

The Ages 1321

Chapter 1321 - Octabane, Vastsun Godbeasts

Lan Sha and Yun Tianque led the others in their sects to greet the woman that had just appeared. She stood ahead of the man that also came out from the flaming pillar. This woman was dressed in a moon-white robe and wore her hair in a ponytail. She looked really neat and tidy, almost minimalist like a hermit. One look was enough to peg her as a totemancer. There was a cold aura about her that made others think twice before approaching her. With how the Tumulus Pill God was respectful toward her and how she was a totemancer, it was clear she was a celestial orderian.

"Good. I'm only here to accompany Haochen. Drop the formalities, I don't need any commotion," said Lady Wushuang in a voice so cold that it seemed to have come from the depths of the abyss. Her moon-white eyes were cold and sharp, as if she looked at everything in a detached manner.

"Very well." The Tumulus Pill God and the others nodded. They understood her character well enough to not dare to make any large commotion.

Haochen was the man who stood behind the maiden. The others turned to the youth and were impressed by how much he resembled his birthright. His aura alone had surpassed that of many grade-four seniors. He had light gold hair that looked like fine glass fibers. His eyes burned like the sun and his clothes were covered in many gold divine patterns. There were many depictions of ancient gods and fiends on his robe, making him look even more domineering. He was from an imperial bloodline. If Tianming was there, he would notice that this youth was of a prime bloodline like Princess Shen Yu.

The part of the youth that stood out was the spot between his brows. There was a golden sun there that looked like one of the eyes of the Divine Sun Palace. Power circulated furiously within, burning at shocking temperatures. It looked completely different to the third eyes of those from the Trioptic True Dragon Branch. It wasn't an eye, but rather a chain of eight sun-shaped bane-rings interlinked with one another. Apart from Li Wudi, Tianming hadn't come across anyone with eight bane-rings yet. It seemed that when totemancers had that many bane-rings, they became life forms of a completely different league. The youth looked like a god among men. He didn't have the kind of aura that made others loathe him; instead, the aura that had stemmed from his bloodline caused others to instinctively want to worship him.

"Li Haochen, I already brought you all the way here, so tell them whatever you want to say. When you want to leave, send me a transmission stone," she said.

"Aunt, are you leaving the Azurecloud Continent?" Li Haochen asked. His voice was clear and innocent, but it contained the dignity of a highborn person.

"I'll stay here and travel around." The Lady Wushuang turned to look at the Tumulus Pill God, signaling that she was leaving him in their care. If anything went wrong, they would have hell to pay.

"See you, Aunt," the youth said, waving. Then, the woman was nowhere to be seen. She vanished in an instant, not wanting to be among others the slightest fraction of a second longer than she had to. The youth had been left alone with all those seniors, but he didn't fear them in the slightest. In fact, his demeanor even applied some pressure to everyone there. "Seniors, I might have to trouble you with something later." Though it sounded polite, it was actually an order, just phrased more diplomatically.

"Of course! Haochen, we are your father's loyal servants. If you need anything, we're ready to serve at a moment's notice," the Tumulus Pill God said with a bright smile and a bow.

"That's right! Even though we're part of the Myriad Solar Sects, our allegiances lie with the celestial orderians," Lan Sha said. He pulled Yun Tianque over and said, "This is Yun Tianque, sect master of the Supracloud Sanctuary. If there's any trouble on this continent, simply come find him."

Yun Tianque hurriedly nodded. This was the first time he had ever been so polite to someone this young. He didn't even have to behave like that with Long Longlong or Weisheng Moran before.

"Gentlemen, I want all the fruits produced by the divine tree," he said with a bright smile at a leisurely pace. He had come prepared.

The three of them were shocked wordless. He wanted everything! While that was awkward for Yun Tianque, all he could do was lower his head and wait for the answer of the other two. In fact, even the Tumulus Pill God felt troubled by the demand.

Right as he was about to speak, Li Haochen said, "Don't worry, Sect Master Yun, I'll give you the ten percent we promised. That's an important resource for your sect to ensure a bright future for you. As your ally, I won't make things difficult for you. All I want is the rest of it, all ninety percent of it. And remember, I want it all for myself, not for the celestial orderians."

"I wasn't worried for the slightest moment.... Thank you, Lord, for your kind understanding. If it weren't for the fact that our sect is in a desolate location, I'd gladly offer up my sect's share as well," Yun Tianque said. He had been banking on working as a lapdog for the celestial orderians, so being addressed as an ally was more than courteous to him.

"What about the two of you?" Li Haochen asked.

Lan Sha gave the Tumulus Pill God a look, then the two smiled. "We came here to serve the celestial orderians. Giving the fruits to you or giving it to the celestial orderians is one and the same thing."

"Very well." Li Haochen nodded and turned to look at the endless tree branches behind him. He flew up high and asked, "How many days has the harvest been taking place? Do you already have something?"

"Yes. So far, we have ten million fruits, but they're all grade three or below," the Tumulus Pill God said.

"It's fine. Better if it's lower grade, since it'll be easier to digest. Bring them here."

"Understood!"

The three of them immediately gathered the tens of spatial rings that stored all the fruits harvested so far.

"Get them all out and scatter them on the ground," Li Haochen said.

"Huh?" Yun Tianque didn't know how to react, but Lan Sha gave him a nudge to do what he said. Then Yun Tianque waved, causing tens of millions of divine herbs to fall to the ground like rain. A medicinal fragrance immediately filled the air.

"What's he going to do?" Right as the others were doubtfully looking at the sight, they heard a loud, bestial roar. The eight suns on Li Haochen's forehead shook and brightly glowed. The next instant, eight sun beasts came rushing down. They were huge, flaming beasts that could take many forms, shifting from lions, to tigers, and even dragons and phoenixes. Every one of them was made of golden flames. The eight of them devoured the fruits.

"Eat up! Eat all you can. At home, Father wants me to fight for any resource I want. But here I can get everything for free with my authority! If I could've used this authority from the get-go, I wouldn't just be at the eighth level by now, would I?"

The beasts continued consuming the fruits.

Yun Tianque shuffled closer to Lan Sha, not knowing what to make of this. "What is this, Brother Lan?"

"They're ultimate totems, all eight of them, called vastsun godbeasts. They're special spiritforms that are able to burn and infuse the divine patterns inside divine herbs and feed the power to their owner. They're also much stronger than normal totems of the same level thanks to the power of divine herbs!" Lan Sha said enviously. He was a totemancer himself, so he knew full well how powerful these beasts were. Li Haochen looked just like an octuple beastmaster.

"It's no wonder that he's the strongest disciple among the celestial orderians, perhaps even among the disciples across the whole sun. There's no way those on the imperial star ranking can compete," Yun Tianque said with awe.

"Are you joking? All ten of the sun emperor's sons, including the youngest, are the strongest of their generation! There's no exception!" Lan Sha said, rolling his eyes. "Even if beastmasters don't want to admit it, it's the truth. Totemancers reign supreme across the entire sun!"

"Of course," Yun Tianque said with a bitter smile.

The roaring of the beasts shook their hearts. However, none of them noticed the invisible cockroach hiding between the twigs, its feelers moving nonstop.

After some time, Li Haochen came back to the group. "Are there any higher-grade fruits?"

"There's a grade-seven divine herb, but it isn't ripe yet. It will be in some time," the Tumulus Pill God said.

"How long will it take?"

"Around two or three months."

"Alright, I'll wait." Now, he was their undisputed leader.

"Understood! But there's a little problem."

"What is it?"

"This divine herb is located within the Azuresoul Palace's territory, rather deep inside too."

"Oh, so that's troubling for you, huh?"

"No, it isn't!" The Tumulus Pill God hurriedly changed his tune.

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"Gan Gangan, get the fuck over here!" Tianming called out from the entrance.

"Just a moment!" Yu Ziqian cried out. Soon, he rushed over, his clothes a mess and his face flushed.

"Quick, Sister Wanle's about to get dressed again!"

Even Tianming was impressed at how much dedication and focus Yu Ziqian spent on fooling around with women. He squatted and said, "I want to ask about two people. Do you know who Lady Wushuang is? I'm guessing she's called Li Wushuang."

"She's the sun emperor's younger sister!"

"Which emperor?"

"The current one! Li Wudi, of course! What other sun emperor is there?"

Tianming smacked his head. He had spent far too much time in the wondersky realm. Princess Shen Yu's aggressive invitation had made him feel like there were a lot of emperors all over the place.

"The sun emperor's little sister... alright. What about Li Haochen?"

"He's the youngest son of the sun emperor, an eighth-level constellier at the age of twenty-five. He's an octuple totemancer with totems called vastsun godbeasts. I heard they're really powerful, but I haven't seen them before. Sounds like he's defeated everyone his age."

"So he's the elder brother of the Ninemoon Goddess?"

"That's right. The Ninemoon Goddess is the eleventh daughter of the sun emperor. I heard she's an illegitimate child that wasn't borne of the sun empress and she has the most bane-rings ever, nine of them!"

"Alright, got it. You're dismissed!" Tianming slapped his head and he immediately rushed back. "Wait, one more thing!"

"What is it? I'm just about to blast off!"

"Don't you think the name Li Haochen is a little old-fashioned? How does it compare to Lin Feng?"

"It's different! Lin Feng is trite, but Haochen is vintage and classy! It's old, but in a different way!"

"Alright, now buzz off."

"Already on it!"

Chapter 1322 - Grade-Eight Divine Herb

Somewhere far in the south of the tree amidst the dense leaves roamed a group of women. Like celestial maidens, they played around as they happily plucked fruits. It was as if they had returned to their worry-free youth.

"Strawberry, where are you? I have a flower for you!" Yan Nuxia said, a multi-colored flower in hand.

"Over here!" Long Wanying called out from a distance.

Yan Nuxia blinked and flew to her back, putting the flower into her hair. "Not bad. You're as beautiful as ever. A good fit for me, Young Master Tangerine!" She firmly patted Long Wanying's shoulder, only to see her holding a transmission stone with a grave look on her face. Then her expression contorted into one of hate.

"What's wrong?" Yan Nuxia asked.

"Tianming sent me a transmission stone. Look." She handed it to her.

Yan Nuxia immediately cursed. "Even that animal Li Wushuang is here?! Has she finally resolved herself to die? I've been wanting to skin her since forever!"

"Stop boasting. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect wasn't even able to protect itself once they set their sights on us. Who dares to kill the sun emperor's sister now? The Myriad Solar Sects are no longer as strong a force as we thought. We just noticed it too late."

"I really don't know what the Sky Palace is doing. They're already at our doorstep, but they're not doing shit! Why isn't anyone overthrowing the Sky Palace to control the distribution of nova source ourselves?" She couldn't figure out what was going on. Thinking about what had happened back then, she felt even worse. "I've never seen anyone as despicable as Li Wushuang!"

"That's enough. We can't do anything to her. She can't be offended, unlike Shi Yan," Long Wanying said, processing her feelings and letting them go after a deep breath.

"Just because we can't offend her doesn't mean we can't curse her. I suspect she was the one behind the deaths of your husband and son. Why would she approach you otherwise?" Yan Nuxia said, clawing the branch beside her in frustration.

"What's wrong, you two?" the others asked when they came.

"Li Wushuang is here."

They all launched into a tirade of curses when they heard her name.

"It's fine, it won't make a huge difference. All she did was bring the sun emperor's youngest son here. She didn't remain with the Tumulus Pill God and the others. However, I heard Li Haochen wants all the fruits of the divine tree because of his unique totems. In other words, those three factions are going to completely serve Li Haochen, but how they operate among themselves is none of our business. However, they did set their sights on a grade-seven divine herb in the territory of the Azuresoul Palace," Long Wanying said. She began rationally considering the situation. She couldn't let herself act according to her emotions, especially in recent years. She was on her own, and the slightest misstep would cause her to spiral down into an abyss.

"Grade seven? Not even we've found anything that good yet!"

"Maybe the Azuresoul Palace found it and kept it secret from us. There's more of them, after all."

Long Wanying said, "Let's not get anxious over it. We'll get the location soon enough."

In about an hour, another transmission came with the coordinates of the divine herb. Long Wanying narrowed her eyes. "This is located at the southmost part of the divine tree. It's deep within the Azuresoul Palace's territory and not disputed land at all. Would they dare to come in and take it?" It was one thing for them to negotiate with a strong enemy about disputed territory, and perhaps even give some concessions. However, if the enemy didn't care and wanted to go that far south to take the divine herb, that was going overboard.

"Let's go!"

"Do we tell the Azuresoul Palace about it?"

"Of course. We're here to cooperate with them, so there needs to be a baseline level of respect," Long Wanying said.

Soon, they grouped up and headed toward the location of the herb. It wasn't too far off from where they were. The thousands of people sped through the dense greenery. There were a few cockroaches with Long Wanying that could give her really precise instructions.

"It's up ahead. It isn't ripe yet, so be prepared to fight," Long Wanying said.

"If they dare to mess around, we'll kill them all!" Yan Nuxia roared.

They swiftly encircled the area. There were already a few people from the Azuresoul Palace there, among whom was one of the six Swordbearers of the Gujian clan, Gujian Daoyi, the younger brother of Gujian Qingshuang. He was a grade-five swordpupil and looked like the chief instructor, but somewhat younger and beardless, which gave him a righteous look.

"Whitedragon Empress, how'd you know that they were coming?" Gujian Daoyi asked.

"Our scouts noticed them!" Yan Nuxia said.

"Ah, I see...." Gujian Daoyi nodded. He had been summoned because this was the Azuresoul Palace's territory, so it would be more appropriate for someone from their sect to face any invaders.

Soon, the elites arrived. Long Wanying spotted them from a distance away. "There aren't many of them, only tens at most, but they're all elite," she warned.

"Understood!"

The celestial maidens and Azuresoul Palace members numbered around ten thousand. They swiftly set up a defensive perimeter. Nobody from the Emyrean Sword Sect was there, since they numbered rather few and wanted to keep things low profile.

Long Wanying spotted the Tumulus Pill God, Lan Sha, and Yun Tianque attending to a golden-robed youth like loyal servants. The youth looked to be quite satisfied at the sight of the divine herb, but their group was shocked to see Long Wanying and the rest arrive.

The Tumulus Pill God looked around and said, "They're here."

"I see." Li Haochen paid attention to the inconspicuous fruit. "Pill God, you're someone in the trade, so you can tell, right? This fruit looks normal, but its divine ordered patterns are incredibly complex. Each

piece of its flesh contains countless patterns that are still in dormant form. Once the fruit ripens, it could even mature into grade eight!"

"Yes, there's a seventy percent chance that'll be the case," the Tumulus Pill God said.

"We must take it no matter what, understood?"

"Yes! We won't stop no matter what." Even though there was no argument that the territory belonged to the Azuresoul Palace, this divine herb alone was enough to start a war. It was so precious that no other location on the tree mattered in comparison. After all, a divine herb of this grade could be used to make a grade-eight divine pill, one grade higher than even the yinyang skyscorch pill. Even celestial orderians like Li Haochen barely got treasures of that grade; he was already dreaming about keeping it for himself.

Chapter 1323 - Ore Veins of the Empyrean Sword Sect

"I didn't expect my luck would be so good. The only problem is that there's too many flies buzzing around," Li Haochen said.

"It's fine, just swat them away." the Tumulus Pill God beamed.

"Well, I'll leave it to you guys."

"Yes. I've determined that the fruit will ripen within either seventy or seventy-one days. We don't have many people, so should we leave first for today?" the Tumulus Pill God asked.

"Fine." Li Haochen only felt amusement.

Gujian Daoyi stepped out and called out with a stern tone, "Three sirs, this fruit is in our Azuresoul Palace's territory. Please follow the rules and leave."

"Really? Wow, congrats Azuresoul Palace!" the Tumulus Pill God smiled.

They didn't say anything further and just left. They weren't in the least worried that the Azuresoul Palace would damage the fruit, because no one would mistreat such a treasure. Their departure was a little out of Long Wanying and the rest's expectations. However, it only meant they were going back to make preparations for battle.

"Are you Long Wanying?" Suddenly, Li Haochen turned toward Long Wanying.

"Get lost, mongrel." Long Wanying's voice was placid, but she had insulted both the youth and his parents in a few words.

"Shrewish and uncultured. It's unsurprising that your husband had improper thoughts toward my aunt despite having a wife and child. Now, he's just a rotting corpse." Li Haochen shrugged his shoulders as he looked at Long Wanying with distaste.

"Don't kid around, boy. Have you seen your aunt's face? It's like a monkey's ass! Even a dog would refuse her if she spread her legs, and you think she compares with Wanying? It was just your daddy wanting to kill someone. If you kill someone, just be honest about it. You're just embarrassing. Is this how an emperor should act?"

Yan Nuxia had immediately started laying down the insults. She pointed at Li Haochen and said, "If you have the guts, send your three mutts against me. This is the Myriad Solar Sects, and I want to see how you mongrels and mutts bark here."

The Tumulus Pill God carried Li Haochen into the clouds, but Yan Nuxia ignored him. The Myriad Solar Sects and celestial orderians had an antagonistic relationship, so bending the knee was the unnatural choice.

Li Haochen was shocked. Golden fire immediately began blazing in his eyes. He had always spent all his time in his clan, so hearing someone insult his father was a first.

"When can we cut out that woman's tongue?" Li Haochen asked the Tumulus Pill God.

"The fight shall be around the fruit then. It won't take too long. Bring more people along. If we do it today, we may suffer a bit."

"Fine. I can wait," Li Haochen said.

"When the time comes, I'll definitely give you the chance to do it personally," the Tumulus Pill God promised.

"No need. I don't want to dirty my hands," Li Haochen said.

The group left, and naturally, no one tried to stop them.

"I want to vomit every time I see how lofty and cocky that family is. How do you act so pretentious when you do so many bad things? They're all the same!" Yan Nuxia was furious.

"It isn't important now. What matters is that they'll be coming back." Long Wanying considered it for a moment, then looked behind her. "Cherry, go and take a look at that fruit."

Cherry stepped forward, and after a while of examining it, said, "I think it may be grade eight."

"Grade eight?" Everyone was stunned.

"Looks like we need to make preparations," Long Wanying said.

"Yes, we'll need the Empyrean Sword Sect. They'll be the main force. I don't believe they'll be able to resist a grade-eight divine herb!" Yan Nuxia said.

"Yes...."

"Strawberry, did you feel unhappy to see these people today?" Yan Nuxia asked.

"Why would I? I'm not a kid anymore. Now, the only thing I want is a chance to kill them!" The flames of vengeance burned bright in Long Wanying's eyes. She had said before that she was just a middle-aged woman who wanted revenge. It was the one desire that made her live on. Even if it was a fanciful notion, she held onto it.

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Sixth Sword Branch of the Azuresoul Palace.

The Emphyrean Sword Sect's Shi Yan's arrival made Tianming cut short his training.

Tianming stood in the doorway and looked at the woman with stone-like skin. "Is there something you need, Senior Shi?" Tianming asked.

"Let's chat for a while," she replied.

"Sure, come on in."

The two sat facing each other inside. Shi Yan sat up straight, resembling a lifeless statue.

"I'm not used to beating around the bush, so may I speak bluntly?" she said.

"Alright."

"I hear you want metal ores?" Shi Yan asked.

"Yes."

"The Emphyrean Continent our Emphyrean Sword Sect is on is the location with the greatest number of ore veins. We have over three thousand currently being mined. They're important sources for the artifacts of our sect. Even the Dreamless Celestial Nation has less than half as many as us."

"Yes, I've heard of it. The material wealth of the Emphyrean Continent does make people envious."

"That's good." Shi Yan couldn't be described as a gentle woman. However, she was trying her best to be gentle now and not give Tianming any pressure or discomfort.

She went straight to her topic. "You should be clear on the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's current situation. It isn't optimistic, and they'll have trouble resolving it within a century. Staying at the Azuresoul Palace is an insult to your rate of growth, so you can't stay here long. Thus, our Northdipper Swordsage wishes to have the four of you join our sect. We aren't that far off from the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. At least, we can provide you with as much ore as you want."

"In truth, our sect just wants to foster a good relationship with you two Sky Palace disciples. We'll mutually help each other. As a Sky Palace disciple, you don't need to worry about us plotting about you."

Clearly, Jiang Qingliu's lack of untimely death as well as Tianming and Long Wanying's increasing closeness had made her anxious. Honestly, Shi Yan's conditions were good. The ore veins were exactly what Tianming needed, and the Azuresoul Palace's Azuresky Bridge was indeed unable to help Tianming maintain his ridiculous rate of breakthroughs. If he didn't have the hope of challenging the Violetglory ranking, or access to the Violetglory Pagoda, the Emphyrean Sword Sect may have been his only choice.

But now that he could choose between resources and people, Tianming would choose people. After all, the Emphyrean Sword Sect had managed to give Tianming an amazingly bad impression.

"The Northdipper Swordsage is very sincere. If you're willing, he'll personally come to pick you up. He can even provide the six-star universal manna you want."

Tianming laughed inside. The distant Divineglory Dynasty had offered him two seven-star universal manna to try and entice him. Geniuses really had it good!

Actually, the Emyrean Sword Sect was indeed not treating him badly. They wanted to form an emotional bond through a long period of fostering them. Furthermore, they would have Lingfeng and Xiaoxiao. Five hundred years later, when everyone was intimately connected, how could the Sky Palace not take care of the Emyrean Sword Sect?

They had planned well. Their only mistake was being a step slower than Long Wanying.

Chapter 1324 - Protect Azurecloud

If this went through, the Emyrean Sword Sect would benefit greatly. In the end, the Azuresoul Palace hadn't been generous enough either, for fear of Tianming's appetite bankrupting them.

"Tianming, what do you think?"

Ore veins, universal manna, the Swordsage's personal welcome... the conditions offered were fantastic. However, Tianming could only reject it.

"I'm grateful for your good intentions, Senior Shi, and especially the Swordsage's. However, I've already spoken to Auntie Ying and made a promise. I'm thankful for her early favor. It's now, when the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is having trouble that I need to stand with it. I believe Senior Shi doesn't want me to be an ingrate either, right?"

He could abandon benefits when making a choice. Him calling one side 'Auntie Ying' and one side 'Senior Shi' made Shi Yan's heart thump. She realized that, in addition to just passively waiting for Jiang Qingliu to die, she had underestimated Long Wanying.

"I respect your choice. However, my Emyrean Sword Sect won't give up. I'll go back and propose some new conditions to the Swordsage. If you have any desires, let me know. We'll welcome you anytime!" Shi Yan said. She was certain that when the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's situation worsened and Tianming didn't get his breakthroughs, he would come and look for them.

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At the Driftsword Halls, of the over ten thousand members of the Emyrean Sword Sect, eight thousand had already left. The remaining two thousand were planning to move out as well. Inside, Shi Yan was meeting Gujian Qingshuang before leaving.

Shi Yan had an overcast expression. "Long Wanying is too vicious. I suspect she used some contemptible means to fool those naive children."

"What contemptible means?" Gujian Qingshuang asked

"What do you think? She must've used her feminine wiles to entice these inexperienced children."

"Then, how about you...." Gujian Qingshuang frowned.

"Do I look capable of that?" Shi Yan resisted the urge to stab him with her sword.

Gujian Qingshuang took a look and realized that would be a stupid plan. Long Wanying was charming, but the person in front of him was a hard stone. Some innate talents just couldn't be overcome.

“No wonder she brought over so many women from the Group of Celestial Maiden Halls. How could they fail when thousands of them are tempting Li Tianming and Yu Ziqian every day.” Shi Yan knew she had failed.

“What now then?” Gujian Qingshuang asked.

“Don’t worry. They’re disciples of the Sky Palace. Women aren’t something they’ll lack. They’ll get sick of them sooner or later, but the ore veins and resources of my Emyrean Sword Sect can’t be matched by anyone. It’ll only be a few months until they’ll be thinking of us,” Shi Yan said.

“Li Tianming is already in contact with Long Wanying, so why?” Gujian Qingshuang asked.

“I already paid the fee. There’s no refund if I cancel the hit.” Shi Yan rolled her eyes.

Gujian Qingshuang was speechless.

“Anyway, even though they’re close to Long Wanying, Jiang Qingliu is still an intermediary. It’ll be more convenient for Li Tianming’s group to join the Emyrean Sword Sect if he’s gone.”

“Alright!” Gujian Qingshuang nodded.

“Hey.” Shi Yan looked up and smiled coldly at him. “Oh, Gujian Qingshuang, stop faking it. Only the two of us are here. Even if we weren’t around, you still want him dead, right?”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” Gujian Qingshuang said.

“Why fake it? The Azuresoul Tower has always been a major part of the strength of your head instructor. Because he became the Defender of Azuresoul Tower, you ended up losing to Yun Tianque and became the continent’s number two.”

Gujian Qingshuang froze.

“Brother, we’re all on the same boat. No need to hide anything.” Shi Yan patted him on the shoulder.

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Today was the annual celebration of the Azuresoul Palace to honor their ancestors. Apart from Jiang Qingliu, who was in secluded cultivation, and Gujian Daoyi, who was outside the sect, the Swordbearers were present at the ancestral tomb.

Next to Gujian Qingshuang, Ye Dongliu, and Granny Mu Hua, there was a man dressed in yellow robes. He was standing behind Ye Dongliu and carrying a long sword, wearing a cold expression. He was the Swordbearer in charge of the Fourth Sword Branch, Ye Buzhiqiu. He was also the son of Ye Dongliu and a pillar of the Azuresoul Palace’s Dongye clan.

At that moment, in the foremost area of the ancestral tomb, Gujian Qingshuang was lighting an incense for each tombstone one by one. He respectfully bowed with a solemn expression to each of them.

“May the ancestors protect us and keep the Azuresoul Palace safe for generations and thriving forever.”

The three behind him lit their incense too.

With the ceremony complete, Gujian Qingshuang got ready to leave. "A grade-eight divine herb is about to be born. Apart from Granny Mu Hua, who'll remain to protect the sect, all others will follow me.

"Head instructor, what about Jiang Qingliu?" the youngest, Ye Buzhiqiu, said in a low voice.

"He claims to be at a critical juncture of his secluded cultivation."

"At this time, he has to come out no matter what. He has to fight to the death for the Azuresoul Palace's honor and not be a coward," Ye Buzhiqiu said.

Gujian Qingshuang's mouth twitched.

"Head instructor, call him along," Ye Dongliu suddenly added. "This is a major matter of the sect. It's a grade-eight divine herb! The other side clearly wants to snatch it. The Empyrean Sword Sect and Group of Celestial Maiden Halls are also moving out, so how can we be the ones turtling up?"

Gujian Qingshuang stood in front of the tombstones, not saying a word.

The young Ye Buzhiqiu stepped out and spoke to Gujian Qingshuang's back. "Head instructor! I'm more blunt, so don't blame me for saying some words." When he saw that Gujian Qingshuang wasn't saying anything, he continued, "The new myriad sect ranking is about to come up. We'll obviously be higher than the Supracloud Sanctuary. But everyone knows our actual strength isn't above theirs. How could it be, when our head instructor is weaker than their Yun Tianque? How on the sun will we qualify to be this continent's number one sect."

Ye Buzhiqiu's voice echoed through the ancestral tomb and no one said anything for a while, so he forged on. "But! As far as I know, our head instructor isn't poorer than Yun Tianque when it comes to talent or cultivation level. So what's the problem? It's that the head instructor's Azuresoul Tower is in Jiang Qingliu's hands and has recognized him as its master! But that fellow hasn't grasped its power and he can't even match up to me. It's an utter waste! However, the artifact will never submit to the head instructor as long as he's alive. In that case, Jiang Qingliu is a sinner of our sect. He doesn't just not help us, but he's actually a burden!"

No one said anything.

Ye Buzhiqiu got even more emotional, and said loudly, "Today, the Supracloud Sanctuary has chosen death and to become the celestial orderians' new lapdogs! This is the Myriad Solar Sect's territory. With the hijinks they're pulling here and in the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, if we don't respond at all then, well, there's no point for the Myriad Solar Sects to exist."

"Thus, the Supracloud Sanctuary is seeking death. They'll be finished, sooner or later, and there's no way the celestial orderians will care about their life or death. All of that combined means that our chance of dominating the Supracloud Sanctuary and Azurecloud Continent is high. However, all of it rests on our head instructor, our leader, having the Azuresoul Tower and being able to crush Yun Tianque!"

"This is our best chance in history, yet someone is getting in the way of the Sky Palace disciples and Empyrean Sword Sect. This burden who's stolen our head instructor's treasure and prevented our rise to greatness, what is he if not our greatest sinner?"

“Jiang Qingliu must die!” Ye Buzhiqiu exchanged a look with his father, Ye Dongliu, who looked very pleased.

The tomb was dead silent.

Ye Dongliu broke the silence. “Actually, if we can conquer the continent, the best part is that we can chop down the Azurecloud Divine Tree. In truth, the Sky Palace gives the continent quite a bit of the nova source. It’s just that most of it is taken by the tree, and the fruit it bears using that doesn’t really come to us.”

“We might as well cut it down. In that case, the continent’s resources will belong to us and we’ll become a true first-rate sect one day. Our generation will be the eternal heroes that broke the shackles of the Azurecloud Divine Tree and become revered by all our descendants!”

Gujian Qingshuang’s heart pounded at the thought of chopping down the tree. He looked up and saw a plaque above that had been personally written by the founder. It was a teaching passed down through thousands of generations and deep within every member of the Gujian clan’s blood, as well as the belief countless children living under the Azurecloud Divine Tree held.

The words were: “Protect Azurecloud”.

“The ancestor was wrong. When we have no power, the tree isn’t a treasure but a chain around our neck, caging us in.” Granny Mu Hua sighed. All of them were looking at Gujian Qingshuang.

He breathed in deeply. “Let’s go find Jiang Qingliu.”

Chapter 1325 - Take a Stand Regardless of Life and Death

The Azuresoul Sword Hall was the only place not kept under surveillance by Yin Chen. However, it was an area where mostly only Gujian Qingshuang stayed.

Everywhere else was covertly filled with little Yin Chens. They were tiny and didn’t move at all, so it was like they had disappeared. Hidden in the dark corners, they quietly watched everything. Up until now, apart from when Yin Chen took its work break and found somewhere to wash itself, nothing was missed by the omnipresent Primordial Chaos Beast. Tianming wouldn’t be wrong to say that he would have been blind at the Azuresoul Palace if it weren’t for Yin Chen.

Tianming was training in the Violetglory Pagoda’s seventh floor when Yin Chen rushed him out to show him what it had seen. After hearing a short bit, Tianming’s face darkened.

Yin Chen was still slowly describing, “Then that... Ye Buzhichen... started saying....”

Tianming immediately set off and, after dragging Yu Ziqian out of dreamland, rushed over to Jiang Qingliu.

“What is it?” Yu Ziqian shouted.

Tianming ignored him and spoke to Yin Chen. “Enough, just display what you want to say to me!”

Inside the lifebound space, the remaining tiny silver eggs were succinct. "Stupid fool." However, it still knew it was slow, which was a critical flaw for a messenger. Hence, the small eggs transformed into tiny cockroaches that spread out, forming words.

Ye Buzhiqu's words were quickly displayed in text form. It only took one quick glance for Tianming to understand.

"If I'd made you say all this, it would've taken an hour," Tianming muttered.

"Stupid fool." The antennae of the cockroaches all stood up.

Tianming felt like it was pointing the middle finger at him. It hadn't been alive long, and it had been spending most of its time eavesdropping and watching Yu Ziqian tease his junior and senior sisters. It had also learned some uncouth words and spoke like a delinquent.

Jiang Qingliu was currently in the Sixth Sword Branch. Gujian Qingshuang and the rest were currently at the ancestral tomb, which was located in the First Sword Branch. They wouldn't be coming over in a hurry, so Tianming quickly seized the time and rushed to Jiang Qingliu's residence.

He immediately barged in.

"Master, master!" Yu Ziqian shouted.

A middle-aged man in green clothes appeared in front of them. His hair and clothes were a complete mess, and there was no light in his eyes. He didn't seem very steady on his feet, either. Clearly, his mental state wasn't the best during this time.

"What happened?" Jiang Qingliu rubbed his eyes, looking slightly lost.

"Something huge." Tianming was someone who always worked fast. He quickly conveyed the conversation in the tomb to Jiang Qingliu before finally summarizing, "They have actual killing intent toward you now. Not because of the Emyrean Sword Sect or the matter of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, but because they want your Azuresoul Tower. If Gujian Qingshuang is coming, it means he's been convinced. Either that, or the Azuresoul Tower has always been plaguing his mind."

Jiang Qingliu calmly listened. He just chuckled bitterly and downed more wine, shaking his head.

Yu Ziqian had been furious to find out the truth. "Fuck them! It's Gujian Qingshuang's own fault for being anxious when the Azuresoul Tower was choosing its owner, and ended up losing its trust. My master didn't even approach the tower and it chose him!"

It was inexplicable. The chief instructor of the Azuresoul Palace didn't have the divine artifact with the same name.

When Tianming and Yu Ziqian looked at Jiang Qingliu and asked him what to do, Jiang Qingliu hoarsely laughed. "Actually, I knew his real intention from the moment he didn't say anything."

As expected, the ones who understood the situation best were those involved.

“Bastard! He’s blaming others for his own ineptness. You’ve done so much for the Azuresoul Palace!” Yu Ziqian’s eyes were turning red. “Even worse, they want to chop down the tree. Taking care of it has been an ancestral instruction for generations. It’s the foundation of the continent! “

Compared to simply dying, the Azurecloud Divine Tree falling would be the pain of centuries and generations. Many natives of the continent saw the tree as their origin and the support of their heart. Even if not many saw it bear fruit in their lifetimes, it still represented thriving through the ages and every scar on its body told a story and symbolized history. It was something core to the blood flowing through everyone on the Azurecloud Continent.

“Was I at fault? Am I the greatest sinner? Haha...” Jiang Qingliu slowly sat on the ground, his expression growing bleaker. He recalled how before he was thirty, he had wanted to fight for his home’s glory. However, ignorant then, he had lost half of his talent. For hundreds of years afterward, he had tried his hardest. He had campaigned for the Azurecloud Continent, accepted disciples, and always put in his best. He had loved this land, but was now being called a sinner by these people.

“Master, don’t listen to them. You need to fight back! We’ve all been to the ancestral tomb. They’re the ones who’ve gone against the ancestral teachings. They’re the traitors to the Azuresoul Palace and our ancestors!” Yu Ziqian grit his teeth.

“Protect Azurecloud...” New light shone in Jiang Qingliu’s eyes. The people he had once respected the most, including Granny Mu Hua, had said words that had made him despair. His entire world had collapsed. However, the conviction in his heart and his veneration for that tree had relit the fire in his heart.

“Senior Jiang, I hope you can stand up again. After all, you aren’t alone. You still have me, Ziqian, Auntie Ying, and the friends from the Group of Celestial Maiden Halls. Even if the entire Azuresoul Palace stands against us, history will determine the party that’s in the right. Following our hearts is the path of a cultivator, and the treasure we try to grasp our whole lives. You cannot give up hope. At least, you can’t let down your children and their children because of short-term benefits.” This matter had made Tianming quite emotional.

He did get it. On the surface, the Azuresoul Palace barely got any fruits. However, that amount was enough to make the sect rank thirty-eighth on the myriad sect ranking. One could only imagine the value of the full haul.

The tree sucked up most of the nova source of the continent to produce these fruits. Clearly, the tree could raise the efficacy of nova source by several times! It wasn’t at fault; the only fault lay with the Azuresoul Palace and Supracloud Sanctuary not having the strength to protect this treasure, which let outsiders occupy it.

The outsiders using their strength to snatch treasures didn’t seem wrong either. Thus, the original sin lay with the weak. However, wanting to cut down the tree because they were weak was both short-sighted and insane. Perhaps the Azuresoul Palace’s ancestors had more reasons for making protecting the tree a teaching!

Jiang Qingliu inhaled deeply. “I’m impressed with your understanding at your age. I’m several centuries old, yet I was so confused.”

“It’s just because senior wasn’t able to take an objective view and was too emotionally invested in this. Since the opponent doesn’t care about bonds, senior can also ignore any past ties. Take a stand regardless of life and death”

Jiang Qingliu laughed. He stood up and patted Tianming’s shoulder. “Thank you. My fate would’ve been to die, and I would’ve done so in ignorance as well.”

“So?” Tianming asked.

“Wait for me.” Jiang Qingliu went back inside.

“What will master do?” Yu Ziqian asked.

“I don’t know. However, they’re about to arrive.” Tianming knew that Gujian Qingshuang had arrived in the Sixth Sword Branch from Yin Chen’s report.

Jiang Qingliu reappeared from inside. He had cleaned up. He had changed into new green robes, tidied up his hair, and washed his face. Now, he gave off a positive vibe. He seemed completely different than the man he was before.

“Did you transform inside?” Yu Ziqian asked, surprised.

“Yes, it’s a new me,” Jiang Qingliu chuckled. Now, he seemed to have an immortal air around him the way Gujian Qingshuang did.

Gujian Qingshuang’s group had arrived outside. They directly entered when they saw the gate open. As they entered, their faces resumed peaceful expressions instead of their previous coldness.

“Qingliu.” Gujian Qingshuang entered and immediately caught sight of the three of them. He noticed that Jiang Qingliu seemed to be in a much better condition than before.

Chapter 1326 - Greenjade Mountain’s Ore Veins

“So the two Sky Palace disciples are here as well?” Gujian Qingshuang asked. Ye Dongliu, Granny Mu Hua and Ye Buzhiqiu were behind him with expressions that were too obviously calm.

“Yes, Tianming needs some ore veins to cultivate, so he came to find me. He wanted me to help him speak to the chief instructor.” Jiang Qingliu smiled. Then he directed a doubtful look toward them. “What’re you four here for? Is something the matter?”

The matter of ore was a painful topic for Gujian Qingshuang, so he avoided it. With a solemn look, he said, “Qingliu, a grade-eight divine herb has appeared near Elderpond City. However, the group of wargodeans, Supracloud Sanctuary, and the Blueblood Starocean have all discovered its location. The sun emperor’s youngest son, Li Haochen, is teaming up with them as well.

“Daoyi ran into them. Their intention was clearly to snatch away our divine herb. We’ve discussed it with our friends from the Empyrean Sword Sect and Group of Celestial Maiden Halls. We’ll defend our treasure and give the invaders heavy injuries.”

Gujian Qingshuang continued, “We’ve decided to have Granny Mu Hua stay behind and guard the sect. The Sixth Sword Branch will go out to battle, and we may need the Azuresoul Tower. I heard you were in

secluded cultivation, but the glory and survival of the sect is most important. We're setting off now, so follow along!"

Gujian Qingshuang's stern tone made it clear this was an order, not a request. His meaning was obvious when he mentioned the Azuresoul Tower. Jiang Qingliu may not have been strong, but the special properties of the tower were irreplaceable. As one of the six Swordbearers, there was no reason Jiang Qingliu could give to escape it. Otherwise, he could even be deemed guilty.

Gujian Qingshuang had already overcome his internal struggle and made the most cold-blooded decision. Fortunately, Tianming hadn't revealed he could eavesdrop. This man wouldn't be trustworthy even if the Empyrean Sword Sect wasn't around.

Jiang Qingliu frowned and immediately raged, "Outrageous! This is our land! It's not even in disputed territory, and it's quite close to us here! If they even dare to snatch that, aren't they saying that the whole Azurecloud Divine Tree is theirs? "

"Correct, this is the one time we can't back down!" Ye Dongliu added.

"Let's stop here. Pack up, we're leaving," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Qingliu will naturally not refuse and shall throw himself into hell or high water for the sect. Let me go prepare," Jiang Qingliu said.

Tianming froze when he heard that. Was Jiang Qingliu so eager to die? Gujian Qingshuang and the rest, on the other hand, sighed in relief and revealed satisfied smiles.

"Oh, wait!" Jiang Qingliu had just taken two steps when he turned around. "Chief instructor, when will the divine herb ripen?"

"Two months or so." Gujian Qingshuang didn't overthink it before replying.

"Two months? So there's still time..." Jiang Qingliu thought for a moment, then said, "You all go first, chief instructor. I'll set off in one month. I won't miss the battle."

"You have something on?" Gujian Qingshuang frowned.

"Yes! I've been stuck at my current level for more than eighty years now. I used to think it'd be my life's limit. However, I've recently had some inspiration and felt my divine will improving. I feel like if you give me a month, I'll be able to kill more enemies when the time comes."

"You can break through in a month?" All four of them were stunned.

"Yes, but I'll need some help from the Azuresky Bridge," Jiang Qingliu said.

"Fine!" The four exchanged a look.

Honestly, Ye Dongliu and Granny Mu Hua were so old that their cultivation had begun wasting away. Breakthroughs were something they had long forgotten. Gujian Qingshuang had reached his peak too long ago as well, leaving only Ye Buzhiqiu any hope for growth.

For people of their tier, breakthroughs were a fantasy. Once accomplished, their status would greatly change. Hence, they were doubtful of Jiang Qingliu's confidence. Disdain even crept into their hearts. To them, Jiang Qingliu had grown full of himself after getting two Sky Palace disciples.

"Don't worry while you're trying to break through. If you fail, don't waste time here. We need the Azuresoul Tower," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Don't worry, one month will be enough." Jiang Qingliu pounded his chest confidently.

"We'll leave first then." Gujian Qingshuang gave his group a look.

After they turned away, their expressions grew much colder.

"Break through?" They were all at their life's peak. If a single month would be enough to surpass it, then others were just embarrassing themselves. It seemed more and more like a figment of Jiang Qingliu's imagination. However, they couldn't force things when he had said that. The divine herb really hadn't ripened yet, after all.

"Wait." Jiang Qingliu spoke up as they were leaving.

"What?"

"Can you stretch the rules a little for Tianming's ore veins? Maybe the Greenjade Mountain's ore veins? It's mostly abandoned and not much of value is left inside, I believe."

"Fine. bring him there. If you need to go outside, make sure to protect the Sky Palace disciples."

"Many thanks, chief instructor!" Tianming hurriedly said.

"No need to be polite. If our foundations weren't so shallow, we would've answered any request of you Sky Palace disciples. I hope you can understand," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"I do, I do."

Thus, the four flew away. Three left the sect, while Granny Mu Hua returned to her Third Sword Branch to 'protect' the sect.

"Urgh. They want master to accompany you just for an ore vein. They want to kill him." Yu Ziqian spat.

"Every word that comes out of their mouths is one that can't be trusted." Tianming rolled his eyes.

"Master, don't you have any better tricks? If you could break through, then pigs can fly." Yu Ziqian was anxious.

"What choice did I have? I can only try buying time," Jiang Qingliu said.

"Then what happens in a month?"

"We'll see." Jiang Qingliu turned to Tianming. "Find someone to bring you to the ore vein, I'm going into secluded meditation."

"Okay. The Group of Celestial Maiden Halls' Auntie Niu is still here." Tianming smiled.

Chapter 1327 - Two Peerless Beauties

Auntie Niu was Niu Xiaoqian, also known as Avocado. She had a robust figure and was talented in the fine art of beating people up. Long Wanying had specifically left her behind to protect Tianming.

“Master, are you really going into secluded cultivation?” Yu Ziqian’s eyes widened.

“Get lost already! I recommend you stop overexerting yourself when you’re young. Quite a few female disciples have been coming to me complaining you’re scum! You’ve ruined my heroic reputation!” Jiang Qingliu scolded.

“Woaaaaahh, look at that! The weather’s so great that the skies are clear for miles!” Yu Ziqian blatantly changed the topic, earning him a glare from Jiang Qingliu before he went back inside.

“Do you think he might have a chance to break through?” Tianming asked Yu Ziqian.

“Yeah right.” Yu Ziqian rolled his eyes.

“I actually think there’s a chance. When their life is undergoing great changes, people change. After despairing, they may be reborn and walk a new road they never would’ve walked before. That rebirth can lead to the divine will growing and the cultivation growing,” Tianming said.

“True. But this old dude has been quiet his entire life. He was only glorious before he was thirty. So I don’t hold much hope,” Yu Ziqian said.

“Let’s watch and see,” Tianming said.

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The next day, Auntie Niu accompanied Tianming to Greenjade Mountain. Despite her robust appearance, she was actually very meticulous. She took care of his well-being on the way, making sure he was well mentally and physically.

However, all Tianming really needed was Gujian Qingshuang’s approval. He left a single Yin Chen behind; if no one bothered it, it would clean up the mine itself. The new clones would automatically return to Tianming’s side.

The ore vein there was nearly exhausted and the remaining ore was all deep underground. It was harder to mine it, and the available resources were limited. However, that wasn’t a problem for Yin Chen. Preliminary estimations were that cleaning up this mine would increase the number of small silver eggs by two hundred and fifty thousand.

After supplementing the metal cockroaches used for scouting and investigation, there would still be two hundred thousand left. Tianming intended to use a further fifty thousand silver eggs to become five hundred thousand metal cockroaches to send to the tree.

Thus, in the form of locusts, a swarm flew to the tree. The rest made their way back to Azuresoul Sword Mountain.

A junior like Tianming couldn’t help with the conflict over the divine tree, so he stayed behind to cultivate. However, his true cultivation location was the seventh level of the Violetglory Pagoda.

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“Lin Feng.”

Tianming was at the entrance to the pagoda and Liu Wanwan was waiting for him there.

“Wanwan?” Tianming smiled. “What is it?”

“People from the Violetcloud Imperium reached out to me through the pavilion master of my Mystgod Pavilion. They wanted me to recommend them to you.” Liu Wanwan stuck out her tongue.

“Eh. I’m not going,” Tianming said.

“Eh? Why so direct?” Liu Wanwan was confused.

“For now, I won’t go to either the Divineglory Dynasty or the Violetcloud Imperium. Tell them we’ll discuss things when I get first on the rankings,” Tianming said.

“First... how much do you know about Ye Chen?”

“Not very much, honestly. Hey, how about you help me collect his information? While you’re at it, get all the top three for me,” Tianming said.

“Alright! I’ll look for you when I have it.”

“Thanks, little sis.”

“No need to be polite with me. But, you should call me big sis, I am the older one, after all.” Liu Wanwan pouted.

“Well, you don’t have that vibe at all.” Tianming laughed.

Liu Wanwan snorted. After pausing for a moment, she asked, “You sure you don’t want to meet the people from Violetcloud Imperium?”

“Yes, why?”

“I’m scared my pavilion master will scold me when I go back.”

“Is that so.” Tianming suddenly realized his reputation could give Liu Wanwan some trouble. Thinking it over, he said, “Okay, from now on, let’s not meet again. We’ll only use wondersky fairies to talk. Tell them we’re just casual acquaintances and I can’t be bothered with you.”

“Is that to protect me?”

“Yes.” Tianming nodded.

“That’s thoughtful of you.”

“Completely natural talent. Goodbye!” Tianming proceeded to enter the pagoda.

“Yes. I hope you get first! Too bad I won’t be able to brag that the number one is my friend.” Liu Wanwan understood. A genius who didn’t want to show himself was potentially a fatal disaster for her.

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The solarian caeli on the seventh level were clearly better than those on the sixth. Tianming and Lingfeng spent almost all their time here. Cultivating with them were the solarian seniors of the Violetglory Star. All of them would be lords and rulers on nova source stars. They all made huge progress every day.

Lingfeng was still testing pills for Yu Ziqian. His Primordial Demonlord legacy wasn't amazing on the battlefield, but instead in the area of cultivation speed.

Xiaoxiao was still on the pagoda's sixth level. They had expected her to stay there for quite a while, but unexpectedly, she had instead exploded into a flurry. What Xiaoxiao lacked the most was combat experience, making this wondersky realm a paradise for her. She was continuously fighting, thereby merging and grasping her strength and making her the fastest in rising through the cultivation levels.

A month had since passed since Gujian Qingshuang left the sect and Jiang Qingliu hadn't made his breakthrough yet. Xiaoxiao however, had become a sixth-level constellier. Afterward, she had used the Dragonblood Desecration to challenge the tenth place on the Violetglory rankings.

Tianming watched the fight. It was the battle that granted Xiaoxiao fame, as she was the third disciple from an unknown power in the top ten and had also been spotted alongside Lin Feng.

The first attempt, she had failed. A dozen days later, she had re-challenged the seventh-level constellier. This time, working together with the Archaionfiend, she defeated her opponent and entered the top ten of the rankings.

The battle was fierce, but no one would get injured in the wondersky realm. Thus, the trio had seized fifth, eighth and tenth on the board.

It did seem slightly amusing that the trio from the imperial star rankings had transferred to the Violetglory rankings billions of kilometers away.

Xiaoxiao was happy to have access to the seventh level as well. Apart from devouring caeli, she also hoped to improve the proper and traditional way.

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Time continued passing, and fifty days had passed since the discovery of the grade-eight divine herb.

Xiaoxiao was currently a sixth-level constellier, while Lingfeng was a fifth-level constellier. Tianming had said he could already challenge the second place on the rankings, an eighth-level totemancer from the Violetcloud Imperium. However, Lingfeng wasn't anxious yet, and needed a long period to master his skills. His soul also wasn't properly registered by the wondersky realm, so it was less effective than in real life.

As for Tianming, he was hurriedly trying to catch up. He was trying his best to shoot for the third place right now!

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The Supracloud Sanctuary was a city built on a cloud. Corpses from generations of nimbus emperors had been piled together, forming a giant city that floated in the sky of the Azurecloud Continent.

A massive army had gathered there. The wargodeans, Blueblood Starocean, and the Supracloud Sanctuary had come out in force. And all of them were kneeling to Li Haochen, the emperor's youngest son.

This sense of power, when compared to the petty squabbles between the younger generation of the celestial orderians, made Li Haochen's heart pound.

"Prepare to depart!" This time they would surely crush the opponent. Ambition burned in Li Haochen's chest. This was his first time going to war in his life, and he had to prove himself.

The troops roared in response, their shouts shaking the skies. The Tumulus Pill God whispered to Li Haochen, "Prince, two women are here to see you. One says she's the princess of the soul tribulators, Li Ruoshi. The other says she's the daughter of the Torchdragon Emperor from the Veildragon Palace, Long Youyou."

"Did they come together?" Li Haochen felt his head hurting.

"No. One came from the celestial orderians, while the other came from the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. However, they arrived at the same time. Are you going to let them in? They're going to fight soon." The Tumulus Pill God felt his head aching as well. He couldn't afford to offend these two young women,

The soul tribulators were the number one vassal of the celestial orderians, and the clan of the empress. Their status was countless times higher than the Blueblood Starocean. The other was the daughter of Veildragon Palace's First Dragon Imperial.

Neither were easy to deal with!

The Tumulus Pill God also knew that their talent and ranking were both just below Li Haochen in the celestial orderians. They weren't second or third, but tied for second.

"Let them in," Li Haochen said.

"Yes." The Tumulus Pill God hurriedly nodded his head, then left to collect them.

Li Haochen sucked in a deep breath and gritted his teeth.

"I can hear them fighting over a man from here. The young prince is quite lucky, both are goddesses," Lan Sha cracked a joke.

"If just one was here, it'd still be fine. But since both of them are here, urgh...." Li Haochen shook his head. "Let's focus on the important things and ignore them."

"Yes,"

"Big Brother Haochen!" A gentle voice reached him before the people did themselves. Immediately after that, two young women with vastly different styles attached themselves to Li Haochen's arms.

Chapter 1328 - A Beauty On Each Arm

The style of the two girls by Li Haochen's side were different, but they were still both stunning beauties. One look and it was clear that they were the top of their generation when it came to clan and talent.

As the princess of the soul tribulators, Li Ruoshi was a classical beauty of the celestial orderians. Simple, but elegant, flowers decorated her white dress. Her exquisite figure combined with her fair skin made her seem like a fairy that had descended into the human world. Her shy gaze was especially moving as well.

The current empress who had bore ten sons for the sun emperor was her aunt. Thus, she had been determined to be Li Haochen's main wife since young.

The other, Long Youyou, was the Torchdragon Emperor's daughter. Recently, the Veildragon Palace's stock in the celestial orderians had shot up, especially after taking control of the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. After hearing that Li Haochen had appeared in the Azurecloud Continent, Long Youyou had made a special trip down there.

As a beastmaster of the Veildragon Palace, Long Youyou had three red eyes, one of which was between her eyebrows. It was currently closed, making her forehead look unblemished. Her strange appearance was the opposite of Li Ruoshi's. She had a much livelier vibe and was the adorable type. Together with her features, she seemed like a little fairy. In contrast, however, her body was very well-developed into a spicy figure.

Together, each of them grabbed one of Li Haochen's arms.

Li Ruoshi was still slightly embarrassed and didn't dare to go too far. However, Long Youyou was worried about being slower so she daringly held his arm and leaned her head on his shoulder, practically pasting herself to him. She gave a warning look toward Li Ruoshi.

A storm of jealousy was clearly brewing for all to see. Both of them would be marrying Li Haochen, that wasn't the conflict. The question was who would be higher in the pecking order. It was a sensitive issue, as it affected the standing of their clans.

That was why Li Haochen had said that if just one was there, it would still be fine.

"Youyou, why are you here? I thought you were helping your brother bring the rebel clan to heel." Li Haochen's head hurt.

"I heard you were in the Azurecloud Continent and was worried some blind idiots would bully you, so I came to protect you. As for my brother, he doesn't need my help," Long Youyou replied.

"I don't need your help, either." Li Haochen rubbed her head, before turning to Li Ruoshi. "Shishi, I thought you were in secluded cultivation?"

"I.. I heard the tree here has magnificent scenery. I've never had the chance to see it. I heard Big Brother Haochen was here, too, so I thought I'd take the chance to see it," Li Ruoshi said. That was what she said, but she was actually afraid of her opponent spending too much time with Li Haochen.

"Alright! However, I don't need any protection. The tree isn't very nice to see, either. In a few days, both of you go back. Don't affect my work," Li Haochen said sternly.

"Yes!" Both of them pouted, clearly unhappy.

"Big Brother Haochen, I heard we're about to set off and fight for a grade-eight divine herb?" Li Ruoshi asked gently.

“Yes.”

“Woah, I didn’t expect such a backwater to have something so good. Big Brother Haochen just happens to need this, so that’s good.” Long Youyou was excited.

“It should be easy to get with so many people here, right?” Li Ruoshi asked.

Li Haochen looked ahead. “Probably. However, this isn’t our turf and there’s some annoying flies buzzing around.”

“Flies? Just swat them away then.” Long Youyou blinked.

Li Haochen roared with laughter. “Set off!”

With beauties accompanying him, he felt like an emperor setting off to war. For a while, he was in high spirits.

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In the seventh level of the Violetglory Pagoda, Tianming’s caelum was swimming through the various solarian caeli. For these nearly two months, Tianming had mostly been working on his Lifesbane Will.

“These should all be around Senior Jiang Qingliu’s level, I think. Just this region has millions of them. With so many people and such a long history, the number of people who’ve reached such heights really has built up.” Though every person walked a different path, there would always be similarities.

“In the final analysis, the path of cultivation is to absorb divine will from the laws of the world. Then, absorb power from a nova source before using divine will to control that power. So, every one of these caeli is a fragment of the world’s laws.” The core of Lifesbane Will was mutual resonance. Through resonance, each and every caelum would be used to supplement the world’s laws that Tianming needed.

“The formation of my Lifesbane Will was the foundation for what happens next.” The following rapid growth of his Lifesbane Will was what Tianming had expected, too. This kind of ‘natural growth’ could catch up to Lingfeng and Xiaoxiao’s devouring speed. In truth, it was a benefit that came from Tianming’s stable foundation. It was also proof that his choices back then were correct.

In his divine will right now, the Grand-Orient Sword was the sword while the Prime Tower was the shield, both mutually reinforcing each other. The sharp Grand-Orient-Sword-shaped Imperial Will could stimulate Lifesbane Will’s growth!

“When my Lifesbane Will was formed that time, I more or less rose a level and a half. Today, I’ve managed to finish up the last half a level.” Tianming had had to endure the boredom of doing the same thing over and over again for days.

“Am I finally a third-level constellier?” Tianming returned to the Azuresoul Palace and began absorbing nova source. The five layers of astraldiscs were almost at the third level of the Constellation stage. The combination of his Imperial and Lifesbane Wills was what barely allowed Tianming to control this violent and surging energy.

In his albi, five different types of astralforce roared and whistled. "The Saint Palace Spring is the first stage of cultivation, while the astralforce of albi is the second stage." As for Earth Saint, Sky Saint, and the Samsara stage, those were all just minor substages within a 'major stage'.

"It's the same for the Ascendant, Constellation, and Solar stages." As for the Beast Vein, Spiritsource, and Unity stages... the greater races with nova sources were all born as a saint at minimum. They gained their heavenly wills in the womb and didn't need those trifling starter stages.

After reaching a new level, Tianming's heart remained calm.

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Tianming, Lingfeng, and Xiaoxiao all trained near Xian Xian's Radix World Tree, not bothering each other. By Tianming's side was the flower Feiling had transformed into. He would regularly be there, watching Feiling grow and missing her more and more. "Ling'er, I'm dying for someone to caress."

The flower shrank back a little, as if it was frightened.

Tianming lowered his head and asked Lingfeng, who was below the tree, "How do you feel?"

"I feel much better now. This progress is fine with the Primordial Gate, and the souldfiend is also fully recovered," Lingfeng said. He was now a fifth-level constellier. With his soul advantage, he could fight someone on the seventh level. And if it was a totem cultivator, matching an eighth-level constellier would be possible!

Chapter 1329 - Your Death Will Benefit Us All

Tianming sat beside Lingfeng, putting a hand on his shoulder. Lingfeng would often look in the direction of the flaming north with eyes filled with worry. "Don't worry about it too much for now. I asked around and heard that she's cultivating at the Moonfang Sea or Ninemoon Palace and has a high status among the celestial orderians. However, she basically never shows herself in public, so nobody really knows how powerful she is."

"I see.... It's fine, I was just wondering how much more powerful we'd have to be to be able to go see her and get a hold of her situation, and when we can finally take her away." Lingfeng seemed rather down.

"The situation is far from ideal right now, so we'll have to keep an eye out for chances. It'd be ideal if she can find a chance to come to us herself." As far as they were concerned, the territory of the celestial orderians was off limits for them.

"She still feels so far away."

"She is indeed. But as long as we keep up our pace, we'll meet again one day."

"That's right. You becoming a Sky Palace disciple was already a huge step." Lingfeng looked in the distance with confidence in his eyes once more. The Soulfliend came over and he jumped onto its shoulder, then the two jumped down into the abyss of the mountain. He had always liked training at dark spots.

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The next day, Tianming went to Jiang Qingliu's residence. He asked Yu Ziqian, "Your master said he would break through in about a month, but it's been close to two. Why isn't he out yet?" We should be heading to the location of the herb."

"That's right! That old fool was just boasting after all," Yu Ziqian said.

"Didn't anyone rush him?"

"Granny Mu Hua did, every day in fact. But he just kept telling them that he needs a few more days. He's almost like a tenant who doesn't want to pay rent."

"I didn't think your master would also be talented at having thick skin. I heard the divine herb's just about to ripen. Li Haochen's army of three factions has departed and will arrive soon. I want to go check it out."

"It's only going to be endless fighting there. Why go? It's a battlefield for the peak elites. Going there might get you killed for no reason."

"That isn't necessarily the case." Since getting Yin Chen, he could easily probe the danger of a place before going there.

Right then, Granny Mu Hua came again, this time looking rather sour. She didn't even bother greeting the two of them and started banging on the door. "Jiang Qingliu, open up! Don't hide inside! I know you're in there!"

The door was suddenly pushed open. There was a disheveled man within trying to get his hair in order. "Shut up. I'm just about done."

Granny Mu Hua rolled her eyes. "You said you'd head out in a month, but it's been two! Bring the Azuresoul Tower there, quickly! The battle's about to start."

"There's still time, don't panic. I'm about to head out now." He came out, now looking like the dandy gentleman he had always been.

"Come to think of it, have you broken through?" she asked doubtfully.

"No! I'm just a little bit short. If it weren't for your constant pestering, I would've succeeded."

"You little.... What's with that nonsense?" She began to feel like he was getting more and more carefree like Yu Ziqian, completely unlike his former serious self. Yet she couldn't figure out what had gone wrong. "Enough. You better head out now."

"Fine."

"Master, are you really going to go?" Yu Ziqian said, winking. There were killers out there! He had already dragged it out for two months, so why not more? At the very least, wait until the battle for the grade-eight divine herb is over. With how chaotic the fight out there would get, it would be quite easy to assassinate him.

"Of course. I need to fulfill my duty to the Azuresoul Palace."

"Don't be an idiot!" Yu Ziqian snapped.

Tianming tugged on his arm and said, "Gan Gangan, trust your master." Had he not stopped him, Yu Ziqian would have revealed everything.

"Fine...." Yu Ziqian furrowed his brow, not able to conceal his worry in the slightest. "Master, I'll go with you."

"Why're you going there? If they can't identify you as a Sky Palace disciple in time, you'll get killed," Jiang Qingliu said.

"Then all you have to do is protect me! Maybe our status can even apply pressure on the enemies. Sky Palace disciples can't be that far off from the son of the sun emperor, right?"

"Master, let all four of us go with you," Tianming said. While Jiang Qingliu could refuse Yu Ziqian, he couldn't refuse Tianming.

"Fine, I guess having two Sky Palace disciples around can't hurt. Let's go!"

"What a mess..." Granny Mu Hua said.

"What's it got to do with you?" Yu Ziqian barked. That old woman kept hurrying Jiang Qingliu to leave every day. That was akin to wanting him to die as soon as possible. If it weren't for the fact that he had to keep what they knew under wraps, he would have cursed her right to her face. To think that she was the most respected elder of the Azuresoul Palace.

"You?!" She was quite taken aback, but could only helplessly sigh. This was a Sky Palace disciple, not just any disciple.

"Let's go," Jiang Qingliu said. Tianming, Lingfeng, and Xiaoxiao also went along.

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Once they were gone, Granny Mu Hua breathed a long sigh. She wrote a note to be sent with a transmission stone. 'Jiang Qingliu has left for the divine herb. It's time to act now! Caution: two Sky Palace disciples are traveling with him, so don't let harm come to them.' Sending out the note would be akin to giving Jiang Qingliu the death sentence.

"Jiang Qingliu, don't blame the sect or anyone in it. You were useless while you were here, and your death will benefit us all." Her face was covered entirely in tears.

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Fire began raining down along the way.

"Are you insane? Why did you come out? Just keep dragging things out! You'll die at this rate!" Yu Ziqian said, anxiously tugging on his master's sleeve.

"Ziqian, I can't keep hiding for the rest of my life. If I'm to have any dignity left, I'd better fight with my own two fists when the time calls for it!" Jiang Qingliu said with a calm look.

"Fight my ass! Why're you still trying to play the teacher when people are out to kill you?! Listen to me this time. Turn back immediately. Hide in the sect, or disappear somewhere else. You're an expert at stealth, right?"

Jiang Qingliu laughed, then sighed, "I've always been an obedient coward all my life and never dared to offend anyone. But now I've seen through all of that. The kind will always be taken advantage of. Since I'm going to die no matter what, I might as well do it on my own terms."

Yu Ziqian knew how bad his master had had it in his youth. Even though he'd lost half of his talent, it was still impressive that he had made it to this point. But his easygoing demeanor made it easy for others to sacrifice him for the sake of the sect.

'Dying on my own terms'. Those were the most despairing, frustrating, yet helpless words Tianming had ever heard. That was why he wouldn't stop Jiang Qingliu no matter how worried Yu Ziqian was. He thought Jiang Qingliu was right; hiding for the rest of his life wasn't a solution. There would only be a point to running away if one survived to be able to slaughter their pursuers.

Chapter 1330 - Dying on One's Own Terms

Tianming's parents were also on the run, so he could empathize with the bitter feeling.

"A real man should fight without holding back when the time calls for it," Xiaoxiao said, as if she had an epiphany. Oddly, it sounded more convincing coming from a girl like her.

"Me?" Yu Ziqian didn't understand it. He tearfully looked at his resolute master. "Master, you've protected me for two decades, yet I couldn't do the same for you for even one day...." His tears began flowing as he said that.

"Are you kidding me? I'm your master, so why would I need your protection? That'd make me a useless old man! Buzz off, stupid brat!" Jiang Qingliu stood on the head of his qilin, guiding them toward the divine herb. "Old friend, it feels like we've returned to our twenties. Back then, I was filled with ambition and desire just like the day we went to the Voidsky Realm. I wonder if we'll be able to return this time."

It had been a few centuries since then, and he'd kept the frustration within him the entire time. "No matter how much good I do for others, I'm still a sacrificial pawn that they can discard at any time. I didn't think I'd hide away for eight centuries after suffering a loss once. I'm far too pathetic...."

"It's not your fault alone. We're both too weak," the qilin said. There used to be five qilins, but only two remained.

"Let's give it our best and hope that we're still worth some salt." Along with the flaming embers that rained down, they felt their hearts set ablaze. The killers had appeared.

"They're here." The azuresky qilin abruptly stopped and another one appeared next to it.

Jiang Qingliu turned back and said, "Wait for me down there. If I don't return, don't miss me too much. This is all my own choice. But Ziqian, remember to avenge me when you grow up, okay?"

"Master!" Yu Ziqian grit his teeth, unable to do anything but shake his head in frustration. They were already being targeted. Since the time they had left the Azuresoul Sword Mountain, there would be no turning back.

"We're going down." The qilin shook the four of them off and they began falling millions of meters downward. Then it rejoined Jiang Qingliu and the other qilin above the flaming clouds, after which loud booming sounds rang out. It felt like the world was about to fall apart.

From the intensity of the sound, it wasn't a normal fight, but a complete slaughter to the death between solarians. It wasn't something the likes of mere disciples could possibly stand up against. These killers existed to snuff out lives, so they didn't hold back at all. The flaming clouds above turned into a vortex from all the forces unleashed. Roars of beasts and the flashing of swords could be heard and seen. A gigantic, illusory azure tower also appeared. It was a sight that greatly moved Tianming. This was the power of a person who had been forced to hold in his frustration for eight centuries and betrayed by those he trusted. Jiang Qingliu stared his death bravely in the face without flinching.

"Your master's truly impressive. Even if he doesn't believe it himself, the Azuresky Tower's choice is proof of that. He's stronger than Gujian Qingshuang!" Tianming said, holding Yu Ziqian's arm. He was worried that he would do something suicidal.

"Is that true?" Yu Ziqian said. He had clearly seen it in the past two decades he spent at the sect. The Sixth Sword Branch would always be the place with the weakest disciples. After all, people mocked Jiang Qingliu for not caring about anything and keeping himself cooped up most of the time. He had always contributed to the sect, but never took credit for any of it. Yet someone like that had gone through such lengths to gather lots of resources for him, causing many to want to expose him as a fake genius during the Voidsky Skirmish. Even after he became a Sky Palace disciple, he still wasn't able to cover for his master.

"Fight. Fight all you want." Even though the end result would be the same, being killed while trying to hide and dying while facing his killers were two completely different things.

The four youths kept looking up as the flaming clouds swallowed everything, looking more and more distant with every passing moment. The clouds above constantly deformed, like craters forming from powerful impacts to the ground. The booming sounds of battle sounded like a drum-like rhythm to them.

Tianming tightly clenched both of his fists. He desperately hoped that Jiang Qingliu would emerge victorious. He knew what it was like to run and hide like a sewer rat. Even now in Orderia, he didn't dare to use his totems. What was all this subterfuge for? Was it so that he could shatter the shackles of fate and guide his own destiny one day? 'Kill'. The word embodied resisting one's fate and letting those that would step on their dignity view them in a new light.

At that moment, a much louder explosion came from above, and then there was silence. Everything began dissipating, as if nothing had happened. The four of them nervously looked up, holding their breath as their heart rates increased, desperately wishing for that person to descend from the clouds and tell them that he had survived and won. There seemed to be tidal waves in the sea of flames above. Time slowly passed; if the killers had won, they wouldn't bother showing their faces and would simply just leave, so if anyone came down, it would have to be Jiang Qingliu.

As anxious as Yu Ziqian was, he subconsciously gripped Tianming's arm every moment he didn't see Jiang Qingliu. His throat was burning and his voice was hoarse. His eyes were bloodshot as he slowly knelt to the ground, almost biting through his lip. "Master, your teachings will stay with me for the rest of my life. I'll dedicate the rest of my life to avenging you." His tears started flowing once more.

"What are you crying for, Gan Gangan?" said a voice from behind them. It was Jiang Qingliu's familiar, magnetic voice.

The four immediately turned and looked. Yu Ziqian was stunned for a moment before he burst into joy. He crawled closer to take a look at the bloodied middle-aged man with messy hair. In each of his hands was a decapitated head. The two heads' eyes were wide with disbelief, a sign that they had died in a shocking instant.

Jiang Qingliu had faced off against two enemies and won! He tossed the heads into his spatial ring and said, "I knew the Emyrean Sword Sect would send these two after me. They're called the decapitator brothers, infamous for always taking the heads of those they kill. Needless to say, their sins are nigh endless, but I managed to give them a taste of their own medicine and enact justice upon them! However, they were pretty skilled. Just look at what they did to my hair!" The four of them still looked at him blankly. "What? Don't look down at me like that, alright? I broke through, that's all. Do I have to prove it to you or something?"

"Master, you're far too badass! How can I even compare to you?" Yu Ziqian turned his frown upside down and burst into laughter.

"That's right. I've had an epiphany." Jiang Qingliu took a deep breath and looked in the direction of the divine herb. "What people do to you, swiftly pay them back. That's what life is about."

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Tens of thousands of cultivators from the Azuresoul Palace, Emyrean Sword Sect, and the Group of Celestial Maiden Halls surrounded the grade-eight divine herb. Their defense was airtight. Within one short month, they'd even had formation gurus lay some fortifications, converting the entire place into a battleground. Their scouts constantly kept them informed of the positions of their enemies. Hearing that the enemy troops had crossed the border, they took a deep breath and prepared for battle.

At the very center was the divine herb, defended by a group of people that included four of the six Swordbearers, Shi Yan, and Yan Nuxia and her allies. Long Wanying stood beside Yan Nuxia. The preparations were all complete.

Gujian Qingshuang constantly reported the latest enemy positions to his allies, making the atmosphere quite tense. "They should be here in an hour. Conflict is inevitable, especially if they're coming on the orders of Li Haochen. That young man has a rather short temper, after all. Not to mention, he doesn't care about the consequences, since the casualties won't be celestial orderians. This is the Azuresoul Palace's territory! According to the Sky Palace's rules, the treasures here belong to us! They've violated our sovereignty and we shall drive them out with our lives!"

The troops morale rose with his speech. After that, Gujian Qingshuang, Ye Dongliu, and Shi Yan got together at a corner.

"Congratulations, Chief Instructor. Jiang Qingliu will be gone sooner or later," Shi Yan said.

"Likewise," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"That fellow really knew how to drag things out. However, there's no way he'll be able to see it coming. He'll never know that he was the key to all this," Ye Dongliu said gleefully.

"Shut up," Gujian Qingshuang chided.

"Understood." Ye Dongliu kept his head low. Even though he had a senior position, he knew that mocking Jiang Qingliu, someone in his own sect, in front of outsiders was distasteful to say the least. At the very least, Gujian Qingshuang wanted to forget all that ever happened.

"I'll have them send the Azuresoul Tower to you. All you have to do is to make up a narrative as to how you got it," Shi Yan said.

"I appreciate the trouble," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"No worries. Our sects share the same origin. It's about time we helped each other grow stronger."