

## The Ages 1631

### Chapter 1631 - Peak Geniuses of the Stars

"Astralium Seeking? Is there a benefit to participating?" Tianming asked. It sounded like the rules of the fourth level were different from those of the third. Perhaps it was a treasure hunt of sorts.

"The Astralium Seeking is the event that'll help you progress to the fifth level. Its venue is based on an actual astralcrypt! Winning the event not only means that you'll advance to the fifth level, but you'll also be heavily rewarded. This time around, the reward is most highly anticipated, as it's celebrating the hundredth year of the events," said the wondersky fairy.

"Alright, then I'll join," he said without thinking too much. He had wanted to go to the fourth level to fight other youths and gain more support from the Violetcloud Imperium for his bid for the other manna imperius anyway. As for how the competition would take place, he didn't really care.

"The event starts in thirteen days and will last for fifteen. Before you are 'killed' or the event ends, you won't be allowed to leave the Astraldome, or it will count as a rule violation. The penalty for that is being banned from the Astraldome for half a year. Are you certain that you'll be free during that time and that you have an environment that guarantees you won't be disrupted during the event?"

Everyone outside could also hear what Tianming was hearing. The upcoming Astralium Seeking event seemed to hype up the audience even more. Within Violetpeak, he was surrounded with a lot of protection. Nobody would disrupt him during such a crucial moment, either. He wouldn't have to spend more than a month in the Astraldome during the event, and he could leave if he lost anyway, so it wasn't a big deal.

"I'm fine with it."

He could almost feel the excitement of the Violetglorians, even though his caelum was far away in the Astraldome. At this point, everything Tianming did was creating new history for their star.

"Make sure to enter the lobby before thirteen days pass. You'll have to form a party," the wondersky fairy said before it began to vanish. The lights around Tianming turned brighter as his caelum was transported ahead.

"Violetglory Disciple Li Tianming, based on the age of your caelum, you'll be sent to the absolute lobby of the fourth level. Notice: as long as you don't reveal it yourself, the wondersky realm will not release any information about you, apart from your name and origin."

Tianming was quite surprised at what he had heard. "Absolute lobby?" It sounded like there were other lobbies as well. Perhaps the younger ones that showed more potential were sent to higher-tier lobbies. That would expose Tianming's age range to the rest of the astralscape, but he had consented to participating in the match regardless. While people wouldn't be able to figure out his exact age, at the very least, they would no longer consider him a normal person that only made it that far in the Astraldome because of his age advantage.

"Well, I guess my age reveal can't really be helped." The wondersky fairy had said as much beforehand. But since he had decided to join, he couldn't back out. Otherwise, he would be banned for half a year.

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The absolute lobby of the fourth level was quite dark and filled with green fog, though visibility was still much better than on the first two levels. The ground beneath him was firm. Tianming saw that he was standing on a huge, green platform. Looking around, he couldn't see an end to it.

"There's quite a lot of people here." A cursory count showed him one or two thousand people. The people in this lobby were no doubt powerful and young. He saw that most of them were on the level of Xiao, though most were somewhat older than him.

"There's actually more than a thousand people on this level?" It felt quite staggering to contemplate. Even though they were mostly older than Xiao, it wasn't by much. He felt like he was standing with countless talented geniuses like Ye Chen.

"How many lobbies are there, anyway?" As he didn't know anybody there, there wasn't anyone he could really talk to. So he headed toward the edge of the platform. Eventually, he caught sight of another lobby. It was another platform in the distance that seemed tens of times larger than the one he was standing on and there were hundreds of thousands of people on it. "There's even more over there."

It was a stark difference in number. Tianming didn't see any other lobbies aside from those two.

"So there's only two, eh...." He concluded that the other lobby was for disciples between the ages of thirty to a hundred. The absolute lobby, on the other hand, was for those under thirty, hence the disparity in numbers! It wasn't hard for a ninth-level solarian to make it into the Astraldome, but it was much harder for someone under thirty to reach this level. It wasn't surprising that fewer than two thousand across the wondersky realms in the vast astralscape made the cut in that category.

Those under thirty were considered absolute geniuses and numbered less than two thousand. The others were considered normal class, and there were hundreds of thousands of them. It was also said that the two classes wouldn't be pitted against each other. Those that were assigned to the absolute class were automatically assumed to be under thirty, but that didn't count as a violation of the privacy policy of the wondersky realm.

"If I meet Xiao here, he'd be dumbfounded for sure. It's a shame he was already eliminated by me and won't be able to join this round's Astralium Seeking. No wonder he was so anxious to get to the fourth level...." Tianming, on the other hand, had joined in Xiao's stead. He turned and looked at the other young geniuses. Each of them had a different aura and physical appearance; there were people from all sorts of races.

"Only the wondersky realm can have so many miraculous folk gathered in one place. Perhaps not even the top disciples among many heliacal-class worlds can make it here...."

Tianming figured that the minimum cultivation level of those here was probably the second level of the Solar stage. For someone to achieve that under thirty, not even Princess Shen Yu or Li Haochen could match up to that. These opponents only sharpened his fighting spirit. He thought he would be facing enemies around the age of eighty, but it appeared that he had been filtered out and sent to the elite group of youths.

"Now, the only question is what the difference is between the two lobbies for the event...." He wanted to learn more, and he had thirteen days until the event started. "Didn't the wondersky fairy say that I had to form a party?"

It looked like most people had already formed their own groups. Clearly, many of them were already acquainted with each other—they probably all came from the Mysterium Cluster. That was troubling for him, as he knew nobody there.

"Most of the parties have five members... so I guess that's the required number? Guess I'll have to look around." He blended in with the crowd and searched for people to join up with.

### **Chapter 1632 - Chalk Draconians**

Forming a party was quite awkward for Tianming. He was a newcomer to the scene, after all, so he knew nobody there. He had only spent a total of three or four months to reach the fourth level, and was even sent to the absolute lobby because of his age. The entire time, he had been acting alone.

The absolute lobby had been open for quite a while, and the others had had the time to demonstrate their abilities and network around. Most parties already had five members and there were few that had any space left. Tianming had tried to approach them, only to be refused before he even said a word. They claimed they were waiting for others.

In fact, quite a lot of parties were already full. According to Yin Chen, the lobby had been open for the past seventeen days, so most parties were already rather well formed. It was also crucial for them to practice as a team, so letting in new members this late in the game could be a disadvantage.

"If only Ling'er, Feng, Qingyu, and Xiaoxiao could come. That would make for five people. Even though their abilities aren't equal to mine, their teamwork is great and I just have to carry them."

Lingfeng was incredibly proficient at soul attacks, Xiaoxiao had mastered the Dragonblood Desecration and could fight well at range, Feiling had recently caught up with the rest and could use her finger abilities as support alongside Xian Xian, while Qingyu basically fought similarly to Tianming. She could take up the main attacker role with him. Tianming had seen her totems, and they were quite powerful too. As heavenly being totems, they were different from Tianming's sword totems. Not to mention, she had a kunpeng lifebound beast, meaning she inherently had more potential than normal nonabanes.

Then again, that was all still speculation. There was no way they could come here in a short thirteen days. Even gaining the right for Tianming to go to the Astraldome had taken a long time.

"There is... a target... over here," Yin Chen suggested. There was a party of four that needed one more—just perfect! Tianming would be happy to even get a party at all, so he wasn't picky. He headed in their direction, intending to feign coincidence. Soon, they were close. Tianming saw them coming his way as well. He didn't expect that the one who first met his eyes would be a girl. Based on the way she walked, he had assumed that she was a guy.

While she was dashing and well put together, she wasn't burly like Princess Feifei from Longbeard; instead, she had pretty and refined features. No doubt, she could pull off the stunning beauty look with a simple makeover, though Tianming had to admit that her boyish way of dress suited her the best. She had much shorter hair than Tianming that glistened silver and was clad in a tight-fitting gray outfit that

showed off her impressive figure. Overall, her silhouette was clean and striking. Her white eyes were filled with stars, a sign that she was a specter. That was why her physique seemed powerful and fierce. He even saw white dragon scales on her neck, the back of her arms, and her waist. The confidence she radiated, coupled with her heroic aura, gave him the impression that she had quite a high status.

Her name label read 'Whitechalk Star Disciple Bai Feng'. Even her name was simple and short like a man's. Coupled with her outlook, that made for quite an impression. Such an aura had a great deal to do with one's status, identity, and talent. People like Bai Feng, who others would remember for the rest of their lives, were quite common among the group here. There was a dragon-like aura about Bai Feng that seemed sacred and inviolable. It seemed that her line of specters also had dragon blood.

As they were looking for another member as well, they immediately spotted Tianming. Bai Feng stopped and asked, "Friend, are you alone?"

"Yes, all by myself with no acquaintances. Perfect for a party that needs one more," Tianming said with a smile.

Surprised, Bai Feng said, "How'd you know we needed one more?"

"It was a random guess."

"Huh... well, you aren't wrong. Your name's Tianming.... Heaven's fate, eh? Almost as if fate brought us together. Want to join us?"

"Sure thing! Though, would you have not invited me to join if I was named something else?"

"Haha, what a lame joke..." she chuckled, her eyebrows twitching a bit.

"It made you laugh, didn't it? Surely that did something."

"You're a smooth talker, but I ain't buying it. Let me make it clear out front. I don't like guys, so don't try to flirt with me or unnecessarily draw my attention, alright?" She patted his shoulder in a friendly manner and to test him.

"Self-conscious much? Don't worry, you aren't quite my type."

Though she got burned, she didn't mind it too much. She was quite happy that Tianming didn't back off. For his part, Tianming also found her quite interesting. He hadn't yet met a woman who would publicly proclaim that they liked women.

"Very well. A team without ulterior motives is a powerful team," Bai Feng said. When a group had many eligible bachelors and bachelorettes, the romantic tension could cause some friction. "Come, I'll take you to the others," she said, tucking her short hair behind her ear.

"The other three won't reject me, will they?"

"No. I'm the leader of the party, so they do what I say. Not to mention, many other groups already had their pick, even some weaker ones. We came late, so we're lucky to even find someone."

"In other words, I'll be fine if I more or less match your standard."

"Yeah. Granted, if you're much better than us, I'll fall asleep smiling tonight."

Tianming found that she was a straightforward and direct person who spoke of anything that came to mind. It was quite a masculine trait, and she seemed to be rather firm minded too. People like her were easy to get along with. Tianming believed he was quite lucky to have encountered her.

The two of them headed toward the center of the lobby where her party was waiting. After they met, they would have to use the remaining time to build up their teamwork and ensure they had a higher chance of winning. On the way, Tianming saw many other parties already making plans for their formations and combinations.

### **Chapter 1633 - Faceless Humans**

Tianming and Bai Feng spoke quite a bit along the way.

"The Violetglory Star? I haven't heard of it before. Is it a skypiercer class or heliacal class?" Bai Feng asked as she walked.

"Heliacal," Tianming said.

"Is it in the Mysterium Cluster?" They would have to get to know each other well to properly fight together, so she grilled him with questions.

"Nope."

"Then is it far away from the cluster?"

"I'm not sure myself. I haven't left it before, and there aren't any nova source worlds nearby."

"Oh, I see." She looked at him with a different expression than before. "For a heliacal-class world to produce someone who's able to come here under the age of thirty is already really impressive. It looks like you've had a harder time than most others to make it here. You must be a legendary figure in your world, right?"

"I suppose so, haha."

"Be honest with me—are you some superstar in your territory? How many harems do you have?" she asked, raising her brows.

"Ahem, I'm not that kind of person," Tianming said with a serious look.

"No need to be humble. I've seen countless geniuses like you that're only in their twenties, but have tens of thousands of the most beautiful women of their nova source world."

"Why are you so interested in that anyway?"

"I'm envious. You guys are stealing pretty girls from my pool of potential partners."

"Haha!"

"Hey, even though I respect you, this is a fair place. There's far too many exceptional people in the Mysterium Cluster alone, especially the three deific-class worlds. I heard that the strongest of them are all assembled here in this lobby," she said with a respectful expression.

"Is that so..." Tianming still had many questions, so he asked them to his new friend. "Sister Feng, what class of world does the Whitechalk Star belong to?"

"Skypiercer class." In other words, the intermediate class. No wonder they were that formidable.

"Is it in the Mysterium Cluster?"

"No, but it isn't far away. Otherwise, my party would've been full a long time ago. Most of those from the Mysterium Cluster already came with fully formed parties. They're the mainstream and they have many connections," she said, shaking her head at her disadvantageous position.

"I see."

"Ours is one of the largest worlds outside of the Mysterium Cluster, but we chalk draconians look to the faceless specters of the Skyway Tristar as our ruler."

"What happens if you don't want to be ruled by them?"

Shocked, Bai Feng suddenly laughed and said, "Friend, don't put me in a tough position. Those of my world are listening to us, you know."

"I see. Apologies for the carelessness." In a way, Bai Feng's response had already answered his question. They were clearly dominated by the faceless specters and had no way of breaking free. Changing the topic, he asked, "How far away are you from the Mysterium Cluster?"

"About three months by divine astralship."

"I see." Tianming didn't have a good grasp of distances in the astralscape. The fact that it hadn't taken much time at all when he went from Orderia to the Violetglory Star showed that it wasn't as far as he had imagined. If a three-month voyage was considered short, then the astralscape was far wider than he had imagined. I wonder how far I am from the Mysterium Cluster.... That was a question that nobody could answer.

Still curious about the Mysterium Cluster, he pressed on with his questions. "Are you familiar with the deific-class worlds?"

"Of course. Few, if any, people here don't know about them."

"Then tell me more about them. I've only just come here not too long ago and fought my way to the fourth level without spending much time learning about the other worlds."

"I see. It's no wonder you don't know so many things. Fine, I'll be the knowledgeable elder sister and tell you what you want to know." She had her own dashing charm that, when coupled with her feminine beauty, made her even more appealing. "The deific-class worlds rule the entire Mysterium Cluster. They're also the rulers of the astralscape of order. The three Skyway stars form a triangle at the center of the Mysterium Cluster, and the size of the Skyway Bistar and Skyway Tristar is two hundred times that of normal heliacal-class worlds. The Skyway Monostar, on the other hand, is also called the Skyway Imperial Star and is three hundred times as large as heliacal-class worlds." Bai Feng's expression was filled with both respect and dread for those worlds.

"Have you personally seen those worlds?" Tianming asked.

"Of course not! How could I? Even though I've gone to the Mysterium Cluster, our divine astralship doesn't have clearance to fly to the core sector. However, my dad has gone to the Skyway Tristar before to pay tribute to the faceless specters."

"Are the faceless specters that impressive?" Tianming asked.

"You really...." She felt a headache coming.

"What's wrong?"

"The moment you asked that question, there's no doubt that my family back home will be laughing at me for joining up with such an ignorant backwater hick... I hope you aren't unhappy with what I just called you."

"It doesn't bother me. It's a fact that I don't know much. I'm just glad you're so patient and understanding."

"Very well. In my personal opinion, the faceless specters are the strongest specters in the astralscape!" It seemed that the skywolf royals or others with fiendgod bloodlines were still weaker than faceless specters.

"Impressive. By the way, they're one of the mysterians, right? What about the mysterians on the other two worlds?"

"They're faceless humans."

"Huh?" What did that mean? Were both the humans and specters of the three deific-class worlds faceless?

She explained, "Well, faceless specters aren't their official designation. Across the three worlds, they're all officially labeled mysterians. However, mysterians include both specters and humans that share the unique faceless trait. The faceless humans on the Skyway Monostar are beastmasters, while those on the Skyway Bistar are totemancers. The Skyway Tristar belongs to the faceless specters."

In other words, each star was dominated by one type of cultivation, and all of them were mysterians who, like Xiao, didn't have faces. If the faceless specters were the strongest of the specters, then the faceless humans would be the strongest totemancers and beastmasters too. The puzzle pieces were being put together in Tianming's mind.

Those three deific-class worlds were surrounded by even more skypiercer-class worlds, and even further out were many more heliacal-class worlds, altogether forming a huge cluster of stars. He could only imagine how epic it was. "Impressive...."

"You don't have to feel too down. If you perform well, you'll have a chance to come here as well. Even though the mysterians don't take in geniuses from foreign worlds, the hundreds of skypiercer-class worlds in the cluster are more than willing to recruit talented people. Their worlds are plenty close to the core of the cluster too. The fact that you're a heliacal native among the others here already qualifies you for a place among those skypiercer-class worlds."

"I see, so I'll be scouted if I do well here."

"Of course. Apart from the aloof mysterians, every other faction will want powerful talent to grow their influence. I've been scouted before, but my world is already a skypiercer-class world. There's no need for me to move closer to the core. Even though there's benefits to doing so, I might have to leave my home and turn my back on my people, so forget it. I can interact with those from the core through the Astraldome anyway, so it isn't too bad."

Tianming nodded. It seemed like the Mysterium Cluster was rife with both opportunities and risks. The closer one was to the cluster, the closer they were to the divine wonderians. For now, Tianming didn't intend to head there. It was already enough trouble for him to build and maintain his influence where he was.

"How far is the cluster to distant worlds like mine, usually?"

"It's hard to say. Normally, it might take divine astralships a year or two, since the astralscape is so big. One time, a genius who won the Astralium Seeking had a reward shipped to him via divine astralship and it took ten years for it to reach his world."

Hearing that made Tianming more relieved. In other words, if I attract the attention of those in the Mysterium Cluster, whether good or bad, it would still take them at least a year or two to come to where I am. I can easily leave during that time if I want to. He could afford to be a little bolder now. "Oh, there's a reward for the Astralium Seeking too, eh?"

They slowed down as they talked, getting to know each other better.

### **Chapter 1634 - Grade Nine Grand Orient**

Subconsciously, Tianming treated her like he would one of the boys, and there was no longer a need to hold back. They were only one shoulder hug away from being best friends.

"Are you stupid? If there was no reward, why would so many people join this? Haven't you heard about how important this Astralium Seeking event is as you climbed up? Many top geniuses from the Mysterium Cluster intentionally didn't progress from the fourth level for this particular iteration of the event! Some even stayed here for a year or two," Bai Feng said.

"I'm asking now, aren't I? Senior, please enlighten this inexperienced junior," Tianming said.

"Fine! You really are a blank sheet of paper, albeit a rather cute one. With your looks, it'd be ideal if you were female!"

"Ahem...." Tianming felt a little shy about being called cute for the first time.

"Actually, the past events of the fourth level were also Astralium Seekings, but this time around, a special absolute lobby was set up to gather disciples under thirty who managed to reach the fourth level. We'll be competing with each other to see who stands on top! The ones in the top ten will be allowed to head to the fifth level and be heavily rewarded! The Astralium Seeking's venue is based on an actual astralcrypt, and we'll be able to obtain the actual treasures found in that very crypt in real life through the challenges!" Her eyes were filled with longing for the rewards.

"Will there be divine astralships that ship the rewards to us?" So far, Tianming had only obtained techniques and the like from the Astraldome, none of which were too useful for him. The Violetglory Star itself had many such techniques.

"The rewards of the top ten will be shipped to you from the Mysterium Cluster, yes. Naturally, that also comes with opportunities for you to be scouted and brought to the Mysterium Cluster. That way, you'd be doing your home star proud and might even be able to bring it protection and many other benefits from the larger factions."

"I see...." In other words, it would be like how the Azuresoul Palace was in the Xuanyuan Dragon Sect's sphere of influence. Anywhere with people and factions would see such complex interrelations between the hierarchy. That was the same from the smallest of towns to the largest of stars. The higher one went, the faster the water flowed downward.

Tianming pondered it and thought, "That's troubling. I don't really want to leave."

"Wow, someone's confident about winning already." Bai Feng didn't know how to react to his bold assumption.

"A little confidence never hurt anyone," Tianming said with an awkward chuckle. He didn't care too much for the treasures or rewards of the Astralium Seeking. All he needed to do was to prove himself to the imperium and be given the manna imperius.

At that moment, Bai Feng said in a more shaken voice, "Normally, there'll be competitions among the best geniuses on the fourth level from time to time. But the rewards for first place this time around is too alluring, so much so that it even drew the best of the best from the three Skyway Stars."

"What could be so tempting as to draw all of them in?"

"The strongest type of divine artifact the astralscape has ever known: a grade-nine divine artifact! Not even many sovereigns have such an artifact!"

"Holy shit!" That was far from the answer he expected. "Equipment that even most sovereigns don't possess?"

"That's right."

"Wow, just wow...." His expectations had once more been surpassed. Not even the Violetglory Star and Orderia had a single treasure of that caliber, yet they were going to have a chance to get one at the fourth level of the Tranquil Battlefield.

"It's crazy, right? Someone at the ninth level even got awarded a whole divine astralship. That's even crazier. Perhaps only a divine astralship could possibly rival a grade-nine artifact in terms of value."

"Amazing." Tianming shot her a thumbs-up, all the while reminding himself of how lucky he was to have the Ninedragon Imperial Tomb.

"Even so, no amount of desire will do anything. That treasure is something the mysterians provide, and this is nothing but a charade for them to pass it on to their descendants. We're just here to join the festivities. Every time there's such an event, it's no surprise that the top ten spots will all be mysterians, so it's highly unlikely that divine astralships will even be needed to ship the rewards in the first place."

"I guess that makes sense." It would be quite wasteful to spend a few years just to send a reward. The fact that they even offered it up as a reward in the first place probably meant that the expensive and time-consuming shipping wouldn't be necessary, since the victors would certainly be from those deific-class worlds. The rest were only there to give the event an air of legitimacy and to spread the word. Even so, that didn't stop people from dreaming they stood a chance to rise to the top.

"What's the weapon called?" Tianming asked.

"I think it's called the Grand-Orient Sword," Bai Feng said.

Tianming felt like he was slapped in the face and stopped walking. "Did I mishear that?"

"The Grand-Orient Sword? It's a grade-nine divine artifact that they dug out from the actual astralcrypt at Astralium. Thanks to its ancient history, it's also called a primordial artifact. It's really terrifying. Apparently, it's able to easily crush any grade-eight divine artifact and is considered the king of all swords in the astralscape. It ranks pretty high among grade-nine divine artifacts, or so they say," Bai Feng said with resigned yearning.

Her resignation came from the fact that she knew it was meant to be obtained by the mysterians alone. The event was held so that the talented young descendants of the elites would prove themselves with their own abilities. Only the most worthy among them would be allowed to gain that treasure. Those who weren't in the Mysterium Cluster would never stand a chance in the first place. In fact, all ten of the best rewards were prepared specifically for the chosen ones.

"Have you seen the Grand-Orient Sword?" Tianming asked.

"Of course not. An artifact of that grade is kept hidden, even in a deific-class world. Only a few have had the luxury of seeing it. Since its discovery, the Grand-Orient Sword has been sealed and is only being brought out now to be handed down to a lucky young mysterian. It's said that the mysterians only recently managed to break its seal."

"I see." Tianming had two main concerns, the first being the identical name to his sword, and the second being whether Astralium was connected to the Primordial God-Emperor. Perhaps that grade-nine Grand-Orient Sword was even a part of his sword. If it is, that means even if I'm lucky enough to win it, I'll be in grave danger. There's no way I'll be able to stay where I am after obtaining it. Bai Feng also said that the mysterians have no precedent of taking in foreign blood, either, as they consider themselves to be the strongest race in the astralscape.

The conclusion he came to was that there was little to no chance he would be able to obtain such a primordial artifact, let alone keep it, no matter how tempting the thought may be. Even if he did, he would have to dip his toes into the Mysterium Cluster one way or another. Not to mention, he didn't know how far away he even was from the cluster! What if it took a decade for them to bring the sword to him, then another decade for them to bring him to the cluster? What could happen during that time? The possibilities were hard to envision with how wide the astralscape was; it was far wider than the lower layers of the astralscape that made up the sky of the Welkin plane.

"We're almost there. Let's get acquainted with the others," Bai Feng said.

"Alright." For now, the top rewards of the Astralium Seeking were far and away out of reach, so the only thing he could do was go step by step. He didn't even know the rules of the event, yet. How would the elimination of nearly two thousand people even work out to select the strongest and most talented? How would they even be ranked?

"By the way, what's your cultivation level and combat strength? I'm trying to assign you a role based on that," Bai Feng said. Before Tianming could say anything, she continued, "You have to note that everyone here are the best of the best and able to fight a few levels higher than their own on average. They could even be stronger than seniors of the same level as they are."

Tianming was all too clear about that. He had noticed that while he could fight people six levels above him in reality, five or fewer would probably be his limit in the Astraldome. Faced with Ye Chen who had five sovereign beasts, that gap became even smaller. No doubt, there would also be those among the contestants here who had as much talent as Ye Chen, but an even better upbringing and cultivation environment. Xiao, for instance, was a third-level solarian by the age of nineteen, only four levels above Tianming, yet he'd had to use his full power and his fusion move along with the power of the Frozen Glasstree to defeat him. Though, granted, that was without his totems and lifebound beasts.

In other words, he couldn't use his old ways to judge an opponent's strength. They could easily be as powerful as second or third-level solarians. Even so, he knew that he probably had the most talent among them, given his nine totems and five lifebound beasts. If there was anyone that could fight the most levels above their own, it would be him.

### **Chapter 1635 - Party of Five**

Tianming was an eleventh-level constellier, as he had only started his cultivation anew when he was twenty. It had only been some five years since he started again. The others here, however, were close to thirty and from higher class worlds filled with resources and good teachers. They had six times as much time to cultivate as Tianming had.

As he was still a constellier, it wouldn't be apt to reveal his actual cultivation level. Fortunately, Bai Feng wouldn't ask to inspect his sacrosun, so he made something up. "I'm currently a second-level solarian, but I've defeated third and fourth-level seniors before." At the very least, it was an honest evaluation of his combat strength.

"Second level? The level alone doesn't say much. Who's the strongest opponent you've defeated?" Bai Feng asked. She was quite a meticulous person, despite her straightforward personality, and wanted to make sure of everything for the good of the party.

"Hmmm..." Tianming scratched his head for a moment and continued, "When I was at the third level of the Tranquil Battlefield, I defeated a third-level solarian faceless specter."

His words came as quite a shock. She laughed and patted him on the shoulder. "You even dare to defeat faceless specters, so you're no coward. What was that person called? They have too many top geniuses, but I basically know all of them."

"I think he's called Xiao and there's Whitejade on his label as well."

"Ugh..." She stared at him speechlessly. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I defeated him and came here. He claimed to be nineteen. Is he famous?"

Bai Feng was scrutinizing him from top to bottom with a different look from before. "Yeah, he's famous alright, and he's of incredibly high status. Too high, in fact. As a disciple from a distant star, it must have been a feat that shook the Skyway Tristar for you to defeat him and come here."

Her expression was far more serious than before. Even though she'd only been looking for someone to fill up their ranks, she was quite lucky and had found an elite helper like Tianming.

"I don't think it'll be to that extent. They don't recognize me anyway, and probably think I'm close to a hundred."

"Even so, they'll have their answer once they see you here. Xiao himself will be completely crushed when he finds out your age isn't too far off from his. He must be having a bad time," she said, feeling a rush of satisfaction.

"Hey, aren't you going to doubt my claim one bit?"

"Anyone who's able to come here wouldn't do something pointless like that," Bai Feng said. "However, let me remind you to keep it to yourself. That's pretty embarrassing for the faceless specters. Spreading it around might be inviting trouble."

"It's enough that you know. I won't spread it around," Tianming said.

"Good boy." She pointed ahead and continued, "Alright, we've familiarized ourselves with each other already, so let's join the rest over there."

Tianming saw where she was pointing, but there was only one person there instead of three. "Qiao Xingzhou, where's the other two?" Bai Feng called out.

"Sister Feng!" The youth spotted her and his eyes brightened. He was wearing a beautiful robe and seemed very well put together. He was a rather handsome lad with youthful features and skin that seemed smoother than even Bai Feng's, making him look like quite an adorable little brother. That didn't, however, mean he was a pushover. Everyone here was definitely somewhat capable. He only seemed a little soft in comparison to the headstrong and direct woman. In the mortal world, he would constantly be flocked by fangirls based on his looks alone and have no worries about life. His label read 'Bluemarked Star Disciple Qiao Xingzhou'.

"Sister Feng, you've been gone for so long and left me alone here! I've been waiting for quite a while!" he said with a whiny tone like a newborn puppy. Even Tianming felt a little unnerved by his coquettishness.

"Ahem... given the current situation, it took time to find people to join us. Where's my brother and Rou?"

"They went looking for people as well, since you were away for so long. That way we'd be able to find people and start practicing sooner." He spotted Tianming and raised his brow. "Who might this be?"

"Our new comrade! He's called Li Tianming. Get acquainted, we'll be counting on each other from now on."

"Oh? What's his background? Where is Violetglory?" When Bai Feng glared at him, he stopped and nodded at Tianming. "I'm Qiao Xingzhou from Bluemarked, a world not far away from Whitechalk. We can travel to each other's worlds in a month without a divine astralship."

Tianming knew what his declaration meant. It appeared that the youth liked Bai Feng and felt some rivalry with Tianming, though Bai Feng didn't like men anyway, so what was the point?

"Alright, I'll be in your care," Tianming said.

Seeing him keep his distance from Bai Feng, Qiao Xingzhou seemed somewhat relieved. However, he didn't get too chummy with Tianming. "When Rou and Bai Huai come back, let's figure out a plan, alright?"

"Sure." Bai Feng crossed her arms and nodded, not saying anything else.

Tianming noticed that Qiao Xingzhou looked to be a human. For a human to dare to like a specter showed that procreation wasn't a big concern where they were from. Instead, true love seemed more important. Qiao Xingzhou constantly circled around Bai Feng. Even though she responded courteously, a sign of her emotional intelligence, she did seem somewhat annoyed. Though, as this was a team event, there were some compromises she would just have to make. The reason she didn't just kick Qiao Xingzhou out of the team probably had something to do with her younger brother and a girl called Rou.

When the other two returned, Tianming knew what was up. Bai Feng's younger brother, Bai Huai, was a chalk draconian like his sister. There was a cute girl dressed in a short, blue-green dress next to him who was also from Bluemarked, like Qiao Xingzhou. The pair seemed like they were dating.

### **Chapter 1636 - Darkfiend Heptus**

Bai Huai and Rou were the ones who formed the party of five. Bai Huai got his sister to come with him, while Rou got a friend from her hometown, Qiao Xingzhou, to come with her. Rou was just a nickname for her. Her full name was Zhong Yirou and she was a human like her friend— a beastmaster in particular—whereas Qiao Xingzhou was a totemancer.

Bai Huai's appearance resembled his sister's, though he was taller and more buff. He was bald and his eyes glowed white. He radiated a sense of security and he also had white dragon scales across his body, a sign of his toughness.

Zhong Yirou was a rather petite beauty, in contrast to her partner. Unlike Bai Feng, she seemed to be rather dainty and was clad in many fashion accessories. Her skirt showed off her long legs and she constantly had a sweet smile on her face.

What Tianming didn't expect was that the two of them had returned with someone else. In other words, they had found someone themselves, making things rather awkward.

"Sister Feng, I found an impressive person. With him around, our party's strength will definitely rise to a whole new level!" Rou said as she pulled the arm of a gray-clad youth toward them. However, her smile froze when she saw Tianming.

"Rou, Sister Feng also found someone," Qian Xingzhou said.

They all turned to Tianming, while he and Bai Feng looked at the youth in gray. The words above his head read 'Darkfiend Heptus Disciple Kou Mingyou'.

Seeing that name, even Bai Feng's expression changed. The youth looked rather cold and he had a signature bandage wrapped around one of his eyes, leaving the other green eye exposed. He was slightly hunched, like a beast, and had messy hair, giving him a rather wild and aggressive look.

Rou immediately reacted and pulled on Kou Mingyou's arm. "Sister Feng, you know the Darkfiend Galaxy, right? They have seven skypiercer-class nova source worlds and are basically near the central core of the Mysterium Cluster! Darkfiend Heptus is the largest skypiercer-class world, boasting a size of more than sixty times a heliacal-class world! Brother Kou is from there. He's even slightly stronger than you, Sister Feng! With him around, our whole party will be completely transformed. So...."

She looked at Bai Feng with a pitiful expression and a pout, hinting that she should give up on Tianming. Surely she knew the significance of having someone from near the core on their side! "Bai Huai, talk to Sister Feng for me! Brother Kou is really strong!"

Bai Huai hadn't said a word since he got back. He turned to his sister and said, "Sis, I think Rou's right. I'm afraid we can only say sorry to our friend here."

"A beastmaster from Darkfiend Heptus... he really is powerful," said Qiao Xingzhou in affirmation.

By now, most of the party wanted that big figure to join. However, Tianming could tell that Bai Huai felt a little awkward about how his girlfriend, Rou, was holding Kou Mingyou's hand so intimately and calling him Brother Kou. Naturally, Tianming wouldn't give up just like that after having such a hard time finding a party with space. Not to mention, he liked Bai Feng's directness. It was still their decision to make, however.

"Li Tianming from the Violetglory Star?" Rou gave Tianming a good look and said, "I'm really sorry, could you walk away from this?"

She seemed rather impatient. She had been quite happy when she returned with Kou Mingyou and was afraid that Bai Feng would only accept someone she had found herself. She really thought that she had lucked out by finding someone with a powerful background.

"Rou," Bai Feng said, turning to her brother as well. "I'll make the decision here, so keep your thoughts to yourself." As Bai Feng also cared about her brother's opinion, she didn't snap at Rou for being so rude to Tianming.

"Fine!" Rou grit her teeth, feeling a little annoyed. She thought that she was just doing this for the good of the party. She turned to Kou Mingyou and said, "Brother Kou, don't feel too bad about this. It's only a small issue that we can easily resolve."

"It's fine." Kou Mingyou waved, feeling slightly annoyed. He stepped toward Bai Feng and said, "Bai Feng, let's be straight with each other. I know you, and I've come for you. Otherwise, I wouldn't have bothered to go with just anyone. With the two of us together, we might rank above average. However, there's something I'd like to confirm with you beforehand."

"Let's hear it," Bai Feng calmly said.

"I want to be the leader and I expect my commands to be followed without hesitation. You must understand that a party can only have one leader, otherwise it'll get really messy really quick. If all of us have our own thoughts on how to act, our combat capability will be negatively affected."

"Sister Feng, Brother Kou's strength does qualify him for that role," Zhong Yirou weakly said.

"Oh," Bai Feng chuckled, having constantly exchanged glances with her brother. She stopped chuckling and pursed her lips. "If that's the case, you aren't welcome here, Kou Mingyou. May we meet again some other time, fate willing."

"Huh?" Zhong Yirou reacted strongly even before Kou Mingyou said anything. She was almost tearing up as she said, "Sister Feng, there's no need to do this! With him around, our chances of surviving are much higher! We can work out who leads the party!"

"Enough talk. What a waste of time," Kou Mingyou said, glaring at Bai Feng. "Since you didn't even pretend to care, let's hope we don't run into each other later."

"I won't mind even if we do," Bai Feng said, rolling her eyes.

"You've sure got guts." Kou Mingyou immediately turned and left.

"Hey! Brother Kou!" Zhong Yirou panicked and gave chase.

But before she could go far, Bai Feng said, "You can leave if you want, and we'll just look for someone else!"

"Sis!" Bai Huai immediately pulled Zhong Yirou back. Seeing her tear up, he said, "Rou's only thinking for the team. Don't fault her for this."

"Oh, I'm not blaming her for finding someone else. I only had a bone to pick with how intimate she was with Kou Mingyou even though you're together. I guess the status of chalk draconians isn't good enough for her." She rolled her eyes and ignored them, returning to Tianming's side. "Apologies for the laughable show."

"It's my bad for causing trouble," Tianming said at the same time, causing them both to laugh.

"It's no big deal," Tianming said.

"Sheesh, that prick challenged me during our first meeting! What a showoff!"

"Come on, at least don't make your brother out to be so bad."

"Hmph, I don't care. I've been unhappy with that girl of his for quite some time now, and can't wait for them to break up. That would be to the benefit of us chalk draconians."

"Sis." Bai Huai came over with Zhong Yirou.

Looking a little troubled, she said, "Sis Feng, I lost myself a little back there, but I was just doing what I thought would be best for us! Don't be angry at me, alright?"

"Sis," Bai Huai said.

"Fine, it's no big deal. We're a team, so we should stick together." Bai Feng smiled and hugged Zhong Yirou, pinching her cheeks. "What a cutie. No wonder you have my brother wrapped around your little finger."

"Sis Feng...." Rou blushed.

That seemed to put a close to the matter. However, Tianming could tell that the other three didn't have too good of an impression of him apart from Bai Feng. Rou, especially, would no doubt bear the most resentment due to how much embarrassment she had suffered. Though, to be fair, even if Tianming wasn't there, Bai Feng wouldn't get along with someone like Kou Mingyou either. Nobody in their right mind would blame Tianming for that not working out.

"Sis, introduce Brother Li Tianming here to us. We're going to fight as comrades later, so it's best we get familiar with each other," Bai Huai said.

"Very well." Bai Feng was just about to start, but she turned to Tianming. "By the way, are you a beastmaster or totemancer?"

"I'm both."

"What are you? Messing with me?" Bai Feng said.

"I'm a totemancer at my core, but I got a few lifebound beasts to play with in my childhood," Tianming said.

"Sheesh, you're quite the joker, aren't you." Bai Feng didn't dig too deep into it. "Tianming's pretty strong, at least stronger than the three of you."

"How strong is he, then? Over her, Bai Huai and Sister Feng are specters who can fight as the vanguards. My lifebound beast, the huewing spirit, can boost their combat capabilities. My good friend here's totems are celestial bows that can fight at range. To join our party, you must be able to contribute in some aspect." In a way, only slackers would mind the fact that there was another slacker in the group. That was why she had been unhappy with Tianming from the very beginning; he had robbed her of someone who could carry her to the top without her having to do much.

"Me? I can perform any role," Tianming said.

Qiao Xingzhou and Zhong Yirou looked each other in the eye, feeling a little unsettled, though there was little they could do now that Kou Mingyou was gone. Bai Feng had decided on Tianming herself, anyway.

"Perfect. An all-rounder's for the best," Bai Feng said, smiling. Then she explained the rules of the fight.

### **Chapter 1637 - Celestial Beings**

According to the explanation, the upcoming competition would be split into two parts. The first was the Astralium Battlefield and the second was the Astralium Seeking, with the latter being the main event. The former was just set up as an elimination round for nine out of ten participants before the rest moved on to the Astralium Seeking.

"There's around a thousand and eight hundred contenders right now. They'll split into groups of five and fight it out in the Astralium Battlefield. They'll be five-on-five fights and once any member of a group is

eliminated, they won't be reinstated for the next battles. As it isn't certain how many people will be eliminated in a round, it's hard to say how many rounds a group will have to fight. One battle could see nine people eliminated from both groups, leaving only one standing, after all. Basically, things just repeat until there's around a hundred people left. Those will be the cream of the crop who will be sent to the Astralium Seeking for the actual event."

The first segment was basically an elimination round without any good treasures. Being killed meant being eliminated, and that was a huge deal in this format. For instance, if Tianming lost all four teammates in his round, he would still have to face a full party in the next round even though he would be alone.

The Astralium Seeking after that was the more exciting event. They would be sent to a place called Astralium, which was said to be a star with supergravity and a surface area comparable to a continent. The hundred people there would fight to eliminate the rest as they searched for treasures. The last one to remain on Astralium would be number one. According to Bai Feng, Astralium was a desolate and uninhabited star, and the Grand-Orient Sword had really been found there.

"In other words, groups of five might have to fight two or three rounds. The fewer people they lose, the higher chance they stand of making it to the next round." Tianming looked at Zhong Yirou and the rest, feeling like it wouldn't matter much if they were to lose two members. "Looks like this format makes the later battles much harder."

Tianming noticed the potential problem. This format was exceedingly beneficial to those from the Mysterium Cluster, especially mysterians themselves. For people like Tianming or Bai Feng who were from non-deific-class worlds, it would be really hard for them to be acquainted with the best of the best. The mysterians, on the other hand, would know who the best among them were, and they might even already be acquainted, making it really easy for them to form parties. They could perhaps even join up with others as strong as they were to avoid having to clash in the Astralium Battlefield. As far as they were concerned, the first part of the event wasn't the real challenge, so there was no need for any of them to die.

As for the second part of the event, those without good teammates like Tianming could end up being ganged up on. There was no point for mysterians to kill each other while outsiders remained uneliminated.

"So the format is rigged so that there's little to no chance for outsiders to get the treasures. Granted, they were theirs to begin with, so naturally they prepared them for their own use. Who would bother wasting a few years just to ship a treasure to the outer worlds, anyway? It seems like folks like me and Bai Feng are only here to glorify this event." Tianming felt more relieved when he understood the intentions of those who held the event. "It's best that I don't dream too high for that treasure. All I need to do is to perform well enough to merit another *manna imperius*."

The treasure wasn't his to begin with, so desiring it when he probably didn't stand a chance of keeping it would be pointless. In a sense, he had to let go of his worldly wants and focus on what mattered. There were still thirteen days left, so the five of them had to come up with a strategy for the event. Mainly, they had to have a proper combat formation and contingencies. Bai Feng was better at defense, so she

chose the defensive role. She also said that she might need Tianming to do surprise attacks from time to time.

"Don't worry, I'll carry you," Tianming said.

"You said it, so it's a deal. If you fail, I'll come banging on your door," Bai Feng said.

"If I can't carry you, you only have your weight to blame."

"I'm very light, mind you!"

"Gee, it sure doesn't seem that way."

"You're asking for a beating, aren'tcha?"

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Now that they had come up with a strategy, Tianming didn't join in too much in the coming days. Zhong Yirou, Qiao Xingzhou, and the rest, however, talked a lot and gathered loads of information about their enemies.

"Hey, Li Tianming, why aren't you joining us for the research? Are you going to count on others for everything?" Zhong Yirou said in an odd tone.

"Only the weak need to stack things in their favor," Tianming said.

Bai Feng burst out laughing, much to Zhong Yirou's embarrassment.

"Hey, stop boasting! Fight me if you dare. Do you think you're a big deal for bullying Rou?!" Qian Xingzhou said with dissatisfaction.

"Forget it. I'm afraid I'll mess up your makeup," Tianming said.

Bai Feng absolutely lost it and hammered her fist on the ground, causing the other two to turn and glare at her. "I'm sorry!" She stifled her laughter and turned to Tianming. "Hey, we're all friends here, so there's no need to be that harsh."

"Alright. I'm sorry, both of you," Tianming said with a smile.

The two childhood friends rolled their eyes and ignored him. Tianming did listen to what they said in the coming days. He didn't have any opinions he wanted to share anyway, though his ears did twitch upon mention of the mysterians.

"Did you know? The top-ranking mysterian cultivators from the three core worlds, a terrifying genius divine wonderian as well as a woman of unknown origin formed a party. While they'll be competitors in the second part of the event, they're working together now. I bet anyone that runs into them will be wiped out," Zhong Yirou said. She had brought quite a lot of useful information from going all around.

### **Chapter 1638 - Defending the Astralis**

"Insane... those people really joined up?"

"There's no chance for anyone else...."

"Those five are the strongest of all, right?"

"Of course. At the very least, the ones from the Skyway worlds are all from deific-class worlds, and they're the strongest under thirty. As for the divine wonderian, that's even crazier. Every time they send someone to join, they'll definitely take first or second place. The only question mark is the mysterious woman."

"Is there any information about her?"

"Nope."

"What's her name and origin?"

"Nobody has seen it since they didn't dare to approach her. They could only tell that she's a woman."

Tianming listened as they talked, quite curious how powerful this party would be.

"I heard they even have a party name. They're called Celestial Beings," Zhong Yirou said.

"Wow, what a badass name."

Tianming's party had also gotten a new name. Now, the words above Tianming's head read 'Violetglory Star Disciple Li Tianming, Team Rou'. Naturally, Zhong Yirou was the one who had come up with it. Bai Feng couldn't be bothered with it, so anything that Bai Feng didn't feel like doing, Zhong Yirou took up. After all, Bai Huai and Qiao Xingzhou were her lackeys. Tianming did acknowledge that she was cute, but she was quite a drama queen and very annoying to get along with.

"That name sounds really punchable," Ying Huo said.

As for Tianming, he didn't have much to do in the days leading up to the start of the event, so he finished mastering the Kilofold Starcluster Fist. Though, that appeared to be last minute preparation to the eyes of Zhong Yirou and Qiao Xingzhou, so they rolled their eyes at his seemingly futile efforts.

As time passed, the atmosphere at the lobby got more and more intense. Countless worlds, Violetglory included, were anticipating the upcoming fight! On the very last day leading up to the event, Violetglory was in a state of charged excitement. Not because of Tianming, however, but rather Ye Chen! What they didn't expect was how he finally managed to kill a hundred people two days ago. After lasting a full day, he went to the third level of the Tranquil Battlefield! For someone as powerful as him, the third level wasn't an obstacle at all. He endured the trial of the Myriadeyes Wonder and easily ascended it, finally making it into the absolute lobby a few hours before the start! Though the Violetglorians didn't hold out any hope for him, he had persevered and made it through.

"Looks like he made it after all. However, will Ye Chen even be able to find a party to join?"

Tianming was with Bai Feng the entire time, so he didn't know about any newcomers. Time continued to pass, and eventually, a vortex appeared above the lobby that led to the Astralium Battlefield. The parties huddled together as they ascended, vanishing from the eyes of others.

"Let's go! Quick!" Rou impatiently said.

"Come on," Bai Feng said. To prevent being flung apart by the vortex, they had to hold hands as they ascended. Zhong Yirou held Bai Huai's hand with her left and Qiao Xingzhou's with her right. "Let's do our best!"

"Alright. We'll fight till the end," Bai Huai said.

"We'll have to do more than fight." Bai Feng rolled her eyes and held Bai Huai's hand, then stretched the other out to Tianming. "Lead the way, friend."

"Easy peasy." The moment he held her hand, the five of them joined the other parties and ascended into the vortex.

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A white-robed youth in the distance could be seen with four other guys.

"What're you looking at, Ye Chen?" asked a one-eyed man with a bandage covering the other.

"I think I saw someone I know."

"Oh? Someone from your star?"

"That's right. He's called Li Tianming. Have you seen him?"

"I have. I don't have to hold back against him if we meet on the battlefield, right?"

"Not at all." Ye Chen nodded, black flames burning in his eyes.

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"It's starting!"

Countless cheers could be heard from all across the astralscape. Tianming couldn't even begin to imagine how many people were watching them. It wasn't just a matter of billions of people, but possibly billions of worlds! He hadn't been to the Mysterium Cluster before, so there was no way he could fathom the scale. Perhaps the worlds in that cluster were loudly cheering for their own youth representatives as well. No doubt this was among the most prestigious events in the whole of the known astralscape, perhaps even comparable to the ninth level of all three battlefields.

Every world had its own wondersky realm, and like Violetglory's, they were all filled to the brim with spectators. Even the sovereigns of the worlds watched the matches. Tianming alone was ignorant to the fact that he had wandered his way into such a grand event. Now, all he could feel was Bai Feng's powerful grip; it felt no different from holding a man's hand. It wasn't that her palm was rough, but rather forceful enough that he felt a slight pain from it. It was almost like she was secretly harboring a grievance against him.

"Each party of five will be sent to a sealed battlefield to fight another team. I wonder who our first opponents will be," she said, her deep voice ringing in Tianming's ears as their bodies lightened and appeared in a different location.

They stood firmly on the ground. Tianming looked around and saw the familiar green fog that was as dense as it was on the second level, which limited their range of vision to some degree. If Ying Huo and

the rest were to come out now, the fog would shroud them in mystery. The environment allowed for sudden ambushes from enemies whose location they didn't know. Even with the strong winds, it didn't help as the whole place was already covered in fog. The wind just made it sound like there were people snickering around them.

Zhong Yirou yelped and buried herself in Bai Huai's embrace the moment she appeared, appearing like a helpless bunny.

"Shut up," Bai Feng said and glared at her. She was alert and in work mode. She quickly scanned her surroundings for something.

"Over here." Tianming waved at them. There was nature all around them, much like the first two levels. Trees and cliffs were visible from where they were, and Tianming was standing outside a cave. The other four quickly went to him.

"It's an astralis! We found it!" Zhong Yirou said. When Bai Feng glared at her again, she shut her mouth. The five of them surrounded a small formation.

"Even though this formation is small, it's a grade-seven divine formation. It'll take quite a bit for us to break through," Bai Feng said. This was an Astralium Formation. Unlike normal defensive formations, it had no formation spirit threads, but they were similar at their core. They were beneficial, as they could be made rather easily.

"So the thing inside is an astralis, right?" Zhong Yirou asked quietly and carefully.

"Yeah." Bai Huai was the only one who nodded. As for the others, they ignored her pointlessly obvious statements. There was a sphere with a diameter of one meter inside the formation. It looked a little jagged, much like a meteorite, and its surface was worn with age and time.

"It's said that the astralis is a miniature version of Astralium," Qiao Xingzhou said. It seemed like a smaller version of where the second part of the event would take place. "All we need is to protect it."

Bai Feng said, "Alright, let's not waste words. Get into a defensive formation according to our plans."

"Understood."

The reason they had to defend the astralis was that it was the key to victory. The rules of the Astralium Battlefield weren't as simple as running into others and killing them. Instead, each team would have their own astralis and Astralium Formation. Any team that has their astralis destroyed would be completely eliminated. Both sides only knew the location of their own astralis, but not the opponent's. The fog was there to encourage an active search for the enemy team's astralis, so that necessitated a few people leaving the base.

They would have to split roles according to their strengths. Should one send out too many and not keep anyone at the base to defend the astralis it would be destroyed once it was found. Apart from that main method of elimination, there were other rules. The first was that the astralis would light up and give away its location once two members of a team were eliminated. The astralis would also let out a loud sound if it was attacked as a reminder for those who left the base. All of that made for quite the exciting match to watch. It also gave weaker teams a chance to defeat stronger teams! As Bai Feng was average in terms of attack power in the party, she would be holding the fort.

## Chapter 1639 - Nemeses Shall Meet

The benefit of the competition format was that even if their opponent found them, there was a chance they wouldn't send out all their members to take on the defenders. That would give Team Rou an advantage in numbers in the short term. Most weaker teams used defensive tactics like that.

Naturally, there were some who opted for sending one or two people on the offensive. Being completely defensive had its downsides as well, the main one being that they wouldn't know the location of the enemy's base even after their own was exposed. The enemy could simply retreat and gather the rest of their team for a proper assault. As such, the key point after having one's base discovered was whether or not they could count on their numbers to hold their ground.

However, that wasn't an issue for Tianming at all. With Yin Chen around, he was a god on the battlefield, at least in terms of seeing through the fog of war. For a truly strong party, they could afford to send three people out on the offense without compromising on their defense at all. They wouldn't be afraid of any tactics, and each of them could probably take on ten others alone. In other words, while tactics helped, the core winning formula was still having insurmountable power. The rules were only flavor for the main dish.

"Let's go!" Tianming spread Yin Chen out from their base in all directions. The silver cockroaches didn't fly fast, so it would take some time for their vision to expand. However, Tianming would find out about the enemy and their base first either way, not that he would tell Bai Feng about it for now.

"We have to dream big. There's been many instances of weaker teams defeating stronger ones with a good defense and surprise offensives," Bai Feng said.

"Interesting." Tianming was talking about the format of the battle. With the fog of war limiting their vision, attacking and defending became much less certain. The thought of their base being attacked before they even found out about their enemy's location was exciting, to say the least, not that it was something Tianming would experience since he would have eyes everywhere.

"The battlefield is quite huge." Even if one side sent out people to search and scout, they stood a rather low chance of being able to overcome the enemy defenders even if they found it. Tianming stood facing the south side of the astralis, while Bai Feng faced north. Bai Huai was facing the east, while the two from the Bluemarked Star faced the west. The fact that Bai Feng had chosen such a formation showed her trust in Tianming being able to take on one direction alone. However, Zhong Yirou came to him not long after.

"What're you doing?" Tianming asked.

"I'm worried that you won't be able to hold your own, so I came to help keep watch," Zhong Yirou said.

"No need."

"What're you talking about? I'm not helping you, I'm doing my part to defend the astralis! It's for my own sake and the party's!"

"Is that so? How praiseworthy of you."

"At least I'm not messing around like you."

"Sigh, do you have a problem with me? Why are you always getting under my skin?"

"Don't you know why? If not for your interference, the one standing here would've been Brother Kou. Only he can give me a true sense of security."

"Kou Mingyou, huh?" As Tianming spoke with her, Yin Chen gave him an important piece of information.

"That's right. What about it?" Zhong Yirou pouted. "He's stronger than Sister Feng and a beastmaster like me. Mine can even elevate his beasts to a whole new level."

"Looks like your wish is about to come true."

"What do you mean?"

"Look. Your ideal partner is here, but as an enemy," Tianming said, shamelessly smiling.

Looking ahead, they saw five people approaching them. The opponents were taking a huge risk by completely ignoring their astralis and launching an all-out attack! The perfect counterplay to going fully defensive was a full offensive. When the numbers were equal, the stronger side would dominate. Not to mention, the attackers' astralis would still be undetected, while the defenders couldn't even leave theirs to hide away in ambush. It was a completely opposite approach to Bai Feng's.

Tianming knew that their enemies weren't just acting on impulse. There were bound to be more weak parties compared to strong ones, and the weak parties would normally choose to go full out on defense. As such, there was a good chance they would encounter weak parties that did just that, and the enemies had made the right guess this time.

What Tianming didn't expect was that the leader of the enemy party would actually be Kou Mingyou. He wore a headband that covered one of his eyes. Given his leadership style, it made sense that he wanted Bai Feng to follow his every order. Someone as aggressive as him couldn't work well with someone that wouldn't follow his orders to the letter. However, there was another surprise in store for Tianming: Ye Chen's presence.

"It's like he's haunting me or something...." It was a crazy coincidence. Ye Chen had come at the last minute and managed to join Kou Mingyou's party, out of all peoples'. He looked above the head of Kou Mingyou and saw 'Darkfiend Heptus Disciple Kou Mingyou, Direwolves'. Direwolves against Team Rou.... It didn't take one with much imagination to know what would happen.

"Ye Chen again... I bet Violetglory is going to freak out again." Tianming was already sick of fighting him. They had reached a 'draw' in their previous duel only because Tianming couldn't be bothered to fight against him. He was far more interested in Kou Mingyou, who was supposed to be a top genius from a skypiercer-class world. I can tell with one look how arrogant he is. He must have the skills to back it up.

All of Team Rou noticed the incoming enemies. Unsurprisingly, Zhong Yirou's expression immediately collapsed as she teared up. She glared at Tianming, as if she were blaming him for jinxing them. Tianming only thought, I wonder if team-killing is okay here....

The five of them joined up in a defensive line, facing off against the approaching enemy. Apart from Ye Chen, the others Kou Mingyou had selected seemed to be cold, powerful, and adept at fighting, completely unlike Zhong Yirou and Qiao Xingzhou. They were just as surprised to see Bai Feng's team.

"Interesting.... I didn't think such a coincidence would be possible. Looks like the heavens have plans for us, Bai Feng," Kou Mingyou said, nonchalantly waving.

"Stop. It's gross," Bai Feng snapped.

Though Ye Chen was initially shocked, he immediately calmed down and smiled at Tianming. Even so, that didn't mask his urge to finish their fight from before. The others picked up on how they were both from the same star.

"Are the two of you nemeses?" Bai Feng asked.

"Him? My nemesis? He doesn't deserve that honor," Tianming said with a shrug, causing killing intent to surge from Ye Chen, as well as an uproar back home.

"Since that's the case, I'll leave your acquaintance to you. Help out my brother and the others if they need it. I don't think Kou Mingyou's that easy to deal with," Bai Feng said. Even though they were both from skyscraper-class worlds, Darkfiend Heptus was situated in the core of the Mysterium Cluster where the resources were most plentiful.

"Let's trade. Leave Kou Mingyou to me and I'll deal with my fellow Violetglorian when we get home," Tianming said, much to the shock of Bai Huai, Qiao Xingzhou, and Zhong Yirou. Zhong Yirou had planned to beg for mercy from Kou Mingyou, yet the other two were already deciding who would fight him.

"Stop messing around, Li Tianming. This is no joke," Qiao Xingzhou said. With how pale he looked he had definitely lost all hope for his own party.

"Are you saying you'd rather take on Kou Mingyou?" Tianming asked.

"Of course... not...." He took a step back.

"Then shut up. Only say things you mean."

Qiao Xingzhou and Zhong Yirou exchanged glances, rolling their eyes at Tianming's attitude.

"Hey, you can get yourself killed for all I care. Qiao Xingzhou's totems are ranged totems, so your mission is to not let others approach him," Zhong Yirou said.

"You fucking idiot!" Tianming was losing it. Xiaoxiao was a ranged fighter herself, and everyone seemed to just assume it was Tianming's job to be her shield. He decided to ignore the two of them. Looking at Bai Feng, he indicated his readiness to fight. The other five had also detected the astralis behind them and had their own little discussion before they glared at them, applying huge pressure.

"Since your fellow Violetglorian is so capable, I'll leave him to you, Ye Chen," Kou Mingyou said.

"No problem," Ye Chen said, yet neither of them expected that their enemy would attack first!

The white-haired youth struck with his left hand holding a silver whip, using Painstaking Separation. Flower petals instantly manifested all over the place as the Lifesteal Silverdragon's bladed body lashed out toward Kou Mingyou, who defended himself with a spiked club. The chain wrapped around it and its tail spike struck Kou Mingyou's face, drawing blood, much to the shock of others. Tianming was far too

ruthless, striking without even saying a word and actually managing to wound Kou Mingyou. Even though they were caeli, the pain they felt was still all too real.

"You!"

"Step out. Let's not bother with a messy group fight. I challenge you to a duel," Tianming said, walking to the side and leaving his chain wrapped around Kou Mingyou's weapon. Waves of dark frost traveled through the chain and instantly froze the spiked club. It appeared to be some kind of black plant that even threatened to stretch toward Kou Mingyou's hands. This was the power of the Frozen Glasstree!

"Huh?!" Kou Mingyou seemed surprised. Tianming had used the Frozen Glasstree to make an opening, and his challenge caused his eyes to turn red. He refused to let go of his weapon, only to be pulled along by Tianming towards him. The two of them clashed near a green lake.

"Are you courting death?!" Kou Mingyou instantly released his lifebound beast.

The Lifesteal Silverdragon flashed, causing a lot of lake water to splash through the air as all five of Tianming's lifebound beasts were unleashed, Lan Huang shining the brightest among them and drawing the most attention and shock.

"A sovereign beast?!" Even for peak geniuses like Bai Feng and the rest, sovereign beasts were incredibly rare. All of his beasts had different main elemental attributes, making them quite a contrast, completely overshadowing Kou Mingyou's single lifebound beast. Zhong Yirou and Qiao Xingzhou were completely flabbergasted by the dramatic entrance.

"Is he really that powerful?!"

"Didn't Sister Feng say that he's only a second-level solarian?"

The two of them felt really awkward all of a sudden. Fortunately, the other four enemies charged toward the astralis, so they didn't have to face the consequences of their behavior just yet and could focus on the fight at hand.

## **Chapter 1640 - Moonscourge Abomination**

Tianming estimated that Kou Mingyou should be about as powerful as Bai Feng. In terms of totemancers, he would be about equivalent to an octabane. The main reason he was able to be up to six levels higher than geniuses from heliacal-class worlds was his access to resources and legacies from his skypiercer-class world. Even a normal skypiercer-class world's nova source could reach up to ten times that of the Violetglory Star's, and Darkfiend Heptus' was tens of times beyond that. Putting environmental factors aside, Kou Mingyou would probably still be three levels above the likes of Princess Shen Yu and Li Haochen, a marked gap in their talent. In other words, the gap in talent wasn't as easy to detect as a gap caused by other factors.

Based on totems, Tianming figured that few, if any people here had nine of them. Most of them here would be roughly octabanes while heptabanes were the minority. The only reasons they could get here with seven totems were that they came from a top-class world with the best resources or legacies, or if they had totems of really good quality.

That said, using totems as a measure of talent wasn't absolute. Some totems were inherently more terrifying. There had been quite a few instances of heptabanes exceeding octabanes in talent throughout history, and the type of totems was a deciding factor. Even among beastmasters, penta-beastmasters might not have as much talent as a quad-beastmaster. There were even some mono-beastmasters who were able to devote all of their resources into one beast, making them quite terrifying as well.

However, one thing was for sure: when Tianming asked about decabanes, even Bai Feng and the rest were speechless. As far as they were aware, nine totems was the absolute upper limit across the astralscape. Those who had nine totems included the first founder of the celestial orderians, the current sun emperor, and many other elites across the astralscape. Even among nonabanes, there was quite a bit of variance thanks to totem types.

While the Astralium Seeking was a fight among juniors, many of them showed impressive talent and potential, sporting sovereign beasts or nine totems, and some specters having progenitor bloodlines. It was one shocking revelation after another. There had never been a time when people could see so many of them assembled in the same place. Every super genius here was the best of the best, inheriting the most impressive legacies in the astralscape. Tianming's battle, for instance, didn't get too much attention in the beginning, but drew a lot of attention from other worlds the moment sovereign beasts appeared—Ye Chen's in particular! He had five of them, and even Kou Mingyou was shocked to see them.

"A penta-beastmaster who only has sovereign beasts... What a huge spend. Perhaps only the Skyway Monostar would invest so much resources into a youth, right?"

Everyone turned their attention from Tianming and Kou Mingyou to Ye Chen.

"Dammit, our luck is horrible!" Zhong Yirou couldn't cry even if she wanted to from the sheer shock.

"Now, I know why Li Tianming doesn't dare to face his acquaintance! He knew that Kou Mingyou wasn't as powerful and pushed Sister Feng to take on Ye Chen instead!" Qiao Xingzhou said, teeth chattering with rage.

"Shut up and defend the astralis according to the plan!" Bai Feng snapped. Facing Ye Chen and his five Desolate Chaos Progenibeasts, she entered battle mode and stood at the vanguard with her younger brother. The siblings' bodies grew in size and were covered in dragon scales. Both of them were from skypiercer-class worlds, so they were far from weak. Bai Feng, especially, looked larger than her brother and was a complete wild beast.

"Die!" she cried.

"Rou, use your huewing spirits to help us!" Bai Huai cried.

"Alright!" Zhong Yirou and Qiao Xingzhou hid behind them, the latter of whom manifested his eight totems with a pale look. While he looked soft, he was still quite talented. Otherwise, he wouldn't even be here. His celestial bows were rather interesting in that they were weapon-type totems like Tianming's. Each of the bows had a different design as well, and they all fired piercing totem arrows that were effective against totems and lifebound beasts alike.

He used his own bow and joined his totems in unleashing suppression fire on the enemy. Not even Ye Chen's beasts would dare to take those shots with their own bodies, which gave Qiao Xingzhou some confidence. When it really counts, they still need to rely on me. It seemed to not occur to him that had it not been for the fact that the vanguards were holding Ye Chen back, he would be defeated in one shot.

Zhong Yirou's performance was also quite decent. Her lifebound beasts, the huewing spirits, were five colorful butterflies that somewhat resembled Yun Tianque's cloud lifebound beasts. They seemed a little ethereal and without proper form. The butterflies flew toward Bai Huai and Bai Feng, assimilating into their bodies as if they were possessing them. Tianming would have watched to see what that did if he hadn't been busy dealing with Kou Mingyou.

"Looks like the four of them will be able to defend the astralis for the time being." That allowed Tianming to focus his full attention on Kou Mingyou. Their teamwork made it much easier than him having to fight while defending the astralis alone.

"You really don't know regret until you've experienced death," Kou Mingyou spat, clearly enraged by Tianming.

"Stop bullshitting. Nobody really dies in the Astraldome, so what's there to fear?" Here, even cowards would dare to fight with their lives on the line. People like Qiao Xingzhou were able to unleash their full potential, as there was no risk of actual death. Tianming and Kou Mingyou clashed with their lifebound beasts, causing the most commotion in the battle.

"Is this the level of a genius from a skypiercer-class world?" The enemy was a third-level solarian in his twenties with a sovereign beast. Even though it was just one sovereign beast, he should be much stronger than people from heliacal-class worlds like Tianming and Ye Chen, who usually wouldn't be given manna imperius. Kou Mingyou had five lifebound beasts, one of which was an eight-star divine beast, and four seven-star divine beasts, the same as Tianming's. It was a pack of wolves led by a mythological feral beast. The feral beast was the eight-star divine beast with more than eight thousand and one hundred stars, and it was a moonscourge abomination. It was the smallest among all the beasts and had snow-white fur and large eyes. Its limbs seemed rather short and not fully developed. However, it was filled with terrifying astralforce, a sign that it had powerful abilities.

The other four were desolate night sky direwolves, all of them pitch black and well built. Their fur stood sharp and stiff and their fangs constantly dripped with a viscous liquid. With the feral beast surrounded by these wolves, Kou Mingyou shook off the Lifesteal Silverdragon and waved his grade-seven divine artifact. The spiked club shone and started dripping with blood. Then he charged at Tianming with his beasts with as much bravado as Ye Chen had. The spectators from his world were filled with praise as they watched his magnificent assault. However, many of them also noticed Tianming's five beasts—his sovereign beast, in particular—as well as the fact that they all had different elemental attributes.

It was a clash of geniuses! Tianming could finally fight someone else of his age that wasn't Ye Chen. He was already getting sick of defeating his so-called 'rival' over and over.

"Beat him up!" Tianming ordered. His five beasts didn't hold back at all. Ying Huo and the eight million Yin Chens beneath it gained the most attention. It was hard to see their numbers in the fog; all that could be seen was an army of metal insects of all kinds, ranging from locusts, spiders, scorpions,

centipedes, and even butterflies! Yin Chen swarmed ahead toward the five enemy beasts, instantly enveloping them.

"I'm coming through!" Lan Huang shone brightly and roared, a spectacle for the eyes and ears both. The task Tianming gave it was to take on the moonscourge abomination, as it seemed to be the only sovereign beast, but it wasn't adept in close combat. As long as Lan Huang could hold it back, things would go smoothly.