

The Ages 151

Chapter 151 - Grand Thunderflare Sword, An Orthodox Weapon!

“Three bane-rings! She has the bloodline of three incarnations! Who would have thought that we could find an heir with three-bane rings in this far-flung desolate land?!”

Unknown to Li Tianming and Wei Jing, there were two figures hiding in the woods, a short distance from the Rainforest Pavilion. One of them was an elderly woman, her back hunching and her voice hoarse with age. Beside her was a young girl, and while her features were hidden in shadow, the contours of her body were enough to make her a breathtaking beauty.

“Gran, are you sure there’s three rings?” the girl whispered.

“I had a clear view! She definitely has the bloodline of three incarnations, a true miracle! Including you, the entire Li Saint Clan has only less than ten youngsters with three bane-rings, and yet... yet! Who would have thought that we could find such a genius?! According to our ancestry records, this is one of the furthest branches of our bloodlines and yet, we could find a descendant with three bane-rings!” The old lady couldn’t hide the excitement in her voice.

“Gran, are we taking this elder sister back to the Grand-Orient Sect with us? Our Saint Li Clan desperately needs geniuses like her to support the clan,” the girl said.

“Of course we are. We have travelled to eighty-nine nations, but simply bringing back one heir with the bloodline of three incarnations would make that all worthwhile.” The old lady smiled. “Haah. Who could have known that the previous rulers of the Grand-Orient Realm, the Li Saint Clan, would fall to such a state? We even have to visit such rural lands just to find bloodline descendants. But our efforts aren’t futile, and we finally found the talent we needed!”

“It’s alright gran, things will get better for us, for sure,” said the girl, Li Qingyu.

“Let’s observe her for a few days more to make sure that her personality and morality are fine.”

“Alright.”

“Her son looks like he has one ring as well. Do you want to take him too?”

“We’ll leave it up to her. A bloodline of one incarnation should qualify him to join the clan.”

.....

“Why does your Lifesbane feel so different?” Wei Jing assessed Li Tianming, clearly confused.

“How so?” Li Tianming asked.

“Your hair is slightly whiter, and your body also seemed more vigorous than it was. It’s almost as if you were cured of the Lifesbane the moment it appeared — you don’t even seem to have suffered from it at all.” In other words, Li Tianming’s state was more similar to Wei Jing’s state after she was cured. That would also mean that he could cultivate at an even faster pace.

“Hmm, I suppose your unique cultivation technique had broken its curse the moment the Lifesbane appeared,” Wei Jing continued, much to Li Tianming’s relief.

“Oh right, is Lifesbane shared by both beastmaster and lifebound beasts?” Li Tianming asked.

“Yeap.”

Li Tianming grabbed the little chick and the black cat. The little chick now had a little black dot under one of its wings, which was probably the same thing that Li Tianming found on his elbow. As for the black cat... well, it was covered in black fur, so it was impossible to find the black rings to begin with. Since there was nothing wrong with their bodies as well, Li Tianming decided to just throw the matter to the back of his mind.

Since he had no idea what the Lightning Manor was up to anyway, Li Tianming returned to the Flameyellow Pagoda for his cultivation. Not only was Mu Yang there to help him today, but Sage Chen was also present.

“Tianming, it’s time I bring you to the second floor of the pagoda,” Mu Yang said. He was evidently planning to personally guide Li Tianming today.

Soon, they arrived. The first thing Li Tianming saw was countless images of himself, before he realised that the second floor was in fact enclosed by four walls of mirrors.

“These are the four Flameyellow Mirrors. They have purple heavenly patterns, and they too will provide you with generous amounts of spiritual energy to help you cultivate. While it may not be as strong as the Flameyellow Rock, there’s four of the mirrors on this floor for your use alone,” Mu Yang introduced.

“The primary purpose of the Flameyellow Mirrors is for you to learn battle arts. By looking into the mirrors when you practise your arts, you get to observe and reflect on your moves. One mysterious thing about the mirrors is that they magnify the mistake that you make, thereby helping to correct these moves,” Mu Yang explained. “You also get to study and observe the wonders of the battle arts, laying a good foundation for your studies of heavenly patterns in the future. By cultivating here, you will find out that cultivation is not just about building up your beast ki or learning arts and abilities. There’s so much more you can do once you reach a higher level.”

Li Tianming stared into the mirrors, and his head began to spin. Everywhere he looked, he could see his own figure, and after trying out some moves, it indeed lived up to its reputation. Truly, it wasn’t just any ordinary mirror, but one of the most precious treasures of Heaven’s Sanctum!

“Tianming, do you still want me as your mentor?” Mu Yang suddenly asked.

“Of course, it’s something that I always aimed to work towards,” Li Tianming replied. Since he could already easily crush Wei Guohao, he had long met this criterion.

“Well, I would advise you against that idea,” Mu Yang said, his expressions serious.

“What? Why?” Li Tianming was in shock.

“You have done more than enough to impress me, and you never fail to surprise me with your incredible performance. At your current level, staying in Vermilion Bird would be a massive waste of your talent. Lin Xiaoting may have equally massive moral flaws, but you should follow his example and find a place to stretch your wings,” Mu Yang said. That was also his dream when he was younger, but a dream that he had dropped for various reasons.

“Either way, I will guide you as your Uncle Yang. And honestly, I’ll be very pressured if you were to call me master.” Mu Yang smiled.

“Ha, he’s always like this, getting stressed from just about everything and anything,” Sage Chen joked at one side.

“Alright then.” That said, it didn’t really matter whether Mu Yang accepted him as a disciple. In Li Tianming’s mind, Mu Yang would always be the one that he respected the most.

Wei Tianxiong always thought that Mu Yang intended to let Li Tianming inherit the Sanctum, but he was mistaken. Mu Yang was far more ambitious, and he wanted Li Tianming to explore the lands outside of Vermilion Bird and even the peninsula.

“Oh right, Uncle Chen!”

Li Tianming took out the leaf of the helios fruit that he had obtained back in the Abyssal Battlefield. “This is for my debt. Is this enough?”

A spirit herb with blue heavenly patterns was more than enough to pay for ten times the price of a thousand yellow-patterned spirit gems.

“Kudos for returning me my loan on time. Saves me the trouble of having to hunt for it.” Sage Chen smiled.

“Tianming, the two of us are bringing you here today to help you adjust your cultivation methods, and also to let you maximise your advantage as a twin beastmaster,” Mu Yang explained.

That was exactly what Li Tianming needed. He had been struggling to find a path for himself in the past, and things would be a lot easier if there was someone to guide him.

“Before we start, I have a question. What do you think of weapons other than chains?” Mu Yang asked.

“I guess I still prefer the likes of the Blazing Dragon Chainblade. Anything wrong with those?” Li Tianming asked.

“It’s not wrong per se, but the chain is too unorthodox a weapon. As a result, if you are too used to using it, it might affect your learning of other types of weapons in the future. Practise your chains, but you should master a more conventional weapon too. Since doing so gives you more options in battle, there’s no harm in picking up one more weapon.”

“Mastering a more conventional weapon? Sounds reasonable.” Li Tianming nodded. He could see where Mu Yang was coming from. He was familiar with fighting using chains, and he was in love with that feeling. The most memorable experience he had was when his Blazing Dragon Chainblade pierced through a Volcanic Torch Dragon to instantly destroy the beast from inside out. He could still remember the menace of the weapon as it plunged into the beast. But if he carried on with that, it would be difficult for him to adapt to any other methods of battle. Furthermore, the ferociousness of his chainblade might even become an unshakable habit in his fighting style. Therefore, it made sense for him to learn a more conventional weapon.

“If that’s the case, Uncle Yang, what weapon suits me the most right now?” Li Tianming asked.

"You should learn the way of the sword. The sword is a nobleman's weapon, and I myself have practised it all my life. If you were to look for a teacher for swordsmanship, then no one in Ignispolis is as qualified as I am," Mu Yang replied.

Li Tianming has always thought that swords were too mundane for his liking, so he rarely used them, if ever. But as he spent more and more time with his chain, he was beginning to see that there was much more to the way of the sword than what he had known.

"I'm willing to try it out." Li Tianming accepted the offer without hesitation. It didn't mean that he would forgo his chains though; it wouldn't hurt to master two completely different weapons.

"Excellent. Now go ask Uncle Chen what he has for you." Mu Yang grinned.

"What he has for me?" Li Tianming was startled for a moment, as he looked towards a laughing Sage Chen. The two of them clearly knew that he would accept this offer and had already prepared a sword, which was nestled in Sage Chen's hand.

"Tianming, this is the most suitable weapon I can find for you in the Xing & Chen Merchantry. Are you willing to give grade six weapons a go?" Sage Chen asked.

"Definitely!" Li Tianming's eyes sparkled as he looked at the sword. It was a splendid piece of work, its blade well-sharpened and its body split into two different colours. The middle of the sword was darker than the night sky, while the blades were covered in a brilliant red hue as if the edges were burning. In the middle of the hilt was a dark purple gem, which held an overwhelming amount of lightning energy, with the constant rumbling of thunder proof of the sheer power within. Four slightly smaller crimson gems sat at the four corners around the purple gem, each of them burning with dark red flame. The weapon was a perfect balance of fire and lightning power!

"This is the grade six weapon, the Grand Thunderflare Sword. Its body is made mainly of thunderwraith profound steel, together with ninety-three different kinds of spirit ores. The thousand thunder gem embedded on the hilt is a spirit gem with blue heavenly patterns, holding the power of a thousand lightning-type spirit hazards with blue patterns. The four crimson gems are used to augment and channel the power of the lightning spirit hazards into the sword, thus forming the unique Grand Thunderflare Sword Ki." Sage Chen held the blade up.

"In other words, this sword has both the scorching might of flames as well as the destructiveness of lightning! I have never seen or heard of twin beastmasters with dual-types like you before. Even since the Grand Thunderflare Sword was created, it had never met a beastmaster that could truly wield it. Given its high price, it went unsold in the Xing & Chen Repository as well."

"But I believe that you are the only one capable of releasing the true potential of the Grand Thunderflare Sword."

Chapter 152 - Spectral-Dance, Soul-Extinction, Earth-Quaker, Hell-Shaker!

As they spoke, Sage Chen handed the Grand Thunderflare Sword to Li Tianming. When he grasped the sword, wind and thunder howled around him, with the blade itself emitting rumbling sounds.

"This sword used the blood of the seven-star wildbeast, the Thunder Flare Lizard, and therefore contains its bloodline. Obviously, it approves of its new master." Sage Chen smiled.

“Thank you, Uncle Chen!” Li Tianming fondled his new sword admiringly. Weapons were a way to use power more effectively, and Li Tianming was the kind of person who really loved weapons. Hence, he was very thankful to Sage Chen for this gift.

“Tianming, don’t you go ‘out with the old, in with the new’ and forget the Blazing Dragon Chainblade,” Mu Yang said.

Sage Chen laughed. “Hah, he’ll just embarrass himself with that puny grade five gift of yours.”

“Just you wait. I’ll give you a new grade six weapon in a few days.”

“No need to be polite, uncles. I’ll gladly accept!” Li Tianming said. He finally felt how it was like to have backers. Lacking them was why he had lost three years ago.

“Don’t be complacent. Now’s the hard part of training your sword arts. The one I’ll be teaching you isn’t easy,” Mu Yang said.

Li Tianming himself was curious how hard that sword art would be.

“You’re still Spiritsource. Hence, you won’t be able to use unity-ranked battle arts, as they require a unity field. Unity fields are the result of symbiotic cultivation between beastmaster and lifebound beast when they breakthrough to Unity. Hence, your limit now is supreme source-ranked battle arts,” said Mu Yang. “However, my sword art is a heavenly-ranked battle art for Heavenly Will stage cultivators, surpassing unity-ranked battle arts. They’re not something you can comprehend. However, I’ve simplified, compressed and picked out the bits a Spiritsource beastmaster can understand for you.”

“This sword art is thus equivalent to a supreme source-ranked battle art, but if you can master it well and use it to make deductions and inferences, you can unleash the power of a heavenly-ranked battle art. You could even infuse weak heavenly will into your attacks and give it an incredible killing potential. Simply put, the limit of the sword art is your own talent.” Mu Yang looked at Li Tianming evenly. “So, are you confident?”

“We’ll see.” Li Tianming said, hefting his new sword. He knew Mu Yang was seriously guiding him, so that he could defeat Lin Xiaoting and his inner demons, thereby achieving a meteoric success from there.

That was why he had worked together with Sage Chen to prepare a new weapon and battle art for him. The effort these seniors had put in were as clear as day to Li Tianming.

“You should have a chance to face Lin Xiaoting, and this sword art is the one thing I didn’t teach him. After Heaven’s Elysium looked at him favourably, this rebel didn’t even show me any more respect. Tianming, this is all I can help you with. From here on out, it’s all up to you.” Mu Yang picked up a wooden sword and he stood in front of Li Tianming.

Even though it was a wooden sword, simply picking it up had made Mu Yang’s aura become sharper. Li Tianming could immediately feel the sword’s keen edge. It could be described as straightforward, unyielding even in the face of death and overflowing with sword intent. It was the most orthodox of paths!

As the vice-potentate, Mu Yang was naturally extraordinary.

“This sword art is known as ‘Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven!’! It has a total of seven stances.”

“Demise of Man, first stance, Spectral-Dance, second stance, Soul-Extinction!”

“Demise of Earth! The first stance is Earth-Quaker, the second Hell-Shaker!

“Demise of Heaven gathers a heavenly sword will. Its first stance is Divine-Fury, its second Heavenly-Judgement and its third stance is Apocalyptic-Will!”

“I’ve simplified all seven stances to their basics. How much you can understand depends on yourself.”

While Li Tianming didn’t say anything, he was listening carefully to all of Mu Yang’s words. Were heavenly-ranked battle arts really that incredible?

Mu Yang began to brandish his sword in front of the Flameyellow Mirrors.

Demise of Man, Spectral-Dance! The stance was both unpredictable and invisible, a result obviously from the integration of movement arts into the sword stance. It even had some hallucinatory effects added in. That was the only way for it to be worthy of its name.

As the wooden sword struck out, a screech that should only arise from metal scraping against metal pierced Li Tianming’s eardrums.

Li Tianming’s eyes widened. “So this is heavenly will! Even simplified, it’s still so majestic!”

Li Tianming was aware that the Heavenly Will stage was where beastmasters finally exceeded the spiritsource abilities of lifebound beasts and came into their own.

Even the little chick and the black cat found themselves enraptured by the display, watching the gorgeous display in silence.

However, that was only the start.

Demise of Man, Soul-Extinction!

This following stance lost those hallucinatory effects, but it more than made up for it with its increased fierceness and savagery.

Mu Yang didn’t stop.

Demise of Earth, Earth-Quaker!

This stance was an even clearer amalgamation of a sword art and movement art. Every step Mu Yang took was accompanied by the pagoda and even the very earth shaking under his feet. If they were on land, this move would cause earthquakes.

Demise of Earth, Hell-Shaker!

This sword stance was an eruption of power that could shake even hell in its wake!

The Flameyellow Pagoda shook violently once again.

Mu Yang suddenly sheathed his wooden sword, his sharpness vanishing as the blade slid into the sheath. "Train these four stances first. I'll teach you Demise of Heaven when you master these. It's not good to aim too high. I'll be with you for the next few days to answer any questions you have."

"Understood!" Mu Yang's performance had broadened Li Tianming's horizons regarding the martial dao as well as the Heavenly Will stage.

Spiritsources abilities belonged to lifebound beasts, while beastmasters were meant to pursue an even more profound power!

Li Tianming shut his eyes as he recollected the Spectral-Dance from just now, and the little chick also followed suit. As for Meow Meow, it was sleeping already...

Within moments, Li Tianming was already completely immersed in his own world.

"Open your eyes and look straight ahead at your reflection in the mirror. Enlightenment found yourself is the truest enlightenment. Only when you find the truth amongst this chaos that we live in, can you unleash your potential to the fullest in battle." Mu Yang reminded.

Li Tianming looked at the countless reflections of himself, each of them mimicking his every action and magnifying their flaws. "This is great."

It was only by examining yourself you could improve beyond it.

"First, start with one thousand repetitions of Spectral-Dance. We'll see if there's one time in there where you can grasp the essence of the stance," Mu Yang instructed.

One thousand times? Li Tianming looked at his reflection, before beginning. Strike followed strike, but...

Wrong! Definitely wrong!

Li Tianming was having trouble, but since this sword art exceeded the level of Spiritsource, it was to be expected. He replayed the repetitions in his head over and over, immersing himself in his practice. He didn't need Mu Yang to perform the art again, as that could result in an entirely different sensation.

What was important was the sensation, not blindly copying the form. How can I exhibit that kind of intent?

Li Tianming's sword flickered again and again, while he watched all of his reflections in his quest, in order to find the essence of the sword art.

Demise of Man, Spectral Dance. The sword was to be invisible and unpredictable, capable of catching the opponent unawares.

The eighth hundred iteration still fell short.

"Steady your heart. Every try, begin from the very start," Mu Yang reminded.

"Yes..." Honestly, this was the first time Li Tianming was ever struggling in his cultivation.

Another strike came out from him, but something unrelated to his practice abruptly occurred. Li Tianming's black-grey hair had ditched the word 'black' entirely, halfway through his swings. Now, it was a dark grey, a shade that bore some similarity to Wei Jing's light grey hair.

"What's going on?" Li Tianming looked down. "Dammit!"

A second ring had appeared on his right arm, intersecting with the first! Li Tianming clearly remembered there was only one yesterday, and his scalp tingled once more. The Lifesbane had yet to end...

Right now, he had two rings, which were still less than Wei Jing. While there weren't any problems now, who knew if there would be further changes a few days down the road.

"Why did you stop?" Mu Yang asked.

Li Tianming explained to him about his Lifesbane.

"Is your body affected?"

"I feel like my mind is clearer. In fact, this ring is even helping me absorb the spiritual energy around me."

"We'll examine it tomorrow. Continue," Mu Yang said.

Li Tianming nodded. He picked up the little chick to give it a check, and found two dots below its wing. It was an odd change, and he wondered if a new ring would pop up tomorrow. Whether it was a blessing or a curse he didn't know, but he had the premonition it was a result of the heaven-defying changes to his bloodline.

He would have to see what further developments there were tomorrow.

Chapter 153 - White-Haired Youth, Li Tianming!

Li Tianming spent the day training Spectral-Dance and familiarising himself with the Grand Thunderflare Sword, while he spent the night cultivating by the Flameyellow Rock. The black cat could only sleep away the day, since it was dragged along to cultivate at night with Li Tianming.

When dawn broke the next day, the results of the previous day's training was evident. Li Tianming, in front of the Flameyellow Mirrors, personally witnessed his hair turning a light grey like Wei Jing. Combined with his left arm, which was wrapped in white cloth, he now looked something like a demon of sorts.

A third ring had also appeared on his right arm, and with that, he looked like Wei Jing, save for the difference in gender.

"What's going on? You don't have the symptoms of Lifesbane, but you have its benefits?" Mu Yang massaged his head, confused. "For every ring you Wei Clan members get after overcoming Lifesbane, your cultivation speed will rise by a fold. Jing'er seems to be cultivating three times faster than twenty years ago, since she had three rings. But since we're talking about someone who has perfect synchronisation with the Flameyellow rock, your speed's pretty much off the charts. Of course, I don't know if that will still hold true after Spiritsource."

“There are other improvements. Your ability to sense the spiritual energy of heaven and earth, convert it, as well as your comprehension abilities have all risen as well.” Mu Yang sighed. “The more rings you have, the greater your talent shall be. I just don’t know if you’ll have side-effects like Wei Jing.”

Those twenty years had been a nightmare for Wei Jing. She had returned to being twenty, but it had come at the cost of much pain. From Mu Yang and Sage Chen’s discussion, Li Tianming obtained new knowledge about the three rings.

Li Tianming spent the new day practicing the Three Demises sword art. He found his mind much clearer again. Each movement of Mu Yang was recalled with perfect clarity, each detail of Spectral-Dance magnified.

His sword continued to flicker, on and on.

What was talent? Talent was the ability to understand even the hardest of things. The more one had, the faster they learned.

“That’s the feeling!” Li Tianming’s sword suddenly stabbed out. His body moved in a ghostly fashion. Despite making only one thrust, a few thousand mirages had followed at the same time.

“Finally, a success. Continue!” A gleam of praise shone in Mu Yang’s eyes.

Li Tianming didn’t need his prompting to continue. The next attack was made with light steps.

“Continue!”

One strike, two strikes...

Li Tianming had unleashed thirty strokes of Spectral-Dance. However, each was different.

“Every single one a success, impressive! You’ve mastered Spectral-Dance. We’ll move on to Soul Extinction, but while you’re learning and practicing it, you are to integrate it with Spectral-Dance,” Mu Yang instructed.

Sage Chen watched quietly from the side as the vice-potentate continued to teach Li Tianming, but his mind was currently as well. The little chick had caught his attention; it was earnestly listening in as well, using its wing as a sword while shuttling around and leaving afterimages in its wake.

“Is this seven-star beast a freak?” Sage Chen gasped in amazement. A freaking little chick could learn a simplified heavenly-ranked battle art?

In comparison, that napping black cat with its legs sticking up in the air was too lazy. Still, it was fortunate there was a lazy one, or else other people would be too embarrassed to continue their cultivation journey, given the two little monsters’ talent.

Li Tianming, meanwhile, was immersed in the world of Soul-Extinction.

The sword would pierce through the heart and end the opponent’s soul in a sure-kill hit. It lacked the hallucinatory effects of the first stance, but it had more killing power.

The Demise of Man comes with a single blow. Use Spectral-Dance to land Soul-Extinction!

The sword, fast, precise and vicious, whistled through the air. The beast ki in Li Tianming's body, born from his infernalsource and lightningsource, wound together and surged into his Grand Thunderflare Sword, igniting the thousand thunder gem and four crimson gems on it.

The sword struck out, carrying a might that could only belong to a soul-shattering Demise of Man!

"That's it. I can confirm your comprehension abilities have risen a lot after getting three rings," said Mu Yang.

Sage Chen chuckled. "Do you think a fourth will appear tomorrow?"

Li Tianming was curious too. Four would put him ahead of his mother.

Perhaps I have a body with Lifesbane. However, the moment it was triggered, it came into contact with my Aeternal Infernal Body and Genesis Chaos Body. Hence, it never truly flared up, but I got its benefits? Li Tianming had a feeling that this odd result was the aftermath of the Lifesbane coming into contact with the Primordial Chaos Beasts. After all, his two lifebound beasts had three dots as well. And if his guess wasn't wrong...so did the other eight eggs!

When night fell, Li Tianming descended to the first floor of the pagoda. He confirmed that his speed of absorption and conversion of spiritual energy was threefold his original, and that running the Aeternal Infernal Codex and Genesis Chaos Codex was much smoother.

Will a fourth one pop up tomorrow?

The next day quickly arrived. When dawn broke, Li Tianming examined his right arm under the sunlight, watching as the fourth ring formed to the right of the previous three, creating a chain of four connected circles. In the process, Li Tianming's body underwent shocking changes.

Li Tianming entered the pagoda's second floor.

Mu Yang hadn't come yet, while Sage Chen had left for home. In the mirrors, Li Tianming could see his hair, which was coloured in a shade of grey so light that it couldn't be distinguished easily from white.

Let's continue with Soul-Extinction. Li Tianming was struggling to wrap his head around the concept of one new ring every day and decided to throw it to the back of his mind.

Li Tianming's first attempt of the day was met with success. Every attempt that followed was equally anti-climactic; all of them had been executed perfectly.

"Amazing. Did you get a fourth?" Mu Yang and Sage Chen entered, their eyes filled with shock. Was this the same youth they had thought could never catch up to his peers?

Now, he was the one his peers in Vermilion Bird couldn't catch up to.

"Yes."

"Alright then, we'll move on to the first stance of Demise of Earth, Earth-Quaker!"

"Yes!"

Demise of Man was designed to make killing others easy. Demise of Earth, however, strove to shock and awe.

“You need to pay attention to your footwork arts. Demise of Man is a combination of sword arts and movement arts, while Demise of Earth is a combination of swords arts and footwork arts.” Mu Yang’s eyes glinted. “Leg arts aren’t a means to attack, but to sense the throbbing of the earth and draw on that force. Which is why you need to go down and learn this on the soil, even though the Flameyellow Mirrors are here.”

“Understood!” Li Tianming was excited. If he couldn’t sense the throbbing of the earth, how would he ever get the chance to shake hell? Those two stances were imposing and styling, and in his hands, the Grand Thunderflare Sword would become a heavy sword.

The disciples on the first floor began to whisper as Li Tianming followed Mu Yang down.

“What is Li Tianming doing here?”

“The vice-potentate is personally teaching him sword arts. Looks like he’s already accepted him as a disciple.”

“I’m so envious. Then, everyone kept saying he was mediocre, but I heard he’s already defeated the combination of Xing Que and Chen Hao!”

“That sword is so powerful!”

All the disciples who were familiar with him were all sighing with praise.

In the distance, Wei Guohao and Wei Lingxuan were watching with displeasure as well. Wei Guohao in particular was jealous to see Mu Yang guiding Li Tianming. These thoughts of displeasure, however, were scattered and reformed into fright when Li Tianming struck out.

“Big brother Hao, my dad said Li Tianming is the future potentate. It’s over for us.” Wei Qingyi said, pronouncing each word with extreme reluctance.

“It’s still too early to say. Wait for my Devilblue Incantation to recover. There will come a day I defeat him.”

“Yes, prove to grandfather who’s the strongest!” Wei Lingxuan gritted her teeth. She snorted and turned away. “Let’s go!”

This group of problem children still hadn’t let go of how Wei Jing and Li Tianming had snatched their limelight. That was because they were the true direct descendants of Wei Manor!

.....

On that day, Li Tianming gained basic mastery of Earth-Quaker. For major mastery of it, it would probably take four or five days, according to Mu Yang.

However, did he really need that much time?

On the fifth day, a fifth ring appeared on Li Tianming’s arm, turning his hair even whiter.

“Is he dyeing his hair?”

“Does he think white hair is cool? Actually, FINE. Dammit, it’s cool!”

“Now that I look at him, he does seem worthy of Princess Ling. He is a descendant of Wei Manor, after all.”

None of them were aware of how high Li Tianming’s talent had risen with five rings.

However, Li Tianming had the premonition it wasn’t over yet.

The sixth day!

Li Tianming walked out when dawn broke and examined his arm.

The sixth ring didn’t appear.

“It’s ended.” Li Tianming found it slightly regretful that it had come to an end. Still, when he stood in front of the Flameyellow Mirrors, why did he get the feeling that his hair was even whiter now? It wasn’t the dry kind of white now, but rather, a lustrous silver-white that made Li Tianming’s hair look like fine silver threads.

It didn’t look aged, but rather full of vitality.

Li Tianming felt his talent was even more terrifying than yesterday. In that case, why didn’t the number of rings increase?

“Boss, it did increase. You just didn’t see it.” The little chick chuckled. It had felt itself become even more terrifying, a similar sensation to unlocking bloodline shackles.

“What do you mean?”

Could it increase beyond five rings? If no new one appeared on his right arm, where was the new one? Could it be...

Struck with enlightenment, Li Tianming examined the area between his legs.

Chapter 154 - Divine-Fury, Heavenly-Judgement And Apocalyptic-Will!

“You fool, what are you thinking?” The little chick snickered. It lifted up its right wing first. As expected, there were five dots and nothing more. And then it lifted its left wing.

“See this?”

Li Tianming saw a black dot on an obscure corner of Ying Huo’s left wing, and he understood immediately. There were five dots on its right wing, and a new one on its left that only appeared today.

He looked at his own left arm. Considering that the rings had manifested on his right arm so far, he didn’t expect to see them on his left. After all, his left arm was covered in black scales too. Taking off the bandage, he scrutinised his arm closely and saw a faint black ring engraved into the black scales. Just like the black cat, it was difficult to see since the background was black, but there was no doubt the sixth ring had appeared. In other words, he had twice the number of rings Wei Jing had!

“What’s going on with this Lifesbane?” Li Tianming didn’t know how to react to the changes in his body. His body was progressing to that of an unfathomable genius at an alarming rate, and who knew how long it would take for him to master Demise of Earth now!

Six days had passed since he began learning the Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven, which was also the day of the sixth ring’s appearance.

With his silvery hair and his magnificent sword arts, Li Tianming was already drawing the attention of many disciples, but now that the earth itself would shake with every strike he unleashed, ‘center of attraction’ was now an understatement.

The stance he was currently practicing made use of a posture that let him draw on the power in the ground to release an explosive burst of energy. It consisted of nine different strikes, each of them capable of unleashing an earthquake’s might. Just by standing around him, the onlooking disciples could sense the remnants of his sword ki, crashing onto them like tidal waves.

The focus of the disciples, however, still remained on the same thing.

“He really looks different now.”

“Was he always so handsome?”

“I think it’s just the hair, the silvery threads really give him a cool feel to it. I should ask him where he got that dye.”

“Forget it, with your looks it’s like dyeing a frog.”

Discussions and envious exclamations surrounded Li Tianming, who ignored all those and focused on his sword. He was almost done with Earth-Quaker.

“Six now?” Mu Yang arrived just in time to see his next Earth-Quaker, the corner of his mouth twitching.

“Yes...”

“I’m pretty sure I will die from stress if I take you as my disciple.” A bead of sweat rolled down his forehead.

After everything Mu Yang had done to help Wei Jing, he was now hiding from her. According to him, to be together with the youthful-looking Wei Jing was too stressful. Likewise, now that Li Tianming wanted to be his disciple, having met his requirements, Mu Yang rejected the talented youth, once again due to the immense pressure.

Sage Chen’s words weren’t that off the mark, eh? Could it be that he’s spending so much time guiding me, simply because he wants to avoid Wei Jing? Tianming stared at him, suspicious.

“Once your left arm is filled, you should have ten rings,” Mu Yang wondered out loud.

“That should be the case...”

“I look forward to seeing how talented you’ll be after attaining all ten rings. We shall see if you can learn the entire Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven within half a month then.”

That was Li Tianming's goal as well. He was done with Earth-Quaker, and now it was time to move on to Hell-Shaker. The new move was a downwards vertical cleave, making it an immensely powerful move that was also equally difficult to learn.

Demise of Man and Demise of Earth differed from each other greatly. Demise of Man styled the user as a phantom that terrorised souls, while Demise of Earth focused on using overwhelming power to crush foes. Just like its name suggested, the Hell-Shaker's might would penetrate even the depths of hell.

As he started practicing the move, Li Tianming was immediately aware that the seemingly simple cleave was in fact the most difficult stance that he had tried so far. The most difficult part was to understand the boldness and will needed to split hell apart, and only then could he properly master the move. It had a steep learning curve, and after a day's practice, he returned to the Flameyellow rock with little gain.

The next day, when the seventh ring appeared on his left hand, the move seemed easier to understand. On the eighth day, he could somewhat grasp the basics of the move. And on the ninth day, Li Tianming had mastered the Hell-Shaker, not forgetting to rub it in by exclaiming the ease in which he picked up the move.

On the tenth day, Li Tianming's left hand was now identical to his right in terms of the number of rings. He stared into the mirror, completely flabbergasted. Was that person still... him?

His hair was now a white so pure that even a speck of dust would be noticeable on his head. It wasn't a greyish-white that came with old age, but a shiny white that radiated a healthy glow. Even his eyebrows were the same colour, giving him an exotic aura that was bound to turn heads. Of course, that applied for the other hairs on his body too...

"How I wish I could get such a colour too. Why did I not get it?" the little chick asked enviously, its feathers still the same fluffy yellow. The Lifesbane was a result of Li Tianming's bloodline and it would therefore have a lot less effect on his two beasts.

.....

"What a miracle!" On the third floor of the Flameyellow Pagoda, Mu Yang and Sage Chen stared at the white-haired youth in awe. His mother was already something of a legend, since she had three rings... but where did that place the ten-ringed Li Tianming? Wei Jing could cultivate three to four times faster than a regular Spiritsource.

With that as a bench mark, the monster called Li Tianming should be minimally ten times as talented as a youth his age. Having ten bane-rings had a holistic effect on him, improving his comprehension, intelligence, and his speed of cultivation in general.

The blessing of Lifesbane was different from what he had gotten from the Primordial Chaos Beasts. It was a result of Li Tianming's own bloodline, and had little effect initially. However, when combined with the Primordial Chaos Beasts, the changes on his body were almost unimaginable!

In other words, the Primordial Chaos Beasts had helped Li Tianming to obtain a comprehensive upgrade to his physique, beast ki, and bloodline. At the same time, Lifesbane had maximised his talent at cultivation and learning martial arts. That was also the reason why he only took ten days to learn Demise of Man and Earth, which were simplified versions of heavenly-ranked battle arts. While it wasn't evident

now, the moment Li Tianming entered Heavenly Will, he would notice that his understanding of heavenly will would also be much better than most others.

While the blessing of Lifesbane originated from his own bloodline, his two lifebound beasts had benefitted from it as well. For example, the little chick was already capable of pulling off Earth-Quaker with its wings. With their reliance on spiritsource abilities, most lifebound beasts had limited understanding of bestial arts. Ying Huo, however, was an exception — he was a monstrous genius when it came to learning them. Even Meow Meow could have been one too, had it not been so lazy.

“What? Learn bestial arts? No way, meow! That’s taking away even more sleep from me, meow!” The best that Li Tianming and Ying Huo could do was to convince it to cultivate using the Genesis Chaos Codex.

.....

It was the tenth day since Li Tianming’s Lifesbane appeared, and Mu Yang had instructed him to have a one-day break before starting on Demise of Heaven. He would be learning Divine-Fury, Heavenly-Judgement, and finally Apocalyptic-Will!

For the past ten days, Li Tianming had always spent the night working on symbiotic cultivation beside the Flameyellow Rock. His original cultivation speed had doubled, tripled, and then went on from there with every passing day; right now, he was ten times faster than his original speed!

This ‘original speed’, furthermore, was taking into account his proximity to the Flameyellow Rock. He was forty to fifty times faster than a normal disciple at the third ring, while being a hundred times faster than someone who cultivated in the outermost ring. With the speed that his Aeternal Infernal Codex and Genesis Chaos Codex converted spiritual energy into beast ki at, a day’s work meant a lot for his strength.

Ten days ago, when Wei Jing was cured of Lifesbane, he had just reached sixth level Spiritsource. But now, with the aid of his ten bane-rings and the Flameyellow Rock, Li Tianming was already seventh level. One month had passed since the Abyssal Trials finished, and he had already cleared two levels consecutively. The difficulty of breakthrough would increase exponentially as one continued to cultivate, not to mention that his breakthrough was twice as difficult, since he needed to progress both of his spiritsources together.

Now that he was seventh level Spiritsource, Li Tianming was confident that he was unrivalled below Unity. Even without Jiang Feiling, he could probably challenge someone in Unity.

But against Lin Xiaoting, will this be enough? He has the Saintbeast War-Soul, and probably knows unity-ranked battle arts too, so it’s not guaranteed that I will win. The battle with Lin Xiaoting was one that Li Tianming wouldn’t take any risk for. He only had one chance, after all. Therefore, his goal remained the same. He would continue to practise Demise of Heaven while trying to make breakthroughs in his cultivation level.

There’s no other choice but to continue cultivating!

While he might be seventh level Spiritsource, the fact that he was a twin beastmaster and the nature of the infernalsource and the lightningsource made it such that he had the equivalent of nine spirit sources

of normal beastmasters. Considering the terrifying natures of his beast ki, he was definitely beyond Spiritsource in terms of beast ki. If he could beat Wei Ziyu when he was just fifth level, what about now? Even if he was pitted against a Unity stage opponent with a unity field to boot, Li Tianming was still confident in winning.

Except Lin Xiaoting wasn't any opponent. He was a genius at Unity, and was also a twin beastmaster. Against him, Li Tianming knew he needed to be even stronger.

Mu Yang had been helping him to keep track of the situation at the Lightning Manor. Yueling Ji was still on her final stretch towards Unity, so they hadn't left yet. She wasn't the only one making improvements, and they could never imagine how much Li Tianming had improved.

Lin Xiaoting would never see it coming.

After all, the latest intel anyone had was that Li Tianming alone was just enough to defeat Wei Ziyu. Therefore, the Lightning Manor believed that they had secured the victory for the younger generations, but was that really the case?

.....

The eleventh day came, and as expected, the bane-rings stopped appearing. These ten rings had already maximised Li Tianming's potential at cultivating, with even Mu Yang treating him as a real 'monster' for cultivation!

"Today, we start on Demise of Heaven and its three stances," Mu Yang said. "Divine-Fury, Heavenly-Judgement and Apocalyptic-Will."

Chapter 155 - A Wedding Invitation

"For Demise of Heaven, you have to be one with the heavens and understand their intentions. Simplifying this into a source-ranked art was the hardest, since it had the most heavenly wills. As such, the difficulty level is nothing like the previous two Demises. Mastering it at your age is an impossible task, but I trust a little monster like you won't disappoint me."

"For Divine-Fury, you are a god, and a god's wrath is capable of destroying anything and everything in this world! The crux of this move lies in understanding that wrath and reproducing that attendant intention of blotting out the world itself. If Demise of Earth aims to crush opponents with overwhelming force, then with Demise of Heaven aims to destroy with indifference. With your will, call forth an apocalypse to the mortal world and erase all other beings in existence."

"While this may sound exaggerated, keep this determination in mind when you practise the Demise of Heaven. Even if you can't destroy a world with the strike, you'll need that level of determination when you are swinging your sword at your opponent."

Li Tianming committed every single word that Mu Yang had said into his memory. He was definitely a good disciple who processed every single thing he was taught, even trying to think beyond what he was told.

“Divine-Fury... to be a god...” He imagined the almighty creator, who ruled all beneath the azure skies. An overlord that looked down from the heavens. A being, whose single strike would cleave all creation. It was a terrifying prospect... and a tantalising one.

Li Tianming could tell the clear difference between the heavenly-ranked art and the ones that he practised before. The source-ranked arts were orders of magnitude easier than this. For source-ranked arts, he just needed to mimic the movements and understand the technique to use it. But for heavenly-ranked arts, even simplified ones, he needed to understand the heavenly will behind the move before he could cast the art. Only if by understanding the will of a god could he strike like one, and unleash his fury onto his foes.

“Fury of the divines!” Li Tianming thought about it again and again as he swung his sword. He pondered over the art in the day, while spending the night cultivating. In that day alone, he had struck out three thousand times, his muscles now sore to the point that his arms were immobile. And yet, that was nothing compared to the mental fatigue he felt. Trying to be a god, even through thought alone, was a herculean feat.

In Mu Yang’s original plan, Li Tianming was to study the first two Demises, leaving Demise of Heaven for when Li Tianming reached Unity. But his talent had surpassed the limits of Mu Yang’s imagination, having progressed to Demise of Heaven in no time at all.

The relationship between Divine-Fury and Heavenly-Judgement was like the one between Spectral-Dance and Soul-Extinction, where the former was a build-up for the later. Apocalyptic-Will, however, had the essence of the three demises combined! As Li Tianming brushed up on Spectral-Dance, he realised that it helped him to understand the idea behind Divine-Fury better, which in turn helped in understanding Heavenly-Judgement. The earlier moves were like ladders that set a foundation for Demise of Heaven.

That was in fact one of the key points about learning the three demises, something that Mu Yang had not told him on purpose. But when Mu Yang saw him starting all over from Spectral-Dance again, it was obvious Li Tianming had grasped the most important concept already.

“I chose to not tell him about it, but to think he actually figured it out by himself that quickly. In comparison, it took me an entire year to understand that and master Divine-Fury. This kid really is something special.” Mu Yang sighed. “It makes sense, since he’s Wei Jing’s son... but that Li Yanfeng? Ugh.”

He could feel his head aching as he thought of the past.

.....

Eleven, twelve, thirteen... On the thirteenth day, Li Tianming had mastered Divine-Fury! Unknown to Mu Yang, Li Tianming had taken a shortcut to understand the will of the gods. Instead of the gods, Li Tianming thought of the phoenix flying in the realm of stars, the thunderfiend in the endless sea of lightning, and the black hand. What was it to like to be them?

How would Mu Yang react had he known that Li Tianming had found something even beyond the will of the gods? Like the thunderfiend, capable of cleansing myriad worlds with lightning. Was it a god, or was

it something so much more? Mu Yang had never beheld such a sight, which was why Li Tianming's achievement was also beyond his expectations.

When Li Tianming executed Divine-Fury, Mu Yang couldn't help but rub his eyes. Li Tianming's rendition was far more destructive, unleashing a hell of flames and lightning with a single blow!

But the surprises didn't end there. On the seventeenth day, he had mastered Heavenly-Judgement too. The stance was yet another level more powerful, supported by a willpower meant to destroy everything in existence.

Now all that was left was the Apocalyptic-Will. It was more difficult than the other six combined, and Li Tianming reckoned he needed another ten days to learn its basics. The willpower required was even more complicated, and he found it hard to grasp that level of understanding. With that said, he had already done incredibly well.

These six stances are sufficient for now. I should take a break and see if I can make another breakthrough in levels. It had been a week since he entered seventh level Spiritsource. But compared to the time at the Abyssal Battlefield, his strength had grown tremendously.

"I overestimated myself when I said I can get you a grade six chain, although I did find a grade seven one. However, you are not at a level where you can use that." Even with Mu Yang's position and wealth, it was difficult to find a grade seven chain, considering how rare such weapons were.

"No worries, I don't mind a grade seven one..." Li Tianming grinned. Grade seven bestial weapons were worth a fortune, mainly used by beastmasters in Heavenly Will.

"Grade seven weapons have purple heavenly patterns and are already infused with the power of Heavenly Will. It's too early for you to use such a weapon, and you can only truly understand it at the later levels of Unity," Mu Yang explained.

Li Tianming grinned. "Don't tell me you are too stingy to give it to me."

"Of course not, I will give it to you when you have the opportunity to leave Vermilion Bird." Mu Yang patted him on the shoulder.

"Thank you, Uncle Yang!" It sure felt good to have seniors backing him up. However, what Li Tianming cared about was not leaving Vermilion Bird, but how to not let Lin Xiaoting leave Vermilion Bird!

.....

At night, Li Tianming opened the windows on top of the Flameyellow Pagoda as he stared in Lightning Manor's direction. A gentle breeze caressed his glowing white hair, a bloody mist forming in his eyes.

"Lightning Manor, Yueling Clan, and the vice-inspectors. What are they planning, and why is it taking so long?" Li Tianming frowned.

He held a golden feather in his hand, a feather that belonged to Midas. He had recently made a trip back to the institute, and found this in a corner of his old bedroom. It was the last feather of Midas that he could find.

"Brother, you shall rest in peace soon. Soon..."

There was a bottle in front of him. It was prepared for draining Lin Xiaoting's blood, to honour Midas.

"Mu Qingqing, I wonder if you are dead yet." Li Tianming snickered coldly. Even if she was still alive, the torture she went through for the past month probably made death look like a mercy.

That was within Li Tianming's expectations as well. He wouldn't let her die that easily, just like how he wouldn't forgive her. He would never forget the brother that he had lost on that stormy night, along with the hatred in his heart.

Li Tianming picked up the bottle. The sword was ready, and so was the container for Lin Xiaoting's blood. All he needed now was an opportunity.

.....

On the very same night, that opportunity arrived. Li Tianming received a wedding invitation from the Lightning Manor:

To Li Tianming,

On the fifth of October, a wedding will be held between my grandson Lin Xiaoting and Yueling Ji of the Yueling Clan. A feast will be prepared, and it will be our pleasure to have you join us.

Lin Zhao.

Li Tianming finished reading and his lips curved. Again, that was expected.

"Qingqing, are you happy?" It must have been a memorable month for her. Li Tianming carefully kept the invitation in his pocket.

"Today is the fourth, which means that their wedding is tomorrow."

"Will you be going?" asked the little chick.

"Of course." There was no doubt it would be an interesting night, and there was no way Li Tianming would miss it.

Chapter 156 - The Wei Clan is Finished!

Lightning Manor and the Yueling Clan had been very thoughtful in their distribution of wedding invitations.

Apart from the general invitation to the Wei Clan, Li Tianming, Wei Jing and Mu Yang all got personal invitations. The fact that even Wei Jing received one showed that everyone with a reputation in Vermilion Bird had been invited. As the marriage between two disciples of Heaven's Elysium, this was the most illustrious wedding in Vermilion Bird since its founding. Not even the marriage of the king himself would make inspectors of Heaven's Elysium participate.

Despite just being vice-inspectors, they were already terrifying figures to the powerful clans of Ignispolis.

The scheduling for the wedding was very tight, set for the very night after the invitations were received.

An uproar occurred in Vermilion Bird immediately. One side was the peerless genius chosen by Heaven's Elysium, Lin Xiaoting. The other was the winner of the Abyssal Trials held between three countries. Both had gotten together within a short month.

This was the epitome of a match made in heaven.

As for Mu Qingqing, who would pay attention to her in the face of authority, talent and prospects?

"Mu Qingqing's standard is a little low. Her current accomplishments were all thanks to Lin Xiaoting. She would have been an ordinary Flameyellow Scions Institute disciple otherwise."

"Considering Lin Xiaoting's current accomplishments, just becoming a concubine or a servant would be impressive for her. I even heard that in the Abyssal Battlefield, she was crippled by Li Tianming, or perhaps even tainted by him."

"Yes. How could Li Tianming give up on such a good chance after failing three years ago? That's why I don't think Lin Xiaoting marrying Yueling Ji can be considered as him abandoning her."

"Well, all I can say is that Mu Qingqing is unlucky to be continuously pestered by that devil Li Tianming."

Gossip was a fearful thing. In this world, not many knew the truth. And for some, all it took was a modicum of effort to sway public opinion. Smearing Li Tianming again was no big deal.

As soon as the invitations were sent out, Mu Qingqing's reputation was lost, but Lin Xiaoting, who was marrying someone else, was showered with praise.

Who would believe it if someone said no one was manipulating things behind the scenes?

All this pointed to how if you wanted to enter a powerful family and latch on to the wealthy, then you had to be mentally prepared to be screwed over heartlessly.

Many influential figures could feel the hidden undercurrents after receiving their invitations. The vice-inspectors had stayed at Ignispolis for over a month, with the Yueling Clan even moving into Lightning Manor. And now, Lightning Manor was disregarding even the royal clan.

Something big was about to happen!

Ignispolis had enjoyed a month of peace. It was about time for the storm to hit. However, no one could predict how many lives would be lost in its wake, or how many would ride the wave to prominence!

.....

Li Tianming was already back at Wei Manor when he received the invitation.

Coincidentally, Wei Tianxiong and the others were currently in the meeting. Among the attendants included Mu Yang, the four heavenly guardians, the eighteen supernal mentors and the five hall overseers. Wei Jing was also present.

"Come over, Tianming." Wei Jing beckoned him over.

Li Tianming's hair of silver-white hair was now very eye-catching, and the seniors quickly noticed.

“Men shouldn’t be spending their time dressing up. And this kind of colour at that. What is it supposed to be?” Flameyellow Scions Institute Chancellor Wei Tianxiong said mildly.

The Sanctum Potentate, Wei Tiancang was still in convalescence. He needed at least a month of rest to recover his vital energy, which explained his absence. Currently, the greatest authority fell to Wei Tianxiong.

“Uncle, you’re just not up to the date with the latest trends. This is in fashion now and is considered super manly. I guess you just can’t appreciate it.” Li Tianming gave Wei Tianxiong an indifferent look before sitting by Wei Jing. Li Tianming couldn’t be bothered to argue with Wei Tianxiong.

Wei Tianxiong had never liked him, but whose fault was it his son Wei Guohao was trash compared to Li Tianming?

“Frivolous child,” Wei Zikun criticized.

“Quiet, focus on raising your son first. Even if this so-called frivolous child just stands there, your son still can’t beat him,” Wei Jing said.

Wei Zikun nearly had a heart attack there and then. However, that didn’t change the fact that he had no grounds to refute her words.

“I also received an invitation,” Li Tianming suddenly spoke up.

“You have it?” No one expected this development.

“It must be Lin Xiaoting who arranged it. Our information says that Yueling Ji has reached the Unity stage. Obviously, they will head to Heaven’s Elysium after the wedding. However, Lin Xiaoting invited you because he wants to eliminate you before he goes to avenge Mu Qingqing. Going doesn’t bode well for you,” Wei Tianxiong said confidently.

“He’s not doing this for Mu Qingqing. It’s because he’s scared of me,” Li Tianming said calmly.

“Scared? Why, because you can defeat people ninth level Spiritsource?” Wei Zikun, the Hall Of Phoenix Overseer snorted derisively. Although Wei Tiancang had forgiven Wei Jing, these two brothers were still brooding over the matter.

Combined with Li Tianming’s strong showing and how he outshone their children, they were antagonistic to him.

The heavenly guardians and supernal mentors didn’t quite believe Li Tianming.

“Based on how all eighteen supernal mentors looked down on me that time in the Hall of Ancestry. But now? Not even three months, but I can crush any of your disciples underfoot,” Li Tianming replied.

The supernal mentors were speechless. That day, led by Liu Xueyao and Zhao Tianchen, the supernal mentors had been very sarcastic, continuously shaking their heads at Li Tianming.

And Wei Guohao, who had broken Li Tianming’s weapon and suppressed him, was now soundly beaten up by Li Tianming.

For this group, Liu Xueyao felt her face stinging the most. After all, Li Tianming had crippled her favourite disciple, Mu Qingqing.

“Tianming is right. Even I misjudged him that time. I feel embarrassed by your performance.” The Guardian of Ancestry, Jun Yuancang, chuckled bitterly. He was saying this, despite his plentiful experience.

Now, Wei Zikun, who had called Li Tianming into question, had made a fool of himself. At least, the eighteen supernal mentors couldn't pick out any faults with him,

However, Liu Xueyao wasn't very happy.

“I've seen many geniuses, but none as full of themselves as you. In this at least, Lin Xiaoting is superior to you. If he really was targeting you, he must be sure of himself. He also has the vice-inspectors backing him up. If I were you, I wouldn't be so cocky.”

“You're not even at Unity, so don't even presume to know how much stronger than Spiritsource it is. You also don't know the might of the Saintbeast Warsoul,” Liu Xueyao said coolly.

“What a coincidence! I actually do know how powerful the Warsoul is,” Li Tianming replied.

“What do you mean?” Liu Xueyao frowned.

“You should know exactly what I mean.”

Li Tianming claimed so because the Warsoul had once belonged to him.

At this time, a rumour was circulating in Heaven's Sanctum. It said that the obscene matter three years had actually been a case of robbery and entrapment. The real victim was Li Tianming. However, Liu Xueyao, who had known Mu Qingqing for three years, was the one most doubtful of its veracity.

“It seems many here think Li Tianming was framed then?” Liu Xueyao asked.

No one replied.

“If we all have different views, there's no need to associate.” Liu Xueyao stood up.

“Go quickly. If you're going to be Lightning Manor's dog, bark somewhere else. In fact, it might be time to check up on your disciple and make sure she hasn't died yet.” Li Tianming snorted.

“You!” Liu Xueyao was furious. “When I was contributing to the sanctum, you weren't even born yet!”

“So you were an old granny then!”

“Disrespectful!”

“You may leave.” Mu Yang looked at her.

“Vice-potentate!”

“No one here is a fool. Liu Xueyao. If you want to be a spy, don't be so obvious about it. I called it long ago. Your brain has something wrong.” Chief Mentor Mu Wan was the one speaking now; she had been in a nondescript corner somewhere in the room.

“Wei Clan? Heaven’s Sanctum? Hahaha...” Liu Xueyao stood up and swept everyone with a sinister look.

She was just about to leave when Mu Yang stood in front of her. “Liu Xueyao, it seems you know why the vice-inspectors are staying here.”

It was obvious from her parting words and smug attitude that she was privy to information others weren’t.

Li Tianming had casually talked back to her when she started her theatrics, but he hadn’t expected such a scoop. He shared a look with Chief Mentor Mu Wan. They really did both have a bitch detector.

“Oh well, you’ll find out tomorrow anyway. My fellow supernal mentors, I have good news for you. What’s coming has nothing to do with you. The only ones in trouble are the Wei Clan and all those related to them, like you, Mu Yang!” Liu Xueyao said triumphantly.

Then, she sneered at Li Tianming. “You especially. Don’t be too proud too soon. You’re about to be the most miserable one. The Wei Clan is finished!”

“You don’t need to leave anymore.” Including Mu Yang, everyone stood up and surrounded her. In all its years, never had a supernal mentor of Heaven’s Sanctum turned into a spy.

“You all should thank me. I let everyone present know that it’ll be only the Wei Clan that’ll be in trouble, so you lot can get a good night’s sleep. When this is all over, we’ll still all be fellow supernal mentors and friends,” Liu Xueyao replied, a sardonic grin on her face.

The supernal mentors all looked at each other, their hearts shaken.

“Let her go!” Suddenly, an old figure appeared from the shadows.

Wei Tiancang had arrived. His face was pale, but the authority in his voice still made Liu Xueyao step back in fright.

“Father, she may know about the brewing conspiracy!” Wei Tianxiong urged.

“What conspiracy, it’s all out in the open. The vice-inspectors will tell you all tomorrow at Lightning Manor. No need to be anxious,” Wei Tiancang said.

“She betrayed Heaven’s Sanctum!” Wei Zikun said emotionally.

“Wrong, she betrayed only our Wei Clan,” Wei Tiancang said coldly.

“So we’re just letting her off like that?”

“Or else? It’s not the Wei Clan’s style to attack an unrelated woman when we go into conflict, is it?” Wei Tiancang said.

Wei Zikun was speechless.

“Looks like Lord Potentate has some integrity. In that case, I wish you all good luck.” Liu Xueyao snorted before turning to leave. Her clothes, however, were drenched in cold sweat.

Chapter 157 - An Auspicious Time To Tie The Knot!

“They aren’t setting up a trap for the wedding ceremony tomorrow. It will just be announcements, so don’t worry,” Wei Tiancang said.

“Announcements? About what, master?” Mu Yang asked.

“If I’m not wrong, it should be the ‘Sanctum Replacement Challenge,’” Wei Tiancang replied.

“What’s that?”

“I remembered Jin Yixuan bringing that up once a few years ago. It’s an event where clans controlling Heaven’s Sanctum are tested and swapped out if necessary. I’m not so sure about the details either, so let’s just wait for the inspectors’ updates tomorrow,” Wei Tiancang explained.

“The vice-inspectors want to make use of this challenge to replace the Wei Clan with the Lightning Manor, and let them seize control of Heaven’s Sanctum?” Wei Tianxiong asked.

“No, it’s the Yueling Clan,” Mu Yang muttered.

“That’s right, it’s the Yueling Clan.” Wei Tiancang nodded in agreement.

“Master, as the potentate, will you be taking part in this challenge?” Mu Yang asked worriedly. Normally, he wouldn’t be worried, but since he had just cured Wei Jing of her Lifesbane, Wei Tiancang needed time to recover.

“Most likely.” Wei Tiancang frowned. That was definitely troubling.

“Father, don’t tell me you knew about this long time ago and yet you still chose to heal Wei Jing!” Wei Zikun jumped up.

“Silence!” Wei Tiancang threw him a stare.

“Zikun, don’t make guesses on things you know nothing about. We only arrived at this conclusion in the past two days,” said Wei Qing, the Guardian of Sanctions, who had spent much more time with Wei Tiancang than the rest.

Clearly, Wei Zikun was trying to blame Wei Jing for making Wei Tiancang lose his power at such a crucial moment. Even Wei Jing couldn’t say anything to defend herself, only looking at the still tired Wei Tiancang worriedly.

“I understand, master. Please get some rest. I’ll figure out what the exact rules for this challenge are tomorrow.” Mu Yang knew he needed to be the one to support the Sanctum at this crucial moment.

“That’s right. The Wei family would rather die than to give up without a fight!” Wei Tiancang cast one last look at the crowd, before leaving the hall, his hands behind his back.

The supernal mentors took their leave as well. Liu Xueyao had already mentioned that the supernal mentors were not involved in this, so none of them received the invitation.

The ones set to visit Lightning Manor tomorrow were Wei Tianxiong, Mu Yang, Wei Jing and Li Tianming. Out of the four, Mu Yang represented the Sanctum, while Wei Tianxiong represented the Wei Clan. As for Wei Jing, they were probably just curious about her recovery.

The mentors were at ease knowing that it has nothing to do with them. But sadly, the same could not be said for members of the Wei Clan who are deemed to have a sleepless night.

“What do you think?” Mu Yang asked.

“Whatever it is, we shall be fine as long as we win the battle.” In that aspect, Li Tianming was on the same line of thought as Wei Tiancang.

“Then we shall pay them a visit and see exactly what they are up to tomorrow.” Mu Yang wasn’t afraid either. The Lightning Manor wouldn’t dare to do anything outrageous during such a public ceremony.

The undercurrents that came along with the wedding invitations swept across Ignispolis in a single night. On the second day, the whole city was discussing the largest wedding to ever take place in the history of Vermilion Bird. Rumours and gossip flew all over the place; some backed with evidence, others just utter hogwash.

Li Tianming disregarded the ongoing speculation, choosing to spend the entire day in the Flameyellow Pagoda instead, learning Apocalyptic-Will, the final move of Demise of Heaven. When dusk approached, Wei Tianxiong, Mu Yang and Wei Jing were already waiting for him outside of the pagoda. It wouldn’t be a surprise if all the rich and famous of Ignispolis were all heading for the Lightning Manor right now.

“So, how much have you grasped?” Mu Yang asked.

“Not that much. I still need inspiration.” Li Tianming said. The move was too unique, and even with ten bane-rings, it wasn’t enough for him to fully understand the move in such a short period of time. With that said, the more difficult the move was, the more terrifying its power.

“About time, let’s go.” Wei Tianxiong beckoned them over. Whatever his father said yesterday were all guesses, so he would be the one to hear the vice-inspectors’ official statements later.

Speculations about the wedding tonight flew wild, and underneath the celebrations and joy was a bloodbath ready to be unleashed at any time. But for the average citizens, the wedding no doubt called for a celebration.

“Congratulations to Lin Xiaoting and Yueling Ji. Congratulations to the Lightning Manor. And congratulations to our Vermilion Bird!”

“Once Yueling Ji gets married to Lin Xiaoting, she’ll be a genius of Vermilion Bird too!”

“We will have two disciples of Heaven’s Elysium in our nation. Vermilion Bird shall prosper in the years to come!”

The vice-inspectors had spent so much time in the Lightning Manor that even ordinary folk were now aware of their existence. But as expected, no one talked about the abandoned Mu Qingqing. She was nothing but history now.

Before long, the group in Wei Tianxiong’s horse cart had arrived in front of the Lightning Manor. Lanterns and ribbons draped over the manor, while the sound of music and the smell of delicacies hovered in the air. It was an extraordinary sight to behold.

“Vice-Potentate Mu Yang, the Flameyellow Institute Chancellor, and their family have arrived!” The moment they stepped out of the cart, they were welcomed by members of the Lightning Manor. As one of the famed beauties of the manor, Liu Qing was naturally there to receive the guests.

“Liu Qing, show these distinguished guests to their seats,” Lin Xiaofeng, the second son of the Lightning Seigneur, murmured.

“Yes, sir.” Liu Qing wore a red cocktail dress, her make-up further bringing out her charming looks. But when a young girl alighted from the Wei clan’s cart, attention was immediately diverted away from Liu Qing. The girl showed little emotions and wore minimal make-up, but her natural beauty was enough to make Liu Qing appear pretentious and fake. Likewise, the white-haired Li Tianming had also sparked a discussion amongst the crowd.

“Who’s this girl, and why does she look somewhat familiar?”

“Haven’t seen her before. Since when did Li Tianming befriend another beauty?”

Only Lin Xiaofeng recognised Wei Jing, since he still remembered her looks from twenty years ago.

“Congratulations on attaining your youth once again.” He smiled.

Wei Jing chose not to reply. Two decades ago, they already weren’t on good terms, let alone now. But Lin Xiaofeng did not take offence to that, choosing to cater to Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong instead, while letting Liu Qing take the mother and son pair.

“This way, please.” Liu Qing’s head was lowered and she did not wish to look at Wei Jing and Li Tianming in the face. They did have an awkward relationship after all.

Li Tianming stepped into the Lightning Manor. The first thing he saw was a middle-aged man standing before him. The man’s face was plump and rosy, and even his mustache was shining. It was evident that he was having the time of his life.

Both Li Tianming and Wei Jing saw the man, who was none other than Li Yanfeng. He remained expressionless as he looked at the mother and son. Compared to a few months ago when the two left Flamehaven, they were in a completely different state now.

He saw Wei Jing returning to her youth, a pretty lass who seemed to be at the prime of her teenage years, boasting a beauty that made everyone else look dim in comparison. He also saw Li Tianming, who was now one of the most successful teenagers in the nation, unstoppable by anyone but the newlyweds tonight.

Would he regret it? Li Tianming wanted to see Li Yanfeng’s bitterness, but he knew the man had a face thicker than a wall. No matter how ashamed, how annoyed, how envious he might be, Li Yanfeng was not one to show it. He was a man who treasured his face more than anything else, after all.

He had long heard about the happenings to Wei Jing, and he, like Liu Qing, wouldn’t even look at Wei Jing right now. Liu Qing’s main selling point was her age and her looks, but how could that compare with Wei Jing now? When placed beside the latter, she was just another gaudy woman on the streets.

Even though it has been long since they left Flamehaven, Li Tianming still flared up the moment he saw Li Yanfeng.

“It’s been a while. Lightning Manor must be feeding you well. To think that even a dog can put on so much weight.” Li Tianming looked askance at Li Yanfeng. He had heard that Li Yanfeng was in the Lightning Manor.

“Tianming, many have told me that you’ve been doing well lately, and that you are working hard to change your fate. But a bastard child will remain a bastard child.”

“Hoho, it’s impressive to know that Lightning Manor can train such a sense of superiority into their dogs. Have you been barking so much that you forgot how to talk like a person?” Li Tianming smirked.

“Li Tianming, brother Feng is a member of the clan, so quit your insults. He has more power in the manor than you think.” Liu Qing snapped angrily.

“Don’t bother about him, he can only laugh for a few more days.” Li Yanfeng smiled. But even then, he never did look at Wei Jing, let alone Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong. It was a past that he had forgone, so why bother?

“Then you better keep your eyes peeled and see who gets the last laugh. We will see where being a dog of the Lightning Manor will get you,” Li Tianming said.

“Very well, drown in your illusion that you are now an unmatched genius. We shall see the end of you soon!”

Throughout the conversation, it had only been Li Tianming and Li Yanfeng talking. Since even Wei Jing did not say anything, Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong chose to remain silent as well. After stepping past Li Yanfeng, Li Tianming asked Wei Jing.

“Did you not see how cocky that bastard is? Aren’t you going to at least scold him a bit for old times’ sake?”

“As you said, we will soon see who has the last laugh, so no need to waste time here,” Wei Jing said.

True enough, arguing with Li Yanfeng wasn’t going to achieve anything. How could he not be clear on how Wei Jing was doing? If he truly thought his actions were justified, then would he still keep his head lowered and refuse to look at her?

“What’s over is over. He’s no longer your father, so just forget about him.” Mu Yang patted Li Tianming on the shoulders. Even then, Li Tianming found it hard to accept that the person who birthed him was such a piece of trash. If Li Yanfeng thought that Li Tianming’s glory was short-lived, then Li Tianming would prove to him how wrong he is!

.....

Night fell, and the truly influential people of the entire capital were now gathered in the Mythic Lightning Hall inside of Lightning Manor. It was the biggest hall in the manor, with no less than a thousand tables sitting inside.

The layout of the hall was split into three different layers. In the most prestigious layer were guests like Mu Yang, Wei Tianxiong and the Vermilion Bird Emperor. They were naturally accompanied by the likes of Lightning Manor, Yueling Clan as well as the two vice-inspectors. Other personages in that layer

included Minister Qin, the Starry Sages, and so on. They were all some of the top figures across the entire Vermilion Bird.

The second layer hosted slightly less distinguished guests. Li Tianming and Wei Jing were guided to a table in this layer, and they were seated in the outer ring of the hall.

Lastly, the third layer was those outside of the hall, which was also about a thousand tables of guests. Even though it was the least prestigious layer, the honour of being present at such a wedding was enough to boast about. Clans and organizations had sent many gifts in the off-chance that they could see the two Elysium disciples.

Li Tianming was seated beside Wei Jing, and those in the same table had all chosen to distance themselves away from the two. Some even chose to move to a nearby table. Rumour had it that before Lin Xiaoting departed for Heaven's Elysium, he would butcher Li Tianming. As such, simply getting too close to them was a risky act. Even though many people were still curious about Wei Jing's return to youth, they chose to observe it from a distance.

Li Tianming looked towards the VIP seats. The two vice-inspectors were seated in the most distinguished seats, and were currently receiving flattery from some of the most famous people in the nation. The Lightning Seigneur Lin Zhao, Yueling Hong, Lin Tianjian and Yueling Xiao were all accompanied at one side, engaging in joyous conversation.

In comparison, Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong's seats were arranged in a corner. Even the emperor was seated away from the center, with no one to talk to. It was quite an awkward scenario for them.

At that moment, chimes sounded, marking the auspicious hour... and the beginning of a wedding whose proportions were hitherto unseen in Vermilion Bird.

Chapter 158 – A Toast To You; I Wish You Many Children

“Bow to heaven and earth!”

“Bow to the parents!”

“Bride and groom, bow to each other! Now, move to the bridal chambers!”

The ceremony was complete!

Lightning Manor was immediately wrapped in a festive atmosphere.

Lin Xiaoting was currently dressed in his groom's clothes with a giant red rose on his lapel. While it was tacky, it couldn't hide his aura of a peerless genius.

Many of Lightning Manor's lifebound beasts were dancing through the air, the lightning around their bodies creating a gorgeous net of lightning that lit up the manor. The display made the upper echelons of Vermilion Bird present let out a sigh of admiration, before quickly seizing the opportunity to bootlick the manor.

Lin Xiaoting was currently gazing at his bride with a smile. Everything was going exactly as planned. He had reached the peak of his life.

“From now on, my heart belongs to you and only you. I will embrace, protect and never abandon you. Let us tread our path together with no regret henceforth, be it in cultivation or battle.” Lin Xiaoting held Yueling Ji’s hand and swore sincerely.

“Husband, I’m willing to love you for the rest of my life.” Yueling Ji’s face was hidden under her veil, but it was most likely emotional and red right now.

Such a vow drew envy and admiration from those around. At the same time, the youngsters of Lightning Manor started to cheer wildly, making the atmosphere festive.

This pair of lovers had already entered the annals of Vermilion Bird history.

Under the light from the lightning, Li Tianming suddenly noticed someone.

Mu Qingqing.

She wasn’t dressed in white today, as that was considered bad luck in weddings. She had obviously dressed herself up, her makeup successfully hiding her frail body and poor complexion.

Only Lin Xiaoxiao was by her side. No one else dared to get near her. However, she still continued to carry that never-changing smile as she watched the marriage and vows that should have been made with her. She watched as the man she had given up everything for grabbed the hands of another woman and gave her a kiss. His eyes were filled with adoration, but it was towards someone he had only known for one month.

It was difficult to imagine her response to this was so small. The absence of a ruckus or even a teardrop had made many admire her.

“What a wonderful girl, Mu Qingqing. She knows when to retreat.”

“Unfortunately, she was tainted by Li Tianming.”

Those who did pay attention to Mu Qingqing found that she was acting very appropriately to the occasion, but that didn’t mean their words were pleasant to the ears. Lin Xiaoxiao, who had heard this, was naturally furious. However, Mu Qingqing only had a mild reaction, making Lin Xiaoxiao force down her anger.

“What is she thinking?” Wei Jing asked.

Li Tianming didn’t reply. After sparing her a glance, he ignored Mu Qingqing. After the Abyssal Trials, Mu Qingqing was finished. Discussing her further was pointless.

Now, the only one who held his attention was Lin Xiaoting.

After the kneeling ritual, the bride would enter the bridal chambers alone first, while the groom would go around with his parents and toast all the guests.

Naturally, they started with the vice-inspectors. They followed with the parents of both sides, and then the likes of the Vermilion Bird King, Prime Minister Qin and so on.

After making the rounds with all the seniors, Lin Tianjian, along with his wife and son, continued to cover the remaining tables. When they reached Li Tianming's table, only Li Tianming and his mother were left.

"Wei Jing, congratulations on regaining your youth. It must have cost quite the bit of energy for your father!" Lin Tianjian was full of smiles.

"Just lay out whatever conspiracy you have."

As the senior generations spoke, Lin Xiaoting and Li Tianming's eyes met.

"Not a bad hair colour. I'll try it out myself one day," Lin Xiaoting said casually. Fury was burning within his eyes, despite his light-hearted tone.

When Lin Xiaoting and Li Tianming's gazes met, sparks flew.

"It's not suitable for you. Green would be better," Li Tianming said.

"Green? I think gold's better, like the colour your Midas' feathers were," Lin Xiaoting replied.

"Then get to it. It'll be good timing for me to pluck it all off," Li Tianming said.

It was unnecessary for Lin Xiaoting to try to provoke Li Tianming, as Li Tianming had already made plans to kill him. He only lacked a suitable venue to do so.

"Interesting. I can tell you've really changed since three years ago. I will admit I'm surprised." Lin Xiaoting smiled faintly.

"You're the big fish. Just being shocked isn't enough seasoning to prepare this dish. First, I need to remove all the intestines, descale it, and add oil in. I guarantee it'll be a delicacy after I braise it. I'm just afraid the fish will flee out of fear before I can catch it." Li Tianming grinned. No one present could miss the killing intent laden in those words.

"Relax, I won't go without eating the bait." Lin Xiaoting gave a cold smile, finally giving Li Tianming his answer. However, it wasn't because he was scared. He simply wanted to resolve all the matters in Ignispolis before beginning his journey.

"Wash your neck." Li Tianming had once said this to Mu Qingqing, and it was Lin Xiaoting's turn now.

The father-son pair simply snorted derisively before moving to the next table.

They soon reached Mu Qingqing and Lin Xiaoxiao's table. However, Lin Tianjian wasn't happy with the two of them showing up here, so he made a detour around them.

"Settle the problem and don't let new ones crop up," Lin Tianjian said.

"I know, I know." Lin Xiaoting was rather displeased by his father's brusqueness.

Lin Tianjian gritted his teeth helplessly. Ever since Lin Xiaoting reached Unity, his son had grown more and more unbridled.

"Big brother Ting, let me give you a toast." Mu Qingqing walked over alone, a smile on her face. Her gait was steady, not looking any heart-broken at all.

"You're looking better today," Lin Xiaoting responded, a small smile on his face.

"Big brother Ting's words made me open my eyes." Mu Qingqing came before him and glanced at his wine cup.

"Big brother Ting, let me fill it for you." She had a small wine flask in her hands, which she used to fill his cup to the brim. "Thank you for all your guidance and care all this time. I wish you a smooth journey and a house full of descendants."

Lin Xiaoting downed the wine in his cup. "Go back early to rest."

"Let's go," Lin Tianjian said, leading his family to pass by Mu Qingqing as quickly as possible, to continue toasting the guests. No one spared her another glance.

When Mu Qingqing turned around and saw Lin Xiaoting's back, she couldn't hide a mocking smile, a smile that only Li Tianming noticed. She then left the feast with Lin Xiaoxiao's support.

Li Tianming poured his wine on the ground and nodded at her departing figure. "Have a smooth journey."

That action was one used to send off the dead.

.....

Wei Jing didn't have to wait too long for the show to start. After one round, Wei Tianjian led Lin Xiaoting to the Lightning Seigneur.

The Vermilion Bird King and Prime Minister Qin, who had been about to leave, were stopped by Vice-Inspector Jin Yixuan. When he spoke up, the noisy Lightning Manor immediately fell silent. All of them looked at him, aware that the hidden undercurrents were about to break out!

"Vermilion Bird King, how much do you understand of our Heaven's Elysium's 'Sanctum Replacement Challenge?'" Jin Yixuan smiled, as he made what seemed to be idle talk.

"Lord Inspector, I've never heard of it before." The Vermilion Bird King shot Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong a look. They all knew that while these words were directed at the king, the true recipients were the two of them!

"This peninsula really is remote and ignorant. Since I'm in a good mood from the wine, I'll explain the Sanctum Replacement Challenge to the Vermilion Bird King. What say you?" Jin Yixuan said.

"I'll naturally be delighted if Lord Inspector wants to enlighten the ignorant me," the Vermilion Bird King said.

"Well, it's like this. You all are aware that my Heaven's Elysium established Heaven's Sanctums in every country, right? They'll be under the control of a clan, with authority over it passed down through the clan's inheritance. Then, they'll build a Flameyellow Scions Institute and enlighten the masses in the martial path."

"Having a clan control a sanctum is beneficial in ensuring the stability of succession. However, it runs the risk of the clan declining or becoming corrupt, leading to the local sanctum stagnating and therefore

ruining the youths of that country." He sipped at his cup. "Hence, my Heaven's Elysium came up with the Sanctum Replacement Challenge, which allows a new clan to replace an old clan by challenging them. This reinvigorates the sanctum and ensures its continuous prosperity. THAT is the Sanctum Replacement Challenge."

Jin Yixuan placed his wine cup down. "Of course, the challengers will be audited by Heaven's Elysium before a Replacement Decree is issued. Inspectors of Heaven's Elysium will then adjudicate and ensure fairness, allowing the declining family to step down and the new to grasp the right to foster the next generation!"

Jin Yixuan had said a lot, but each sentence had been engraved onto the hearts of the upper echelons of Vermilion Bird. The looks they gave Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong now were vastly different.

The Vermilion Bird King's expression flickered. "Heaven's Elysium really is worthy of admiration. Since it's so just, surely the old clan will have a chance to prove if it's declined."

"Naturally. We can't listen to hearsay for this! The new and old clans will prove themselves through a fair battle. Heaven's Elysium will not be biased to any one side!" Jin Yixuan said righteously.

However, the two vice-inspectors had stayed in Lightning Manor for a month. Who would believe in their so-called absolute impartiality?

[1] Green hair here is to imply wearing a green hat, which carries the connotation of being cuckolded in Chinese culture.

Chapter 159 - Lin Tianjian's Revenge!

For the upper echelons of Vermilion Bird, these actions were enough for them to know which clan would be rising to fame, and which one would suffer a humiliating defeat. The fact that Jin Yixuan hadn't said a single word to Mu Yang was enough evidence to suggest that the Wei Clan was doomed!

For the rest of them, what was more important now was how to protect themselves from being affected by this battle, and the first step in doing so was choosing the right side. Within moments, even more people had moved away from the isolated Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong. Some even glanced at Li Tianming and Wei Jing, a malevolent glint in their eyes, a clear signal of those gloating over their downfall.

Clearly, the inspectors themselves were leading the Yueling Clan to challenge the Wei Clan. Even though it was apparently a simple replacement, putting up the Wei Clan by the roots after the deed was done was not impossible.

At such a crucial moment, only the Occult Athenaeum held their ground, as they stood by the king's side, led by Prime Minister Qin.

"Vermilion Bird King, as the ruler of this land, surely it's your responsibility to make sure that the nation's younger generation can flourish and the country will prosper, right?" Song Yixue asked with a smile.

"It is naturally my role," The king, Jiang Cheng, replied.

“Not only is it your responsibility, but you are also in a position that the citizens of Vermilion Bird can trust. Therefore, we invite you to invigilate this challenge together, and validate this battle in front of the rest of the nation. Will you accept this role?” Song Yixue continued asking.

Many gasped when they heard the vice-inspector say that. The royal clan, who was led by Jiang Cheng himself, was the only one who could have supported the Wei Clan. They had been on good terms for many years, as the two strongest clans looking over Vermilion Bird, with one ruling the country while the other raised future talents.

If the royal clan couldn't help the Wei Clan, that meant that neither the Occult Athenaeum or the palace in general could. Bringing the king to their side effectively forced the entire nation to give up on the Wei Clan, turning the Sanctum Replacement Challenge into a spear that was poised to plunge through the Wei Clan's throat.

“If it's the inspectors' request, it will be my honour to invigilate this event. Is there a family that has received the replacement decree and is ready to challenge the Wei Clan?” As much as he didn't want to, the king couldn't possibly reject the inspectors. It was obvious that they were using him to validate this challenge and convince the masses that it was a fair contest. If not, with the current rumours about how the inspectors have been staying in the Lightning Manor, together with the Yueling Clan, many were sure to question its credibility.

That was the main reason they needed the king to become an invigilator. To force him to take their side, and also to use his power and reputation to silence the rest of Vermilion Bird!

Once the Vermilion Bird King was done, many turned to look at Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong again. They were completely isolated now, and what used to be looks of respect and envy were now looks of pity and gloating.

“We know the perfect clan for that. The Yueling Clan has over a thousand years of history in Torch Dragon. They are a well-established clan with talents across the clan, and Heaven's Elysium has recognized their morality and their capability to bear the Sanctum Replacement Decree. As for the Wei Clan, they have occupied the Sanctum for a thousand years without trying to improve, and amongst their descendants, they couldn't even find someone who can take over as the next potentate. Therefore, the Elysium questions their capability to continue ruling the Sanctum.”

“Thus! It is our decision to let the Yueling Clan challenge the Wei Clan. No matter which side emerges victorious, the Vermilion Bird Nation will benefit. If the Yueling Clan wins, a new family will control the Sanctum and bring it to greater heights. If they lose, it will serve as a reminder for the Wei Clan to keep on their toes and regain the trust of the Elysium!” Song Yixue said solemnly, her voice echoing inside the hall.

“Wei Tianxiong, as the son of the potentate, you couldn't earn the right to inherit the position from your father, and your descendants are incapable of being the future potentate's disciple too. For that, we question the Wei Clan's ability. Are my words justified?” As expected, the vice-inspectors had targeted the Wei Clan directly. Instead of asking Mu Yang, they targeted the query at Wei Tianxiong, striking the deepest regret in his heart!

From the moment Song Yixue started talking, Wei Tianxiong's face had turned dark. It was no different from shaming him publicly! But he couldn't defend himself, not just because he was facing the inspectors from Heaven's Elysium, but also because what they said was a well-known fact.

To appoint Mu Yang as the new potentate was Wei Tiancang's own decision, and the same could be said for not letting Mu Yang accept Wei Guohao to be his disciple. But Wei Tiancang couldn't imagine that his own strict standards were instead used against himself by the inspectors as evidence that the Wei Clan was deteriorating. Wei Tiancang had heard of this challenge in passing, never expecting it to be used against his clan.

"Yes, Lord Inspectors. You are right." Wei Tianxiong clenched his fists.

"Wei Tianxiong, we are merely stating facts and we have nothing against you, so you don't need to hate us. It is a challenge, so naturally the Wei Clan is given the chance to defend their honour! We encourage the Yueling Clan to fight for the position, but at the same time, we also support the Wei Clan in defending their title!" Jin Yixuan said.

"Inspectors, may I know what are the exact rules to the challenge?" Mu Yang knew that Wei Tianxiong was not in a stable state, so he took over the conversation. The enemies have come prepared to rid the Wei Clan and bring the Yueling Clan to power, so grumbling about it would do them no good. The smarter approach was to ask for the rules, and prepare for battle! That was the Wei Clan's only chance!

As Wei Tiancang had speculated, the inspectors had already planned it beforehand, determined to bring down the Wei Clan no matter what. If not, why would they have spent so long in Lightning Manor? If they could even rig the Abyssal Trials to let Yueling Ji win, then there was surely no point in expecting reason and logic from them.

No matter what, it was certain that the Sanctum Replacement Challenge was not going to be a fair fight. The only thing that the Wei Clan could do now was to seek out their slim chance of survival in this lopsided fight. Mu Yang had that all figured out as he looked at the smiling Jin Yixuan, who was busily putting up a good show to act as a fair judge.

"The Sanctum Replacement Challenge is a challenge between two clans, and a contest of their strength. There are three rounds to it — the battles between the older generations, current generations, and the younger generations respectively. This way, we'll have a fair assessment of a clan's foundation, current strength and future potential," Jin Yixuan replied. "The rules are simple. The two families will each send out a representative into the arena. Whoever they send out, if defeated, will be swapped out, until there is no one else who can replace them."

That was very straightforward indeed. Basically, the battle would end when the clan runs out of beastmasters in a particular generation.

"Winning in one round nets that clan one point. Whichever clan that wins two points first will emerge victorious!"

This way, Wei Tiancang and Wei Qing would be pitched against Yueling Hong, Wei Tianxiong and Wei Zikun against Yueling Xiao, Li Tianming and Wei Guohao against Yueling Ji. If either side has a superstar in one generation that could suppress everyone in the opposing clan, getting the point was a given.

“Sir inspector, as the future potentate of the Wei Manor and the disciple of Wei Tiancang, am I qualified to take part in the challenge?” Mu Yang questioned in a low tone.

Everyone looked at the inspectors nervously. Mu Yang was definitely the top three in his generation, perhaps even the top! He was Wei Tiancang’s prided disciple, and first place in the Heavenly Leaderboard back then. Lin Tianjian, Sage Xing and Sage Chen had all lost to him before.

Reasonably thinking, the vice-inspectors should not give him the chance to participate in this challenge. But in actual fact, Jin Yixuan and Song Yixue had already anticipated this question. However, they had already fixed the rules once to benefit the Yueling Clan, and they weren’t going to change it again just to bar Mu Yang from taking part.

In addition, Lin Tianjian wanted to find out whether the Mu Yang that had crushed him years ago could still defeat him now. This was also his revenge, which was why he told the inspectors to not change the rules for Mu Yang.

Simply put, they were overconfident and too arrogant.

Jin Yixuan waved a hand casually. “Of course. According to the rules, the potentate’s disciples do have the right to participate in the battle. Mu Yang, I’ve heard that you are quite capable, so do put up a good show.”

The onlookers gasped in wonder. The inspectors must be really confident of the Yueling Clan’s strength to say this! If the two clans were to fight, could Yueling Xiao really match Mu Yang?

Just then, the Tempest Marshal Lin Tianjian cut in. “Mu Yang, it’s been a while since we last fought, and I can proudly say that I have improved. This time, I’m afraid you will be handing over the title as the number one in Ignispolis.”

His words were like a thunderclap, and everyone looked at him. This was clearly between the Yueling Clan and the Wei Clan, so what did Lin Tianjian of the Lightning Manor have to do with it?

“Are you allowed to fight in this challenge?” Wei Tianxiong voiced out the question everyone present had.

“Of course. After the wedding today, the Yueling Clan and the Lightning Manor have become one family, so we are considered as their relatives,” Lin Tianjian sneered.

“Inspectors, is this true?” Mu Yang frowned. That explained where Yueling Clan got their confidence from. This wedding was all planned beforehand too, and this was why the challenge was announced after the wedding!

“Naturally. According to the rules of Heaven’s Elysium, the power of a ruling clan’s relatives will also count, so each side gets to appoint a branch of their relatives to take part in the battle,” Song Yixue explained.

“Every member of the Lightning Manor shall battle alongside the Yueling Clan! Similarly, the Wei Clan can appoint a family as well, as per the Elysium’s rules.” The Lightning Seigneur, Lin Zhao, bared his teeth. They could overwhelm the Wei Clan with numbers, since the notable members in their current generation were only Mu Yang and Wei Tianxiong.

This was the truth behind this challenge. It wasn't a battle between the Yueling Clan and the Wei Clan. It was a raid, with the Yueling Clan and the Lightning Manor ganging up on the Wei Clan!

Chapter 160 - The Girl In White

While the Yueling Clan had an edge in all three generations, their strongest card was still their younger generation. They had Yueling Ji and Lin Xiaoting, who were both at Unity; that point was practically theirs.

The challenge wasn't a battle of strength, but more of a battle of numbers. Having two clans on one side of the battle was enough to tilt the balance of battle. No matter how strong Mu Yang was, Lightning Manor could keep sending fighters until he got exhausted. Lin Tianjian himself had five brothers, each of them at Heavenly Will and a decent threat in their own right.

In comparison, the Wei Clan was always a clan that remained low-key, and as a result they fell short when it came to numbers. Even if they could find relatives that could fight alongside them, it would be a fruitless endeavour. Firstly, no one would dare to go against the inspectors, since it seemed that the Elysium wanted the Wei Clan dead. Secondly, the members of the Lightning Manor were experts in their own right; few could stand against them.

The only faction that could possibly defeat the Lightning Manor was the Vermilion Bird Royal Clan, but the first reason was enough to deter them. Were they going to risk their own survival to save the Wei Clan? Li Tianming looked at the king, whose head was still lowered in front of the inspectors. At one glance, he knew that it was impossible. It was understandable, really, since the risk was too much for the royal clan. A single mistake would end the royal clan's millennium-long reign, what with the Lightning Manor's obvious ambitions. For the latter, trying for the throne was now not off the table.

As the only reliable person in the younger generation of the Wei Clan, Li Tianming knew that his battlefield had been determined. Even if that meant he had to fight against both Yueling Ji and Lin Xiaoting, he would go out with a bang, if need be.

He didn't exactly have the most pleasant time with the Wei Clan, and he also fought quite a number of times with the youths from the family. But that didn't mean he would give up on them. Li Tianming would never forget that it was Wei Tiancang that saved Wei Jing, curing her of the illness that tortured her for twenty years. He wouldn't forget his grandfather's debilitated state that lasted a whole month, putting them in a bad place for the upcoming challenge. Most importantly, the Wei Manor was Wei Jing's home for twenty years, where she spent her youth.

Of course, there was Mu Yang who had helped him consistently for the past few months. And for this challenge, there was no doubt that Mu Yang will be on the frontlines, fighting for his mentor's honour. Li Tianming would gladly accept the challenge just for the sake of Mu Yang and Wei Jing, not to mention that this was the best chance for him to duel with Lin Xiaoting. This was the chance that he had been waiting for three years for!

"Lin Xiaoting, thank you for giving me this opportunity. I'll make sure not to disappoint!" Li Tianming's eyes burned with fury.

Three years, and the chance had finally presented itself. It wasn't a chance to flaunt his ability, but a chance to announce to the world that Li Tianming was back to reclaim what he had lost! He would make

them pay for stealing his Saintbeast War-Soul and taking Midas' life! This was a blood debt that could only be repaid by the killer's blood!

Li Tianming smiled at the thought. However, Wei Jing wore quite a different expression, her brows knitted together as she appeared deep in thought.

"How despicable! Earlier on, Lin Tianjian asked me how much your grandpa had deteriorated. Because he exhausted himself to save me, he can at most fight at sixty percent of his normal strength!"

For the Wei Clan's senior generation, there was only Wei Tiancang himself and Wei Qing. In comparison, the Lightning Seigneur had three brothers, and an extra Yueling Hong. If Wei Tiancang was in his best state, victory was still possible, considering that he too used to be the strongest person in Vermilion Bird. But Lightning Manor had seized the opportunity when he was weakened to strike.

Wei Jing lived, but at the expense of Wei Tiancang's power. Who would have expected that? Even if Wei Tiancang did figure out their intentions towards the end, it was too late to react by then. Now what mattered was when the inspectors will set this challenge to be.

"From tomorrow onwards, the challenge will take place over the course of three days, with the order of the older generation, current generation and finally the younger generation. For the Yueling Clan and the Wei Clan, you have the night to prepare your strategies!" Jin Yixuan got up, wearing an expression of utter neutrality in the centre of attention. "The challenge will take place inside the Flameyellow Stadium of the Flameyellow Scions Institute! The battle will be open to the public throughout the three days, so those who are interested in reserving a good seat there might want to make a move soon."

The stadium was where the ranking test took place, capable of housing ten thousand people.

By setting the challenge to be tomorrow, they were clearly trying to exploit Wei Tiancang's weakness. The older generation would be the first to battle, and Wei Tiancang would get minimal rest before he faced the onslaught of both the Yueling Clan and the Lightning Manor.

Since the challenge was a grand event that was impossible to hide, the inspectors might as well open it up to all citizens. This way, the challenge would also be more formal and credible.

As Jin Yixuan made the announcement, many of the guests were ready to take their leave, planning to head over to the Flameyellow Stadium as soon as possible to occupy a good seat. The battle was tomorrow, and no one wanted to miss what could possibly be the most exciting event in Vermilion Bird's history.

While Wei Tianxiong was still petrified, Mu Yang had already risen to his feet.

"Ah, Vermilion Bird King, isn't it a beautiful night? Will you like to take the two of us on a tour around the capital?" The moment the ceremony ended, Jin Yixuan and Song Yixue appeared in front of the king, brilliant smiles on their faces.

"It'll be my honour. This way, please." The king forced out a smile. He didn't have the chance to help the Wei Clan even if he wanted to, and neither would Mu Yang get the opportunity to approach him for help.

The king was now one of the three invigilators for the challenge. Thus, he could only stand idly beside the two inspectors and watch Mu Yang leave. Even if the royal clan was on good terms with the Wei Clan, there was nothing he could do.

At another side of the hall, Sage Chen rose to his feet and walked towards Wei Jing.

“Brother, don’t.” Sage Xing held him back.

“Brother?” Sage Chen gritted his teeth. They were brothers after all.

“The two of us started from scratch, and how much blood and sweat did we put in to form the Xing & Chen Merchantry? Think of all those who depend on us for a living, do you want to destroy everything?” Sage Xing’s voice trembled slightly as he asked.

Sage Chen took a deep breath. By the time he looked over again, Mu Yang, Wei Jing, Wei Tianxiong and Li Tianming had already left.

.....

The horse cart rattled as it travelled down the street of Ignispolis. Night had fallen, but the whole city was boiling with excitement.

“It’s over for us.” Wei Tianxiong’s head was lowered, his fist clenched so hard that the nails were biting into his skin.

No one replied to him. Mu Yang opened the window and looked out at the boiling Ignispolis.

“Everybody dies in the end, but my master was the one that gave my life meaning. If it’s needed, I am willing to defend the family with all that I have, even if it costs me my life.” The determination in his eyes was incomparable to Wei Tianxiong’s. Beside him, Wei Jing was crying, her face buried in her hands.

“I shouldn’t have lived. If I had endured Lifesbane a while longer, father wouldn’t have to fight in such a state. With his age...”

Li Tianming could feel a fire burning in his chest when he saw her tears rolling down her cheeks. Gently, he used the corner of his sleeves to wipe the beads off her face.

“Don’t worry, your son will get rid of every last dog from the Lightning Manor. If they as much as touched anyone in the Wei Clan, I will make sure they regret it.”

It was bound to be a sleepless night in the Wei Manor. They would discuss, they would panic, and they would struggle to find their chance of survival. Because of that, Li Tianming chose to alight at the gate of the Sanctum, not returning to the manor. He was not interested in seeing them succumb to their so-called fate.

If he had the time to listen to their howling and crying, Li Tianming would rather spend it to understand that ultimate move, Apocalyptic-Will!

.....

In the bridal chamber, Lightning Manor. Lin Xiaoting was slightly dizzy from all the drinks that he had, as he opened the door. He was immediately greeted by his bride, dressed in red and sitting at the edge of the bed. Her face was a faint red, tickling the desire in Lin Xiaoting's heart.

"How bold of you to make me wait for so long. Don't keep me waiting next time." Yueling Ji pouted.

"Darling, it's my bad." Lin Xiaoting knew she wasn't a woman whom he could fully control like Mu Qingqing.

"I promise that this is the only time in my life I will keep you waiting. It is a happy day after all, and all my relatives and friends are too enthusiastic," he explained.

"Hm, then I shall forgive you this time," Yueling Ji replied, twiddling her fingers. She too was a young lady that just got married, and it was her first time as well.

What would be happening next was clear as daylight. Lin Xiaoting had imagined this night many times already, and he could barely wait anymore.

To practice his 'Heavenly Yang-Thunder Manual', Lin Xiaoting had refrained from the promiscuous lifestyle that many other youths his age had. For twenty years, he kept his distance from women, but when he finally entered Unity, his girlfriend of three years was destroyed and crippled.

And now, faced with the talented beauty who even had the support of the vice-inspectors, there would be no better time and target for him to grow from a boy to a man. He reached for her red veil, revealing a peachy face that was enough to make his blood boil.

"Hubby..." Her voice was trembling slightly. Her bashful tone was enough to turn any man into a beast. Lin Xiaoting's eyes burned with desire, like a wolf ready to enjoy its feast!

"Don't blame me if you can't get out of bed tomorrow." Lin Xiaoting smirked.

"No worries, we are not battling tomorrow." Yueling Ji said with burning cheeks. Like Lin Xiaoting, she could wait no longer!

Just as he reached for her dress, Lin Xiaoting felt a sharp pain stabbed through his abdomen. With an ear-splitting shriek, Lin Xiaoting fell to the floor. His face was paler than paper, and his hands were cupped in between his legs as he screamed and writhed non-stop.

"Hubby!" Shocked, Yueling Ji watched Lin Xiaoting from atop the bed.

"AHH!" Lin Xiaoting's face was turning from white to blue, as beads of sweat formed on his forehead. His eyes were going in and out of focus from the sheer pain, his only recourse rolling around the floor.

"Husband, what's going on? What..." Yueling Ji jumped off the bed. Something was very wrong!

"Someone! Call someone!" Lin Xiaoting's shrieks echoed in the chamber.

There was no need to call anyone, as the screams were enough to draw Lin Tianjian and his wife's attention. What could possibly happen on the first night of marriage that can result in such a scream? Without a second thought, the two burst into the room, just to find Lin Xiaoting rolling on the ground in pain.

Lin Tianjian stepped up, feeling his son's body. His face blanched a moment later, as he took an involuntary step back!

"Gelding Blight! Yueling Ji, you fed my son the Gelding Blight!" Lin Tianjian's eyes widened, nearly fainting in shock.

"Gelding Blight?!" Lin Xiaoting's mother let out a shriek before collapsing to the floor in a dead faint.

"I didn't!" Yueling Ji was transfixed by that name. The Gelding Blight was a venom that made one heirless for the rest of his life! While it was harmless to the body, Lin Xiaoting was now impotent, forever!

The meaning behind that was obvious for Yueling Ji. Unless she made a divorce, happiness after marriage was now a pipe dream.

"I will kill you!" Lin Tianjian was now half-mad by the horror of his son's impotence.

"Father, it's not her..." Amidst his shrieking and groaning, Lin Xiaoting's eyes suddenly opened wide. A particular figure appeared in his mind, a figure that made him tremble uncontrollably.

During the toast, it was her who filled his cup to the brim, and it was him who finished the cup! That figure usually dressed in white was now like a demon, bringing chills to every corner of his body! That woman...

Three years ago, she approached him with news of a Saintbeast War-Soul, asking him to cripple her boyfriend. When Li Tianming stumbled away on that stormy night with Midas' corpse, she was there cuddled in his chest.

Now, three years later, she poured the Gelding Blight into his cup.

And wished him a happy future with many children.

"Find Mu Qingqing, I want her DEAD!"

That night, the entire Lightning Manor trembled at Lin Xiaoting's roar.

.....

At the same time, at the millennium-old stone gate outside the Flameyellow Scions Institute, a coil of rope looped over the gate.

Shortly afterwards, a girl in white put her head in the noose, before she took one final leap.

And ended her own life.