

The Ages 1051

Chapter 1051 - Conditions for the Fifth to Hatch

Tianming had killed the sovereign's younger brother, yet she didn't press him on it, but killed Yueshen Qi as well. She also offered to take him to the mooncore. What in the world did that mean? What was her endgame? Either way, it was plain to see that Tianming was once more wrapped up in her grasp. No matter what she's going to do, if I fall into her pace, I'll only come closer and closer to oblivion.

His attempt to flee had been a complete failure, so it didn't bode well for his future prospects. However, he still had two trump cards: the Prime Tower and his decapath era godswords. As long as he can survive, he still had a chance. Since the mooncore was the place he needed to be to rescue Ye Lingfeng, he wanted to check it out.

"Let's go, then," Tianming said. Since she was here, he would pretend that all of this had nothing to do with him.

"Keep up," she said as she flew toward the palace. That meant the pathway to the mooncore was within the palace grounds.

Along the way, she said nothing. Soon, they arrived and Sovereign Xi descended to the Grandfowl Water Palace. When they reached the entrance, she turned and waved at Tianming, who quickly walked to her side.

"Let's walk side by side."

"Okay."

Soon, they reached the clear, moon-like lake that looked ever so dreamlike with the formation covering it.

"Open." Her fingers pulsed with astral force as a hole three-meters in width opened at the center of the lake. The sparkling lake water began flooding to the sides and looked nothing like blood at all.

"Come."

Her voice was as enchanting as ever. She walked with light steps as her dress flapped around her. The cut on the dress was pretty bold, allowing Tianming to see quite a lot. However, he had no reaction to it. She was as beautiful as a rose, but also just as thorny.

Together, they approached the hole. Dense stellunar source was coming from within to the point that his astral discs began circulating. At that moment, Sovereign Xi took his hand and smiled. Like a normal girl in love, she took Tianming into the moon.

They continued down along the passageway as stellunar source continued pouring out, pushing her skirt to head level. However, Tianming's gaze was affixed on the stellunar source coming from below rather than the tempting beauty beside him. They first passed through a thick layer of sand and stone, which was the crust of the Divine Moon Realm. Beneath it was where the stellunar source that fueled all life in the realm came from. There was something that separated the solid crust from the stellunar source that

also prevented the lifeforms on the surface from being consumed by the rampaging power of the stellunar source. It was called the fusion formation.

Fusion formations were key components that filtered fundamental cosmic forces for use by people. The creation of one required millions of years of time and effort. There were two types of formations in the astralscape of order that were considered to be most complex and tough. The most complex kind was the fusion formation, which served as the foundation of the utilization of nova sources, and the second was the astralguard formation.

Fusion formations were far more important than astralguard formations. The Divine Moon Realm had an astralguard formation for use in war, but it couldn't stop Bodhi, who was already in the Divine Moon Realm.

The deeper Tianming went, the brighter it got. The energy from the mooncore burst out like a geyser, flushing his face red. Sovereign Xi's skin was also a little raw and seemed to have the consistency of water. Then they came to a thick formation that prevented them from continuing downward.

"So this is the fusion formation!"

Tianming had breached the Skysource Hellshaker Formation before, which was already complex enough. But it was child's play compared to this. He saw billions of heavenly patterns constantly swimming across the formation's surface. When Sovereign Xi opened it and led him down, he noticed that the formation's thickness was more than fifty times that of the Skysource Hellshaker Formation. If it weren't for that, it wouldn't be able to hold back the power of stellunar source.

The Ninefold Hell is a dead star, but it used to be one of the stars in the astralscape of order. I wonder if its fusion formation is still around. There was only one way to find out: continue digging down. Right as that notion occurred to him, they passed through the formation and reached the real stellunar source. The sight completely shocked him. Nova and stellunar sources were keystones to life across the cosmos and considered ultimate treasures. He saw a boundless world filled with fundamental cosmic force. The fusion formation formed a pathway heading straight into the center of the stellunar source. They walked along the corridor like they were descending into a well, surrounded by the raw, rampaging energy outside.

"If it weren't for this fusion formation, the entire Divine Moon Realm would be swallowed up by its stellunar source."

One had to travel at least half the diameter of the moon to get to its core. As he traveled along the corridor, the energy seemed more and more volatile and dense. It was as if he was in a burning forge that constantly hammered to refine and reshape material that was put within it. Within his lifebound space, the grey egg and the remaining eggs that didn't have cracks on them shook a little after feeling the force.

Tianming told Ying Huo, "Did you notice it? Fundamental cosmic forces like this stellunar source seem similar to spirit hazards."

"That's right."

Tianming secretly took the grey egg into his hand. Though it seemed enthusiastic at first, it soon mellowed and seemed a little hesitant about the stellar source.

"What's going on?" Tianming asked.

Ying Huo explained, "We're already at the Ascension stage, so it takes energy as powerful as the stellar source's to hatch the grey one. However, it isn't the right element for it. In other words, there's some kind of fundamental cosmic force that has a similar element to what it needs."

Meow Meow and the rest had all hatched by relying on spirit hazards. Now that he was a 'god', however, he might need a divine-grade spirit hazard to hatch the fifth egg. What he didn't expect was that fundamental cosmic forces would be an even better fit for hatching Primordial Chaos Beasts.

Chapter 1052 - Divine Ordered Patterns

Tianming quietly examined what was going on.

"What's that?" He suddenly noticed that the stellar source outside the barrier seemed to have some circles of light marked with what seemed like heavenly patterns. In fact, they looked like countless tribulation patterns. They looked like naturally-occurring patterns in spirit ores, herbs, and hazards and were different from man-made ones in formations or tomes.

"If they have heavenly patterns, does that mean the stellar source is actually more like a kind of spirit hazard?"

Spirit hazards were formed from natural elements like water, fire, lightning, wind, and so on. They had heavenly, saintly, and tribulation patterns that denoted their power. Even a little spirit hazard flame could exterminate an entire city.

"Are you asking Us?" Sovereign Xi said. Tianming had mumbled his thoughts without noticing it. He hadn't been trying to mentally converse with Ying Huo and the rest.

"Yes." He wanted to learn how stellar sources even came to be. If she was willing to explain it, he wouldn't mind giving it a listen. It would be some time before they reached the mooncore anyway.

"Those circles of light are actually divine ordered patterns."

"There's divine ordered patterns in stellar source?" Tianming had heard a little about those. They were said to be of the highest order among heavenly patterns, much higher than tribulation patterns.

"Of course. Divine ordered patterns are actually manifestations of the laws of order, and govern the behavior of cosmic forces. On a small scale, they allow us to use our divine will to control astral force. On a large scale, divine ordered patterns control nova and stellar sources. It's the same principle."

Tianming now had a rough understanding. Before this, he had heard that nova sources were a kind of fundamental cosmic force that could change and flow. The reason for that was the laws that governed them, which manifested as divine ordered patterns that the eye could see. In contrast, fusion formations were only used to contain them. If the laws didn't exist to control and regulate those forces, even fusion formations would be useless.

"The heavenly and divine will of cultivators result from study of the universal laws of order."

Tianming could see the laws themselves in action, regulating the stellunar source. "May I ask how the stellunar source that has divine ordered patterns is related to spirit hazards with heavenly patterns?"

"Spirit hazards are variations of fundamental cosmic forces. They're more volatile than stellunar sources, and aren't suitable to be used for cultivating the body. However, they're a good fit for making pills and artifacts."

Tianming nodded. So it appeared that spirit hazards were also derivatives of the fundamental forces, just worse. In essence, they were similar.

So I just need to find a star with an element that fits the fifth egg to hatch it. Now, the last hole he had in his understanding of star worlds had been filled.

"In other words, divine ordered patterns are the most powerful patterns in the astralscape of order, manifestations of the laws that govern fundamental cosmic forces. They're also part of nova sources. As nova source dissipates into surrounding ores and herbs, the divine ordered patterns also scatter to form tribulation, saintly, and heavenly patterns. Once they absorb enough patterns, they become spirit ores, herbs, and hazards, and those with a single complete divine ordered pattern become divine ores and herbs. Spirit hazards are variations of nova sources with divine ordered patterns and only those with complete divine ordered patterns can be considered divine grade. The many races of the astralscape call those divine hazards."

Meow Meow and the rest had hatched after absorbing low-quality spirit hazards. If he could get enough divine hazards, he might not need a stellunar or nova source to hatch the fifth egg.

"Divine hazards, ores, and herbs, no matter what level they are, only have a single divine ordered pattern, never two or more. The patterns themselves have nine grades, each recorded with a unique name. They determine the quality of the divine treasures," she continued.

Now Tianming's understanding of the world was complete. Divine ordered patterns that represented the universe's laws were the main reason for the naturally occurring treasures of the world. Nova sources, a fundamental force of the universe, nourished normal objects to make them treasures. Based on that, even a normal divine ore was a universe in itself, just like the human body.

"Spirit ores, herbs, and hazards thus make up fundamental cultivation resources." For instance, weapons like the Sungod Cycle and Kilostar Photondragon were forged with divine ores and hazards by layering the divine ordered patterns of each ingredient together, compounding their power. Those forged using this method were called divine ordered artifacts, or divine artifacts for short.

When it came to determining the grade of divine artifacts, the higher-grade pattern took priority. For instance, an artifact forged using a divine ore with a grade-two pattern and a divine hazard with a grade-one pattern would be considered a grade-two divine artifact. That allowed divine artifacts to have the power of divine ordered patterns, toughness of divine ores, and explosive damage potential of divine hazards.

"So the grades of divine ores, hazards, and herbs are determined by the grade of the divine ordered pattern. Those are naturally occurring with only a single pattern. As for divine arms, they're forged, so they have two or more divine ordered patterns."

Apart from divine arms, the astralscape of order also had alchemy for refining pills, something that was absent on the Flameyellow Continent, whose residents wastefully consumed spirit herbs. Pills could be made by processing divine herbs and divine hazards, and they could also have multiple divine ordered patterns. Consuming pills allowed cultivators to grow in power and will. On that front, while divine ores had divine ordered patterns as well, they weren't consumable. Alchemy was a much rarer art than forging, not to mention more complicated.

So combining divine ores and hazards creates divine arms. Combining divine hazards with divine herbs creates divine pills. The key to alchemy and forging lie in the divine ordered patterns. So how many patterns do my Grand-Orient Sword and Prime Tower have? What grade are their divine patterns?

Usually, the number of patterns didn't matter too much, as they only determined the functions of artifacts. The grade of the patterns was more important. Tianming had always been curious as to what class of divine artifacts those were. Thinking back, he trained using the odd patterns he found within the Grand-Orient Sword and Prime Tower to grow his heavenly will. The only reason that worked was probably because they were parts of divine patterns and contained the essence of the laws of the universe. In other words, studying them was akin to studying universal laws. He had been doing that since he was at the Grand-Orient Realm.

Do the five gates in the sword mean it has five divine patterns? I recall they looked a little incomplete, though. The Prime Tower has three floors, each with patterns. So, perhaps it has three kinds of divine patterns. They also look somewhat incomplete.

Given how incomplete they were, he wouldn't be able to tell what grade the sword and tower were. Even so, he felt that they were much more powerful than he actually thought. He hazarded a guess that divine artifacts like the Amnestic River Voidbanner were only grade one, while the Kilostar Photondragon and Godbane were grade two. So far, he hadn't seen any stronger ones.

So all of these are classified under the same umbrella of having divine ordered patterns.

Some time back, Feiling was studying a tome on divine ordered patterns that recorded tens of thousands of types. It had almost all the patterns under grade five. It was too bad that Tianming hadn't given it a detailed look.

He looked at the divine ordered patterns present within the stellunar source once more. The one he was looking at looked like a circle of light, much like the glow of a star. Upon closer inspection, they were formed of little gold dots, each of which looked like an individual tribulation or saintly heavenly pattern. They grouped together to form a mysterious heavenly union.

"This divine ordered pattern is called Aurum Star. It's a grade-three divine pattern."

Chapter 1053 - The Terrifying Sovereign

"Can I take it out and use it?" Tianming asked.

"Of course not. Once you touch it, it will scatter. Divine ordered patterns need mediums like ores or herbs. Otherwise they're useless."

"Understood." In other words, every cultivation resource stems from divine ordered patterns and nova sources. Lifebound beasts evolve using manna, which is another distinct fundamental part of the universe.

Back then, he knew very little about divine ordered patterns, but he finally rectified that lack of understanding today. Divine ordered patterns and nova sources resulted in naturally occurring divine ores, herbs, and hazards, which could in turn be made into artifacts or pills by people.

Guess it's even clearer to me now how I should hatch the rest of the Primordial Chaos Beasts. Either I get lots of divine hazards, or I use a fundamental cosmic force with a fitting element.

While the stellunar source of the Divine Moon Realm had enough energy, it was too bad that the fifth egg didn't like the element. By now, the two of them had reached the deepest part of the pathway. The stellunar source here was rampaging wildly, to the point that the sound hurt his ears. He felt like his eardrums were about to explode; it was as if he was at the bottom of the ocean. The slightest failure in the fusion formation could cause him to be completely swallowed up by the stellunar source, but the same also applied to Sovereign Xi. Even she felt small in comparison to that huge power.

"We're here."

They had finally reached the mooncore, an eerie place indeed. Everything there was completely dark, and even the sound from outside was gone. The space was probably twisted due to the sheer force produced by the stellunar source. He felt like his body and the sovereign's were longer than usual from the tugging force, and it was only thanks to his astral disc body that he could resist the pull. Any normal person that came here would surely be torn to shreds.

It was no surprise, then, that a way into the world of caeli would be formed in a place where such forces ran wild. The instant Tianming came here, he stopped thinking about divine ordered patterns and looked for the entrance to the xenomemory space. Immediately, he spotted a dark vortex that seemed to be where the space was most twisted, right at the center of the core. It really stood out.

He took a few glances at it. If I can get the dimensional rope, I'll be able to enter and save Feng. The fusion formation can't stop me, the only issue is how to get that rope.

That would have to depend on the sovereign. Come to think of it, there was nothing here apart from the entrance to the xenomemory space—why had she brought him here in the first place?

Since they arrived, she had been looking at him through her mask. She seemed all the more terrifying in the presence of such odd forces. Everything was quiet, a calm before the storm that was her bringing up her trump card. Tianming had killed Yueshen Hao, so things were bound to change.

At that moment, she laughed abruptly and took out a black rope from her spatial ring. Then a transparent bottle appeared in her other hand that contained a drop of blood. That sight was completely out of his expectations. Whose blood was that? What was she trying to tell him? His gaze wavered.

"Sigh... are all men fools like you? When will you learn to try hiding your concern for others?" Sovereign Xi said, shaking her head.

"What're you trying to say?" Tianming felt a headache welling up. He had a feeling that she was more cunning than Li Caiwei. Her shiftiness was impossible to figure out.

"Let me guess... you're Ye Lingfeng's friend and you're trying to save him, so you came to me of your own accord, right?"

Tianming had no words. If she knew about that, what didn't she know?

"Do you want to know how We found out?" she asked, winking. "It's simple: careful observation. Women are mysterious figures that you'll never figure out, you know. Don't pretend you're smart if you're in the company of one. We know your every move and thought. Men are all fools if they think they know better, and you're no exception."

In her eyes, Tianming was nothing but a foolish child. Since she had already said as much, there was no longer any point in denying it. She wouldn't buy it. So Tianming went straight to the point. "You've guessed right. However, I'd like to know what gave me away."

"Then you'd better listen up."

"I'm all ears."

"First, We heard that you managed to leave the Veneramoon Formation despite not being a member of the divine moonrace. We took note of that and began to have Our doubts."

"But you hadn't met me back then, and I was a no-name. You're telling me you remember that insignificant little detail?"

"Yes, We do. We take note of what most would deem insignificant. No detail can escape Us. You might think that was insignificant, but in Our eyes, it was a huge mystery that needed to be answered. It unnerved Us greatly." Watchful people like that were rather scary in their own right.

"What else?"

"Second, since you came to Divine Moon Skycity, We've had Our eyes on you the entire time. That night when you were at the blood lake, We saw your arm tear through the formation. And tonight, We saw you destroy Yueshen Hao's formation as well. Third, yesterday was your first day in Xi Palace, yet you already requested freedom of movement. When We limited it to only the city, We noticed a slight change in your expression that indicated satisfaction from Our response. That was how We concluded you were able to leave the city at any time using your arm." When she finished, she continued to look at him, smiling.

Now he knew the reason that he had been found out was that he'd underestimated how careful she was, as well as how significant she thought him to be. It was no surprise that she wouldn't let him out of her sight at all. With her power, she could hide from him and never be discovered. The fact that she had taken note of him leaving the Veneramoon Formation meant there was no way he would have been able to leave the city tonight.

"So what does all that have to do with Ye Lingfeng?" Tianming asked.

"It's also really simple."

"It can't be. The two of us are completely unrelated."

"That seems to be the case on the surface, but here's where I tell you that women's intuition is a real thing."

"What do you mean?"

"When We said we were bringing you to the mooncore, your expression shifted ever so slightly, but it couldn't escape Our eyes. When We took out the dimensional rope and a vial of Ye Lingfeng's blood, your expression changed again. Even if your irises dilate only the slightest micron, We'll take note of it. While there's no rational justification for Our doubts, We've always felt that Ye Lingfeng was somehow related to you, hence Our tests," she explained.

In other words, she was incredibly observant! There was no way he couldn't have any reaction to all that had happened, and she had picked up on every clue. Not only was she a mastermind in full control of the situation, it almost seemed like she obsessed over every insignificant detail. He should have been clued in to her nature when he saw that the three thousand skeletons were arranged in the exact same position, nailed down with the exact same number of nails at the exact same places.

"We'll let you in on another shocking fact," she said, putting the blood and dimensional rope away as she slowly approached him. "Just now, We used Yueshen Qi's blood to leave a Bluemoon Heart mark on your chin. This is a fourth-realm divine art. As long as that's on your body, We will be able to find you no matter where you go. You'll never be able to escape the palm of Our hand."

Tianming didn't even know he had been hit. Using his third eye, he saw a small blue dot on his chin.

"Damn, how are you that impressive?"

"It's a natural talent. Convinced?" she said mischievously.

"Then can you answer two more questions of mine?"

"Sure. Go ahead, darling."

"First, why are you carrying Ye Lingfeng's blood on your person?" It would be normal to expect her to ditch the blood of someone who had been exiled on the orders of the celestial orderians so that he would never have a chance of being recovered. He was also worried about another thing; given how observant she was, she might even guess that he had come from the Flameyellow Continent. All he could do was try to get her to reveal what she knew.

"That's because We were planning to secretly get him out of there and use his life to do something for Us. High risk, high reward."

"Got it. Then, my second question: what are you trying to achieve by showing me your hand?"

"That's because We no longer have to take that risk. You will be a good replacement for Ye Lingfeng! That's the whole reason We were observing you from beginning to end. Any other questions?"

"Yes."

"Ask away then."

"What am I supposed to be replacing him for?"

"Shh!" She placed her index finger at her mouth as she hushed him.

"What does that mean?"

"Loudly announcing Our grand ambition before carrying it out will jinx it. Let Us whisper it to you," she said as she approached his ear. "We... want you... to turn Us from a maiden... to a woman..."

"I've seen more men who've waited on you than pigs in my life, hag."

"What're you talking about? Didn't you see what happened to them? We nailed them all to poles. They never touched Us, hehe..."

So she was a five-century-old virgin? A withering, unplucked flower?

"You must already be molding..."

He knew that this monster was planning to kill him for sure. However, he couldn't help his quipping. After he vented, he felt relieved and not panicked in the slightest. But given how sly she was, there was no way to tell if she was lying.

Chapter 1054 - Past of the Eightmoon Swordsage

There was no way Sovereign Xi would go so far just to 'graduate from maidenhood'. She was definitely after something else.

"Since you're already showing your hand, you might as well just get straight to the point," Tianming said. While many of his plans had been seen through, he still had a last-ditch plan, so there was no need for him to panic. Staying calm was vital in such a delicate situation.

"Let Us tell you a story." She stretched out her arms around his neck and hugged him close like a clingy girl.

"Do you have to be so touchy to tell a story?" Tianming furrowed his brow.

"Of course. You're Our darling to play with as We please."

"Then go ahead..." He had a feeling that he was being slowly constricted by a venomous cobra, having been tempted by its beautiful colors.

"This is a tale about Our ancestor, the Eightmoon Swordsage. During his era, the divine moonrace was still on Orderia. It wasn't something to brag about, Our people were smaller in number compared to now. We lived in a world of many superior races and had no dignity. We were naught but vagabonds—"

"So he was an octabane, and his meteoric rise brought your race to prominence? It's a little cliché if you ask me," Tianming said.

"That's right. But the details were much more complicated."

"How so?"

"Well... he started off as a heptabane. His eighth bane-ring was awakened later." There was a burning light in her eyes, almost as if that was her dream.

"Awakened?" Tianming didn't understand. His, Qingyu's, and Li Wudi's bane-rings had appeared in stages. For instance, Qingyu started out with only three, then five, and now she had nine.

"That's right. Do you know the difference between a heptabane and an octabane?"

"Of course. The current ruler of the Divine Moon Realm is a heptabane and the ruler of Orderia is an octabane, hence the difference in power of the realms, right?"

"That's not really the reason. Our heptabane is the worst kind. We don't have the right to cultivate in a world with a nova source. In Orderia, even a hexabane can easily supersede Us. That's the difference a nova source and the legacy of a superior race makes. Though We call Ourselves ruler of this realm, We're but a nameless official in far off Orderia," she said with an angry look. That was the only time she had lost control in front of Tianming.

"So you're telling me that you have a way to make yourself an octabane. After that, you'll lead the divine moonrace to Orderia to change your fates and prove yourself? That sounds like something all members of the bane race want to do."

"So you can understand where We're coming from?" she said, surprised. But she shook her head. "We shouldn't be surprised, given how smart you are."

"How did the Eightmoon Swordsage succeed?"

"First, one needs an invisible bane-ring on top of the seven. In the history of the divine moonrace, only he and We have something like that."

"What then?"

"He wrote down his experience for his descendants to refer to."

"And...?"

"And We have done what was written."

"I'm asking about the details."

"Luck lies at the core of the awakening of the eighth bane-ring. Do you know what luck is?" She tilted her head as she looked at his face like she would an art piece.

"I do." Luck was an abstract concept that was hard to define. Those with great luck would always have things turn out well for them, and vice versa. The luckiest ones became rulers; luck was a mystical force that could be grouped together with Omniscient Will and good karma.

"There may be geniuses among the larger populace, but even among geniuses are those who have reincarnated into the right circumstances. Those people are said to have good luck. The more luck they have, the harder it is for them to die and the brighter their future is."

"So are you saying I'm one of those lucky few?"

"Of course. You're so lucky it's ridiculous. The ancestor instructed Us to look out for the lucky ones. You're the luckiest one We've seen so far, even luckier than Ye Lingfeng and Li Qingyu."

"Were the three thousand corpses in the blood lake all lucky as well?"

"Of course, but all of them combined can't compare to you." It was no wonder she stared at him so voraciously.

"So what in the world did the Eightmoon Swordsage do to awaken the eighth bane-ring?"

"He used an ancient sacrificial formation. First, he nailed ten thousand genius girls onto sacrificial poles to concentrate their luck in the formation. Then, he bathed in it every day until the night when Orderia's nova source pulsed. On that night, he liberated the pure yang body he had kept celibate for over six centuries with a celestial orderian girl with legendary luck! That's how he did it!" She practically shouted the method out loud. Her fervent passion was overflowing; however, Tianming felt his bones shudder.

"Li Tianming, you think it's cruel that We're using the lives of geniuses to awaken an eighth bane-ring, right?" she said with a smirk.

"Those who kill to enrich themselves invite death to themselves as well."

Sovereign Xi loosened her hands and chuckled eerily. "Cultivation itself is an act of plundering the blessings of heaven and earth. In the fight for the light of the sun and moon, everyone else is competition where the saintly always wither and die. Every being should be prepared to be weeded out in fierce competition from the moment of their births. Life is but a fleeting daydream, while death is insignificant in the totality of existence."

"That sounds good and all, but you wouldn't be too happy if you were on the receiving end of being nailed on a pole."

"They'll thank Us."

"How so? Thank you for taking their lives?"

"Thank Us for leading the divine moonrace, their fellow kin, back to Orderia, so that our descendants may live on with dignity. The Divine Moon Realm is a measly outpost. All there is here is a pitiful stellar source, a dying ember that our race relies on for sustenance. We have nowhere else to go in this endless universe. It's really lonely, do you know that? On the day I become an octabane, I'll be able to rise to the level of the leaders of the other races. We'll never have to remain exiled ever again."

From what she said, a single bane-ring made all the difference. Even the leader of the celestial orderians was only at the eighth level.

"You wouldn't understand how important it is for a race to have a powerful leader. You're too young," she mocked.

"I do." Tianming knew too well. He, Bodhi, and Sovereign Xi were the same in that regard, but they all chose different paths.

"You don't. For instance, when the Eightmoon Swordsage was alive, he ranked in the top ten in Orderia. The divine moonrace had room to grow and expand."

"What happened when he died?"

"We lost our central support and got retribution."

"Who sought revenge against you? The ten thousand genius girls? Or the peak genius celestial orderian? I'm guessing it's the latter. The others didn't dare to touch the divine moonrace while the Eightmoon Swordsage was still alive, but once he died, karma caught up to you all, right? That's why you were exiled to the lower levels of the cosmic aether, right?"

"That's a good guess."

"So do you understand now? Even if you end up growing more powerful, so what? Once you die, the divine moonrace will fall again all the same."

"It's different this time. I'm using you, so I won't be offending anyone. I only need to return and develop our foundations there. When I finally pass away, I'll have rendered endless contributions." In other words, she was trying to retread the Eightmoon Swordsage's steps but without being so daring as to make use of the celestial orderians to get there.

"Luck is a capricious mistress. Just because the Eightmoon Swordsage took a mad risk and succeeded, it doesn't mean you will too."

"It's fine. Attempting it can't hurt Us."

"Your little attempt has already cost the lives and dreams of three thousand people. They can't even enjoy eternal rest, with their bodies still being prominently displayed by you." He had seen through it all. She wasn't just a venomous snake, she was a venomous snake gone mad.

"As long as achieving Our dream is possible, any sacrifice is worth it, right? You said it yourself. Everyone in the bane race will do what they have to do to break the curse and change their fate."

Tianming fell silent, knowing that nothing he said would convince her to change course. She had dreamed about this for five centuries and wouldn't give it up over a few words from him.

"Now, everything is in place. All we're waiting for is the nova source pulse." A nova source pulse was a natural phenomenon, but when exactly it would happen was hard to predict. Stellunar source would surge in a huge torrent of energy during the pulse.

"How long until it starts?" he asked.

"Soon."

"How many days specifically."

"Not telling you," she said mischievously.

Tianming bit his lip and looked into her eyes. "So what's the point of you telling me all this?"

"We need your cooperation when the time comes! Women aren't like men, you know. The Eightmoon Swordsage might have been able to force his way, but We can't. What if your member doesn't react during the crucial time?" she said with an embarrassed look.

Now that Tianming had been marked by her Bluemoon Heart, his chances of running are slim. As for where her invisible bane-ring was located, it wasn't hard to guess.

Chapter 1055 - Mannequin on Strings

It sounded like something out of a horror tale. Tianming took a deep breath. "So what happens to me after the deed?"

"You'll die," she said with an innocent smile.

"Cool." It was as bad as he had expected.

"Haha, We're just joking. You won't die."

"Then what happens?"

"You'll turn into a woman and We'll turn into a man." She sounded serious.

"That's as good as dying!"

"Alright, jokes end here. Here's the truth."

"I'm listening."

"The ancestor wrote that there's a ninety percent chance you'll die. It depends on if you'll be able to endure it. At least there's a chance you'll survive. But not even We know how high that chance is. In fact, We rather like you and hope you'll live. That's why you should do your best to cultivate before the nova source pulse. Perhaps getting stronger will increase your chances."

"I see." Many thoughts occurred to him at that moment. First, she would be able to track him anywhere he went, so going back to the Flameyellow Continent was out of the question. Second, given the chances, it was no different from her trying to use his life to awaken her bane-ring. Not to mention, her words couldn't be fully trusted. For all he knew she was trying to give him a little bit of hope so he would peacefully cooperate. He wouldn't be fooled into thinking that she wasn't as cunning as she actually was just because she was beautiful and tempting.

There was no way he would cooperate with her. If push came to shove, he could use his ten godswords or the Prime Tower to escape danger. The question now was whether he wanted to completely turn against her. She was a madwoman. Despite how gentle she seemed, she wouldn't hesitate to completely crush him if she didn't get her way. No doubt, she was the one who personally nailed all those skeletons on the poles based on her ancestor's teachings. Turning against her would also make rescuing Ye Lingfeng much harder.

At the end of the day, even his options were determined by her. The only thing he could take advantage of was his slim chance of survival. The fact that she didn't stop him from cultivating or keep him

imprisoned was probably a sign of her confidence in being able to track him down no matter what. He continued analyzing his deathly predicament.

"So what happens if I don't cooperate?"

"You will."

"How are you so certain?"

"We know that you want to save Ye Lingfeng, so We'll be sure to make use of that fact. Let's make a simple promise. If you do what We say, We'll pull Ye Lingfeng out when we're done, regardless of success or failure. That is, assuming he's still alive."

"Are you joking again? You would dare go against the celestial orderians' wishes?"

"If We become an octabane, why would We be afraid of doing so? Not only that, We can hide him from their eyes. He might even be of use to Us. We wouldn't squander such a useful weapon. Even if you end up losing your life to save him, We'll save and protect Ye Lingfeng at the end of the day. Isn't that the perfect deal?" She was confident that if she could control Tianming, she would also be able to control Ye Lingfeng. They were merely puny little men in her eyes. It was no wonder she came clean about Ye Lingfeng from the beginning; she had planned this long ago.

"Li Tianming, We can tell you're a person of passion. Given your personality, there's no way you'll give up on the chance to save Ye Lingfeng and benefit tens of millions of people at the cost of your life, right?" Slowly and methodically, she was reasoning her way through his mental defenses. "And even if you're unwilling, I have medicines I can use to make you cooperate. This isn't a fate you can escape. However, We don't want it to turn ugly, you see. It's a joyous affair, so We want to have fond memories of our union."

She didn't even give him an option to refuse. Like a praying mantis, she would devour her mate after the act. Tianming scoffed at the thought of a pleasant memory. Sovereign Xi was waiting for his answer, despite not needing it, since she could just force her way through. Still, she tried to make it better, more pleasant. Hardly a surprise for an obsessive perfectionist who bothered to line up every one of the three thousand skeletons in the blood lake down to the number of nails.

"It isn't even a choice at all. If being your plaything will allow me to save him, it sounds like I'm getting quite a good deal, right?"

"You really thought it through properly. The moment you decided to come to me was the moment your fate was decided."

"Then grant me one more condition then."

"Let's hear it, darling," she said with the playful air from before.

"Save Ye Lingfeng before you attempt your awakening," Tianming said.

"No can do. What if you mess things up for Us once your goal is achieved?"

"Didn't you say you had everything under control? How could I possibly mess it up?"

"We won't give up Our hold over anyone. All We can do is promise that We'll save Ye Lingfeng after the fact. Even if you're unwilling, resistance is futile."

He grit his teeth. "At the very least, hand me his blood."

There was no way she would give him both the rope and the blood. So, he should at least choose one. The blood could easily be lost or destroyed, while the rope was an artifact that was much stronger, after all.

"What would you do with it anyway?"

"I need some assurance. What if you throw it away after you get me to agree? At least if I have it, I can hope to survive the ten percent odds and reunite with my friend."

"Fine. We also hope you'll survive. That way, the two of you can be Our right and left hands while We rise to prominence." She tossed him the blood without hesitation. Since she still had the dimensional rope, there was nothing Tianming could do about it. The blood was a cheap price to pay to assure him.

"So we'll come back here on the day of the nova source pulse?"

"No, the place is above the lake at Grandfowl Water Palace. It'll take at most ten or so days. That's when you get to have the most beautiful woman in the Divine Moon Realm to yourself. Looking forward to it?"

"You're already five hundred... I'll think about you as a pickled cabbage to go with my porridge!"

"Now you're making Us mad," she said with puckered lips.

Tianming chuckled as he thought, you think I'm a mannequin that'll dance to the tug of your strings... but don't celebrate just yet.

Chapter 1056 - Quadseal Sky

It was already dawn by the time they returned to the Grandfowl Water Palace. After Sovereign Xi dropped Tianming off at the Origin Hall, she smiled.

"See you soon, precious." Then she vanished in the mist of the moon.

"Tsk tsk!" Ying Huo and the rest had heard the whole conversation and popped out of the lifebound space to move about.

"Lend me a feather," Tianming said. A black and red bird landed in his palm; it was even smaller than his palm. It looked no larger than a freshly hatched chick, as if it had undergone a reverse growth spurt. While Meow Meow could grow in size by becoming a Regal Chaosfiend, Ying Huo had awakened a new technique from its bloodline: shrinking. It could turn as small as when it had just hatched, making it just the right size to nestle on Tianming's head.

This wasn't just a pointless size change. Much like the royal specters, the smaller it became, the faster it was, making it much harder to track. However, it would be much weaker in terms of absolute strength. In other words, Ying Huo could pick any size from a wingspan of three meters to as small as a little chick.

"As expected of Chicken Bro. You can inflate and deflate... like a certain avian-like part of the body. No wonder your tattoo was located at Boss's crotch," Lan Huang joked.

It felt like the sky was falling for Lan Huang to come up with that quip. One had to wonder whether Ying Huo had spoiled the rest of its siblings to think that way.

Joining in the fun, Ying Huo said, "It's too bad that I'm not the birdie that the old hag wants..."

"Buzz off. I need to cool off," Tianming said.

"So are you going to just wait for her to pounce you?" Ying Huo asked.

"No way. I'm waiting for a chance."

"What chance?"

"If I say it, I'll jinx it."

Tianming plucked off one of its Cosmic Blade feathers. Using his third eye, he gave it a look before piercing it into his chin and digging out the piece of flesh with a fleck of blue. It definitely hurt, but nobody who had changed fate got away without going through some sort of pain. However, he was disappointed to find that the blue dot still remained when the flesh grew back. It was no wonder she didn't keep him locked up, since she would be able to find him no matter where he went.

"Is this good or bad?" Ying Huo asked.

"It's hard to say." He got up and returned to his room. "Let's go to the wondersky realm and see if Feng is still there."

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Tianming had waited two days at Violetglory Pagoda's entrance, but Ye Lingfeng didn't show up. "He said there were hundreds of xenofiends around him. Could he have perished?"

His heart beat nervously. The mere thought of that possibility made him feel like something inside him was being torn apart. He was even short of breath. He'd already walked into Sovereign Xi's trap of his own accord, so he had to at least be able to save Ye Lingfeng.

But since waiting any longer didn't seem to have a point, he decided to do something else. "Let's focus on cultivation. I can't waste any prime growth window I have after breaking the Lifesbane curse."

He entered the pagoda to start another round of challenges. This time, he used seven of his godswords. Coupled with the recent power scan, he was able to defeat seventh-level ascendants, so nobody could match him on the first level of the pagoda. Once more, he came to the world with billions of caeli. Using his Caelum Prime, he rapidly scanned the stories of the seniors.

Like last time, it only took him one moment per caelum, thanks to his unique caelum which, along with his terra and vita, had been transformed by Trisoul Prime. Each day, he scanned thirty thousand caeli as well as defeated any challengers that had come.

Ten days passed without Sovereign Xi disturbing him, so he didn't leave. He continued to choose to challenge after a full ten-day cycle. But this time around, the wondersky fairy said, "As you've displayed

the power equivalent of someone at Heptaglory Sky, you now have privileges to cultivate on the pagoda's second level. Cultivators there range from Heptaglory Sky to Orderian Sky. Would you like to attempt to challenge someone at the second level, Lin Feng?"

"What benefits are there to cultivating on the second level compared to the first?"

"The caeli come from seniors of a higher level. More than half of them are beyond Ascension, so there will be benefits."

"Alright then, I'll take the challenge on that level instead."

He turned out to be rather lucky. His first opponent was a totem user at about the same level as Prince Zhuoyang had been. After defeating his opponent, he could finally start cultivating there.

His power in the wondersky realm with seven godswords was actually akin to him using four in the real world. After all, the wondersky realm decreased the actual power of his lifebound beasts, so the three extra swords only made up for that specific lack.

The second level turned out to be rather different. There were just as many caeli there as there were on the first level, but they shone even bigger and brighter. When he approached them, it felt like each of them were bright suns. It wasn't as easy to scan an entire caelum within a breath's time, but he noticed that the insights of cultivators of a higher stage were much more complex and suited to him.

"So powerful... This senior is also a totem user and a heptabane."

While there were many caeli that belonged to the bane race, practically none of them used a will that stemmed from Lifesbane itself. However, there was a common theme of resisting fate in their life stories. From them, Tianming could find his own answer.

"Right now, Sovereign Xi practically wants to kill me, just like Bodhi, and I have countless people like Feiling, Feng, and the humans of the Flameyellow Continent counting on me."

He thought back to Li Wudi, who had spent fourteen whole years of his life resisting his fate. Sovereign Xi thought that she had decided Tianming's fate, but in fact, she was only giving him one to resist! It would be the bane of his life story!

"Lifesbane Will is rooted in the courage to stand against destiny. It isn't just about stubborn hotblooded resistance. More than courage, endurance, and fighting spirit, it requires wisdom."

He needed to understand the powers of the universal laws of order to be able to control the forces that shaped his life. Looking through many tales, he had seen many who failed or succeeded in their own quests to resist, but his courage didn't falter.

"The strong are as powerful as fiends who kill to benefit themselves, while the weak change their mindset to cope. Those that don't resist perish!" As he had just started pondering on his Lifesbane Will, he rapidly improved with it.

"The foundation of Lifesbane Will is the power of rage and resistance! Enrage all the albi in the body! Let the astralforce wildly surge and grow stronger through the constant denial of death itself!"

He had Bodhi and Sovereign Xi to thank for the pressure they were applying on him, which served as a great source for his heavenly will's growth.

"Phew..." In the end, he spent thirteen entire days cultivating at the pagoda. During the fourteenth day, he encountered a ninth-level ascendant and was defeated, thus ending his streak. Then he spent another day waiting outside the tower, but Ye Lingfeng didn't show up. There wasn't a single trace of him in the crowd.

Tianming's heart burned with rage as he returned from the wondersky realm. Once his caelum returned, the memories it retained helped fuel the growth of his heavenly will after they synchronized with his vita. The last three days he had spent in the pagoda were equivalent to ten days on the first level.

"I should be able to reach Quadseal Sky by now." After absorbing stellunar source for a day and night, his lifebound beasts and totems all broke through to the fourth level. Now, he surged with even more power.

"No matter how observant she is, there's no way she'll be able to fathom the real speed of my improvement. I'm a decabane, an impossible existence that's far beyond the realms of her imagination."

That might be the only edge he had, so he wasn't too anxious, despite the heavy pressure he was under. However, he made a mental calculation and noticed that the day of the nova source pulse would soon be upon him. Was she ready to go through with it?

Chapter 1057 - Grand Burial

Since he had reached the fourth level, Tianming came to the Moonnight Patio to practice his swordsmanship. Nowadays, he spent his time either there or at the Xi Palace, going nowhere else. After all, the nova source pulse could happen at any moment. Since Sovereign Xi had used the Bluemoon Heart on him and he didn't appear to be trying anything funny, she largely left him to his own devices.

"Hmm, she must actually think that I have some chance of survival, then. However, should I really thank her for wanting me to live after putting me up against such odds in the first place?" Tianming smirked coldly.

"Didn't you already master that move? Why are you still here?" Ying Huo asked, perched on the top of his head in a miniaturized form.

"Learning never ends." Tianming looked at the bamboo tree that shot up into the clouds.

"I can hear it. That dastardly plan brewing in that head of yours—"

"It isn't dastardly. It's for my survival." He continued cultivating nonstop.

"Tianming, a grand moon guide is giving a lecture today. Will you be going?" asked a youth dressed in dark blue. He looked about Tianming's age, being roughly twenty, and was a third-level ascendant. He was roughly on the same level of talent as Huiyue Jie. His name was Yueshen Xi and he was Prince Fengyue's son, and thereby the sovereign's nephew. He often trained in the Moonnight Patio as well. Unlike others, he was rather respectful toward Tianming and often talked to him.

"Of course I will," Tianming said, smiling. Grand moon guides were seniors whose role was to guide the younger generation; they had exalted status. The Moonnight Patio had ten grand moon guides who were also in charge of the distribution of cultivation resources. They were without a doubt among the most powerful people in the Divine Moon Realm.

The one giving the talk that day was called Yueshen Wushuang, a dashing, short-haired woman. Her explosive personality meant that she gave direct demonstrations to her disciples, literally hammering her years of combat experience into them a punch at a time. Yueshen Xi stepped up once and only got badly beaten. However, she wasn't just beating them up for fun but gave accurate advice on how to better themselves, tailored to each person.

"Since I have time today, I'll spar with every single one of you spoiled brats who don't know the harshness of the world!"

Hearing that, everyone gasped.

"Come up one by one!"

"Yes, Grand Moon Guide."

Tianming watched it from afar. As he wasn't an official disciple, he wouldn't have to go through the beating.

"What level of power do the grand moon guides possess?" he asked Yueshen Xi.

"They're all at Octasaint Sky! With that level of power, one can become a city lord anywhere in the Divine Moon Realm," he answered with pride. It looked a little comical thanks to his bruises.

"Where do they usually spend their time?"

"The Divine Moon Skylake, of course. Isn't that common knowledge? The imperial guide, saint moon guide, and grand moon guides' official role is to guide disciples, but their actual task is to guard the Divine Moon Skylake. That's even more important now, with that astral killer running rampant. We have to make sure that the city's formation is up at all times, so the imperial guide can't leave the place at all!"

"There are saint moon guides too? How powerful are they? How many are there?" Tianming asked as he observed the young fellows near Yueshen Wushuang.

"There's only one saint moon guide. He's the imperial guide's husband. I don't usually see him, though."

Since the imperial guide was second only to the sovereign, being something akin to the prime minister, then her husband must have a lower rank than her. Tianming committed it all to memory.

"Oh? Isn't that the saint moon guide?" Yueshen Xi excitedly said.

Tianming looked in the direction he was pointing and saw a man with messy hair and a face seemingly flushed by alcohol pass by. He held a large wine jar in hand and swayed about like a drunk and was soon gone. He seemed to be heading toward the Divine Moon Skylake.

"He doesn't look like one of the divine moonrace."

"Of course not. He's the strongest member of the rootbeast race in the Divine Moon Realm! It's said that he was really talented in his youth and was treated well by the royals. For him to even get together with the imperial guide, he must be the most well-integrated non-divine moonrace here. But lately, he doesn't show up anywhere other than Divine Moon Skylake. I've only seen him fewer than ten times in my twenty years of cultivating here. He's a responsible and low-profile person!"

"Rootbeast race? His lifebound beasts must be impressive then."

"They're alright, but rootbeast race cultivation is much slower than ours. That's why, while the saint moon guide is really powerful in battles, he's only at the Nonahonor Sky level. He used to be impressive in his time, but his peers outstripped him. In his prime, he was said to have rivaled the sovereign and imperial guide."

Tianming could hear the pride in his voice. It seemed the divine moonrace loved to sound superior to the rootbeast race. "The ninth level, eh..."

"Her Majesty's new pet, do you want to come up and spar too?" Yueshen Wushuang asked with a provocative gaze. The other divine moonrace disciples were itching to see it as well.

"Forget it. I worry that you'll lose face if I overpower you," Tianming replied with a smile.

The crowd burst out in laughter.

"I don't care about losing face. Since you dare to claim you can defeat me, come and prove it!" Yueshen Wushuang said.

"I have no time," he said, right as the others thought he would go receive a beating. He immediately turned to leave.

"That's it?"

"Say you're scared if you're scared. Stop boasting."

They had heard that his talent was outstanding to begin with, but their pride wouldn't let them accept it so easily.

There's no way I'll beat you up here and raise the sovereign's guard, he thought.

Within his lifebound space, his four beasts knew what they had to do after processing the information Tianming just got, no matter how idiotic they were.

"It's going to get exciting!"

"Siblings, gather! We have to protect the Boss's little birdie!" Xian Xian announced.

The other three looked at her, stunned. It seemed she had been infected by their shenanigans too. They were rotten to the core ever since Ying Huo hatched.

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At dawn two days later, Tianming left Origin Hall and ran into the sovereign. She was seductively leaning against a pillar, her skin glistening in the moonlight.

"Are you going to the Moonnight Patio again?" she asked.

"Yes." Saying too much might make him reveal something inadvertently, so he kept it short.

"Someone like you who only cultivates is boring..." She winked her beautiful eyes.

"If I weren't at risk of dying, I'd take it easier." Tianming passed her by and kept walking.

"We got word that the nova source pulse will happen tomorrow night. It'll last for twelve hours. You'd better be bathed and ready."

"Tomorrow?" He took a deep breath. He couldn't afford to give her the slightest clue about what he was planning, from his expression down to his every movement.

"If you die, We'll give you a grand burial."

"Oh, I suppose I should be grateful, then." After he said that, he noticed that the imperial guide was there. Though his expression didn't change in the slightest, his heart rate increased. The chance he had been waiting for was finally here.

"Come," Sovereign Xi said, motioning her finger towards her.

The imperial guide descended to the palace ground and followed the sovereign in. Before she entered, she turned to look at Tianming. "It's tomorrow night, right? Are you still letting him roam around?"

"It's fine. Let him relax. He'll be my first man. Don't all women want to enjoy what it feels like to be desired and spoiled by a man? I'd hate for him to be all sour and grumpy when the time comes."

"I wouldn't know. I don't care for little things like that." They looked at each other for quite a while.

"Where's your little puppy?"

"Kneeling and eating dog food as usual. It's only fitting, given how dirty he usually lives his life."

"Hehe... Alright, come in."

The two of them entered the palace together.

Chapter 1058 - Fatal Blow

Tianming was on the streets of Divine Moon Skycity.

"Hurry up!" Ying Huo urged.

"I can't," Tianming said.

"Why? We don't have much time. The imperial guide doesn't often leave the Moonnight Patio, and tomorrow night's going to be your last."

"Sovereign Xi can tell where I am at all times with the blue dot. If I'm too quick, she'll notice something."

These days, Tianming had verified that Sovereign Xi didn't know anything about the wondersky realms, so Orderia might not have one either. Otherwise, she would know if he had gone there or not.

"Oh? Looks like you're growing rather cunning," Ying Huo said.

"I have to. The devil's in the details." He had learned that lesson well from the sovereign. With nobody else to rely on, he had to be careful to the utmost.

"Looks like I've been doing it wrong! Boss says we men have to be careful and dainty!" Meow Meow said.

Tianming really marveled at their ability to joke around in the face of death. Eventually, they reached the Moonlight Patio. Yueshen Xi seemed to have just arrived as well and he waved at Tianming.

"Tianming, are you going to the Bamboo Forest as well?"

"Yes, yes I am." He said as a faint killing intent flashed through his eyes.

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Light and shadow cascaded within Nulldream Hall in Xi Palace. The lamp illuminated the bed the sovereign and the imperial guide sat on. The imperial guide had her head leaning against Sovereign Xi's shoulder.

"That Li Tianming is far too mysterious. Are you sure you have everything under control?" the imperial guide asked.

"He's just a little boy for me to play with."

"What're his origins? Is he really from Soulwell Mountain?"

"Huh? No way. More like, he's from a chaos skyjail," Sovereign Xi said with a smile.

"What do you mean?"

"Think about it. Li Qingyu and Ye Lingfeng both came from the chaos skyjail. Li Tianming seems more impressive than them, at least in terms of cultivation speed. He can trick others by saying he uses blood pacts, but he can't fool me. There's no way the Divine Moon Realm can produce a genius of that caliber."

"Then that means he has both lifebound beasts and totems, just like Li Qingyu."

"Do their surnames sound familiar to you?"

"They're both surnamed Li, so they must be from the same clan at least. They might even be siblings."

"Siblings they are, indeed."

"Is that what your intuition tells you?"

Sovereign Xi held the imperial guide's hand and smiled. "Men can't hide their past. It's always bulging to come through. It only takes a simple guess to reveal it."

"So how many bane-rings does he have?" the imperial guide asked with a furrowed brow.

"It isn't important."

"Not important? Why? You got rewarded so heavily when you discovered Li Qingyu's talent. If he's at least as talented, you might get rewarded more."

"Are you an idiot? Miracles like that won't happen twice. It's only impactful the first time around. Can their reward even compare to me becoming an octabane? Do you understand now? Even if Li Tianming has as many bane-rings as Li Qingyu, I'll still use him to improve myself! I know you want to say that being an octabane might not bring my talent to his level, and that I'm just squandering our chance for great treasure. However, he's his own being. What he has doesn't belong to me! To make him stronger, I even gave him the universal manna our ancestors kept for thousands of years and allowed him to cultivate, and all of that was just for an even higher chance of succeeding!"

"I haven't seen you so passionate in a long time," the imperial guide said, shaking her head and smiling.

"This is a turning point of fate. I am excited, as you say."

"You said he wanted to rescue Ye Lingfeng, right?"

"That's right. That's why the fellow tried to hide his talent. He didn't want to be brought to Orderia. Otherwise, I wouldn't have this chance. Li Qingyu is a woman, so she won't do. As for Ye Lingfeng, he was stupid enough not to hide his talent and got discovered... what a waste. But Li Tianming could endure it. Just perfect! Even if he disappears, nobody will remember he even existed."

It was all falling into place. She knew everything. The more Tianming wanted to hide it, the happier she was.

"What kind of place is the chaos skyjail? How could three peak geniuses like that appear there all of a sudden?"

"No idea. Entry to that place is forbidden, it's said that the secret to the birth of the universe lies there. Those three might've come into contact with it."

"Are you sure you can't tell how many bane-rings Li Tianming has? At the very least, his lifebound beasts seem much stronger than Li Qingyu's. Even if he's only an octabane, he'll enjoy similar treatment to Li Qingyu in Orderia."

"I don't want to know."

"Why?"

"He's already going to be wasted on me. His death is certain, so knowing makes no difference. It might even cause me to hesitate to go through with this."

"So you know it's a waste then? You're an old cow devouring newborn grass."

"Nonsense, I'm still a blooming, unsullied flower."

"A withering, unplucked flower, you mean?"

"You're unplucked yourself, despite being a married woman."

The two of them had known each other since their teenage years.

"I only have one beloved in this world," the imperial guide suddenly said with a lowered head.

"Me too."

"Will this stay the same forever?"

"It'll never change, ever."

Their slender fingers intertwined with one another.

"Do you need me to stand guard tomorrow?" the imperial guide asked.

"No, I don't want you to have to see that. Just guard Divine Moon Skylake. That beast has gone missing lately, and every time that happens, chaos results. Once I succeed, I'll tear it to pieces!" she snapped fiercely.

"That lake's all you talk about. I've been guarding it my whole life," the imperial guide complained.

"It won't be for your entire life. You'll still live a long time. I won't abandon you."

Holding hands, they looked deeply into each other's eyes and smiled.

"By the way, what level can Li Tianming fight at?" the imperial guide asked.

"Heptaglorry Sky. Why?"

"Then it's fine. When you said he could go through formations as he wishes, it occurred to me that the formations of the Divine Moon Skylake won't be able to stop him either. But my cute puppy and a few other grand moon guides are there to guard it, so it'll be fine. But... it's best I return."

"What are you talking about? That little brat is really obedient—" Her expression suddenly changed.

"No, wait!" She abruptly stood up.

"What's wrong?"

"If he's trying to increase the odds of surviving the ritual, he just needs to cultivate! Training his swordsmanship is pointless! Even after I asked him to go to the divine moon hall to go through the legacies of the ancestors, he wouldn't go. There's no way he has to go to the Moonnight Patio at all! Not to mention, he's hiding at least some totems, so he's definitely a little bit stronger!"

While it was still a stretch for Tianming to defeat elites on the level of Nonahonor Sky, it was odd that he would go to the Moonnight Patio on the very day he might lose his life, regardless of whether or not he could break the formation core. He had been cultivating properly in the palace the few days before, after all.

The imperial guide also looked worried. "Let's hope you're just overthinking this."

The two of them immediately vanished from the palace. This was a battle of wits. The more arrogant one was, the more details they would miss. Tianming had been really careful, waiting for his chance.

When it finally came, he dealt the fatal blow.

Chapter 1059 - Blacksky Panthergod

Within the Bamboo Forest in Moonnight Patio, Yueshen Qi and Tianming were together.

"I'm envious that you're allowed to learn Moonnight Subdued Strike," Yueshen Xi said.

Tianming was actually looking past the final bamboo tree toward Divine Moon Skylake. He drew the Grand-Orient Sword out without looking at Yueshen Xi and charged forward as quickly as he could.

"Hey! Where are you going?! Divine Moon Skylake is forbidden! You can't enter!" However, Tianming disappeared before his eyes in an instant. "What in the world? I have to look for the grand moon guides!"

By the time he left, Tianming had already reached the huge, misty lake. It looked almost fairy-like. The formation core that protected the city, the Brightmoon Divine Formation, was hidden beneath it. There were five layers of divine formations protecting the core. Altogether, they were about at the same level as the Skysource Hellshaker Formation. That was really high-level protection. Even if Bodhi were there, it would take him more than two hours to break through all of it.

"Sovereign Xi, since you're asking for my life, I'll cause you endless trouble!" He had known long ago. The naive humans, divine moonrace, and specters were the ones to suffer the most in the ensuing chaos. It was a fatal balance they were in, and the weakest of them all, the Flameyellow humans, were sandwiched in the middle of it. As the representative of the weakest faction, he didn't have a choice.

"I wanted to leave to lead Bodhi here at first. But you left me no choice but to break your Brightmoon Divine Formation and let him in! I won't be able to survive unless you start killing each other."

Tianming had been enduring his searing rage this entire time. Finally, he could vent it before the nova source pulse. It just so happened that the imperial guide wasn't there and had joined the sovereign somewhere else.

Even so, the Divine Moon Skylake was guarded by many elites. All he could do was desperately fight. Without a single word, he used his black arm on the five divine formations and tore them apart. Luckily for him, using his Plundering Arm on formations caused no commotion and alerted nobody. He easily went through three layers as he forged onward.

"The imperial guide can come back at any time! I have to maximize every single second I have!"

Finally, he broke through the fifth layer and reached the lake. It was ten times the size of the blood lake and filled to the brim with divine patterns that were probably part of the formation core.

There was a large hall next to the lake that seemed to be the imperial guide's residence. The reason she stayed there was that she valued peace and quiet; not to mention, the formation core had to be protected at all costs. Normally, nobody could even reach it unless they were the core members, or in other words, the saint moon guide and ten grand moon guides.

Even so, grand moon guides were hardly there all the time, as they also had to guide disciples. So there were only a few of them present at any given time. When Tianming barged into the formation, he encountered a handsome, short-haired girl with an athletic figure who just happened to be leaving. She was none other than Yueshen Wushuang.

Spotting him there, she immediately found it weird. "What are you doing here?! How did you get in?!"

"Try to stop me and you'll die!" Tianming growled, immediately summoning his four lifebound beasts and cardinal godswords, which were fifty meters in length, and sent them flying toward the eighth-level ascendant. They corresponded to the attributes of fire, ice, fiend, and yin-yang.

"Are you crazy?" she snapped. This sight was completely out of her imagination. The seventeen-year-old brat actually seemed to pose a fatal threat to her. First, Xian Xian began taking root beside the lake, spreading its thousands of vines and roots into the lake in almost an instant. Soon, the roots began affecting the formation. While the formation was strong, its core was rather weak.

Yueshen Wushuang could immediately tell what he was going for. "You're the one going around killing people! You're gonna die trying to destroy the formation core! Everyone, someone's trying to sabotage the formation!" she cried as she started fighting. She was actually rather taken aback at the thought of the cold killer being a mere brat like Tianming, and the sovereign's pet no less.

As she called out for help, Lan Huang's huge body shot past her into the lake, splashing water all over. Now in the large body of water, Lan Huang's nine kui seas began to spin, giving it absolute maritime superiority.

The effects on the city's formation were immediately obvious. Countless people saw the formation above them flicker, rumble, and even shoot bursts of energy into the city.

"What's going on?!"

"Someone's attacking the formation! The killer is here!"

"They dare to attack Divine Moon Skycity?"

The city was breaking out into chaos. Tianming knew that elites would be flocking to him immediately.

"No, it doesn't look like someone's attacking from the outside! There's someone sabotaging the formation core!"

"But it's being guarded by the imperial guide! Everyone, don't panic!"

The royals seemed far more levelheaded than the rest of the populace. However, everyone that took note immediately flocked to the Moonnight Patio.

"Everyone, calm down. The formation core is made up of the water in the Divine Moon Skylake. It can absorb a lot of powerful shocks. The formation is shaking because someone made their way into the Divine Moon Skylake, but if they want to destroy the core, they have to destroy the entire lake! No normal person can achieve that within a short period of time, and the sovereign and imperial guide will kill the troublemaker before that happens!"

That seemed to reassure most people. Tianming also noticed how difficult it was to actually destroy the formation core. He turned to Lan Huang and Xian Xian and asked, "What do I do? The water is a part of the formation core, so if you have to swallow the water to disrupt it, you'll need to drink at least a fifth of it. Can you two do it?"

"It'll take some time! Sis and I will work on it together!" Lan Huang roared.

"Good. I'll make sure nobody gets to you!"

Lan Huang had to focus entirely on disrupting the formation, but Xian Xian could still support Tianming, Meow Meow, and Ying Huo in combat. By now, Yueshen Wushuang was charging toward Lan Huang.

"Stop her!"

Other powerful elites would soon be coming. From the moment he had decided to enter the lake, he could no longer turn back from this fight to the death. Yueshen Wushuang was a core member of the royals, and her totems were called blacksky panthergods. Like their name suggested, they were entirely pitch black humanoid figures with panther heads. Both arms wielded powerful crescent-shaped claws, each of them more than ten meters long. They came forth from Yueshen Wushuang's bane-rings and stood around three hundred meters tall. Yueshen Wushuang was fast as lightning as she circled around her totems toward Lan Huang, wielding a black divine spear that looked to be around the second grade, akin to Prince Zhuoyang's Sungod Cycle.

"You're courting death!" she roared. She was far more furious than when she was beating up her disciples to guide them. But before she had taken two steps, lightning exploded in front of her. Amidst the countless lightning bolts, a gigantic feline creature with a fiendish aura appeared.

The clouds above boomed and crackled. Meow Meow was surrounded by Ninefold Chaos Thunderscape. It opened its mouth and shot out Misty Hellthunder, enhanced further by Blitzbane, Worldbolt Blast, forming a two-hundred-meter-wide electric disc that rolled toward her at blinding speed before exploding. The blast shook the entire Moonnight Patio once more as all six of Yueshen Wushuang's totems were sent flying.

"Since when was he so powerful?" She was flabbergasted as her face twitched from the zaps. What was worse was that, when she turned around, the white-haired youth with black and gold eyes that matched his two swords stood before her with four totem swords imposingly raised. A palm-sized bird was even hiding on one of the totems. The sight was explosive, to say the least, as he charged through the forest of lightning bolts.

"Yueshen Wushuang, I'll send you to hell in three breaths' time!"

Chapter 1060 - His Name Is Liu Qinghuan

Taking her life in three breaths' time sounded like a joke, but Yueshen Wushuang couldn't bring herself to laugh. She had been at the Octasaint Sky level for a long time and hadn't broken through in decades, so she found it baffling that a seventeen-year-old brat could pose such a threat to her.

As Tianming spoke, he charged with his four godswords along with Ying Huo and Meow Meow at full throttle. Every instant that passed was precious time that couldn't afford to be lost. Desperate, Yueshen Wushuang grit her teeth as she used every ounce of her power and experience as a grand moon guide to fight, charging with her spear, Blacksky Sunpiercer. Every single albus in her body sent astralforce into her divine artifact.

Only divine artifacts could endure the power of astralforce from a divine body. The spear pierced through thousands of meters as she executed her spear art, Darkstar of Death. Her spear began

morphing into tens of thousands of black stars after executing the third-realm divine art. While its principles weren't as simple as Hexapath Samsara Sword's, the spear art was rather complex. It could turn one spear into tens of thousands, sealing off every avenue of escape for Tianming. However, he wasn't even trying to escape. Instead, he charged straight toward her.

But that wasn't all. Yueshen Wushuang used her totems to support her by activating their totemic calamity. All six blacksky panthergods scattered and formed a circle as black smoke began wafting off their bodies. Eventually, the smoke became a sphere, then a black vortex which hung above her head that worked perfectly in tandem with her spear art. It was the Blacksky Voidhole, used to increase the force of her attack by sucking her enemies toward it!

The mud, water, gravel, and even trees around Tianming were pulled and ground to fine dust by the vortex that had manifested in a fraction of a second. As expected of a royal eighth-level ascendant, a peak elite of the divine moonrace. Her abilities made Tianming retract his former arrogance.

"Die!"

Lately, Xian Xian had mastered a second-realm divine art that Tianming had obtained by challenging the third ancient idol when he wasn't at the pagoda. It was called the Celestial Fairy's Floral Whip and it seemed tailor-made for Xian Xian. Being not too complicated, it could be crudely executed by its vines. When tens of thousands of them used it at the same time, the move could unleash a huge destructive force.

The Radiant Vines turned into blurs as they began swatting away at the totems, slowly damaging their corporeal forms, but that was only the first act. Amidst the whipping vines shot out two lances of blood lightning that pierced two of the blacksky panthergods' heads. The heads exploded shortly after into mists of blood from Meow Meow's Cosmic Lance, thanks to the explosive reaction that mixed the forces of yin and yang.

The damage the two totems suffered affected the power of the totemic calamity, causing the vortex to drop in suction force for a single moment, which was fatal for Yueshen Wushuang. Tianming's swords came flashing countless times, blasting out complicated sword intent all over the place. Countless moons began forming in their surroundings, colored with the attributes of Tianming's cardinal godswords as he executed the Moonnight Subdued Strike, the most famous battle art in the Divine Moon Realm. And now it was being used by an enemy, another fact that completely shocked her.

The first strike, Seaborne Moon, completely locked her down with its complicated sword formation. Then Ying Huo appeared and used Infernal Haze, causing countless flaming birds to manifest. It used Death Inferno and Skyscorch Featherblast back to back as well as Hexapath Samsara Sword as it rapidly descended from the sky with Meow Meow. Flames and lightning intertwined, completely obliterating the vortex generated by the totems.

The totems themselves groaned in pain from the collision and began to fade away. They tried clawing away at the flaming bird clones, but they only exploded and caused further damage. A few of Ying Huo's feather projectiles had also pierced Yueshen Wushuang's back. Now, she was sandwiched between the Moonnight Subdued Strike and Hexapath Samsara Sword. It really had only taken three breaths for Tianming to neutralize her divine art and totemic calamity.

He blazed a trail of flame as he tore through the blacksky panthergods and thrust his swords through Yueshen Wushuang in tandem with Ying Huo attacking from behind. She didn't even get a chance to shriek as she instantly died on the spot, right on time.

Her hands loosened and she dropped her spear before slumping lifelessly to the ground. Tianming only glanced at her for a moment before drawing back his sword and charging forward. She was only the first to die in an attempt to stop him; there was no more turning back.

He had no choice if he wanted to save Feng and protect his home. Despite the quick battle, four grand moon guides had made their way to the lake from the nearby building, only to see Yueshen Wushuang's lifeless body, which stunned them for a good moment. During that time, Tianming intercepted them while Lan Huang and Xian Xian continued wolfing down the water of the lake. As the lakewater receded, the formation shook more and more and started going haywire, bombarding the city itself. No matter how unbelievable the sight was, the grand moon guides were hardly novices, so they quickly reacted.

"Quick, kill him!"

One after another, elites that weren't any bit weaker than Yueshen Wushuang charged at him like they would Bodhi. Tianming even heard an annoyed man's voice coming from the building. "Who in the world is causing such a ruckus when I'm drinking? Are you trying to die?!"

Tianming knew who that was: the strongest member of the rootbeast race in the Divine Moon Realm and husband of the imperial guide, Saint Moon Guide Liu Qinghuan!

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It was the eighteenth time Lin Xiaoxiao saw Feiling split into dust and reform again and again. She looked a little pale from the experience.

"Don't worry, I'm holding up," she said, forcing a smile.

"Ling'er, it's taking longer and longer."

"What is?"

"The time it takes you to reform."

"How... how long did it take this time?" Feiling asked nervously.

"Fifteen minutes. I feel like some parts of your body might've scattered in the surroundings," Lin Xiaoxiao said melancholically.

"I see... it's fine, just consider it as me getting a free trip around the world. I'm fine, Xiaoxiao, really. I'm growing stronger," she consoled.

"Alright. It'll be fine." She held Feiling's hand tightly.

"What do you mean it'll be fine? You'll die after exploding one more time!" Huiye Shi said.

"You, shut up!" Lin Xiaoxiao snapped.

"I feel like it's pointless for you two to console each other like this. At this rate, you won't even be able to see him one last time. What's the point of cultivating and improving? Think about it. With Tianming in the palace, nobody else pays me any more attention, so I can sneak in. If I can find him, I'll tell him what's going on with you."

"No," Feiling insisted.

"I don't care. You're not the boss of me! It's wrong for you to hide this. He has a right to know. Back then, I almost doomed you because of my immaturity. Let me make up for it this time!" Huiye Shi stood up and headed toward Divine Moon Skycity.

"Let her go. She might be able to find Tianming," Lin Xiaoxiao said.

Feiling closed her eyes. "I'm a little mad..."

"Because of Huiye Shi?"

"No." Her expression grew colder.

"Then why?"

"It's hard enough to even survive... I feel that the heavens aren't treating me fairly. It feels like my life is at the whims of others and it's infuriating."

"It'll get better, Ling'er."

"Let's hope I'm still me when it's all over." She gripped her fists tightly. Since leaving Vermillion Bird, she had noticed herself clenching her teeth with rage from time to time. She was still holding Ling'er's Love; it was what motivated her to endure and hold on time and again.

"Huiye Shi's gone in."

The two of them looked at the city. All of a sudden, the beautiful and peaceful formation shook, and even seemed to be crumbling.

"The formation's off. He must be starting," Feiling said.

"If we'd known earlier, we wouldn't have let Shishi go," Lin Xiaoxiao said.

"Yeah..."

Things were getting more dangerous.

"He might be trying to lure Bodhi in. If Bodhi's nearby, he wouldn't miss it."

The two of them looked at one another nervously. Even with Tianming's Prime Tower, Feiling still couldn't stop worrying.

"Ling'er!" Lin Xiaoxiao said nervously, "Look over there!"

Feiling turned to where she was pointing at. There was a girl in pure white sitting on a tree branch, shaking her legs as she looked toward the city. She seemed really young and looked to be holding a purple doll.

"It's a specter," Lin Xiaoxiao said, relaying what the Archaionfiend told her.

"Only Bodhi could've brought her here. That means he's nearby," Feiling said.

"What do we do?"

"Shhh, don't make a sound. Don't move."

They watched the girl closely; she didn't seem to have noticed them. Then, the girl jumped off the tree, seemingly bored, and tossed her doll on the ground. Feiling and Lin Xiaoxiao only just realized that it was no doll, but a dead divine moonrace infant. It must've died quite a while ago, given how purple it was.

Then the girl turned into a gigantic silver wolf and devoured the infant in a single gulp, not spitting out even a single bone.