

The Ages 1241

Chapter 1241 - Hegemon of the Sun

Facing those giants, Yun Tianque turned to the eight-eared old man which seemed to be about the same stature as himself. Compared to the other wargodeans, he was half their size and looked weak and slender. Yun Tianque immediately bowed. "This junior greets the Tumulus Pill God."

"No need for formalities, Sect Master. We're equal in status," the old man kindly said.

"That won't do. The Tumulus Pill God is a senior and deserves respect and worship," Yun Tianque said.

Lan Sha smiled as well, satisfied with his humility. Only by knowing one's place could cooperation go smoothly. "Brother Yun, the Blueblood Starocean and the wargodeans are old friends."

Yun Tianque kept his smile up, but he internally thought, you're merely a branch family of the celestial orderians. If it weren't for common interests, nobody would consider you friends. "The two of you are important figures of the Myriad Solar Sects. I've heard much about your impressive achievements."

"You're too kind." The Tumulus Pill God looked at the imperial star ranking and waved to Yun Tianque. "Sect Master Yun, we wargodeans like to go straight to the point, so I'll tell you what I think without reservation."

"Please do, Tumulus Pill God!" Yun Tianque said.

"I want the Divine Worldeater Cauldron. As the Azuresoul Palace is on your Azurecloud Continent, I might need your help with that. As payment, I'll help your sect stop the rise of the Azuresoul Palace."

"Tumulus Pill God, being able to serve the wargodeans is my honor and pleasure. There's nothing we won't do for you!"

"It's nice that you're so decisive about this, Sect Master. If that item shows up on the Azuresoul Continent, I'll need you to handle matters concerning it as well."

"Consider it done," Yun Tianque said.

"Sect Master Yun truly is an example for us all. How decisive and quick-witted you are," Lan Sha said with a chuckle.

"Brother Lan, do you need my humble aid with something as well?"

"I wouldn't call it aid... but I do need your cooperation. My elder brother said that we'll be taking the Lifesteal Silverdragon and Dragonblood Desecration too," Lan Sha said.

Yun Tianque understood their intentions. The Lifesteal Silverdragon was something Blueblood Starocean wanted for themselves, for they were most proficient with chain weapons. As for the Dragonblood Desecration, they most likely wanted to use it to curry favor with the celestial orderians, among whom dwelled an offshoot of Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. That weapon was part of their legacy.

The Blueblood Starocean has always been affiliated with the celestial orderians. They might as well be considered part of them. With the wargodeans allying with them, that can only mean that they've received secret support from the celestial orderians to rise up among the Myriad Solar Sects as well.

Even so, the Azuresoul Palace's rise leaves me no choice. He could clearly see all the undercurrents, but this was a path he had to walk.

The celestial orderians and wargodeans both had a subcauldron of the Divine Worldeater Cauldron, which only cemented the connection between them. The Tumulus Pill God was the controller of their subcauldron. There was no demerit to them allying close with the celestial orderians.

Don't they know who the real hegemons of the sun are? Yun Tianque smiled coldly. The ancient emperors across aeons of the sun's history definitely weren't, nor was the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect that had weakened over hundreds of millennia.

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The skyward eyes were back in the Voidsy Realm, broadcasting the disciples leaving the tomb as it sank into the ground. At least eight of the ten billion participants were still in the Voidsy Realm. Samsarans, ascendants, and constellers had their own respective competitions within, with the constellers competing for the top treasures, the ascendants going for the average ones, and the samsarans picking up the scraps in the tomb before they were ejected outside.

"What will the Sky Palace do next?"

"How will the imperial star ranking change again?"

Those were the main concerns of everyone, participants and audience included.

"If nobody joins the Sky Palace, troops from many factions will be deployed to kill those Azuresoul Palace disciples."

"There's no way they'll make it back in one piece unless they discard the treasures."

"Looks like universal manna and divine pills are the best after all. They're gone after they're used, unlike divine artifacts—the Divine Worldeater Cauldron especially!"

There were far more places to hide outside the tomb. Those that didn't want to be eliminated quickly faded into hiding. The Voidsy Skirmish returned to how it used to be, but encounters were far and few between like the very start.

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Tianming hadn't been ejected by the tomb; instead, the drum on his hand allowed him to control the shifting pathways, which he used to find a way out. Once they left the tomb, it was completely sealed.

"I'll come back to activate you."

He wasn't the least bit sentimental about it. He hid the drum and dragon sticks and had Lan Huang pave the way by digging up a pathway through the mud. The first thing Tianming had done after coming out was find a stream of lava. With this being the center of the Voidsy Realm, the nova source there was most unstable and bountiful. There were a lot of huge, tough wildbeasts around.

"Come out, glutton. Time to eat." Tianming's efficiency at dispatching the wildbeasts rose significantly with the Lifesteal Silverdragon in his possession. He had even nicely cut them up.

"Hmph, stupid Little Li!" Xian Xian hated being called a glutton, but it didn't bother with Tianming now that food was served. It was going insane after enduring not eating for so long to heal from its injuries. "Nom nom nom nom! I'm so hungry I could die!"

Its roots savored the food. "Whoa!" Xian Xian was so happy it was in tears.

After this lesson, Tianming switched out for an even bigger spatial ring. It was a grade-three divine artifact called the Omnistorage, which he used to store Xian Xian's food supply. He couldn't bear seeing it starve again. After an entire day of eating, Xian Xian was finally sated and could fight again.

"I feel great!" Its spiritform rubbed its belly as it laid on a pile of eggs within the lifebound space. There was no empty ground to lie on, as the eggs filled nearly every inch of it. Those silver eggs were as tough as divine artifacts and couldn't be stomped flat at all. These days, they wildly bumped around at their dissatisfaction of being unable to hatch. They were bound to be unruly children.

"Alright, stop complaining. Once I join the Sky Palace, I'll start researching your hatching conditions." Tianming stood amidst a firestorm, looking at the Skyward Stele. Sounds of battle and conversation could still be heard from afar; the eight billion remaining participants were still competing. Even so, finding anyone in such a vast area wasn't easy, which made raising points hard.

Tianming still led in first place by more than two hundred thousand points. His position was unshakable. "Looks like I'll be first for sure if this goes on. The Sky Palace should be within reach, right?"

Chapter 1242 - The Final Battle Rules

Tianming was in no hurry, but he believed the Sky Palace would act if the situation ever got too chaotic. Now, the tension was rising to a new peak. Unsurprisingly, the imperial star ranking had changed once more. The black stele had tens of thousands of names, all shining bright gold. Tianming's name was especially prominent.

However, the top eight gold names began turning blood-red, including Zhan Yuance's. It was no longer just a simple red dot like before; the dot had vanished with the sinking of the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb. Then something else appeared on the very top of the stele: the number forty-nine. What did that mean? The square of seven? Nobody had any idea. The changes were broadcast all across the sun through the skyward eyes.

"What does the names turning red mean?"

"Forty-nine? Is there any significance to that? Is that some sort of countdown? If so, does it denote days or hours?"

As people were wondering, a booming voice rang out from above the stele. The voice was so loud that it even shook the flaming clouds above as it spread throughout the battlefield. "The Sky Palace has come to a unanimous decision to offer two candidacies for this Voidsky Skirmish."

Those words were mind-blowing. Candidacies didn't mean one would be accepted into the Sky Palace. Instead, they represented chances to be tested by them to see whether they qualified to join. Usually, there would only be one candidacy offered, if any at all, and they were offered once every couple of centuries. Only the top-ranking participant out of an average of ten Voidsky Skirmishes would be

allowed to undergo the final trial. Upon passing, the candidate would rise to the very top of the sun's hierarchy.

The announcement of two candidacies was completely unexpected. There was a good chance that one of those eight red names would eventually become an actual Sky Palace member.

"It's been a long time since anyone joined the Sky Palace...."

The announcement continued amidst the frantic chatter. "Additionally, the Voidsky Skirmish will end in forty-nine days." It turned out that the number was a countdown after all. "The skirmish shall continue within that time. Anyone that makes it into the top eight will have their names turned red. When the countdown is over, the ranking shall be fixed and the top eight participants shall have the right to compete for the two candidacies."

In other words, everyone would do their best to increase their points in the next forty-nine days to make it to the top eight, after which they would have to fight one final battle.

"So, we have to secure our place in the top eight. The Sky Palace gave extra time for the disciples that didn't manage to get any treasures so they'll have a fighting chance. If they're powerful enough, they can brute force their way into the top...."

The question was how the final two candidates among the top eight would be picked, though the announcement continued and immediately answered it. "A new battlefield formation will appear beneath the Skyward Stele after the countdown ends. Only the top eight may enter. The first place will fight against the eighth place, the second place against the seventh, the third against the sixth, and the fourth against the fifth. This will only be the first round. For instance, if the first place gets defeated by the eighth place, their points will switch!"

Xiaoxiao was currently ranked eighth, so if she could defeat Tianming, she would instantly have more than seven hundred thousand points, while Tianming would fall to eighth place and lose the right to compete for the candidacy.

"After the first round of battles, the new top four shall draw lots to determine their opponents. The winners of the second round of battles will obtain the candidacies."

That was the end of the announcement. The rules were surprisingly simple; to sum up, there would be forty-nine days for others to work on raising their points. Then two rounds of battles would be carried out to eliminate six of the top eight for the final two to rise. The first round was particularly interesting, as it afforded the lower ranked of the top eight to suddenly turn things around. It also made it possible for one to control their current ranking to determine who they would fight. For instance, the seventh place Long Longlong would be facing off against Weisheng Moran, who was currently in second place, but since he had been defeated by her once, there would be no point in trying again. He could instead think of a way to fight someone who wasn't Weisheng Moran.

"I'm already leading by two hundred thousand points in the first place, so it doesn't matter much to me. Everything depends on the last two battles."

Forty-nine days was almost an eyeblink for cultivators. Thus it seemed that all four of them would stand a good chance of making it in, based on the current rankings. Tianming decided he would act depending on how the ranking changed.

"Zhan Yuance's in fourth place, but he's already been eliminated and can't come back to fight. I wonder who'll fight the fifth ranker?" Yu Ziqian asked. Currently, Lingfeng was fifth.

"Who knows... the rules don't say anything about what happens if Zhan Yuance stays in the top eight after the countdown ends."

It would be pointless to consider something like that, though; only time would tell. There was little chance anyone would be able to get many points in such a short time anyway, now that the tomb was gone. Assuming the points rose at a gradual rate for everyone, Tianming would be able to maintain some control. He asked Xiaoxiao, "Do you want to fight?"

"I would like to try," she said.

"You're in eighth place now, and the ninth ranker is two hundred thousand points behind you by virtue of not obtaining any treasures. It isn't impossible for that person to catch up in forty-nine days, though. We have to pay attention to their points."

"Alright. I'll do my best to cultivate. If I'm going to be overtaken, I'll go get some points with Wu You."

The situation with Lingfeng was similar. Unlike Tianming, his position wasn't as secure.

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After the announcement, the participants continued raising their points aside from Zhan Yuance. Lan Feilin had long been pushed out of the top ten.

"Did you notice anything?" Lingfeng asked, looking at the Skyward Stele.

"Long Longlong, you mean?" Tianming paused his cultivation and looked up.

"That's right. His points aren't moving either."

"He's ranked seventh, with less than ten thousand points over Xiaoxiao. He'll be facing off against Weisheng Moran at this rate. Since he doesn't want to fight her again, he's probably waiting for Xiaoxiao to overtake him."

If Long Longlong was trying to get to sixth place, he would have to compete with Kong, who was rapidly increasing his points. Thus, falling to eighth place was his safest bet.

"We aren't that strong and had to gang up on Zhan Yuance to defeat him, yet Long Longlong is a fifth-level constellier at his young age and even has the Ninedragon Imperius, a grade-eight divine artifact. He's probably only a little weaker than Weisheng Moran. If he falls to eighth place, he'll face off against you," Xiaoxiao said.

"Of course. If he defeats me, he'll jump straight to first place. Not to mention, I took quite a few things that belonged to his ancestor, so he probably has a bone to pick with me."

The Ninedragon Imperius was the Ninedragon Emperor's top weapon and was no doubt far more powerful than the Divine Worldeater Cauldron in combat. Now that Zhan Yuance was out, Long Longlong was probably the only one that would have the strongest reason to consider Tianming his enemy, since he probably considered all the treasures in the tomb to belong to him, since they used to be his ancestor's.

The two rounds of battles would be broadcast by the skyward eyes, unlike what happened in the tomb. That only brought even more excitement to those watching. The battlefield was akin to a holy land for all the young blood; it was where they could prove themselves to be the best of the best. Unsurprisingly, Long Longlong wanted to face off against Tianming to do just that.

"Should I stop raising my points too?" Xiaoxiao asked.

"Do you still want to fight?"

She gave it some thought and still decided to fight. But there wouldn't be a point if she was going to fight Tianming if she stayed in eighth place.

"Go for seventh place then!" Tianming looked at the stele again. "So Long Longlong thinks I'm a pushover, eh." Joining the Sky Palace was his only ticket to survive; he wouldn't let anyone stop him!

Chapter 1243 - Lord of Somnium

In Orderia, the celestial orderians reigned supreme, followed by the dreamless celestials. The Dreamless Celestial nation spanned three continents, at the center of which was the Great Clouddream Sea. The surface area of the sea was larger than all three continents combined and was demarcated as dreamless celestial territory. As such, they had constructed a lot of floating cities in the sea, making it just as prosperous as the land settlements.

Based on sheer conquered territory alone, the Dreamless Celestial Nation couldn't compare to the celestial orderians. However, they were absolute giants in the Myriad Solar Sects, having even more area than the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, Voidword Shrine and wargodean domain combined. Though the dreamless celestials were initially aliens, they had settled down on the sun for good.

Their leader was the dreamless celestial emperor, and they had grown powerful and prosperous under his reign. Most citizens live on the three continents, whereas the aloof dreamless celestials themselves cultivate in the area of the sea. There was a city deep within the sea called Somnium that was larger than half of the Azurecloud Continent. Normal people weren't able to go there at all. The city itself seemed surrounded by clouds, even though it was on the sea, thanks to the countless illusion formations laid out around it that threatened to completely trap even the strongest of cultivators. Most would never make it out for the rest of their lives, and some said that even the sun emperor of the celestial orderians wouldn't be able to attack the city.

Somnium was among the most mysterious places on the sun. The palace of the dreamless celestial emperor within it was even harder to access. In this world where cloud, sea and mist intertwined, there was no escape, no end.

Even so, hustle and bustle was standard fare for the mysterious city. Its wide streets were covered in a veil of mist that gave it a dreamlike atmosphere. Though it was usually a crowded place, it was currently

even more rowdy. Many lifebound beasts even occasionally emerged from the mist. Gigantic beasts came swimming toward the city from the sea, most of them whales. It made the city an even more unbelievable sight to behold.

"Looks like we're getting some news."

Many cold, quiet voices spread like whispers through the mist.

"That's right. The disciples that came out of the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb number in the hundreds of thousands. Many have personally witnessed it."

"Weisheng Moran surrendered the Divine Worldeater Cauldron without fighting to the first-ranked Li Tianming...."

"Records don't show anything suggesting that she had a relationship with him beforehand."

All of the dreamless celestials were discussing the same matter.

"That grade-eight divine artifact caused a complete civil war among the sects millions of years ago...."

"Given our current power, we could keep the cauldron from the other sects if she'd managed to obtain it."

"Why in the world did she make such a braintead decision?"

"Who knows? The emperor has already received word of it. He's her master, so let's see how he reacts."

"I really don't get it. Weisheng Moran did really well in recent years, thanks to the emperor's nurturing. How could she do something that betrays so many people's trust in her?"

"The cauldron is far too valuable to us. I heard the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect wants to take these disciples into their care and they've already made a deal with the Azuresoul Palace. However, with all that they've gained, it seems like the Azuresoul Palace is already beyond the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's control."

"I believe the emperor is considering taking the cauldron."

"There's no need for consideration, is there? It was ours to begin with. Moran only let the enemy borrow it for a while."

"Of course."

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Somnium was never a chaotic place. The palace was located right at the very center and it was also where the dreamless celestial emperor cultivated. Being among the strongest people on the sun, his rise to prominence was nothing short of a legend. He was almost a mythological figure himself.

Layers of mist surrounded the palace that was built between the clouds and the sea. Veils of white fluttered in the air, carrying muffled echoes and the suggestion of sounds. On a small lake was a small pavilion with a small, wooden chair, upon which sat a youth. He had long, black hair and his eyes seemed to be immersed in the sea of clouds. His fair complexion made him look almost translucent. Under his long eyelids were obsidian-black eyes. He also sported a tall and sharp nose that didn't spoil

the overall elegance of his features. He was handsome, even beautiful, for a man, though his physical appearance paled in comparison to that mystical aura of his. He looked like he belonged only in the idyllic world of dreams, his presence ethereal and his deep gaze eternal.

"Little fish only has seven breaths' time of memory.... Yet it struggles, and even found a scapegoat. What's the point?" mumbled the youth as he looked up in frustration, still looking ahead.

He held a purple container in one hand and stretched the other behind him, placing his slender fingers on the back of his head. "Do you think that going to the distant Voidsky Realm will allow you to escape my grasp?"

His lips curved into a light smile. When his long hair pulled apart from the back of his head, the face of a young girl could be seen. Her features were picturesque and breathtaking, yet her abyss-like gaze ruined the harmony, making her look like a breathless dead person. If Tianming was there, he'd recognize that face as identical to Weisheng Moran's. There wasn't a single difference, down to her fine eyelashes.

"Since you don't want to play anymore, I'll play in your stead." He covered the face of the young girl with his palm.

At the same time, far away in the Voidsky Realm, a stunning girl that held a green paper umbrella walked amidst flaming storms. Her feet sizzled upon contact with the burning ground, her snow-white skin emitting smoke as they came into contact with the coal-like substance beneath. Right then, white mist appeared around her, forming into a face in front of her.

"Celestial Emperor...." Weisheng Moran stopped and gripped her fists tightly, though she shivered. Cold sweat fell from her head and back, seemingly drenching her. Her teeth chattered nonstop as she powerlessly looked at the expressionless male face, before kneeling on the sizzling, coal-like ground.

"Little fish, was it fun pulling your little tricks?" asked the youth.

Chapter 1244 - Joining the Fray

"Sorry, this little fish has made a mistake..." Weisheng Moran said, keeping her forehead flush with the ground. Her hair fell to the ground as the youth reached out through the mist and put his palm on the back of her head.

"Remember. You have never existed. Don't even dream about becoming a person of your own. You're not a person, just a process. Understood?"

"Yes... I understand," she said.

"You did poorly and wasted my time. I'll be the one to play this game with the Sky Palace from now on." After saying that, he gripped her head tight, causing all the white mist to enter her head.

"Ugh!" She widened her eyes abruptly, her entire body uncontrollably twitching. Despite her face being plastered to the burning hot ground, her eyes didn't close in the slightest. She dug her fingers into the ground and let out a gut-wrenching shriek. "Master, I was wrong! I was wrong!"

She continued foaming from the mouth and rolling her eyes. Right now, she was completely seized by terror, like a fish out of water. Then, as abruptly as it had begun, her gaze completely changed and she calmed down. She stood up and tidied her clothes up, tossing her hair with style. "Hmph."

Her gaze, expression, and behavior had completely changed and her aura was identical to the one in Somnium. She turned and saw the green umbrella on the ground. Stretching out her hand, the umbrella came flying and elongated into a spear that was two meters long. She pointed it toward the imperial star ranking and squinted with a sinister smile. "Looks like I'll be joining the fray."

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The countdown proceeded rather swiftly. Time seemed to pass without notice during cultivation, with each day seeming only about as long as two hours. Tianming felt like the number on the stele decreased by one with every blink, but he kept to his own pace no matter what happened. He prioritized cultivating in the Violetglory Pagoda once every ten days, managing to stay there five full days every time. After that, he would focus on the Ninedragon Tribulation, so he no longer needed to challenge the ancient idols.

Apart from cultivating, they would also go out hunting to bring their scores up, Lingfeng and Xiaoxiao especially. The other disciples were striving to raise their points as well, with fewer and fewer people choosing to hide. Even so, Tianming's position was unshakeable; he was a miracle in the making. Though he wasn't that powerful in relation to the rest, being the fifth most powerful at best, he had managed to soar to first place two times, then he'd stayed there for the remainder of the competition.

Some people ranked those in the top twenty according to their actual power and performance. Weisheng Moran was first, according to them, followed by Long Longlong in second place, and Kong of Voidword Shrine in third place. As Zhan Yuance had been eliminated, they didn't rank him, so the one in fourth place was taken up by the current ninth-ranked Chu Jingchuan. Tianming was ranked tenth in their custom power ranking. There were no Azuresoul Palace disciples in the fourth to ninth places of the power ranking, with most of them being disciples from first-rate sects instead. On the imperial star ranking, those disciples were actually ranked ninth to fifteenth.

People had noticed their talent and prowess, but as they hadn't been able to obtain any of the treasures, they hadn't made it into the top eight. Most people still felt that the four Azuresoul Palace disciples didn't deserve such a high ranking. After all, they had worked together to defeat Zhan Yuance, so they weren't that powerful. Apart from the Dreamless Celestial Nation, Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, Voidword Shrine, and the wargodeans, the disciples of the other six first-rate factions were incredibly powerful. They were the ones rising at the fastest rate in terms of points. Even so, it wouldn't be easy to make up for the huge point boosts afforded by the treasures.

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Xiaoxiao went to fight when she wasn't cultivating. Even though her points didn't rise so quickly, the ninth ranker wouldn't catch up to her anytime soon.

Weisheng Moran, now ranked second, gained the most points in the shortest time. She was catching up to Tianming. Throughout the entire time, Zhan Yuance's points didn't change at all, while Long Longlong's slowly rose. Eventually, he would definitely be overtaken by Xiaoxiao, and everyone was clear about his intentions. Weisheng Moran was far too powerful, after all.

Being ranked second in terms of power, there was no need for him to face off against Weisheng Moran head-on. In fact, if he didn't have to face her, his chances of getting a Sky Palace candidacy skyrocketed.

Not to mention, he could use the time he wasn't hunting for points to cultivate and familiarize himself with his new sword.

In fact, that was exactly what he was doing. He wanted to break through once more before the final battle and become a sixth-level constellier. Having consumed a divine pill before the Voidsky Skirmish, he had already broken through once, hence his relatively slow progress now. Even so, learning to use the Ninedragon Imperius well would make him much stronger.

"He's using the last bit of time to improve, huh? Long Longlong truly is dedicated."

"In terms of talent, he might be the best of them all. He's a few years younger than Weisheng Moran, after all."

"He's the grandson of the Saintdragon Emperor, after all. Those horns of his are proof of his talent. In the centuries to come, he'll become the new Saintdragon Emperor and inherit Xuanyuan Dragon Sect."

"Long Longlong was just a little unlucky. Had he been born a year later, he could join the next Voidsky Skirmish at twenty-nine instead. By then, nobody would be able to defeat him."

"But the Ninedragon Imperius showed up this time—the tomb might be absent in the next round!"

"True. With his talent and the Ninedragon Imperius, though, he might eventually grow to be more powerful than Weisheng Moran. I feel like he's far ahead of the others in the ranking based on his talent alone."

"Seriously... the Sky Palace is really unfair to this young man for making the final phase a duel."

"If he can become a sixth-level constellier within these forty-nine days, he might actually reach first place!"

The skyward eyes often flocked around Long Longlong. Currently, hundreds of disciples from his sect were defending him as he trained.

"Long Longlong is trying his hand for first place, so he'll definitely be facing off against Li Tianming."

"Interestingly, the Whitedragon Empress has already announced that Li Tianming would join Xuanyuan Dragon Sect as their disciple. Wouldn't Long Longlong be fighting an ally?"

"This was only announced on the outside. The disciples within might not be aware of it. I think he loathes Li Tianming for taking so many of those treasures."

"That's right. Li Tianming also got the Whitedragon Palace's treasure, right? Was there any word on what it was?"

"None for now. The Sky Palace hasn't broadcasted anything concerning him so far. Since his score isn't rising fast, he's probably cultivating."

"At this point in time? How old is he? Does he think he has Saintdragon Talent or something?"

"Don't laugh just yet. He definitely isn't unskilled, having come so far."

"I'm not laughing, just curious. I wonder what the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's other dragon imperials think of this fight between a disciple they just picked up and a successor to their legacy."

"Xuanyuan Dragon Sect might just favor the latter."

"Yeah. A disciple they picked up for convenience will be cast away, sooner or later, after they get the treasures."

"Nobody knows yet if the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's protection is a blessing or a curse. Li Tianming, Feng, and Lin Xiaoxiao's futures are still far from set in stone."

Chapter 1245 - Blazedragon Fireblast

Tianming stood with his mind as calm as still lake water, despite the raging environment around him. Within the third level of the Violetglory Pagoda were countless caeli of forerunners, available as a guide for the future generation to learn from. Their insights might come to inspire those that tried to learn from it, allowing them to improve their divine wills. By now, Tianming's Lifesbane Will had reached the point of maturing into a divine will.

"Bane... or tribulation, is the chain of fate. It's a fundamental part of the cosmos. Pushing through and overcoming the bane will allow a life to completely transform. Cultivation is no different from overcoming banes and tribulations like these. Step by step, one will walk the path to godhood and fight the heavens for survival!"

This path was too complicated, and too burdensome to navigate. Fortunately, forty-nine days were nearly two months, so there was still plenty of time.

"Even though I'm basically trying to achieve godhood a second time, I'm still in the prime growth phase after breaking my Lifesbane curse. It should be enough time."

He progressed at a firm pace. He didn't need divine pills, but grew with his own efforts according to his plans. Yu Ziqian was incredibly grateful for his help in obtaining the cauldron and wanted to give him his last myriad dao pill, but Tianming refused it. He truly didn't need something like that. Unlike Lingfeng, consuming a divine pill would increase his resistance to the pill's effects. The more he consumed, the weaker the effect would become. Instead, he would rely on hard work and careful practice to make sure every detail was perfect.

At the same time, he had started practicing the third move after fusing the first two. It was called Blazedragon Fireblast. The strike was interesting in that, when it was executed, the blade of the sword would generate sparks that filled the sky, which was accompanied by a loud roar that had the same effect as Lan Huang's Primordial Soundwave, but with the added effects of flames, and it was infused in every strike. It could almost instantly knock an opponent out, and Tianming had only needed around three days to learn it.

After that, he executed the Blazedragon Fireblast, descending like a flaming dragon as his sword emanated the roar of tens of thousands of dragons, creating soundwaves so powerful that they seemed to cause explosions. The strike itself was about as powerful as the Silverdragon Flashkill, and it wasn't too difficult, either. As usual, the difficulty lay in fusing this move together with the previous two for a combination strike that was fast, fierce, and loud! Fortunately, Tianming had more than enough time

thanks to the Sky Palace's generosity. Not only was he able to stabilize the sudden burst of power he had gotten by consuming a myriad dao pill, but he had also managed to use his Lifesbane Will to help him break through.

"Finally, I'm a twelfth-level ascendant." One more level until he was a proper constellier, and his Lifesbane Will was on the brink of turning into a divine will. That was always a bottleneck for most people for decades or even hundreds of years. Some people would only take one day to come to a miraculous realization and make the breakthrough, however.

The key to becoming a constellier was their constellation, whose manifestation relied on understanding the astral signs. Time wasn't necessarily a factor when it came to this process. Tianming had thought that perhaps Yu Ziqian's myriad dao pill would be of help to him, but it was definitely inferior in comparison with the grandpath fiend pill. He didn't hold too high hopes for it, so he didn't want to waste it.

"Converting a heavenly will into a divine will is the core foundation of the process. If I speed it up using a divine pill, my foundations won't be stable enough, making a problem that'll haunt me in future breakthroughs." Many geniuses who had relied on divine pills to grow would be built up hollow and filled with holes by the time they were a few centuries old. It was mostly better to take one's time and grow slower. Only then would they stand a chance of becoming an elite.

"Aren't you a calm one? The upcoming fight has to do with fate itself. How are you able to resist the allure of the divine pill?" Yu Ziqian said, impressed to no end. The more he came to know Tianming, the more he came to see how out of the ordinary he was.

"Umm...." Tianming had just broken through and was still in his own world, fusing Tridragon Tribulation. "Maybe that isn't its real name, but why does it matter? It isn't like the name changes the power of the move." Once he managed to fuse it, he would dramatically increase the power of the move. Perhaps then, not even fifth-level constelliers would be able to hold a candle to him.

"Once I have a constellation, strengthen my sword body, and use this move with totems, it'll be far more powerful. I'll soon get my own constellation, but I still won't be able to use totems. That aside, where should I get divine hazard sword ki?" Tianming looked toward the Voidsky Flame Pillar. Divine hazards were all around them, but none of them were top-quality sword-ki hazards.

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Less than ten days were left until the competition. Tianming asked Lingfeng about his progress after consuming the grandpath fiend pill and myriad dao pill and was told that he was now a third-level constellier. "Won't this destabilize your growth at all?"

"Don't worry. My Primordial Gate can continuously refine the pill without resulting in any wasted effects. It also helps remove impurities that can trigger unstable thoughts," Lingfeng assured.

Tianming could only inwardly praise the Primordial Demonlord. Now, Lingfeng could consume as many pills as he wanted without any of the side effects. As for Xiaoxiao, she could only rely on consuming caeli to break through, but she was easily the fastest among the three. Not to mention, she didn't care about the consequences. How powerful she would be in the future didn't matter to her, so long as she was powerful enough right now. During the past forty or so days, she sometimes went hunting for caeli

herself, allowing her to remain the highest in terms of level among the three, being a fourth-level constellier now. She was still the weakest among them, but that was somewhat offset by her growing familiarity with the Dragonblood Desecration.

"Thank goodness the Sky Palace gave us all that time. Otherwise, we wouldn't stand a chance at all in the final battle," Tianming said.

These days, the Voidsky Realm was at its most chaotic. There were few who could afford to calmly train like they could, especially right when everything was going to start soon.

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Tianming checked the ranking once more. It read:

First Place, Li Tianming (Azuresoul Palace), 810000.

Second Place, Weisheng Moran (Divine Celestial Nation), 740000.

Third Place, Yu Ziqian (Azuresoul Palace), 480000.

Fourth Place, Kong (Voidword Shrine), 460000.

Fifth Place, Feng (Azuresoul Palace), 400000.

Sixth Place, Zhan Yuance (Wargodeans) 390000.

Seventh Place, Lin Xiaoxiao (Azuresoul Palace), 360000.

Eighth Place, Long Longlong (Xuanyuan Dragon Sect), 350000.

Ninth Place, Chu Jiangchuan (Empyrean Sword Sect), 280000.

.....

Many people made similar observations about the current ranking. First, Zhan Yuance's points hadn't increased, so his rank had fallen to sixth place. Long Longlong didn't raise his own points either, allowing him to fall to eighth place as planned. Third, Chu Jiangchuan had been rapidly fighting to raise his points in the forty-odd days to rise to eighth place, but things just hadn't gone his way. The Voidsky Realm was so large that nobody intentionally gathered at one place, so he would be quite lucky if he was able to get a few thousand points each day. Not to mention, the other participants cannibalized each other for points, making the available pool of points even smaller. It didn't seem like he would stand much of a chance with so little time remaining.

The Empyrean Sword Sect ranked fifth on the myriad sect ranking, being the most powerful sword sect of all—the Azuresoul Palace had actually branched out from it millions of years ago. No doubt, the members of the sect were on the edge of their seats as they watched the competition unfold.

There was another odd occurrence: Weisheng Moran shouldn't have a need to raise her points at all. After all, being first or second would likely make no difference when it came to joining the Sky Palace. Yet she was using her last bit of time to defeat more than a hundred thousand enemies at a rate as fast as Chu Jiangchuan. Though even with that, it didn't seem like she would be able to catch up to Tianming.

The ranking scheme was heavily skewed toward those that had obtained treasures. As a result, the battle matchups were more or less decided to be as follows.

The first battle would be between Tianming and Long Longlong, the second was between Weisheng Moran and Xiaoxiao, and Yu Ziqian would face off against Zhan Yuance in the third. As for Lingfeng, he would be going up against Kong in the fourth battle.

The question now was: how would the eliminated Zhan Yuance be allowed to compete? He no longer stood a chance to join the Sky Palace, after all. It seemed that Yu Ziqian would easily join the top four without even having to fight. The Sky Palace had probably considered this and gave more time for someone else to catch up to Zhan Yuance and push him out, but nobody had managed to do it. Only time would tell how that would be dealt with in the upcoming final battle.

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The first battle between Tianming and Long Longlong was one to look forward to. Tianming was from a humble background, yet he had managed to get so many treasures, which allowed him to rank first. Even so, he hadn't shown any power beyond that of a fourth-level constellier so far.

On the other hand, Long Longlong was from the second-ranked sect and was blessed with talent. Not to mention, he wielded a grade-eight divine artifact. Which one of them would triumph?

Finally, the countdown came to an end; the names and points on Skyward Stele would no longer change. For those outside the top eight, the competition was over. Some left after having obtained some benefits while others left with nothing, or with less than what they came with. There were those that had honored their ancestors with their performance in the rankings and others who were now doomed to mediocrity. Even so, people couldn't care less about those who weren't in the top eight.

Chapter 1246 - Black Dragon Robe

Many people were gathered outside the Voidsky Flame Pillar, most of whom were in their prime age of a few centuries old. On Orderia, the first fifty years after one's birth was the rapid phase of growth and improvement. From fifty to three hundred, they would still be able to look young. While cultivating in that phase wasn't bad, by any means, it was still slower than the first fifty years. Past three hundred was where most people hit their plateaus, significantly slowing their growth. It was at that point where the divine will stabilized, making it hard for any concrete progress to be made.

Given that Sovereign Xi was able to maintain her youthful looks at five hundred years old, it went without saying that most people on Orderia could as well. Jiang Qingliu, for instance, was more than eight centuries old, but looked closer to middle age. He was currently at the peak of his power. The Whitedragon Empress beside him, Long Wanying, was about his age as well. But women tended to care about maintaining one's appearance more than men, so she looked much younger than him. She was also in her prime age of beauty.

These days, Jiang Qingliu had been flabbergasted time and again at the sudden changes in the ranking. To prevent himself from being assassinated, he also made sure to not leave the Whitedragon Empress' side.

No doubt, Long Wanying had an impressive status in her sect to match her power. There were thousands of troops sent by the sect, standing by. Nobody dared challenge the sect that ranked second out of all of them. While the Dreamless Celestial Nation and Voidword Shrine ranked first and third, respectively, they seldom engaged in large displays of power. Only the wargodeans and the fifth-ranked Empyrean Sword Sect dared throw their weight around the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect.

Long Wanying was just as shocked as Jiang Qingliu. "How powerful is that Yu Ziqian anyway?" she asked.

"Well... I'd say not bad, definitely not bad. Are you planning to take him into your sect as well?" Jiang Qingliu asked.

"Forget it, I can't. The Divine Worldeater Cauldron's benefits are far outweighed by the negatives it comes with. The only way I can possibly take in Yu Ziqian is if I return Tianming and the other two to your sect."

"Even so, that'd still be good for you, right? Your sect would have the two most powerful treasures, the cauldron and the Ninedragon Imperius." At the very least, he wanted Yu Ziqian to be safe.

"It would be, but it's still uncertain whether we would get to keep those two 'best treasures'. Not to mention, I can afford to not take Yu Ziqian in, but I must have Li Tianming."

"So this isn't your decision to make at the end of the day."

"Who said that? I'm fully accountable for this!" she snapped, glaring at him.

"How could something that'll potentially result in the end of your sect be your decision alone to make? It's almost time for the final battle. I suppose the other dragon imperials will arrive soon, right?"

"Just shut up." Things had changed considerably since the appearance of those two top treasures. Long Wanying grit her teeth, pursing her glossy lips.

"You know that Li Tianming's going to fight the precious grandson of the Saintdragon Emperor soon. Only one of them will get the candidacy. Who will you support?" Jiang Qingliu asked.

"I'll support whoever wins."

"Haha, you aren't really fit to be the leader of the entire sect after all. How could you support a disciple of the Azuresoul Palace instead of your own sect? Long Longlong is the prodigal son of your sect, and he's been blessed with ultimate talent and a weapon to match it. Shouldn't he be the future of the sect?"

"Shut up. Your voice is grating." She didn't bother with him, but she knew the status quo deep down. It was practically public knowledge that she would be taking Tianming and the other two back. Long Longlong had chosen Tianming as his opponent in order to avoid Weisheng Moran, and everyone was impatient to find out the result. Tensions were at an all-time high.

At that moment, someone came and made a few reports to her, immediately causing her expression to change. "Come. I'll take you to see someone." After she said that, she immediately turned and left.

"Who?" Jiang Qingliu hurried to keep close, surrounded by the thousand-plus Xuanyuan Dragon Sect disciples.

"Two people that'll make you vomit at the sight of them," she said with a smile.

Jiang Qingliu had immediately guessed who that could be, judging from his nervous expression. Their group proceeded onward, undeterred by the flaming rain. Some time later, they entered a flaming mist that obscured their vision ahead. Jiang Qingliu followed her lead, sweating somewhat nervously. Some hundred meters ahead of him was a great existence to be revered.

This person had the aura of a ten-thousand-meter-long dragon, a gigantic beast that covered the entire sky. Just being near him made it harder to breathe, even for Jiang Qingliu, who was no young junior. There were fewer than twenty people on the entire sun that could make him feel this way.

Slowly, he raised his head despite the mounting pressure. There was an old man clad in a black robe, standing with his hands behind his back. The robe was adorned with patterns of black dragons. His hair was bound in a simple, long ponytail. The signature feature of his face was a third, central eye, outshone only by the huge single horn on his head that resembled Long Longlong's. It marked him as a possessor of the Saintdragon Talent.

The old man was at least a thousand years old, yet merely standing there was all he needed to do to project his magnificent presence. Jiang Qingliu understood with a single look that this person was as impressive and domineering as the first dragon emperor. Though he was of advanced age, that didn't mean he was weak. Each year of his life was filled to the brim with rich experience, thus most, if not all, people standing near the Voidsky Flame Pillar would regard him as a senior.

"Junior Jiang Qingliu greets you, Senior Saintdragon Emperor!" Jiang Qingliu hurried and knelt halfway to the old man.

"Rise, oh famous master," said an insulting female voice in a teasing manner. Jiang Qingliu looked up and saw a woman who looked to be Long Wanying's age. She wore a black dress, embroidered with intricate dragons. The way the dress clung to her figure made even a seasoned middle-aged man like Jiang Qingliu feel parched at the throat. She exuded pure seduction.

However, she wasn't intentionally trying to use her wiles on him. What he had seen was enough for him to offer her endless praise, but only for her outer appearance. What normal people might not be able to see was her inner pride, which Jiang Qingliu had instantly noticed. It was no wonder Long Wanying had called her someone that would give others the urge to vomit.

The old man was the Saintdragon Emperor of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, and the one with most authority among the Seven Dragon Imperials. As for the woman in the black dress, she was his daughter, Long Xiqian. She was from the same generation as Long Wanying. Jiang Qingliu also knew one other thing about her: Long Wanying and Long Xiqian had once fought for the position of Whitedragon Empress. During their competition, Long Xiqian had the edge on almost every front as her father was the Saintdragon Emperor himself, with the sect being an extension of the power his family wielded. Long Wanying, on the other hand, only had a normal background.

But during the final duel, Long Wanying had completely defeated Long Xiqian to claim the position of Whitedragon Empress. Based on that alone, it was clear why they were on such bad terms. Jiang Qingliu noted how Long Xiqian had rolled her eyes at Long Wanying the moment they met—it was a textbook gaze of contempt. Even so, the Saintdragon Emperor wouldn't let that minor feud between them

surface in the open. He was far from a minor figure and couldn't afford to fuss over petty matters like those.

"Saintdragon Emperor," Long Wanying greeted, though not as respectfully as Jiang Qingliu had. She only greeted him as a junior would. After all, they were supposedly of equal status in terms of their positions in the sect.

"Jiang Qingliu, those disciples of yours have definitely shaken up the Myriad Solar Sects as a whole," the old man said after shooting Long Wanying an acknowledging glance.

"They're only average. I have their luck to thank," Jiang Qingliu awkwardly said.

"This isn't fortune, but rather, fortitude," said the old man.

"The Saintdragon Emperor's praise is to be cherished...."

The old man walked toward Jiang Qingliu, causing him to subconsciously pull back his neck. "Jiang Qingliu, the Whitedragon Empress has told me about taking in three of your disciples. But now the Divine Worldeater Cauldron has surfaced. After a discussion among the Seven Dragon Imperials, we've come to the conclusion to take only Yu Ziqian in. Li Tianming, Feng, and Lin Xiaoxiao shall remain at the Azuresoul Palace. Given their talent, they'll no doubt find their own way. Congratulations in advance, Jiang Qingliu." The Saintdragon Emperor had calmly stated his terms in one go.

"Huh?" Jiang Qingliu didn't understand, though he didn't mind their decision. Yu Ziqian was his only real disciple, after all, while the other three were pick-ups who no doubt had masters of their own. It seemed like the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was going to attempt to keep the cauldron for themselves while ignoring the scraps. After all, those two weapons and the mysterious treasure Tianming had obtained combined couldn't compare to the Divine Worldeater Cauldron in value. Instead, tossing those three to the wolves would help keep attention off their sect.

However, Long Wanying wouldn't agree to it. Jiang Qingliu turned to look and, as expected, said, "What discussion? I wasn't part of it, and I have an objection."

"Then state your objection, hehe," Long Xiqian said.

"I want Li Tianming and the other two, but not Yu Ziqian. We won't be able to keep the cauldron for ourselves, anyway. Instead, we should take the other three treasures and stay away from the mess created by the cauldron." Her eyes were sharp and cold as she looked straight at Long Xiqian, then the Saintdragon Emperor.

"Li Tianming?" Long Xiqian looked at the ranking and shrugged. "What's the point of that? The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect has me around. Raising those strays is just a waste of effort. We might as well turn our attention to guarding the cauldron. Long Wanying, I didn't think you were that shortsighted." What she was implying was that they really only wanted the cauldron and not Yu Ziqian, which made things awkward for Jiang Qingliu. As Yu Ziqian's master, he wanted him to have a good future, but now it seemed like Yu Ziqian would be considered an outsider even if he joined the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect.

It was rather disrespectful to talk about his disciple as they would a tool. He turned back and looked at Long Wanying, hoping that she could afford him and his four disciples their due respect.

Long Wanying smiled without saying much. "I worry that your precious son will be defeated by those 'strays'."

Chapter 1247 - Lockdown

Long Wanying's words shocked even Jiang Qingliu. The others were all elites of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and had turned around, tuning the conversation out. It appeared that this bickering was common among the two women, and they didn't hold back. Sometimes, they even lashed out physically.

They had fought one another countless times since their childhood; Long Xiqian had only toned it down after Long Wanying became the Whitedragon Empress. Now, it seemed like they were going to break out into a fight again, but it was a little different than usual.

Long Xiqian blinked a few times after she heard that, as if she couldn't believe what she was hearing. "What are you talking about? Are you sure you didn't misspeak?" she snapped, her arms around her chest as her thin lips curved slightly upward.

"Of course, not. It isn't like Long Longlong has never been defeated. He and the other three couldn't take down Weisheng Moran even while working together, and even suffered a heavy defeat. Don't tell me you haven't heard about it."

"So what? Long'er's still young! In another decade, not even ten Weisheng Morans would be able to defeat him.

"Stop being in denial, alright? I'm sure you've fed him more than a few divine pills. Even the Saintdragon Emperor might not be aware of them."

"You'd better have proof if you're going to accuse me of that!" Long Xiqian growled.

"Accuse you? Oh, no, he's your son and none of my business."

"I think you're just jealous. Why do you want Li Tianming to join? Are you going crazy over wanting a son of your own?"

Those were really hurtful words to say to someone who had lost their husband and children, but it wasn't the first time Long Xiqian had gone for a low blow to tear open her healing scab. Long Wanying's world had collapsed on that day, but by now, she was already somewhat numb to the intentional offense in Long Xiqian's comment. She looked at her calmly and turned to the Saintdragon Emperor. "Saintdragon Emperor, why do I feel like you're overestimating yourselves? Do you think our sect can afford to take in two grade-eight divine artifacts? This is a path of no return! The nail that stands out gets hammered down! I understand that having the cauldron is an alluring prospect, but it's almost doomed to fail. Don't forget that our sect isn't even complete right now. Do you think our only enemies are those in the Myriad Solar Sects? There's fellow kin on the other side of the sun that want to exterminate us! Think this through properly!"

She knew that her reasoning wasn't well thought out, but all of them understood her points. They'd made the decision they had simply because the greed in their hearts had overcome their sense of danger.

"None of you have ever come to the Voidsky Realm yourselves. But now that you're here, don't be in too much of a hurry to make your decision. Watch closely and see for yourselves. Let the battles play out at least before we decide on who to bring back. What if one of those four joins the Sky Palace? Would we still have a choice then?" She was trying to appeal to the Saintdragon Emperor with a peaceful, yet firm tone.

"Saintdragon Emperor, we feel that the Whitedragon Empress has a point."

"Given how chaotic things already are, getting rid of the Lifesteal Silverdragon and Dragonblood Desecration is pointless. Our enemies aren't interested in them. Instead, they're going to want the cauldron the most."

"The treasures of the Ninedragon Emperor are his legacies, but not the cauldron. As such, we don't have a legitimate claim over it. All the factions must be starting to band together against us, and we have to be prepared."

Quite a number of elites of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect stepped forward. They had been Long Wanying's followers for a long time, and she was just as powerful a leader as she was a fighter, commanding the respect of many. Now, most of the people there were supporting her point of view, something that was sure to enrage Long Xiqian. After all, this woman had been getting in her way since she was born, yet was still somehow able to make everyone like and protect her. It was almost as if she was the dear daughter of the Saintdragon Emperor instead of her.

"Are you really suggesting that someone from the Azuresoul Palace will be able to join the Sky Palace?"

"All I said was that the person who will join the Sky Palace won't be your son," Long Wanying said.

"Hehe... it looks like people really do get jealous over things they don't have." Long Xiqian was rubbing even more salt into the wound.

Long Wanying finally retracted her smile. "Long Xiqian, I've been quarreling with you for years, and time and again I learn more about how shameless you are. You aren't fit to be my rival anymore." It was a ruthless bullseye.

Right as Long Xiqian was about to explode with rage, the Saintdragon Emperor shot her a glance. Though she managed to stop, her demeanor was now far colder than before. Letting her father down was the one thing she had never wanted to do since childhood, and that was still true even now. She begrudgingly lowered her head, blaming everything on Long Wanying in her mind. You vile widow, always getting in my way! Even though you lost your husband and son, you still refuse to stand down! You're disgusting! You deserve to be alone!

If it weren't for the Saintdragon Emperor, she would have definitely said all that out loud. Her life now was perfect; though her husband was married into her family, he was a capable person. Their children also showed quite a lot of promise, Long Longlong especially, after obtaining the Ninedragon Imperius.

Right as she was imagining the moment her son took first place and got a candidacy to join the Sky Palace, the Saintdragon Emperor had an answer. "Alright. We'll do as the Whitedragon Empress says and leave the decision for after the Voidsky Skirmish."

Long Wanying breathed a sigh of relief.

"The final battle is about to begin. Make sure to keep this spot defended. When Li Tianming's imperial star formation shatters, immediately take him into our protection," instructed the Saintdragon Emperor.

"Understood!"

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The moment the countdown vanished, a nine-colored formation appeared beneath the Skyward Stele. Within it was the final battlefield. By now, everyone who was ranked outside of the top eight had been eliminated and ejected from the Voidsky Realm. Nearly all billion participants were out by now, their journey into the Voidsky Realm having finally come to an end. The number of people outside the Voidsky Flame Pillar suddenly soared. While many were unwilling to leave just yet and wanted to see how things would turn out, their seniors swiftly took them away the moment they emerged.

Many of the disciples weren't even aware of the treasures within the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb and had only just found out from those outside that the area around the Voidsky Flame Pillar might erupt into battle at any time, with many of the sects setting up themselves for an incoming conflict. It was an incredibly volatile situation, and everything would go down after the final battles concluded. The 'children' under thirty would be mere cannon fodder in a battle of this scale and level, so they were hurriedly evacuated from the area.

More and more cultivators assembled until they numbered in the hundreds of millions, and most of them tried to keep themselves hidden. Each of them posed a threat to Tianming and the rest. An absolute lockdown had formed as the various factions of the Myriad Solar Sects, and even the celestial orderians, worked in the background.

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The sound of the flaming storm could still be heard. Tianming was standing with Lingfeng, Xiaoxiao, and Yu Ziqian. They were within the Voidsky Flame Pillar and had been heading toward the Skyward Stele for quite some time. By now, they could be certain that there was nobody else in the Voidsky Realm.

Looking up, they saw the grand arena formation. The eight red names on the stele above looked a little different from before, as well: Tianming and Long Longlong's names were highlighted and their points and ranking had vanished; the implication was clear.

"Looks like the first battle has started." Before Tianming could react, a flaming storm carried him toward the battlefield. He hadn't even bid the rest goodbye yet. Fortunately, Ying Huo and the rest were within his lifebound space.

"Everyone, get ready to fight. Meow Meow, wake up. Lan Huang, stop playing. And Xian Xian, are you done digesting your food?" Tianming always came close to breaking down when dealing with those three. Only Ying Huo was raring to go and perched atop of his head, using its wings to style its 'hair'.

"It's just a couple of feathers. What's the point?" Tianming said.

"What do you know? I'm going to display my proud form before billions of beautiful girls. The first impression is important, you know. With how large the sun is, there must be many girlies who'll secretly harbor some feelings for me!" Ying Huo said earnestly.

Tianming burst out laughing. The storm was carrying him north; it was said that the celestial orderians made the north pole of the sun their home.

"With how big a deal all of this is, I wonder if Qingyu has seen me through the skyward eyes?"

"It's very likely she has."

"Then I have to do even better to reassure her. She must know that I'm looking for her."

Ying Huo suddenly sighed.

"What's up with you this time?"

"I'm afraid I'll perform too well and make Suo Yue fall for me. I don't want to be a fool like you. The forest is big, so perching on only one tree for the rest of my life is just a huge waste."

"Compared to Suo Yue, you look more like a maggot."

"What did you say?!" A maggot? That was a huge blow to its self-esteem! "Li Tianming, I'll claim your balls!"

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Tianming went slamming into the arena formation. He saw a hundred skyward eyes hanging above him as the flames vanished. The terrain looked completely peaceful and nothing stood out. It was almost deathly quiet. "Dammit, with so many skyward eyes around, those folks outside can even count my hair follicles..." Right after entering, he felt fifty of those eyes focusing on him.

Chapter 1248 - Perfect Lifebound Beast Combination

Half of the skyward eyes were broadcasting their feed outside.

"Exciting."

Tianming looked back and saw that the colorful arena formation was entirely sealed off. Only he and Long Longlong would be able to enter. It was so huge that he couldn't see the other end and the whole place was far too quiet; the slightest sound either of them made would immediately alert the other of their position. It wouldn't be long before they clashed.

Since the battle had started, Tianming didn't want to waste any time. "Let's go!"

He didn't have much of a grudge with Long Longlong, so they probably wouldn't be fighting with the intent to obliterate each other. He swiftly headed toward the center of the arena. All the while, Meow Meow was still catching up on one last bit of sleep within the lifebound space to charge up. And thanks to the stockpile of wildbeasts, he wouldn't have to worry that Xian Xian wouldn't have enough to eat, either. He was now in peak combat condition!

He stood atop one of the peaks in the middle of the arena and looked at the hundred skyward eyes. Billions of people were looking at him through them, yet his gaze didn't waver one bit. After having been through so much, his will had become strong. Before, none of the skyward eyes had really paid attention to him, but now he had basically all the attention.

Just as he found his footing, he heard the roars of dragons from afar. They sounded like songs of sacred beasts. Tianming looked east and saw five gigantic beasts circling about in the clouds before rapidly flying toward him. Their scales shone like colorful glitter, and they were so huge that he could barely see their whole form within his line of sight.

Zhan Yuance had five goldmane skyapes, and Long Longlong had five dragons of his own to match. They were the only two beastmasters with five beasts in the top ten, giving them a huge edge in fights with other beastmasters. Yet Long Longlong's lifebound beasts were really different from Zhan Yuance's goldmane skyapes: they were of different elemental types. Tianming could see the five dragons and had discerned some of their differences.

"They seem to resemble the lifebound beasts of Great Emperor Xuanyuan. Their elements are gold, wood, water, fire and earth... the five phases...." The ancient emperor of old's highest level of cultivation was probably not far off from where Tianming was now. His lifebound beasts had probably also had star counts around a thousand or so. Not even a legendary emperor could compare to this core disciple of Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, despite both being beastmasters with a dragon for each of the five phases.

The five dragons displayed their proud bloodline legacy. Each of them had more than five thousand stars, proof that they had relied on five-star universal manna to evolve into five-star divine beasts. Among Tianming's beasts, Ying Huo had the most stars at around four thousand eight hundred, marking it as a four-star divine beast. That difference was huge and analogous to the difference between grade-four and grade-five divine artifacts. This was only exacerbated further by how all of Long Longlong's beasts were five-star divine beasts, and he had one beast more than Tianming.

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The dragons came bearing down on Tianming, finally revealing their full appearance to him as they descended from the skies. Their domineering auras sent a wave of shock across the audience—it was the perfect entrance. The five beasts that represented the five phases were said to be the perfect combination. Each of the five phases built up the next, perfected by the powers of the dragons' bloodline. They made their beastmaster a master of the five elements, rounding out any weakness he might have. There was a good reason Long Longlong had been recognized as the most talented of this generation.

Thanks to their unique elemental affinity, the five dragons were considered superior to Zhan Yuance's five skyapes. Great Emperor Xuanyuan had had a similar setup of lifebound beasts, but his were merely infants compared to Long Longlong's, who was strengthened even further by his Saintdragon Talent. He was the quintessential dragon beastmaster, and the mere appearance of his dragons had expanded the horizons of the audience.

"This is true talent! The best on the entire sun!" Their eyes were drawn to the five dragons. The first shone gold from its scales, horns, claws, talons, and even eyes. It was the most eye-catching of them all. In fact, it glowed so brightly that many struggled to look straight at it. It was a traditional five-clawed dragon like those used by imperial dynasties to symbolize their authority. Similarly, its roar was the most commanding of them all and its entire body was as tough as divine artifacts, making it not the least bit inferior to goldmane skyapes in close combat. The dazzling light from its body made it hard for enemies to even look at it in the first place. It was a platinum venus dragon.

The second dragon was entirely green and covered in vines. Its scales were shaped like leaves and it had two heads, one of which was as brown as a tree trunk and just as wide, too. The other was leaf-green and filled with lively vigor. Its entire body was covered with long dragon whiskers that somehow resembled Xian Xian's roots. It looked like a fusion of animal and plant. While it wasn't as fierce as the platinum venus dragon, it seemed like it would possess field control abilities rivaling Xian Xian's. It was an antivoid jupiter dragon.

The third dragon was as blue as the ocean and had a wide body. Its claws were webbed and its tail resembled a boat's rudder. It had the largest head of them all, which looked like that of a qilin. Its deep, azure eyes were really round. A mist surrounded its body that seemed like it would allow it to swiftly roam amidst the clouds and water. When it roared, it sounded like a whale's song. It was an abyssal mercury dragon.

The fourth dragon was completely covered in flames and wasn't that large, which made it more agile than the rest. Its eyes looked like burning, purgatorial flames, and its scales looked like little cauldrons that were linked together like chain mail. It possessed the shortest temper of the bunch, having roared nonstop since the moment it had appeared. It was a surging mars dragon.

The last beast had long landed on the ground. It had a stout figure, like that of a mountain, and was colored a yellowish brown. Its upper body resembled Lan Huang's, with saw-tooth-like mountains across its back. It had a hammer-like tail and a sharp, horned head. All in all, they allowed it to pin any foe to the ground before utterly brutalizing them. It was a grandiose saturn dragon.

All five sacred dragons had assembled, their elemental powers wreaking havoc and giving Tianming a lot of pressure. They looked at Tianming like he was their prey.

"Not bad... not bad at all...." Long Longlong was the first beastmaster that Tianming had met that was able to match him in terms of elemental combinations.

Chapter 1249 - No Time to Waste Words

All five phases were present—strong metal, raging fires, flowing water, sprawling wood, and stable earth. Almost all aspects of the battlefield were under control. What was even more impressive was that they were all dragons that had elemental synergy with one another, further enhancing their teamwork. Even so, the team that would perform better was still to be seen. After all, Ying Huo and the rest had fought hundreds of life-and-death battles alongside one another. Even if their star counts were a level lower, they were by no means weak. One thing was for sure: they were one unit short as the fifth egg hadn't hatched yet.

When the five dragons graced them with their presence, Tianming sent his four lifebound beasts striking out. It was a battle of the strongest beastmasters of the new generation. Back then, Tianming had fought Zhan Yuance with the help of friends. But now he would have to fight such a powerful opponent on his own.

Tianming's lifebound beasts stood out too much compared to one another. He had a phoenix the size of a palm and smaller than even a single of those dragons' scales, perching on Tianming's head. Then there was a lazy cat that stood near his feet, only just now stretching and yawning, even though the enemy had already shown up as if it still wasn't fully awake. It was as if those mighty dragons didn't exist before

it. Not to mention, Meow Meow even lightly groomed itself, licking its whole body once over until its tongue was full of fur. It jumped around and tried to spit it out.

His third beast was a two-headed dragon with mountains and seas across its body. Compared to a normal dragon, it had a much stockier body, and it also had a shell. Its tail was like a huge greatsword and it was surrounded by rings. As it walked about, the ground itself shook. Lan Huang was itching to clash with the new 'playmates'.

As for his fourth beast, it was a gigantic tree that took root on the battlefield. Its leaves and branches spread out, followed by the replenished Radiant Vines, with Radiant Daffodils, Evernight Roses, Scarlet Lilies, and Fiendsong Mares all over them. Xian Xian had recovered to its prime fighting state and it was without a doubt the largest beast on the field, even larger than the five dragons. Its spread-out roots and vines were filled with limitless possibilities.

Between them stood Tianming with his right hand on his Grand-Orient Sword, thrust into the ground, and his left hand wrapped around by Lifesteal Silverdragon.

"Where's Long Longlong?" The countless members of the audience searched for a trace of the other beastmaster the best they could. Sure enough, he showed up with a flurry of sword strikes. Nine swords came flying out from the clouds, each sporting a different measurement. Some were greatswords, while others were short blades, but every one of them shone blindingly. They also had dragon-shaped hilts. When the nine swords collapsed, a sharp sound could be heard as they fused together and became a nine-colored greatsword floating in the sky.

"The Ninedragon Imperius!"

Witnessing this legendary weapon for the first time caused the spectators to go wild. Who wouldn't want to own a weapon of such caliber? Weapons were fundamental tools of cultivators, after all, and the Ninedragon Imperius was among the sexiest weapons they had ever seen.

While most cultivators acknowledged that the Ninedragon Imperius was a fitting weapon for Long Longlong, that wasn't the case for the Divine Worldeater Cauldron. Firstly, it wasn't something that had belonged to the Ninedragon Emperor. Not to mention, the cauldron was now in Yu Ziqian's hands, and even fourth-rate sects thought the cauldron would be better in the hands of others. Despite both of them being grade-eight divine artifacts, the way they were perceived was completely different.

Had Weisheng Moran from the Dreamless Celestial Nation obtained it, the audience would have nothing to say about it.

Nowadays, people only pined for the Ninedragon Imperius and envied Long Longlong for his fortune and his future. As people watched, a white-robed youth descended from the skies and stepped on the Ninedragon Imperius with his hands behind his back. His robe fluttered as he skated around on his sword, his horn shining bright gold. There was nothing about him that looked less than impressive, despite his young age.

"Wahoo!" The dragons followed behind their master like crazed fangirls. All Tianming could think of was how much he liked to show off. Long Longlong looked at Tianming from high up with his hands behind his back. Though he didn't speak, his gaze conveyed his unfriendliness. He had intentionally picked Tianming as his opponent, after all. These days, he had been asking many disciples about every detail

they knew about Tianming's fight with Zhan Yuance. He had analyzed it as best he could and shaped his strategy around countering it. His conclusion was that he was able to defeat Tianming and take first place after their scores were swapped. He even had his eyes on taking the Lifesteal Silverdragon.

"It's a legacy of my ancestor, yet now an outsider holds it. I must collect all the treasures my ancestors left behind for my sect." That was something he firmly believed. He stretched his hand out for the sword under his feet. Beside him, his dragons were already ready to engage.

"Li Tianming, is there anything you want to say beforehand?" Long Longlong asked in a deep voice. Stating things clearly before a fight was a custom among cultivators, but Tianming never followed convention. He immediately lashed out with the Lifesteal Silverdragon and sent his beasts to attack.

He would take the chance to strike first, instead of being forced into a defensive position by Long Longlong. Most people didn't think he could defeat Long Longlong, who wielded the Ninedragon Imperius, so his first strike came as a shock to many.

"Isn't this a surprise attack?"

He had struck before the formalities had concluded. On Orderia, it could indeed be considered a cowardly surprise attack. The Lifesteal Silverdragon's effects instantly activated, causing it to expand as quick as lightning toward the surging mars dragon.

Though the dragons had huge bodies, they were actually really young. The flaming dragon's temper was further shortened by its fiery temperament. Since it had shown up, it was roaring and provoking them from a closer distance than the rest, so Tianming attacked it first.

"Go!" They were going to take on a single opponent with their full, combined force. Xian Xian's Bloodrain Swords came raining down on the fire dragon, falling like raindrops of blood from which nobody could hide. Between the bloody raindrops were Ying Huo's feathers as it used Skyscorch Featherblast. The Bloodrain Swords gave cover for the feathers, which packed an actual punch. Even so, Ying Huo was embarrassed enough to block its featherless private parts from the skyward eyes after using such a humiliating move.

Then Tianming slapped Meow Meow on the head, causing it to snap out of its daze and attack with Myriad Thundernet. A black ball of thunder immediately burst apart into an expansive net formed from countless lightning bolts and shot toward the surging mars dragon.

It wasn't Long Longlong's first time running into people who would strike before talking, though he definitely hadn't expected that Tianming would pull something like that on a stage like this! "Looks like disciples from second-rate sects really have poor manners."

He and his dragons immediately tried to evade, but they reacted a little slowly. The surging mars dragon was tied down by the barrage of abilities, which prevented it from escaping. Then the Lifesteal Silverdragon's strike finally connected. The dragon growled in pain as its gaze turned fiercer, but it didn't retreat. Instead, it pressed on toward the net of lightning, breathing fire that burnt out most of the sword-shaped petals fired its way.

"Useless tricks... agh!" The surging mars dragon was struck by the feathers hidden by the flower petals, which pierced through his flaming tornado, a defensive ability in the same vein as Meow Meow's

Ninefold Chaos Thunderscape with five different layers. Even then, they weren't able to endure Ying Huo's Infernal Blaze-infused feathers. Ying Huo, being practically the source of all flames, was covered entirely in Infernal Blaze flames. Its feathers also contained Blazebane, which had allowed it to overcome the surging mars dragon's ability. Primordial Chaos Beasts would usually have an advantage over other beasts of similar elements!

The feathers were now embedded in the dragon. They were as sharp as swords and had managed to pierce through the half-meter-thick scales and reach its flesh. The wounds were small, but deep enough, inflicting a considerable amount of pain, as evidenced by the dragon's pained roar.

When Ying Huo withdrew the feathers, they gouged out even more flesh, causing blood to gush out of the holes. The surging mars dragon had paid a huge price thanks to looking down on its foes, and now it was battered and bleeding all over. Tianming had even managed to wrap his chain around it some ten times, causing the voidslice blades of the chain to bury themselves deep in its body. The blades rivaled Ying Huo's feathers in their cutting capability.

Tianming pulled the chain tight, digging the blades deep into the grooves between the scales, creating sparks in the process. The sound of blades rubbing against scales was ear-piercing. Many of the scales were pried off of its body, causing even more blood to flow. No matter how angry the flames on its body flared, the chain simply refused to budge. Tianming had truly gained quite an edge by going for the first strike without warning. His experience had proven rather useful.

Chapter 1250 - Dragon Eye of the Five Phases

After drawing first blood, Tianming had an edge. He wrapped part of the long chain around Lan Huang, though it wouldn't harm it. It could pull on the chain as hard as it liked as it ran around. Given that its four limbs were thicker and more powerful than the surging mars dragon's, it could exert more physical force despite having weaker astralforce than its foe.

"Start running!"

Lan Huang sped across the area, loudly roaring and using Primordial Soundwave. Running was its favorite pastime. Like a raging bull, it tugged on the chain and ran toward the direction Tianming's back was facing. Then it used Azure Oceanic Purgatory, causing the sandy terrain around them to turn into a vast ocean. The yellowish seawater began rising, and soon, Lan Huang was swimming at full speed with all nine of its kui seas spinning. It dove deep as it continued heading toward the outer edges of the arena.

"Time to fly my kite!" Lan Huang cheered with childlike innocent laughter, despite its actions amounting to nothing less than horrifying torture. Tianming had formed a knot with the chain around the surging mars dragon, so it was unable to use its claws to free itself in a short time. Everywhere the chain touched caused it to bleed profusely, and Lan Huang's forceful tugging had completely grounded it, causing it to crash into countless boulders and leaving a trail of blood and flesh in its wake. Though this dragon was at the fifth level of the Constellation stage and shouldn't be weaker than Lan Huang in terms of physical endurance, Lan Huang had the benefit of 'attacking' with the Lifesteal Silverdragon. To Lan Huang, it was a harmless rope, but to the dragon, it was peeling away its skin one tug at a time. Given that, even if the surging mars dragon had twice the force of Lan Huang's, it wouldn't dare to engage in a tug of war.

The dragon had been dragged into the ocean right at the start of battle as everyone watched. This was a nightmare scenario for all fire-type beasts. Once in the water, Lan Huang used a death roll, its huge physique tugging the chain even tighter and causing the blades to pierce even deeper into the dragon's body. The crunching sounds, accompanied by the splashing and sloshing, was hard to stomach. Though the sea was boiling from the dragon's heat, there was nothing it could do but cry out in endless pain. There was no time for it to free itself from the chain at all as the brutish Lan Huang dragged it around. Not to mention, the artifact soul in the chain made it so that it was even trickier to get off than normal chains.

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Tianming had spent quite a while to figure out such a use for this chain. Though it wasn't his ultimate strike, it had already commanded more than enough attention. Long Longlong immediately lost his cool at the sight.

"Launching a surprise attack right after meeting? How shameless."

"Yeah. It was supposed to just be a friendly spar, but now Long Longlong is pissed."

"Looks like this 'internal strife' of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect will be interesting to witness."

"It's clear that Long Longlong doesn't know that his sect is planning to stretch out an olive branch toward Li Tianming."

This fight was the main talk of the entire audience and tensions began rising. Now that Long Longlong had been angered, the fight was bound to turn more exciting. They were surprised to see how the surging mars dragon had been taken out just like that. Now, many skyward eyes turned to film Long Longlong's expression. An explosive draconic aura radiated from him.

"Li Tianming, I'd wanted to defeat you with your dignity intact. Since you didn't hesitate to shamelessly attack me, don't blame me for not showing any mercy." He didn't say much and sent his other four beasts to help out the surging mars dragon. In the meantime, he pointed the Ninedragon Imperius at Tianming, a powerful glow visible in his eyes. That gaze could make his enemies feel the threat of sword ki. No doubt, he had also cultivated some kind of sword art like the Invincible Sword Body.

"Eyes open!" he yelled. His body began resonating as light gathered around him and five-colored astralforce rushed toward his black third eye. Then the iris within suddenly turned from black to gold, brown, blue, red, and grey! They were the colors of the five phases—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. The colors from the eye spread throughout Long Longlong's body, causing his limbs to dragonmorphize. Now the Ninedragon Imperius looked like it was being bitten by a dragon's mouth, rather than being held by a hand.

However, this transformation was only temporary. He was nowhere comparable to the Ninedragon Emperor, who had actual dragons as his arms and legs. Even so, it was proof enough that he was the legend's descendant and it befit the title of genius. He had inherited the talent of his ancestor, as was evidenced by the single horn on his head. It was said that he could scan caeli through that horn of his, allowing him to cultivate much faster than most people and reach his current level at the age of twenty.

He proudly raised the Ninedragon Imperius up high, seemingly unstoppable. The power it showed completely stunned everyone watching. "Li Tianming, the treasures of my ancestor that you stole are wasted with your level of talent. No matter where you are, thieves like you are to be squashed and killed."

"Stop spouting bullshit. First, the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb was left there by the Sky Palace. Everything within it belongs to them. Second, the fact that your ancestor didn't directly pass it down to you means that he probably never intended to do so in the first place. You were able to get the Ninedragon Imperius because of your own abilities, not because it was your birthright. I know you're young, but stop clinging to the childish belief that these treasures belong to you." Though Long Longlong's power seemed incredibly oppressive, Tianming wasn't the least bit fearful.

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Back at the sea, the water abyssal mercury dragon and earth grandiose saturn dragon dove right in. As they weren't able to pull the chain apart, they charged to deal with Lan Huang instead. The gigantic water and earth dragons came bearing down from both flanks, with the water one on the left agilely using its ability, Thousand Waterform Dragons, to turn the waves around it into many copies of itself, which then swarmed Lan Huang. The earth dragon on the right blended into the bottom of the sea, using its ability, Grand Terra Corpus. It caused the ground beneath to fold above and over, covering the entire sea and pushing it down on Lan Huang.