei Mei's faction, like him. In fact, they had fought, partied, and cultivated together when he was a part of her faction as well.

"Yes, in a round of blood and pain, they earned their spots." Elder Ji seemed to recall something and said, "They've both transformed their Heart of Qi, and have immense potential now."

"Oh?" Wei Wuyin felt somewhat curious, but mostly excited. He was happy that two of his comrades from his inner disciple days made it to a higher rank. Now, they stood on equal footing with him - status-wide.

It wasn't long before they arrived at the Scarlet Solaris Mountain's eastern gate at the base of the mountain. There was a steady flow of entry and exit from the mortal members and cultivating families who lived there.

His eyes swept over these people and a deep melancholic feeling emerged in the depths of his heart. Memories entered his mind as his heart felt constricted by a giant hand.

"There they are," a voice broke him out of his emotions, a feeling washed over him that cleansed his mind, and he looked at the area Elder Ji directed him to. There, four women stood.

Shu Yin, with her brown-skin and light-brown eyes, was looking at them approach. Wei Wuyin saw this beautiful woman and saw a deep level of exhaustion suffused within her eyes. She stood with energy and had a determined expression, but her eyes, they reminded him of his own.

She must have a world on her shoulders. Her brother's world.

Yan Zhu still stood as straight as a spear, her body exuding a heroic and valiant aura, like a general's spear. Everytime he looked at her, she reminded him of a grand spear willing to cleave through the winds and rain. Her short black hair and tight-fitted light armor suited for battle cut a powerful figure.

However, as his eyes roamed briefly around her physique, a series of moans couldn't help but resound in his mind. His blood increased in temperature a little before he smiled.

Xing Fu was a young girl that had nothing particularly outstanding about her. She was a little shorter than average-sized women, and her eyes were sharper, but besides that, she simply did not leave a decent impression.

Even her long, black hair felt common, as there was no sheen or luster to it. Her female assets were also below average, which made him recall Su Mei.

Elder Bing, however, was different. Her icy-blue hair that emitted faint traces of frost left a definite impression. She had mature features, beautifully appropriate attire and assets that couldn't be ignored or missed. While she didn't dress in a revealing fashion, her body's curves were clear. Her slim and long legs may be hidden beneath her long skirt, but they were definitely satisfactory.

They all wore scarlet colors with unique dressings, but each had the Scarlet Solaris Sect's symbol embroidered somewhere visible.

When Elder Ji sent the crane down, the four women all glanced upwards. They landed nearby and Wei Wuyin immediately leapt off. His silver eyes, handsome visage, and unfathomable aura was quite attractive and eye-catching, unable to be ignored .

All of them were looking at Wei Wuyin with an intense gaze of observation. He could even see Xing Fu wildly using a Spiritual Spell to observe him. However, he wasn't concerned that his cultivation base was revealed. He had long since familiarized himself with his new cultivation base to suppress its innate vitality and yin manifestations.

Unless he wished for it, they would at most see his body suffused with elemental energy, placing him at the Third Stage of Qi Condensation, Elemental Birth Phase. They wouldn't even be able to tell that he possessed metal qi or lightning qi unless he exhibited his strength.

"You're finally here, huh?" Xing Fu said begrudgingly. Her tone was filled with annoyance. This shocked Wei Wuyin as he hadn't recalled what he did to receive such a reception. After all, it was her master who requested him.

"Alright, let's get going. We'll be late if we continue to delay," Yan Zhu said. It seemed that despite Elder Bing being the elder of the group, Yan Zhu was in charge as they all listened.

A black crane was already waiting for them nearby. Before Wei Wuyin could even offer greetings, all four of them jumped on the black crane and readied themselves, with Elder Bing acting as its navigator.

Wei Wuyin frowned. He turned to Elder Ji, who had a frown on his face as well. They had requested him to participate, but they didn't seem to care about him. It felt out-of-place.

Wei Wuyin sighed, muttering lightly to himself, "I hope this is just a mission." With that, he kicked off and landed on the black crane's wide back.

Just as he was about to take a seat next to Xing Fu, she coldly spat, "Who gave you permission to sit next to me? I sure didn't." Her eyes reflected disdain and contempt.

His expression changed. However, seeing that no one seemed to care, he just sat alone and avoided conflict.

They took flight.

"According to Elder Ji, we're supposed to meet the Aqua Echo Sect and Sky Sword Sect at Lake Muu. That's in the central area where the most disappearances took place. This task force..."

Elder Ji had given him all the information about this mission, including a jade inscribed with spiritual markings, a dossier that could only be read through spiritual sense. In it, he learned that many subordinate powers and cities in control of the three sects had been struck with abnormal disappearances.

At first, many believed it was just evil cultivators practicing a dark art, but it became different when, after several hundred people vanished, no evidence of dark arts were performed. Dark arts were qi methods that used blood, souls, and lifeforce for its execution. They could even siphon energies from others.

However, it corrupts one's mind and can even cause all sorts of horrendous mutations in the body. However, for those who are untalented or seeking swift revenge, they would sometimes have no choice but to resort to that. With people as cultivation resources, they rise.

With the absence of evidence in that avenue, they believed it was a concerted effort done by normal cultivators. In fact, this was still the prevailing theory.

That being said, Wei Wuyin felt that the incident was surrounded with the scent of demons. Demons were strange existences, while many attached the title of being malicious and evil to them, Wei Wuyin didn't. Demons had unique abilities and cultivated differently than humans, so the vanishing people felt more in line with one of them.

While they all might not be evil, there were quite a few who were detestable, enough to establish the stereotype. However, the Wu Country treated demons like the plague. They would hunt down at the first sign and eliminate them with the strongest of prejudice, including all those involved.

As he thought of this, a wave of sadness battered his heart.

He shook his head, pushing those thoughts back, as he started to cultivate. He breathed in the Essence of Heaven and Earth and entered it into his Heart of Qi. While cultivation like this would no longer progress his cultivation base, it still could increase his strength, no matter how small.

The sixth phase, the False Reality Phase, was known as the gateway to godhood, and relied on mixing one's yang and yin energy in a perfect cohesive whole, creating yin-yang energy. With this, one's qi could become real, integrating with the natural order of the world. While it may not be able to gain permanence, the fact one gains the ability of 'creation' was extraordinary.

It was the first watershed of cultivation that required only comprehension rather than the accumulation of the appropriate energy and a hint of understanding. To understand yin and yang and perform a fusion.

It's this bit that can cause others to forever be unable to move forward. The worst of it all was that the help of others did very little. Even if a Sixth Phase expert were to give you their experiences, it wouldn't help much. In fact, it could even hurt you.

Wei Wuyin knew that this phase was the true defining moment of a cultivator and moved them from being just a cultivator to being a powerhouse in Wu Country. Luckily, he had nearly one hundred and eighty years to delve into this.

After several hours of continuous flight, a beautiful, clear lake entered his view. It was surrounded by forestry, natural and pure. He felt a dense aura of water energy from within the lake.

The Muu Lake was within the area of the Aqua Echo Sect. It was a cultivation ground for them, where many disciples practiced water-type qi arts. In the jade, it noted that the Aqua Echo Sect was the first hit and their forces suffered some losses. In fact, the majority of people missing originated from their territory.

Then, the Sky Sword Sect and Scarlet Solaris Sect decided to act after receiving the request from them. Wei Wuyin smiled as he thought that the two sects were like boys trying to gain the attention of a pretty girl.

The Aqua Echo Sect was a female-only sect. This wasn't always the case, but due to a tragedy that had happened that nearly crippled the sect, it became that way. With all their cultivators being female, they had their share of difficulties, but one thing couldn't be ignored.

They had the highest number of Fourth Stage of Qi Condensation, Yin Form, experts out of all the Five Great Sects. In fact, they were the second strongest sect in the entire Five Great Sects, hands down. The Sky Sword Sect being the first, as they had two Godlord's upholding their banner.

However, in terms of expert cultivators outside of Godlord's, the Aqua Echo Sect had the highest number, be it Fourth or Sixth Phase experts.

While the Scarlet Solaris Sect had the highest number of Fifth Phase experts. This dynamic was formed because of innate resources. The Scarlet Solaris Mountain exuded Scarlet Qi, which carried inherent yang properties.

"You better behave when we get there," Xing Fu said. Wei Wuyin realized she was talking to him. A twitch occurred at his eyebrow. He felt a sudden desire to send this girl flying with a slap.

As if ignoring Wei Wuyin's face, she scoldingly continued without pause, "the Aqua Echo Sect has countless beauties, and if you say or act in an improper way, it'll be very disadvantageous to us and the sect, so I hope you keep that in mind and control your urges."

"..." What type of person did she take Wei Wuyin as?

Elder Bing directed the crane to descend near the lake. As they approached, they saw two groups of people. The first group were dressed in blue robes that seemed to ripple like water. They were all female and all had beautiful countenances. There were a total of six.

The second group was a mix of male and females. Two males and two females, with the way they stood and their aura, it seemed that they were masters and disciples.

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The middle-aged gentleman wearing white robes and a sword strapped to his waist, gave off a scholarly aura. A young woman with black hair and white robes stood behind him. Her eyes were clear and effused intelligence and will. She also had a sword strapped on her waist.

A beautiful woman that looked no less than twenty years old also wore white, but her sword was strapped onto her back. She looked young, but her aura and stance demanded respect and her eyes revealed aged wisdom. Behind her was a young man with his eyes closed, his body emitted a sharp aura unlike the other three. It was like he was an unsheathed sword.

They had the insignia of the Sky Sword Sect, an upright golden longsword, embroidered onto their robes.

When they arrived, the gazes of all, except the young man, were drawn over. They landed and walked forward.

Elder Bing halted them with a gesture and continued. The middle-aged man and young woman from the Sky Sword Sect and two female members of the Aqua Echo Sect walked forward. As they gathered, they seemed to be discussing something.

As all of that happened, Wei Wuyin inspected everyone here. The Aqua Echo Sect truly lived up to their reputation that all of their disciples were beautiful. As for the Sky Sword Sect, he couldn't make any judgment. Supposedly, they were all like sharp swords, arrogant and fierce.

However, rumors weren't always true.

"There's ten disciples and four elders..." As he counted, he couldn't help but be inwardly shocked. They were taking this mission very seriously.

Each of the elders were in the Yin Form Phase, and all the disciples were at least at the Second Stage of Qi Condensation. They must all be core disciples of their sects.

Just as he was looking around, his gaze fell on a particular woman from the Aqua Echo Sect. She had strawberry blonde hair, bright eyes, long legs, and a strong and prideful chest. Her eyes contained a strong strength and confidence that left one impressed. That coupled with her beauty left one intrigued and wanting to know more.

Her body had a heavy aura of water, likely having transformed her Heart of Qi into a Heart of Water Qi. With that, her water-type qi arts would increase three-fold at the very least.

"Control yourself, you're drooling," Xing Fu called out loudly. Wei Wuyin turned towards her and saw the disgusted expression on her face while she pointed.

This...girl...

Before he could say anything, he felt the gazes of everyone reach him. While he wasn't drooling, it was still embarrassing to be singled out for such a reason. However, he quickly calmed himself and smiled.

"Jealous?" His tone was teasing and filled with insinuation.

Xing Fu was caught off-guard and huffed, "As if!" She turned away. Her leg twitched slightly as if she wished to stomp the ground and leave.

Shaking his head, he felt this girl was only slightly bothersome. Now he understood why she took the initiative to engage him. She had a crush on him, and was just immature in how she was approaching it.

As she was unremarkable in many areas, there weren't many ways she could make herself known to Wei Wuyin who had his pick of women. Doing whatever she could to leave an impression. It was cute, but he didn't have time to deal with such matters.

Shu Yin looked at him, her brows furrowed. She seemed as if she wanted to say something, but Elder Bing was already returning.

When she arrived, she directly spoke, "I'll give you all flares as we'll be splitting up in groups." She handed out red orbs the size of baseballs. If crushed, a brilliant red light would be released that'll be visible in a five hundred mile radius.

She explained that there would be three groups, one covering about sixty percent of the area, and the other two handling twenty percent each. Supposedly, they figured out how to find the culprit or clues to them. However, they just didn't know where.

So they decided to split up to hasten the search.

The Elders will be in one, and the disciples will be split into two composed of five people.

She also gave them crystal balls. Supposedly, these were Dead Spirit Crystals. If they approached an area where an enormous amount of people had died recently, it'll shine with light. As they were assuming it was a mass murder done by conventional cultivators, these were excellent tools to find the site of the killings.

From there, they can investigate further.

If nothing comes up, they'll move to the next suspected area. This was only a preliminary method deployed, and they had several other methods to find the culprits.

"Shu Yin and Xing Fu, you'll be in the first group. Yan Zhu and Wei Wuyin, you'll be in the second group. Any objections?" Elder Bing asked.

"Master, isn't this inappropriate? Yan Zhu and Wei Wuyin have the highest cultivation amongst us four, they should be split, no?" Xing Fu immediately raised an objection. Her words weren't without merit, but the response she received shocked her.

"Shu Yin has reached the Elemental Birth Phase, so her cultivation base is similar to Wei Wuyin. You'll also be with Dao Shin. It's appropriate." Elder Bing explained.

Dao Shin? As she said that, Wei Wuyin glanced towards the Sky Sword Sect's members. That young man was like an unsheathed sword.

"Sword Qi?" His brows furrowed. If that was the case, that young man was definitely strong. Those who comprehended the Ethereal-Type Sword Qi had one of the highest combat abilities known to modern cultivators.

He also didn't forget Shu Yin. To think she had ascended to the third phase. It seems the sect had placed deep importance on those who successfully cultivated the Haven Heart Qi Method. He had received violet lightning stones, Yan Zhu received six months of cultivation ground training, and Shu Yin likely had support as well.

Shu Yin smiled as he looked towards her, a hint of pride within. He replied with his own smile that said, "You're extraordinary, I'm impressed."

Soon, the disciples were divided into two groups of five. Wei Wuyin, Yan Zhu, the female disciple from the Sky Sword Sect, and two disciples from the Aqua Echo Sect.

Wei Wuyin noticed that the woman with a dense watery aura had been assigned to their group. His silver eyes couldn't help but appreciate her serene beauty and calm elegance as she arrived.

Yan Zhu stood out with a map in hand, her expression commanding and charismatic, "Our assignment is to sweep the southeastern section of the Muu Lake's forest. We each have a dead spirit crystal, so we can split up further into two groups and divide the section into two areas." She pointed at an area and cut down, dividing their area into two.

Wei Wuyin realized that Yan Zhu had the bearing of a natural leader. Even though he also possessed that inherent quality, the degree was several times lower than Yan Zhu. However, while he was praising her in his heart, others found the sight unsatisfying.

"Hold it! Who gave you the title of leader?" The Aqua Echo Sect member coldly asked. She obviously didn't like that Yan Zhu had abruptly taken the leadership role.

"Hm? Then, what do you think we should do?" Yan Zhu calmly countered, her eyes narrowing dangerously. It seemed that she didn't like her momentum being broken. The other two girls, who were obviously extraordinary, hadn't said anything.

"I think we should vote and decide the appropriate leader," the Aqua Echo Sect's disciple offered.

Yan Zhu shook her head, "Impossible. If we voted, then the Sky Sword Sect will be at a disadvantage, and a tie could form." Yan Zhu highlighted how the method was ineffective.

Suddenly, a sharp voice interjected, "You're right. The best and most fair choice is to allow the strongest to lead." It was the Sky Sword Sect's female disciple, Ming Yu. She stepped forward, her eyes containing a powerful battle intent.

Yan Zhu nodded without hesitation, her courageous demeanour and firm stance agreeing without a word. The Aqua Echo Sect's, Zhou Gao, was taken aback for a moment, but then coldly smiled. "Agreed."

Wei Wuyin saw the intense atmosphere formed and couldn't help but be intrigued at this development. Of course he wouldn't participate. His cultivation exceeded everyone present and he birthed metal and lightning qi. He didn't believe anyone here was his match, and he cared even less about who led.

Instead, he looked at the only one who hadn't said a single thing. The serene beauty with an unshakeable aura. She was aloof and proud.

"Shui Wuhen, what do you think?" Zhou Gao asked.

Shui Wuhen smiled mildly and replied, "You three can decide." With that, she slowly walked away as if she had no intention to get caught in the crosshairs of their little competition.

Yan Zhu furrowed her eyebrows slightly. This woman was powerful, she knew this much. There was little fear and vigilance in her heart facing Ming Yu or Zhou Gao, but Shui Wuhen gave her a frightening sensation of danger.

"Wei Wuyin, do you-" Yan Zhu was going to ask something, but was interrupted by Zhou Gao.

"You want a man to fight your battles?" Zhou Gao coldly mocked with a sneer. She had the expression as if Yan Zhu was afraid of handling her own mess. Yan Zhu's frown deepened, her eyes flashing with anger as she was obviously provoked. When did she ever need to rely on a man?!

Her rage had missed the vigilance that both Zhou Gao and Ming Yu had when Wei Wuyin was mentioned. If she knew their elders told them to not offend Wei Wuyin, who knew what she would think? In fact, Zhou Gao's Elders told her to avoid conflict with Wei Wuyin under any and all circumstances.

"I need no man to fight my battles, do you? Let's do this. The strongest will be the leader!" Yan Zhu heroically declared. She withdrew her spear. It was nine feet and nine inches longer, slender, and scarlet colored. It exuded a faint scarlet qi.

This was the Scarlet Hell Spear, a spear she constructed using the Scarlet Qi Stone gained from the Core Competition rewards and other materials. It

seemed as if it was pulled from hell as she pointed the bladed portion emitting scarlet wisps of smoke at Zhou Gao.

"Good! It seems you're not so useless!" Zhou Gao waved her hand, a folding fan emerging in her hand. She unfurled it. When it did, ripples surged around it as if the air had turned liquid.

Ming Yu excitedly smiled, pulling out her sword from its sheath. A bursting flow of metal qi pervaded her surroundings and formed the faint silhouette of a sword behind her. This was a sign that her cultivation was incredibly close to reaching the Yin Form Phase. When this image formed, the other two's expressions turned serious.

Metal Qi was one of the Five Advanced Elemental Qi, which included ice, wood, lightning and magma. Formed from the extreme of the four natural elements in various combinations. They were powerful and fierce. With this, they had to take her far more seriously.

This was bound to be an interesting battle.