

The Ages 251

Chapter 251 - Grand-Orient Sect's Top Beauty

Yunchi Mountain was so tall it pierced through the clouds, and so broad that it blocked their path through the sky. It was just like the person it was named after, Second Elder Su Yunchi. It was the second immortal mountain of the sect, subordinate only to Fengyun Immortal Mountain.

The mountain was rather busy as Su Yunchi's granddaughter, Prime Disciple Su Wuyou, was holding a banquet and meeting for the Wuyou Faction at Wuyou Hall. The core members and other disciples belonging to the faction were there.

It was more like a gathering than an actual meeting. After the agenda was run through, the youths began partying. Some danced, some chatted in the corners, some enjoyed the food and alcohol, and some simply messed around.

Lively young girls made up ninety percent of the attendees, all of them with impressive family backgrounds and gaudy dress, forming a wall of beauties. It was a beautiful view, indeed. It was no wonder that whenever any member of the Wuyou Faction wanted to form groups for training, disciples of the sect would flock to them in droves.

The merrymaking continued into the night. The one hailed to be the top beauty of the entire sect, Su Wuyou, sat in the seat of honor, showing off her long, beautiful legs. She let her hair fall freely behind her all the way to her waist. It was so lush and thick it resembled a black waterfall, and the fragrance it exuded made it even more unforgettable.

Her bright eyes were as clear as a lake. As she gazed at the partying youths, her refined facial features shone even more from under the white face covering she wore.

She sported a slender figure and was slightly taller than most girls, but that by no means meant she was powerless. Though she was the embodiment of beauty, she had a rather restrained character. People only fell for her charms when she unconsciously let them slip.

Yuwen Shengcheng quietly sat by her side, looking at her in a daze. He felt that she was truly deserving of the top beauty title. Even though every generation had a top beauty, Su Wuyou was the youngest and, in his opinion, most beautiful. Even so, he didn't dare bear any untoward thoughts towards her, for she didn't like him, but rather Yuwen Shendu. She had been pursuing him for the last five years.

In the eyes of many in the sect, they were the perfect couple, talented and pleasing to the eye. Though they should have been together from the very beginning, they had never ended up together. In the past five years, Yuwen Shendu hadn't interacted with her at all, but nobody knew why. Perhaps they thought Yuwen Shendu was merely ignorant of her feelings for him.

However, the people in question knew that wasn't the case. Before Yuwen Shendu managed to attain his goal, the Grand-Orient Sword, he couldn't afford to lose focus, so Su Wuyou merely waited.

The Realm Wars would begin when the Prime Struggle ended. She knew it wasn't that he didn't have any interest in her at all; the moment he succeeded, they would get together like they had agreed.

"Shengcheng, you have to be braver. Don't keep doubting yourself. Your brother and I will be able to help you in the future," Su Wuyou said with a sympathetic look.

"Sister Wuyou...." He looked down and thought about his pathetic loss a few days back, as well as his father's punishment, and his eyes turned bloodshot once more.

"Yuwen Zhenxing told me that this is a trial set by your father. You don't have to take this to heart. As long as you do your best to prove yourself to him, it'll definitely turn out well," she consoled.

"I know. Brother Zhenxing told me that he sees me like his own blood brother."

"That's right. Your father has also tasked him to avenge you. That junior sect master will die without a doubt, so what's there to worry about? Don't tell me you're unhappy because you won't be able to exact revenge yourself?"

Yuwen Shengcheng nodded.

"Prime Tower is an opportunity. Usually, you'll be in trouble if you kill a disciple from Azure Dragon Sword Mountain. Had that not been the case, it would've been possible to arrange for you to end him. However, I think you don't really have to care, as long as the junior sect master pays the price. You're still young, so losing isn't really a big deal."

"Alright. Brother Zhenxing told me that he would make sure Li Tianming leaves this world in the most gruesome fashion."

"Now that's just great. You should be happier about it." Su Wuyou smiled, looking ever so detached from normal concerns.

"Alright," he said, nodding hard. He didn't dare to open his mouth, for he had lost all his teeth. He seemed no different from an old geezer now. Even so, Su Wuyou still noticed he hadn't cheered up.

"Sister Wuyou, is Li Qingyu part of your faction?" he asked.

"Yes. I heard she hasn't shown up for quite a while and I was about to kick her out, though."

"Let's not."

"Don't tell me you've fallen for her? Do you need me to create an opportunity for the two of you to meet?"

Yuwen Shengcheng gave it some thought and shook his head. However, his eyes still glowed with desire.

"Just let me know when you feel like it." She patted him on the shoulder and stood up.

Her movements could be described by no word other than 'graceful'. The way she moved and swayed caused many hearts to throb.

"Li Qingyu!" Yuwen Shengcheng mouthed when she left, his eyes bloodshot.

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Wuyou Hall still seemed rather crowded even after Su Wuyou left. Her sister, Su Yiran, was still there, after all. They were surrounded by a bunch of disciples, forming a wall that no envious outsider would be allowed to enter.

Su Yiran felt a little worn out from the partying. Holding her wine jug and two cups, she went to a dark corner where a huge, bearlike figure sat. His head was shiny and bald, and his burly physique and height of two meters should have made him seem rather imposing. However, the face hidden in the shadows had rather refined features, with the exception of his reddish, bestial eyes.

He was a mix of nobility and savagery.

Su Yiran was just as pretty as her elder sister, but not nearly as reserved, choosing instead to put her beauty on full display. Her limbs were also rather powerful, despite their dainty appearance.

"Big Brother Zhenxing," she said as she entered the darkness and sat on the man's lap, filling the two wine cups.

"Cheers." His voice was rather deep. After the cups touched, he downed the whole cup of wine and put his large arms around her waist.

"Congratulations, Big Brother Zhenxing, for getting the elders' acknowledgement as the strongest disciple and skipping the second round of battles entirely. You can go straight to the Prime Tower now, right?" she coquettishly asked.

"It's no big deal. Even if I didn't skip the battles, I would've gone to the tower all the same."

"But it sounds really impressive, no? That also shows that the elders think you're the strongest one in the Prime Struggle, so you might be the only one who stands a chance at becoming a prime disciple." She put her arms around his neck.

"That's true."

"Big Brother Zhenxing, how are you going to deal with the junior sect master?"

"Even the elders won't be allowed to enter Prime Tower during the match. I'll slowly toy with him and avenge my brother while getting rid of an annoying fly for my clan," he said with a savage glare. His eyes looked like a killer's.

"Then he's in for a lot of trouble," she said, chuckling.

"Hehe...."

"But Big Brother Zhenxing, you haven't seen the list for the second round of battles, right?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"The fights in the second round are determined by the ancient first and fourth elders. Guess who's going to fight the junior sect master? He might not be able to make it into Prime Tower at this rate for your revenge."

"Don't tell me it's you?"

"Impressive. You're really smart."

The man gave it some thought and said, "Perfect. You just have to throw the match and let him enter the tower. You won't be able to enter the last fight anyway."

"Who said I can't? It'll be embarrassing to lose to him. I won't be happy with it," she said, cuddling up against him. Her seductive charm was enough to make any guy lose his cool.

"Stop messing around. Everyone knows what you're up to. What do you want? Just tell me straight."

"You sure know me well, Big Brother Zhenxing," she said, eyes glowing, "I want the treasure on the first floor of the tower. The top-grade terrestrial manna."

"Aren't you a greedy one?"

"No, I'm not. Your lifebound beast is already a third-order saint beast, so that manna will be useless for you. Not to mention, the treasure on the second floor is the one that was chosen for you. You can easily get it yourself," she said.

"But I want to leave it for Shengcheng...."

"That won't do. I'm afraid Uncle won't agree, either. Surely he has his own plans for him. It's time for Shengcheng to experience some hardship. I doubt you want to go against your uncle's plans."

"You speak sense."

"Just give it to me, Big Brother Zhenxing. I'll make it up to you."

"Alright. Tonight, then."

"No. We'll see once I get it. Who knows if you'll follow through on your word? I won't be tricked that easily."

"Haha, alright, you little vixen."

"Big Brother Zhenxing, my dad is really satisfied with you. Soon, he'll come to arrange our marriage."

"It's better for me to get my dad to initiate it. However, it might have to wait until after the Realm Wars. You know how important that is to both of our clans, right?"

"Of course I do. By then, the whole sect will belong to our clans, and those annoying old rags can die for all I care."

"Alright, it's a promise. Just throw the match with the junior sect master, but don't make it look too fake. Otherwise, he'll chicken out and won't go to the Prime Tower."

"Don't worry. Acting is my forte. I'll make sure he comes out of the battle more confident than ever," she assured.

Chapter 252 Vilemoon, Moonset Galaxy Blade Ar

Taiji Mountain.

"Li Xuanchen," Yuwen Shengcheng beckoned to the young man who was currently cultivating. Rising to his feet, Li Xuanchen darted into a secret room with Yuwen Shengcheng.

Staring at the white-robed boy before him, complex emotions flashed past Li Xuanchen's eyes. He had assumed the fight would end in an easy victory for Yuwen Shengcheng, but the opposite was true; he had been beaten into a sorry state.

Even now, there was blood on his weak and listless face. Wherever he went, strange gazes would follow. Meanwhile, Tianming's reputation as a genius had spread through the entire Grand-Orient Mountain range. One only had to ask around to know that Yuwen Shengcheng had become a laughing stock. Even the Li Saint Clan had accepted Tianming.

"Shengcheng, what is it?" Li Xuanchen asked.

"Do you remember what you said last time?"

"About Li Qingyu? Don't worry, I've got a meticulous plan up my sleeves, All I need is the east wind," Li Xuanchen replied.

He was unwilling to give up on the Kunpeng Sacred Seal.

"And the east wind you're waiting for is an opportunity to get Li Qingyu to leave?"

"Yes, an opportunity for her to leave the sect."

Yuwen Shengcheng's eyes lit up as he explained what Su Wuyou had mentioned to him yesterday.

"Perfect!" Li Xuanchen's eyes gleamed.

"How so?"

"I asked around, and from what I've heard, there's only one person in the Wuyou faction Li Qingyu considers a friend—Guo Xiaofu, who was an outer disciple and only recently promoted to an inner disciple. She's a nobody with no power or backer. They used to go out and perform tasks together," said Li Xuanchen.

"What about it?"

"Well, Li Qingyu hasn't been on a Wuyou faction task for a long time. We can ask Sister Wuyou to arrange something, and at the same time, get Guo Xiaofu to invite Li Qingyu on the task. Li Qingyu trusts her. As long as she leaves the Grand-Orient Sect, you can do as you please!"

Yuwen Shengcheng burned with eagerness.

"If Sister Wuyou can give us a hand, all we need is a little coercion to get Guo Xiaofu to play along. Who knows, we might just succeed. After all, there's still a considerable amount of time before the Prime Struggle. Li Qingyu might decide to leave. Now that all the attention is on Li Tianming, no one's concerned about her."

The more he thought about it, the more Yuwen Shengcheng felt like they had a chance.

"We can give it a try," persuaded Li Xuanchen.

"What should I do when the time comes?" Yuwen Shengcheng wondered.

"I've got something special prepared for you. All you have to do is use it," Li Xuanchen grinned.

"What is it?"

"A carefree fruit with indigo heavenly patterns. I managed to get my hands on it through someone else. It cost me quite a penny. It can erase short-term memories. In large doses, it'll turn people into fools."

In that instant, Yuwen Shengcheng understood what he meant.

"So after I'm done, I don't have to kill her, just turn her into a fool. Then, find some place outside and imprison her so she's my exclusive property. That way, no one will find her."

"Yes! Your reputation won't be affected, nor will it bring you any trouble. Kill Guo Xiaofu and the girls will be considered missing," suggested Li Xuanchen.

Although the Yuwen clan was planning on killing Tianming in the Prime Tower, it didn't matter. Satisfying Yuwen Shengcheng's desire for payback would only bring him closer to the Yuwen clan.

That way, the Kunpeng Sacred Seal would most likely fall into his hands, instead of being destroyed by the Yuwen clan. Additionally, since this was something he had promised Yuwen Shengcheng, he didn't dare go back on his word. After all, he was very clear about just how vengeful Yuwen Shengcheng was. Yuwen Shengcheng was undoubtedly dissatisfied with leaving the killing to Yuwen Zhenxing, and wanted to personally get back at the siblings; not just Tianming, but also Qingyu.

"Li Qingyu, with the carefree fruit, what's waiting for you is a fate worse than death!"

In the secret room, a beastly ferocity burned in Yuwen Shengcheng's eyes.

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Earlier that day, Tianming had left the Li Mausoleum and headed back to Azure Dragon Sword Mountain.

At the gates of the hall stood Li Qingyu with her new weapon. A fine blade, her new weapon was longer and thinner than the Fullmoon Blade and dark from top to bottom. Just glancing at it from a distance would have a person breaking out in goosebumps.

"Where did you get this?" asked Tianming.

"Master gave it to me. It's called Vilemoon, a grade seven bestial weapon." Qingyu was in such a good mood that she couldn't bear to put the blade down.

"Oh, how I envy you. The old man is clearly biased. How come you get one, but I don't? I'll have to ask him for my new weapon," laughed Tianming.

"Big Brother, I'm guessing master has one prepared for you as well. He even taught me an extraordinary unity-ranked battle art called the Moonset Galaxy Blade Art. I can feel its power," she said.

"How does it feel to receive guidance from master?"

"All I can say is, I feel supercharged!"

"Haha, and how is your progress with the battle art?"

"Master says I'm a peerless genius. In fact, I've already mastered most of it. It won't take long before I advance to sixth-level Unity." The fact that she was a Pentamoon Skybane had yet to fully set in.

"Well done, young woman. I'm waiting for you to rise against the strong. Don't forget to support me when the time comes," said Tianming.

"No problem! I promise to stand idly by while others beat the crap out of you!" Qingyu chuckled.

"How cruel. You have no love for your brother."

"Alright, go on. Master's been waiting for you," Qingyu gave him a push.

Qingyu bit her lips, smiling as she watched Tianming walk into the Azure Dragon Sword Hall. In the quiet woods, she continued honing her skill with her new weapon.

I have a feeling that as long as I follow in his footsteps and try not to fall behind, I'll be able to achieve something.

With each devastating sweep of Vilemoon, moonlight danced on the blade.

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When Tianming entered Azure Dragon Sword Hall, he was greeted by the sight of a motionless man, standing with his back to him.

"Master, are you trying to look handsome?" teased Tianming.

Unexpectedly, Ye Shaoqing turned around. With the stretch of his finger, a terrifying sword aura shot toward Tianming. The sword intent in the aura possessed the will to defy the heavens, a majestic wave capable of destroying everything and overturning heaven and earth.

Tianming felt as if this one blow would wipe him out from the face of this earth. What a frightening sword intent! The feeling was hard to describe, but he was certain that rank, status, and power meant nothing, crumbling before this sword.

On the brink of claiming Tianming's life, Ye Shaoqing withdrew his sword intent. Tranquility was restored to the heavens and earth.

Beads of cold sweat dotted Tianming's forehead.

Chapter 253 - Countercurrent, Starfall

"Young man, did you feel that?" Ye Shaoqing said, giving his fingers a light blow.

"I did. Are you going to kill your own disciple?" Tianming asked.

"Fool, I was asking if you felt the Voidgod Sword Intent's might."

"Well... I thought it was about average. Are you going to teach it to me?" In all honesty, he found it rather terrifying. The merest hint of that sword intent was far more terrifying than his Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven's Apocalyptic-Will. It was in a whole different league.

"Not really. Since you don't think it's impressive, I won't bother," he said with a smile.

"Oh, you don't have to do that. It's average, but I can live with it."

"Live with it? If you can practice the first strike of Voidgod Sword Intent within a month, I'll be your disciple," he boasted.

"Are you serious?"

"Still want to try?"

"Come. I'm not afraid."

"Hehe... I've seen too many ignorant, disrespectful ones all but tear up and cry before me at the very end."

"I'm ready to have an elder become my disciple," Tianming said.

"We'll see," Ye Shaoqing said, still doubtful. "Go now. Go to the mountains near the rivers. I'll show you the true form of the Voidgod Sword Intent!"

"Don't tell me you're going to teach me badly because you're afraid you'll lose to me."

"Me? Afraid of you? Now that's a joke if I've ever heard one."

They went to the foot of Azure Dragon Sword Mountain. On the way, the many disciples and exalted masters paid their respects to Ye Shaoqing. It appeared that he now fully controlled Azure Dragon Sword Mountain.

"Now watch." A sword appeared in his hand. "The Voidgod Sword Intent is a battle art beyond the Heavenly Will stage. It's what I'm currently using. What I will demonstrate today is the version with half of the Heavenly Will insights excluded so you can try comprehending the mysteries of this sword strike. I've seen your sword art before and the one who simplified it for you is a genius. It's incredibly hard to simplify a heavenly-ranked battle art to the Spiritsource stage. Even I can't do it.

"That's why I'm only simplifying it by a bit. However, it means Voidgod Sword Intent will be easily five times harder or more than yours. Inherently, it's a saint-ranked battle art. If you can master it, it'll be much stronger than normal unity-ranked battle arts. To think that you'd dare to make a bet with me on mastering something so hard. You really don't know the heights of the heavens or breadth of the earth."

Ye Shaoqing pointed his black longsword toward the mountains and rivers. Tianming's eyes were glued to the black sword that had a black dragon head with red eyes at its pommel. Hundreds of bloody lines extended outward from the eyes. The whole sword looked a little like meat with a network of blood vessels, and the dragon's eye looked like a heart. It almost seemed like blood was circulating throughout the sword. The blood on that sword gave off a mysterious, domineering, and terrifying sensation, as if it were a gigantic beast.

On the sword were many violet heavenly patterns—a sign it was a grade-seven bestial weapon. Obviously, Ye Shaoqing usually used saint bestial weapons, not a grade-seven one, so he had obviously brought it out for a reason. Thinking back at him giving Qingyu Vilemoon, he figured the black sword was for him too.

He could tell that the sword contained explosive power. But since Ye Shaoqing hadn't brought it up, he didn't ask about it. Now, both of them were focused on the sword intent.

"The key to Voidgod Sword Intent lies in the name: the void. Void is a kind of unyielding will. A will to rebel. A will to break rules and change destiny. Actually, this technique was created by the ancestors of the Li Saint Clan. Perhaps you'll be able to comprehend it more easily, as you have Lifesbane.

"You have to focus on nurturing that feeling in your heart. Let your moves come from the depths of your heart. To simplify: see past life and death and act to change what you're unhappy with! People, the world itself, and countless things within it—even the gods high up—will strive to oppress you. You should void all their efforts! Fight to thwart them! March forward bravely and without fear, then break all the rules!" As Ye Shaoqing spoke, the sword intent formed.

Tianming watched attentively, seeing nothing but the sword and taking in all of his words. That feeling came rather easily to him. As Ye Shaoqing went on, he felt the blood of his ancestors boiling within him. The eyes of the little chick on his shoulder glowed. Just two days back, it had still been struggling with the Life-Death Whip Art. However, this new sword art once more piqued its fighting spirit.

"I know this state of mind. No matter what or who, whether it be the heavens, earth, gods, or demons, as long as they oppress me, they will die by my hand!" the little chick announced.

Ye Shaoqing looked at the little chick and saw that it was indeed an eight-star lifebound beast. However, no normal lifebound beast would have such acute observational abilities.

"Ahem... Let us continue." Ye Shaoqing felt a little unnerved looking at the man and chick. If Tianming really did master the first strike in one month, things would be awkward.

"Listen well. There's four strikes in Voidgod Sword Intent, but they can also be considered one because only one will prevails through all four strikes, and that is the Voidgod Will! However, each subsequent strike's sword intent is a whole level above the previous level's. In other words, each subsequent strike will be far more damaging and ruthless. Once you comprehend the first strike, you must remember it well, but you can't stop there. You must keep on going until your Voidgod Will grows stronger, which will in turn boost the damage you can inflict."

Tianming felt himself understanding it more and more. There were seven kinds of distinct wills for his Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven. Though the Voidgod Sword Intent only had one kind of will, he felt it was much harder, as the complexity of that path compounded upon itself.

Ye Shaoqing, enduring Tianming's intense gaze, looked toward the landscape before him. "The first strike: Countercurrent. The second strike: Starfall. The third strike: Cosmic Break. And the fourth and final strike, which is the quintessence of the technique and makes it a saint-ranked battle art: Myriad's Only!"

Tianming remembered it all and had some thoughts about it. It would be a long journey to master Countercurrent, Starfall, Cosmic Break, and finally Myriad's Only. It would be a process, and the foes he would have to fight would only grow stronger and more terrifying.

Not to mention, the Voidgod Sword Intent's will required him to defy fate with a mortal body, looking past life and death and fighting fearlessly. The Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven was like divine punishment,

but the Voidgod Sword Intent was the complete opposite. With a mortal body, he had to challenge nature, the stars, the cosmos, and the gods and devils themselves.

During his final battle in Ignispolis, his state of mind had matched the will of Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven. But since he had come to the Grand-Orient Sect, his Lifesbane curse had activated, leaving him with only three years left. Given those conditions, and being a descendant of the Li Saint Clan, he managed to resonate really strongly with the fate-changing Voidgod Sword Intent his ancestors had created. Before Ye Shaoqing had even struck, Tianming's blood was boiling.

"Watch well!" Ye Shaoqing cried, then slashed down with Countercurrent. That strike made Tianming's scalp tingle, but it didn't come from the force of the strike. Instead, it came from the will behind it. The mountains shook and the river's current was reversed. Everything under the skies fell silent from the strike.

Most crucially, Tianming could see Ye Shaoqing in the midst of the storm, challenging the status quo of nature itself, despite being a mortal man. This was the first and simplest strike of the Voidgod Sword Intent, but Tianming could feel the spirit it required for a mere mortal to challenge the heavens and everything under it in an effort to prove themselves, which was profoundly different from the Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven.

Despite his state of mind changing from that of one exacting heaven's will to a mortal like himself, Tianming noticed it was far stronger. Using the Demise of Man-Earth-Heaven, it felt like he was channeling the rage of the gods. But now, he found the mortal state of mind even more suited to himself. The scene he had just witnessed played back endlessly in his mind.

"Did you watch properly? I will only demonstrate it once." He then handed Tianming a book containing the Voidgod Sword Intent. "What you have to do is to read this while recalling that strike. Start from the sword intent, and more importantly, feel the blood of your ancestors and channel their spirits," he instructed strictly.

Tianming would be facing far more danger than before. As such, he required an even stronger might. Ye Shaoqing had seen Yuwen Taiji and knew how overboard he was going. So, he hoped that Tianming would drop out of the Prime Struggle. But seeing how headstrong the boy was, Ye Shaoqing knew he wouldn't give up easily. Tianming would definitely participate in the second round of battles, at least. As for the Prime Tower, he still had a chance to give up.

This child is too stubborn. If he can pass the second round, he'll definitely try the third as well. If he can master the Voidgod Sword Intent before that and break through once more, he might just stand a chance—

Before he could finish that thought, Tianming suddenly struck. The strike caused Ye Shaoqing's eyes to widen as he stared at Tianming, dumbfounded.

"Come greet your new master," Tianming said, chuckling.

Chapter 254 - Onyx Dragon

It was as if time itself had frozen over. Ye Shaoqing looked at Tianming with his eyes wide open for a good, long moment.

"Master, why are you looking at me like that? Do you swing that way or something?" Tianming asked.

"Damn it!" Ye Shaoqing shook his head and couldn't help but curse.

"Please don't, I'm not into middle-aged men. You'd better just hail me as your master and get it over with."

"I don't believe it! One more time!" He had only demonstrated it once, yet Tianming had managed to execute it. That simply couldn't happen.

"It's easy no matter how many more times I do it," Tianming said, then his expression grew stern. Closing his eyes, he felt the will within his bloodline; the will of his ancestors. The Voidgod Sword Intent was the crystallization of his ancestors' will. He could grasp it clearly, as the resonance in his blood helped him understand it in an inexplicable way. His very blood imparted upon him a fundamental understanding of the technique.

While Ye Shaoqing had only demonstrated it once, Tianming's ancestors had trained the technique millions of times before. Even Tianming couldn't master a battle art in one go, but the Voidgod Sword Intent seemed tailor-made for him.

"The heavens shake where fate blocks my way. As a mere mortal, only by voiding the gods' wills can I maintain my dignity!"

He executed Countercurrent, this time with even more force. While it still wasn't at Ye Shaoqing's level, the will aspect of the strike was identical. It was enough to burst through the oppressive force of nature itself. He immediately sheathed his sword after the strike.

"With the Kunpeng Sacred Seal, the strike could've been much stronger." He felt like his ancestors were supporting him from behind as he struck, their wills becoming his. Perhaps his opponent would be subject to the combined will of his countless ancestors.

Ye Shaoqing took three more steps back after witnessing the strike, completely floored. He looked at Tianming and stepped forward, searching his body all over.

"What are you doing? Don't force yourself on me, alright?" Tianming said with his guard up.

"I'm checking to see if you're human, or a monster!" He was at the edge of his sanity. He himself had only just mastered the Voidgod Sword Intent in the recent years after lots of effort and countless nights of arduous meditation, yet Tianming had mastered the strike in one go. How could he be human?

"Are you looking for an excuse to not take me as your master?" Tianming teased.

"Shut up! When did I say I would do that?" he argued.

Tianming didn't know someone of Ye Shaoqing's age could be so shameless. Only after a little more fussing did he fully accept the facts before him. "A genius indeed!" he cried toward the skies with an expression of both rage and joy.

In his youth, he had been a prime disciple, so he knew how hard it was for him to step into the saint stage. Yet, this kid had it so easy! If there was a monstrous genius, he would be it.

"Even with Kunpeng Sacred Seal, your comprehension of this technique is too frightening."

"Master, you just have to get used to it."

Ye Shaoqing felt a growing urge to squish him. "Continue practicing it! A thousand strikes each day! You've only just got the looks right, so make sure you get the rest correct. Only when you truly get the form right can you start learning the second strike, Starfall. I know you're a fast learner, but don't grow arrogant, got it?"

"Master, why does it feel like you're envious of my talent?"

"Does it seem that way? Ahem... You're overthinking it." Ye Shaoqing tidied his robes and glared at Tianming, then turned to leave. "Keep practicing!"

Tianming smiled as he watched him leave. Naturally, he wouldn't grow proud. The Voidgod Sword Intent just happened to be a technique suited to him; there was no way he was nearly that talented.

Clang!

All of a sudden, a black sword pierced into the ground next to Tianming's foot. It was the one Ye Shaoqing had been wielding.

"That's for you. It's a grade-seven bestial weapon, Onyx Dragon. This sword isn't that special. It's made using spirit ores and spirit hazards. Its only defining characteristic is that it contains the blood of a third-order demon beast, an Onyx Viledragon. Even I would have to go through a lot of trouble to kill it. If you can tap into the power of its blood, the sword will open up endless possibilities."

When lifebound beasts transcended mortality into sainthood, they would be called saint beasts. When wildbeasts went through the same process, they would be called demon beasts.

Tianming drew the dragon-pommeled sword. At that moment, he felt that the sword was its own living being. Like a giant, divine dragon filled with life, it wouldn't be easy for him to conquer it. The dragon's eyes were where its blood gathered. Tianming pressed his thumb on that spot and immediately felt the blood of the Onyx Viledragon pierce into his body. It was trying to tear him apart, but his Aeternal Infernal Physique and Genesis Chaos Physique immediately dominated the remnant will of the demon beast. After that, the blood within the sword immediately boiled, causing the sword to burst with power.

Tianming gave it a swing. The moment his infernalsource and lightningsource surged, a wave of dark crimson sword ki was unleashed. It was a few times stronger than the Grand Thunderflare Sword. That was none other than the Onyx Viledragon's sword ki. With this sword, he would be far more powerful.

"Thank you, Master!" He looked at the sword lovingly and cherished it dearly. From now on, he would slaughter all with viledragon in hand!

"Damn it," Ye Shaoqing cursed helplessly again. The way he saw it, Tianming had completely mastered the sword's might. To think that it had taken Ye Shaoqing so much effort to reach that point.

"A monster indeed! So pentabanes are that fearsome after all? It's no wonder the founding ancestor of the Li Saint Clan could reach the Empyrean Saint Stage and gain a terrifying reputation in the Theocracy

of the Ancients. If this child survives, it's only a matter of time before he defies fate itself. It's a shame that he'll have to experience so many deathly trials before he grows strong enough."

All Ye Shaoqing could be sure of was that he would do his best to help him out.

Chapter 255 Indigo-Scaled Unicorn

The Li Mausoleum.

Under Li Shenxiao's tomb sat a white-haired young man, eighty-one saintly heavenly patterns circulating between him and the tombstone. Endless spiritual energy of heaven and earth accumulated in his body. On top of his head was a little chick, and he held a small black cat in his arms.

Between the three of them, a cycle was formed as the spiritual energy of heaven and earth constantly flowed through them, converging in the two infernalsources and thundersources.

His unity field enveloped half the mountaintop. Li Wudi couldn't stay here much longer, so he dashed to the mountainside, foul-mouthed and cursing, then fell asleep on his Void Kunpeng.

With the passage of time, the integration of Tianming's unity field grew stronger. The eighty-one saintly heavenly patterns resembled living creatures, releasing endless spiritual energy.

During the day, Tianming and Qingyu cultivated the sword on Azure Dragon Sword Mountain. In the evening, Feiling stayed with Qingyu, spending her time reading and exploring all sorts of bizarre things. The library in Azure Dragon Sword Hall perfectly met her needs. Presently, she had no problem serving as Tianming's personal encyclopedia.

She did her utmost to help Tianming. In fact, he thought of them as partners who supported each other, much like Tianming, Ying Huo, and Meow Meow were partners in battle. Feiling was an indispensable part of the team. With how little time they had, her existence was extremely important!

Aside from Li Shenxiao's tomb, Tianming spent the bulk of his time at the Grim Reaper's tomb. During this period of time, at his stage, the Life-Death Whip Art and Heaven Defying Sword Intent went hand in hand.

The second battle of the Grand-Orient Sect's number one battlefield was here!

"I've broken through to third-level Unity."

After his last unsatisfactory confrontation with Li Xuanchen, Tianming had been on a roll; everything had gone smoothly! He had Soul Hook cultivated to perfection and had begun contemplating Death Requisition!

After ten thousand swings of the sword, Tianming had mastered Countercurrent, reaching a level that amazed Ye Shaoqing. Most importantly, after half a month of cultivating before Li Shenxiao's tomb, Tianming had finally broken through to third-level Unity with Ying Huo and Meow Meow. As a result, he had achieved great breakthroughs in both cultivation techniques and battle arts. Coupled with Archfiend and Onyx Dragon, Tianming had risen to the level of a genius.

As a matter of fact, everyone in the Grand-Orient Sect believed Tianming was a rare genius, comparable to the first ancestor of Li Saint Clan. It was a pity he lacked enough cultivation time.

However, death waits for no one.

.....

Grand-Orient Sect's number one battlefield.

All hundred thousand seats were full, the audience packed like sardines. On the battlefield, Elder Su Zhen was in charge with a complete list of matches. Under his arrangement, the thirty-two contenders, aside from Yuwen Zhenxing, walked in one after another, ready to fight for the final sixteen places to enter the Prime Tower.

Without exception, the intense battles would cause a hubbub. At this moment, the audience was boiling!

Tianming stood by the window in Azure Dragon Sword Hall, carefully observing every opponent. He had strengthened his resolve to participate in the Prime Struggle.

Seeking fortune amidst danger, Tianming was hell-bent on visiting the mysterious third floor of the Prime Tower, which was supposedly an incredible space created by the Li Saint Clan ancestors.

Ye Shaoqing's original intention was to give the siblings an opportunity to get a feel for competing in the Prime Struggle, and return three years later. However, upon recognizing Tianming's talent, he decided to throw caution to the wind. After all, there was still a month before the Prime Struggle.

Who knew what height Tianming could cultivate to within that period of time?

"Aside from Yuwen Zhenxing, Master places emphasis on these two opponents," said Qingyu.

After awakening as a Pentamoon Skybane, her temperament had improved by leaps and bounds, like a beautiful goddess of the moon.

Tianming's eyes fell upon a teenager on the battlefield.

The young man was dressed in heavy indigo armor that covered his entire body. His helmet, chain mail, and metal boots were solid, resembling the cavalry. This set of indigo armor was obviously a grade seven beastial weapon, and as such was worth much more than ordinary weapons.

In his hand was a star pike. His pike resembled that used by Sage Chen—slender and dazzling, its sharp point was bursting with an intense aura.

The most striking thing was the fine, indigo-scaled steed he was riding. It was tall, vigorous and powerful, and had a pair of starry, colored eyes. The horn on its head stretched a meter long and was sharper than a grade seven beastial weapon.

"This young man is Chen Xiaoji, the grandson of the seventh elder, Chen Nantian, and is currently at eighth-level Unity. His lifebound beast is a second-order saint beast called the Indigo-Scaled Unicorn. Elder Chen Nantian is a loyal ally of Yuwen Taiji, and Chen Xiaoji and Yuwen Shendu have a good relationship. If you enter the Prime Tower, he's one to watch out for. Both Yuwen Zhenxing and he are cut from the same cloth, scoundrels who advance and retreat together."

During the short time Qingyu was making her introduction, Tianming had seen through Chen Xiaoji's strength. At Chen Xiaoji's level and with a second-order saint beast, his fighting capacity far outweighed that of Yuwen Shengcheng. After all, Chen Xiaoji was several years older than the Yuwen Clan scion. From all the direct disciples, he was a genius among geniuses of their generation, second only to the prime disciples.

None of the other pampered grandchildren of the sect elders could compare to Chen Xiaoji; not Su Li, and not even Gongsun Yu.

Chen Xiaoji's every move had the audience exclaiming in shock. Under their appreciative gazes, he rode his Indigo-Scaled Unicorn and defeated his opponent in one charge.

"Chen Xiaoji wins! A month from now, you'll be able to enter the Prime Tower," declared Elder Su Zhen.

As Chen Xiaoji dismounted and left the battlefield, he glanced in the direction of Azure Dragon Sword Mountain, lips curled in a cold smirk.

Was it merely coincidence? Tianming committed the young man to memory.

A few rounds later, another teenager attracted Tianming's attention. He was also the focus of Qingyu's introduction. It was a boy with long crimson hair. He was tall, but thin, a bit like a bamboo pole. His fiery eyes made him ferocious. And even more frightening was the huge locust beside him.

It stood as tall as a hill, and its belly made up ninety percent of its body. Tianming was reminded of the Bloodhell Broodmother.

Right now, countless blazing locusts the size of a thumb flew out of the giant locust's belly. The blazing locusts swarmed into the sky in a dense cloud, ravishing and burning everything they came across.

The young man and his lifebound beast were a terrifying sight to behold!

Chapter 256 The Imperial Flame Locust And Hundred-eyed Winged Serpen

"This young man is Gongsun Shengji, from the Gongsun clan. The elder of the Gongsun clan, Gongsun Sheng, is also an ally of Yuwen Taiji. Gongsun Shengji is another genius from Yuwen Shendu's circle and his lifebound beast is a fire type broodmother beast known as the Imperial Flame Locust, which can probably birth a hundred thousand Sky-Blazing Locusts. His lifebound beast is quite difficult to deal with, so if you do encounter him, you must be careful. Gongsun Shengji is also at eighth-level Unity. As for how much of a challenge he poses, you're about to witness that for yourself."

As Qingyu spoke, Gongsun Shengji and his Imperial Flame Locust had gone into battle. His opponent, a seventh-level Unity disciple, was basically useless against him. When the Sky-Blazing Locusts swarmed, flames filled the air, so his opponent could only surrender.

"Amazing!" Tianming frowned.

"Chen Xiaoji, Gongsun Shengji, and Yuwen Zhenxing are all after you. And each is harder to deal with than the last. Big Brother, if you want to enter the Prime Tower, you'll have to properly consider this," Qingyu said.

"It's too early to talk about this. If I can't even pass the second round, I won't have to think about the Prime Struggle," Tianming smiled.

In truth, these three young men didn't scare him. They couldn't stop him from competing for the treasure in the first and second levels, or break his resolve to explore the third level.

"Don't worry, I'll protect you, Big Brother," assured Feiling.

"Of course. With you around, I have little to worry about," added Qingyu.

"You're amazing as well. Your master constantly praises you," replied Feiling. The two girls started complimenting each other again.

Meanwhile, Tianming was calmly observing his opponents.

There were indeed several notable characters with amazing combat power, especially Chen Xiaoji and Gongsun Shengji, who enjoyed the disciples' awe.

"Big Brother, do you know who your opponent is today?" asked Qingyu.

"Yes, it's Su Yiran, your previous opponent."

"Yuwen Zhenxing and Su Yiran are a couple, both at seventh-level Unity."

"A couple?"

Tianming was well aware that the Su clan was once on par with the Ye clan, but that was thousands of years ago. Now, the Su clan had three elders, and Su Zhen was one of them. Headed by the second elder, Su Yunzhi, they were the strongest supporters of the Yuwen clan.

Su Wuyou and Su Yiran were granddaughters of the Su clan, and enemies who didn't deserve any civility.

The junior sect master's talent had shocked the entire sect. All the talented disciples of the forces headed by the Yuwen clan desperately wanted to crush him. However, their abilities remained to be seen. Whether or not they could actually obstruct Tianming's rise was still up in the air.

Tianming wasn't proud, but he had a clear understanding of himself.

"Surpass yourself and you can defeat your enemies." Tianming took a deep breath. Next up was his turn.

As expected, Elder Su Zhen announced, "Next, Ninepaths Mountain's Su Yiran against Azure Dragon Sword Mountain's Li Tianming! Li Tianming is the junior sect master of the Grand-Orient Sect. Ladies and gentlemen, are you excited?"

At the mention of his name, the audience boiled with excitement, displaying a greater reaction than during Gongsun Shengji's appearance. Since the junior sect master rarely made an appearance, many disciples looked forward to seeing him in person.

In the eyes of the masses, Tianming descended from the sky, stepping into the battlefield without further ado. Drawing the Onyx Dragon, Tianming thrust it into the rock before him and waited for his opponent.

Seventh-level Unity, Su Yiran?

"Not a bad opponent to practice my sword intent on."

The Onyx Dragon had the audience's mouths agape. Numerous inner disciples kept their eyes wide open, so they wouldn't miss the junior sect master's performance.

"The junior sect master is probably slightly stronger than Yuwen Shengcheng, who's at sixth-level Unity. But against Su Yiran, I'm afraid it'll be a losing battle."

"With his talent, God knows how much progress he's made. Perhaps he has a fighting chance."

"Well, let's watch and find out!"

"To be honest, I admire the junior sect master's courage. There are few people who dare confront those in that circle. Even the grandchildren of the first and fourth elders lack the courage."

"I heard that the junior sect master beat Yuwen Shengcheng into a sorry mess. I'm guessing Su Yiran will teach him a lesson on Yuwen Shengcheng's behalf. This battle is going to be phenomenal!"

"Su Yiran made her move!"

Where the audience's gazes were fixed, a beautiful girl in a fiery red dress slowly descended on the lake. Her flame-red lips, cat-like, charming eyes, soft posture, and slim, flexible waist had the audience drooling with each suggestive step she took.

One could hardly imagine how it would feel to have such a girl wrapped around a man. After all, her beauty was beyond the reach of ordinary men.

Deathly silence pervaded the battlefield.

Su Yiran swept her seductive eyes over the sword-wielding young man. His white hair swayed in the gentle breeze, forming a sharp contrast against his scaly, black arm.

She had to admit that Tianming had a special charm, which wasn't limited to his heroic air. Both his gaze and his manner of being were intimidating. However, at the thought of his level, Su Yiran was confident.

After making a decision, Su Yiran's lifebound beast emerged from her lifebound space, wrapping around her with a ferocity comparable to a Taotie.

The Su clan of the Grand-Orient Sect possessed winged serpents for lifebound beasts. Su Yiran's huge winged serpent had a pair of blood-red wings, which burned with flames. Most winged serpents were fire and poison dual type lifebound beasts.

The terror of Su Yiran's winged serpent lay in the eyes that stretched throughout its body—a total of one hundred blood-red eyes, burning with flames and poison. This was a second-order saint beast, the Hundred-eyed Winged Serpent. Aside from its fire and poison properties, it also possessed illusion abilities.

As soon as Tianming's eyes were laid upon the Hundred-Eyed Winged Serpent's blazing wings and bloody eyes, he sensed an awe-inspiring oppression.

What a fierce lifebound beast! The moment the Hundred-Eyed Winged Serpent locked on to Tianming, its murderous intent unfurled.

Su Yiran tapped her feet, charging forth with her lifebound beast. In her hand was a grade seven Red Plume Serpent Sword that was curved like a snake and as thin as a cicada's wing. It seemed powerful enough to easily slice through everything.

With a smile, Su Yiran waved her sword, demonstrating the unity-ranked Phantom Flameheart Sword Art.

A sea of flames flowed toward Tianming.

"Junior sect master, would you agree if I said that you're a reckless fool?"

Plastered across Su Yiran's beautiful face was a charming smile, her captivating voice spreading throughout the battlefield.

Chapter 257 - Heartburn Toxiflame and Magma Toxiflow

People really shouldn't be judged by their appearances. While Yuwen Zhenxing sported a huge physique, he was a rather complicated fellow who often kept to himself and his books. On the other hand, while Tianming looked like a refined gentleman, all Su Yiran could see was a brute who didn't know what was good for him.

"People like you usually don't live long," she said, correct in a way she wasn't aware of. Tianming really didn't have long left to live. She communed telepathically with her Hundred-eyed Winged Serpent and it charged forward, causing the ground to shake as its eyes burst with flames. The flames were the color of blood, and seemed like a kind of toxin. It was its spiritsource ability, Heartburn Toxiflame. Surrounded by the poisonous flame, Su Yiran laughed confidently and executed Firegod's Raging Slash.

I only used seventy percent of my power. He won't die just like that, right? she thought as she attacked.

Right as Tianming was about to be swallowed up by the flames, he finally drew Onyx Dragon, put his finger on the dragon eye, and instantly felt the dragon's blood boil. His strike was quick, accurate, and ruthless. Stepping forward as he drew his sword back, he gave it a quick slash. The movements looked simple, but the crowd burst with fervor when they witnessed it. Voidgod Sword Intent, Countercurrent! Su Yiran was the river he was trying to go against.

Su Yiran was the first to feel the razor-sharp will emanating from the strike. The headstrong, ruthless, and chaotic will formed a terrifying attack that instantly stunned her. A hundred-meter-long sword ki in the form of the Onyx Viledragon shot out, the might of the strike shaking the whole arena. The moment the swords clashed, the crowd watched as Su Yiran's sword was sent flying. Not only that, she herself was blown back until she rammed into the heavenly pattern barrier before she collapsed, unmoving. It only took Tianming one strike to reduce Su Yiran to a miserable mess. By the time she got up, she was helplessly coughing out blood.

"She's this weak?" Even Tianming hadn't expected that his strike would be that powerful. Little did he know that Su Yiran wasn't fighting with her full power. Otherwise, while she would've lost, she wouldn't have fallen so pathetically and end up so haggard. It turned out that holding back had only unnecessarily doomed her.

Tianming didn't stop at all, as the winged serpent was before his eyes by now. It opened its mouth and spat venomous magma toward him; that was its second spiritsource ability, Magma Toxiflow. Even the

slightest touch could cause poisoning so severe that it would put one at the brink of death. However, Tianming now had the Voidgod Sword Intent. In the past ten or so days, he had performed more than ten thousand strikes and grown even stronger.

Sword ki filled the area around Tianming once more as he executed Countercurrent again. The wave of magma was intercepted by the draconic sword ki and cut in half, then it splattered back on the head of the winged serpent and caused such severe melting damage that its skull was revealed. The Hundred-eyed Winged Serpent shrieked as it spat magma around in a panic without hitting Tianming at all, for he was protected by Infernal Armor.

The little chick had only come out for a look, activated Infernal Armor, then went back into Tianming's lifebound space, leaving him alone to fly in the skies with Celestial Wings and give the airborne serpent another slash. He left yet another huge, bleeding wound on the serpent's body, grounding it proper this time. By now, Su Yiran had only just crawled back up, right in time for the serpent's body to fall onto her head.

Her whole skeleton was about to fracture from the sheer force as she tumbled away from the collision. Struggling to push her serpent away, she cast a burning gaze at Tianming.

"You...!" Yet, she couldn't find any words to say to him. All she could do was glare at him hatefully. Meanwhile, Tianming descended to the ground without a single stain on him, as if he hadn't been in a fight at all.

"What about me? Are you sure you're at the seventh level of Unity? You couldn't have been holding back on me, could you?" he mocked, causing her scalp to tingle with fury. He had actually seen through her ruse! What infuriated her even more was that she hadn't even had an opportunity to switch gears and use her full power at all. With her lifebound beast squirming on the ground in pain, and a few of her bones completely shattered, she was at the point of fainting from pain like she had never experienced in her life before. The shame and humiliation only compounded her rage.

"I didn't know someone like you could be so glad even though you're about to die. I admit it was my loss today, but just you wait. You're a goner for sure!"

"So you're saying you want me to go to Prime Tower so you can deal with me? Thanks for the reminder. I won't be going then," he replied, smiling.

Su Yiran froze. She couldn't stand this at all. Did that mean all she had done was in vain? Once the Prime Struggle ended, their seniors would be going to participate in the Realm Wars. Who would be left to deal with Tianming then? Not to mention, the one to ruin Yuwen Zhenxing's plan would be her and her big mouth!

"Li Tianming, don't think you managed to escape. It's my loss today, but I'll make sure your whole family is wiped out if I get that opportunity!" She was so angry she was losing breath over it.

"You want to kill my whole family?" Tianming had long known that his future was sure to be a path full of obstacles and struggles. From the moment Yuwen Taiji had cut off one of Ye Shaoqing's fingers, he knew things would only grow far worse. However, there were some things he would be willing to risk death for. A true man wouldn't kneel and beg their foes to spare them, no matter what.

"That's right. The Li Saint Clan's so-called Apex Branch will be completely wiped out! Just you wait!"

Tianming merely smirked. All of a sudden, he extended a beam of sword ki from his fingers. It was so savage that it resembled the demonstration Ye Shaoqing had shown him. Before Su Yiran could react, the sword ki streaked past her right hand.

She squealed, her face contorting in pain. When she looked back down, she found that her pinky had been vaporized by the sword ki and left without a trace. Her prized sword fell to the ground once more. At that moment, tears and snot flowed endlessly from her pale face.

"It hurts! It huuuuuurts!" she cried as she shuddered nonstop.

"Su Yiran, go tell Yuwen Zhenxing I know he's watching. Tell him that I'll take his hand in the Prime Tower a month from now!" Tianming said, ignoring her cries. Even if he knew he might die, he would still join the fight at Prime Tower in a month. By the time Su Yiran looked back at him, the white-haired youth had turned and left the arena.

Chapter 258 - Battle to the Death a Month Later

What did Tianming mean? Even though Su Yiran couldn't really process it at the moment, it was clear to everyone else. Tianming radiated bravado and courage. Even though his decision basically amounted to suicide, it was enough to inspire respect for him. By the time she snapped out of the pain and thought it through, her face was blank.

At the end of the day, the scheme had worked out more or less like they had planned. Tianming would be going to the Prime Tower. However, she had lost horribly and even had her pinky finger cut off. Turning back, she saw the tall youth burning with rage as he watched Tianming leave.

"Big Brother Zhenxing, you have to torture him to death for me!" she said once Yuwen Zhenxing came to her side after the elder announced the end of the battle and dispelled the heavenly pattern barrier. Tianming had already returned to Azure Dragon Sword Mountain's hall by then.

"Don't worry!" Yuwen Zhenxing's eyes were seething with killing intent. "Yiran, I will definitely pay Tianming back ten thousand times what you suffered. Nobody should be allowed to bully you like that. It was my fault today. I would've risked my life to come to you if I was able to."

Yuwen Zhenxing had killed many people, but never had he wished for someone's death so fiercely. The Grand-Orient Sect was still ruled by their own regulations, so he forced himself to endure it. However, that didn't stop him from agonizing over what had happened.

"You should leave now," Elder Su Zhen said.

"How dare you speak? You couldn't even stop her from losing her finger!" Yuwen Zhenxing snapped, making it rather weird for the elder. However, he had indeed made a mistake today. He had never expected Tianming to be so daring, or he would have stopped the battle much earlier. Thankfully, not too many had heard him being chided by a junior like that, as most of them were still awestruck by Tianming's might.

More importantly, he hadn't even needed to send his lifebound beasts out to defeat Su Yiran. How strong was he, truly? Most, if not all of the audience members were shaken by that fact. Perhaps they would find out the answer to that question in the Prime Tower.

The disciples of Azure Dragon Sword Mountain were cheering for Tianming. Him qualifying for one of the seventeen slots for the Prime Tower round was already a mark of huge honor that their mountain hadn't enjoyed for years. However, they looked forward to the match that would take place a month from then even more. It would be a true unrestrained slaughter, for most of the people who had a grudge against their junior sect master would be gathered there. Even the elders wouldn't be able to interfere with what happened in the three floors of Prime Tower. Would they really be fighting to the death there?

Even though the seniors of Taiji Mountain, Yunchi Mountain, Fengtian Mountain, Ninepaths Mountain, Azure Immortal Mountain, and Azure Dragon Sword Mountain didn't show up, those present could feel the seeds of conflict being sown between those factions. Even so, some did have a few things to say about the matter.

"The junior sect master really is talented. His guts and straightforwardness are also to be admired."

"I really hope the heavens will give him more time to cultivate."

"There's only a month left."

"Cultivation isn't simply a matter of time. There will be different kinds of obstacles and challenges."

"It won't be such smooth sailing for him from now on."

"I guess we'll see if he can adapt to the Prime Struggle, survive, and emerge with some gains."

"If he really becomes a prime disciple, nobody will be able to stop his rise anymore."

"Even though he knows Yuwen Zhenxing and the others will gang up on him if he goes in the Prime Tower, he doesn't care. What a hot-blooded young man."

"Let me say that I saw something often described by our ancestors as the will of the Li Saint Clan in him."

"Who knows whether the neutral elders in the council will support him...."

The neutral elders referred to those aside from Yuwen Taiji, Azure Immortal Mountain, and Azure Dragon Sword Mountain's factions. There were quite a lot of them who hadn't quite chosen a side to stand on yet, chief among whom were the centenarian First Elder, Huangfu Fengyun, and the Fourth Elder, Shangguan Jingshu.

In Fengyun Immortal Mountain's Hall, Huangfu Fengyun and Shangguan Jingshu had watched the battle just now in full.

"There's something I heard of, you see..." Huangfu Fengyun began.

"Pray tell, Old Man Huangfu."

"A few days back when Ye Shaoqing fought Yuwen Taiji, the latter won and took the former's finger as a warning."

"So the junior sect master did this as payback?" she asked.

"I didn't expect a brat in his teens would be so fearless. He doesn't even care about offending Yuwen Taiji," he said with some measure of shock.

"He has guts, alright."

"I wonder what Yuwen Taiji thinks about this...."

"What else? For someone on his level, if he kills the junior sect master over such a trivial matter, he'll no doubt be made a laughingstock across the whole Grand-Orient Realm. That'll just invite quite a lot of criticism for when he wants to become the sect master in the future."

"True. Tianming is Ye Shaoqing's direct disciple, after all. While Ye Shaoqing lost, he's no weakling either. If they really flip out, the Yuwen Clan will be in for quite some trouble, trouble they can't afford right before the Realm Wars," Huangfu Fengyun said.

"However, there's nothing we can do if Yuwen Taiji really wants to go for the kill. Tianming isn't a prime disciple, after all. Had that been the case, Yuwen Taiji would have a hard time touching him, at least until he gets the Grand-Orient Sword."

"If he was a prime disciple, we could also send quite a number of people to protect him. It's a shame he hasn't had long to cultivate. It doesn't seem possible for him to become a prime disciple in this round."

"So why do you think Ye Shaoqing offended Yuwen Taiji for this kid?"

That was the thing they had trouble figuring out.

"Actually, with Yuwen Taiji's current status, he won't be able to deal with Tianming as he did Li Wudi back then. He'll probably let the juniors sort this matter out among themselves."

"True. He has his focus set on the Realm Wars," Shangguan Jingshu said.

"Speaking of which, the Prime Tower really is mysterious. Nobody can peek into what happens within it. If people end up dead, nobody can say for sure who the culprit is. Among that group, there are a few geniuses, Yuwen Zhenxing, Chen Xiaoji, and Gongsun Chi to name a few. The junior sect master might not survive," Huangfu Fengyun said with a sigh.

"It'll depend on his efforts then. He did rather well today. Su Yiran really did herself no favors by holding back against him."

All they could do was watch as things unfolded. After all, the Prime Struggle paled in comparison to the Realm Wars, which was the real battle that would cement the Grand-Orient Sect's fate.

"Did you see it? The Voidgod Sword Intent."

"I did."

"In terms of talent, there's no doubt. That child just returned a little late."

"That's true. Otherwise, the one to take back the Grand-Orient Sword for us wouldn't be Yuwen Shendu, but rather Li Tianming."

As they chatted, a young, handsome couple stood behind them. The pair were stunning to look at.

"Feifei, Jiayi," the old man said as he waved.

"Great-grandfather."

"Great-grandfather Huangfu."

Two children were walking toward the elder and greeted him as they approached. The boy was the great-grandson of Huangfu Fengyun, Huangfu Feifei. The girl was Shangguan Jingshu's great-granddaughter, Shangguan Jiayi.

"You two are pretty impressive as well, and stand a chance to get the treasures in the first and second floors. You must work together in there, alright?" Huangfu Fengyun advised.

"Don't worry, Great-grandfather Huangfu. I'll definitely protect Feifei," Shangguan Jiayi said, smiling sweetly.

"Looks like there's nothing else an old fogey like me can say."

"Of course. These young lovebirds will definitely fight shoulder to shoulder," Shangguan Jingshu said.

"However, there's one thing I have to warn you about," Huangfu Fengyun said sternly out of nowhere.

"Pray tell," the two chorused.

"Once you enter the Prime Tower, do not antagonize Li Tianming. Just focus on the treasures. But don't help him, either. We'll leave the rest for after the Realm Wars, understood?"

The couple looked at each other and nodded.

"Understood!"

"We won't help either side."

.....

Back at Taiji Mountain, Yuwen Shengcheng knocked on the door and was hurriedly let in by Li Xuanchen.

"Come in," he said as he pulled him in.

"Have you heard? Li Tianming wiped the floor with Su Yiran!" Yuwen Shengcheng said with a grim look.

"Wasn't that the plan? Yuwen Zhenxing wants him to enter the Prime Tower, after all."

"It's not the way you think. He really crushed her without even bringing his lifebound beasts out!"

"His growth is far too terrifying. Are pentabanes really so ridiculously strong?" Li Xuanchen said helplessly.

"It was truly shocking. However, that only makes us even more resolved to wipe him out. One of Su Yiran's fingers was completely severed, and Sister Wuyou was really angry. I used that opportunity to do what you suggested and she agreed she'd deal with Guo Xiaofu for us!" Yuwen Shengcheng said excitedly.

"Really? Then the carefree fruit will finally see some use."

"With Sis Wuyou and Sis Yiran's cunning wiles and the powerless Guo Xiaofu, it's practically settled. In the coming month, let's see if Guo Xiaofu will be able to lure Li Qingyu out of the sect."

"Congratulations, brother!" Li Xuanchen shot him a thumbs up.

Yuwen Shengcheng smirked triumphantly. "He really doesn't know what kind of trouble he's in for, if he dares to mess with us."

However, there was something Li Xuanchen didn't dare mention. From the very beginning, Tianming had never planned to go against them. Never had he taken the initiative to mess with them. In fact, they were the ones who tried bullying him the whole way, but so what? Their world operated on the simple principle of might makes right.

Chapter 259 - Yuwen Shendu and the Heavenly Will Stage

Two men stood on Fengtian Mountain's cliff. One had two different-colored eyes, one black and one white: Yuwen Taiji. The other was in a white robe and had a skinny figure. His aquiline nose and long, narrow eyes combined to give him the semblance of a hawk. Finally, his perceptive gaze and hands clasped behind his back made him look full of foresight and wisdom.

He was the third elder, Yuwen Fengtian!

The father-son pair stood there like two trees rooted to the cliff, staring into the misty abyss below. A black-clad youth sat there cross-legged, a large pile of red spirit gems, the most basic kind, beside him.

His hand grasped at the air repeatedly, as if he was trying to grab hold of the mysteries within.

In a nearby cave lurked a gargantuan beast. It kept its head lowered, and its two eyes looked like swirling black vortices.

Ripples began emanating from the black-clad youth's body.

Upon seeing this, the gargantuan beast made its way out of the cave, the ground shaking in its wake. The thick mist only barely revealed the thick layer of spikes that covered its body like a hedgehog. However, unlike a hedgehog, which had spikes for the purpose of self-protection, this beast's were a deadly murder weapon.

It reached the black-clad youth, and endless spiritual energy began surging in their direction.

"Success!" Up on the cliff, Yuwen Fengtian's eyes reddened. He kept his voice low to avoid distracting the youth, but his emotional state could easily be gleaned from his expression. "He's finally comprehended the heavenly will. Shendu has successfully made the final step before the Realm Wars! Heaven is on my Yuwen clan's side!

"He really didn't let me down. As expected of my, Yuwen Fengtian's grandson. He's had an iron will and tenacity since he was young. Now, with the divine items we've prepared for him and his Heavenly Will stage cultivation, who could possibly stop him in the Realm Wars?" Yuwen Fengtian's fists were balled tight, as he was filled with endless yearning for the future.

However, when he turned around, he saw that his son, Yuwen Taiji's expression remained solemn without the slightest excitement.

"Taiji, are you not excited?" Yuwen Fengtian asked.

"There's no need to celebrate until the Grand-Orient Sword is in our hands," Yuwen Taiji said coolly.

"Honestly, you should take care not to push him too hard. Shendu has never let me down before all these years," Yuwen Fengtian said.

"Push him too hard? You can't say that. Our world has a strict hierarchy. If he wants to climb up, he needs to put in more than a hundred percent effort and devote all of his focus to the task. Father, don't blame me for pushing him. One day, when Shendu reigns over the Grand-Orient Realm, he will thank me.

"Shengcheng is the same. I've been focusing on Shendu all these years, and neglected him in the process. His current state is my fault. When Shendu retrieves the Grand-Orient Sword, it'll be Shengcheng's turn to experience everything his elder brother has! Our Yuwen clan only needs shocking talents, not embarrassments."

Yuwen Fengtian sucked in a long breath when he heard this. He couldn't deny that there were reasons why Yuwen Taiji had accomplished so much, and even surpassed him. And those reasons were his harshness and vision.

"Father, there's not two months left until the Realm Wars. This is the last stretch for Shendu. Henceforth and until then, you and I will be here the whole way, guiding him in heavenly-ranked battle arts, except for the day of the Prime Struggle." Yuwen Taiji looked northwards, his eyes ablaze.

Yuwen Fengtian nodded in agreement.

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At Taiji Mountain, next to Fengtian Mountain, Yuwen Shengcheng was currently lazing around on a bench in one of its courtyards.

"Ever since elder brother reached Heavenly Will, father and grandfather have locked themselves away. I don't think they'll come out until the Prime Pagoda opens."

Yuwen Shengcheng had been chased away yesterday when he'd gone to Fengtian Mountain. At this juncture, not even Yuwen Kaitai would be allowed to disturb them.

"Your elder brother is really awesome. He's actually a prime disciple who's in Heavenly Will! I guarantee he'll be dominating all comers in the Realm War," Li Xuanchen said.

Yuwen Shengcheng smiled, not denying anything.

Also present were Yuwen Zhenxing, Su Wuyou, Su Yiran, Gongsun Chi, and Chen Xiaoji. They were all in a circle, in deep discussion about the prime struggle. Su Wuyou stood at the head of the group; she was looking in the direction of Fengtian Mountain, happiness for Yuwen Shendu still present in her heart.

However, her gaze turned cold when she noticed her younger sister's pale complexion.

“Shengcheng, Guo Xiaofu has already been handled. I promise you she’ll be obedient. Now you just need to come up with an excuse for her to bring Li Qingyu out,” Su Wuyou said. Her features had always been beautiful; however, her expression was slightly twisted now, causing her looks to drop a grade.

“Thank you, Big Sis Wuyou!” Yuwen Shengcheng said excitedly, finally hearing the news he had been waiting for.

“No need. Those two flies are our mutual enemies. Everyone will be happier if the flies stop buzzing around earlier.” Even now, Su Yiran was still feeling tormented by her severed finger.

“Big Sis Yiran, don’t worry. I’ll definitely help you vent your anger! When Li Qingyu becomes an idiot, I’ll definitely torment her well and good!” Malevolence filled Yuwen Shengcheng’s eyes.

“It’ll be up to you, Shengcheng. Right, are you curious how I handled Guo Xiaofu?” Su Yiran asked.

“I would love for you to broaden my horizons.”

“She has no power or backing. Her parents had low cultivation too, so I just grabbed them directly. If she doesn’t listen, I’ll just execute them on the spot,” Su Yiran sneered.

“Amazingly done,” Yuwen Shengcheng said.

Everyone laughed, filled with expectation at what Yuwen Shengcheng was going to do.

“Li Qingyu is already at fifth-level Unity. While you’re one level higher, getting her to yield may not be that easy.”

“Don’t worry, Big Sis Wuyou. Li Xuanchen will be with me. We’re both at sixth-level Unity, and I have a second-order saint beast,” Yuwen Shengcheng said smugly.

“Then it should be fine.” Su Wuyou nodded.

At the side, Su Yiran grit her teeth, filled with impatience. For her, it wasn’t just Li Qingyu, but Li Tianming as well! She turned to look at a hulking figure in the corner. The man’s head was currently lowered and unknown thoughts filled his mind.

Two youths were by his side as well, one dressed in blue and one in red. They were Chen Xiaoji and Gongsun Chi.

“Big Brother Zhenxing, I’ll be leaving my grudge to you!” Su Yiran stepped forward, looking extremely moving and pitiful.

Chapter 260 - That Isn’t A Genius, But A God!

Tears started falling from Su Yiran’s eyes.

“Don’t worry, Yiran. With the three of us, we’ll definitely make the rest of his life a pleasant one if he dares to enter the Prime Tower,” Gongsun Chi said.

“How so?”

“As an example, we can let my Sky-blazing Locusts nibble on his flesh bit by bit,” Gongsun Chi said.

“That’ll be a sight for sore eyes. What a pity I won’t be able to see it.” Su Yiran still couldn’t let go of her grudge.

“That can’t be helped. However, what I can do is help describe the entire process to you as you’re eating!”

“Get lost, that’s disgusting!” Su Yiran had finally started laughing.

Chen Xiaoji and Gongsun Chi exchanged a smile, then Chen Xiaoji asked, “Zhenxing, why aren’t you saying anything?”

Yuwen Zhenxing lifted his head, revealing slightly bloodshot eyes. Frowning, he said, “I’ve been making calculations. His rate of improvement is just too fast. I’m afraid he’ll make another breakthrough before entering the Prime Tower.”

“A breakthrough? That won’t be possible. Even for us, the fastest it’ll happen is a level a year in the Unity stage.”

“Right. He may have been a little fast, I admit. I think he took half a month per level? But you can’t linearly calculate increases in cultivation levels like that. Also, his pentabane can only provide him so much aid in fighting above his level. That advantage will slowly vanish. Even if he does make another breakthrough, at most, he’ll be on even footing with us. However, don’t forget the Prime Tower was designed by our seniors. He’ll surely die, having to face all three of us!”

“The higher the cultivation level, the harder the breakthroughs. Heh, if he could proceed at the pace of half a month per level, that wouldn’t be a pentabane but a centibane!”

“You’re right. That wouldn’t be a genius, but a god. Anyway, as long as he’s not a god, he’s dead meat when he steps into the Prime Tower. A heaven-defying pentabane? What the hell does that matter once he’s dead?”

“Does everyone still remember? We have the perfect specimen of Li Wudi to see for that!”

Everyone burst out into laughter. Their only worry was that Li Tianming would hide himself like a mouse.

“A god?” Yuwen Zhenxing clenched his fists and looked at Su Yiran. “Even if he were a god, that doesn’t change anything. I still need to behead him.”

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Back on Azure Dragon Sword Mountain, there was no moonlight. However, the stars in the sky were many and resplendent. They came in all colors, with purple and blue being in the majority.

Such beautiful stars were the most resplendent of creations in the world. However, according to Ye Shaoqing, the very purpose of the Voidgod Sword Intent’s second move, Starfall, was to bring down those stars. It was far more powerful than Countercurrent.

There were still fourteen days left until the Prime Struggle. In other words, Li Tianming had been working on Starfall for sixteen days! Training Starfall needed clear imagery; hence, Li Tianming had switched up his schedule. Now, he spent his days in the Li Mausoleum and nights on Azure Sword Mountain.

Ye Shaoqing would often be at his side, watching and correcting his errors. With the Kunpeng Sacred Seal, comprehending sword intent was nothing difficult. However, to achieve mastery and unleash its true power, what was needed was practice and practice.

Starfall!

Under the starlight, Tianming held on to Onyx Dragon as draconic blood seethed on its surface.

Every time he flicked his sword, a violent streak of sword ki would shoot out toward the stars.

“The endless stars are a representation of how vast the world is, and how microscopic and insignificant man is! Hence, for that insignificant man to hold the desire to bring down the stars is in itself heaven-defying! From fighting against the current, to fighting against the stars is a qualitative leap in might!” It sounded easy to possess this kind of spirit, but in practice it was another matter.

How could a mortal body have the spirit to fell the stars? They could only keep striking out with their sword, viewing the stars as something to remove, until the knot in their hearts were untied.

The stars only served as an image for something impossibly vast and distant, an analogy for the Voidgod Sword Intent’s growth.

Under the starry sky, Tianming had a special feeling. It wasn’t hopelessness—instead, he was thinking of two scenes.

An Aeternal Infernal Phoenix swallowing sun after sun, and the Genesis Chaos Thunderfiend roaming a sea of lightning and using the lightning to refine worlds.

That was truly the vast world!

What did minor beastmasters count for by comparison?

That was why he didn’t feel hopelessness, but instead became fired up in the face of those distant stars and the vast world. He was grateful to these stars for opening his eyes!

He would bring down the stars and change his fate, so that he could one day step on the same stage as the stars and live as long as heaven and earth!

When his thoughts found the correct path, everything became smoother. That night, over a thousand streaks of sword light soared into the sky, seeming to reach infinitely close to the stars.

Until, finally, one streak pierced through the clouds.

“Not bad. You’ve achieved great mastery in Starfall!” Now, Tianming had mastered two of the four stances. While on the surface, Ye Shaoqing was clapping, he was cursing up a storm inside. Freak. I used to think the tetrabane Li Wudi was hot stuff and an unparalleled genius. But now I know, only Li Tianming deserves those descriptions!

Ye Shaoqing had originally planned on not letting Tianming risk himself in the Prime Tower. However, he was now more interested in seeing how many worldviews Tianming could topple during the Prime Struggle.

“Many people think that even if you can maintain your previous rate of improvement, death is still a foregone conclusion for you,” Ye Shaoqing said.

“Oh. Next is Cosmic Break, right?”

“Aren’t you worried?”

“Cosmic Break, huh. That’s a scale even larger than the stars. So, it needs even an even more heaven-defying will to support it. Am I right?”

Tianming had absolutely no interest in the Prime Tower or his life and death. Immersed in the profundities of the Voidgod Sword Intent, his mind was only focused on advancing.

Ye Shaoqing was speechless. Weirdo!

However, there was no way for him to know that Tianming held no interest in surpassing others. In Tianming’s heart, his only targets were fate and himself.

Everyone else thought that as long as he survived, his future would be limitless. However, he alone knew that if he didn’t become a saint in three years, Lifesbane would kill him.

That was the true specter of death that loomed over him!