

The Ages 1281

Chapter 1281 - Essence of the Emperor

"The Clouddream Ark...." At that moment, a white warship emerged from the flaming clouds, causing the many cultivators outside the Voidsky Flame Pillar to draw a cold breath. Only a small part of the gigantic ship was visible under the clouds. The exposed part shone with a blinding light. The ark almost looked like a ten-kilometer-long swordfish swimming about in the sky.

"The dreamless celestial emperor came...."

"With the Clouddream Ark here, looks like the Divine Worldeater Cauldron will end up his."

"I heard that Weisheng Moran's actions completely enraged the Dreamless Celestial Nation."

"It's all over for that girl. It's such a shame. She had great potential and could've become a diamond among her peers."

"Little girl? Did you forget? They're both male and female at the same time."

"Ah, damn, I really did forget!" Weisheng Moran had always presented herself as a woman, causing most to forget the nature of her physiology.

The ark hovered like a gigantic sword above the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's men, causing quite a lot of unrest among them.

"As expected of the top faction."

"Perhaps not even the Saintdragon Emperor would be able to take on the dreamless celestial emperor."

"He's already quite old. There isn't anyone in the next generation that can lead the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect."

"The husband of Long Wanying, however, was said to be a genius with the essence of the emperor, though. He used to be a Sky Palace member, but was killed by the sun emperor before he reached the age of five hundred after he offended him...."

"Offended him? Do you really believe that? It's obvious that the sun emperor was cautious of him. Only he would dare to kill someone from the Sky Palace."

"In recent centuries, the sun emperor has started to act more and more overboard, completely disregarding the Myriad Solar Sects. He keeps sowing discord among our own ranks, allowing the celestial orderians to push the envelope more and more."

"What can we do about it, anyway? The wargodeans themselves are suspected to have risen to new heights with secret support from the celestial orderians. Now, they're ranked fourth. With the appearance of the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb, they completely stopped hiding and started mingling with the Blueblood Starocean."

The rest could only sigh at these developments.

"What's worse is that the Dreamless Celestial Nation only cares about the power of their own race. They don't intend to aid the Myriad Solar Sects at all. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect used to play that role. When they were in their prime, the Myriad Solar Sects had the most sway, especially during the age of the Ninedragon Emperor. But after that, they split into two splinter factions and the Veildragon Palace sided with the celestial orderians...."

"That sure is a hard pill to swallow!"

The Sky Palace was a special institution to the Myriad Solar Sects, being some sort of adhesive between them and the celestial orderians. It wasn't really a faction in its own right; in fact, if the Myriad Solar Sects had been a united faction, there would be no need for the Sky Palace to exist.

"There's no point counting on the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. They'll fall even further after those from this generation retire. Didn't you notice how even second-rate factions like ours can't stomach how they claimed so many treasures for themselves? That's a sign of how far they've fallen!"

At the end of the day, might was right. Once power was lost, the loss of reputation would follow, preceding an imminent collapse. The celestial orderians were practically untouched due to how powerful they were.

"Looks like they're coming out." Everyone took a deep breath and looked at the Voidsky Flame Pillar.

"Do you think either of them can join the Sky Palace?"

"It usually takes a century or more for there to be a new member of the Sky Palace. Of those two, Li Tianming seems capable enough, but Yu Ziqian's just a minion. It doesn't look like both of them joining is possible. In fact, I'd say there's a six-in-ten chance that neither of them get accepted, and a three-in-ten chance that Li Tianming alone gets accepted."

"So the final ten percent is the combined probability of them both joining, or Yu Ziqian alone joining?"

"That's right. Aren't we all hoping that Yu Ziqian doesn't join so the Divine Worldeater Cauldron is free game?"

It was highly likely that a grand battle would break out. Heart rates began soaring as the moment of truth approached.

"There's someone there!" Countless eyes immediately turned toward the pillar.

"That's them!"

Everyone looked at their foreheads. The presence, or lack, of stigmas would say it all. At the very front of the pillar were the elites from the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, ready to strike at any time. Even their lifebound beasts were charging up their abilities within their lifebound spaces.

Then the two youths hurriedly left the pillar. One had black and gold eyes, a black arm, and white hair, while the other looked much like a scholar with how he held his fan daintily. Immediately, they felt the billions of gazes. Even a single senior who had cultivated for more than five centuries on the sun would pressure Tianming, let alone the gazes of so many. Any junior under the age of thirty would no doubt be terrified by the spectacle.

"Dammit, this pressure...." Yu Ziqian stumbled and almost fell to the ground. It felt like he was staring down the countless mouths of large beasts. Fortunately, they weren't actively trying to apply pressure and were just looking for an answer to their burning question. The stigmas were finally seen. Countless gasps were heard, followed by exclamations like, "Both of them have stigmas from the Sky Palace!"

The whole place exploded with sound. It was almost scandalous.

"This has never happened before in the history of Orderia! There's never been two new Sky Palace members after a Voidsky Skirmish!"

It was out of this world, far from common sense.

"They both joined the Sky Palace!"

Transmission stones were sent out in an endless stream to spread the news all across Orderia. The impossible had just transpired as these two youths' status rocketed to new heights practically overnight. They had made history. The people who had been on the edge of breaking into a fight were completely stunned. They felt more envy for the youths than shock at how things had turned out.

"Does that mean that Li Tianming and Yu Ziqian's treasures, the legacy of the Ninedragon Emperor and the Divine Worldeater Cauldron respectively, still belong to the Sky Palace?"

"So they took it out only to take it back for themselves? Are they toying with us?"

"Coupled with the Ninedragon Imperius, it's like the Sky Palace was splitting up the spoils from the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb with the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and only allowing the wargodeans, Voidword Shrine, and the Dreamless Celestial Nation a taste of those treasures." Many people thought it over and found that it made sense.

"So, this is what they had planned all along." The Sky Palace got the lion's share, while the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect got the main legacy of their ancestral leader. The other three most powerful factions got a divine corpse puppet, universal manna, and a divine pill respectively. Not the best of the treasures, but still nothing to scoff at.

"It's a perfect happy ending! All is well!"

"Guess we were being messed around with by the Sky Palace and the top factions from the beginning."

"I was wondering why Weisheng Moran would give the cauldron to Yu Ziqian. It appears that the Sky Palace planned for that to happen all along."

"Isn't that kind of pointless?"

Whether that was the truth or not, it would definitely be what most accepted to be the truth. Tianming knew better than anyone that things hadn't transpired as most believed. Though the Myriad Solar Sects were all curious of how the Sky Palace worked, few truly understood the far more complex truth that had played out behind the scenes.

Still, there was something that was without a doubt: Tianming and the other three wouldn't have to worry about being robbed of their treasures any longer. The Dragonblood Desecration immediately returned to Xiaoxiao.

"The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect?" Tianming turned to look at Lingfeng.

Lingfeng nodded and said, "They've been protecting us from the beginning."

"I see." Tianming had a rough idea of what'd happened.

Chapter 1282 - Azurecloud Divine Tree

Tianming shot a glance at Long Longlong; the youth that had been so dissatisfied with how things turned out was completely stupefied at the sight of the Sky Palace stigma on his forehead. His will was already crumbling. His mother had just consoled him that he was far superior than Tianming in terms of talent and would be able to surpass him one day, but the Sky Palace had changed everything.

"Master," Tianming and Yu Ziqian greeted Jiang Qingliu. Tianming noted the gentle and beautiful woman that stood beside him. Though she stood out from the others with her beauty, she didn't act cold at all. Her smile actually seemed particularly pleasant, especially with that dimple. The gaze with which she looked at him was also rather mystical, as if she was looking at a treasure she deeply cherished.

"Ziqian, Tianming, congratulations on joining the Sky Palace! The Azuresoul Palace is proud of you! You've also made your master unbelievably proud." Jiang Qingliu felt like he was dreaming. This was the best outcome that could have happened, and he was completely relieved.

The four Dragon Imperials that were present looked at one another. It was a decent outcome, and they definitely benefited greatly from it. Not to mention, with two Sky Palace members in their ranks, they would be able to securely hold the Ninedragon Imperius.

"According to the rules, the two of you can serve your sects before you reach five hundred years old. However, I'm afraid the Azuresoul Palace can no longer accommodate your cultivation needs. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect can give you far better cultivation resources, so before you came out, I already discussed it with the Whitedragon Empress. If you agree, you can be brought to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect for a joint nurturing program between our two sects. At the same time, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect will also support the Azuresoul Palace. What do you think about this arrangement?" Jiang Qingliu said, going to the point.

Tianming knew that Jiang Qingliu had only survived up to now thanks to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect.

"What do you think?" Yu Ziqian asked.

"If we didn't manage to join the Sky Palace, we would've needed to carefully deliberate this. But now we can just go wherever the resources are more plentiful," Tianming said.

"Makes sense!"

Additionally, the Azuresoul Palace would fare much better with outside help. That would be Yu Ziqian's contribution to his sect.

As they were discussing it, Jiang Qingliu came to them. "Ziqian, honestly, I suggest you go with them. As for Tianming, it's your own decision to make."

Tianming was a decisive person. He looked at the Whitedragon Empress. Feng had already explained what happened before they left the pillar to him.

"Come with us. I promise you we'll make sure you're well taken care of. If there's anything you need, you can come to me," Long Wanying said.

"Thank you for your kind offer, Whitedragon Empress. We'll go along with the plans," Tianming said. The fact that she had fought to defend him even before it was known that he'd joined the Sky Palace made a good impression on him. He wouldn't let her down, knowing that.

"How decisive!" She shot him a thumbs-up. "That's great," she said, relieved. Everything had gone according to plan.

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"Let's disperse!"

"There's no point in staying here."

"Jiang Qingliu had been planning this with Long Wanying, and she immediately started working on their case. It's only natural that Li Tianming and Yu Ziqian would join the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect."

"She made the right bet."

"The only faction stronger than the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is the Dreamless Celestial Nation, but since they have no affiliation with them, there's no way they'll go over to them."

"Looks like our sects aren't even comparable to the Azuresoul Palace. Let's forget this."

"There'll be no fight now. Let's leave!"

Thanks to the two Sky Palaces stigmas, the brewing storm dissipated and all was well. The resolution was far calmer than anyone could have imagined. The countless elites there left disinterestedly after seeing the outcome.

"Come. Let's return to the sect."

"This Voidsky Skirmish seemed rather pointless. It's like it was only for the Sky Palace and top five factions."

Though most people had even more complaints, they didn't dare voice them.

"The wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean brought so many people in preparation to fight. They must be stupefied by the outcome."

People turned to look at the two factions and saw that they were oozing with animosity. The wargodeans were fierce fighters to begin with, and the cultivators of the Blueblood Starocean held much pride thanks to being totem users. Their arrogance made them rather hard to approach. Though they had assembled an army, it was all for naught. Things couldn't get more awkward than this. They stayed there even as everyone else began leaving. It took until a deep, low voice barked an order for the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean to give up and disperse, further setting the current status quo in stone.

"Disperse!"

The folks of the Supracloud Sanctuary were just as shocked. This result meant the Azuresoul Palace would completely dominate them and they wouldn't be able to resist at all. Their fate was to be trampled.

"Jiang Qingliu... Gujian Qingshuang...." They all hatefully ground their teeth when they looked at the two Sky Palace disciples.

"Brother Yun," someone called out from behind.

Yun Tianque turned back and saw the Tumulus Pill God and Lan Sha waving at him. Though most of the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean members had left, these two top figures and some elites remained behind.

"Brother Lan! Pill God!" Yun Tianque respectfully hurried toward them.

"Based on the latest reports, that thing in the Azurecloud Continent is about finished growing, right? Once it matures, it'll take another year, more or less. You'd better go back to prepare," said the Tumulus Pill God with a sly, chilling smile.

"Yes, it'll mature any time now!" Yun Tianque said.

"If it's maintained for more than a year, I wonder how many precious 'fruits' we'll be able to harvest for refining pills.... I really envy you. The divine tree on your continent is truly a miracle. The Supracloud Sanctuary must only be able to dominate the continent thanks to your ancestors' foresight. And given the agreement between the Myriad Solar Sects and the Sky Palace, I'm sure it's hard for others to take it as well," Lan Sha said.

"Gentlemen, please listen to what I have to say," Yun Tianque said with a solemn look. "There's no way my sect can enjoy the benefits of so many resources. The divine tree is simply so miraculous that we have much left over to offer others. Hence, I've decided to extend my invitation to the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean to help with the harvest. I wonder if you'll agree to help me with this little endeavor?"

"Since Brother Yun needs help, then Blueblood Starocean won't hesitate to offer it. Since we came by your invitation, we wouldn't be violating the existing agreement with the Sky Palace," Lan Sha said.

"What about the wargodeans?" Yun Tianque turned to the Tumulus Pill God.

"Since a friend needs help, we wargodeans won't hesitate to offer it."

"Thank you, gentlemen!"

Chapter 1283 - Huge Changes

It was really interesting how this all was framed as Yun Tianque asking them to help out with their harvest.

"However, the divine tree is so large that at least three-fifths of its branches are located within the territory of the Azuresoul Palace. What do you think about that?" Yun Tianque asked.

"Since both of your sects inhabit the continent, it's first come first serve, right? There's nothing wrong in taking what's in your own home," Lan Sha said.

"Of course there's nothing wrong about that! However, they'll definitely be asking the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect to help with the harvest." Yun Tianque turned to look at Long Wanying talking with Tianming. Everyone knew that he would be considered a disciple of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect for the next five centuries to come. Long Wanying had had a rather good relationship with Jiang Qingliu to begin with, and it was said she had already sent people to convince Gujian Qingshuang. It would be too late for other people to finally see the merits of Tianming and ask to associate with him.

"Well, it now depends on whether the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect can possibly deter us then." A cold glint flashed across Lan Sha's long eyes. As those two had joined the Sky Palace, there wouldn't be an all-out war here. However, that didn't stop a conflict from brewing that centered around the divine tree. It wasn't something that Sky Palace disciples could interfere with. After all, their main mission was to cultivate over the next five centuries and they didn't have any authority to boss the factions around. The most was that other factions wouldn't be able to touch them.

"Yun Tianque, whether the Supracloud Sanctuary will continue to dominate the Azuresoul Palace and the efforts of your predecessors will all go to ruin will depend on this conflict around the divine tree," the Tumulus Pill God said.

"This junior understands," Yun Tianque said.

"Before the new sect ranking is announced, you have to use this opportunity to gain some merits."

"Yes!" He was a smart man and knew who could help him out.

"Naturally, this struggle can't involve those two Sky Palace disciples, lest we get in trouble for that," the Tumulus Pill God continued.

"They should be going to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect to cultivate. Their territory is far from the Azurecloud Continent, so we probably won't need to worry about them."

"That makes sense...."

The Tumulus Pill God squinted at the thought of the two Sky Palace disciples. Even their warlord and Emperor Lan had been angered to the point of leaving from these developments, feeling that the Sky Palace was toying with them.

The Tumulus Pill God laughed and said, "Looks like the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect has won those two over. However, the other sects are unhappy with how things turned out. Do they think they can appease us with a single yinyang skyscorch pill? They can't blame anyone for wanting to hammer them back down for standing out so much!"

Lan Sha looked up at the sky and smiled so widely that his lips practically reached his ears. His shark-like mouth was large indeed. "At least, the dreamless celestial emperor is unhappy with this, and he's an entire league above us."

"Let's go and see some local sights at the Azurecloud Continent," the Tumulus Pill God said.

"Prepare for our arrival," Lan Sha said, winking at Yun Tianque.

"Of course! There will be good food, good wine, and good women to accompany good views and sights!"

"I've been wanting a taste of your famous skycloud brew," the Tumulus Pill God said.

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As Tianming was talking to Long Wanying, he heard a sharp windy sound. "Do you hear something weird?" Tianming asked Xiaoxiao.

"Nope." She shook her head. The others around them seemed completely normal. Only Tianming felt like his ear was being torn apart.

Suddenly, his left eye began hurting. It was that small green fish again. The little fish hid inside his eyeball as if it feared something. Tianming looked up and saw the Clouddream Ark above him, glowing threateningly.

"Give it back," said the voice that only he could hear, "otherwise, you will be constantly fraught with trouble."

Whose voice was that? Since the dreamless celestial emperor was there, Tianming decided to make a bet. He wanted to return the little fish to him, but didn't have any way to do so. It hid deep inside his eyeball and he couldn't get it out. "Do you have another way to get it out apart from digging out my eyeball?" Tianming said to nobody in particular, much to the others' surprise.

"Who are you talking to?" Long Wanying asked.

However, the sound in the wind didn't respond. There was no other way, then. "Then don't mess around! I know your secret! Threaten me and I'll reveal it." Though the ship was far away, Tianming knew the person was listening.

"I'll look for another way and come back to you. Before then, make sure you don't mess around," said the voice in the wind. Like before, nobody else heard it. The speaker must have been using some intricate technique.

"The Dreamless Celestial Nation?" Long Wanying turned to look at the ark. "Don't be afraid of them. Not even they would dare touch a disciple of the Sky Palace."

"Thank you, Aunt Ying," Tianming said with a polite nod. After they had talked a bit more, he knew how much she'd argued his case. She was no doubt his benefactor and he would be sure to cherish her, especially since he would need more of her help back at the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. For instance, Yin Chen needed large amounts of divine ores to consume. That was among the key reasons Tianming had to have the support of a sect.

With the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect having control over two continents, they had quite a lot of resources. Lingfeng needed large amounts of divine pills, while Xiaoxiao needed lots of caeli, all of which could be provided by Long Wanying.

Those from the sect, including the Greendragon and Violetdragon Imperials, were also quite polite toward Tianming and the rest. They seemed to have a similar vibe as the Archaic House of Xuanyuan back on the Flameyellow Continent. It was the soul of their clan, and it allowed Tianming to accept them

with little difficulty. Such a thing wasn't something that could be faked. While even the best clans would have bad apples within, it wouldn't spoil their good character in the grand scheme of things.

"Alright, let's go to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and start the next part of our journey!" Tianming looked at the other three, firm in his choice.

"Prepare to head back," the Saintdragon Emperor said.

"Yes!"

Everyone was leaving when all of a sudden, something unpredictable happened. A large number of transmission stones flew toward the four Dragon Imperials, as well as some other sect members. Something huge must have happened for there to be so many reports. Tianming also spotted many other sects receiving similar stones, though the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was among the first to do so, meaning that this incident had something to do with them.

"What happened?" Everyone turned to the four.

Long Wanying opened the paper note and her expression immediately changed to one of panic. Backing off a few steps, she shook her head. "Impossible...." Her fingers were shaking. Few people had seen the Whitedragon Empress actually lose her cool before.

"What about you three?"

They turned to the other three Dragon Imperials, only to see the same reaction. Some even had bloodshot eyes.

"Impossible!"

"The celestial orderians.... The sun emperor!"

Reactions from the other sect members were just as shocking and infuriating.

"What in the world happened?"

More and more people received transmission stones. The ones that were about to leave immediately stopped and turned to those from the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. Many of them knew that they had benefited the most from all this and couldn't help but be glad at their predicament.

"They deserve it. They got the most treasures, after all, and sent out most of their elites—even four of the Dragon Imperials, leaving their home base unguarded." They gleefully waited for the rest of the show to play out.

"Long Wanying, stay here and deal with the rest!" the Saintdragon Emperor ordered, then charged into the sky.

"Understood!"

"As for the others, follow me back to the sect. Prepare to fight!"

"Yes!" Everyone disappeared into the clouds at blinding speed.

"What happened, Long Wanying?" Jiang Qingliu asked.

Stones still in her hand, she said, "The sun emperor mobilized the Divine Sun Palace to attack our sect in our absence. He brought the ten million members of the Veildragon Palace and five million celestial orderians with them! Using the Divine Sun Palace, he's managed to shatter the dragon formation core. The Myriaddragon Mountains are now defenseless, and the two sides are engaged in conflict. With the sun emperor striking with his palace, we're more or less doomed."

The celestial orderians were stronger than all the Myriad Solar Sects combined. Even with the four Dragon Imperials returning, they might not necessarily be able to resist the sun emperor and his palace. They had been aiming to crush the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect in one fell swoop.

Then Long Wanying received another transmission stone. Reading it, her tears began flowing. "Our sect has been completely conquered...."

"Impossible!" Jiang Qingliu couldn't believe it. "Didn't the Myriad Solar Sects have a ceasefire agreement with the celestial orderians? The Sky Palace and the representatives from all the sects personally signed it! How could the sun emperor attack and even mobilize his palace? Has he gone insane?"

"Sky Palace!" Long Wanying took a deep breath and said, "We'll go there now. Tianming, lead the way."

This was far beyond what Tianming had imagined would happen. "Will the Myriad Solar Sects stand united?" he asked.

Long Wanying looked around, seeing some avoiding her gaze and others gleefully looking at her. "It doesn't seem so. We've been at peace and fighting among ourselves for far too long. People have forgotten the days of being oppressed by the celestial orderians."

"I see...." They hadn't even gone to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect yet, and now it was no more.

"Then where in the world will we go?" Ying Huo asked.

Chapter 1284 - The Faceless People

Tianming wasn't very clear about the situation or the factional undercurrents in Orderia.

"Didn't you say that the Sky Palace and Myriad Solar Sects are united against the celestial orderians? Aren't the two sides supposed to have divided the world in two and refrained from interfering with each other?" How could the sun emperor attack the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect? "Isn't this tantamount to going to war with the Myriad Solar Sects?"

He was a little confused. Even if the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect had benefited from this Voidsky Skirmish and invoked the envy of others, an attack by the celestial orderians would be crossing the line. Could the other sects just sit back and watch it happen?

The key was the Sky Palace, the representative of the Myriad Solar Sects. They were the ones who dealt with the celestial orderians. Even if many sects had forgotten the threat of the celestial orderians after years of peace and infighting, the Sky Palace still had its use. Tianming had just left them, but could easily return with the stigma.

"Let's go."

After the end of the Voidsky Skirmish, the Voidsky Flame Pillar was no longer closed to Jiang Qingliu and Long Wanying. Led by the Sky Palace disciples, they returned to the Skyward Stele. However, apart from Tianming and Yu Ziqian, no one else could enter it, much less set foot inside the wooden house.

"Ziqian and I will ask them," said Tianming.

"Do you remember what I said?" Long Wanying asked eagerly.

"I do. Don't worry."

Tianming was a reliable man. After leaving a silver cockroach on Lingfeng's shoulder, he headed toward the Sky Palace.

"They were in that great hall before."

Yin Chen still had quite a few bodies inside. They turned their attention to the white hall. Tianming and Yu Ziqian quickly returned to the main hall. In front of them was the stairs, but there was no one in the hall.

"Seniors, I have something important to ask you!"

Tianming wasn't on good terms with the white-robed elders, so Yu Ziqian did the talking. They stared at the top of the stairs, but failed to get a response. In fact, Tianming had known there was no one here even before they'd entered the wooden house.

"The sun emperor has led the celestial orderians in attacking the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and violated the rules. They're going to war with the Sky Palace and Myriad Solar Sects! Please preside over the situation and rescue the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect from the quagmire," Yu Ziqian said loudly, his voice echoing in the empty hall. But there was still no response.

"The Sky Palace receives the respect and reverence of the Myriad Solar Sects and enjoys a lofty status. Now that something came along, you're not going to hide and play ostrich, are you?"

Tianming despised these unpredictable and cunning people. When they assumed their position, they took over the responsibilities that came along with it. The Myriad Solar Sects gave the Sky Palace its high status, which allowed them to hold power over the distribution of the sects' cultivation resources.

"Aren't you going to show up? Why are you hiding?"

This matter was closely related to Tianming. After the Voidsky Skirmish, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect had become the bedrock of his cultivation. This was his hard-won opportunity to completely integrate into Orderia. In the future, he could rely on the sect and a united Myriad Solar Sects for an opportunity to fight the celestial orderians and truly establish himself on the sun.

However, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was now in turmoil, which interrupted his brilliant future prospects. If it weren't for his identity as a Sky Palace disciple, he would be left in dire straits, unable to even hold on to the Lifesteal Silverdragon. Having offended the person behind Weisheng Moran, a miserable end awaited him. He would still be affected even if he was now a disciple of the Sky Palace. If the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was destroyed, he would be out in the cold.

Despite the sarcasm in his words, there was still no response in the empty hall. His heart pounded with tension.

"We're coming up!"

Raising his head, Tianming glanced at the steps in front of him. Even if the seven white-robed people were hostile toward him, Tianming wasn't afraid of them in the presence of the wooden house. The moment his feet landed on the steps, the ground beneath him trembled.

"Stop!" came the order.

Tianming looked up and saw a white-robed man appear at the top of the stairs.

"Fall back!"

A burst of power swept over Tianming, sending him flying backward and slamming into Yu Ziqian.

"Is there a secret to these stairs?"

His blood roiling, Tianming narrowed his eyes. He rose to his feet and glanced over. There seemed to be only six people at the top of the stairs. What was even more bizarre was their pale faces. The powder and blush had completely fallen off. These people were devoid of eyes, ears, and a nose, their faces as smooth as a mirror.

The only difference between them were their hairstyles and the shape of their bodies. Judging from the latter, the only one missing was the white-robed woman who had suppressed Yu Ziqian. She was the youngest and most well-maintained, while the remaining six were extremely old. Tianming felt his hair stand on end as he stared at the faceless people that didn't even have eyes.

With how noble the Sky Palace was, Tianming had imagined their members were all peerless geniuses despite being few in numbers, with unique personalities and extraordinary demeanors. At the very least, there should be someone as interesting as Ouyang Jianwang. However, the last time they had entered the wooden house, they were greeted with a bunch of wooden, powder-faced people. And this time they didn't even have a face. It was unspeakably creepy. Without the white fog surrounding them and lending an air of sanctity, it felt as if he was standing in a cemetery. Their strange togetherness and order was terrifying.

Taking a deep breath, Yu Ziqian quickly added, "Seniors, did you hear what I said earlier? The sun emperor has led the celestial orderians in attacking the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. We're part of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, so on behalf of the elders, we would like to ask the Sky Palace to come forward and restrain the sun emperor. Otherwise, we'll unite with the other sects and fight the celestial orderians!"

It was the Sky Palace's responsibility to unite the Myriad Solar Sects.

"We're already dealing with this matter. There is no need to be impatient. We'll give you an answer," the six faceless people replied in unison.

So the missing person was dealing with this matter? Just as Tianming was about to speak, the faceless people interrupted, "After entering the Sky Palace, you must focus solely on the Sky Palace and prepare to devote yourselves to the Sky Palace, even if you are less than five hundred years of age. As juniors,

your only task is to cultivate! We will communicate with the Myriad Solar Sects with regard to the overall situation. This is no place for rude behavior. Get out."

With the flick of a finger, Tianming and Yu Ziqian were sent rolling out of the hall. In the commotion, the silver cockroaches in the hall were thrown out as well. The ones that remained were hidden in the corners, motionless and invisible. Tianming and Yu Ziqian fell out of the Stele and onto the ground.

"How'd it go?" Long Wanying asked anxiously as she helped them up.

Chapter 1285 - Number Seven

Long Wanying was originally a dignified and gentle woman, but now that the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was facing disaster, there was a deep melancholy in her eyes. Her life was full of misfortunes, with fate dealing her a blow time and again, slicing apart her deep love... the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was the last of her deep loves that remained.

Tianming quickly reiterated the Sky Palace's answer. He didn't express his doubts, but repeated their conversation word for word.

"White-robed woman? Has Granny Yuan Long gone to look for the sun emperor?" Long Wanying breathed a sigh of relief.

"Granny Yuan Long?" Tianming realized she was referring to the white-robed woman who had suppressed him.

"Yes, didn't she take care of you?" Long Wanying asked.

"Why would she?"

"She's from our sect," Long Wanying replied.

"Oh, I didn't know that." She didn't take care of him, but on the contrary, had seemed to really hate him.

"She should be able to turn the tide. Let's go."

"Aunt Ying, where are we going?" Tianming asked.

"We're going to the Azuresoul Palace. I just received a transmission stone from the Saintdragon Emperor. I'm supposed to take the four of you to the Azuresoul Palace, where you'll cultivate while the turmoil in the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect unfolds. I won't return to the sect for the time being. I'll stay with you," said Long Wanying.

Upon contemplating, Tianming agreed that this was their only way out at the moment.

"I..." Jiang Qingliu hesitated.

"What? Are you going to shirk your responsibility? Aren't these four your disciples?" Long Wanying sternly asked.

"No, but their identities are special and I can't decide for the Azuresoul Palace. On top of that, you're going as well..." Jiang Qingliu lowered his head.

As the Whitedragon Empress, Long Wanying's identity was sensitive at the moment. Jiang Qingliu couldn't shoulder the responsibility if the Azuresoul Palace were to suffer a calamity because of her. Since Long Wanying would stay at the Azuresoul Palace with the four of them, it was clear the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect wasn't going to give up on them. The other dragon imperials had entrusted her with the task.

Although Tianming and Yu Ziqian were disciples of the Sky Palace, they were still just juniors, after all. And Lingfeng and Xiaoxiao didn't have an identity that protected them. Perhaps treasures like the Dragonblood Desecration would be stolen from them.

"Are you joking? The return of the two Sky Palace disciples would be welcomed by any sect. No matter how much of a coward Gujian Qingshuang is, he wouldn't want to become the laughingstock of the entire world." Long Wanying fumed.

"You're right. But if you're in trouble, the Azuresoul Palace doesn't have a solid backing. What a headache! Never mind. They're my disciples so I'll fight for them! As for you...." Jiang Qingliu pursed his lips.

"Master, what're you doing? Why are you so scared? They wouldn't dare say a thing if I take Aunt Ying back to the Azuresoul Palace. How can you be so wishy washy in front of a beauty? You're embarrassing me," Yu Ziqian chided.

"Fuck!" Jiang Qingliu glared at him with flushed cheeks. Waving his hand, he retorted, "Who says I'm scared! Follow me, I'll protect you!" Then, turning to Long Wanying, he asked, "You have your dragonspring with you, don't you?"

"Of course," Long Wanying replied.

"Alright, don't lose it."

"We'll see if the Azuresoul Palace has the spirit of loyalty. After all, the Azuresoul Palace benefits if I keep my dragonspring and the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect isn't destroyed," she said.

"Don't worry. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect has existed for millions of years. It won't be destroyed so easily," Jiang Qingliu comforted.

"Of course." There was hope in Long Wanying's eyes.

"Let's go."

The Azuresoul Palace was protected by the Azuresky Myriadsword Formation. The dragon imperials meant for Long Wanying to hide and guard her dragonspring. There were a total of seven dragonsprings, each one a key to defending the sect. At the same time, Long Wanying could also protect Tianming and the rest, making sure they could continue growing. Once the world was in chaos, there were bound to be desperate criminals. They were at risk, even with the identity of Sky Palace disciples. Owing to the drastic change, their trip to the Azuresoul Palace might not be smooth. Jiang Qingliu was worried that the people headed by Gujian Qingshuang wanted to completely rid themselves of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and sever any ties to them to avoid disaster.

"Let's get going."

Jiang Qingliu's heart, which had been silent for hundreds of years, began burning with passion once more.

...

In the fiery cloud that was hundreds of thousands of meters thick, flames seethed, forming an endless sea of fire that surged above the sun. Like dragons, ten-thousand-meter-high solar storms wandered between the burning clouds. The seas of fire formed a blazing rain that scattered over the world, leaving enormous holes in the ground. In the boundless sea of fire, a deafening roar sounded, blowing apart wave after wave of flames. A burning behemoth walked through the sea of fire and a golden flame suppressed the fiery clouds. The behemoth resembled a human head with fluttering gold hair. In its eye sockets were two bright stars, nova sources that had been compressed.

With every blink of its eyes, thunderous booms reverberated. Every person in Orderia recognized it; it was the sun emperor's mobile war machine—the Divine Sun Palace. When it flew over the celestial orderian's territory, the clansmen below prostrated themselves. It hadn't appeared in the southern sky for many years; the south was the Myriad Solar Sects' territory. Everywhere the Divine Sun Palace went, all beings trembled. Not even dozens of Clouddream Arks could rival the lethality of a divine astralship.

At that moment, a white light entered the open mouth of the Divine Sun Palace. In the central hall surrounded by golden flames, the light transformed into a white-robed woman. The flames couldn't reach her at all. She looked up at the giant man sitting on the throne carved with nine dragons. He slumped in his seat with his legs crossed, a golden leaf between his lips and his chin resting on one hand. His playful gaze landed on the white-robed woman.

"Number Seven, it's been a long time since we last met. I trust you have been well." The man's voice seemed to burn. When he spoke, it was as if the entire sun resonated with him.

"My name is Yuan Long," the white-robed woman indifferently said.

"No, you're number seven, and you are called Number Seven." The man smiled.

"How meaningless. Give the Sky Palace and Myriad Solar Sects an explanation," she demanded.

"An explanation? What explanation? I have yet to ask you for an explanation regarding the Imperial Ninedragon Tomb," the man replied.

"The Imperial Ninedragon Tomb? I told you, it was the will of the wooden house. It has nothing to do with us! We certainly wouldn't want to release the contents of the tomb," she raged.

"What about the wooden house or the Sky Palace? When we signed the agreement, there was only the Sky Palace. I don't know what the wooden house is. As far as I know, the Sky Palace has given treasures like the Divine Worldeater Cauldron and Ninedragon Imperius to the Myriad Solar Sects via the Voidless Skirmish, cultivating and strengthening their descendants. You're the ones that openly broke our agreement. You're planning to rebel!" The man's loud voice suppressed the white-robed woman.

"Rebel?" Amidst the excitement, the powder on the woman's face sprinkled on the ground. "You know about the wooden house, yet you feign ignorance! You're so sure we won't fight back. You've breached the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and the other Myriad Solar Sects cannot sit idly by. The Sky Palace will not allow such unscrupulous behavior!"

"Number Seven, you must be joking!" The man smiled. Stretching out his finger and rapping on the dragon head, he said solemnly, "Stand still and don't you tremble. Listen clearly to my words. I have never breached the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. I merely asked them to open their gates to allow their companions to return. The Veildragon Palace has been separated from the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect for too long. They're brothers and sisters. Blood is thicker than water, after all. Having wandered outside for all these years, the Veildragon Palace longs to return to their home. All I did today was fulfill their wishes."

"Fulfill the Veildragon Palace? So the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is ruined? You're trying to control the sect through the Veildragon Palace," the white-robed woman sneered.

"No, no. Don't say that. Why gauge the heart of a gentleman against your own mean measure? Besides, who says the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is ruined? After learning of the Veildragon Palace's intention to return, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect lined the streets in welcome. At this moment, both sides are happily getting along at Myriadragon Mountains. They've let go of their previous suspicions and united as one. Together with the Veildragon Palace's three dragon imperials, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's seven dragon imperials have now become ten. The experts and geniuses from both sides have come together, thus, creating a prosperous sect. I released the Veildragon Palace and helped them realize their dreams of returning home. How can such a good deed be misconstrued as an outrage? Do you know how much courage it took for me to give up the Veildragon Palace?" the man said sadly, clutching his chest as if a piece of flesh had actually been sliced off.

"Sun Emperor, your schemes are cursory, yet here you are, whitewashing your actions with shameless words. You can convince me, but you can't convince the Myriad Solar Sects," said the white-robed woman.

"Tricks? I'm helping them out of the goodness of my heart. My merits are boundless. What tricks could there be? Number Seven, don't you dare accuse me or you'll incur my wrath. After all, there aren't many willing to do good in this world." He grinned.

"Are you still going to argue? You must've already obtained three dragonsprings. With the other three from the Veildragon Palace, you actually hold six of them now. Thus, the Myriadragon Mountains has fallen under the Veildragon Palace's command. You control the Veildragon Palace and it controls the new Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. You've only left the people alive to force them to serve you!"

When the sun emperor had attacked the sect, only three dragon imperials remained and each of them had a dragonspring. At the moment, he possessed six dragonsprings against four. Naturally, he had the upper hand.

Chapter 1286 - Dominion

"What's a dragonspring? I don't know at all." The man smiled.

"Very well." The white-robed woman grit her teeth. The most frightening thing was a shameless man who stood above all others, breaking all the rules.

"Control the dragonsprings and you'll control most of Myriadragon Mountains' formation. It's become part of your territory. Even if the Saintdragon Emperor and the others return, you have countless

hostages in your hands. They'll choose to surrender and recognize the unification of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect."

For any top sect, the formations built by their ancestors were their foundation. At this moment, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's foundation was in someone else's hands; their lifeline was at the sun emperor's disposal. Even if most of them had survived the attack, now that the sect was occupied and at least three dragon imperials had been captured, it was equivalent to constantly having a knife to their necks. Their lives were completely under the control of others. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect still existed, but it was no longer the same. It no longer recognized the will of the dragon imperials, but the will of the sun emperor.

The sun emperor used the Imperial Ninedragon Tomb and rebellion as an excuse. And because the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect had obtained too many treasures, provoking the envy of the other sects, and most of the sect's experts were away, the sun emperor had led the Veildragon Palace in an attack and instantly controlled three dragonsprings. It was a fierce, decisive, and provocative battle.

"Number Seven, the unification of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's bloodline is a joyous occasion. You mustn't spread rumors, stir up public resentment, and provoke conflict between the Myriad Solar Sects and the celestial orderians. Do you understand? There's no benefit in doing that." The gold-haired man rose to his feet, his torch-like aura blazing against the white-robed woman. She felt as if her body was on fire.

"Then you'll have to see if the Myriad Solar Sects will allow you to make the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect your puppet!" The white-robed woman tightly clenched her fists, staring at him with her hollow eyes.

The sun emperor walked toward her step by step, his laughter reverberating in the fiery hall. "Alright, let's make a bet. I bet the other sects will turn a blind eye. After all, what has all of this got to do with them? Who'll take the lead in opposing me? The dreamless celestial emperor? He's busy raising little devils. Will the Voidword Shrine resist? They just hope to devote their lives working for the Skywolf Star. Do you think the wargodeans will be the first ones to oppose me? Think about it carefully.... Haven't the times changed? Hasn't the armistice turned these wolves into tigers or monkeys, each occupying their mountain? It doesn't matter. It's none of their business. They didn't acquire treasures from the Imperial Ninedragon Tomb. In fact, they're all eager for something to happen to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect."

The gold-haired man stood in front of the white-robed woman, looking down at her. His fiery gaze burned her body, turning the powder on her face into golden dust. Stretching out his huge palm, he held the woman's head, just like an ordinary person holding an apple. Then, bending slightly, he whispered into her ear, "Number Seven, have you been overcome by your demons during all these years I spent recuperating? One thing has never changed. I am the emperor, the only ruler of the sun. If it pleases me, the so-called Myriad Solar Sects will be allowed to live, but if I want them dead, they will all perish. It isn't your place to ask questions. Go back to the Sky Palace and be Number Seven. I'm in a good mood today, so don't ruin my fun, got it? Otherwise, I might decide to head to your old lair and feed them to the fish."

The woman wanted to remove his hand, but trembled and put her arms down instead, her eyes widening like saucers.

"You know. You know everything...." She appeared defeated.

"Yes, and that's why I can act without the slightest scruple. Do you understand now?" He laughed.

"I understand."

The hall fell into deathly silence.

"You should know what to do."

Taking a deep breath, the white-robed woman nodded.

"The next time you want to speak to me, send Number One instead. You aren't experienced enough."

"Yes." She turned to leave.

"By the way—" The sun emperor sat on the throne once more.

"Your Majesty?"

"The next myriad sect ranking is about to be announced, right? The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect now has ten dragon imperials and an army of fifty million. They've overtaken the Dreamless Celestial Nation, haven't they? Let's bump them up to first place. How can you allow a foreign race to be at the top of the ranking? What were you all thinking? Where's your dignity? Xuanyuan Shenlong—that's what the Myriad Solar Sects are aiming for. Do you understand?"

"Then the first, fourth, and tenth place will all be yours," she said hoarsely.

"What? You're confused. How can you insult me like this? Am I that sort of person?" Crossing his legs again, the sun emperor shook his head.

"What should I say then?"

"Listen up—" He straightened his clothes, sat upright, and cleared his throat. Staring at the white-robed woman, he enunciated each word, loud as a bell. "All the lands in the world belong to me, and all living beings are my subjects. Do you understand?"

Number Seven understood. They were all his!

...

On the way to the Azuresoul Palace, Long Wanying received another transmission stone.

"What happened?" Everyone gathered around her, asking nervously.

After reading the message, Long Wanying had a strange expression on her face.

"What is it?" Jiang Qingliu asked.

"The battle is over. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect hasn't suffered too many casualties. The dragon formation core was destroyed, but it can be repaired in the future," said Long Wanying.

"That's good news! It seems that the sun emperor is afraid to act recklessly. At most, he means to intimidate us. Perhaps the outcome from the return of the Imperial Ninedragon Tomb has made him a little unhappy so he decided to punish the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect to warn the Sky Palace and Myriad Solar Sects." Jiang Qingliu sighed with relief.

"It isn't good news." Long Wanying shook her head.

"No?" Jiang Qingliu asked dubiously.

"The three dragon imperials who remained in the sect have lost their dragonsprings and the Veildragon Palace has settled in the Myriaddragon Mountains. They have six dragonsprings, which means they're in control of most of the formations. Five million celestial orderian warriors are stationed there, and the three dragon imperials are being held as hostages. They've just met with the Saintdragon Emperor and two other dragon imperials and requested for the Veildragon Palace to return to the sect. The Saintdragon Emperor was forced to agree because of the hostages and the dragonsprings. So from now on, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and the Veildragon Palace are one, and all power will be in the hands of the latter." Long Wanying frowned.

"In other words, the Veildragon Palace has absorbed the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect... or perhaps it's more accurate to say that the celestial orderians have absorbed the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect," Tianming said.

"Yes."

"What about the Sky Palace and Myriad Solar Sects?" Tianming asked.

"I'm pessimistic about the other sects' response, even if the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is destroyed and its people slaughtered. After all, the Myriad Solar Sects have been divided for too long. The fact is, the Veildragon Palace acted in the name of rejoining the sect and we only lost a few lives. The other sects know what's at stake, but without someone to take the lead they won't be able to keep the resistance going. Besides, the dreamless celestials are a foreign race. We can only rely on the Sky Palace!" Long Wanying rubbed her eyes.

"So the agreement you signed before is like a slow-acting poison? Like boiling a frog in warm water?" Tianming was speechless.

"That is a suitable analogy. Now that the water is boiling, trouble is here," she said helplessly.

"Since the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is now under the control of the Veildragon Palace, we won't be able to return for the time being," Tianming added.

For Tianming, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect meant cultivation resources. But now it had become someone else's territory. With the backing of the sun emperor, perhaps the Veildragon Palace wouldn't care about their identity as Sky Palace disciples. There was no point in returning unless the situation changed. After all, the Saintdragon Emperor was still dealing with them.

"Let's head to the Azuresoul Sword Mountain first...."

Chapter 1287 - Date of Marriage

The northern hemisphere of the sun was where the nova source burned most abundantly. Within this wide territory, few areas were as calm and gentle as the Moonfang Sea, which was as beautiful as a stellar source world, but with far denser fundamental cosmic force. It was said that the sun emperor had modified the fusion formation to allow a gentle nova source comparable to moonlight to emerge in that area, giving his daughter the best circumstances to cultivate in. That daughter, the Ninemoon Goddess Li Qingyu, would benefit twice as much compared to cultivating in other places.

That day, a large, white fish swam within the Moonfang Sea. Its pearlescent scales glowed a faint white, reflecting the gentle light coming from the water and making for a breathtaking sight that caused the maids waiting on the shore to gasp in awe. There couldn't be a more beautiful sight to behold, one of the goddess, the great fish, and the wide seas. It was like looking at a precious scroll painting that had assembled and integrated the elements in perfect harmony.

"If the goddess displays her totems, each one a different celestial maiden, this sight would be even more beautiful."

"However, the goddess doesn't seem to like showing them. I've only seen them once."

"That's right...."

"The Voidsky Skirmish is over and she's started focusing on cultivating again. We have to follow in her footsteps."

"That's right!"

The innocent young girls watched the white-haired girl coursing through the sea with a sense of worship. At that moment, they noticed a black-clad youth standing under a white maple tree. "Young Master She, why are you here?"

The young man's arms were crossed as he shot a gentle gaze toward the open sea. He seemed to have been there for quite some time, but they hadn't noticed him due to how quiet he was. "Shhh..." he hushed with his finger to his lips. Then he smiled and said, "Don't interrupt her."

"Okay!" The girls nodded and went back to gossiping with one another again.

"Young Master She is really kind."

"My mother said that finding a man older than us is the best. That way we'll feel protected."

"That's right. It sounds so much more intimate. Little boys only mess around all the time. I like mature big brothers much better."

"He and the goddess are truly a match made in heaven."

At that moment, they realized that the great white fish in the ocean had disappeared.

"Goddess...." The white-haired woman had appeared before them without them even noticing. Though she was filled with joy, her smile gradually stiffened, then turned cold. She had been bullied quite a lot in her childhood as a result of her father's circumstances, so she'd developed a defensive personality.

"Goddess, Young Master She has been waiting for you for quite a while."

"I see."

The black-clad youth approached them. The maids in waiting quickly moved aside to make way, sensing the goddess's displeasure building though not understanding why. Did the goddess not like beastmasters and only prefer totem users?

"Goddess, I'm here to bid you farewell," the youth said.

"I see. Great. So long!" She wanted nothing more than to be as far away from him as possible.

"Aren't you going to ask me where I'm going?"

"I don't really care. I'm heading back to the Ninemoon Palace to cultivate.

"The emperor has taken back the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect for Veildragon Palace. Now, the splintered sect has finally rejoined into one. The Veildragon Palace has control of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect now, and the new sect ranking will soon be announced. We'll be ranked first and lead the Myriad Solar Sects! My parents and the other seniors will have to dominate our fellow kin to make them obedient, and that'll take some effort. So I need to go there and help out." He paused for a moment, before he said, "The emperor said that once the sect is properly united, we'll pick a date for our marriage."

"Marriage?" Qingyu took a step back, biting her lip and glaring at him coldly. "Interesting that he chose to tell you about this before notifying me."

"I'm sure the emperor's just been far too busy striving for peace in his realm. I hope the goddess understands."

"Hehe...." She grit her teeth, a little perplexed. She had learned from the maids that Tianming was now a disciple of the Sky Palace and that the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect had intended to take him in. This was a great outcome for the Voidsky Skirmish, yet the celestial orderians and Veildragon Palace had chosen this time to cause trouble for the sect. I wonder if my brother and the rest have already gone there. I'm sure they should be able to defend themselves as Sky Palace disciples....

Infuriatingly, these people had once again ruined a good situation, causing her even more distress. The worst part was the impending marriage that would come after the Veildragon Palace took complete control of the newly-merged sect. That wouldn't be too far off, so there wasn't much time left.

She finally knew why that person had wanted her to pick the successor of Veildragon Palace that stood before her now as a suitor. His parents were important pieces for the sun emperor. The emperor had used the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb as an excuse to take over the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and made it a tool of the celestial orderians. This was far more influential than simply destroying them. If it worked out, the Myriad Solar Sects would be even less able to resist the celestial orderians. Controlling the first-ranked sect was akin to controlling the enemy's head. The four limbs and organs would soon be swallowed up.

"The sun emperor is a wise ruler!" The youth spoke of the emperor with utmost worship and respect.

"Is it that easy? Don't they have the Sky Palace? What about the Dreamless Celestial Nation? They're powerful, too, right? Won't the other sects clearly see what you are doing?" Qingyu asked. There was no way the sects wouldn't be aware that this was going to end up badly.

"That's where your father, the emperor, truly showed his wisdom. By signing the ceasefire treaty, the enemy has forgotten about us and started fighting amongst themselves. With the outsiders of the Dreamless Celestial Nation currently in first place, the Myriad Solar Sects aren't united at all. Even if the Dreamless Celestial Nation doesn't want to admit it, they can't deny that they only managed to rise to such heights because we allowed this to happen.

"On the other hand, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect has constantly been suppressed by the emperor. For instance, the emperor personally killed the previous Whitedragon Emperor centuries ago and has exterminated anyone that can help them rise to greater heights, thinning the herd and allowing outsider factions like the Dreamless Celestial Nation and Voidword Shrine to continue gaining power over the past two centuries. Not to mention, the emperor also engineered the rise of the wargodeans. By now, there's nobody among their ranks that can resist us." The youth looked like a religious zealot.

"What about the Sky Palace?"

"I'm not too sure about that. The emperor himself handles affairs with them, no doubt. What I do know is that the Myriad Solar Sects are chickening out while the Xuanyuans take power. The Sky Palace has kept quiet about it."

How had the sun emperor achieved this? Nobody in the many factions understood it.

"At the end of the day, the return of the Veildragon Palace and the extermination of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect are two sides of the same coin. But most other factions only pay attention to the latter side and believe that the former wouldn't affect them, since the Veildragon Palace is only one faction among many." The youth was growing more and more agitated in his fervent tirade. "Goddess, the emperor's plans are absolute. This victory of ours will set the stage for the unification of the sun. To truly devour the Myriad Solar Sects will require the efforts of subsequent generations. In the future, we'll control the most powerful sect in the ranking and you'll rule the celestial orderians. Together, we'll dominate everyone on the sun and control all of the nova source!"

His eyes were practically glowing while Qingyu merely coldly glanced at him. "Dominate everyone? What's the point?"

"We can kill as we please. Even the tiniest slight toward us can be used as a reason to justify the slaughter of millions. We don't have to care about what people think of us and can take whatever we want. Everyone will fear and respect you. Isn't that the best feeling ever?"

"No. I like simple folk better." Qingyu suddenly smiled.

The youth grit his teeth and awkwardly smiled. "Alright, Goddess, I'll take my leave."

"Wait," Qingyu said. When he turned around, she continued, "May I go to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect with you?"

"What're you going to do there? Given your status, if this isn't done in the utmost secrecy, it can be taken advantage of by our enemies."

"Are you afraid?"

"Of course not. That's already our territory. But we must consult the emperor about something like this. Goddess, if the emperor permits this and sends me a transmission stone, I'll come get you immediately."

"Deal." She didn't want to continue idly sitting by. She would give anything just to see them one more time.

.....

Tianming and the other five were on the back of the azuresky qilin as they crossed many rivers and mountains on their journey toward the Azurecloud Continent, which was located around the center of the sun. It was a considerably cool place, given its distance from the Voidsky Flame Pillar in the south, allowing life to thrive, though that also meant it had the lowest concentration of nova source, being so distant from the north and south poles of the sun. Most first-rate factions made their home near the Voidsky Flame Pillar, after all, allowing their sect members and subjects to enjoy access to the highest quality resources.

Chapter 1288 - Azuresoul Palace

The qilin continued toward its destination. Strong winds blew across the back of the gigantic beast, and soon, the expansive Azurecloud Continent was visible ahead of them.

"Where'd these bugs come from?" The qilin brushed at its body in a puzzled manner, sweeping away quite a few silver cockroaches.

Tianming immediately asked Yin Chen to not simply crawl around. "I'll need you to send out a hundred thousand cockroaches at the Azuresoul Palace, so for now you'd better stay put."

"Fine fine." The bugs were still lining up and bathing in Tianming's lifebound space.

"Amazing. Now, you have a free pass to spy on all the baths in the Azuresoul Palace. No beauty's naked body will evade your sights," Ying Huo enviously said.

"Nonsense. It isn't like I share Yin Chen's vision."

"You can still feel the sensation through the telepathic link."

"Enough!"

They were about to reach the Azuresoul Palace soon. "I hope we can get enough cultivation resources, including divine pills, caeli, and especially divine ores for Yin Chen. I know it isn't as grand as the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, but it's still ranked thirty-eighth among all the sects. That's already an impressively high ranking."

Though, with the recent developments, whether he could get resources from the Azuresoul Palace was still in question. "Gan Gangan, come here," he said.

Yu Ziqian looked like he was returning to his sect, filled with glory. Even as he came over to Tianming, he was brightly smiling. He was the one who cared the least about not being able to go to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. After all, he was the respected chief disciple in the Azuresoul Palace.

"What's up, handsome?" he asked, waving his Reginal Fan and showing off the female artifact souls.

"How many veins of divine ores does the Azuresoul Palace own?" For sects or factions, the most important thing was access to divine ores, herbs, and hazards. Divine ores were crucial ingredients for divine artifacts, and even some formations.

"There's around eighteen of various sizes and types," Yu Ziqian said.

Yin Chen could increase in number by consuming more divine ores, so that was crucial. For it to become the sea of silver stars Tianming had dreamed about, it had to keep consuming divine ores. Though it could consume divine artifacts as well, that was not only wasteful, but really inefficient. It didn't need refined alloys, only ores in large quantities. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect might have been able to offer him quite a lot of it, but now it was different.

"Do you think I'll be able to enter the mines as I please?"

"No problem. With me around, you're free to do so," Yu Ziqian promised.

"Things won't be that simple." Tianming glanced at Jiang Qingliu, who had been receiving one transmission stone after another. No doubt he was communicating with Gujian Qingshuang. As far as he was concerned, what happened with the Azuresoul Palace was far from optimistic.

Since they were about to arrive, Tianming asked Yu Ziqian about how the sect was organized. Basically, they occupied half the territory of the Azurecloud Continent. The remaining tens of smaller sects were all part of the Myriad Solar Sects, seven of which were third-rate ones.

"The Azuresoul Palace was founded by the Azuresoul Progenitor, who was exiled from the Empyrean Sword Sect. After leaving his old sect, he formed his own and rose to prominence. At the very end, he conquered the Azuresoul Sword Mountain and made it his home base. The sect now has nearly a million years of history, so it's considered rather old."

The power base of the sect was located on the Azuresoul Sword Mountain, followed by the many cities they controlled. In other words, the Azuresoul Sword Mountain was akin to the Archaion Sect's Taiji Peak Lake.

"The most famous people in our sect are the six Swordbearers, a title the six most powerful members of our sect hold. Their leader is our chief instructor, Gujian Qingshuang. My master, Jiang Qingliu, didn't have that kind of power before, but after gaining the recognition of the Azuresoul Tower, he became a Swordbearer as well, albeit the lowest ranked."

Even so, that meant he was still the sixth most powerful person in the sect. Apart from that, Yu Ziqian went on to explain the hierarchy and structure of the sect. "The Azuresoul Palace recruits juniors under the age of thirty every year. Those that fit the bill are allowed to cultivate on the mountain until the age of a hundred. During that time, they're simply known as youthgrand disciples, as in young disciples of a grand age." That would be where Tianming and the rest fit in. For them to refer to those under the age of a hundred as youths showed how differently superior lifeforms perceived age. In the Vermillion Bird Kingdom, those above a century old were most likely already dead.

"Most other factions also have a similar designation for those of this age. Past that is the fork of most people's lives. Taking disciples of the Azuresoul Palace as an example, we have three choices at that age, namely swordpupils, swordtroops, and swordcitizens."

"How are they different?"

"After the test at a hundred years old, the best of the best will be allowed to continue training. They'll no longer be junior disciples, but will become swordpupils. The ones that aren't as good as them will leave the Azuresoul Sword Mountain to join the Azuresoul Sword Army as swordtroops, eventually

becoming soldiers or generals. The ones who do even worse will leave the mountain and get posted in the various cities to administer the subjects there as swordcitizens."

So there was a path for true elites, a path for soldiers, and a path for civilian officials. Such a scheme was emulated by most other sects as well. The lives of everyone would be determined by the test they took at age one hundred. Tianming was still far from that, so it wasn't something he would need to consider yet. All he needed to know was what his status in the sect would be.

Yu Ziqian continued, "That means there's only swordpupils and normal disciples under the age of a hundred on the Azuresoul Sword Mountain. The swordtroops and swordcitizens are all elsewhere. Swordpupils are graded one to five according to their power, contributions, and status. Normally, grade-two swordpupils need to be at the Solar stage in power. Grade-five swordpupils are the strongest among them. Our master is also a grade-five swordpupil, incidentally. There's only six grade-five swordpupils, which would be the ones we call Swordbearers."

"Then what would our grade be as Sky Palace disciples?" Tianming asked.

"The highest, of course. In essence, we're considered equals of our master and the chief instructor. Offending them isn't a worry at all."

"You mentioned that most other factions have a similar structure, right? And it isn't just a measure of power, but also status and position. Do other sects have any ranks that're considered superior to grade-five swordpupils?"

"Of course. The one behind you is one such person."

Chapter 1289 - Allmother Tree

Tianming turned back and looked; Yu Ziqian had been referring to the Whitedragon Empress.

"The Seven Dragon Imperials can be considered grade six, so they have higher status than our master or chief instructor. That means there's six grades in the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect for those above a hundred, with the Seven Dragon Imperials taking the highest spot. They have at least a hundred cultivators with grade-five status there," Yu Ziqian said.

In other words, the graded status didn't necessarily represent power. For instance, Long Wanying might not necessarily be stronger than Jiang Qingliu or Gujian Qingshuang, but her status and influence—especially coming from her sect—was higher. It was clear how much stronger the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was than the Azuresoul Palace, considering they had a hundred grade-five cultivators while the latter only had six. Not to mention, they had a few Dragon Imperials that could defeat Gujian Qingshuang. As Long Wanying had only assumed her post a short time ago, it went without saying that she was weaker than the others.

That was the difference between the rank two sect and the rank thirty-eight sect. In any faction, there would be far more cultivators over the age of a hundred than the number of youthgrand disciples. However, most swordtroops and swordcitizens were spread out across the Azuresoul Palace's territories. Only swordpupils trained on the Azuresoul Sword Mountain, being the elites among elites. They numbered about the same as normal disciples.

"I knew the hierarchy on the sun would be much stricter. It's no surprise that they have such fine distinctions when it comes to position and status." Those of higher status had huge sway over those of lower status, which served as the main motivation for people to continue improving. The Azuresoul Palace occupies half of the Azurecloud Continent, which is a few times larger than the Flameyellow Continent, and the lifeforms here are much more powerful, too, most of whom are gods with astral physiques. I wonder how much more powerful the Omniscient Threads will get if I get them to worship me.... But that's thinking too far ahead. I'm not a proper member of the Sky Palace yet, just a disciple. I'm not even a youthgrand disciple. If I want to replace grade-five swordpupils like Gujian Qingshuang, there's still a lot to do.

As urgent as matters were, he still had to take it step by step. Though, he still needed ambition. As much as he wanted to settle down and lead a peaceful life, he knew this wasn't his destiny. There were far too many people that he cared about now, including his lover, lifebound beasts, friends, and his parents who were on the run. The fastest path of growth for him was through the relationship between a sovereign and his subjects. Becoming the pillar in which others put their trust in was his destiny. Only by rising up could he ensure that those he cared about could truly be free.

The Azurecloud Continent was in his vision now. Though it was on the sun, it looked far wider and more ancient than the Flameyellow Continent. It made his blood boil. I want to conquer this place. His blood pulsed with the desire to become the absolute ruler of this new place.

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"What's that?" As they got nearer, Tianming saw a gigantic tree in the middle of the continent. It stood tens of thousands of meters tall, almost reaching the flaming clouds above. Even Xian Xian, the Radix World Tree, looked like a sprout in its presence. The tree's branches and leaves spanned about a third of the continent, casting a rare veil of shadow on the surface of the sun. Even as the flaming rain fell, the leaves simply stopped them from reaching the ground. Countless vines also hung from the branches of the tree, making it look like a forest of its own. There were countless animals, birds, and insects under the tree; it was nothing short of a paradise for all life.

"It's the Azurecloud Divine Tree, of course." Yu Ziqian was already used to how Tianming didn't know even the most basic things.

"But it's still far too big. Is it some kind of grade-seven divine herb or plant?"

"It's not a divine herb, but part of the sun itself. Many of its roots are intertwined with the fusion formation and in contact with the nova source. The tree is doubtless the oldest life form in Orderia, having lived for millions of years. The reason it isn't a divine herb is because divine herbs grow from its flowers and fruits!" Yu Ziqian said with a look of awe. Taking a deep breath, he continued, "I'm one of many who grew up under the shade of the tree. We call it the Allmother Tree. People consider it a miraculous life form. Every ten thousand years, it bears fruit, which is a blessing to those living on this continent. Some, however, consider it a leech for consuming the nova source of the continent and leaving its shade a barren place for cultivation. They even try cutting it down. It's complicated. What I know is it's an ancestral decree in our sect to defend the tree with our lives."

"It's truly miraculous. Look at that size!" Tianming didn't often feel as moved or awed as he did now.

"Come to think of it, the ten-thousand-year cycle is about to come to pass again. At that time, all kinds of divine herbs will grow on the tree for an entire year, ranging from grade one to seven. There's even records of grade-eight divine herbs sprouting, which can be used to refine incredible grade-eight divine pills. Ten thousand years ago, it's been said, the tree produced five billion divine herbs. I wonder how many there'll be this time...."

"Five billion?" How many divine pills could be made from that? "Since the Azure Soul Palace and Supracloud Sanctuary are situated so close, you guys really hit the jackpot, huh?"

"Nope. Looking back at history, getting even ten percent of the full harvest is already good enough. Most of the top quality herbs get taken by the first-rate factions."

"How does that work?"

"Well, look at it this way. In terms of nova source, our continent gets the least, which makes sense according to the theory that the Azurecloud Divine Tree is absorbing most of it. That's why the Sky Palace has historically given the divine herbs of the tree to the sects of the continent and prevented other sects from sending large numbers here to wage war for them as a form of compensation.

"However, rules are meant to be broken. It's true that we get to pick some of the normal grade divine herbs. There'll be many other sects that come to 'help' us with the harvest. In essence, they take the lion's share. Not to mention, any grade-seven divine herb that appears will always be spirited away. Neither the Supracloud Sanctuary nor our sect can do anything about it. Even so, we can't not ask other sects to come help with the harvest, either, as the Supracloud Sanctuary definitely will. If they have helpers and we don't, we won't be able to compete at all!"

That was why there were some that wanted to cut down the tree. Not only did it rob them of nova source, slowing down cultivation for most, the divine herbs that were supposed to make up for that would also be taken away by so-called 'helpers', leaving the actual inhabitants of the continent with scraps that couldn't even begin to make up for the lack of nova source. It was a love-hate relationship where the tree was concerned.

"Honestly, the tree has historically produced many grade-eight divine herbs. Legends even speak of grade-nine divine herbs. But the amount has gradually been decreasing over the cycles. Now, there isn't enough supply to meet the crazy demand."

"I see." Tianming was still marveling at this miracle of nature. Now that Yu Ziqian had the Divine Worldeater Cauldron, large numbers of divine pills could be produced, regardless of grade. That would still be a huge boost for Lingfeng and the Azure Soul Palace; the divine tree and the cauldron were a match made in heaven.

As they spoke, Long Wanying and Jiang Qingliu came over. The old master sighed and said, "The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was supposed to be our helper this time around, but with what happened at the Myriad Dragon Mountains, that won't be possible. The Supracloud Sanctuary will have the Wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean helping them out. It looks like we won't even be able to get scraps for this harvest."

"Nonsense. I have help," Long Wanying said as she sent out a transmission stone.

"Who?"

"My girlfriends!"

"Huh?" Jiang Qingliu shuddered at the thought.

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A gigantic sword of stone pierced through the flaming clouds, the sword ki paving a way through the clouds. Thousands of elites dressed in swordsmen robes stood atop it, emanating powerful sword ki. A flaming transmission stone caught up to them and landed in the hand of the leader, whose skin looked like stone.

The leader was a woman. Her features and figure looked completely normal, though her stone skin stood out quite a lot. Even her eyes looked like rocks that had been embedded into her face. There wasn't the slightest sign of life coming from this person. She stretched out her rocky fingers and unfurled the note on the stone, then her stiff mouth began shaking as she chuckled and raised her hand.

"Everyone! The Northdipper Swordsage ordered us to head to the Azurecloud Continent to help the Azuresoul Palace with the harvest!"

The crowd blew up in cheers.

"Did that Gujian Qingshuang brat invite us?"

"Of course not," the woman said. "Fellows, change course! The Azuresoul Palace has stood out quite a bit for their exploits recently, so it's about time they paid the price."

"That's right! They're supposed to have branched off from our Emypyrean Sword Sect, yet they immediately submitted to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect to get their help! How naughty of them!"

Chapter 1290 - Six Swordbearers

The Celestial Welcome Hall was located at the gate of Azuresoul Sword Mountain. There was a pine tree thousands of meters in height on the cliff near the hall. Its needle-like leaves looked like green swords that filled the sky, making an entire world of swords.

There were currently thousands of swordpupils standing in front of the entrance, all of whom were over a hundred years old. However, they all looked and felt like middle-aged folk. People like Sovereign Xi, who still looked young and nubile at the age of five hundred, were like them in some regard. Given Tianming's current physique and his level of cultivation, he wouldn't really age before reaching the age of five hundred. That was what differentiated lower life forms from higher life forms. These swordpupils that were allowed to continue training on the Azuresoul Sword Mountain were no doubt considered the elite among such higher life forms.

Grade-two swordpupils had to be solarians, that is, at the Solar stage. That was the level Tianming had to aim for, though it wasn't fair to compare their power. After all, Tianming was only in his twenties, while they were hundreds of years old. As far as they were concerned, Tianming was no different from an infant. And not even the strongest infant could fight an adult.

The swordpupils stood ramrod straight. They were like sharp blades, their razor-like gaze aimed toward the south of the mountain.

Orderia was a place that was without want for space. Most lifebound beasts didn't have the habit of staying within the lifebound space long term. As such, gigantic lifebound beasts that radiated sword auras could be seen all over the place near the swordpupils; there was more than enough space for them to be in their natural habitats. Lan Huang would definitely love a place like this. Sounds of roars and sharp chirps came from all over in this lively world.

The leaders that stood among the swordpupils looked a little worried. The one standing in the middle was the number-one person of the sect, Gujian Qingshuang of the Gujian clan that had founded the sect. He wore a green and white robe and had a long beard. He seemed quite slender, and his gaze was as deep as the galaxy. There was a celestial air about him. Among the six Swordbearers, he was known as the Ancient Prime Sword.

To his left was a white-haired man with a hunched back. However, his sharp facial features didn't look that old. One of his eyes looked like it had suffered a traumatic injury from the way it seemed caved in. The socket was empty. The other eye was dark purple and filled with intrigue. He was second in command of the sect and Gujian Qingshuang's senior, Ye Dongliu. Being the second-ranked Swordbearer, his sobriquet was the East Forth Sword.

To Gujian Qingshuang's right was an old crone that liked fresh flowers. There was quite a lot of floral embroidery on her long, twilight-yellow robe. She looked even older than Ye Dongliu, but her aura was subdued and gentle in a refreshing manner compared to the others'. She was the third in command, often called Granny Mu Hua, and was the oldest person in the sect. It was said that her power had once surpassed Gujian Qingshuang and that she had contributed far more to the sect than he had. Though her current power had diminished due to age, she was still stronger than the majority of people there and was known as the Green Grass Sword.

The three of them were the most respected members of the sect with proper status, bloodlines, and contributions befitting their name. Granny Mu Hua, especially, had earned even more respect for still being so powerful despite her age. Coupled with Jiang Qingliu, they made four of the six Swordbearers.

There were two other younger Swordbearers, namely Ye Buzhiqiu and Gujian Daoyi, who were both younger than Jiang Qingliu. The former was Ye Dongliu's son, while the latter was Gujian Qingshuang's younger brother.

The Swordbearers were the highest authority in the sect, each of them controlling a main branch and taking their own disciples. Jiang Qingliu was in charge of the Sixth Sword Branch, which was rather small in scale, not even a third of the size of the Fifth Sword Branch. Similarly, Yu Ziqian belonged to the Sixth Sword Branch, so his status in the sect was rather negligible. Even though Jiang Qingliu was the Defender of the Azuresoul Tower, there were still quite a few people that had higher authority than him. Without the tower, he would merely be a bystander on the sidelines of power.

There were two main factions within the sect, namely the Gujian clan and the House of Dongye. The former was the clan of the chief instructor, while the latter was a group of famous plant beastmasters that made up the main base of the sect. Most other sects had far more complex histories or structures, while the Azuresoul Palace was considerably simpler.

All in all, the Swordbearers had great authority, with the Dongye house and Gujian clan having even more factional power. Though their status wasn't impressive among the Myriad Solar Sects, they were among the most influential people on the Azurecloud Continent. Aside from Tianming's status as a Sky Palace disciple, he could only count on them.

"They've already reached the continent," Gujian Qingshuang said, reading a transmission stone note and crushing the stone.

"Jiang Qingliu!" the white-browed Ye Dongliu said with a face full of dissatisfaction.

"The Whitedragon Empress is with them as well?" Granny Mu Hua worriedly said.

"That's right. To be fair, Jiang Qingliu wouldn't be able to stop her if he tried," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"This Jiang Qingliu is looking more and more pathetic. What a disgrace to the Azuresoul Tower! How could he be so weak as to let a woman walk all over him...." Ye Dongliu blew his beard to vent.

"A woman? Putting aside the chaos at the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, Long Wanying is an impressive legend in her own right," Granny Mu Hua said, glaring at Ye Dongliu.

"So what? Their sect is as good as gone now. No matter how things turn out, nothing good will come of associating with them. We'll either piss off the celestial orderians, or the Sky Palace and the other sects," Ye Dongliu said.

"It's not that bad. They didn't lose that many people. However, the sect is under the control of the Veildragon Palace and the celestial orderians. The sun emperor used repatriating the Veildragon Palace as an excuse. Eventually, they'll begin brainwashing the next generation. When the current generation finally dies off, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect will be completely changed," Granny Mu Hua said. She had seen too many such occurrences in her long life. There were two ways to completely take over a territory. The first was to massacre all of its existing inhabitants, while the second was to maintain tight control and use propaganda over a few generations. The ones born later would have forgotten who their forebears really were.

Given the existing social norms, not even the sun emperor would dare to massacre billions of people outright, so the invaders had chosen the latter method. They would raise the descendants of the conquered to be loyal pawns, and do nothing to the current generation apart from maintaining tight control. Eventually, all of them would die off anyway, and their children would mock them for their stubborn resistance. That was a far worse fate than being killed outright.