

The Ages 1431

Chapter 1431 - Escape from the Continent

The most terrifying part of the plague was the rate at which it spread. It constantly propagated itself by using the bodies of those it infected. The ten thousand plus swordpupils were all terrified and those near the outer periphery instantly kept their lifebound beasts back into their lifebound spaces. No matter how much they cried and shrieked, they all kept running away from the epicenter of the outbreak.

Now, the blood-colored saplings looked like nightmarish abominations everyone was trying to flee from. What happened at Magma Valley was only a part of it, as similar outbreaks occurred at all of the sapling sites. What was even more terrifying was how the bloody mist seemed to expand across the range of the divine tree, coalescing and even raining down on the ground below. It wouldn't be too long before it covered the entire continent.

"Aaaaah!" The cultivators ran, seeing bloody boils develop on their bodies or others. If the boils started to form near the arm, cutting the arm off would be enough, but what could one do when they formed on the head?

"I didn't even touch any blood! How did it—aaagh!" Countless sprouts burst out from the boils before exploding, scattering fine pollen like that of Xian Xian's Evernight Curse and causing the germination to spread far and wide. The area covered by the divine tree had become hell on earth. Countless lifeforms lived beneath the divine tree in cities, towns, and villages. Before any battle, even the smallest settlements would activate their defensive formations; however, would mere formations be able to resist the blood plague? Blood-colored rain soon swallowed up the continent.

"What happened?" The Northdipper Swordsage's group was greeted with a terrifying sight when they drew close to the Magma Valley.

"Swordsage! The divine tree is unleashing its wrath! Run!"

It was only now that they recalled that the divine tree had a history as old as the celestial orderians.

"It's just a damned plant, how can it be angry? Somebody must be messing around," Wu Lingcang said.

"What about the saplings?" the Northdipper Swordsage asked.

"The saplings are the ones killing everyone off! We've lost thousands!" The person who gave that report was panicking. Even though there were more than six hundred thousand troops before him, they were nothing but a delicious feast for the divine tree. Once the plague spread among them, it would be a nightmare. And as he had imagined, someone next to him grew covered in boils and exploded, splattering all over the troops. At the same time, his lifebound beast emerged from his lifebound space in despair, boils manifesting at a rate the eye could see before sprouting and exploding before the whole army.

"What in the world?"

It was one thing for the Supracloud Sanctuary to betray the celestial orderians, but what in the world was happening with the divine tree?

"Run!" The swordpupils that had been left to guard the saplings despaired as they retreated, ignoring any orders from the swordsage.

"Stop!" Before Wu Lingcang could finish his order, tens of people beside him collapsed. He saw bloody boils spread to their face as if they had been stung by hundreds of bees before they sprouted and exploded, splattering blood and flesh all over the place.

"Not even astralforce can stop it?"

With how tightly packed the army was, the rate the plague spread was insane. Their morale evaporated in an instant.

"Scatter! Scatter!" people cried, then all hell broke loose. They looked at each other like they would ghosts.

"Don't come here!"

"Buzz off!"

With disaster at their doorstep, they all defaulted to self-preservation. The whole army had broken down into anarchy as flowers of blood bloomed across the land. One look south and one would see a world coming to its end, even seemingly hearing the cries of despair carried by the wind. Nobody knew if those cries came from the denizens of the continent or the troops of the alliance.

"Swordsage, we have to retreat quickly!"

"Things have changed! We have to retreat beyond the range of the tree!"

"No, we have to leave the continent!"

"Quick!"

"If we don't decide soon, we'll all die! The tree is enraged and we can't handle it!"

"It must be heavenly punishment...."

Amidst the despairing cries, the Northdipper Swordsage turned his head around, taking everything in. Nobody could see his expression through his mask. Even so, the speed of the plague's nightmarish spread was exponential. They would reach tens of millions of cases soon enough. If they lost their million-man army on a trip that was supposedly to get some easy pickings, it would be unthinkable.

"Everyone, scatter and retreat!" he finally ordered. In fact, he didn't even need to give that order because the troops were already running for their lives, first to the edges of the divine tree's branches and then out of the continent. Even as they ran, they lost about fifty thousand people to the Azurecloud Divine Tree. Many of them didn't even regroup with the rest, but fled straight back to their sects. After all, many of them from second- to fourth-rate factions were only there to boost their numbers, not to actually fight for the main cause. They had already gotten the spoils left behind by the defeated wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean cultivators, and the divine herbs had nothing to do with them in the first place. When the plague spread, a whole three hundred thousand of them didn't remain a second longer and immediately retreated.

Only the first-rate factions in the alliance still had other plans, but even then, most of them were terrified by the staggering developments. Eventually, about half of the alliance's army left the continent. It would take quite a lot of time for the Northdipper Swordsage to reassemble the ones that remained.

The swordsage himself finally retreated beyond the range of the divine tree, but the bloody mist was still spreading. They had no choice but to keep backing off until they left the continent. Turning back, they saw the gigantic tree frantically waving its body like a bloody demon. By then, the pollen-like mist had enveloped the entire continent.

Chapter 1432 - Fracturing Alliance

"Is that damned tree going to wipe out all life on the continent?" The Northdipper Swordsage didn't understand what was going on.

"Did the tree decide to do this or did someone cause it to? It couldn't have been us, right?"

The death of billions was such a horrifying catastrophe that even the Northdipper Swordsage couldn't properly wrap his mind around it. It used to be that he had wanted to obtain the saplings no matter what, but now all his plans had been ruined. Right now, he didn't care about being the leader of the Myriad Solar Sects anymore. He felt nothing but fear and awe toward the divine tree.

"Their deaths have nothing to do with me!" He took a deep breath, only to suddenly recall something. He had seen the divine tree absorbing blood from hundreds of thousands of lifebound beasts and more than two hundred thousand cultivators, all of whom were killed by his army. Immediately, something clicked in his mind and he fell into deep thought.

"Swordsage!" Wu Lingcang, Wang Hong, and Mu Qingqu came to him. He nodded a response.

Wu Lingcang looked at the tree and shuddered. "According to our previous arrangement, the Supracloud Sanctuary's divine herbs should've belonged to us. But now the situation has changed thanks to Gujian Qingshuang, Long Wanying, and the Sky Palace disciples causing trouble. So, we'd like to renegotiate. If you can allow the three of our factions to split the divine herbs at the Azuresoul Palace among ourselves, we'll return to the continent with you."

"The Azuresoul Palace? Impossible." The swordsage shook his head. He had assembled the allied army with the goal of crushing the two outsider factions before defeating the Supracloud Sanctuary and taking over the continent. But now his plans had been ruined. If he couldn't attack the Supracloud Sanctuary or take over the continent, what use was there for an army? Even around four hundred thousand of the troops from the second- to fourth-rated sects had fled. Now there was no good reason for the Northdipper Swordsage to hand them the divine herbs. He no longer had any intention to work with them any longer.

"How about we split the divine herbs? You can take half, with the remaining half to be split between our three factions. At the very least, we won't be returning empty handed," Mu Qingqu said.

The Northdipper Swordsage still shook his head.

"Are you really going to go so far?" Wu Lingcang asked.

"That's not my wish. The Emyrean Sword Sect has already lost too much for the Azurecloud Continent. I need to have something to show for the sacrifice of our fallen. Not to mention, your losses haven't been massive," the swordsage said.

"Alright. Then I hope you don't come to the Divinemight Empire to rally troops for any future alliance you want to forge anymore. We won't want to come back to this continent, either. Let's go!" Wu Lingcang didn't bother keeping up the pleasantries. His faction was ranked sixth, after all, only one below the Emyrean Sword Sect.

"See you, Swordsage."

"May we meet again should our fates cross."

The other two also left, leaving the swordsage behind with around two hundred thousand swordpupils, half of whom were still scattered.

"Swordsage, without their support, will we be able to demand the divine herbs from the Azuresoul Palace?" the Wind Swordlord asked.

"Let's not talk about that and see how the situation here develops. If they all die out, it'll be our fault. We'll have committed a heavy sin. Would it still be right to take advantage of them after all this?" the Northdipper Swordsage said.

"What do you mean?"

"We won't be taking the divine herbs. Let them have them! The people of this continent have suffered too much...."

The Wind Swordlord was shocked. This time around, the Emyrean Sword Sect had suffered significant losses. Not only had they failed to take over the Supracloud Sanctuary, they even drove their allies away, so the divine herbs of the Azuresoul Palace were their sole recourse for deriving a profit. Yet the swordsage had driven the three factions away just to ensure the Azuresoul Palace got to keep the divine herbs. "Do you sympathize with them, Swordsage?"

"It's not sympathy... I just want to keep the least bit of human decency that I still possess." The mere notion of the death of billions caused him to shudder. Taking the sole thing that could keep the Azuresoul Palace afloat was something he couldn't permit himself to do. "I wonder how many people on the continent will manage to survive...."

"Rest assured, Swordsage. This is all the fault of Li Wushuang. She was the one who destroyed the saplings. It has nothing to do with us, so we don't need to feel responsible for it."

"Yes...." Though he said that, he couldn't shake the anxiety at the memory of seeing the divine tree absorbing all of that blood.

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"Whoa...." Tianming had a bad feeling as he stood on the divine tree's branch. The whole world was swallowed up by the same bloody mist, which let out a sharp sizzle as it contacted his Infernal Armor. So far, none of it had been able to seep through it. He watched as the billions of people in the towns and cities were caught up in this living nightmare. 'The rage of the divine tree will fill the skies with blood as

the plague spreads and culls all life'. Every word of that ancient prophecy was coming true; Tianming found it hard to even breathe.

"Is the divine tree unleashing its rage from losing its children?" There was no way he could figure out the intentions of this ancient being that was no more responsive than an average plant most of the time.

"Even the alliance's army is gone. Will the divine tree really wipe out all life?"

Tianming traveled through the mist, followed by Long Wanying, Yang Ce, and the rest. The astral force of the peak elites seemed able to ward off the effects of the mist, which was why the casualties among solarians were far fewer than those among constelliers.

They eventually descended into a town. The people living on Orderia always had formations around any kind of settlement to protect them against the fiery rain. It was all too easy for normal folk to die from the rain if they lacked adequate protection. The town was surrounded by a dense mist, but the density of the mist within the formation seemed less intense.

"Will the divine tree stop? How many people will die if this continues?"

Everyone watched with shock and awe, Tianming included. When they landed, they finally got some reassuring news.

"Aunt Ying, they're saying that people whose ancestry can be traced back to the locals of this continent aren't affected by the plague at all. Only those who moved here in the past few decades are being affected," Tianming said.

"Is that true?" Long Wanying said. If that was really the case, only a small proportion of the population would be affected! Instead, the ones hit hardest by this would be the alliance's army, who were all outsiders. Even though the divine tree was venting its rage, it was still protecting the other lifeforms with which it shared a continent! It simply couldn't bear to harm them!

Chapter 1433 - Blood Grudge

Only a small proportion of people had moved to the continent in the recent decades.

"Let me ask Gujian Qingshuang and Yun Tianque to confirm." They were definitely natives, so Tianming needed them to send some people out to test this theory. He also had Yin Chen try verifying it as well. Either way, it was relieving to hear.

"Either way, let's make sure they order anyone who's just moved to the continent in the past hundred years to not set one foot out of the formation." It was rather intriguing for a divine tree to make it so that the denizens of the continent were like its descendants, almost like some of its essence flowed in their veins.

The arrangements were relayed back to the two sect masters and they immediately formed probing parties. Tianming also ascertained that some dozen people in the town he was in had died, all of whom were outsiders. This was a small, old town that didn't have too many interactions with the broader outside world, and none of the local folks had passed away. The townsfolk all knelt along the streets facing the tree during this apocalyptic occasion, making quite a moving sight.

Some time later, the two sect masters sent news back confirming that the blood plague didn't affect the locals of the continent at all, which meant that almost all their problems had been solved. The Northdipper Swordsage thought that billions of people would die, but that hadn't come to pass.

"Though, I don't doubt that close to a billion non-locals who just moved here have already died, given the sheer size of the population. It's fine and well for the continent's locals to be protected, but we can't let this go on for the long term. The continent will become a forbidden zone and many more people will die as a result."

Not only that, but the bloody mist would be a problem for the locals if it lasted for too long; it blocked out much of the daylight. The only good news to come from this was that the alliance's forces had been completely defeated and sent running from the continent. Tianming was still having a hard time figuring out what he could do about it.

"Must Li Wushuang be killed to quell the divine tree's rage? But she's already left the continent...."

Where would they find her? He, Long Wanying, and the rest had gone to many different places. The lush and verdant continent now looked like something out of hell with the bloody mist all around them. Many trees, plants, and divine herbs seemed to have wilted. The divine tree's rage appeared to be persisting.

"If this goes on, the divine tree might stay like this forever and never bear fruit again. The Azurecloud Continent won't have a future all the same." This was now Tianming's greatest predicament. The loss of the factions that sided with the celestial orderians and the opportunistic alliance's departure should have been something worthy of celebration, but now they had even worse things on their mind to worry about.

Tianming came to the main trunk of the divine tree. It looked like a gigantic wall that endlessly stretched beyond his field of view. Many words were engraved on the trunk, ranging from 'someone was here' messages to proclamations of eternal love. The tree was part of many people's youthful memories, but now all of them had been stained red.

Tianming reached his hand out to touch the trunk, feeling as if he was holding the hand of this gigantic lifeform and experiencing its pain and frustration. That made him understand something. "The plague doesn't just poison the people, it also poisons the tree. It's already doing its best to limit the damage by preventing the locals from dying to it."

It had only turned red because it was poisoned! That was the only sound explanation.

"So the death of Li Wushuang is the only antidote?" But where could they find her now? Tianming furrowed his brow, seeing how the tree seemed to be withering as it unleashed the toxin, its bloody leaves and vines slowly shriveling up.

Once more, Tianming heard its cry of pain. The ground began shaking as a cry reverberated throughout the entire continent just like last time. Everyone in both sects and all the settlements who were locals of the continent began tearing up, resonating with the cry. This wasn't the end of the people's world, after all. Instead, it was the end of the Azurecloud Divine Tree.

They all burst out in tears as they knelt, looking at the struggling divine tree. The frustration and hate that the tree felt was a toxin that harmed others, as well as itself. Tianming could feel all the grief passing through his arm into him and fully empathized with the tree. This tree was a special lifeform that could experience complex emotions as well. Unlike normal humans, it sometimes thought like an old sage, but also thought like a young beast operating on instinct. Though it was stubborn, its feelings and love for its saplings were real. It didn't understand why people would destroy its saplings, though it was still trying to control the rage it couldn't help but feel to the best of its ability. However, it was slowly stepping closer to the edge of the abyss. Not harming the locals of the continent that it had protected was the best it could do.

Tianming fully understood its internal thoughts. Why was it trying to communicate this to him at a time like this? Tianming looked at his palm and suddenly recalled that he had engaged in symbiotic cultivation with the Radix World Tree, so his body was technically part plant.

"Xian Xian, come out."

"What is it, Little Li?" Xian Xian's tree form appeared under the divine tree, looking much smaller by comparison.

"Try to see if you can communicate with it."

"Oh? I've never tried, but let's see how it goes!" Xian Xian stretched its roots and vines toward the trunk. Some roots burrowed directly into the blood-colored tree while the vines wrapped around it. It looked like a little girl hanging from the back of an old man. After that, nothing could be heard. Xian Xian's leaves kept shaking as if it was waving, and Tianming didn't dare to interrupt. Long Wanying and Yang Ce watched from nearby in anticipation.

Tianming hugged Xian Xian's spiritform as it closed its eyes to focus on communion with the divine tree. Eventually, it opened its eyes.

"How is it? Can you talk to it?"

"Of course. Why else would I be out for so long?"

"Then what's it saying?"

Xian Xian nonchalantly said, "Well, you see... too many people and beasts died in the war, causing a lot of resentment to build up. The corpses and blood were littered and spilled all around its roots, causing it to absorb them. That's its innate living response. It wouldn't be a big deal if the amount of blood was small, but the casualties numbered close to a million, and all that blood belonged to elites. After absorbing all that, something called a blood grudge formed in the divine tree and infested it, triggering an ancient, repressed resentment to surface. It's already done its best to suppress it, but to no avail. The blood grudge is still inside it and draining away its vital essence. If this keeps up, the tree will eventually die off and the blood plague will no longer be controlled. Eventually, even the locals will succumb to it."

That was horrible news. Yin Chen had noticed the roots of the divine tree absorbing blood, but little did he know that it would actually result in a catastrophe! Once the blood grudge went out of control, it would spell the end of the Azurecloud Continent.

"I suppose the divine tree is already doing a great thing by trying to stop the plague from affecting the locals...." The target of the blood grudge was people, the very same ones that caused the war and destroyed its saplings. All the tree had wanted to do was to procreate. "Xian Xian, is there a way to get rid of the blood grudge? Will killing Li Wushuang work?"

"Not really. Even if she dies, the only thing that'll quell is the divine tree's rage. However, it won't heal the sickness."

"Then is it over for us?"

"Not really." Xian Xian crossed its arms and raised its mouth proudly, gleefully flapping its lotus-petal wings.

"Don't keep me hanging! What can we do?" He gave it a knock on the head.

"Hmph!" Xian Xian glared at him and continued, "I can absorb blood and essence too. The only reason the divine tree lost control of the blood grudge is because it's too weak. It's no big deal for a Radix World Tree like me."

It was rather miraculous for the divine tree to be able to grow to this size, but it was no big deal to the Radix World Tree.

"Do you mean you can absorb the blood grudge and digest it?" Tianming gingerly asked.

"Hmph, I don't want to talk to you. It's a problem with your attitude," Xian Xian chided.

"Don't be like this, my lady.... Here, Little Li will treat you well. Do you want a back massage?" Tianming immediately switched his stern look to a bright smile.

Xian Xian couldn't help but burst out laughing. Then it forcefully stopped itself and wore a stern expression once more. "Fine, then I suppose I shall go through the trouble of trying. I haven't done something like this before, so there's no guarantee."

"Will the blood grudge affect you?"

"I don't know."

"And there you were calling the divine tree weak."

"I'm still really young, okay?"

"Fine...."

Even though its true form was a gigantic tree, Xian Xian would always be a little girl to Tianming. He wouldn't let it take any risk it didn't have to.

"My spiritform needs to enter my flower to manage things. You can't leave, either. I'm afraid my mind will go astray, so I need you to telepathically talk to me," Xian Xian said, tugging his sleeve.

"Alright."

Xian Xian's spiritform was just as much a part of it as its tree form. After that, it flew to Tianming's back and grabbed his ears, treating them like reins as it cried 'giddy up!' and rode Tianming like a mount.

Chapter 1434 - News of Li Qingyu

Yang Ce and Long Wanying watched this mysterious lifebound beast with wonder.

"This little lass looks like your daughter," Long Wanying said.

"No way!" Tianming didn't know how to react.

"But when are you going to find a suitable mother for this daughter of yours? Want Aunt Ying to introduce one to you? There's many nice girls in our sect, you know," she said.

"Aunt Pretty, my half-mother is up on the tree. That flower over there! Little Li strokes it every day!" Xian Xian said excitedly, pointing at Feiling's light blue flower.

"Shut up!" Tianming pulled it off of his back and brought it toward the Radix World Tree. Its spiritform had to enter the Radiant Daffodil, which had the power to cleanse negative and evil forces. Xian Xian's idea was to rely on it to neutralize the blood grudge.

Tianming hugged its spiritform and was embraced by the petals of the flower. The petals closed back up, tightly sticking to his body. Then he started symbiotic cultivation to still Xian Xian's mind.

"Can we start now?" Xian Xian asked.

"Yeah."

"Then sit tight! Watch me drift around!"

All of Xian Xian's roots latched on to the divine tree, making it look like the Radix World Tree was hanging from the divine tree. The black roots served as transfusion tubes that siphoned out the blood grudge. A wave of blood red began spreading throughout the Radix World Tree, but whenever it approached the Radiant Daffodil, a strong light immediately vaporized it.

"It works!" Tianming was delighted, but still cautious. There was quite a large amount of blood grudge, after all, so it might take quite some time.

Long Wanying and Yang Ce exchanged relieved glances.

"This kid really can do everything," Yang Ce praised.

"I heard the alliance is basically gone from the continent now. If the divine tree's blood grudge can be resolved, it'll be a complete victory for the continent," Long Wanying said.

"I wonder how the tree will change from now on."

"Guess we'll have to wait and see...." Suddenly, she recalled someone else. "I heard Li Wushuang had one of her bane-rings destroyed. There's no way she'll just give up on that. I wonder where she is now. Did she go back to her people to seek help?"

"Either way, she's sure to cause more trouble for us. You have to be on your guard. She wants nothing more than to kill you. That was the main reason she came to this continent, after all."

"I know...." She turned to look at him; he had protected her ever since he came, never leaving her side. "You've contacted the Saintdragon Emperor lately, right? How's the sect doing?"

"Not too good. They're applying pressure, invading us more and more... but I did hear about something else."

"What is it?"

"The daughter of the sun emperor, the Ninemoon Goddess, seems to be coming to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect with a descendant of the Veildragon Palace."

"How can that be? The sun emperor wouldn't let his precious daughter come to our territory in broad daylight! What if she was taken hostage and used as a bargaining chip for the release of our Dragon Imperials?"

"I didn't really want to believe it myself, but that's what the Saintdragon Emperor said. I heard that the girl wants a change of pace and not even the sun emperor could stop her from coming. Naturally, there'll be lots of people protecting her, even more than the ones who protect Li Wushuang."

"Haha, the sun emperor really likes to put up a front of obsessing over people...."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, he used to obsess over his sister, and now he's obsessed over his daughter."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Not really. He's a twisted, self-serving pervert that cares only about himself."

"That's true." Yang Ce didn't deny it. Many people had differing opinions about the sun emperor, but if there was one thing they could agree on, it was the fact that nothing the sun emperor did was orthodox. The plan to take over the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect had come out of nowhere. There was nothing Yang Ce and Long Wanying could do about him apart from holding on to their grudge.

As they talked, Tianming said something to them, sounding rather urgent. "Aunt Ying, Li Wushuang came back to the continent."

"With how many others?"

"She came alone."

"Then we have nothing to worry about as long as she doesn't come to us."

"She's looking for the saplings that have already vanished. She's going from one site to the other, and there's a chance she'll come somewhere near us where there used to be a pair of saplings." With the Radix World Tree's size and the blood grudge that visibly headed their way, it wouldn't be hard for Li Wushuang to detect them.

"How long will she take to come here?"

"Around two hours, given her current speed."

"Get Gujian Qingshuang and Yun Tianque to immediately send out a thousand elites to aid us. As for you, focus on absorbing the blood grudge. We'll hold her back if she really comes!" Even though Li Wushuang was Long Wanying's nemesis, she didn't want to take any risk by fighting her.

Tianming immediately notified the two sect masters. As they had nothing to attend to, they could personally come here. He even had Yun Tianque bring the Snowsun Quadspecters along as he continued absorbing the blood grudge with Xian Xian. There was far too much of it. Given Xian Xian's rate of processing it, it was akin to a little bird trying to drink all the water in a basin tens of times its size.

"No doubt her strength will have fallen considerably after losing a bane-ring. I think she won't even be your match," Yang Ce said.

"Yeah, but we can't be careless either way."

The two of them stood guard, serving as a barrier for Tianming. No doubt, Li Wushuang wasn't someone who could be reasoned with, especially in her mad state. She would also travel far faster alone than she would with a group of people, so it was up to Yang Ce and Long Wanying to keep Xian Xian safe for now.

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A figure flashed through the bloody mist at a speed no normal person could detect. It was none other than Li Wushuang. She used astralforce to form a few protective layers around herself, stopping the blood mist from touching her. The world in her eyes was completely stained red.

"What happened?" She still recalled the location of all the sapling sites. Soon, she passed the Magma Valley by, but the saplings were nowhere to be seen. "They must've been picked."

The whole continent was in chaos and her subordinates had mostly died off. There was no way for her to stay up to date on the latest developments. "Did the divine tree change because someone picked its saplings?"

She was filled with hate and resentment. Still refusing to give up, she flew to the other sites to check. "They're gone here too... Emyrean Sword Sect...."

Her eyes slowly turned blood red as her sanity waned. She was probably trying to pocket whatever benefit she could. Little did she know that the Emyrean Sword Sect had left empty-handed or that the saplings had vanished on their own accord.

The trunk of the divine tree was situated at the border between the territories of the two main sects of the continent. As she was heading into the Azuresoul Palace's territory to see if any saplings were left, she would eventually pass by where Tianming was. Traveling alone, she was as fast as lightning. But unbeknownst to her, small silver cockroaches constantly kept an eye on her no matter where she went. As Tianming predicted, she eventually passed them by. There was quite a lot of commotion where the Radix World Tree was, given that the density of the blood mist was the highest there. The blood grudge there was incredibly concentrated with the essence and souls of the fallen that cried out in agony. Anyone who passed this place by would detect something was amiss about it.

"Huh?" Li Wushuang saw Long Wanying and Yang Ce from a distance, dressed in white and black respectively. Then, she saw Tianming's lifebound beast sticking to the divine tree and absorbing something. There was nobody else in the vicinity.

"You could have escaped already, so why'd you come back here?" Long Wanying said.

"You think the likes of you and Yang Ce are enough to kill me?" Li Wushuang mocked as she took out her Skymoon Holyfiend, immediately closing a distance of one kilometer to attack. "Long Wanying, I've wanted to kill you for quite some time. I didn't think I'd meet you here. Nobody can come to your aid now."

Seven ghostface moongoddesses appeared, attacking with their warblades. The bloodstained tree branches in its way were torn asunder by all the slashes. Li Wushuang was fully driven in her quest to kill her nemesis. Even though she didn't know what Xian Xian was up to, it must be something to end the current crisis. Thus, she focused part of her attack towards the Radix World Tree with enough force to completely eradicate it. Right before the attacks connected, Yang Ce came and deflected them.

"Oh, looks like the Sky Palace disciple is here too. Then all of you shall go to hell together!"

Right now, Xian Xian was at a crucial juncture, so it needed to focus all of its attention on what it was doing. Despite her boasts, the blood grudge was really powerful. Even though her spiritform was inside the Radiant Daffodil, it had still been stained red, which was why it needed Tianming to protect it and constantly cheer it on. However, all of that effort would go to waste if Li Wushuang's attack was successful. Not to mention, there was no way a junior like Tianming would be able to take her attack.

Thankfully, she lost a bane-ring and isn't as strong as she was before, Tianming thought, slightly relieved. He continued forging on with Xian Xian while Yang Ce and his eight darknight truefiends and Long Wanying and her five worldcleanse whitesoul dragons surrounded Li Wushuang.

Chapter 1435 - Red-faced Fiend

Long Wanying's dragons were pure white, with crystalline horns, jewel-like eyes, and pearlescent scales. They were the most beautiful dragons Tianming had ever seen, all with an aura of elegance. They were all seven-star divine beasts of top-class bloodlines, making them incredibly powerful.

Li Wushuang's totems had been just as beautiful when she was still in her youth, but now their terrifying faces were horrifying to behold. She was just barely holding on against Yang Ce with her seven totems, so Long Wanying's participation completely tipped the scales. The five dragons used the same ability: Worldcleanse Dragonbeam, which pushed apart the blood mist immediately before slamming into the faces of the ghostface moongoddesses and causing all seven of them to shriek in pain. The nightmarish darknight truefiends of Yang Ce continued holding them back, biting, tearing, and using their totemic calamities to keep Li Wushuang at bay.

"Her injuries haven't healed yet, so she's got less than an eighth of her normal combat capability. It's a good chance," Yang Ce said.

"Alright. We'll take her down and use her to save the other three Dragon Imperials," Long Wanying said. While they had planned to do that long ago, they were simply lacking the chance and adequate justification. Now, only the two of them were fighting, so they only represented the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. With Li Wushuang still weakened, this was their chance to turn things around.

Li Wushuang still managed to divide some of her attention to attack Tianming, but Long Wanying's dragons turned into a gigantic white vortex that sucked in the slashes the moongoddesses unleashed, reducing the threat of their attacks until they were minimal. Then, Yang Ce's figure flashed as he turned

into a hundred thousand afterimages. There was no way to tell which was the real one. All of those figures rained down sword ki on Li Wushuang.

"Hmph." Faced with a fatal attack like this, all she did was smirk. The look she shot Long Wanying was even more twisted than before. Yang Ce was a prime talent, given his eight totems. Yet another impressive man was coming to Long Wanying's aid, reminding Li Wushuang of the mocking words Long Wanying had said to her: 'nobody has ever loved you'. It was too humiliating. What did she ever do to deserve the difference in treatment? Even though she wouldn't admit that she was simply jealous of Long Wanying, that was exactly what was going on. And thanks to that jealousy, she would be led to her demise.

"Die." As the smoke around them began to clear, things began seeming like a lucid dream. Despite facing Yang Ce's attacks, Li Wushuang turned to Long Wanying and got her totems to point at her. Then a savage, bloody aura emanated from her body, stinking of an ancient evil as a red-robed, long-haired female demon with a long tongue emerged from her broken bane-ring. It was a completely new totem that was even larger than the other ones. Many venomous insects crawled around its dress as its tongue abruptly shot toward Long Wanying like a sword, closing a distance of a kilometer in an instant.

"What?!" Long Wanying was taken aback; it had been too fast and fierce! The attack would be fatal! How could a new totem emerge from a broken bane-ring, one that was even fiercer and uglier than the original? Nobody was able to react to it aside from Yang Ce, who swerved the trajectory of his swords to slash toward the new totem in red. The swords pierced into the red dress and tongue of the totem, weakening the attack somewhat.

"Wanying!" he cried, face covered in cold sweat.

Long Wanying's dragons returned and used an ability to block the tongue attack. The clash resulted in a bright white flash that shook the area around them. Fortunately, she had been able to avoid being killed thanks to Yang Ce's interception. She rode one of her dragons higher into the sky with the others following behind as she looked at Li Wushuang. "Haha... I don't know where that totem of yours came from, but it really suits you. Its ugliness is a perfect match for yours."

Li Wushuang gripped her Skymoon Holyfiend tight as all eight of her totems were affixed on Long Wanying, only for her to hear that. She was stunned. Looking up, she saw that her new red-robed demon was ugly to the extreme. Not even her other totems could bear to look at it. Then she recalled her reflection in the mirror from just a little while ago. Didn't her face look identical to her red totem's? Back then, her totems looked like stunning goddesses of beauty, just like her, and she was definitely no worse than Long Wanying. But how did she look now? The memory of how she looked in the past contradicted with her current appearance, reminding her of the blonde-haired man that claimed to be doing all of this for her in the name of love. The rage that rushed to her head kept her rooted in her current position, causing her to vomit a huge mouthful of blood.

"You!!" She glared at Long Wanying like a bestial fiend. Just as she was about to leap in for an attack, her face turned pale and she slumped to the ground, unconscious. Her totems returned one after another, including the red-robed demon that seemed to unwillingly return to the ghost-faced bane-ring. Everything was quiet once more.

"What in the world? Did she faint from rage?" Long Wanying asked, puzzled.

"No. Her powers are probably still unstable. The two different types of totem ki in her probably conflicted, and your words stimulated it even more, causing her soul to suffer a blow. She's temporarily out cold, but once she gets her totem ki in order, she might reawaken even stronger than before. This totem is far too terrifying," Yang Ce said.

"Then we have to bind her up while she's out, quickly!"

"Right." Yang Ce took out a black rope and went to work. "This is just a low-grade divine artifact. When she wakes up, she might break free."

They turned to Tianming at the same time.

"Aunt Ying, are you sure we can use the bonegnaw ants on her?" Tianming asked.

"She's someone we can't kill at the end of the day, and we can't expose the bonegnaw ants to the celestial orderians.... Tianming, do you have a way of using the ants without her knowing? We want it as a precaution. We can just release her after the situation at the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is settled," Long Wanying said.

"Sure. I can use fewer ants, probably around a hundred thousand. They can pretend to be part of her bones. As long as they don't move around, she won't notice a thing. Even if she did, she wouldn't think too much of it."

"Okay."

Using the bonegnaw ants on Li Wushuang was quite a bold move, but they needed a precaution. There would probably be even more ways they could keep her bound later, so they didn't need Tianming for that. Even for cultivators, being in a state of complete unconsciousness would make them ignorant to all sensation of their bodies. Killing her now would be incredibly easy, and Long Wanying wanted that more than anyone. She tightly clenched her fists and took deep breaths, trying to suppress the urge. They had to use Li Wushuang to save others, after all.

Yin Chen was turning into bonegnaw ants in the meantime and entering her body, though incredibly slowly to maintain secrecy. At the very end, only around eighty thousand infested her body, so the effects probably wouldn't be significant.

"I'll think of other ways to keep her bound," Yang Ce said.

"How's it going with the divine tree, Tianming?" Long Wanying asked.

"It'll be done soon." Tianming was still protecting Xian Xian with all he had. Now, about half of the divine tree had turned green again, regaining its former vibrancy. The rest of the blood grudge was gathered near Tianming. "It might take another two hours. Let's hope nothing else happens during that time."

Yun Tianque and Gujian Qingshuang finally arrived with reinforcements, only to find Li Wushuang passed out. So they swiftly returned with their men. During the entire time, Long Wanying and Yang Ce used all sorts of methods to curb Li Wushuang's power.

"Are you alright, Xian Xian?" Tianming asked, hugging its spiritform.

"Yes... my head hurts a little, but... hold on... scare this mean thing away." It seemed like it was mumbling in a dream rather than lucidly speaking, but it didn't seem to be going wild, at least.

"Alright. Tell me if anything is amiss."

"Okay!"

Tianming continued nervously waiting. Then he suddenly turned to Feiling's flower. It seemed to be absorbing blood grudge as well. "Ling'er! Xian Xian, what's happening to her?"

"Don't... know...."

The light-blue flower began absorbing the blood grudge like a vortex at a rate a hundred times that of Xian Xian's. The remaining grudge didn't go through the Radiant Daffodil at all; instead, Feiling's flower absorbed all of it.

"Xian Xian, cut it off, quick!" Tianming wanted it to cut off the connection with the divine tree through the roots. There was no telling what would happen if all that blood grudge entered Feiling's flower! It might ruin her!

"No! I can't pull it out!" Xian Xian was panicking. Tianming could feel its powerlessness. Its tree form couldn't control the flow rate of the blood grudge at all, and the flower only seemed to be absorbing it faster and faster.

The bloody mist around the continent cleared at a rate visible to the eye as all of it flooded toward the light-blue flower, dying it blood red. Only after that did Xian Xian manage to remove all of its roots, but it was too late. The divine tree was free of the blood grudge, and the Radix World Tree didn't have any trace of it at all. More than half of all the grudge on the continent was now concentrated in Feiling's flower. It looked so red and beautiful like it was bleeding. The petals of the flower looked like seductive faces that looked back at Tianming.

"Ling'er...." He stood in front of the flower, his body frozen. This was something out of his worst nightmares, and he wasn't dreaming.

Chapter 1436 - Don't Abandon Me

The Radix World Tree fell to the ground and took root. Xian Xian's spiritform looked fine, if a little fatigued. It was right next to Feiling's flower with Tianming, anxiously looking at it.

"Why did this happen... why...." It tried hugging the flower, only for the blood grudge to turn into a ghostly figure and slam into it, pushing it back and corrupting it.

"Ling'er!" Tianming approached the flower, prompting the same reaction when his arm approached it. The slightest touch of the bloody storm caused the flesh around his body to painfully rot. It could be fatal.

"Can you hear me?" Tianming was completely panicking. Everything that was happening was making him lose his breath.

"Ling'er!" He tried approaching the bloody flower again, weathering the strong blood grudge that was tearing him apart. If he didn't have the Soul Tower, his vita might have been negatively affected as well.

"Can you hear me?!" His voice was hoarse and his eyes were cracking apart. Panicking, he was afraid that the blood grudge would tear Feiling apart the next moment. Losing her would be a complete nightmare. He didn't care about anything else and forged ahead, swallowed up by the blood grudge. It didn't take long before his skin fully rotted. The blood grudge entered his body from his ears and nose, gradually destroying his albi. Searing pain spread across his entire body.

"Tianming!" Long Wanying quickly charged into the mass of the blood grudge and pulled him out.

"Aunt Ying, think of a way! What can we do?!" he cried, clasping her arm like it was his lifeline.

"I..." Long Wanying had no idea what she could do.

"Xian Xian, can you suck the blood grudge back?" Tianming asked. He knew he couldn't lose his cool at a moment like this, nor could he blame Long Wanying for not knowing how to help.

"Let me try!" Xian Xian used everything it had. Feiling was technically connected to its main body, after all.

Once more, Tianming charged in without regard for his life. His palm eventually touched the blood-colored petal. The moment it did, it felt like he was touching a soft hand. That was the same feeling Feiling gave off, something he was intimately familiar with. "Ling'er, don't be scared. I'm right here! We'll take this on together!"

He embraced the flower without caring about anything else. The blood grudge began permeating his body, corroding it at a rate that even the Greenspark Tower couldn't keep up with. His veins pulsed with pain. He didn't know if hugging the flower would do anything. All he wanted was for her to feel his presence. Standing together, they would have all the courage in the world.

"Don't abandon me, Ling'er," he said with everything he had. Their memories together surfaced in his mind. She had left to travel with him at the young age of sixteen, survived the Tomb of the Ancients with him, stayed apart and yearned for each other at Taiji Peak Lake, and were connected to each other by a single dimensional rope at the mooncore.

"You've undergone a hundred cycles of Perpetual Nirvana and survived! You can't lose here! You're my life, Ling'er!"

He kept his face and hands plastered on the petal. The blood grudge tore him apart piece by piece, and there was even more of it within the flower. Tianming knew she could feel and hear him. They were hugging each other like the saplings of the divine tree. There was no way she couldn't feel his dedication and love.

Blood from his body dripped into the flower, blending into an arcane mix of the ages. All of a sudden, the remaining blood grudge was absorbed into the flower he was tightly hugging. The blood grudge around Tianming was no more and the flower seemed to be digesting whatever it had absorbed. Gradually, the redness began receding from the flower, leaving only specks of red on the original light blue of the petals.

Everything seemed to have calmed down. The flower looked as vibrant as it used to. In fact, it looked like it was the largest it had ever been. The same fragrance was still there, almost as if it was Feiling's

own enchanting odor, but seemingly intensified. The flower seemed a little more dangerous than before.

Tianming deeply breathed it in as the injuries he suffered from the blood grudge began recovering. As the harm was mostly superficial, it hadn't affected him too badly. After all, his soul was safe from the blood grudge's influence. He kept his eyes on the flower that seemed to be lazily stretching like a girl before snuggling in his embrace, then dazedly looking at him and going back to sleep.

"How is she, Little Li?" Xian Xian asked, widening its eyes.

Tianming felt Feiling's lively heartbeat through the flower. "Her life force seems stronger than before." Tianming had a feeling that she had overcome yet another tribulation. While she wasn't completely done with it, it didn't seem like there would be much longer to wait.

Tianming knew that the blood grudge hadn't entirely disappeared, but had been absorbed into the flower. What would happen to it in the end was anyone's guess. The only thing that showed it was still there were the bloody streams of light that swirled around the blue flower petals. However, he knew that Feiling was fine from the warmth he could feel.

"Thank goodness... I thought I was gonna lose her," Xian Xian said, wiping her tears away.

"Me too. I thought the pleasure ball contraceptives I've been stockpiling would go to waste...."

"What are those?" Xian Xian asked.

"Nothing!" he yelped, only for two spikes to poke out of the flower at his stomach. "Watch out! Don't pierce my kidneys!"

Chapter 1437 - Secret of the Saplings

Tianming was still worried about Feiling, so he kept checking on her flower. She also gave him some reassurance in the limited way that she could. When he was entirely sure that there would temporarily be no issues, he finally allowed himself to turn his attention elsewhere.

The gigantic divine tree above him looked refreshed, as if it had been reborn after undergoing the blood grudge's trial. It didn't look like it had aged one bit, instead looking far more reinvigorated than before. The countless branches and leaves looked like they were filled with life.

The bloody odor on the battlefield had vanished, replaced by a refreshing viridian fragrance. Once again, the light from the flaming clouds above was allowed to shine down to the ground. The world looked like a celestial forest, filled with sublime beauty. People who had been cooped up in their homes behind their formations were no doubt coming out to celebrate the divine tree turning over a new leaf.

Tianming, Feiling, and Xian Xian had taken on the blood grudge and saved everything, finally putting an end to the conflicts on the continent. The celestial orderian-aligned factions and the alliance had held a huge battle there, only for the former to be wiped out and the Empyrean Sword Sect to retreat without taking any of the divine herbs. Peace had returned to the continent. The only question left was where the saplings had disappeared to.

"Phew...." Tianming took a deep breath of relief.

"Little Li, that big dumb one has something else to give you to thank us for saving it," Xian Xian said as Tianming joined up with Long Wanying and Yang Ce.

"Big dumb one? Who's that?"

The tree pointed all of its branches toward the divine tree. It sounded like Xian Xian had found a new victim to slap another lame nickname on. "See for yourself."

There was a green radiance in the sky. Tianming looked up and saw a group of hugging humanoid figures descending before him. They numbered more than sixty people, or rather human-shaped fruits. The fragrance coming from them was thick and dense, a sign that they had separated from the divine tree after ripening. They were the very same saplings as before. Tianming counted a full thirty-five pairs, not one fewer.

"What did it say?" Tianming asked. He had no idea what the saplings could be used for.

"They're basically young divine trees. One day, they will grow into new divine trees. It said that this is both a gift and request. If you find a good place to plant them and protect them, they'll each grow into a divine tree like this one. All of them will be able to harvest the nova source and convert it into countless divine herbs," Xian Xian said.

"Got it!" That would be a win-win arrangement. The divine tree needed someone to protect its children as they grew up, and once they did, they would be able to return the favor. As for why it'd chosen him for this, it no doubt had something to do with what happened today. Even though he was only a junior, he had earned the divine tree's trust.

"It also said that it knows that the bugs that're all over its branches are part of you. It says that you'll definitely become really powerful one day, and the thirty-five divine trees will help you construct a bountiful and prosperous galactic empire," Xian Xian proudly said. Tianming's greatness was its greatness as well.

"Alright!" He deeply bowed toward the divine tree. "Old divine tree, I'll definitely protect them as they mature so that you have no worries. Your family will definitely spread and prosper for countless generations!"

Each of the divine tree's leaves shook, making a rustling sound that was almost like a grateful affirmation, unlike the grieving cry from before. Tianming could hear its praise from the sound. He knew how much it valued the saplings, for the number of divine trees that existed in the entire universe was far too low. Yet it had entrusted all of the saplings to him alone to help it propagate and achieve its ultimate purpose in life. It was the divine tree's dream to propagate and prosper, a dream that Tianming clearly understood. That was why it had decided that he was a person worthy of its trust.

"However, they're still saplings right now. What do I need to do to help them grow?" he asked.

As the divine tree couldn't speak, Xian Xian had to be the interpreter. After a while, it crossed its arms and said, "The big dumb one said that the only thing they need is nova source, so as long as they're planted somewhere safe with nova source, they'll be fine. They're fundamentally weak, so protection is important."

"Alright." As they were lifeforms, they couldn't be transported in spatial rings, so placing them at the Azuresoul Palace or Xuanyuan Dragon Sect would be the safest thing for now.

"It hasn't finished!" Xian Xian said.

"Then tell me."

"Tch! Listen up! This is the most important part!" Xian Xian cleared its throat and continued, "It said that saplings like them are really rare across the universe. As they can store large amounts of nova source, they're often used as supplemental power sources for divine astralships! When the big dumbbo was still a sapling, it served as one such power source. The nova source it absorbed could be used to power those ships and fuel cultivation as well. The only difference between the nova source it stores and releases and that of the sun is the rate of release.

"Nova source in the form of plant energy is released slightly slower, so it can't be used to power the formations of divine astralships, which often require large bursts of power. So, it can't be used for assault astralships like the Sun Palace. However, it can be used for high-speed travel across the cosmic aether. Once the nova source stored within the saplings is used up, they can be recharged by bringing the saplings to a nova source world. The thirty-five pairs of saplings can probably be used to power the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb once they've all been charged up in Orderia."

Tianming only lacked a power source for that divine astralship. "Does the divine tree know I have it?"

"Well, it didn't... so I told it," Xian Xian shyly said.

Once more, Tianming was in awe of the wondrous lifeform.

Chapter 1438 - Ruler of the Azurecloud Continent

The celestial orderians' Sun Palace used two stellunar sources that had been compressed into a miniature nova source to power the astralship, allowing it to cruise through the astralscape and providing nova source for its passengers to cultivate. Who would have known that the sprouted saplings would be able to perform the same function.

"How much nova source can they absorb?" At the very least, it would be far more than a normal cultivator's body could. Normally, nova source, when absorbed by cultivators, lifebound beasts, or even totems, would be converted into energy they could use and control. However, such a conversion process wasn't present in the saplings. Instead, they were simply vessels to store all of that energy in its original form, charging up at a gradual rate before releasing it at a similarly controlled rate. That said, it couldn't be used for combat purposes, which was a sign that the divine tree was essentially weak despite its huge size.

If the saplings were taken before they sprouted, they would be useless. The most the thief would be able to do was to use them to steal some nova source, but that wouldn't be enough for billions of people to cultivate. Fortunately, Tianming had the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb.

"Thank you, Azurecloud Divine Tree, for this favor. I'll see to it that they're planted!" Tianming said. His conversation with Xian Xian was free for Long Wanying and Yang Ce to hear.

When Long Wanying heard it all, she seemed a little puzzled. "Tianming, what were you talking about? Is the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb actually a divine astralship? And you have it?"

"Yes, Aunt Ying. That's the biggest of my spoils from the Voidsky Skirmish. The Ninedragon Emperor gave me the tomb, which happens to be a divine astralship that only lacks a miniature nova source power source. Even now, I can only control a fraction of the entire thing."

"Heavens! Surely you can't be an actual descendant of the Ninedragon Emperor, can you?" Long Wanying didn't know what to make of it.

"Come on, surely I'm charming enough to earn the Ninedragon Emperor's recognition without having to be his descendant, right?"

"Nonsense!" She rolled her eyes at him and glanced at Yang Ce, still not relieved. "Tianming, are you the only one who can control it? Nobody else can enter it, right?"

"Yes." He still had the war drum and dragon sticks.

"Then move the saplings directly into the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb. The tomb's at the Voidsky Realm where the nova source is densest, so their absorption will be faster. It'll also save us trouble from protecting the saplings since nobody else can enter the tomb."

"That's what the big dummy here was suggesting, too," Xian Xian said.

"Alright." Tianming nodded. The saplings were far too precious and useful, and also represented the wish of the divine tree. Nothing could go wrong, and keeping them with him was only asking for trouble. For now, he chose to temporarily store them in his spatial ring. Even though the saplings were lifeforms in some sense, they also had some inanimate qualities. When they weren't absorbing nova source and were instead stored in spatial rings, they were nothing more than normal seeds.

"Hmm, I don't think they can go into hibernation. Must I go to the Voidsky Realm as soon as possible?" he asked.

"That's right. We already took Li Wushuang captive, so we have to go back to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect soon. The sect is near the sun's south pole, so we can take you to the Voidsky Realm first to store the saplings before bringing you back to the Azure Soul Palace," Long Wanying said.

"Alright." However, he began contemplating the arrangement a little more.

"What is it, Tianming? Do you have thoughts about it?" she asked.

"Aunt Ying, all the divine herbs harvested are safe within the bounds of the two sects' formations, right? So they won't be taken easily. With the Wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean suffering such heavy losses, they should go to the Empyrean Sword Sect to retaliate if they're ever going to. And the Empyrean Sword Sect no longer has a justification to attack the Supracloud Sanctuary, so they'll be fine for now. As for the Azure Soul Palace, they're much tougher than before thanks to our support. Now they can protect the divine herbs with their formation, just like the Supracloud Sanctuary can. Not only that, we know what to do with the saplings now, so everything on this continent is coming to an end. My goal is close to being achieved."

The unification of the continent and the possession of the divine herbs and saplings were all in place. Tianming had everything under control, and even the two factions of outsiders were gone.

"You're right, Tianming. If we settle things at the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, the continent will be even safer. Both sects here can properly develop with their divine herbs, just like you planned," she said.

"That's right. Now you're the ruler of the continent," Yang Ce said.

"I wouldn't dare... all I want is for everyone to live better lives," Tianming said. At the very least, that had come to fruition. Now the continent's masters were the two main sects themselves. While Tianming was in control of everything, he wouldn't be taking anything other than the saplings, which the divine tree had specifically given to him. As for the near ten billion divine herbs, he would leave all of them for the continent. He couldn't really expose his true identity yet, but he would one day come here to set up his dynasty.

"Tianming, by the sound of it, are you going to leave the Azurecloud Continent soon?" Long Wanying asked.

"Aunt Ying understands me the best," he said. Since things here were settled, it was time to head to his next battlefield.

Long Wanying and Yang Ce were going to take Li Wushuang with them to deal with the mess at their sect, but that wasn't Tianming's battle. "You can't go to the sect with us. It's too dangerous."

"Aunt Ying, Yin Chen picked up what you said about the Ninemoon Goddess. She'll be at the sect, right?"

"Yes." Both Long Wanying and Yang Ce nodded.

"So you should know that the goddess has only recently shown up among the celestial orderians, right? They're saying that she's the sun emperor's illegitimate daughter, right?"

"Yes."

"There's some things that I can't completely come clean about, but... the Ninemoon Goddess Li Qingyu is actually my little sister. Neither of us have anything to do with the sun emperor."

"What?!" The two seniors were shocked at the revelation.

"That can't be... you're a beastmaster and she's a totemancer," Long Wanying said, shaking her head.

"No. The Ninemoon Goddess isn't just a totemancer, she's also a beastmaster. The sun emperor claimed that she's the only child to be birthed between a totemancer and beastmaster in history." Normally, totemancers and beastmasters couldn't have children. Even if they somehow did, the children never inherited both types of cultivation.

"Don't tell me?!" Long Wanying and Yang Ce looked at Tianming with disbelief. So far, he hadn't shown them any of his totems.

"This is a secret, so I can't reveal any more. I only need the two of you to believe me when I say that the Ninemoon Goddess is my sister. The reason she went to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect is to look for me, so I have to go see her," Tianming earnestly said.

"Don't worry, Tianming. We know you have a complicated background. There's no way you're someone Jiang Qingliu found and raised. The fact that you've told us so much shows how much you trust us. As for the rest, you don't have to tell us anything. No matter what, Aunt Ying supports you!" Long Wanying said.

"Alright!" He definitely fully trusted them; they had gone through so much together already. He would never forget his main goal in coming to Orderia: saving Qingyu and protecting her per his godfather's request. Now that the continent's situation had stabilized, it was time to go to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect.

Chapter 1439 - Until We Meet Again

Before going to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, Tianming had to go back to the Azuresoul Sword Mountain, as Lingfeng and Xiaoxiao were still there. Not to mention, they still couldn't be certain whether or not the Northdipper Swordsage would come back now that the crisis had been dealt with. He put the saplings away, bid farewell to the divine tree, and returned to the sect as quickly as possible on Long Wanying's dragon alongside the unconscious Li Wushuang.

Capturing Li Wushuang was a huge deal, so Long Wanying and Yang Ce didn't enter the mountains when they arrived, nor did they tell anyone about it. As they were returning, nearly a million of Yin Chen's bodies began gathering at the Azuresoul Sword Mountain to return to Tianming's lifebound space. Now he had around four million of them in total. The remaining million turned into ten million invisible cockroaches before spreading out again to monitor the continent.

Tianming had already informed Lingfeng and Xiaoxiao about their return through Yin Chen on the way back, so they ended their cultivation sessions and waited for Tianming to fetch them.

"Xiaoxiao, the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect will be far more dangerous. Are you sure you want to come with us?" Tianming asked. It would definitely be much safer to stay in the bounds of the sect's defensive formation.

"Of course. There's no point in me staying here alone," she said.

"Alright." Tianming and Lingfeng had come to Orderia for Qingyu, which was why Lingfeng had to tag along if they were going to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect. Throughout this time, he had cultivated nonstop. Coupled with testing out the pills refined by Yu Ziqian, he had been improving at a staggering rate.

The only one left was Yu Ziqian. "Boss, I want to go with you, but there's too many divine herbs here. I wish to pursue the path of pill refining, and it's a great chance for me to use and get more proficient with the Divine Worldeater Cauldron," he said, scratching his head.

"Come on, you just can't part with your dear senior and junior sister disciples, right?" Tianming said, rolling his eyes.

"Don't put it that way, man. Bros before hoes, right? That's what you taught me."

"Buzz off."

Tianming didn't want Yu Ziqian to take this kind of risk either. There were too many uncertainties at the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect, especially since Li Wushuang was involved. He was better suited to staying behind and refining pills.

"Gan Gangan, this secret is just for your ears. I got the divine tree's saplings. In the future, we can plant them and they'll grow into brand new divine trees. By then, we'll have no end of supply of divine herbs. Once you're as proficient in your craft as that portable grandpa of yours, there's definitely a place for you with us," Tianming said.

"Really?" Yu Ziqian was so excited that he was shaking. He had found the path he wanted to tread in the future.

"Just keep it to yourself for now," Tianming said.

"Alright! I'll definitely do my best and not let you down!" he said, motivatedly clenching his fists. Then he gave Tianming a crystal box. "Please accept this! It's super thin and top quality...."

"What's that?" Xiaoxiao asked.

"Ahem...." Tianming kept the goods and gave her a look, signaling her to not ask too many questions.

"Goodbye, brother!"

"Goodbye."

They gave each other a hug. For now, they would have to bid Yu Ziqian farewell. However, Tianming had left quite a few Yin Chen bodies behind at the sect, so he could reach out to them at any time.

"Feng, when you stabilize, I'll get someone to send you more pills. Make sure to take them!" Yu Ziqian said.

"Got it." Lingfeng seemed a little tense after hearing that Qingyu would be at the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect.

Before they left, Tianming patted him on the shoulder and said, "It'll be fine, don't worry."

"I wonder how she's changed...." There was a look of worry in his red eyes.

"Are you looking down on my little sister? Qingyu is a strong girl. She's been living a nightmare for fourteen years without ever being defeated, so this will be no different," Tianming assured.

They had gone through the Voidsky Skirmish as well as a continental war. By now, Tianming finally had some qualifications to meet with the celestial orderians. At the very least, he had defeated Li Haochen, making him a stain that the youths of the celestial orderians and Veildragon Palace could never get rid of. As long as he lived, they would never be able to hold their heads up high!

"I heard there's many descendants of the celestial orderians and Veildragon Palace at the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect who are there to oppress and crush the confidence of the younger generation of the sect. They're also trying to brainwash them into being ruled by the celestial orderians and hate the Myriad Solar Sects for not coming to their aid in an attempt to cause the new generation to break off from the Myriad Solar Sects. There seems to be Ten Dragon Imperials instead of the old seven. I wonder how high the sect will be ranked in the updated sect rankings...."

The new generation normally included anyone under the age of hundred, basically, youthgrand disciples. Currently, the main force of the celestial orderians and Veildragon Palace consisted of youthgrand disciples from thirty to a hundred years old. One of Li Haochen's elder brothers was among them as well.

Tianming had to admit that the sun emperor's ways were incredible. He had managed to instill internal conflict in the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect just like that. Putting aside the fact that the Myriad Solar Sects weren't a monolith, even if they were united, they wouldn't be able to do anything about the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's current peril.

Once they prepared themselves, Tianming, Lingfeng, and Xiaoxiao bade farewell to Gujian Qingshuang and the rest. Yan Nuxia and the others from the Group of Celestial Maiden Halls also prepared to leave after Gujian Qingshuang gave them some divine herbs as a gift.

"There's no such thing as an everlasting banquet. Till we meet again, everyone!"

After the farewell gathering at the Celestial Welcome Hall, they were prepared to leave. Right then, a group of people came flying from the south, around two hundred thousand of them. Tianming knew who they were. It was the Emyrean Sword Sect and the Northdipper Swordsage! It seemed that they'd chosen to return to the continent after the matter of the divine tree had been settled. However, they came without the others from the alliance.

The Northdipper Swordsage was leading the pack from the very front. It didn't take them long before they reached the exterior of the Azuresky Myriadsword Formation. Even though they just arrived, Tianming had actually informed them about the Emyrean Sword Sect's return beforehand. Normally, it would be something to be feared, but now the situation was different. The alliance's troops hadn't dared to touch the Supracloud Sanctuary, so there was no way they would dare to do the same now. It was a different matter altogether when they had no rightful justifications, not to mention the divine herbs were all beyond the formation. Gujian Qingshuang and the rest didn't fear a long-term siege either.

Gujian Qingshuang stepped forward to meet the Northdipper Swordsage.

"Is the divine tree back to normal?"

"Yes, Swordsage."

"Were the losses huge?"

"Quite so. Many people fell to the plague."

"Did anyone see the saplings?"

"No. When the divine tree turned blood red, the saplings vanished and haven't shown themselves since."

"I see...." The two hundred plus thousand others of the Emyrean Sword Sect coldly stared at Gujian Qingshuang.

The Wind Swordlord said, "What're you waiting for? Aren't you going to open the formation and let us in?"

Chapter 1440 - Forget Peace

"Apologies, Swordsage. The Azuresoul Palace has to keep the divine herbs for ourselves. I hope you understand our plight," Gujian Qingshuang said, lowering his head. The Empyrean Sword Sect's intentions were clear. If they opened their formation up and let all of them in, the Azuresoul Palace would be at their mercy.

"What's your reasoning for that?" the Northdipper Swordsage asked.

"The Supracloud Sanctuary has managed to keep all their divine herbs. If we don't do the same, the distance between our two sects will widen over the next ten thousand years. For the sake of our descendants, we've sworn to defend these divine herbs to our deaths. It appears that we can only pay back the Empyrean Sword Sect during the next harvest season," Gujian Qingshuang said.

"How laughable. Weren't you the one who vouched for the Supracloud Sanctuary yourself?" the swordsage said, smirking. If they attacked the formation just to get the divine herbs, things would turn out rather badly, especially after what had happened to the continent. Back then, they could openly rob them of the divine herbs by posing as helpers, but now there was nothing to fear.

"Swordsage, we've fought with the Supracloud Sanctuary for the sake of resources for far too long. Yet they played a pivotal role against the traitors who defected to the celestial orderians' side despite being our nemesis. As such, we don't wish for anything to be unfairly pinned on them. The two matters are entirely separate."

"In other words, you think you can afford to stand up against us now."

Gujian Qingshuang merely lowered his head at that remark.

"Just you wait. There are some things that you can defend for a time, but never for life. Gujian Qingshuang, you know better than anyone how much wrong you've done us. May the Azuresoul Palace forget any semblance of peace in the days to come," the Wind Swordlord threatened, not that it would do anything. In fact, the threat only steeled Gujian Qingshuang's resolve.

"Enough. Nothing you say will be enough now. They've gone blind with greed. And to think I was considering leaving the divine herbs to you just now..." the swordsage said. Had the Azuresoul Palace opened their formation up, the Empyrean Sword Sect would've at least been able to get some divine herbs, but now negotiations were off.

There were still quite a few people in the Azuresoul Palace that were worried. This was nothing short of complete disobedience toward the Empyrean Sword Sect, and there were too many opportunities for them to cause trouble in the future. The Northdipper Swordsage didn't bother saying anything else, but before he left he spotted Tianming and the rest. "I suppose you're already so brainwashed by them that you're filled with hostility against our sect, so I won't bother trying to recruit you now. I only urge you to consider your options and future well. If you're still willing to come to us, we'll definitely welcome you with open arms."

"Thank you for the kind regards, Swordsage," Tianming said. Little did the swordsage know that he was actually talking to the ringleader. The Empyrean Sword Sect had nothing but empty threats. The

Azuresoul Palace wouldn't have to fear an attack from them. If they really did attack, the Myriad Solar Sects would criticize them to hell and back.

"Gujian Qingshuang, make sure you think this through. This is a decision that'll affect the sect for generations to come!" the Wind Swordlord said. Only then did their group turn and leave. However, they were heading north instead of south, probably in search of the saplings. From their eyes, it was clear that they still feared the Azurecloud Divine Tree in some measure. There was no way they would dare to harm it now. As there was nothing they could gain from it, Tianming didn't bother stopping them.

"So what if the Empyrean Sword Sect causes trouble for us in the future? As long as we stand with the Supracloud Sanctuary, the continent is ours and nobody else can say anything about it!"

With the saplings gone and the divine herbs completely protected, there was nothing for any other party to gain on the continent unless they decided to attack the two main sects. With even the alliance gone, there would be no point for the wargodeans and Blueblood Starocean to come back, not even revenge. After all, the ones that killed so many of them were those from the alliance, not the continent.

"However, we still can't be careless! We must keep the formation active at all times. Yin Chen will continue providing updates across the entire continent. Once enemies are sighted, be ready to fend off their attacks." Only then would Tianming be assured enough to head to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect.

The real farewell was after that. Long Wanying didn't show up, so Yan Nuxia went to say her goodbyes in private. After that, she returned with the rest of her sectmates. Tianming, Lingfeng, and Xiaoxiao then traveled south with Long Wanying and Yangchen.

As for the Snowsun Quadspecters, Tianming left them on the continent. They would remain on the divine tree as its protectors from now on, and without explicit orders, they weren't allowed to leave, much less harm innocents! In a way, it was a form of atonement. The four of them were rather powerful, with each of them only a little weaker than Gujian Qingshuang. With them there, the continent was sure to be safe. And with so many divine herbs, the denizens of the continent would rise higher and higher.

"Let's hope that these two sects will be my strongest allies on the day of my return!" Tianming said from atop the dragon that flew south. "Next stop: the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb."

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At a stream near the Azuresoul Sword Mountain was a girl with a green paper umbrella. She sat on a boulder with her legs bare as she dipped them in the clear stream. Many little fish playfully swam around her feet, yet her attention was on her smooth palm. There was a little silver cockroach in it, shaking its antennae around as it turned its little black eyes at the beauty with ink-green hair.

"You said that he went to the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect?" she asked.

"That's right. So what?" the cockroach said.

"How mean.... He didn't come to see this little fish at all... and didn't even tell this little fish that he was leaving," she said, seeming a little hurt.

"Who do... you think... you are... you useless... pleasure ball...."

She suddenly stood up and frowned as she looked south. "The dreamless celestial nation is nearby... this little fish doesn't want to go back, but...."

After some thought, she walked back to the boulder and stepped on it. "Little bug, will you come with me?"

"No way... women are... like clothes!"

"Fine! My head hurts...."

After that, the cockroach left some silver droppings in her palm and scurried away.

"Gaaah!" she cried. How could metal cockroaches leave droppings? However, she was relieved to see that the silver mass in her palm turned into a few silver ants. Then she felt a sudden pain near her chest. She yelped as she reached into her clothes and took out a little ant.

"Pervert!" she cried, then finally left.