

The Ages 1371

Chapter 1371 - Building Up Our Home

"What's so impressive?" Tianming arched an eyebrow. He had a hunch that Gujian Qingshuang was being sarcastic.

Sure enough, the man's blood-stained face was twisted in a scornful expression. "You want to control our lives, force us to obey your orders, and take over the Azuresoul Palace with just an insignificant ability? If it was that easy, those top-ranking experts could take down the sect with a snap of a finger."

"They don't have my bonegnaw ants." Tianming said.

"But they also have ways to make living worse than death!" Gujian Qingshuang grit his teeth.

"It's not the same. I can monitor your every word and deed at any given moment. Even if you resist and choose to die, I'd be losing a pawn, but you'd be losing your life. If you die, someone else will take over the Azuresoul Palace. And perhaps that person will be easier to control than you!"

The bonegnaw ants were an upgrade from the Latticeheart Curse. Once the ants had entered his body, Gujian Qingshuang wouldn't be able to hide anything even if he ran to the ends of the sun. He would be killed the moment he even thought of harming Tianming.

"I'll be honest with you. Almost all those in the upper echelon of the Azuresoul Palace are on my side. You're the only one left." Tianming said.

Gujian Qingshuang fell into despair. At that moment, he began to realize that Tianming was right. Others might also be able to control him, but they would never be able to achieve such a granular degree of that control. With the help of Long Wanying and the other elders, as well as Yin Chen's unique abilities, Tianming was able to strike fear in their hearts.

"You say that you want to use the same method against Yun Tianque...." Gujian Qingshuang's eyes were gloomy.

"Yes, I'll start with the people around him and gradually work my way in. Parts of Yin Chen have already entered the Supracloud Sanctuary to look for opportunities. Once I fully understand their network, I'll eventually come into contact with Yun Tianque one day, even if I start from the small fry! Therefore, the metal veins of the Azuresoul Palace are extremely important to me." Tianming solemnly said.

Upon hearing that, Gujian Qingshuang suddenly burst into laughter.

"What're you laughing at?" Tianming asked in confusion.

"Your ultimate goal is to control the Azurecloud Continent through us head instructors. But how will I know if you're actually in control, or if it's Long Wanying pulling the strings? Or perhaps it's the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. You're just an ignorant child. Do you have the courage to decide the fate of the entire continent? Do you know how many people will die because of your naive and reckless actions if you screw up?" Gujian Qingshuang argued.

"Head Instructor, time will give you the answers to your questions. You just need to watch," said Tianming.

"But you can't deny that you're plunderers! What does the Azurecloud Continent have to do with you outsiders?" Gujian Qingshuang gritted his teeth.

"Headmaster, I'm not an outsider. I want the Azurecloud Continent and Azuresoul Palace to grow to new heights. I can't accept your decision to cut down the Azurecloud Divine Tree." Jiang Qingliu stood up.

"You colluded with outsiders and betrayed your ancestors for glory. How can you claim it's for the good of the sect?" Gujian Qingshuang sneered.

"Head Instructor, you're filled with doubt and malice at the moment. You don't know them and you don't understand Tianming. He's right. Just wait and see what the outcome of this war is and who benefits. Time will reveal everything," Jiang Qingliu said.

"You're plunderers!"

Regardless of Tianming's vision for the future, Gujian Qingshuang was definitely unwilling to fall under someone else's control. As the head of the Gujian clan and the head instructor of the Azuresoul Palace, he wouldn't want to work for others or hand over the sect's fate to outsiders. Tianming would have his sword hanging over Gujian Qingshuang's head the entire time.

"Long Wanying, how can you allow a child to behave so willfully? If calamity befalls the Azurecloud Continent, every one of you here will be a sinner through the ages!" Gujian Qingshuang roared.

"Cutting down the Azurecloud Divine Tree is the real calamity!" Jiang Qingliu retorted.

It was clear there was no getting through to Gujian Qingshuang. The only effective option was the bonegnaw ants. Thus, Tianming refrained from speaking further. Yang Ce and Long Wanying held Gujian Qingshuang down. Tianming had actually brought in a hundred thousand of Yin Chen's eggs. The only reason he tried to convince Gujian Qingshuang was to avoid wasting parts of his lifebound beast. However, it seemed it was his wishful thinking. They could only take the hard way.

"Your crimes are unforgivable. You'll be condemned through the ages! You'll kill hundreds of millions of people. You're all sinners of the continent, especially you, Jiang Qingliu!" Gujian Qingshuang roared as he struggled, his eyes red.

Tianming's gaze turned cold. Without another word, he slashed Gujian Qingshuang on the back with the Grand-Orient Sword and sprinkled bonegnaw ants into the wound. In that instant, the bonegnaw ants frantically rushed into Gujian Qingshuang's body.

The man let out a series of miserable howls. Even with two divine artifacts suppressing him, Long Wanying and the others had to hold the heavily injured man in place. However, Yin Chen was still dying in large numbers. The current death rate was much higher than when it had controlled Ye Buzhiqiu, and Tianming felt the burn. This was the first time so many of Yin Chen's bodies had been destroyed. But when he thought about the metal veins he would obtain by controlling Gujian Qingshuang, he felt relieved.

"You must succeed. Keep going!"

For the bonegnaw ants, it was a war of cannon fodder. The bonegnaw ants that invaded Gujian Qingshuang's body were likely to be crushed by his astral force and perish in an instant. It was good enough if a dozen or so were successful every now and then.

Gujian Qingshuang miserably howled and cursed at Tianming and Jiang Qingliu.

Tianming was sweating profusely during the entire process; he was under a lot of pressure. Large numbers of Yin Chen were annihilated. In his heart, he knew that failure wasn't an option.

What was originally expected to take an hour ended up taking an entire day, but a million bonegnaw ants eventually penetrated Gujian Qingshuang's bones. His entire body was under Tianming's control. Almost a billion bonegnaw ants had been killed by Gujian Qingshuang in the process. In other words, a hundred thousand silver eggs were lost. Relying on the House of Dongye's private mine, Yin Chen had reached nearly three hundred thousand silver eggs before this. However, with success came hope.

At the end of it all, Gujian Qingshuang was still laughing. "Do you think you've succeeded? You think you can manipulate me and do whatever you want?"

"Try this."

Since Gujian Qingshuang liked the hard way, Tianming did what he wanted. What he suffered was worse than even Ye Buzhiqiu. Gujian Qingshuang rolled on the ground, twitching and convulsing, unable to even scream.

"If I die, all your plans will fall short," Gujian Qingshuang angrily said.

"It's alright. We'll blame your death on Li Wushuang. Then the Azuresoul Hall will be temporarily controlled by two prestigious figures, that is, Ye Dongliu and Granny Mu Hua. They'll assist and cultivate your son, Gujian Xuanyuan, to be the next head instructor. If we take down your son, we can achieve the same result," Tianming said.

"Did you attack my son?" Gujian Qingshuang glared at him.

"No, not for the time being. I won't do it unless it's necessary."

"You cruel bastard!" Gujian Qingshuang shouted. If he dared commit suicide, his son would be next in line. He felt his heart tremble.

"Cut it out, Head Instructor. I just want you to join us. When the time is right, all I need is a thought and you'll regain your freedom. Be obedient and cooperate with us. Look at Ye Dongliu, doesn't he look healthy and happy? He's fine, isn't he? As long as we're in the same boat, everything will be fine. I'm not a pervert, why should I torture you? If you didn't have your eye on the Azuresoul Tower, we wouldn't have come to this point. Do you understand?" Tianming said.

"Head Instructor, trust me just this once. He hasn't done anything to me or my son since he took control of us," Ye Dongliu persuaded.

"Scram!" Gujian Qingshuang resentfully glared at him. He had to look at Tianming with new eyes. "So I'm forced to join you, and no matter what you do in the future, I'll have to give my all?" he asked.

"Give your all? You don't have to exaggerate. The only thing you need to do right now is open the metal veins for me. After all, you have many other types of ore veins. It won't affect the forging of weapons. I also want to be able to enter the Swordbath Pool as I please," Tianming added.

"Fine!" Although he was unwilling, Gujian Qingshuang had surrendered, at least for the time being. He had accepted reality. The bonegnaw ants in his body reminded him that his life, the Azuresoul Palace, his son, and the Gujian clan could all be completely controlled by others. However, he was relieved to find out that Tianming was indeed in charge, not the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect.

"Head Instructor, welcome! Let's go home!" Tianming said.

"The Azuresoul Palace is no longer my home." Gujian Qingshuang sadly looked up.

"I've seemed to rob the place of the host. But it's alright, I'm here to help you build up our home." Tianming smiled.

Gujian Qingshuang was so furious he could vomit blood.

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Five days later, Tianming had finally finished placing Yin Chen in half of the Azurecloud Continent's metal veins. Gujian Qingshuang withdrew all the guards, suspended the mining, and arranged for them to harvest divine herbs. Naturally, no one objected.

Yin Chen was having a great time. After its initial observation, Yin Chen informed Tianming that the mines had enough metal for its numbers to reach two million. What a terrifying figure! That was equivalent to twenty million cockroaches, or twenty billion bonegnaw ants.

Chapter 1372 - Next Step, Yun Tianque

Even if Tianming sent a million Yin Chens out and kept a million in his lifebound space, its combat prowess would still have grown. Though, consuming all those divine ores would require quite a bit of time. Countless silver bugs munched on all the metallic material within the mines, splitting into two, then four, then eight, growing at an exponential rate. The bugs consumed everything from greensteel rock to rainbow goldlotus, basically anything that had divine patterns. The new bodies took the form of metallic locusts that eventually formed swarms. Some of them flew back to the Azuresoul Sword Mountain while others spread out to the far reaches of the continent before turning into ten cockroaches each, hiding and surveilling everything in their range.

Quite a number of them made their way up to the clouds and spotted the Supracloud Sanctuary. As their defensive formation was seldom deactivated, Yin Chen had to spend energy to infiltrate it. Now there were about thirty thousand locusts within, which turned into three hundred thousand invisible cockroaches. However, they were only able to surveil a small area of the sect and hadn't been able to infiltrate the core of the sect yet. However, Tianming estimated that the number of cockroaches within would reach two million in another half a month, which meant there would be two hundred thousand silver eggs' worth of Yin Chen bodies there. Only then would he be able to get a good enough grasp on news and reports there. Eventually, Li Wushuang, the Tumulus Pill God, Lan Sha, and Yun Tianque wouldn't be able to keep any secrets from him.

"These little bugs are really crazy," Xian Xian said within the lifebound space. For a single lifebound beast to be able to report everything that was happening on the continent was akin to Tianming's eyes and ears tracking every single person on the continent. While it wasn't a combat ability, it made Tianming about as omniscient as an actual god.

"It's still not enough. Only after its number grows to two million can I have detailed reports from all over the continent." It would be hard for anyone to imagine that a young constellier had spread his tendrils all across the continent with only a single lifebound beast. These days, Tianming had had a lot of talks with Gujian Qingshuang. He believed that he had managed to convince him, but he couldn't find out what he really thought deep down. That was beyond the bonegnaw ants' capabilities, but he seemed convinced enough on the surface, at the very least.

"At least I'll be able to deal with Yun Tianque with this next step. Do you have any thoughts about that?" Tianming asked.

"No. However, I'd like to remind you that the Supracloud Sanctuary is split into two races, namely the skyclouds and the voidstags. Among them are seven people who are equivalent to grade-five swordpupils. In other words, Swordbearers. If you want to make them submit to you, taking Yun Tianque alone might be a little risky. You'll have to get those seven to submit as well," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Yes, I'm aware. I already have the relationships and interactions of those seven there mapped out. Chief Instructor, I need you to give me more detailed reports about them, every known detail about the lives they've led." One had to learn everything about one's enemy to gain every advantage.

"I'll collect it for you in the next two days. I'd like to see how you handle this situation." He sounded agreeable enough, and healthily skeptical too. But as long as he was cooperative, Tianming didn't really mind.

Long Wanying, Yang Ce, and the rest were also there during the conversation. Long Wanying asked, "Tianming, did you learn anything new so far?" By now, there were already quite a few of Yin Chen's bodies at the Supracloud Sanctuary, even though they weren't as populous as they were at the Azuresoul Palace.

"Li Haochen and the rest are still there. As for the helpers Li Wushuang summoned, they aren't there yet," Tianming said.

"Do we have to act against Li Haochen? Maybe get him under our control as well?" Yan Nuxia asked.

"No. He's the son of the sun emperor. If our little machinations here get his family involved, we'll have something even worse to deal with."

"You have a point." Even though Long Wanying desperately wanted to doom Li Wushuang, she knew that she was only messing around here. Everything that happened on the Azurecloud Continent was merely a small matter in the grand scheme of things. But if they escalated it, it would be over for all of them.

"I have another discovery," Tianming said.

"What is it?" they all asked.

"Chief Instructor, the second strongest member of the Supracloud Sanctuary is Lu Yuanji. She's the leader of the voidstags and Yun Tianque's sole wife, right? I heard that their loving relationship is famous across the continent."

"That's right. And Lu Yuanji is rather capable herself," Gujian Qingshuang said. He had to admit that Yin Chen's espionage capabilities were far too terrifying. It was only after he had fallen under Tianming's control that he was made aware that these bugs were all over the entire Azuresoul Sword Mountain, many of which didn't even bother to hide themselves out of sight. Many disciples thought they were cute little things and took them back home for their children to play with, completely unaware that they were actually Tianming's eyes and ears.

The same thing happened at the Supracloud Sanctuary. The moment the metallic bugs infested them, people found their little round eyes rather cute and didn't find them disgusting at all. They played around with them, not suspecting them to be part of the brood of a broodmother-type beast at all. In fact, they weren't even part of a brood; each unit was an equal part of the whole lifeform. Primordial Chaos Beasts really didn't adhere to what was normally held as common sense.

"Tianming, is there something noteworthy about Lu Yuanji?" Long Wanying asked.

"Umm... well, Yin Chen told me something...." Tianming didn't reveal it out of awkwardness.

"Just say it!" The pause had only piqued their curiosity.

"It said that she's been doing the deed with a few young men... and after that, she had them all killed and got rid of their corpses. Yin Chen mentioned that it wasn't the first time she had done so. Any time Yun Tianque isn't around, she'd prey on handsome young boys."

The others here were all considered middle aged, and Lu Yuanji was roughly their age as well. Needless to say, they saw through Tianming's euphemisms and understood full well what it meant.

"She's cheating? And killing them at that? Her orgasms better be worth multiple human lives!" Yan Nuxia said, her mouth agape with shock.

"She'll stoop to any lengths for her own pleasure." Long Wanying was almost speechless.

Wiping out anyone she slept with was Lu Yuanji's ruthless way of not leaving any loose ends. Given her status and abilities, people wouldn't even notice a few young missing disciples, but even that didn't escape Yin Chen.

"Oh... looks like Yun Tianque's been wearing a green hat the whole time," Gujian Qingshuang joked. Ever since he had accepted his place among them, this was the first time he'd felt truly comfortable. He stood up and walked out, then couldn't help bursting out in laughter. "Li Tianming, without your lifebound beast, I doubt Yun Tianque would ever find out that he's probably the most cuckolded person alive."

"I'm glad you're relishing the notion, Chief Instructor," Tianming said.

Yun Tianque was Gujian Qingshuang's sworn enemy, and worse, one who had defeated him, which still made him feel a lot of pressure to this day. The humiliation he received had left a powerful imprint that Gujian Qingshuang struggled to shake off.

Chapter 1373 - Wind and Rain Swordlords

As natives of the Azurecloud Continent, they knew that those of the voidstag and skycloud races often used marriage ties to reinforce their good relations. The marriage between their leaders also guaranteed internal stability in the Supracloud Sanctuary, so Yun Tianque's marriage was practically a match made in heaven that the members of the sect had boasted about for centuries. Not to mention, Lu Yuanji was the second most powerful person in their sect and ranked third amongst all the cultivators on the continent.

"To think that you've seen it a few times in your short time on the continent... I wonder how many times Yun Tianque's been cuckolded in the past millennium alone?" Gujian Qingshuang said, laughing.

"Is it something to be so happy about?" Yan Nuxia said, rolling her eyes. "You'd better go home to check if you're getting the same treatment."

"Shut up."

Tianming wanted to continue spreading his eyes and ears to get a good picture of the relations inside the Supracloud Sanctuary. While this was no doubt a huge scandal, it wasn't that useful at the moment so they left it aside. Yin Chen was still multiplying its bodies to make sure its hold on the enemy sect was stable, and things couldn't be rushed.

"There's still two unknowns we have to worry about," Tianming said.

"You're talking about support, right?" Gujian Qingshuang asked. The deeper he found himself in the conspiracy, the more he had come to accept that this whole operation was really run by this junior who'd been clearheaded from beginning to end.

"That's right. There's two supporting forces on the continent. The first is the Emyrean Sword Sect, and the second is Li Wushuang. Once we take care of the Supracloud Sanctuary, the celestial orderians, wargodeans, Blueblood Starocean, and the Emyrean Sword Sect will all be enemies."

"Li Wushuang probably doesn't know that the Wind and Rain Swordlords will be here in two days with a hundred thousand swordpupils," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Two swordlords? How powerful are they?" Tianming asked Long Wanying.

"The two swordlords are grade-six equivalents, so they're about at the level of the Seven Dragon Imperials like me. Since the two are a couple, they should be equivalent to our Green and Violet Dragon Imperials, though probably a bit younger. Their status in their sect is second only to the Northdipper Swordsage and even higher than Shi Yan, so they're stronger than her. They're probably around Yang Ce's level in strength, individually." She turned and glanced at Yang Ce when she finished.

"I can take on one of them," he said. Not even Gujian Qingshuang thought he was boasting after having seen his power; he was no doubt the strongest in their group now.

"A hundred sword pupils is basically equivalent to our entire sect's forces. Is the Emyrean Sword Sect's goal really to get a few more divine herbs, or do they want to drive the celestial orderians and those traitors away?" Gujian Qingshuang asked.

"Shi Yan hasn't talked to anyone about it, and I can't read her mind. I hope she'll talk about their real goals once the Wind and Rain Swordlords arrive," Tianming said.

"They're sending so many here, so it can't just be for the fruits, right? Maybe what they really want is to conquer the continent and make our sect rule over it," Gujian Qingshuang said. That was the tempting prospect the Emyrean Sword Sect had dangled in front of him. However, it ran contrary to Tianming's goal of uniting the Azuresoul Palace with the Supracloud Sanctuary, something that would no doubt result in far fewer casualties. What Gujian Qingshuang had wanted could result in the deaths of millions, many of whom would be from the Azuresoul Palace.

"Even if the Emyrean Sword Sect is really going to do what they said, you'd be a puppet ruler once they install you in the throne," Long Wanying said.

"Is there a difference? I'm nothing but your puppet right now."

"You can think of it like that if you want, not that you have a choice," Tianming said.

Gujian Qingshuang shuddered. Thinking about it, he knew there was no way he could stand together with the Emyrean Sword Sect anymore.

"Chief Instructor, let's wait and see. The Emyrean Sword Sect is indeed powerful, but I have no doubt that they'll prioritize their own benefits here rather than sacrificing their own for our cause. With Shi Yan only having brought ten thousand people with her, she's keeping a low profile for now, especially with the forces on our side growing. But if the swordlords come here, they might not negotiate with you anymore. No doubt, they'll order you around like a dog," Tianming said.

Gujian Qingshuang couldn't deny any of it. It could very well become the truth!

"Don't you get it? The Northdipper Swordsage has been nothing but a pathetic crook all these years, and a stingy one at that. Don't expect to get any good benefits out of him," Long Wanying said.

"Let's stop speculating and focus on how we can deal with their reinforcements. We aren't able to unite with the Supracloud Sanctuary at the moment," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Let's focus on maintaining our bottom line. Once we unite the continent, we'll think about how to drive them out," Tianming said.

"I guess we'll be troubling you, Chief Instructor," Long Wanying said.

"Don't feel too bad for me. The Azuresoul Palace is now sandwiched between so many factions. Even if the sky falls, I think I can handle it," Gujian Qingshuang said. He wasn't a good person, but he wasn't necessarily a bad one either. Even if he had wanted to kill Jiang Qingliu to get the Azuresoul Tower back, he'd also wanted the sect to prosper. So Tianming respected him even though he had him under control.

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Two days later, the Emyrean Sword Sect's troops arrived, all hundred thousand of them. They were dressed in white swordsmen robes, looking fierce and impressive wherever they went. It almost seemed that storms brewed, earth shook, and flames boiled anywhere they passed through. It was clearly an intentional display of force and their intent to wage a war. Even though the other factions of the Myriad Solar Sects didn't make a showing, their eyes were all set on the developments on the Azurecloud Continent.

This army of a hundred thousand was like a sword that had been plunged into the Azuresoul Sword Mountain. Its denizens felt a grinding sense of oppression at their arrival, thanks to those from the 'main sect' looking down on 'offshoots' like them with disdain. It was almost like the swordpupils of the Azuresoul Palace were automatically inferior to those of the Empyrean Sword Sect.

When it came to picking divine herbs, the swordpupils from the Azuresoul Palace would have to give the newcomers priority. It was also not uncommon for them to sneak some divine herbs into their own pocket, something Gujian Qingshuang couldn't do anything about anyway. Fortunately, Tianming already had control over the Azuresoul Palace or his group would be facing even more pressure than before. Yan Nuxia's thousand-plus supporters were brought here on her own accord without permission from her sect master, after all. Now, only Tianming's group could face off against the Empyrean Sword Sect.

Tianming and the rest didn't show up, letting Gujian Qingshuang and Ye Dongliu handle the arrival of the swordlords with Shi Yan. Before the group arrived, Shi Yan told Gujian Qingshuang, "Chief Instructor, I need the First, Second, and Third Sword Branches cleared out for our people to live in. That should be doable, right? After all, the nova source from the other three sword branches is too weak. That'll be bad for our swordpupils' cultivation."

"Shouldn't the first two alone be enough?" Gujian Qingshuang asked. They were already more than doing their part as hosts to host them, yet the Empyrean Sword Sect wanted them to vacate their premises. As far as the Azuresoul Sword Mountain was concerned, the lower three sword branches were no different from wooden huts.

"Our lifebound beasts like expansive environments," Shi Yan said without a hint of politeness.

"Alright!" He had no choice but to relent, but now he fully understood what Tianming had said about how the Azuresoul Palace would still have to play second fiddle to the Empyrean Sword Sect, even if they helped them take over the entire continent.

The formation opened up, letting the hundred thousand bandit-like swordpupils in. The leading couple, the two swordlords, descended from the sky. The Wind Swordlord was a white-haired old man that stood slender and tall. His sharp aura was only rivaled by his sharp features, like his hawk nose and eyes. Gujian Qingshuang lowered his head, intimidated.

The Rain Swordlord, on the other hand, looked to be about the age of her husband and older than Gujian Qingshuang, but appearance-wise, she looked younger than him thanks to years of good care and maintenance. Based on how she looked now, she was sure to have been a stunning beauty in her youth. Comparing her to Shi Yan, a fellow female swordpupil, was like comparing heaven and earth. Shi Yan was harsh and tough in more ways than one, while the Rain Swordlord was as gentle and soft as water. She held the arm of her husband tight as they descended to the Celestial Welcome Hall.

"I, Gujian Qingshuang, represent our sect to greet you, Wind and Rain Swordlords. Welcome to our humble abode."

The hundred thousand swordpupils descended, looking around at the Azuresoul Sword Mountain as they landed.

"You're too polite, Gujian Qingshuang," the Wind Swordlord said. The two of them didn't seem to be the kind of people to throw their weight around.

However, right after their arrival, the Rain Swordlord asked, "Shi Yan, how many fruits have been picked during the harvest?"

"There's eight hundred million now, Rain Swordlord," she said respectfully.

"I see. Then you should take them back to the sect. Leave this place to us," the Rain Swordlord said with a gentle smile.

"Yes!" Shi Yan nodded. The two of them didn't even bother discussing it with Gujian Qingshuang. They were going to take all the fruits harvested so far without leaving any.

"Don't be too displeased about it, Gujian Qingshuang. We'll definitely give you ten percent of the harvest as we promised. It will be taken from the later batches," the Rain Swordlord said.

"That's right. Emyrean Sword Sect has always respected agreements without exception. Not to mention that, without us, you wouldn't even be able to keep a tenth with the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean helping the other side out," the Wind Swordlord said.

"I personally wouldn't have anything to say about it. The issue is that the Whitedragon Empress and her friends from the Group of Celestial Maiden Halls will have something to say about it, as they've also contributed a lot to the harvest," Gujian Qingshuang said. It was as if he had no pride before anyone from the Emyrean Sword Sect. Instead, Tianming had shown him respect even though he now controlled him and even let him be part of their discussions.

"Them? Come to think of it, we still have a debt to settle with them," the Rain Swordlord said.

"What debt?" Shi Yan asked.

"The grade-eight divine herb belongs to us. Why'd they take it?"

"Rain Swordlord, that was the reward the Sky Palace disciple, Li Tianming, got after driving off Li Haochen," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Who agreed to give it to him? Did they ask our sect? If they didn't, it doesn't count," the Wind Swordlord said.

Everyone fell silent.

"Have the Sky Palace disciple come to me," said the Wind Swordlord.

Chapter 1374 - Nope

Before that, Emyrean Sword Sect had treated Tianming and Yu Ziqian rather well even though they sided with Long Wanying, either because they wanted to get on the Sky Palace's good side or because they wanted to try to recruit them. Shi Yan didn't even have anything to say when Tianming defeated Li Haochen and got the divine herb for himself. However, among the first things the Wind and Rain Swordlords had done upon their arrival was to give Tianming trouble, much to Gujian Qingshuang's surprise.

Does their arrival represent a change in the attitude of the Emyrean Sword Sect? he wondered. He was now under Tianming's control, so he had to take his side no matter what. Thus, he lowered his voice and asked, "Swordlords, are you absolutely sure?" Glancing at Shi Yan, he noticed that she didn't seem to know what was going on either. Even though they had taken a stance against Long Wanying and the others, they'd never specifically gone against Tianming.

"I asked you to call him out. Don't waste words with me," the Rain Swordlord said, rolling her eyes.

"Understood." Gujian Qingshuang escorted them to the Celestial Welcome Hall for a basic reception while he went to 'invite' Tianming over. That was but a mere formality, of course, since Tianming was keeping a constant watch over the situation.

Granny Mu Hua started helping the hundred thousand swordpupils settle into the first three branches, making the swordpupils of Azuresoul Palace rather furious, but they didn't dare to voice their frustrations. All they could do was sigh and leave. They even had to endure the rage of seeing those guests casually destroying their homes and personal belongings. Gujian Qingshuang took note of all of it. Many wanted him to stand up for them, but all they got was a helpless stare.

"Sigh, the Azuresoul Palace is truly in trouble, being stuck in a struggle between first-rate sects like this."

"It doesn't matter whether we even survive. There's no dignity in living like this."

Things grew more and more messier on the Azuresoul Sword Mountain.

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Ye Dongliu's expression soured as he entered the Celestial Welcome Hall with his head lowered.

"Where's the Sky Palace disciple?" Gujian Qingshuang asked.

"Li Tianming said...."

"What did he say?"

"He said 'nope'," Ye Dongliu relayed. The entire hall was silenced by those words. To think that Tianming simply refused the summons of the Wind and Rain Swordlords, but that refusal made it sound like they were simply requesting an audience with him! Yet that was indeed possible with Tianming's status. Sky Palace disciples didn't have to answer to anyone.

"He won't come?" The two swordlords exchanged glances of delight.

"This child is interesting. He really thinks he's a bigshot," the Rain Swordlord said.

"It's fine. We have time, after all. Since he won't come, we'll go see him. Chief Instructor Gujian, lead the way!" the Wind Swordlord said.

"Understood." Gujian Qingshuang obeyed. The matter of the Emyrean Sword Sect shipping away the eight hundred million divine herbs hadn't been finalized yet. Gujian Qingshuang didn't want to lose all of them for no reason, so he needed Tianming to stand up for the sect. Not to mention, splitting the harvest was bound to be a troublesome matter in the first place.

The so-called support that the Emyrean Sword Sect and Group of Celestial Maiden Halls claimed to provide was only lip service. It still fell to the millions of swordtroops of the Azuresoul Palace to truly harvest, guard, and bring the fruits back to the Azuresoul Sword Mountain. Only after that would the spoils be split. All the supporters had to do was come over for a short retreat without putting in too much effort to keep the Supracloud Sanctuary at bay and they would take away up to ninety percent of the harvest, which would number in the billions.

However, the way to split the harvest had yet to be decided upon. That was because the Azuresoul Palace had initially negotiated with the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect about the joint agreement to help with the harvest. Back then, they had been promised thirty percent of the harvest, which was only natural since the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect couldn't just be lending their name out for no benefit at all. When push came to shove, they might suffer real casualties too. The Azuresoul Palace had been all too happy with the generous arrangement, only for the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect to fall upon hard times, resulting in Long Wanying asking her friends from Group of Celestial Maiden Halls to come to their aid while still respecting the initial three-tenths split.

But now that Gujian Qingshuang was part of Tianming's conspiracy, he learned that Tianming actually wanted all of the fruits for the Azurecloud Continent. That was possible because Yan Nuxia's cohort had come to help them without expecting divine herbs in return. Yet the Emyrean Sword Sect had demanded nine-tenths of all the divine herbs harvested by the Azuresoul Palace. On top of that, they wanted to ship away all the divine herbs harvested so far, which made it incredibly uncertain how much would be left over for the Azuresoul Palace at the very end. It was nothing short of robbery, which was only enabled in the first place because both the Azuresoul Palace and Supracloud Sanctuary would invite outside forces into their conflict to gain an edge over the other side. Yet they were the ones who were actually fighting and suffering casualties over the divine tree!

That was the reason Tianming wanted to tie the two sects together. Even if they focused only on harvesting the divine herbs within their own territories, they would be able to keep more than ten times what they usually got! Given those plans, the Emyrean Sword Sect had become an obstacle to him, especially when they hadn't got a handle on Yun Tianque yet.

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Meanwhile at the Sixth Sword Branch, Tianming had known that the Emyrean Sword Sect's reinforcements would arrive. Thus he had gathered the people around him to wait in that part of the mountain. It didn't take long for Gujian Qingshuang to bring the swordlords, Shi Yan, and a thousand elite swordpupils to him. Before they had even arrived, he felt their combined sword ki prickling against his face.

He could tell at a glance that the two swordlords were experts of the sword. It was said that they were incredibly powerful when fighting together. Being a couple for such a long time had allowed them to achieve an unthinkable synergy. Not even people like Yang Ce would be able to defend against their combined onslaught, making them among the strongest forces that the Emyrean Sword Sect could mobilize. Not to mention, they had brought a hundred thousand swordpupils with them, making them far more powerful than Tianming's faction in terms of combined might.

Though it was a troublesome predicament, Tianming had to calmly deal with it. The swordlords met his gaze and tried using their sword ki to intimidate him, but Tianming didn't buy their little trick. Now that he had the Azuresoul Palace in his hands, he was fully confident when he faced off against millennial seniors like these.

The thousands of people on their side stood off against Tianming's own thousands. Those from the Group of Celestial Maiden Halls didn't avoid the Emyrean Sword Sect swordpupils like the Azuresoul Palace swordpupils did. They didn't back down from the pressure one bit, causing the tension in the surrounding atmosphere to peak. Since they didn't break the silence, Tianming kept quiet himself, not bowing to them or showing any respect at all.

Gujian Qingshuang introduced the two sides. He didn't boast too much on the swordlords' behalf, adopting neutrality in his descriptions of both sides, almost as if he was encouraging a clash between the two sides. It was an interesting sight to behold, with both sides keeping quiet.

After some time, Tianming found the standoff rather boring and turned to leave, causing quite a lot of people on the side of the Emyrean Sword Sect to lose their temper. They stood at the peak of power, yet this junior was about to leave them hanging without even a word to excuse himself!

"Halt!" somebody finally called out in an insidious tone. "How could a disciple of the Sky Palace not know any basic manners?"

Chapter 1375 - Spat

If it hadn't been the swordlords who had spoken up, Tianming wouldn't even have bothered with them. Not only did they want the grade-eight divine herb, they expected him to prostrate and humble himself before them. By the time he was almost gone, the Rain Swordlord snickered and said, "You have quite some spunk, child. Enough. We know you're impressive for being able to join the Sky Palace, and that you don't have to respect seniors like us as well. However, even Sky Palace disciples have to speak sense. According to our agreement with the Azuresoul Palace, all divine herbs are to be gathered together before being split, no exceptions. Nine-tenths of your grade-eight divine herb belongs to our sect. The chief instructor can only give you a tenth, so you must return the rest."

Long Wanying and the rest intelligently said nothing, leaving it all to Tianming. If they did, it would spark a conflict between the Xuanyuan Dragonn Sect and Emyrean Sword Sect. But they didn't, so now the Emyrean Sword Sect only really had a problem with the Sky Palace disciple, and by extension, the Sky Palace.

That was inconvenient, to say the least, and Tianming latched on to that fact. He turned to the Rain Swordlord and said, "First, as far as I'm aware, the agreement the Azuresoul Palace had with the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is a three-seven split, not one-nine. Additionally, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's agreement came first, so neither the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect nor the Azuresoul Palace accept your proposal.

"Second, I was the one who personally defeated Li Haochen and won the divine herb as a reward for my personal contribution. Back then, Shi Yan, who represented your sect, and Chief Instructor Gujian Qingshuang had no qualms about how it was handled. It's already an established fact, so for the two swordlords to want to go back on what was agreed upon is insultingly laughable.

"Third, Senior Shi Yan regarded me well and invited me to join your sect. I used to have a good impression of the Empyrean Sword Sect, but the swordlords' behavior today has completely changed how I view your sect. Looks like we don't have anything in common after all."

Tianming himself found it rather weird. It was one thing for them to cause trouble for Long Wanying, but messing with a Sky Palace disciple simply didn't make sense. Even Shi Yan practically had to lick his feet, yet the two swordlords seemed oddly obstinate. Since that was the case, he didn't hold back and returned fire, completely disregarding the two swordlords and the hundred thousand swordpupils. While the Azuresoul Palace had to submissively please them, Tianming didn't. Those words were like knives stabbing into the chests of the swordpupils.

Long Wanying and the rest watched the show, remaining silent and not giving the two swordlords any excuse to turn their ire to them. They had come at the problem from a completely wrong angle to begin with. The two swordlords thought that Long Wanying was the one leading Tianming by the nose and fanning the flames behind the scenes. Little did they know that Tianming actually had his own opinions on the matter and knew how to use his status to his advantage. What could the two swordlords do, forcefully take the divine herb?

It wouldn't be hard for them to try something with the large force they had brought, but it would almost definitely cause a riot. It was clear from their expressions that they didn't feel too good about the matter, but that didn't keep them silent for long, given their long life experience. The Rain Swordlord turned to Long Wanying and said, "Whitedragon Empress, I'm impressed. It only took you a few short months to brainwash this child so completely. I wonder what else you used apart from your body? Does the Sky Palace know about it? Are you trying to lead this disciple astray so he'll serve the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect forever? The Sky Palace would never agree to let one of their own join a traitorous faction that sides with the celestial orderians!"

Those words had been carefully chosen to highlight the difference between the Empyrean Sword Sect and Xuanyuan Dragon Sect to Tianming, but she'd chosen the wrong target despite changing her tune. Not to mention, they had already soured the first impression by personally demanding the divine herb from Tianming. Their whiplash-inducing course correction did nothing to remedy that fact. Long Wanying merely smiled without saying a word, leaving it to Tianming instead.

"Swordlords, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is still struggling against the celestial orderians. The Sky Palace, and by extension the Myriad Solar Sects, will no doubt support a Sky Palace disciple like me as I stand with them, especially after I raised the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's morale by defeating Li Haochen. On the other hand, the Empyrean Sword Sect now claims to be the leader of the Myriad Solar Sects, yet you're doing nothing but fight your own. What's the point? What're your priorities?"

Tianming didn't buy their bullshit regardless of their seniority. The two swordlords considered him a puppet of Long Wanying from the get-go and had treated him like an ignorant child fresh out of kindergarten, yet it only took a few scathing remarks from him to dismantle their narrative.

"Fighting our own? That's a huge allegation to make. The Empyrean Sword Sect has come to the Azurecloud Continent to drive away the dogs of the celestial orderians, such as the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is showing signs of defecting, so we're only doing what's right for the Myriad Solar Sects.

"Li Tianming, you don't have to be so wary of us. It's only natural that you can't see the truth of the matter given the insidious narrative the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect crafted around us. Our backbones are as straight as our swords, so we fear no such accusation. This phase of yours is nothing but a folly of your youth. We only hope that you'll grow to see things clearly as time passes and know for real who will truly make or break you!" the Wind Swordlord said, emphasizing their noble cause while subtly painting the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect in a traitorous light. Too bad this was only their pathetic attempt at salvaging the situation. They had already ruined their first impression, so the rest was just playing catch-up.

Tianming knew better than anyone about the nature of his and Long Wanying's relationship. Gujian Qingshuang stepped up to mediate matters between the two sides, saying good things about each of them to defuse the situation. At the very least, it now seemed that there was no chance they could take the divine herb from Tianming.

"Now, leave," Tianming said unceremoniously. Keeping quiet the entire time had been the right thing to do for Long Wanying and the rest. No matter the insults thrown their way, they let Tianming stand up for them.

"By the time you realize the errors committed in your youth, you'll already be too distanced from the Sky Palace. I hope you'll reevaluate your position," the Wind Swordlord 'advised' before their group left, dissatisfied. They had made a grand entrance and taken three sword branches for themselves, only to be sent off like defeated puppies by Tianming. Even Gujian Qingshuang winced at the mere thought of the humiliation they had suffered. Looks like things can appear really different depending on which side you're on, he thought. Now that he was in Tianming's camp, he was getting more and more displeased with the Emyrean Sword Sect.

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The two swordlords angrily returned to the Driftsword Halls. The Rain Swordlord started smashing things to vent. "Shi Yan, you were right! Long Wanying truly is a shameless, dastardly whore! Even though she was quiet the entire time, she probably wrote all the lines for Li Tianming to recite! What a sneaky little vixen she is!"

"Alright, stop being so mad. Listen to me," her husband consoled.

Shi Yan blankly looked at them. Even though she often saw them together, seeing the lovey-dovey couple who had been together for centuries acting so flirtatious with one another made her want to puke, though she kept that to herself. You two... you're already going to die of old age soon, so please stop acting so corny....

She knew that just because somebody was powerful didn't mean that their wisdom and behavior was a good match for that power. Some normal townfolk were sneaky and deceptive, being almost impossible to grasp, while others that stood at the top of power acted emotionally without thinking twice. The Rain Swordlord, for instance, had thrown tantrums her entire life, always pestering her husband to teach the people that she believed had wronged her a lesson. Many people in the Emyrean Sword Sect couldn't stand the two, but simply didn't dare to say it out loud.

It took a long cycle of venting and consoling for the Rain Swordlord to regain her calm. Shi Yan almost coughed out blood at the sight of her acting like a complete child; Shi Yan was already at the edge of

bursting when they were leaving the Sixth Sword Branch. Their efforts to completely curb Long Wanying and the rest from the Group of Celestial Maiden Halls' had been completely neutralized by Tianming.

After things quieted down, Shi Yan cleared her throat and said, "Swordlords, there's one thing I'm puzzled about. Is the swordsage still trying to recruit Li Tianming, Yu Ziqian, and the other two into our sect? Two of them are Sky Palace disciples, so I'm sure the two of you are more aware than I am about how important they are to our sect."

"That's right. We came here just for that," the Wind Swordlord said.

Stunned, Shi Yan pressed, "Then what was that back there? Why make an enemy out of Li Tianming for no reason?"

The Wind Swordlord awkwardly said, "Well... we heard the name of the grade-eight divine herb and thought it'd be great to refine it into a pill for Rainy here... so we wanted to get our hands on it. We wanted to use a show of force to take the divine herb and let Li Tianming know that the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect can't protect him. Using your methods, we'd only be looked down upon by the Sky Palace disciples. Not to mention, Long Wanying's much better at currying favor with them than you are, so we wanted to shock him into realization with a more forceful method...."

Chapter 1376 - One Foot in the Coffin

The Wind Swordlord trailed off in embarrassment. Obviously, this wasn't his intention, but rather his wife's. She had simply let her greed get the better of her.

Shi Yan facepalmed, though she was already used to this kind of behavior. It wasn't the first time the childish old woman had made such an incomprehensible choice, and her husband had taken her side more than once too. "I'm sure you two thought it was reasonable, but that won't work on Li Tianming. He's not a normal kid. Based on my observations, he doesn't have any physical relationship with Long Wanying either. After all, even Yang Ce has come here. If you two had been here to observe them for as long as I have, you'd know that he isn't that easy to deal with."

"Why didn't you say that sooner then?" the Rain Swordlord said, glaring at her.

"Me?" Shi Yan was stunned. They were the ones who had wanted to throw their weight around before they'd even settled down!

"It's fine. The Sky Palace disciple is still young and that doesn't change the bigger picture. Our main mission here is to ship the divine herbs back to the sect. That's not something a mere few thousand of them can stop. To be honest, the two Sky Palace disciples must've been thoroughly brainwashed by Long Wanying by now, so we'll definitely be in conflict with them if we want to take the divine herbs. It's inevitable, but only temporary," the Wind Swordlord said, much to Shi Yan's relief. She had been considering the issue as well. No doubt, doing anything of the sort would antagonize Tianming, but it was clear that the fruits of the harvest had a far higher priority than a Sky Palace disciple.

"We have to secure the benefits of the divine tree for ourselves, first. However, since you came with a hundred thousand swordpupils, we should probably face off against Li Wushuang and the Supracloud Sanctuary to take more fruits from their side too, right?" Shi Yan asked.

"Let's focus on taking the fruits here first. Only after that will we look elsewhere," the Wind Swordlord said.

Shi Yan nodded, then took a deep breath. "Swordlords, there's another matter I wish to consult the two of you about."

"What is it?"

"Are we really going to heavily damage the forces of the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean to help the Azuresoul Palace conquer the Supracloud Sanctuary and stand up for the Myriad Solar Sects? If we succeed, the descendants of those of the Azurecloud Continent across multiple generations will belong to us," Shi Yan said.

"Attack them? Do you think they're pushovers? There's no way we can achieve that with the numbers we have now. The most we can give to the forces here is a slight edge. There's no way that conquering the continent is an option," the Wind Swordlord said.

"Will the sect not send us more support?"

The two swordlords merely shook their heads. Shi Yan came to understand that the Northdipper Swordsage was only making a blank promise to the Azuresoul Palace. No matter how righteous they had made their cause sound, they'd only come for the divine herbs.

"It's a precarious situation, so acting independently like that will doom us. However, our swordsage still wishes to take the Azurecloud Continent for good, so he's been doing something else."

"What is it?"

"He united thirty-one second-rate sects, two hundred and eighty third-rate sects, and thousands of fourth-rate sects into an alliance. Currently, he's negotiating with the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-ranked first-rate sects too. Once the alliance is formed, he'll be its leader and control up to a third of the Myriad Solar Sects!"

"Sixth, seventh, and eighth... So they're all Orderian natives," Shi Yan said. The Voidword Shrine and Dreamless Celestial Nation had alien origins, whereas the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect and Empyrean Sword Sect didn't. The Northdipper Swordsage seemed to have grand ambitions. "What's the swordsage planning?"

"Once the alliance is formed, he'll conquer the Azurecloud Continent for real. Even if the continent has to be split up with other allies, our sect will still keep the honor of leading the conquest!"

Shi Yan nodded, her eyes filled with worship. "I see... I already said that relying on our sect alone to wipe out the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean's presence on this continent would be hard. They can call for reinforcements, too, and Li Wushuang is also here plotting to kill Long Wanying."

"Li Wushuang? That reminds me... we must find a way to expose her whereabouts or set a trap to lure Long Wanying in and have Li Wushuang kill her," the Rain Swordlord said.

"That'll be difficult. Long Wanying is far too careful," Shi Yan said.

"Don't underestimate Li Wushuang's desire to kill her," the Rain Swordlord reminded. As a woman, she knew how deep hateful grudges like that could run.

"Alright, let's figure out a way together," Shi Yan said.

"At the end of the day, this Li Tianming brat is far too ignorant. Our swordsage now leads too many people among the Myriad Solar Sects. With none of us attempting to give the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect aid, it's only a matter of time before they fall to the celestial orderians. Even the Sky Palace will give up on them. Their fate is practically sealed in stone. If Li Tianming continues siding with them, he will be going against the Sky Palace's interests. By extension, his five hundred years of cultivation will end up rather problematic. The Xuanyuan Dragon Sect won't be able to hold on for long, so we can just wait. That child has nowhere else to go. Without our support, he'll find it hard to join the Sky Palace for real after five centuries of lackluster training! He'll see the light soon enough. It doesn't matter if he's hostile toward us now. It's not like we represent the Emyrean Sword Sect in its entirety. We'll play the role of the crook for now and let the swordsage swoop in to his rescue later! I refuse to believe that he'll remember Long Wanying's care for him after we carefully nurture him for the next five centuries," the Rain Swordlord said self-satisfactorily.

"You're right," Shi Yan said, though she scoffed at her in her mind.

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With the arrival of two swordlords and a hundred thousand swordpupils, the Emyrean Sword Sect had a much bigger force. However, all their plans had been laid bare before Tianming. First, they wanted to take the fruits of the divine tree and couldn't be counted on to fight to the death. Second, they wanted to conquer the Azurecloud Continent, but that would only work out if the Northdipper Swordsage managed to form his alliance. Third, they were still after Tianming and the rest, but they had to temporarily give up on that goal in favor of the first. Gujian Qingshuang processed all the information and had come to a conclusion.

"They're treating me like a chess piece. At least you have the courtesy of being direct with me," Gujian Qingshuang said, rolling his eyes.

"Of course! I'm famous for respecting my elders!" Tianming said.

"The swordlords are your elders too, you know," Gujian Qingshuang retorted.

"Those two's idiocy is infamous. They're only elders by virtue of age alone," Long Wanying said.

"You say that, but they'll wipe the floor with you in a fight," Yan Nuxia said.

"Well, by the time I'm as old as they are, I'm sure I'll be able to slaughter the Rain Swordlord like slaughtering a chicken," Long Wanying hissed.

"Wait, you slaughter chickens?" Ying Huo asked, perched on top of Tianming's head.

"I'm just joking. Yep. Nothing more than a joke," Long Wanying said, winking.

Ying Huo shuddered.

"Come on, stop flirting around. You already have one foot in the coffin!" Yan Nuxia said.

"I haven't flirted for ages. Can't hurt to see if I'm out of practice or not. Even the Rain Swordlord's still flirting with her husband a lot despite her head being the only part of her that isn't stuffed in the coffin yet."

They broke out laughing at the recollection of the Rain Swordlord being soothed by her husband. Gujian Qingshuang felt cold sweat forming at the notion that this was exactly how he had been spied on before this.

As they laughed, Tianming stilled himself and said, "Everyone, there's been a breakthrough at the Supracloud Sanctuary! A surprising discovery!"

Yun Tianque's sect was the key to the next step of Tianming's plans. The two main sects of the continent had to unite for them to be able to drive the Emyrean Sword Sect away.

"What is it?" the rest asked.

"Yin Chen's bodies have increased to a total of two million, which is akin to tens of millions of cockroaches. I have more than ten million of them spread throughout the continent. Occasionally, I noticed that Yun Tianque leaves the sect alone, but Yin Chen isn't quick enough to follow him. So I figured there must be something he wants to hide. I gradually spread Yin Chen as far as I can each time he leaves, progressing little by little, until I finally found his destination: a normal mountain range. However, it's protected by a grade-six formation. Though it can stop other elites, Yin Chen was able to burrow inside. Guess what I found inside?"

"Stop letting us hang like that and be out with it," Long Wanying said.

Tianming narrowed his eyes and said, "I found a beautiful woman with two children. Male and female twins, in fact. The woman isn't that powerful, probably a constellier, and the children are around three or four years old. They call Yun Tianque daddy."

Gujian Qingshuang stood up. "Looks like his wife isn't the only one who cheats."

"That's right. They probably aren't a loving couple at all. He might even know what she does behind his back. Lu Yuanji also probably doesn't care what he does outside. To think that he married someone else that also isn't as powerful as he is. Looks like he's quite the sentimental person," Long Wanying said. That realization made their future plans much easier.

"The grade-six formation is definitely Yun Tianque's, so facing off against him there isn't ideal. We have to use his family to lure him to the Goldridge Mountain to meet us," Yan Nuxia said.

"Tianming, it should be fine to take his family to Goldridge Mountain and wait for him to come, right?" Long Wanying asked.

Tianming wouldn't do anything like harming the innocent, but simply moving them to another place wasn't an issue. He wasn't a saint, after all. "Yeah, that's fine."

Crucially, having Yun Tianque stand with him would be good for him too. Gujian Qingshuang also stood to benefit as he had now come to understand.

"We have to take action before the swordlords ship the eight hundred million fruits back to their sect!"

Chapter 1377 - A Sentimental Person

The Wave Mountains was a nondescript mountain range in the territory of the Supracloud Sanctuary. The natural scenery there was great to behold, especially when it was admired through the thin veils of mist and cloud that shrouded much of the area. Hidden behind the mist and clouds were layer after layer of illusory divine formations that wouldn't even be detected by someone unless they were a powerful elite. There was little chance for most people to find the area sealed within.

Tianming, Long Wanying, and Yang Ce had come to this place, with the others having gone to the Goldridge Mountain to wait. They were going to fortify the area and deal with Yun Tianque using the same method they had used on Gujian Qingshuang, but that meant they had to lure him to that area somehow. They were close to the Clearriver Sword Sect, which was located not far from both the Azuresoul Palace and Supracloud Sanctuary, so it wasn't considered deep within the Azuresoul Palace's territory. That made it a place Yun Tianque could accept going to.

"If we break the formations here, we might alert Yun Tianque. So we have to act fast," Long Wanying said.

"We don't have to do that, Aunt Ying. Let me handle it," Tianming said. Then, he showed them his talents as a sky plunderer as he opened the way, tearing apart one illusion after another till they reached the main grade-six divine formation. Then he used the crimson-red claws on his black arm and expended quite a bit of effort to tear a hole open. During the whole process, the other two watched him in a stupefied manner.

"What in the world is that?" The longer Long Wanying spent beside Tianming, the more mysterious he felt to him.

Tianming merely smiled at them without elaborating. Then they raised their pace and snuck inside, only to discover a microcosmic paradise within. There was a sea of flowers, a huge lake, and a rather large courtyard beside it. The sound of children happily playing came from there. The three of them approached and saw two children, a boy and a girl, playing with their lifebound beasts. Having inherited the bloodline of Yun Tianque, their lifebound beasts were nimbus-type beasts. The two of them laid flat on the floating clouds as they happily flew about.

There was a building beyond the courtyard in which a serenely beautiful woman busied herself cooking for her children, wearing a gentle expression the whole time. In terms of looks alone, she couldn't compare to Lu Yuanji, a woman from a prestigious family, one bit. Yet she was probably precisely the kind of person that would make a home feel peaceful and comfortable.

"Yun Tianque's sneaky and devious actions have caused the Azuresoul Palace much grief. I didn't think he'd have it in him to form a nice family like that," Long Wanying said.

"There's no such thing as a purely good person, nor is there a purely evil person. I don't know whether I'd be considered good or evil myself. People are complicated, and slapping a label on them is doing them a disservice. No person is one dimensional," Tianming said. Even Gujian Qingshuang had moments when he acted ruthlessly, but that was borne of his love for his sect.

As they spoke, the three of them entered the courtyard. When the woman saw them, she dropped the plate she was holding on the ground, causing the children to turn to them. "Are you Brother Yun's enemies?" she asked, hurriedly hugging her children close.

"We used to be his enemies, but from now on we'll be his friends," Tianming said.

She tried sending a transmission stone, but that was foiled.

"Don't worry. We won't let any harm come to you. All we need is a favor to lead Yun Tianque somewhere. After that, we'll send you back here," Tianming said.

"I..." She seemed really fearful.

"Do you know who he is?" Long Wanying asked.

"He said he had the same name as the sect master of the Supracloud Sanctuary by sheer coincidence, but..." She was no fool and had had a gut feeling about his true identity for quite a while now.

"Please come with us," Long Wanying said.

The woman carried her children with her, not resisting one bit. She knew there was nothing she could do and she had no choice but to follow them.

"Relax," Tianming said to her after teasing the children a bit. He left a silver egg there before they departed. Yin Chen would tell Yun Tianque where to go once he returned.

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Meanwhile, at Goldridge Mountain, the preparations were complete. When they had subdued Gujian Qingshuang, they'd dealt quite a lot of damage to the surroundings. However, that wouldn't be a problem this time. They had to lure Gujian Qingshuang in without making him suspect anything before, but this time around, they wouldn't give Yun Tianque any choice. They simply left open a path that led into the Divine Worldeater Cauldron.

After Tianming arrived with the hostages, the invisible cockroaches near Yun Tianque appeared when he was cultivating and told him that they had his family and demanded that he go to Goldridge Mountain to take them back. As expected, his expression completely changed. He grabbed the talking cockroach and went to the Wave Mountains first. This place was a closely kept secret that he hadn't revealed to anyone, yet his family was gone!

"Who was it?!" Seeing the metallic cockroach instantly reminded him of Tianming. He knew it was a trap, but he had no choice! He mounted his nimbus emperor and immediately headed in Goldridge Mountain's direction, alone and without hesitation. When he entered, he did as Yin Chen said and immediately entered the cauldron. After that, the hostages had played their part.

"Ying'er..." Yun Tianque immediately spotted Gujian Qingshuang, Long Wanying, Yang Ce, and the rest, as well as his family. Seeing them safe and sound, he breathed a sigh of relief. The fact that he had come was a sign that they were his weakness. The sect master of the Supracloud Sanctuary had never imagined that anyone would be able to get their hands on his family. Gritting his teeth, he said, "Aren't you all amazing? How resourceful of you. To think that you could even find out about what the others in the Supracloud Sanctuary are completely ignorant of! I'm impressed!"

"I'm also impressed by your sentimentality, Brother Yun," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Just say it. What do you want? To kill me? I know that you've come for me, so at the very least, do the right thing and leave my family out of it. I'll take everything in their place."

"Of course. We'll immediately send them back right now," Gujian Qingshuang said, much to Yun Tianque's surprise.

Tianming would probably have a firmer hold on him with these three people as hostages compared to using his bonegnaw ants, but he had never intended for them to serve such a purpose.

"Brother Yun... we'll...."

"Go back first," Yun Tianque said, then turned and glared at Gujian Qingshuang, thinking that he was the one who had masterminded the whole thing. "If you go back on your word, I'll never spare you and come back to haunt you as a ghost!"

"Relax. They've played their parts, and it's not like you'll never see them again. Even though you're my archenemy, I'm not nearly as merciless as you are," Gujian Qingshuang said. That was the difference in the way they conducted themselves. Had their positions been reversed, things might not have turned out the same way.

Yun Tianque watched as Ye Buzhiqiu escorted his family away, but he couldn't leave. "How can I be sure they'll be safe?"

"Well, try not to die and go back home to see for yourself," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Fine!" He had accepted his fate. When he had come, he'd been fraught with worry, only for him to realize that things weren't as bad as he'd imagined. "Gujian Qingshuang, if you ever let me get a hold of your weakness, I'll make sure I squeeze the life out of you before my very eyes." He gave his nemesis a fierce, yet respectful look.

"If it were up to me, I'd do the same. However, I'm not the one calling the shots today," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"Then who is? Long Wanying? Yang Ce?" Yun Tianque looked at the others. There were five enemies in total, including Yan Nuxia and Jiang Qingliu. Long Wanying and Yang Ce alone were each stronger than him, while Yan Nuxia and Gujian Qingshuang were at least as powerful as he was. Jiang Qingliu, on the other hand, could use the Azuresoul Tower to suppress him.

The Divine Worldeater Cauldron's entrance finally closed tightly shut. Yu Ziqian's mastery over the divine artifact was growing by the day. They had all come fully prepared.

"Once you're defeated and unable to resist, you'll know who's calling the shots. It definitely isn't anyone you'd expect!" Gujian Qingshuang said. What had happened to him would soon be happening to Yun Tianque. The feeling of dragging another crab to the bottom of the bucket with him was refreshing indeed! That was why he would be giving it his all today, putting in even more effort than the rest. It was the only way they could deal with Yun Tianque; there was no point in negotiating!

"Even if I die, I'll make sure you all suffer for it!" That was Yun Tianque's only desire right then. Once more, a grand battle involving the top elites of the continent took place. Yun Tianque would be facing

even greater odds than Gujian Qingshuang had. Reverberations were again felt from outside the cauldron, where Tianming and Yu Ziqian were.

"It used to be a crazy pipe dream... I didn't think we would reach our final step so soon!" Ye Buzhiqiu, Ye Dongliu, and Gujian Qingshuang had joined Tianming's ranks without any hiccups at all.

"To think that we thought we'd have to start from Yun Tianque's subordinates first before directly making our way to him... Who knew that he'd be the first from the Supracloud Sanctuary to fall to us?" Yu Ziqian said.

Luck itself had greatly accelerated Tianming's plans to unite the Azurecloud Continent. If things went well, Yun Tianque's wife and children would have greatly contributed to their cause. Ye Buzhiqiu was obediently sending the three of them back; he had no choice. His every move was being monitored by the bonegnaw ants living within him, and an instant, yet painful, death would be his only fate should he choose to disobey.

Now that Tianming controlled Gujian Qingshuang, the Ye father and son pair was no longer as useful to him, so they had to serve to remain alive. As for returning to their home through the formations, Yun Tianque's wife knew how to activate their markings, so she wouldn't have a problem bringing her children back. Ye Buzhiqiu, however, wouldn't be able to go back in. No doubt, when they reached home, Yun Tianque would be able to feel it, unlike when they were taken from their homes as Tianming had directly torn open the formation without touching its markings.

Chapter 1378 - Darknight Truefiend

Everyone had lines that they wouldn't cross. Tianming's was that he would try his best not to harm innocent people if he could. Using their weaknesses was one thing, but the question lay in how they were used. Sovereign Xi had used the threat of slaughter to get Tianming to bend to her will, but that was completely different from Tianming using Yun Tianque's family to lure him into a trap. The main difference was how the hostages were treated.

He wasn't the kind of fool that would give up on a great chance to build his faction just because he wanted to be known as a 'good guy', so he didn't feel any remorse when resorting to less than savory methods. After all, being ethical and judgmental was the luxury of the rich and powerful, who dictated what was acceptable and what wasn't. While Li Muyang had advocated for him to live an upright life, Li Wudi had taught him how to bend the rules. An upright man without any tricks up his sleeve would only be a saint, not a ruler. Now that Tianming had gotten Ye Buzhiqiu to send Yun Tianque's family back, he focused entirely on the battle in the cauldron.

"These people are so powerful!" Tianming was a little awed by the rumbles coming from within the cauldron. "They should be peak solarians, right? That puts them at the top of Orderia! Even the youngest of them is around eight centuries old.... I'm still so far off from where they are." If it weren't for Yin Chen, there would be no way Tianming could pull them into his circle and make things go as he had planned. It would have been impossible for someone of his age to carry out something like that. Even now, Yun Tianque had completely no idea that the mastermind of everything was outside the cauldron.

The battle proceeded without wasted words. There was only one response: killing his enemies. Yun Tianque used all the trump cards he had to survive. The battle continued for fifteen minutes, during which the rumbles of the cauldron shook even the mountains around them. However, it wouldn't matter even if others discovered what was going on. Goldridge Mountain had a defensive formation, after all, and Ye Dongliu was also standing guard outside.

"I have to hold on!" Yu Ziqian said, his face flushed with effort.

Tianming wanted to enter to see what a fight between solarians looked like, but it wouldn't fly. Not only would he be dragged into it, he might even be a weak link in the chain that Yun Tianque could exploit. Right as he thought that, the lid of the cauldron was busted open.

"Not good!" A huge explosion caused Yu Ziqian to dive into the mud. Tianming hurriedly jumped aside as well and also ended up completely covered in mud. Fortunately, that made Yun Tianque miss them. If they had been caught, their effort would have completely gone to waste.

Looking through the rubble, Tianming noticed that the nimbus emperor was the one who had busted open the lid of the cauldron. It was a unique cloud-like lifeform similar to those that Tianming had encountered before in his fight with Yun Feiyang. However, the nimbus emperor was far bigger and was able to break open the cauldron simply by expanding its body. Loads of cloudstuff rose into the air, pushing apart the mud. Yun Tianque had likely escaped the cauldron amidst the clouds.

"This is bad." Tianming had heard that Yun Tianque was far better at slipping away than Gujian Qingshuang because of his unique lifebound beast. Fortunately, a black-robed youth rushed out of the cauldron with so much force that the aftershock caused Tianming to cough out a bit of blood. He saw many black totems surrounding the man, covering the sky and radiating fiendish energy throughout the entire battlefield. These were Yang Ce's darknight truefiends. They formed a gigantic cage that trapped the nimbus emperor within before dragging it back into the cauldron. The nimbus emperor raged, its roars so loud that they seemed able to shatter eardrums.

"Yu Ziqian, close it!" Long Wanying yelled.

"Alright!" Yu Ziqian burst out of the rubble and moved the lid back on the cauldron, sealing it shut once the nimbus emperor had been dragged back inside. "Phew! We almost let him get away! Yang Ce really is impressive. As expected of the grand minister."

"I saw it too. It looked like he had eight totems, the only octabane that isn't with the celestial orderians," Tianming said. Not even the totemancers of the Blueblood Starocean—including the Deluge Emperor—were octabanes. However, Yang Ce hadn't been described as an octabane, as far as anyone was concerned, so it was probably a secret. Or it could also be something that he had awakened later in life, much like Sovereign Xi had tried to, in the same fashion as her ancestor, the Eightmoon Swordsage, had.

"Senior Yang Ce said that he could take on one of the two swordlords himself. With his help, we'll definitely be able to conquer anything," Tianming said.

"Aunt Ying must be super charming or something. Why're the men around her all so powerful? I heard her late husband was said to be the second coming of the Ninedragon Emperor.... What a shame," Yu Ziqian lamented. Regardless, their priority now was to take down Yun Tianque.

"Gan Gangan, focus. Don't let him escape again," Tianming said.

"Got it. Don't worry, it was just a careless slip earlier."

The two of them continued waiting; the dust had yet to settle.

"Boss, you said the continent would be united once you deal with Yun Tianque, right?" Yu Ziqian asked.

"No," Tianming said, shaking his head.

"Then when will it be united?"

"Once we drive out the Blueblood Starocean, Emyrean Sword Sect, wargodeans, and the celestial orderians. Only then can we make sure all of the divine tree's fruits belong to the denizens of the continent. That is what true unification looks like."

Compared to taking over the two sects, that was a much more difficult goal. The players in the game would include the Warlord, Northdipper Swordsage, Deluge Emperor, and perhaps even the Sun Emperor. Not to mention, Li Wushuang was also a huge unknown. As far as Tianming was concerned, he would benefit from gaining access to the divine ores of the continent. The divine herbs were only secondary. But naturally, his goals extended beyond just that. He wanted to build a firm foundation on the sun and eventually bring his dynasty here in the next century. If he really managed to make a contribution to the people of the Azurecloud Continent, he would end up as a hero here, and possibly even their emperor in the future.

"Not to mention, stabilizing the continent could help out the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect." Long Wanying and Yang Ce had helped him a lot. Without them, this future wouldn't even have been a possibility for him. Now, Tianming believed he belonged not just with the Sky Palace, but with the Azuresoul Palace and Xuanyuan Dragon Sect as well.

"Do your best, seniors. Once we secure the internal factions of the continent, we'll drive the outsiders away!" At the very least, Tianming would consider the best way to deal with the divine herbs that was fair to both sects.

The cauldron continued rumbling as the battle went on, but nothing like the previous escape happened again. That was when Yun Tianque had been fighting at his prime, but by now even someone as strong as him would have been heavily wounded in a battle against five people that were so powerful. Yang Ce alone was probably enough to kill him, though controlling him required much more than just that. Still, Yang Ce's presence was what had really made Tianming's plan work in the first place. Without him, it would be difficult to deal with even Gujian Qingshuang. Tianming felt really grateful to Long Wanying's vast network of allies for that. Being sincere, smart, and straightforward made it easy to make friends.

The nimbus emperor let out one final roar of grief before things settled down in the cauldron. Finally, it had succeeded, and all that remained was the takeover.

"Come in, Tianming," Long Wanying said, sounding a little weak.

"Alright." The cauldron opened and Tianming saw a heavily-wounded Yun Tianque before him.

Chapter 1379 - To the Ends of the World

Yun Tianque was being crushed under the Azuresoul Tower. His entire body was bruised and battered. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the newcomer was Tianming. "You're the mastermind?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"Not exactly. We're all cooperating together. The seniors are helping me, I'm just here to finish the last step," Tianming replied.

"You want to kill me yourself? Hah! Will that help stroke your vanity?" Yun Tianque grit his teeth.

"Are you afraid of death?" Tianming asked.

"Of course not. Life always ends in death, sooner or later, so what is there to fear?"

"Isn't that great? Then, you won't have a problem with me sending you to the afterlife." Tianming saw hatred and fury in Yun Tianque's eyes, as well as a trace of helplessness.

"Li Tianming, I could roughly guess from what I heard that it was your idea to capture my wife but not rely on them to threaten me and instead use so many people to gang up on me."

"I suppose."

"So can you be counted as some kind of good guy?" Yun Tianque asked.

"Not exactly. I just have my own methods, like you have your own. I don't dare to accept such a title."

"Take yourself as one! You can kill me, I won't resist at all. But I have a small request."

"Speak."

"Let them live a happy life and don't disturb them." Yun Tianque's eyes turned red and his fingers dug into the ground. His words were very unwilling, but he had accepted his fate.

"That won't be a problem. That's just basic principles." Tianming looked doubtfully at him, before smiling. "Were you real when you said you wouldn't resist just now?" It broke Tianming's heart every time Yin Chen's clones died after so much effort was spent to make them.

"Yes, no problem." Yun Tianque grit his teeth.

"Then I'm going to start. Sorry, but I have the bad habit of tormenting people while I kill them. It may hurt a little, so just bear with it."

"Haha, I've dominated this continent for so many years. What can a little pain do to me?" Yun Tianque was disdainful. Honestly, when Yun Tianque had seen Tianming for the first time outside the Voidsky Realm, he had never imagined a day would come when Tianming would kill him.

"Enjoy." Tianming took out a dozen small silver eggs. "Remember, don't resist and don't move. Just relax and enjoy it."

"As long as you uphold your promise!"

"Alright." Tianming didn't expect Yun Tianque would really hold true to his word as Tianming sliced open his flesh to insert the bonegnaw ants inside. He didn't make a sound and just grit his teeth.

“Sect Master Yun is truly a man among men,” Tianming praised.

“Cut the bullshit. I’m on a tight schedule to go reincarnate. Just wait, I’ll get you in my next life!” As Yun Tianque wasn’t resisting, the bonegnaw ants weren’t causing too much pain as they entered his bones without resistance. The horrible pain came from their activation. This was the first time it had been such a resounding success. Within an hour, Tianming had easily put a million bonegnaw ants into Yun Tianque’s body and finished the last step.

“When are you going to finish this?” Yun Tianque glared.

Tianming stood up and grinned at him.

“What’s going on?” Yun Tianque was truly confused.

However, he suddenly froze as a formation stone he kept within his spatial ring informed him that three formation markers had entered the formation he’d set up at the Wave Mountains. In other words, his wife had returned home.

“Alright, let’s do this.” Yun Tianque shut his eyes.

“Sect Master Yun, congratulations! I’m pleased to inform you that you have passed the test and don’t need to die!” Tianming said.

Yun Tianque frowned in confusion. “Youngster, have you lost it?”

Tianming straightforwardly took out a few silver eggs and explained the effects of the invisible cockroaches and bonegnaw ants. “There’s tens of millions of these cockroaches scattered across the continent. A million or so are in your Supracloud Sanctuary. Every word and action of your people can’t escape me. This includes your home at the Wave Mountains. That’s how I found it.”

When Tianming was done with his explanation, he had the bonegnaw ants demonstrate the pain. No matter how strong someone was, they would end up curled up on the ground, screaming until they were hoarse and their mouth was foaming.

“Enjoyable?” Tianming asked.

Yun Tianque mutely stared at the bonegnaw ants and cockroaches. The metal lifeforms on Tianming’s hand had made him experience fear worse than death. “What’s your goal in controlling me?” Yun Tianque finally understood the purpose behind what had happened today. If it were just to kill him, Yang Ce would have been enough.

Tianming explained to Yun Tianque his dream to unify the continent.

“Sect Master Yun, when we chase away the invaders, both the Azuresoul Palace and Supracloud Sanctuary will gain ten times the benefits of before. As long as the two sects help each other, no one else can interfere based on the Sky Palace’s rules!” Tianming said.

Yun Tianque roared with laughter after hearing that. “Kid, you’re still wet behind the ears. Why should the Supracloud Sanctuary take such insane risks for you?”

The Azuresoul Tower had already been put away, and Yun Tianque had regained his freedom. He stood up and looked at Tianming coolly. That made Tianming understand something. Killing Yun Tianque would be easy, but converting him to his ideology was hard.

“Using this method on me means you failed. I, Yun Tianque, do not fear death! I won’t bet my Supracloud Sanctuary’s future on you. If I die, someone else will replace me. The celestial orderians are the rulers of the sun, and no one can resist them. When I chose them, I planned on never standing with the Myriad Solar Sects ever again. Dream on if you want to control the Supracloud Sanctuary through me!”

His willpower had given Tianming a new problem.

Yun Tianque had expected that Tianming would be thrown off by the setback. However, Tianming just smiled instead. “You can go back now and give it some thought. Especially when you and your sect continues suffering the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean’s rudeness and suppression, and again when they take the lion’s share of your divine herbs!

“One day, you’ll understand the value of resistance. We live to be people, so why choose the life of a lapdog? The beauty of life is in not fearing challenges.” Tianming could talk to Yun Tianque any time through Yin Chen anyway. Yun Tianque had great influence in the Supracloud Sanctuary; Tianming still needed him and wouldn’t kill him.

“You speak like it’s easy. You should know that resisting them will have a heavy price paid in blood. Naive is naive! And all of you are following this junior in his madness.” Yun Tianque disdainfully looked at all those present.

“Yun Tianque, don’t say junior anymore. Did you think this would happen before today? There’s nothing impossible in this world, only things you don’t dare to do. If you let yourself be abused because you’re afraid of bleeding, what difference is there between your life and a dog’s?” Gujian Qingshuang said. At first, he hadn’t wanted to be controlled. However, afterward, he had been converted to Tianming’s ideology.

Yun Tianque was the opposite. He believed in the celestial orderians and wasn’t afraid of death.

He glared at his old rival and fell into silence.

“Let me show you something.” Gujian Qingshuang cut open his bone, revealing the bonegnaw ants within. With a bitter smile, he said, “You guessed right. I was the previous victim to suffer this boy’s control. I’m not happy with this position, but I don’t believe his dream is impossible.”

“Yun Tianque, our sects have been at each other’s throats for thousands of generations. I’ve wondered before what we could accomplish together. Today we’re under the same yoke, but could this be a chance?”

“Cut the bullshit!” In truth, seeing Gujian Qingshuang end up in the same state was rather shocking for Yun Tianque; however, one’s beliefs weren’t so easily changed.

That was the greatest barrier to Tianming’s path forward. He had underestimated the difficulty of truly controlling Yun Tianque. Controlling his life didn’t mean controlling his heart.

“You may leave,” Tianming suddenly said.

“You’re letting me go just like that?”

“What else? My eyes are all over this continent and bonegnaw ants are in your body. Where can you run?” Tianming said.

“Yes, I admit you’re incredible. But if you’re hoping that I’ll come around one day, it won’t happen.”

“It’s up to you.”

Yun Tianque gave him a deep look, then passed by him as he walked out step by step. Before leaving, he turned around and inhaled deeply. He knew Tianming was certain that he would join their side in the end. “Is that possible?” For a moment, he was in a daze. He knew how mighty Li Wushuang and the Tumulus Pill God were. Resisting them wouldn’t end with just his death.

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After leaving Goldridge Mountain, Yun Tianque flew as fast as he could to the Wave Mountains.

“Ying’er!” Yun Tianque shouted as he barged into the courtyard, still covered in blood.

“Big Brother Yun,” someone replied from inside the house. A few moments later, a woman came out, holding the hands of two children. She looked at him with tearful eyes.

“Everything’s fine.” Yun Tianque wiped away his blood and tried to smile.

“That’s great.” The woman lost her strength and almost fell down, but he managed to catch her in time.

“Are we moving?” the woman asked.

“There’s no point. We can’t escape no matter even if we run to the ends of the world,” he replied.

Chapter 1380 - Common Enemy

Things with Yun Tianque hadn’t gone as smoothly as Tianming had hoped. Wanting people like him to serve under you with just one action was very difficult.

Tianming could have chosen to kill him and instead seized the other six cultivators of the Supracloud Sanctuary who were ranked grade-five in the hierarchy. However, control of the sect would have been less effective then. Hence, Tianming had given Yun Tianque a chance.

“We’ll take things step by step then.”

The hundred thousand swordpupils who had arrived at the Azuresoul Palace had brought a huge storm. With their status as the ‘main branch’, they had been overbearing and seized three Sword Branches. They all looked down on the swordpupils of the Azuresoul Palace. Conflict broke out daily, even resulting in deaths.

And for the Azuresoul Palace, they could only swallow their indignation.

It hadn’t taken long for the First, Second, and Third Sword Branches the Azuresoul Palace had maintained for years to become a huge mess. Despite being guests, the Emyrean Sword Sect had taken

over their host. Their trash and items were strewn everywhere and some male swordpupils had even made inappropriate remarks to female swordpupils of the Azuresoul Palace, inciting huge anger from the rest. There was conflict everywhere!

“The sense of superiority from being a ‘first-rate sect’ and ‘main branch’ has made these swordpupils from the Emphyrean Sword Sect use their numbers to act more and more unrestrained.”

The Wind and Rain Swordlords hadn’t stopped it, which was a form of tacit agreement. The two swordlords were from the top clans of the Emphyrean Sword Sect. There was a reason they were famous for being unreasonable and Long Wanying had said they were famous for their idiocy. They were completely intolerable after a few days of contact.

Tianming was in slight disbelief that such weirdos could exist at the upper ends of powerhouses. The Violet, Green, and Saintdragon Emperor had all been upright. The Whitedragon Empress, Yang Ce, Gujian Qingshuang and Yun Tianque had all had their responsibilities and goals too. And they had all had their independent thoughts.

“It’s just proof that no matter where you go, people whose only aspect worth respecting is their age will exist.”

Unfortunately, the problem was that they had both high status and combat prowess. Tianming dared to claim that if they didn’t have the Emphyrean Sword Sect behind them and hadn’t been born in a top clan, these ‘old trash’ would not have lived so long.

Why did he detest them so much? They had let the Emphyrean Sword Sect swordpupils ruin the atmosphere at the Azuresoul Palace. Also, the swordpupils had overstepped their boundaries and joined in the herb picking. Herb picking didn’t really require much in the way of technical skills. It had always been the various cities and troops of the Azuresoul Palace in charge of their areas and transportation. The jobs involved had all been clearly delegated. Now that the Emphyrean Sword Sect swordpupils had gotten involved, though, things had become a mess.

They would pick unripe fruit, wasting it. What divine herbs they did properly pick, they would simply take for themselves against the rules. There wasn’t much difference between them and bandits. And worst of all, if anyone spoke up or stopped them, they would throw a fit and never hold back. Many of the Azuresoul Palace’s people had died within a few days like that.

“Why so many complaints? If we weren’t here, you wouldn’t even be getting anything.”

“It’s your fortune we were willing to come help you! Why are you chattering so much?”

“Open your eyes wide and know who’s protecting you, ingrates!”

The Emphyrean Sword Sect swordpupils had their excuses. They hadn’t been so unbridled when Shi Yan was around. But now that they had numbers, they were like a swarm of locusts.

Gujian Qingshuang had seen everything. He didn’t have a choice, but internally, he was already standing on Tianming’s side.

The situation was the same on the Supracloud Sanctuary's side. As the Empyrean Sword Sect had sent reinforcements, the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean had sent some too. Although it wasn't as many, there were still over fifty thousand.

Through Yin Chen's eyes, Tianming saw everything that happened in the Supracloud Sanctuary. The wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean didn't quite have respect for Yun Tianque or his sect. They had also taken the best locations and kicked their hosts out. Furthermore, Yun Tianque's skycloud race was full of beautiful women. These beauties from above the clouds were full of exotic charm. The wargodeans were all tall and stalwart. They like beauties and had been frequently doing some very inappropriate things. The beauties of the skycloud race didn't even have any dignity.

As the leader of his people, Yun Tianque could only stew in his anger without saying anything.

The Blueblood Starocean was just as bad. As with all totem cultivators on the sun, they looked down on beastmasters and thought themselves better. Of course, that wasn't to say that all experts would bully and lord over others. However, there were historical and cultural reasons why this was happening so much. If they didn't have the desire to lord over others, they wouldn't have come to the Azurecloud Continent.

"Yun Tianque's feelings must be very similar to ours. And most importantly of all, when Yun Tianque agreed to become the celestial orderians' pet dog, ninety percent of the Supracloud Sanctuary was against it, including four of their grade-five cultivators."

The Supracloud Sanctuary was an enemy of the Azuresoul Palace, but it didn't mean they lacked a backbone. In fact, the cultivators who lived in the sky had always been famous for celebrating light, and thought of themselves as enlightened and pure immortal-like beings

Although they had been forced by circumstances, they now had the label of lapdogs. They also had to endure the oppression of the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean, and had to give away all of their painstakingly-picked divine herbs. The hearts of the Supracloud Sanctuary cultivators were at their limit.

Tianming saw all of it. That was why he firmly believed that Yun Tianque would join them sooner or later. Before, Yun Tianque had had no choice, as the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect was backing the Azuresoul Palace and their rank was going to rise. Only the celestial orderians behind the wargodeans could help balance out the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. However, Tianming's appearance had let him make a choice now.

"Think carefully. Why does first or second in the continent matter if you can get ten times what you get now?" There had been a deeper reason behind Gujian Qingshuang showing Yun Tianque he also had bonegnaw ants. It was to show that he was being controlled too. Hence, it wouldn't be the Supracloud Sanctuary serving the Azuresoul Palace, but both serving under Li Tianming!

After going back, Yun Tianque hadn't been able to shake Tianming off his mind. Nor was he able to ignore the countless metal lifeforms crawling around, or the ones crawling around inside his body....

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In front of the Soaring Palace in the Supracloud Sanctuary, millions of divine herbs were piled up like a mountain. Fragrance filled the air and the immortal aura was abundant there. This was the place the Supracloud Sanctuary had exclusively given to the prince to stay and cultivate.

Outside the palace, Long Youyou and Li Ruoshi were dumbly staring at the massive pile.

“Although the quality isn’t that high mostly, the quantity is just... wow,” Long Youyou sighed.

“Yes, this suits Big Brother Haochen. He needs a lot,” Li Ruoshi said.

“However, Big Brother Haochen wanted to leave after losing that time. He didn’t really want these. Unfortunately, Auntie Wushuang forced him to stay and makes his vastsun godbeasts gorge themselves every day. She obviously wants Big Brother Haochen to beat Li Tianming and get back our face,” Long Youyou said.

“That’s definitely it. Why else would she not let Big Brother Haochen go? She really cares about face, and people say she’s the kind of person who doesn’t like to lose even once in their life,” Li Ruoshi said.

“I see. Though, those wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean people really are attentive. They come and send divine herbs here everyday, making those Supracloud Sanctuary people very, very unhappy,” Long Youyou said.

“Unhappy? For what? Without us, they wouldn’t have anything,” Li Ruoshi replied as the two of them walked into the Soaring Palace together.