

The Ages 51

Chapter 51 - Kill Him!

“Bastard.”

As Li Tianming spoke, Ying Huo had already flown over to Wei Jing. Its eyes were already ablaze when it saw this scene. Its beak, which was flaming as well, began to peck the Bloodhell Worms to death one by one.

However, that didn't end Wei Jing's pain. Bloodhell Worms contained the paralytic Bloodhell Poison, which was administered into their prey during feeding. Furthermore, even more Bloodhell Worms were approaching Wei Jing from her bedside. The swarm would never end as long as the Bloodhell Broodmother continued to spawn them.

This was the most troublesome part of broodmother-type lifebound beasts.

“Your head is worth one thousand yellow-patterned spirit gems. I'll be borrowing it.” The black-clothed man took action as he spoke. As killers, they never talked too much.

He was holding a blood-coloured dagger that looked similar to Li Tianming's Crimson Blood Dagger, except that it was of a much higher quality.

The moment of mortal danger had arrived. The little chick was busy protecting Wei Jing, tied down by the many worms. Hence, Li Tianming had to deal with both the man and the Bloodhell Broodmother himself.

When the black-clothed man turned into a blur, the broodmother opened its maw and let loose a piercing screech that nearly ruptured Li Tianming's ears. His mind descended into chaos immediately, his vision distorting. This was a sound-based spiritsource ability. It was the hardest to defend against, and could only be endured. Li Tianming hadn't expected such an ability from this Bloodhell Broodmother.

Things were definitely going to be hard for him and the little chick who lacked such spiritsource abilities.

“Die!” Even more frightening was that the assassin was at least at fourth level Spiritsource! He was much stronger than Fang Zhao, enough to crush Li Tianming.

Bloodflower Chamber always did things with complete confidence. The assassins they chose would not give Li Tianming any chance to escape.

In the same moment Li Tianming was assaulted by the broodmother's 'Wailing Banshee', the assassin appeared in front of him, while at least five hundred Bloodhell Worms surged towards him from the roof and floor.

A moment was enough for dozens to attach themselves to his body, whereupon they began to nibble at his flesh. They went straight for his arteries, preparing to feast on his blood.

Li Tianming could only struggle before the deadly, two-pronged threat. The other side was much stronger than he was. With a blur, the assassin appeared behind him, the dagger resting against Li Tianming's collarbone. A nick of the blade later, blood began to flow freely.

“Let’s not waste anything.” The assassin pulled aside his veil and gave Li Tianming’s dripping blood a lick. “Mhm, quite hot.”

The black-clothed man chuckled, continuing, “My babies seem to like your blood a lot. I’ll let you live a little longer for their enjoyment. Human blood is the warmest when the human is still alive, after all.”

He leaned in so close to Li Tianming that their eyes were almost right next to each other.

The Bloodhell Poison had already spread to his whole body. It felt like an electric shock had run through his body and Li Tianming found even moving a finger to be difficult.

“How does it feel to be sucked dry?” The assassin looked at him, clearly enjoying it and not wanting it to end yet.

“Careful my blood doesn’t burn you to death!” Li Tianming glared at him, his eyes bloodshot.

Wei Jing’s pain was unacceptable to Li Tianming. She was his reverse scale, something that could make him descend into becoming a crazed demon. Li Tianming no longer considered the gap in strength between his opponent and him. Only the thought of killing him filled his entire mind. This was the first time his killing intent had been so stirred since Midas died.

“Burn to death? Good joke.” The man laughed unbridledly.

However, the next moment, the worms crawling on Li Tianming started to spontaneously combust. They were quickly reduced to ash that fell to the ground.

The assassin’s eyes widened. Something like this had never happened before. How was he expected to know about Primordial Chaos Beasts?

“Unusual, but so what? You can only die with the Bloodhell Poison in you.” The assassin now understood not to give this young man any chances. Li Tianming couldn’t move, so he drew his dagger and prepared to decapitate Li Tianming.

“Who decided I can only die?” Li Tianming, who the assassin believed was immobile, raised his left hand.

The assassin saw something unbelievable. There was a strange eye on the young man’s palm. Then, beast ki circulated through its illusion-type spirit veins and the Bewildering Eye revealed itself.

The assassin had never expected Li Tianming to move nor plunge him into an illusion!

He was too close. Unable to react, he could only watch as Li Tianming’s beast claw immediately ran him through and crushed all his organs!

“Die!” Li Tianming snarled as the assassin looked at him, eyes filled with disbelief. The assassin slowly sank to his knees, blood gushing out like a river.

His body finally crumpled over, dead.

“You as well!” Li Tianming swung his right arm, and the Thunderfire Chain wrapped around the Bloodhell Broodmother. Its strong point was its army of Bloodhell Worms, but it was too close to Li Tianming.

It attempted to use Wailing Banshee to confuse Li Tianming, but Li Tianming was a step ahead in using his Bewildering Eye.

The chain's sharp edges split the broodmother into several sections. It didn't matter what level of lifebound beast you were, you would still go to hell before the current Li Tianming!

All of the worms collapsed into dust at the death of the broodmother, as they were originally just a part of it.

The night's events came to a close, leaving behind a room covered in blood. The little chick was exhausted too, having fended off many worms to protect Wei Jing.

It had been a really close shave, but strangely enough, Li Tianming felt no fear. He realised his heart was much stronger than before, stronger than anyone else. It was through this heart he had weathered this crisis.

Although the assassin was dead, Wei Jing was still being tormented by the poison. Killing him hadn't been enough to soothe Li Tianming's anger nor save Wei Jing. Li Tianming had also been poisoned, but the poison within him had been neutralised already. However, he was still aware of how vile it was. Moreover, he was a healthy youth in his prime, while his mother was like a flickering candle about to go out.

"My apologies for arriving late." A young-looking man appeared in the room. He was dressed in a long robe covered in stars. His eyes sparkled in the darkness like a starfield. He no longer hid his identity and showed his true appearance.

As expected of one of the Starry Twins, Sage Chen of Xing & Chen Merchantry did possess a dignified and elegant bearing.

The moment he had been thrust into danger, Li Tianming had crushed the spirit gem he had been given. Still, Sage Chen still needed time to arrive no matter how mighty he was. He had already arrived rather swiftly, considering everything had wrapped up quickly.

"Sorry, I didn't expect such a situation." The spirit gem Sage Chen had handed him had been for more standard situations, such as a senior suppressing Li Tianming or Wei Jing's illness flaring up.

He definitely hadn't expected someone to try assassinating this nameless nobody.

"It's alright. My mother's been infected with the Bloodhell Poison." This was what Li Tianming was most worried about now.

"Bloodhell Poison? Don't worry, I can cure it."

Li Tianming had faith in Sage Chen's abilities, so he stepped back.

Sage Chen took a quick glance before saying, "It'll be fine. Bloodhell Poison is a type of paralytic agent. It'll hurt, but it won't have any adverse effects on the body. I'll just use spirit herbs to hasten the detoxification."

Li Tianming felt much more relieved after hearing that. He didn't add anything, and as Sage Chen helped Wei Jing, he brought the corpse to the courtyard to incinerate the corpse, leaving no trace behind.

Then, he cleaned up the bloodstains in the room.

"You're back, young master?" The auntie in charge of looking after Wei Jing finally woke up from the firelight. The disturbance before hadn't been very loud as Li Tianming had quickly killed his enemy.

Li Tianming smiled. "I'm bringing my mother along to watch my ranking battles in the institute tomorrow."

"Young master really is a genius! I'm jealous of the madam for having such a great kid."

"You flatter me. I should be the one thanking you for caring for my mother."

"Young master pays me well and the madam is so nice as well. I'll naturally do my best. Right, what are you burning?" She asked curiously.

"A corpse!" Li Tianming grinned.

"You really do know how to crack jokes. I won't be scared so easily." Auntie Li laughed back.

"Is that so? Have a good rest, I'll be going in to accompany my mother."

"Alright. Give me a holler if you need anything."

The ordinary people in the city really were so pure that it was cute.

On the other hand, the powerful clans were so vile to the point demons were probably better friends.

Who was it that had been so vicious to call a hit on him?

"To think that the Bloodflower Chamber was even involved... who did you offend? Their rules insist on accepted missions being completed. This means another will come soon."

"How is she?" Li Tianming asked.

"She'll be fine after a night's rest. The main problem is her Lifesbane. As long as it's removed, she will recover her vitality."

"How do I do that?" Li Tianming asked.

"It's not convenient for me to say if she didn't tell you. Anyway, someone in Heaven's Sanctum can do it," Sage Chen said.

"Alright." Li Tianming nodded. "The Chamber won't dare do anything as long as I'm within the institute compound, right?"

"Yes."

"What about my mother?"

"Don't worry. It was my negligence this time. I'll assign someone to protect her from the shadows."

"Thank you." Li Tianming wouldn't know what to do if not for this man. Perhaps his only option would be to beg Mu Wan to bring his mother into the institute.

"It's fine. Your mother and I had a friendship. I couldn't possibly stand by and watch her die. Still, it's better for you to not tell her I came by, or about the guard detail."

"I understand."

"I'll be going first. I'll be watching your performance tomorrow." Sage Chen rose to his feet, probably to arrange for the protection. He had so many trusted subordinates that this wasn't anything difficult.

After he left, Li Tianming lay together with the little chick in the courtyard to watch the starry sky.

"I thought I was going to die," Li Tianming said softly. "But I didn't. Now I suddenly have this feeling, that maybe, I won't die in this life."

Everything seemed to have calmed down, but in reality, the fire in his heart was still raging.

"What does that mean?" The little chick asked, confused.

Li Tianming suddenly stood up and looked at it passionately.

"What?" The little chick subconsciously covered its chest. "Hey, if you have those kinds of desires, don't come to me. I don't like guys!"

"Moron." Li Tianming gave it a smack. "I suddenly have some enlightenment. Why don't we shoot for Spiritsource tonight?!"

They had only been in ninth level Beast Vein for three days.

"Have you gone cray cray?"

"Nope." It was only that his confidence had suddenly become boundless, enough to attempt for Spiritsource!

Chapter 52 - Infernalsource!

Li Tianming reached Spiritsource about half a month before the incident three years ago. Together with Midas, they had gathered the strength of their eighteen beast veins to form five spiritsources on their body.

"The step from Beast Vein to Spiritsource is a breakthrough from one stage to another. It could take hours for some, but years for others, and in certain cases people have tried for a decade with no success," Li Tianming muttered. "Such a breakthrough requires not just hard work, but also experience and the correct methods of cultivation. More importantly, the cultivator needs a stable state of mind as well as a spark of enlightenment. I've reached Spiritsource before, so no other ninth level Beast Vein cultivator can be more experienced than I am. And in terms of cultivation methods, Ying Huo's Aeternal Infernal Codex is absolutely unsurpassed too."

Now that he had satisfied the first two criteria, Li Tianming just needed to adjust his mindset and feel that spark. After escaping the assassination by the skin of his teeth, Li Tianming could feel that he had entered a state of transcendence. He was calm and rational, yet his blood boiled with passion and fury. It was an otherworldly feeling — his beast ki was rushing through his body, but everything was kept under control by his faith and determination.

Ying Huo could feel his passion and his determination too. His actions were like a battle cry, calling out to the little chick to stand up against their fate.

“Fine, you want to breakthrough, I’ll accompany you,” said the little chick, a fire beginning to burn in its eyes too.

“Then let’s get started!” Li Tianming sat himself down in the dim courtyard, the little chick resting on the top of his head like a ball of fire. As their beast veins connected to each other, the duo gradually became one.

Li Tianming could clearly remember the last time he tried to reach Spiritsource. From the starting point, till eventually getting there, he had taken a total of three months. In those three months, he and Midas had tried thousands of times, made thousands of errors, before he eventually achieved Spiritsource.

But this time, as the little chick started running its Aeternal Infernal Codex, and as their beast ki joined together and ignited, the correct answer seemed so blatantly obvious to Li Tianming! There was only one path ahead of them, and it was a path that would eventually lead the pair to greatness. Without hesitation, Li Tianming and Ying Huo started their breakthrough, their mind fixed on their goals and unimpeded by any obstacles.

Just as Li Tianming had said just now, having survived that assassination, he felt that no one in this world could kill him anymore. At that instance, he charged on towards the Spiritsource stage, and nothing could deter his burning ardor!

“Rahh!” He let out a ghastly roar to vent out the emotions that were building up in him. He recalled his downfall, thought about Midas and ran through everything that happened in the past three years! And all of them were his motivation to cultivate, to seek the path to achieving true strength.

The method that they were using to form the spiritsource was known as the Infernalsource. It got its name from the Infernal Realm, a mythical place where everything would be burnt to ashes, and neither chaos nor reincarnation could escape its blaze. It was a fiery hell spoken of only in legends, a world where nothing survived but flames.

As Ying Huo guided him with the Infernalsource, their eighteen beast veins joined together to circulate their beast ki in their bodies. A while later, Li Tianming could vaguely see the position of their spiritsources. Since Midas could give him five spiritsources, Li Tianming expected the little chick to give him six since it had six stars in its eyes and was considered a six-star lifebound beast. However contrary to his expectations, he only felt a single spiritsource form, located at his dantian!

The number of spiritsources beastmasters and their beasts had not only decided the maximum capacity of their beast ki, but also the number of spiritsource abilities they could refine. Six spiritsources could mean six vastly different spiritsource abilities, but with only one spiritsource they could only refine a single ability. On top of that, they would be basically handicapped when fighting opponents of the same level, as others may have six times the beast ki.

As a three-star lifebound beast was the minimum requirement to reach the Spiritsource stage, beastmasters with a single spiritsource probably never existed before. Obviously, such a phenomenon was a surprise to Li Tianming.

Yet he was not worried at all, given his trust towards Ying Huo. It was the Aeternal Infernal Phoenix, its bloodline prestigious and sacred; there was no way their spiritsource would be ordinary. Li Tianming reckoned that the spiritsource they formed was none other than the infernalsource itself!

The two of them each developed a single infernalsource. While Li Tianming's infernalsource was in his dantian, Ying Huo's one was in its stomach. Considering that it was a being that feasted on suns and stars, the position of its spiritsource was an apt metaphor for its nature.

As all his beast ki flushed towards this only infernalsource that he had, Li Tianming could feel the infernalsource expanding from the sheer amount of Aeternal Infernal Beast Ki. It was the size of a normal spiritsource at first, but as time went passed, it expanded continuously.

The formation of spiritsources was much more complicated than the formation of beast veins, and the time it took was exponentially longer too. While other cultivators would develop their spiritsources one after another in sequence, Li Tianming had been working on that one single spiritsource from the beginning.

From midnight all the way till the break of dawn, Li Tianming channeled beast ki into his infernalsource until it had swollen to an unfathomable size. Having prior experience, he knew what the size of a normal person's spiritsource was and how much beast ki it could hold. Compared to that, his infernalsource was currently seven to eight times bigger than normal ones. That meant when fighting opponents of the same level, not only was his Aeternal Infernal Beast Ki already superior in terms of quality, but he could also store more of it. This placed him at the level of beastmasters with eight-star lifebound beasts, maybe even nine! Li Tianming had never heard of people with eight-star lifebound beasts before, as not a single one had ever appeared in Vermilion Bird's history. In this nation, anyone who owned a seven-star lifebound beast was enough to make the nation tremble!

As such, Li Tianming was essentially invincible when fighting at the same level. He could even easily fight opponents of a higher level than him with that superior beast ki of his!

The only question that remained was how many spiritsource abilities could Ying Huo refine with that single infernalsource? Or could it be possible that it didn't even need to refine spiritsource abilities from wildbeasts? As their cultivation approached its end, and the hell-like infernalsource formed completely, Li Tianming had a rough guess in his mind.

He observed his infernalsource, and realised that it looked just like a real inferno. It was now the core of his body, a center that connected to all nine of his beast veins, and also a passage to Ying Huo's infernalsource. Ying Huo might be much tinier in size, but the nature of its infernalsource was just the same as Li Tianming's.

The little chick suddenly exclaimed in excitement. "I can feel it! My body, it's awakening!"

Li Tianming opened his eyes. The sun had yet to rise and that the world was still deep in slumber. Just then, the little chick raised its head, letting out a cry like a rooster crowing.

Whoosh!

It released a ball of flame that floated in the air! The golden flame was about ten times the size of its body, and immediately took on the shape of a blazing phoenix as it charged into the air. The phoenix

stayed aloft like a miniature sun, lighting up the entire district that they were in. Phoenixes were mythical creatures that appeared only in the oldest legends, and were a symbol of faith for many. The Hall of Phoenix in the institute took its name after this king of all avian beasts, and Li Tianming had read legends describing its looks there, which was why he could confirm that it was a blazing phoenix.

With another breath, Ying Huo sucked the phoenix back into its stomach.

“Hmm, if wildbeasts could get abilities after reaching Spiritsource, then what I just used was that ability. It’s called the Infernal Blaze, and it’s a fire that will burn eternally and cannot be extinguished unless I retract it myself,” Ying Huo explained proudly.

“This must be different from the spiritsource abilities that lifebound beasts have. Those were refined from beast souls of wildbeasts and then channeled into their spiritsources, as lifebound beasts born with no abilities,” Li Tianming observed. “For your case, this is more of a bloodline ability that was gifted by your blood.”

Li Tianming had seen the power of the Infernal Blaze! As long as it came into contact with an enemy, there would be no way to get rid of it. They would need to test it out in battle to see how well it worked, but of course they had complete faith in the bloodline ability of a Primordial Chaos Beast.

“We still don’t know whether my infernalsource is capable of refining beast souls to form spiritsource abilities. We shall try one day, but then again there’s no way those would be stronger than my Infernal Blaze.” Ying Huo was proud of its newfound strength.

“I feel like you possess the traits of both wildbeasts and lifebound beasts. It’s likely that you had your own bloodline abilities like wildbeasts, but at the same time can refine beast souls like lifebound beasts too,” Li Tianming guessed.

Even if Ying Huo had turned from a Primordial Chaos Beast to a lifebound beast, it had not lost all of its power. In fact it may have opened up other possibilities for the little chick as well. While other beasts’ spiritsource could only contain a single spiritsource ability, his infernalsource already came with its own Infernal Blaze. Considering its size and capacity, they wouldn’t be surprised if it could refine beast souls to obtain spiritsource abilities as well.

The duo eventually ended their cultivation, and the heat building up in the courtyard slowly cooled. Li Tianming felt the beast ki running through his body, realising how much stronger he had gotten.

“I’m finally back at the level I was at three years ago, but I’m so much stronger now,” Li Tianming exclaimed. While he had five spiritsources three years ago, it simply wouldn’t compare with that one infernalsource in his dantian.

“It’s time to bring our mother to the institute,” the little chick declared. “Should I find out who tried to assassinate us and hurt our mother, I will make sure his soul burns in the depth of hell!”

Li Tianming was not in a rush though, since he was confident that they would find out the truth eventually. For now, the more important thing was to get into Heaven’s Sanctum.

The sun began to rise, marking a new day... and the beginning of the ranking test!

Chapter 53 - Can You Defeat Chen Yao?

For Wei Jing, she felt like she had a terrible nightmare the previous night. But when she woke up, the first thing she saw was her son sitting by her bedside, telling her, "Why have you gotten so lazy lately? The ranking test is about to begin soon, hurry up and prepare."

"Ah, Auntie Li, come and help me!" Li Tianming ran off.

Wei Jing crawled out of bed hurriedly to prepare for the big day. Auntie Li had done most of the preparations already, and all Wei Jing needed to do was to wash up and get onto the brand new horse cart.

The tickets for the ranking test of the Flameyellow Scions Institute were rather expensive, but of course Li Tianming had prepared for that. In fact, a ticket had been prepared for Auntie Li too, so that she could take care of his mother's needs even when they were inside the stadium. The guards that Sage Chen assigned them should be following Wei Jing as well, and it was only with their help that Li Tianming could place his focus on cultivation. It was still early in the morning when Li Tianming drove the horse cart to the institute. By then, the place was already stuffed with people, but Li Tianming could get ahead of the queue as he was one of the disciples of the institute. As such, he could bring his mother into the stadium and pick a nice cozy spot that had a good view of the arenas.

A look into the stadium told them that tens of thousands of spectators had already seated themselves comfortably inside the stadium. The private rooms, allocated to the rich and powerful of Vermilion Bird, were also filled, their inhabitants ready to watch the show that was about to occur. But of course, the interior of their rooms were hidden from the general audience's view, since normal citizens were not permitted to see what was happening inside.

The ranking test of the Flameyellow Scions Institute was of course hosted by the institute, and the guests in the private rooms would have no influence over the test proceedings. They were just here to watch a good show.

In the arenas, the newly-enlisted disciples who managed to clear their admission test had taken their position. The result of their ranking test would follow them for their time in the institute, and it was a label that would decide the amount of respect and resources they get. It was no doubt a fight that the disciples would put their best effort in.

Li Tianming had settled Wei Jing down, and was about to join the rest from Muwan class when the voice of a woman sounded from behind them. He turned around to find a flamboyantly dressed Madam Xue Lan walking into the institute, surrounded by a bunch of ladies. They were heading for their allocated room when they walked past and noticed Li Tianming and Wei Jing.

By her side was her son, Chen Yao, who was dressed in a dazzling purple robe. Handsome, capable young men like him were always a sight to admire, especially for teenage girls.

"You can go ahead first, I will join you in a jiffy," Xue Lan told the rest of the ladies, and walked towards Li Tianming, accompanied by Chen Yao.

"Jing'er." Xue Lan wore a smile as she gently held Wei Jing's hand and said, "Why did you not go to Chen Yao Inn the other day? I'd already arranged everything for you, but you never showed up."

"I was delayed by other matters. And since it just so happened that Tianming managed to get hold of some gems, we managed to get our own house and decided not to trouble you." Wei Jing wore an unruffled look, and she didn't get angry at Xue Lan either. She wasn't going to waste her emotions on people that had already disappointed her.

Xue Lan shook her head pretentiously. "You don't have to be so awkward with me."

Wei Jing smiled without replying to that. She had no intention to play along with Xue Lan's fake friendship games.

"Speaking of which, the house you bought was also the property of our Xing & Chen Merchantry." Xue Lan suddenly said, the hint in her tone blatantly obvious: So what if you didn't accept my offering? You still ended up staying in the house that we sold you!

Considering the size and power of the Xing & Chen Merchantry, it was normal that she learned of their movements.

"You know where we are living?" Li Tianming frowned at Xue Lan, having thought of something.

"What are you suggesting?" Chen Yao was more straightforward than his mother, and asked Li Tianming, staring at him directly.

"No, just a random question." Li Tianming replied. Was it possible that this woman here was so wicked that when she realised Sage Chen's kindness towards them, she hired assassins to murder the two of them? It was definitely possible.

"Mother, it's time we go. We need to greet the seniors from Xing Mansion and the Occult Athenaeum, and there are important guests from the Vermilion Bird Clan as well," Chen Yao said coldly. "Let's not waste any more time on unimportant personnels."

"Yao'er, how could you say such a thing? Your Aunt Jing was a sister of mine, don't treat her so rudely." Xue Lan snorted, tapping her son's shoulders lightly.

"Sisters? She looks more like that servant's sister." Chen Yao shrugged, and turned to leave.

"Jing'er, forgive me, this boy was born with a silver spoon and it was hard to teach him manners. I envy you sometimes, having a son that is so obedient." Xue Lan smiled, but once again, Wei Jing did not respond.

"Aunt Lan, a quick question please?" Li Tianming suddenly interrupted her.

"Yes?"

"Have you heard of the Bloodflower Chamber?" Li Tianming asked.

"What? No." Xue Lan shook her head. The Bloodflower chamber was a taboo topic, and it was normal for people to not talk about it. Then again, with her position, he wouldn't be surprised if she was in touch with the chamber.

"Oh, then that's all we have. Aunt Lan, please take your leave," Li Tianming said, his tone clearly suggesting that they were not going to entertain her any further.

“Don’t bother us kid, I still have things to say to your mother.” Xue Lan was slightly annoyed.

“Aunt Lan, does Chen Yao want to get the first place for this ranking test and enter Heaven’s Sanctum?” Li Tianming stared at her.

“Of course, what about it?” Xue Lan could sense his aggressiveness.

“Ha, Aunt Lan, you can stop acting so pretentious, it will only make us look down on you even further. Everyone has their own fortunes and mishaps, and you don’t have to rub your fortune into our face. That will only show that you are still bothered by your defeats in the past, am I right?” Li Tianming continued to stare at her directly, his words firm and powerful.

“What’s with you, kid? Do you have any manners?!” Xue Lan’s face turned pale, her fingers trembling slightly from Li Tianming’s accusations.

“Even if I have no manners, I’m still better than that son of yours. You may think that you are superior to my mother in all aspects, and can’t wait to gloat about it. In that case, I must say you will be disappointed very soon.” Li Tianming was not going to give her any face. Wei Jing pulled his sleeves to signal him to stop, but Li Tianming had enough of this pompous madam.

“You are but a brute who tried to drug others. Who gave you the courage to talk to me like this!” Realising that the pair was not going to play along with her game anymore, Xue Lan was also not about to give any chance. In terms of squabbling, she was just as confident.

“You will find out about that soon, when your son is trampled underfoot by others,” Li Tianming said.

Xue Lan smirked, and turned to Wei Jing, “Jing’er, speak. Do you want to compare your son with mine?”

“Please leave, don’t insult the Xue Lan in my memories.” Wei Jing grimaced.

“Insult? Look at your pathetic self! You are insulting no one but yourself, Wei Jing!” With that, Xue Lan sneered at Li Tianming, before turning around to walk away.

She was still gloating over the conversation while walking off, even laughing when she thought of Li Tianming’s words. Onlookers could only guess what had happened to make that Madam Xue Lan this happy.

In the end, after twenty years, who had won? Xue Lan looked at her fair skin, the dress she was wearing and the jewelries that she donned. She thought of the Xing & Chen Merchantry behind her back, and the envious looks that everyone threw at her whenever she walked past them. And finally, she thought of those two sons that she had. The victor was clear.

As for Wei Jing, she was just breathing her last breath in a little corner, having lost in terms of everything. Even if Wei Jing never wished to compare with her, she wanted to! For the first twenty years of her life, she always lived in Wei Jing’s shadow, surpassed by her in every aspect. No one knew how defeated she felt back then.

Even if she had completely fallen out with Wei Jing today, she couldn’t feel any better. She had said many things that she had been thinking of for a long time, and venting those out had given her a spring in her steps. And to think that Li Tianming, that disgusting brute scorned by everyone, dared to challenge her precious boy? She couldn’t wait to share the joke with her sisters.

“What are sisters? I don’t need sisters who can’t bootlick me and appreciate my greatness.” Xue Lan looked at her perfect figure and her fair skin, and then thought of that sickly Wei Jing. She couldn’t help but burst into laughter again.

“Oh, Lifesbane. What a beautiful, beautiful thing!” She smirked yet again as she entered her private room, where she shared with her sisters the stories of Li Tianming, causing the group of ladies to giggle like little girls.

As for the center of their topic, Li Tianming, he had yet to leave Wei Jing’s side.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Nothing much, she just revealed her true nature.” Wei Jing was calm as ever. While Li Tianming may have been suffering for the past three years, she had to deal with this for half of her life! What happened today wasn’t going to affect her.

“Nothing else?”

“Can you defeat Chen Yao?”

“Easy as pie,” Li Tianming said.

“Then you better give him a good beating,” Wei Jing said.

Li Tianming grinned. This was more like his mother. She was never a cowardly person, but fate had been cruel to her. If she had the chance to make those who had disappointed her pay for what they had done, she would not let that chance go.

“Can you do that, Tianming?” Wei Jing asked again.

“Sit back and enjoy the show, mother,” Li Tianming replied.

Wei Jing grinned. “Too bad they don’t have snacks and drinks here.”

“Don’t be too picky.”

At that moment, an announcement that the ranking test was about to commence, and that the important figures of the institute were making their appearances echoed throughout the stadium.

“I gotta go. If not, Chief Mentor Mu Wan will scold me,” Li Tianming said.

“Mu Wan?” Wei Jing was stunned for a moment.

“You know her?” Li Tianming asked.

“No, just go now.” Wei Jing smiled again, her hands resting on her knees.

In fact, when she smiled, she didn’t look that old anymore. Li Tianming could still see the shadow of that beauty from twenty years ago.

Chapter 54 - Flameyellow Leaderboard!

The exciting ranking battles held every four years had finally arrived.

The five hall overseers would personally supervise the battles, which showed the importance the Flameyellow Scions Institute placed on it. For the admission tests, only chief mentors would supervise.

The five overseers arrived jointly. This time, the Hall of Phoenix had been placed in charge of the ranking battles, which meant authority had been ceded to its overseer, Wei Zikun.

"I, Wei Zikun, and my fellow Overseers are glad to welcome your presence here today." The opening remark was met with much applause, a sign of just how excited everyone was.

"Before we begin, on behalf of the institute, I extend our warmest welcome to the VIPs who have come to spectate today. Your presence has brought glory to our ranking battles today and contributed to its fairness! Everyone isn't yet aware of which VIPs have come here today, so permit me to introduce them."

The audience indeed couldn't see all the VIPs with them being in private rooms.

"Firstly, let's welcome King Xuan of the royal Vermilion Bird Clan!"

"Greetings, King Xuan." When people heard King Xuan had personally come, they hurriedly sent their regards. King Xuan was the younger brother and right hand man of the Vermilion Bird King. He was amongst the most exalted personages of the royal clan.

Wei Zikun leading with his introduction was a testament to that.

A gentle voice drifted out from among the most luxurious of the private rooms. "You may dispense with the greeting. The main characters of today are the youngsters. Don't feel uncomfortable, I'm just here to spectate."

The rumour that King Xuan had a good temper seemed to be true.

Wei Zikun continued his introductions.

The second VIP was from the Occult Athenaeum. Technically, the Occult Athenaeum wasn't an actual power but rather an auxiliary faction of the royal clan.

Many of Vermilion Bird's officials were all nurtured by the Athenaeum, which had a dual focus on cultural and martial education. Unlike Flameyellow Scions Institute, they raised geniuses of officialdom.

The current prime minister of Vermilion Bird was the head of the Athenaeum.

According to the introduction, the Occult Athenaeum's representative was the prime minister's daughter, the Occult Athenaeum's Pavilion Mistress of their Book Pavilion, Qin Xuanyu.

The third VIP was from the Lightning Manor. He was the current Lightning Seigneur's son and the next generation Lightning Seigneur, Lin Tianjian.

Lin Tianjian had already inherited his father's position as marshal for the Tempest Regiment. He had become Vermilion Bird's commander-in-chief of the army and was one of the top experts of the nation. In terms of reputation, he was even beyond Qin Xuanyu.

However, Vermilion Bird had always had the custom of ranking the Occult Athenaeum that waited upon the royal clan ahead of the Lightning Manor.

For many years, both the Occult Athenaeum and the Lightning Manor had worked hand in hand to safeguard the nation's longevity. The former specialised in the nation's administration, the latter the nation's defence.

Lin Tianjian was of the same generation as the Starry Twins and the chosen of the Lightning Manor's previous generation. Rumour had it that in the competition within that generation, he hadn't been any inferior to the Starry Twins.

Furthermore, Li Tianming knew he had another identity. He was also Lin Xiaoting and Lin Xiaoxiao's father! Hence, Li Tianming wondered if Lin Xiaoting and Mu Qingqing were sitting by his side when he heard that name announced.

If so, would they be trying to pick him out from among the crowd?

When his gaze landed on that private room, Wei Zikun continued introducing the other VIPs.

From Xing & Chen Merchantry, there was Sage Chen's wife Xue Lan and Sage Xing's wife Madam Yuan Yum, Fateshaven's governor Zhang Yunji, the Punishment Bureau's vice-head Zhao Danhong and so on... Over twenty influential figures in the nation were introduced.

These powerhouses of that age stood at the apex of strength. Together, they held the lifeline of the country.

"It's about time. Now, let us uncover a new Flameyellow Leaderboard!"

A massive stele stood beside the Flameyellow Stadium. It was thick and ancient, having experienced the vicissitudes of the ages. It was the spiritual symbol of the institute, the Flameyellow Leaderboard.

The rankings of the apprentice class decided from the ranking battles would be displayed on this leaderboard.

From then onwards, anyone who entered the institute would first notice this leaderboard. The glory being ranked at the top, receiving the adoration of the masses... such was the appeal of the title of prime disciple.

Four years ago, Lin Xiaoting of Lightning Manor had fought off the outstanding heroes of his age to occupy the top spot, shocking the nation. Before him, the prime disciple had always been geniuses from the royal clan for dozens of years.

That year, Li Tianming had personally witnessed Lin Xiaoting's glory. He himself had been ranked towards the bottom. However, his vision then had been limited, so he had been giving himself a pat on the back for a job well done.

His background was worlds apart from Lin Xiaoting after all.

Today, the Flameyellow Leaderboard had already been wiped clean. The following ranking battles would see name after name climb onto it. New legends would be born this day.

The glory of being the prime disciple would be thirsted for by any faction. Otherwise, people like King Xuan, Lin Xiaojian and Qin Xuanyu would never have come personally.

The leaderboard's reveal was enough to show the ranking battles had begun. All eyes were now focused on it, the blank stele prompting one's imagination to run wild.

Thousands of fireflies encircled the stele, each with a golden flame lit on their rear. Li Tianming had witnessed them using that exact golden flame to engrave the names of disciples in gold on the leaderboard.

The fireflies were all spawned from a broodmother-type lifebound beast, a Heavenly Firefly, which supposedly belonged to a chief mentor from the Hall of Uniquities.

The burning golden words were undeniably very stylish!

"I declare that the ranking battles hereby commence!"

The following battles would be arranged by the chief mentors. For example, Mu Wan would be in charge of her fifty students.

"Li Tianming, why are you late?" When Li Tianming returned to the Muwan class, Mu Wan glared at him.

"Chief mentor, important people always have to be fashionably late, right?" Li Tianming chuckled.

Mu Wan was dressed particularly formally today, that noble but aloof get-up was a beautiful sight in the stadium.

"Confident, aren't you? I look forward to you getting beaten up later." Mu Wan said, displeased after trying to find him for so long to no avail.

"How could that be possible? I'm here to fight for my chief mentor and the Hall of Phoenix's glory!"

The rest of the disciples of Muwan class shook their heads. In their eyes, Li Tianming not only lacked morality, but was also glib-tongued and cocky. They didn't understand why Chief Mentor Mu Wan was putting so much effort into nurturing him.

"Be more obedient, and I'll choose a good opponent for you when I make the arrangements with the other chief mentors. Just wait." Mu Wan rolled her eyes at him before hurrying off.

The rules behind the ranking battles were complicated, and could be boiled down to a rating system. All admitted students would be comprehensively evaluated by their chief mentors with a thousand points as the perfect score.

All ten chief mentors would judge and estimate a disciple's abilities and give a rating. After the best and worst was removed, the average would be taken as the preliminary rating.

The Flameyellow Leaderboard would be initially arranged using these preliminary ratings. Of course, the preliminary rating wasn't the final rating.

Disciples would then participate in battles to raise their chief mentor's evaluation of them and be reassigned a rating. However, if the conclusion drawn by over half of the chief mentors was that their strength was quite similar to their given rating, that would become their final rating.

The chief mentors were all old hands. Once they saw a fight, they could basically tell the potential of that disciple. Many preliminary ratings did end up being accurate.

However, Li Tianming didn't care so much. His main takeaway was that he just needed to keep beating up people until he reached the top.

There were many participating disciples and the chief mentors had done a lot of behind the scenes preparations for the students to fight for their preliminary rating. The process was long, but fair.

Li Tianming listened to Mu Wan's arrangements and slowly waited for a suitable opponent to be chosen.

"I just need to show my very best in the first round. I'll give myself a top ten preliminary ranking so I don't need to slowly fight my way up from the bottom," Li Tianming mused.

The aggression from yesterday still lingering in his heart — perhaps, the person who had ordered the hit was in this very stadium. Hence, his rage was boiling now.

When the fighting started, he would rampage!

Over ten battles started simultaneously. Golden words quickly appeared, which the chief mentors worked together to give a rating.

For example, the current number one - Chen Yao, 870 points!

To be given such a high preliminary rating in this system was very rare, and that glittering name immediately drew the crowd's attention.

Chapter 55 - Tianming Returns With A Slap!

"Chen Yao's performance was outstanding today, his preliminary rating is even 20 points higher than Xing Que and Chen Hao's," from inside one of the Stadium's private rooms, a lady dressed in a luxurious purple dress exclaimed. She was none other than the mistress of the Xing Mansion, Madam Xue Lan's closest sister, and Sage Xing's wife, Madam Yuan Yu.

The two of them were the women behind the Starry Twins' back. When they were young, they were amongst the top beauties in the entire Ignispolis, and even at their age now they were still as charming as ever. Their complexions were as tender and fair as twenty year old girls, thanks to the amount of care and effort they had put in.

"The chief mentors must have a good idea of Yao'er's strength, which is why they put him at the top of the leaderboard," Xue Lan said proudly. "But this is not the final score. He worked really hard for the past few weeks and has improved tremendously."

"Yao'er is such a good son. Even if he grew up pampered and free of worries, he still put so much effort into cultivation. How I envy having a son like him," Madam Yuan Yu exclaimed.

"Sis Yu, please don't say that. Even if you only have one son, we all know how well he is performing at Heaven's Sanctum now." Xue Lan smiled. "You are Yao'er's godmother. These three sons are our sons."

"Oh Sis Lan you sure know how to make me happy, it's no wonder that Brother Chen fell for you."

"And you too, charming Brother Xing throughout the years."

“Cut it out, you two. You’re giving me goosebumps.” Just as the two were joking around, a voice sounded from outside the room. They turned around to find two handsome youths walking into the private room.

The two of them each had their own characteristics, one of them slender and charming while the other bulky and intimidating. The slender one resembled Chen Yao, suggesting that he was Chen Yao’s elder brother, Chen Hao. The other one of them was Sage Xing’s son, Xing Que. It was Xing Que who interrupted their conversation earlier.

“Bro, be more polite to our mothers.” Chen Hao smiled.

“They’re gonna turn into little girls already if we get anymore polite.” Xing Que shook his head and grinned.

“How rude of you, you should look at how caring Hao’er is. I told you to come and support your youngest brother, but you’re too late. He’s already made it to the top of the Flameyellow Leaderboard.” Madam Yuan Yu rolled her eyes.

“Getting first place now is pointless. I heard the stories going around, and it’s probably quite difficult for Yao’er to become prime disciple, considering that he’s competing with the likes of Lin Xiaoxiao and Li Shufan. That Li Shufan is the prime minister’s direct disciple, and he was said to be the minister’s best disciple too. As for Lin Xiaoxiao, need we say anymore? She’s quite close to that monstrous prime disciple four years ago.”

“Are those two that strong?” Xue Lan frowned, clearly feeling the pressure now.

“Of course. Had mother been more strict to Yao’er and pampered him less, he would have a much better chance. As for now, he has a 20% chance, at most.”

Madam Yuan Yu shook her head. “Even so, he still has a chance. I told you all to come and support your youngest sibling, what kind of brothers are you two to say such discouraging things.”

“Of course we would support our youngest brother,” Xing Que said.

“It’s just that he can’t obtain the title of the prime disciple this time round. Even so, with his own discipline and our family background, within three months we can get him to join us in the Sanctum,” Chen Hao further explained.

“Yao’er really is talented, and can at least rank among the top three in his generation. If only he had put more effort into cultivation, his odds would increase to 40% today.” Said Xing Que.

Xue Lan let out a sigh of relief. “Well, that’s good enough! Once he enters Heaven’s Sanctum he can rely on the two of you, and no one would ever dare to touch him.”

“What are you saying mum? Who would ever dare to seek trouble with the Xing and Chen Clans? If anyone dares to so as much as touch Chen Yao’s hair, I’d personally send him to hell.” Chen Hao smirked.

“Don’t forget about me.” Xing Que clenched his fist and grinned too.

Xue Lan smiled too, happy with how bonded the brothers were and also with their capabilities. They were truly the future of this nation! She then thought of that dying woman, and the taunt that her disgraced son had challenged Chen Yao with. That made Xue Lan crack up instantly.

“Godmother, what’s so funny? Anything good happened lately?” Xing Que asked.

“Ha, it’s just that some people have no idea where they belong.”

“Who are you talking about?”

“You will find out soon.” Xue Lan was acting all mysterious.

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“Li Tianming, it’s your turn, make a move.” After a long period of waiting, Chief Mentor Mu Wan had finally turned her attention to him, as she hurried him onto the arena.

Mu Wan was having a busy day, and she was already sweating from the burning sun. But that just made the beauty more attractive than ever.

“Who am I facing, and what level?” Li Tianming asked. He wanted a stronger opponent, so that he could get a higher preliminary score and not waste his time.

“Ninth level of Beast Vein.” Mu Wan replied.

“Oh c’mon, you must be looking down on me.” Li Tianming grumbled.

“What can I do, you are registered as ninth level of ... Wait, you reached Spiritsource?” Mu Wan realised that there was something inherently different about Li Tianming, something that didn’t belong to a Beast Vein beastmaster.

“Yeap.”

“Then all the more you should calm down and take your time. Don’t worry, I will keep assigning you opponents until you lose,” Mu Wan explained with a serious tone.

That was enough to soothe Li Tianming. Some chief mentors might give Li Tianming a biased score based on first impressions, and even if Li Tianming had won, if he wasn’t allocated any more matches, he wouldn’t be able to raise his score.

Li Tianming took to the arenas. Since there were over ten battles happening at the same time, not many had noticed him yet. In a while, his opponent was guided up the arena by another chief mentor.

Li Tianming took a closer look, and he was surprised that he recognised that fellow. His opponent was none other than the ‘genius’ of Lightning Manor, Liu Qianyang of ninth level of Beast Vein.

“What a coincidence. Life sure is funny sometimes, no?” Li Tianming grinned broadly.

Liu Qianyang’s expression was exactly opposite of Li Tianming’s. He had personally witnessed Li Tianming defeating Chen Ding. Furthermoe, his nose bone had yet to totally recover from Li Tianming’s punch. Therefore, he shuddered when he realised that he was matched up against Li Tianming once again.

“Chief mentor, I refuse to battle this person!” Li Tianming never expected Liu Qianyang to yell at the judging chief mentors the moment Liu Qianyang saw his face.

“Reason being?”

“This person is named Li Tianming, and he was expelled from the institute three years ago for immoral acts! He does not have the right to return to the institute, neither does he have the right to battle me!” Liu Qianyang’s eyes were wide open, and his tone hysterical. It was clear that he really didn’t want to battle Li Tianming.

“Bullshit. Li Tianming was not expelled from the institute three years ago, and we have judged that he has the right to re-enter the institute,” said Chief Mentor Mu Wan, who was just a distance away, “Liu Qianyang, you do not have a right to refuse the battle, or you will be automatically eliminated from the ranking test.”

She had made her stance very clear.

“I disagree! Why can an animal who drugged other people before become a member of the institute?! The Flameyellow Scions Institute is a sacred place, and should not tolerate filth like him! I refuse to battle him!” Liu Qianyang roared, his face flushing bright red.

The only reason why he was not chased out of the stadium yet was because he was a member of the Lightning Manor. Instead, many had caught on to what he had said, and they were beginning to notice Li Tianming’s existence. That name reminded many of the joke that had happened three years ago. While Li Tianming was just another average joe, the other member involved in the story was Lin Xiaoting, the prime disciple four years ago and the top disciple in Heaven’s Sanctum now.

“So that’s Li Tianming?”

Li Tianming’s name had started an array of discussions. “That Lightning Manor disciple is right. We can’t let such an indecent human be a member of the Flameyellow Scions Institute, it’s a sacred place after all.”

Even Li Tianming himself did not expect the attention he was receiving right now, since his first battle had not even started. The crowd today was easily ten times that of the admission test’s, and there were simply too many pairs of eyes on him right now.

“What a filthy scum, he belongs in the drains with the rats. He’s achieving nothing here but shaming himself.”

“Thankfully Lin Xiaoting arrived in time to save the goddess of Heaven’s Sanctum, or he would have laid his filthy hands on her.”

“I know, those two make such a good couple.”

“I wonder if they are here looking at this brute too?”

Discussion of this kind was going on in all corners of the stadium.

Liu Qianyang did not expect his little trick to be so effective. Just as he wanted to add fuel to the fire, he heard someone calling him.

“Qianyang!” The boy turned back to see his sister, Liu Qing.

Her face was stone-cold, as she announced, “Battle like a real man, and stop shaming the Lightning Manor. Children of the Lightning Manor will never escape from a battle.”

“But sis...”

“Quiet, the seniors are watching.” Liu Qing’s voice was as cold as ice.

How could Liu Qianyang not get the hint! Liu Qing was in the room allocated to Lightning Manor, and if she stepped out now it means she was carrying the orders from the top personnel from Lightning Manor. To piss off the seniors of the manor was even more frightening for Liu Qianyang.

Before the chief mentors could come to a decision on what to do, Liu Qianyang had summoned his Lightning Bolt Cheetah and shouted at Li Tianming, “I changed my mind! It is my role as a member of the Lightning Manor to punish people like you!”

His words had raised cheers from the crowd. Real heroes would punish evildoers, and only cowards escaped from battles. In fact, many in the stadium were applauding Liu Qianyang’s actions right now.

“Lovely. I owe you my thanks, Liu Qianyang,” Li Tianming said.

“Thank me? For what? For letting the world know that the joke is back in town?” Liu Qianyang sneered.

“Pretty much, your announcement had put me into the spotlight.” Li Tianming smiled.

“And?”

“And you are useless to me now.” Having said that, Li Tianming walked towards Liu Qianyang without even summoning his little chick.

“How dare you look down on me! Children of the Lightning Manor will never go down without a fight!” Liu Qianyang roared, as he charged towards Li Tianming along with his Lightning Bolt Cheetah. He wanted to make use of Li Tianming’s ego and attack before the little chick was even summoned.

BAM!

A fiery mirage flashed past, followed by a crisp sound of a slap. An instant later, the audience saw Liu Qianyang spiral into the air, spinning a dozen rounds, before he finally landed with a thud in front of Liu Qing. His body convulsed violently, and strength fled from his body entirely.

Bam!

Another slap followed. This time, the cheetah was sent spinning too, till it eventually landed beside its master, unable to get up either.

The battle lasted for less than a fraction of a second. Showered by the confused looks from the spectators, Li Tianming rubbed his hands together. Everyone was still in doubt of the result, and shocked by the swiftness of the battle. Had Li Yanfeng been here, he would have seen how Li Tianming dominated Liu Qianyang yet again. This time, it was with a single slap!

As for what happened three years ago, many had been fooled. Therefore, before he could exonerate himself completely, Li Tianming did not want to make any explanations.

In fact, he just wanted to tell Mu Wan: Bring me the next one! If he was lucky, he would be able to challenge the current first place of the leaderboard, Chen Yao, within an hour!

And then, trash the shit out of him.

Chapter 56 - Chen Yao, Come Get Some!

“Li Tianming, 480 points, rank 575.” The preliminary rating was quickly released, and Li Tianming wasn’t sure whether to laugh and cry when he saw the Flameyellow Leaderboard. He hadn’t had much chance to show off against Liu Qianyang when he finished it with just one slap.

The chief mentors couldn’t give him too high a rating when they didn’t really know his limits.

“Whatever. I’ll arrange someone stronger for you now. You’re so famous that it’s easy to find people who want to beat you up,” Mu Wan said.

Liu Qianyang had made Li Tianming the focus of the audience, even if it was a negative example of what not to be. On the bright side, now there was a long line of people queuing up to be his opponent.

“No problem. I’ll go for broke to help my chief mentor earn glory.”

“Give a good performance. A lot of people are looking down on you now.”

Below the other side of the stage, a face-swollen Liu Qianyang was asking, “Why, sis?”

His face was still smarting.

“The Tempest Marshal said not to make things difficult for Li Tianming,” Liu Qing said in a low voice.

The Tempest Marshal was Lin Tianjian.

Liu Qianyang was confused. “Why would the Tempest Marshal take note of such a small figure?”

“Mu Qingqing was next to him. The Tempest Marshal is aware of that incident between them three years ago, so he asked her how she wanted Li Tianming dealt with. Guess what she said?” Liu Qing’s expression was cold. There was no way she felt happy seeing her brother go up to get pummeled.

“What did she say?”

“Mu Qingqing said she’s already forgiven him for what happened and said he had received sufficient punishment three years ago. They were also once friends, so she didn’t want to hound him any further. In fact, she’s happy he’s turned over a new leaf and doesn’t want Lightning Manor to make things difficult for him,” Liu Qing replied.

“How is that possible? He wanted to violate her three years ago!” Liu Qianyang was even more confused now.

“Well, Li Tianming did lose his lifebound beast and suffer ridicule for three years. He has paid a heavy price. It really is a form of magnanimity for Mu Qingqing to forgive him on account of old friendships.”

“That’s too overly kind! Still, big brother Ting won’t forgive Li Tianming so easily. Is he around?” Liu Qianyang asked anxiously.

“He’s in seclusion.”

“Exactly! Big sis Qingqing may have forgiven him, but big brother Ting will definitely teach that guy a lesson once he comes out! We can’t let him make a comeback.”

Liu Qing wasn’t very pleased. “You’re wrong. He’ll probably listen to her. Anyway, how could a random Li Tianming make a comeback? He’ll always be an ant before Lightning Manor. No one cares about him. Still, this decision is troublesome for your brother-in-law.”

“How so?”

“So long as Li Tianming is alive, the possibility of a rift forming between Lightning Manor and your brother-in-law exists.”

“Hasn’t brother-in-law already received an important position from the Manor and obtained a heavenly will technique?” Liu Qianyang asked.

“A possibility is still a possibility.”

“Why don’t we find Bloodflower Chamber and hire a hit on him?” Liu Qianyang said maliciously.

“Not yet. Let your brother-in-law make his decision first.”

“He’ll kill his own son?”

“We’ll see. I do get the feeling he no longer has any emotional attachment to Li Tianming already.”

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As the brother-sister pair spoke in a corner, a group of people were sitting in one of the private rooms. At a glance, they were obviously of Lightning Manor. All of them were surrounded by an aura of lightning, and were threatening without being angry.

In the highest position, sat a middle-aged man dressed in purple robes. His black hair cascaded down like a waterfall while his eyes seemed to contain pools of lightning. Most striking were his pair of lightning-shaped eyebrows, which spiked up at the ends.

It gave him a fierce look that would frighten any kid who looked at him.

He was the number one marshal of Vermilion Bird, son of the Lightning Seigneur and current Tempest Marshal, Lin Tianjian.

He was also Lin Xiaoting and Lin Xiaoxiao’s father.

A delicate-looking girl, with pure and charming features sat besides him. She was the most popular disciple for this ranking battle, Lin Xiaoxiao.

Besides her sat a gentle-looking young lady in a white dress with blue borders. She gave off the impression of a white lotus, peaceful and natural. A smile from her seemed as cleansing as the spring wind.

“Big sis Qingqing, I feel that this Li Tianming’s strength isn’t bad. Supposedly, he had a six-star lifebound beast,” Lin Xiaoxiao whispered in her ear.

“It seems so. He was in Spiritsource three years ago. Now that he has a six-star beast, he’s stronger than before. It’s normal, he is five years older than you.” Mu Qingqing smiled warmly.

“Five years is nothing. If he runs into me, I’ll definitely help you teach the hooligan a lesson.” Lin Xiaoxiao fumed when she thought of that matter three years ago.

“Xiaoxiao, it wasn’t easy for him to turn over a new leaf. Don’t bully him.”

“Will big sis Qingqing treat him as a friend if you see him again?” Lin Xiaoxiao asked.

“Of course not. It’s no longer appropriate for us to meet, nor is there a need to.”

“I understand. Big sis Qingqing really is magnanimous! If it was me, I wouldn’t have forgiven such a person my whole life!” When she said this, she stood up. “Alright, I should get going for my matches.”

“Xiaoxiao, try and become the prime disciple, like your older brother. I’ve already prepared a room for you in Heaven’s Sanctum. You can live with me once you join,” Mu Qingqing said gently.

“I’ve seen Chen Yao and Li Shufan’s abilities. I feel it’s no big deal as long as they have no trump cards,” Lin Xiaoxiao said confidently.

“Don’t be too overconfident. Now, go!” Lin Tianjian said sternly when he heard their conversation.

“Fine!” Lin Xiaoxiao stuck out her tongue before happily going down. While people often said she was very mature and sensible, she would still act like a child around her family.

Mu Qingqing was still smiling as she sent her off. But no one noticed how the armrest on her chair had been crushed at some point in time.

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The atmosphere exploded when Lin Xiaoxiao took to the field. She managed to garner the highest evaluation from the chief mentor through two battles. Chen Yao, who had towered above everyone else before now, was finally dragged down to second place by the 950 points Lin Xiaoxiao.

Unfortunately, he didn’t keep number two for long either.

Occult Athenaeum’s Li Shufan took to the field next and was given 920 points, which was also above Chen Yao.

Chen Yao still had opportunities to fight. After another two fights, he made an excellent showing in defeating some third level Spiritsource opponents. Alas, it was only enough to bring him to 900 points.

It meant that there was no point fighting anyone else if he wanted to be the prime disciple. Only Lin Xiaoxiao was left for him to beat. By the same logic, it was the same for Li Shufan who had reached the peak otherwise.

According to past precedents, one had to accept many challengers to be determined as the strongest disciple by the chief mentors. When there was sufficient proof that the top ranker was unshakable, then and only then would he or she be conferred as prime disciple.

While the 950 points given to Lin Xiaoxiao was the greatest affirmation towards her, it also gave the greatest challenge.

Still, only those in the top ten could challenge her, with priority given to the higher ranks.

The one with the highest priority was the second place Li Shufan. However, Lin Xiaoxiao was still safe, as he was biding his time for now.

The ranking battles had only just hit its middle portion and the bottom and middle rankings were constantly changing. Only when those rankings had stabilised would the most spectacular part come!

Li Shufan, Chen Yao and the rest weren't anxious yet.

During this time, Li Tianming had gone through another two battles. He had already gone against a second level Spiritsource opponent. Without exception, all were defeated by a single slap without him summoning his lifebound beast.

He was currently ninety-fifth place with 790 points.

However, he obviously hadn't shown his true strength yet. Hence, he had much more possibility for upward mobility than the others around his rank.

Mu Wan was getting more excited after seeing his last two battles and hurriedly arranged even stronger opponents.

However, Li Tianming couldn't wait any longer! It was going to take forever at this rate to fight his way to the top ten. Hence, he decided to give it a try himself.

"Chief mentor, I want to try to directly challenge the third place, Chen Yao!" It was time to let Xue Lan know whether her precious son was a stunning talent or a trash who had grown up with a silver spoon in his mouth.

"Impossible. The top ten are just waiting to challenge Lin Xiaoxiao. They have the right to reject your challenge unless you're in the top twenty."

"But hypothetically, what if he accepts?"

"Then you'll be good to go."

Li Tianming grinned. He was full of nothing but methods to get Chen Yao to come get some.

Chapter 57 - Break His Leg!

"Chief mentor. Please help me deliver my letter of challenge to Xing & Chen Merchantry. Help me ask Madam Xue Lan if her son dares to come and get a beating!"

"That's against the rules, but I'll help you this time. But well, from my perspective, you're likely to be the one beaten up. He is a real genius, after all," Mu Wan warned.

Li Tianming smiled, his eyes ablaze with passion. He didn't need to brag or anything. Beating him up was a done deal if Chen Yao dared to come down.

Therefore, Mu Wan delivered the letter of challenge to Xing & Chen Merchantry's private room.

At the same time, Li Tianming took the initiative to leap onto a stage and look at where the letter of challenge had been sent. "Chen Yao! Do you dare come down here for a beatdown?"

The voice suddenly boomed out within the Flameyellow Stadium, immediately drawing the attention of everyone!

Liu Qianyang had successfully helped everyone recognise Li Tianming. So, everyone expected him to be more low profile. On the contrary, he instead even acted more bombastic!

With his rank and power, challenge Chen Yao?

It was delusional and courting death, garnering ridicule from all sides.

"This fellow, he came to create more joke material!" Many immediately laughed at Li Tianming's challenge.

Now, was the time for second place and onward to contest first place!

Chen Yao was waiting for his turn after Li Shufan lost. The first rank had to continuously accept challenges until the chief mentors unanimously decided he or she was the prime disciple.

"The mad dog is barking again. Tell him I'm busy!" Chen Yao was currently resting next to his two older brothers.

"He really is blind. What does he have against you?" Xing Que asked coldly.

Chen Yao didn't say anything, turning to look at his mother, Xue Lan instead. From when Li Tianming started fighting, her expression had been unpleasant throughout. Moreover, Chen Yao was currently ranked third and not first, which added to her displeasure.

"Chen Yao. Go down and teach him a lesson. If the chance presents itself, cripple him!" Xue Lan suddenly said.

"Sis, there's no need right? I just saw him beat a second level Spiritsource. Yao'er is currently preparing for Lin Xiaoxiao. It'll affect him if he exhausts his strength with this person," Madam Yuan Yu advised.

"I think there's no need to. Teaching this sort of dog a lesson can be done anytime, anywhere. It doesn't need to be now," Xue Lan's eldest son, Chen Hao, added.

"Yao'er, are you going or not? You can't lack the courage to handle such trash if you're gunning for first place!"

Everyone realised Xue Lan was getting more and more irascible today.

"How could I reject if mother has already said this much? Honestly, if I didn't want to conserve strength for Lin Xiaoxiao, I would have gone straight down and shut his mouth when he challenged me." Chen Yao stood up. He knew why his mother was so agitated. Before the ranking battles, his mother and Wei

Jing had met, shedding all pretense of cordiality in the process. Furthermore, they had made fun of that mother-son pair so much. If he didn't go forth and it spread, where would Madam Xue Lan's face go?

"He hasn't used his lifebound beast to win so far. Are you confident?" Xue Lan asked.

"Haha, one move is enough! It wouldn't affect later on. Mother, just watch! I'm going to plunge that mother and son into despair. It's just some dog that just won't go away, if I don't break its legs, I'm not surnamed Chen!" Chen Yao sneered.

"It's enough to beat him. Conserve your strength, little brother. After the ranking battles, I'll just get someone to exterminate his lifebound beast and there, matter resolved!" Xing Que patted him on the shoulder.

"We recently made some fugitive friends who can do anything and everything." Chen Hao chuckled too.

"That's good. I won't have to see such dirty things anymore then." Chen Yao walked out.

"Wei Jing, what are you trying to prove before you die? That your son is stronger than mine? Well, I guess you're not going to be able to peacefully go then." Xue Lan looked in Wei Jing's direction, muttering internally. She may not have been able to see her, but she knew where she was.

As for Wei Jing's desire to compare children, she smiled coldly, derision in her heart.

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An incident happened as Li Tianming was confidently thinking Chen Yao would come down. Li Shufan of Occult Athenaeum coincidentally sent his letter of challenge to Lightning Manor.

Lin Xiaoxiao had also been waiting for this to defend her prime disciple spot. When she came out from the Lightning Manor's area, she saw Chen Yao too.

The two passed by each other.

"Don't lose. My next opponent is you, so don't go losing to Li Shufan." Chen Yao was full of spirit, before he descended like a streak of starlight towards Li Tianming.

Lin Xiaoxiao pursed her lips. She was actually very confident. If she could beat Li Shufan, Chen Yao was even less of an issue. Thus, she didn't know where that confidence was coming from.

Under the expectant gazes of everyone, she arrived before Li Shufan. The most exciting moment finally arrived. It wasn't because of that weird match-up between Li Tianming and Chen Yao, but the match between the first and second places of the Flameyellow Leaderboard!

This could possibly be the most exciting match of the ranking battles! It was definitely a match of heavyweights.

Lin Xiaoxiao and Li Shufan were both straightforward people. They had a decent relationship. There was no enmity involved in this fight, only the determination of victor and loser.

Hence, their fight already started as Chen Yao arrived in front of Li Tianming.

Thus, there was less attention paid to the fight between Li Tianming and Chen Yao as everyone just expected a one-sided trampling there. How could Li Tianming who had returned after three years compare to a true talent, the young master of Xing & Chen Merchantry?

Even Chen Yao didn't expect to face off against Li Tianming here. When he laid eyes on him, he realised the rancor in his heart was even more than he had imagined.

"Stupid mongrel. It seems you think I'm afraid of your biting if I don't do anything. Since you dared call me down, I'll break your legs and teeth in front of everyone, including that dying mother of yours!" Chen Yao knew if he didn't teach Li Tianming a lesson, any random stray cat or dog would come challenge him, a 'lion', from now on.

"Madam Xue Lan always acts as if she's well-bred, but her son lacks any sign of education. Talking so crassly only reveals your inner baseness, you know?" Li Tianming smiled coldly. After three years, it was difficult for people to tell anger or happiness from his face anymore.

While he seemed to be casually smiling on the surface, he was hiding a volcano inside, just waiting to erupt. He had been waiting for this too long.

One was spewing insults while one was smiling pleasantly. Immediately, the contrast determined the superiority and inferiority between the two.

Chen Yao saw the looks of disappointment from people in his conduct.

It infuriated him even further to be judged as lesser than Li Tianming! However, the battle of words never mattered in the end on the battlefield. As long as he made Li Tianming kneel before him, everything else wouldn't matter.

"Come out!" Chen Yao snapped, summoning his famous Hex-starred Clinquant Lion, which leapt out of his lifebound space covered in resplendent starlight.

The lion was tall and mighty, holy yet awe-inspiring. It held the presence of the king of all beasts.

Besides each other, the man and beast pair complemented each other well, looking like gods incarnated.

It was a star-type terrestrial beast that could manipulate the power of the stars in the sky, drawing on starlight to grow. It had limitless potential.

Chen Yao using the Hex-Starred Clinquant Lion meant he wanted to crush Li Tianming thoroughly.

From its fierce appearance, it was clear Chen Yao's emotions had affected it. It glared at Li Tianming, the starlight in its eyes pulsing. Its powerful claws gripped the ground, ready to pounce at Li Tianming at any moment.

Chapter 58 - This Is A Beatdown!

"Don't tell me you want to fight one against two!" Chen Yao frowned. He gathered his beast ki and used it to press down on Li Tianming.

He had seen Li Tianming soloing a second level Spiritsource beastmaster and his beast. It did look quite impressive.

Xue Lan had originally thought he was useless, but this performance made her gloomy. Now, Chen Yao wanted to sweep that all away!

Li Shufan and Lin Xiaoxiao's battle was very spectacular, but some people divided their attention towards Chen Yao and Li Tianming. Many were speculating why there seemed to be so much conflict between the two.

However, they would never arrive at any conclusion if they didn't recognise Wei Jing.

"Nope, that'll be too easy for you." Li Tianming hadn't summoned the little chick yet because there hadn't been any worthy opponents so far.

However, this Hex-Starred Clinquant Lion, with its aura as the king of beasts, didn't look any easy to deal with. It was time for it to make an appearance.

A tender little chick appeared on Li Tianming's shoulder. His mysterious lifebound beast finally appeared in the ranking battles.

Many had already heard descriptions of it, but a personal look made them realise the rumours hadn't done its tenderness and diminutiveness any justice!

It looked weak enough that even a baby could crush it. How could it fight the Hex-Starred Clinquant Lion? One was like heaven, one was like earth!

Even the Hex-Starred Clinquant Lion felt amused when it saw it. Its killing intent reduced by half, and its eyes filled with disdain.

Perhaps, only Chen Yao knew looks were deceiving for this lifebound beast.

"Protect it well. Otherwise, you'll end up crying for another three years if I cut off its head." Chen Yao realised all of his upbringing seemed to fade away when he came before this person. He felt there was no need to care when it came to this kind of person.

Beating up the dog was the only enjoyable way to do things.

He drew his grade four bestial weapon, the Starriver Blade, from its sheath. It was a dark blue longsword upon which starlight sparkled, making it seem like a river of stars. Green heavenly patterns could also be faintly seen on it. The blinding starlight it radiated made it difficult to look at directly.

"Protect your little brother well. Otherwise, you'll have to become an eunuch if I peck off its head." With its temper, the little chick definitely wasn't happy to be mocked by Chen Yao as soon as it was summoned.

A tender little chick looking at Chen Yao's groin with ill intentions and saying such words definitely made some people chuckle.

However, Chen Yao felt his humiliation turn into rage. He realised trying to embarrass Li Tianming before the battle only served to work against him.

He had already drawn his sword and his lion was snarling by his side. If he didn't fight now, then when!

"Bro, let's kill this pretty boy for our mother!" The little chick was furious.

Li Tianming didn't need it to say anything to decide an opponent. Burning hot beast ki was circulating through his left arm, the Thunderfire Chain was wrapped around his right arm and mirages were starting to shimmer around his legs.

When Mu Wan announced the start, he instantly sped towards Chen Yao!

Today, he wanted to let Xue Lan know what was a beatdown!

He had the infernal source, which was equal to eight or nine spirit sources in power. He also had the Aeternal Infernal Beast Ki that was several times better in quality than normal people.

Although he was only first level Spirit source, not even a third level Spirit source could withstand the suppression of his beast ki when he let it explode out. In other words, he hadn't shown his true power when he fought against the second level Spirit source just now.

"Hmph. Just a bluff," Chen Yao mocked.

Bathed in starlight, he looked very elegant with the Starriver Sword in hand and the Hex-starred Clinquant Lion by his side.

However, his intermediate source-ranked battle art was anything but elegant as it struck out with startling destructive power!

Shooting Star Flying Sword Art!

When he flourished the Starriver Sword, it transformed into a rain of falling stars that filled the sky! Drawing eye-piercing trajectories, stars descended from the sky, their target Li Tianming.

The beautiful sword stance drew much commotion. It seemed that as soon as they started, Chen Yao was going to suppress Li Tianming.

However, was that the truth?

In the next moment, the Thunderfire Chain seemed to become a venomous dragon. Sparks of fire and lightning scattered, snaking into Chen Yao's sword attacks continuously.

Chen Yao's movement art, the Seven Star Steps, was as good as Li Tianming's. However, he had neglected one thing. Before absolute power, no matter how pretty the sword stance or how sharp the weapon, they wouldn't be able to block Li Tianming's frenzied attacks!

Nine Flying Bolts! For the first time ever, Li Tianming used all nine whip strikes from the first to ninth. They fell like nine lightning bolts from the heavens, producing heavy clangs every time their weapons clashed.

Under the berserk chain attacks, Chen Yao's offensive collapsed. It was an utter crushing!

Chen Yao's beast ki simply couldn't stand up to Li Tianming. In fact, the final whip strike wrenched Chen Yao's Starriver Sword out of his grasp.

“Impossible!” They had only just begun and Chen Yao had already felt that feeling of being absolutely overpowered!

He hadn’t even registered losing his sword yet, only the pain from the torn skin on his hand.

“Nothing is impossible. You’re just too weak.” The next moment, the Thunderfire Chain coiled three times around Chen Yao.

A horrifying force abruptly transmitted from the chain, leaving horrible flesh wounds on Chen Yao. It didn’t end there, as Li Tianming’s right hand suddenly yanked him off the ground with the chain!

Everyone watched dumbfounded as Chen Yao was totally routed. He was then unceremoniously tossed into the sky with the chain, before Li Tianming abruptly swung the chain and smashed him into the ground, his bones creaking ominously.

“So, Chen Yao, who’s the dog here?” Li Tianming stood in front of Chen Yao, his eyes shining.

Chen Yao was trembling on the ground, deathly pale. Everything had happened so fast, he hadn’t even understood what just took place, until Li Tianming’s foot ground into his face and he felt the acute pain from his body and face.

He had actually suffered a complete and total beatdown by Li Tianming!

He hadn’t even had the slightest chance to resist!

At such an abrupt, total defeat, Chen Yao felt like the world was collapsing around him!

Chapter 59 - Rampage!

It had all ended in less than ten breaths of time. Lin Xiaoxiao and Li Shufan had only just started when Chen Yao, who should have crushed Li Tianming, had the tables turned on him immediately!

Because it had happened so fast, everyone was still watching Lin Xiaoxiao’s battle, only noticing Chen Yao’s plight when they glanced over.

“AH!” Chen Yao struggled mightily in an attempt to extricate himself from the Thunderfire Chain, only to make it tighter, increasing his pain.

“Chen Yao, Chen Yao. Look at you now! You’re on a leash rolling around on the ground and I’m using my foot to step on you. Tell me, who’s the dog?” Li Tianming asked Chen Yao loudly. However, his words were actually directed at Xue Lan!

He smiled in Xue Lan’s direction as the force behind his foot nearly flattened Chen Yao’s nose.

He wanted to let Xue Lan know something. If you didn’t want to help an old sister, fine. Just ignore her, and everyone will know the score. We won’t bother you. However, there’s no need to look down or fall out with each other. Nor do you have to take the pain of others for your entertainment!

“You may have been born with a golden spoon in your mouth, but please try to act at least a little civilised. Don’t keep barking like a mad dog. Otherwise, everyone can tell how much wickedness you’re hiding behind that veneer of nobleness. People like you are the real vulgar ones!” Li Tianming felt much better now.

“Let me go!” Chen Yao screamed as he struggled and cried, his tears mixing with his blood.

The scene was incredibly tragic, especially when one compared his current state to how he had previously been respected by all. No one could have recognised this crying fellow to be the young master of the Xing & Chen Merchantry!

The audience all stared at Li Tianming, minds blank. What had happened?

They looked at the Hex-starred Clinquant Lion’s battle, hoping that it would put up a better performance.

However, the situation there was similarly shocking. Before Ying Huo, the Hex-starred Clinquant Lion was like putty in its hands.

The lion could never touch it no matter how it swung its claws. It had six spiritsource abilities, which it had all cycled through, but nothing had been accomplished.

The little thing was like an untraceable and untrackable assassin.

Once again, before absolute power, all techniques were but insignificant tricks.

Just as Li Tianming had laid a beatdown on Chen Yao, so too had the little chick on the Hex-starred Clinquant Lion.

It showed that whether master or beast, they were much stronger than their counterparts, and not just by a bit!

Li Tianming could guess how furious Madam Xue Lan was in her private room now!

Honestly, Li Tianming was aware that Chen Yao was Sage Chen’s son, and Sage Chen was helping him. However, his intuition told him Sage Chen wouldn’t mind him doing this. Xue Lan had spoiled him rotten; that was a fact.

But above all, he wanted to help his mother vent. Now, all of Xue Lan’s superiority complex and all the hurtful words she had said was like a slap back in her face! And it felt good!

Wei Jing had asked him if he could teach Chen Yao a lesson, and the answer he had now shown was a resounding yes.

He had also given Xue Lan a slap on the face as he did so. While it wasn’t a physical slap, it definitely smarted and stung.

Li Tianming tried to find his mother in the crowd, but it wasn’t easy. However, he was sure that his mother was definitely crying with happiness for him now, because he had proven himself before tens of thousands of people.

It was exactly this kind of happiness that life needed!

Were those cruel and heartless people watching as Li Tianming stepped on Chen Yao and trussed him up like a little puppy?

This was the real him, possessing the courage and guts to do this! In fact, some would even go as far as to say the current Li Tianming instilled some reverence in them.

However, Li Tianming still felt this was far from enough. This was only a declaration, and he didn't qualify to appear in front of his real enemies yet.

"So, how does it feel, Chen Yao?" Li Tianming said conversationally as he lifted his foot off. However, that didn't remove the large footprint or swelling on Chen Yao's face.

"Urk..." In his pain, Chen Yao could only tremble and gasp for breath. Of course, when he imagined all of the mocking words he had said to Li Tianming, the pain was surely magnified!

"Yao'er!" Li Tianming finally heard Xue Lan's voice. The beautiful moment had finally arrived.

"Li Tianming, I swear I'll kill you! I will definitely make you pay thousandfold the price. I'll kill your whole family!" Chen Yao was half howling, half gasping for breath.

"Oh my god! Young master Chen Yao really is the badass among badasses. However, let me tell you, the person I respect the most is Li Yanfeng, currently working for Lightning Manor. If you kill him somehow, I fear I'll be so, so unbelievably sad," Li Tianming chuckled.

"LI YANFENG! I'll remember that name!" Chen Yao gritted his teeth. Unfortunately, he was missing several teeth, which made it quite the arduous task.

"Release my Yao'er! Let me go up!" That shrill voice punctuated the air again. Li Tianming turned to see Xue Lan was indeed below. Her clothes were dishevelled and her hair a mess. Combined with her pale countenance, she looked less elegant, and more like a shrew now.

However, Hall Overseer Wei Zikun prevented her from going up. It wasn't very appropriate to let her interfere with Flameyellow Scions Institute's sacred tradition of ranking battles after all.

Mu Wan threw a wink from the side. "Madam Xue Lan, calm yourself. Chen Yao only has some flesh wounds. It's very embarrassing for you to cause all this hoo-hah!"

Two young men joined Xue Lan, each taking an arm. Both of them were also wearing cold and ashen expressions, boiling with killing intent as they focused on Li Tianming.

Li Tianming recognised them. They were Xing Que and Chen Hao, both his age. They had ranked in the top five the previous batch. At that time, Li Tianming didn't qualify to interact with them with his low rank.

Now, they were Heaven's Sanctum disciples, while Li Tianming was still stuck fighting with their little brother.

They didn't levy any vicious words, only supporting Xue Lan and whispering a few words into her ear. Even then, Xue Lan still fixed Li Tianming with a death glare.

Li Tianming couldn't wrap his head around how such an elegant madam could make such a ferocious expression.

“You’ve won, Li Tianming. Let him go and don’t do anything unnecessary. I declare your victory,” Wei Zikun said.

“No problem, Hall Overseer!” Li Tianming had already enjoyed himself. Most enjoyable was Xue Lan’s expression, as if she had been made to eat some dog shit.

“Madam, don’t worry. I’ll return Chen Yao to you right away. Still did you eat something bad? You’re not looking too good there! Be careful, you have to watch your diet when you’re getting on in age. I may not have tried it, but I’m sure dog shit isn’t any tasty!”

Li Tianming tossed out Chen Yao. While Xing Que managed to catch him, it provoked another yelp of pain.

Xue Lan nearly fainted when she took a closer look. Her darling son had never been mistreated like this before. Her entire body shook as she looked at Li Tianming, speechless.

“Madam, why are you shaking? Is the weather too cold for you? You can’t skimp on clothing just because you want to look good!” Anyone could hear the blatant sarcasm in Li Tianming’s tone.

No one knew what conflict existed between the two, but what they did know was that this was Li Tianming publicly setting himself against the behemoth, Xing & Chen Merchantry.

From start to finish, Li Tianming had carried a smile on his face, leaving others unable to read his emotions.

As for Xue Lan, this was perhaps the first time she had ever felt like this. Her body shook uncontrollably as she struggled to find words.

If they weren’t being watched by an audience, she would have probably ripped apart the whole Flameyellow Stadium. She was actually at a rather high cultivation stage, having access to Xing & Chen Merchantry’s resources.

“Mother, don’t bother talking too much. He may have won now, but all he can do is spew some nonsense. Such juvenile behaviour only goes to show he won’t live for long.” Xue Lan’s elder son, Chen Hao, patted her on the back, trying to calm her down.

“True. No one can offend our Xing & Chen Merchantry without paying a price.”

“After this, I’ll see who dares to protect him. What’s the big deal with him beating Yao’er at his age?”

“He only won with his age advantage. After entering the institute, he would be at the bottom of the heap.” Xing Que narrowed his eyes.

The two exchanged a look, immediately making many plans to torment Li Tianming.

“Fine.” Xue Lan finally relaxed, but her expression, as Li Tianming put aptly, looked like she had eaten some dog shit. She could only declare that Li Tianming and his mother would see what the Xing & Chen Merchantry was capable of.

Li Tianming didn’t have much time to act cool before a new commotion arose. On the other stage, Lin Xiaoxiao defeated Li Shufan as expected and defended her prime disciple position.

Fervent gazes landed on the two respective winners.

Li Tianming was now third as he had defeated Chen Yao. Second place had fallen.

Hence, while unbelievable, the conclusion was that Li Tianming now had the right to contest for prime disciple.

Lin Xiaoxiao and Li Tianming. Between these two, who would become the prime disciple?

Chapter 60 - Who Shall Be The Prime Disciple?!

There were bound to be countless battles happening during the ranking test, but the importance of the battle deciding the position of prime disciple outweighed all the rest combined! Everyone had thought that the battle between Li Shufan and Lin Xiaoxiao was already the highlight of the day. But the appearance of Li Tianming had just cast doubt on that result, considering that the black horse had just defeated Chen Yao in a one-sided beatdown.

Li Tianming, compared to Li Shufan, was more qualified to challenge the first place of the Flameyellow Leaderboard.

Lin Xiaoxiao defeating Li Shufan was within most people's expectations, so the only question that remained was how far Li Tianming could go. That joker from three years ago, just what could he achieve today?

No one was going to question his age since the ranking test would not take that into consideration, and in terms of talent, the two were worlds apart. But even if Li Tianming was five years older, for a boy from a faraway city to be able to even challenge the Lightning Manor's twin beastmaster was nothing short of a miracle in itself!

Lin Xiaoxiao had been paying attention to the other battle, and witnessed how easily Li Tianming defeated Chen Yao. She was clear that the only roadblock left was Li Tianming. As for those outside of the top five on the leaderboard, they probably couldn't even overcome Chen Yao, let alone stand a chance against her.

She desired to be the prime disciple as much as Li Tianming did, if not more.

"Four years ago, elder brother became the prime disciple and brought glory to the Lightning Manor. Father has high expectations of me, and I must not disappoint him or the manor!" Lin Xiaoxiao was already staring at Li Tianming, urging for a battle.

The stadium was rather quiet, as the five hall overseers had stopped all other battles already. The ranking test was coming to an end, where the leaderboard more or less reflected the strength of each individual disciple.

As Chen Yao, Li Shufan, and their family members exited the arena, Wei Zikun announced to the crowd, "I believe everyone here understands the importance of the battle for the prime disciple. Now that Li Shufan and Chen Yao have been defeated, and those from fifth place onward do not have the strength to fight for the position of prime disciple, we can safely conclude that the quadrennial mystery shall be solved with one last battle."

The hall overseers and the chief mentor had a great say over the ranking test, and their judgements of disciples were mostly accurate and unquestioned too. Li Tianming clearly had the capability to try for first place, and they would arrange a battle for him to do so. Not to mention that Li Tianming belonged to the Hall of Phoenix, and the overseer of the Hall of Phoenix, Wei Zikun, was the one in charge on the ranking test today.

“Overseer Wei, I think the moment we have all been waiting for has arrived. Please arrange a battle between those two youngsters,” From within the biggest room, the Vermilion Bird Royal Clan’s King Xuan declared.

“Yes, King Xuan.” Wei Zikun smiled, and then announced, “The five hall overseers have come to a united decision that the position of the Prime Disciple this year shall be decided between Lin Xiaoxiao from Hall of Manibeasts, and Li Tianming from Hall of Phoenix. The victor shall be directly admitted to Heaven’s Sanctum!”

He added, “As for the fifth place and below, based on your performances and our judgement, we have decided that none of you are qualified to challenge these two.”

According to the rules, anyone from the top ten were given the chance to issue a challenge, but the final decision still remained in the overseers’ hands. And in today’s case, they have decided that any battle other than the one between Lin Xiaoxiao and Li Tianming was pointless.

“I already vented out my anger on Chen Yao, but that’s not what I’m here for today. Mother’s condition is deteriorating, and I must enter Heaven’s Sanctum. I have to defeat Lin Xiaoxiao!” Li Tianming was clear that he could not back off from this battle, and he must defeat Lin Xiaoxiao, no matter the cost.

He had never included Lin Xiaoxiao into his hatred of Lin Xiaoting and Mu Qingqing. In fact, in terms of animosity, he probably disliked Chen Yao way more. Nonetheless the battle with Lin Xiaoxiao just meant much, much more to him. Therefore, Li Tianming would put in his best, no matter who he was facing, to be the prime disciple!

Only when his name stood at the top of the Flameyellow Leaderboard, could he proudly tell Ignispolis that he, Li Tianming, was back! And only then, would mother tell him about the secrets between her and the sanctum. He knew that her time was running out, especially since that assassination.

“You will have fifteen minutes to prepare, after which you will present the audience with an exciting battle,” Wei Zikun told Li Tianming and Lin Xiaoxiao.

Fifteen minutes of resting was not that long, and it passed in a flash. Considering the importance of the battle, many of Lightning Manor’s youngsters were surrounding Lin Xiaoxiao, encouraging and cheering for her. As for Li Tianming’s side, he only had Chief Mentor Mu Wan, since it wasn’t convenient for Wei Jing to come down from the audience.

Mu Wan patted his shoulders. “Well, here we are. Just do your best and prove yourself.”

“Don’t worry, chief mentor. I won’t lose to that little girl.” Li Tianming smiled.

“Ha, cocky brats like you tend to lose it especially in the important fights. Clearly you don’t have a clue as to how difficult it is to fight a twin beastmaster.” Mu Wan rolled her eyes.

“Are you still my chief mentor? Why are you cheering my opponents on instead of me? I request a change of class, I want to get out of here!” Li Tianming chuckled.

Of course, Li Tianming knew what twin beastmasters were capable of, since Lin Xiaoting himself was one. Back then, the difference between them was so huge that Lin Xiaoting could easily crush him with a single hand without even using his lifebound beast.

“Go ahead, are you going to walk out now?” Mu Wan winked.

“Nah, definitely not.” Li Tianming grinned. After all, Mu Wan was the only one in this stadium supporting him, apart from Wei Jing and Auntie Li!

As the moment drew closer and closer, a tense atmosphere enveloped the entire stadium. Li Tianming closed his eyes, and he could feel the Aeternal Infernal Beast Ki running through his body, as if his body was burning from inside.

At that instance, he could feel someone looking at him unlike anyone else. The look was enough to make his heart shudder, as the last time someone looked at him like that was three years ago.

The moment he opened his eyes, he saw the girl in a white dress standing beside Lin Xiaoxiao. She had long hair reaching her waist, her fair skin shining in the gentle sunlight.

At last, she had finally appeared.

Li Tianming thought of the day they met. It was when the both of them had just gotten the Flameyellow Order, and were on their way to Ignispolis from their respective hometowns.

She was walking in the wilderness when she ran into two lechers who were after her beauty. She fought, one against two, but the situation looked grim for her. Just as she was about to be defeated, and the attackers were about to get what they wanted, Li Tianming appeared out of nowhere.

At that time, he didn't know how such a beautiful girl could exist. He could feel his heartstrings being pulled.

After a fearless battle, they finally defeated the attackers, but Li Tianming himself was on the brink of death. It was she who carried him to find a doctor in the nearby town. Even as he drifted in and out of coma due to his loss of blood, he could still feel the warmth of her body.

After that, they found out that they both had the Flameyellow Order, and from there headed towards the capital together. Along the way Li Tianming said all kinds of clumsy jokes just to please her, and she laughed along to them.

Perhaps she was grateful towards Li Tianming. Perhaps she was touched by his bravery. Whatever the reason, on the night they passed the admission test and became disciples of the institute, Li Tianming kissed her under the moonlight. It was Li Tianming's first relationship, and being madly in love, Li Tianming did all that he could for her, even passing her some of the resources he got for cultivation.

He had always thought that he belonged with her, and she with him, that they were bound to spend the rest of their lives together. For a year they were together, and Li Tianming could remember every single day, every single thing that had happened.

Her smiles, her words of encouragement, would still appear in his mind once in a while. He was with her all the while, be it when she was happy or when she was sad. They had even decided how many kids they would like to have in the future.

Back then, diligence was her utmost virtue. She worked way harder than Li Tianming in terms of cultivation, as she had an unfortunate background. While she was the daughter of the governor of Windhaven, she was born from a lowly servant in the manor, who was killed for her transgression not long after her birth. If it wasn't for her father's protection and her own talents, she would be dead a long time ago.

But life worked in the most funny and unfortunate ways. He trusted her with everything he had, and thought that he knew her better than anyone else. And when she decided to stab him in the back, who could ever imagine the amount of pain and suffering that he went through?

Li Tianming wondered. If he hadn't gotten the Saintbeast War-Soul, or had not told her about it, would that have been a better ending for the both of them?