

The Ages 581

Chapter 581: Lin Feng the Neighbor

"Lin Xiaoxiao?" Tianming almost did a double take. "Why Lin Xiaoxiao and not Lin Xiaoting?!"

Right after coming to the Archaion Sect, his new neighbour was actually called Lin Xiaoxiao. Tianming recalled the girl who bore the same name that had left home on a journey after Lightning Manor was taken out.

"If she really did make it to this sect, I'll call her my mom," Ying Huo said as it played in the courtyard's pond. Tianming's residence was about the size of the one he had used as an astral general back at the dao palace, so it was large enough for Lan Huang to run around in.

He continued cultivating, but the noises from next door were growing louder. It appeared that the sect didn't really care much for discipline among their disciples, especially when it came to the Human Branch. According to the books he got, the Human Branch had ten times the number of disciples of the Earth Branch, and a thousand times that of the Heaven Branch. The descendants from factions all over Archaion came here to cultivate.

"Fu Bo, I obtained the Nine Yang Sword at the Old Deepstar Path. Even if you head to Judgment Hall, you won't be able to take it from me," said a hollow female voice with a hint of melancholy.

Tianming and Ying Huo froze when they heard the voice. The world was big, and it wouldn't be surprising if there were people who looked alike, but it was hard for there to be people who spoke at exactly the same tone, tempo, and cadence.

"No way." Ying Huo flew toward the direction of the sound with Tianming tagging along. Neither of them could believe what they were hearing.

Leaning against the tall wall, they peeked over it and saw a few men and women at the entrance of the neighboring courtyard surrounding a girl clad in black. The man who led them was a head taller than the girl and looked really brutish. He crossed his arms and smirked, but didn't speak, preferring to let his minions do the talking and bullying.

Tianming could only see the other girl's back, but it seemed really familiar. It couldn't have been another person, given how her name, voice and silhouette were identical.

"It's impossible! Xiaoxiao was only at Spiritsource when she left Ignispolis! The farthest she could go was the Grand-Orient Realm. There's no way she'd be able to make it to the Archaion Sect!" Tianming said.

It was already a miracle for him to come all the way here from Ignispolis in such a short time, to say nothing of Lin Xiaoxiao. His emotions were now all over the place.

"It can't be her, right? I won't believe it until she turns around," Ying Huo said.

"We'll wait and see."

Back at the courtyard, the man called Fu Bo finally spoke. "I was the one who obtained the Nine Yang Sword. I have five witnesses who can prove that you snuck into my place to steal it. Stop arguing, Lin Xiaoxiao. The Judgment Hall will definitely straighten this matter out."

The others chuckled when he finished.

"Your father is the elder of the hall. It's no surprise he'll do 'fair' by you," the girl in black said.

"I'm glad you're aware. We invited you to join the Dragonmight Faction to give you face, yet you still put up your holier-than-thou act. If you don't lay low and listen to others, you'll be crushed in the Archaion Sect one day," Fu Bo said as he gave her a leer.

The girl kept her head lowered without talking back.

"Grab hold of her and take her to Judgment Hall. As a disciple of the sect, she's embarrassed us by engaging in the lowly act of theft. I believe that she'll be excommunicated and return from whence she came," Fu Bo said with a laugh, and the others joined in.

His expression turned grim when he tried grabbing her. At that moment, the girl took out a crimson longsword, upon which nine blazing sun-like jewels were embedded. The sword actually had ninety-nine saintly heavenly patterns and was comparable to the Three-Thousand Starfield. No wonder the others were giving her trouble over such an impressive item. While something like that wasn't a big deal in the sect as a whole, it was definitely a treasure to the disciples of the Human Branch.

"Take it and stop bothering me," she said weakly.

"If only you'd done this earlier. However, I'll ask you again whether you'll join Dragonmight. Lin Xiaoxiao, you broke through three levels within the two months after you joined the sect. I admire your cultivation speed, hence my invitation. I don't mean anything else by it," Fu Bo said, in no hurry to take the sword. Instead, he continued to look down on her imposingly.

"If I join, I'll have to train with you and you'll be able to find opportunities when nobody else is around to bully me, right?" she said coldly.

Stunned, Fu Bo said, "It's one thing if you're a cute loner that doesn't mingle like an animal, but why are you so smart?"

The girl's shoulders shook with discomfort. Tianming couldn't bear continuing to watch this. It wasn't that he pitied her; he just wanted an answer to whether she really was Lin Xiaoxiao. The longer the others were there, the more time he would waste.

The Archaion Sect is truly amazing, for Fu Bo to be as powerful as the palace lord when he's only in his twenties... Tianming figured this was the level of the average disciple in the sect. Someone like Xuanyuan Yuheng was probably a genius that even Fu Bo would have to hail as a god.

It seemed that Tianming was rather suited to the Human Branch. At least he would have some say here. Fu Bo's minions were only sky saints, so he didn't bother himself with them.

Right as Fu Bo was about to take the sword away, a flash of starlight could be seen. Fu Bo backed away and saw that the sword was gone. "Who is it?!" he roared when his hard-sought item was gone before he could get his hands on it.

His minions immediately spotted a white-haired youth jump down from the walls to take the Nine Yang Sword. They roared and charged toward him. But with a swing of Tianming's chain, they were whipped

at their mouths faster than they could see it. They all cried out from the pain and collapsed to the ground, bloodied and slightly disfigured.

"You're just a sky saint, but you dare challenge me? Don't you know who I am?!" Fu Bo roared as he marched towards Tianming. All three saint stages exuded a kind of aura that was plain to see at first glance. For an empyrean saint like Fu Bo, he could even tell what level Tianming was at.

According to the sect rules, fights were permitted. While the Grand-Orient Sect and Decimo Dao Palace forbade their disciples from fighting, the Archaion Sect didn't have such a restriction.

It made for a fiercely competitive environment.

"This sword is indeed a rather good one," Tianming said, then gave the sword a thrust the moment Fu Bo approached. The Myriad-Demise Sword came exploding out from the Nine Yang Sword, instantly striking Fu Bo and sending him rolling across the ground as he cried out from the pain. His chest had been pierced into a bloody mess, and some of his bones were visible.

Only Li Wudi had been able to defend against that move, and only in his Bloodfiend form. Normal people didn't really stand a chance. Back during the fight against the autarch, Tianming's Imperial Will grew infinitely close to the sixth level after he shattered the Cyclic Mirror. It had been half a month since then, and he'd properly broken through and become a sixth-level sky saint. Now, even without Feiling, he was easily able to fight off first-level empyrean saints.

"Get out of my sight," he said.

"What's your name?" Fu Bo said, staring at him fearfully. He knew that had Tianming not held back, his chest would've been pierced completely through and he would've died.

"I'm Lin Feng, loud and proud," Tianming said.

"Alright! I'll remember this. You'd better watch out! Let's go!" Fu Bo left with his minions, giving him angry stares along the way. After he left the compound, he spat, "Check everything about Lin Feng's background! If nobody's backing him, kill him!"

"Senior Brother Fu Bo, there's too many people with this name—the sect alone has three hundred. How are we to check?"

"Fool! There's only one Lin Feng living next to Lin Xiaoxiao!"

"Understood!"

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Back at the courtyard, Tianming stood with a phoenix on his shoulder. He stroked the sword with his palm and looked at the black-clad girl with his heterochromic eyes.

The girl took a couple steps back and bumped against the wall as she stared at him, wide-eyed with shock. Her lips were open, but no words came out. Her slender fingers clenched the wall in her nervousness, making a few marks in the process.

Tianming noticed that the color of her eyes had changed, but that wasn't the only thing that was different. The air about her was completely different from before. The average girl from back then had grown into a true beauty. She was still petite, but the aura she exuded was hard to grasp, like that of an abyss. That was the exact feeling he got when he looked at her crimson eyes. They seemed lonely and desolate, yet still retained signs of a struggle.

"When I got to know you, you were only fifteen. It appears that you've grown," Tianming said, locking his gaze with hers.

Lin Xiaoxiao shook as she backed against the wall and slid to the side to avoid him. "Why... why are you here?" she asked in a hoarse voice of disbelief.

"That should be my question. Why are you here, Lin Xiaoxiao?" As he said that, he thrust the sword toward her. It embedded itself in the wall, but left a fine cut on her fair-skinned neck.

Chapter 582: Your Eyes

"Li Tianming, I get it now. The only reason you were able to turn the whole battle around back at Ignispolis was because you got some kind of crazy boost that was enough to last you three years. So that's how you made it here," Lin Xiaoxiao said.

"That's a fine guess, but so what? How did you come here then?" Tianming stretched his hand out and gripped her throat as he glared at her with his piercing-bright gold eye and void dark eye. He had no choice but to do it as he knew that her presence here would be dangerous for him.

The fact that she knew that Tianming had come from the Theocracy was no big deal, since he was allegedly brought here by 'Her Eminence'. Even if he took out his Grand-Orient Sword, he wouldn't have to worry that others would rob him of it. However, Lin Xiaoxiao knew who Feiling was. Even though Feiling would be training in Soulburn hall the whole time and there wasn't much of a chance for her to meet Lin Xiaoxiao, the latter still knew that she was Tianming's lover, and that could cause problems. She pressed herself hard against the wall, shivering from the pressure but not saying a word.

"So, what in the world allowed you to become a sky saint in two to three years? Show me," he said.

Lin Xiaoxiao was breathing hard, but even though she was bleeding and being choked by Tianming, she didn't speak.

Eventually, he pushed so hard that the wall burst through. The two ended up falling into a dark training room.

"Now, speak."

She still refused. Then, Tianming raised her up by the neck. She flailed her arms in the air as she glared at Tianming with her crimson eyes, like a person drowning in water and despair. For some reason, this reminded Tianming of the sight of Mu Qingqing's death, causing his heart to wince in pain. He then loosened his grip.

She fell to the ground and stood back up, but didn't run away.

"Look there," Ying Huo said as it pointed to the side.

Tianming had noticed something in the training room long ago. He figured it was Lin Xiaoxiao's lifebound beasts. He recalled that one was an eagle and the other was a golden ape; both were lightning-type beasts.

However, he didn't see either of them. Instead, there was a gigantic black beast covered in scales in the corner of the room. Its crimson eyes and fierce features made it seem like a demon from the abyss.

Upon closer inspection, it looked like a pseudo dragon. It had a dragon's head that was covered in bony spikes and its teeth were sharp as swords. Its long neck was just as spiky and its body was far burlier than a dragon's, especially its hind legs. The talons on the forelegs were just as sharp as dragon claws. But the place that stood out the most was its black, bat-like wings and long, bondy tail.

The beast and Tianming glared at each other. He felt more danger coming from it than Lin Xiaoxiao. "What is this?" he asked.

"My lifebound beast," she said, her head lowered.

"Are you joking? You think I haven't seen yours before?"

"You did. They're dead now," she said with a pained look. She looked lonelier than anyone he'd seen.

"What about this one?"

"It formed a blood pact with me like your lifebound beasts," she said.

"You were able to find a hundred-star beast with a blood pact?" Tianming smirked. He knew that blood pacts were only desperate solutions weak beastmasters used to make up for their own lifebound beasts. They were usually useless.

"If you can, why can't I?"

Tianming ignored her and approached the beast, who lowered its head slightly as it coldly observed him. It seemed even more fearsome up close.

"Damn, you seem like a fierce one," Tianming said, looking at its sharp teeth. It was at the Sky Saint stage, but he felt another layer of depth from it like he did Lin Xiaoxiao. In fact, the feeling was even stronger. The beast lowered its head and growled under his intense gaze, choosing to submit itself rather than glaring back.

"It doesn't seem very intelligent."

"That's right."

"You still haven't answered my question," he said, coming back to her.

She still remained silent.

"Do you think I won't kill you?" He had already done so many times in the past, and doing so now only made more sense to mitigate future risk. The only thing that was stopping him was that she was a genuinely good person that didn't fit in with the ilk of Lightning Manor in the first place. In fact, she might not even resist.

"I won't tell you what I experienced. If you think you can get whatever I have by killing me, you're free to do so," she said, unaware that the reason he was wary about her was because she knew Feiling.

Tianming took out the Nine Yang Sword, but he still hesitated. She didn't know the full extent of his circumstances here, after all, so was there a need to go so far? He placed the sword against the neck for fifteen whole minutes until she began to cry.

"After leaving Ignispolis, the person I didn't want to meet again no matter what was you... Why did you show up?"

"You're still saying that? Then why are you so stubborn?"

"Did you think I have a choice? I've never had a choice from the very start." She looked like she had accepted her fate.

"Then all you can blame is fate."

"That's right. I've accepted mine long ago. Do whatever you want to me, just don't violate me. At least, I'll retain some dignity. I'll die whenever you want me to, since everything is under your control, isn't it?"

"What happened to you to make you like this in the past three years?"

"It's got nothing to do with you," she said as she struggled to stand. Now that she had said what she wanted, she no longer feared death. She pretended like nothing had happened and resumed her usual routine. "If you're not going to kill me, I'll start cultivating."

"I'll let you live for two days while I observe you."

She hurried past him to the beast and caused it to vanish. That meant that it was really her lifebound beast.

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"A blood pact, huh?" He really had no idea what to make of this. "Does her sudden growth have something to do with that beast?"

Tianming was seated on the stone chair outside. He watched as she began to cultivate.

"Did you grow soft?" Ying Huo said as it flew to him and perched on the stone table.

"No. Given the circumstances, she wouldn't run into Ling'er at all. I will still be able to get rid of her if she shows other signs.

"That's called growing soft."

"The point is, everyone I've killed so far has been for a good reason. But now, I don't know if it's the right thing to do. Killing her will affect my will and dao. I want to continue observing what else about her changed. Things can still develop in a way so that I wouldn't have to kill her. Not to mention, she's always been a good lass, right?"

"We'll see. There's no differentiating between good and bad people when killing to protect yourself. One would rather let the world down than be let down by the world. This is just not you."

"I just find her lifebound beast really weird."

"That's right. I feel like it resembles us."

"Is it a Primordial Chaos Beast?"

"That's impossible, but it might be something else."

"I see."

"What could it be then?"

"How would I know?"

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In the training room, Lin Xiaoxiao closed her eyes and trained.

"If you have a chance, kill him and investigate his secrets," said a hoarse voice in her lifebound space.

"Why?" she asked.

"He killed your whole family! He ruined everything you had! Don't you want to repay this debt of blood?"

"He only killed my brother as a result of a grudge between the two of them. It's not my burden to bear. I am already too worn out from all that. The reason I left Ignispolis is so that I can cast away my past. Please don't bring it up, alright? There are too many grudges that I don't wish to perpetuate."

"Your father has done you well by raising you, has he not?"

"My father didn't die by his hands. If everyone in Ignispolis says those of Lightning Manor deserved what they got, who am I to speak out? Should I betray my own values and become an evil-doer? It's best you don't continue to peek into my memories. My life no longer has meaning. Just let me live out the rest of my days like a walking corpse while I settle some tasks. I will die when the time comes, so why are you trying to poke your nose into my business?"

"You can't die! We are forever bound. With me around, you will rise again. Ascending to godhood is but a first step!"

"Oh. You got the wrong person then. I don't have the kind of ambition you need."

"Lin Xiaoxiao, are you going to remain deluded even now? I've lived for millions of years. By cultivating my will, you will be able to overcome any deathly odds even if you only reach a billionth of what I was! If you weren't too weak right now, you wouldn't even need to use the Old Deepstar Path's Astral Will to cultivate. Right now, we are still ants in the same boat. But one day, you will become a fiend worshipped by all! You will thank me!" the voice said agitatedly.

"So I should thank you for killing two of the most precious friends to me and making me your puppet? You're the one I want to kill the most! Each time I cultivate with you is a nightmare! I am betraying my two lifebound beasts by doing so!" she agonized.

"You want to kill me for helping you? Why would you care about those two trashy beasts? Not to mention, our relationship is a symbiotic one. You're not my puppet."

"If you aren't then shut up. Lifebound beasts shouldn't talk that much. If you were that powerful, you wouldn't need symbiotic cultivation with me." By now, her tears were flowing. After leaving Ignispolis, she had survived with the help of her two partners, only to suffer the pain Tianming had after losing Midas. She finally understood the hate Tianing felt.

"You!"

"Wu You, listen well. I will do my best to enter the Heaven Branch and get your eye for you. However, you better not bother me about other things."

"Are you rebelling?"

"You're overthinking this. I don't have any particular desire. I'm not afraid of becoming a cripple. I don't care about an Archaionfiend either. If you can't kill me, don't force me."

"You really deserve to die, you dumb lass!"

"Yeah? So what?"

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Four hours later, she stood up and looked around only to see Tianming still outside. "Why haven't you left yet?"

"I've decided to live here." He had to watch her well just in case. They were neighbors now, so there wasn't anywhere else for her to go anyway.

"I'm going to cultivate at the Old Deepstar Path. You coming with?"

"Of course."

Chapter 583 - Years of Starlight

The Man Branch of the Archaion Sect was really huge. At their speed, it took them an hour to fly to the entrance of the Old Deepstar Path, which was situated near the part of the sect that was closer to the ocean. They felt the ocean breeze and heard the sound of the waves beneath them on the way there.

"Are you still planning to kill and steal?" Lin Xiaoxiao asked.

"I'm still considering it," Tianming said.

"To be honest, you won't be able to take what I have. Once I die it'll be gone."

"Then, let me ask you this: do you intend to get revenge?" he asked, looking her in the eyes.

"What revenge?"

"Revenge for Lightning Manor."

"I'm just an untethered soul now, let alone someone belonging to Lightning Manor."

"That's what someone trying to hide their desire for revenge would say."

"Kill me if it bugs you so much. It'd be a relief for me, to be frank."

"A release?" He didn't trust her at all. The whole point of watching her was to assess the threat she posed to him. Not to mention, he had a rough idea about the Old Deepstar Path after reading about it in the Trinity Almanac. The briefing the book provided, however, wasn't enough, so he would have to experience it for himself.

"Xiaoxiao, have you only just arrived here recently?"

"Around two months before you."

"How often do you head to the Old Deepstar Path?"

"Every day."

"Give your junior disciple here a brief introduction, if you would."

She looked at her 'junior disciple' blankly. "That's a little different from your previous attitude."

"I don't really care for stuffy formalities. It's better if we talk more casually. However, if I find out you're up to something sinister, I'll kill you with a smile."

"I see." She turned back to the front and said, "The Old Deepstar Path is the main reason for the strength of the disciples of Archaion Sect. It's actually a world in and of itself that's laid out like a path. It stretches endlessly ahead."

"Go on."

"The main function of the path is converting the heavenly will of dead samsarans and lifebound beasts into Astral Will. Like the stars, they hang in the skies and fall to the path like meteors. Future disciples can use them to nourish their own heavenly will and speed up their growth. The lucky ones that find Astral Will that matches their own will be able to personally experience their seniors' cultivation insights and results. The path has existed for more than two hundred thousand years, and countless dead seniors at the Samsara stage have had their cultivation experiences and heavenly wills converted into Astral Will at the path. Passing on their legacies is key to ensuring the sect's strength. That's the main difference between this place and where we came from."

"Have you seen Astral Will before? What's it like?"

"It's truly wondrous. When you pick up the fallen stars, you'll be able to see the heavenly will of one of the seniors' form. As for their cultivation experience up to the Samsara stage, if you manage to see one that matches your heavenly will, you'll greatly benefit from it."

Hearing that, Tianming couldn't wait to see it for himself. "What does the 'death' part of the Samsara stage mean?"

"Do you not understand the stage?"

Tianming shook his head.

"The Samsara stage is the path to godhood. There's twelve levels. By surpassing life and death twelve times and undergoing twelve tribulations each, you'll be able to become a god."

"I see."

"In each of the levels, there's a life tribulation and death tribulation. During the former, your body will be filled with vigor and youth. But when the death tribulation comes, your body will age ten times faster and convert the life force into energy. Even a young person who reaches the Samsara stage will age quickly. If you can't break through to the second level quickly enough, you'll die of old age."

While she wasn't afraid of death, she was rather disturbed by the prospect of advancing to that stage. It was a path of no return.

"In other words, it's a cycle between the life and death tribulations then, and if you get stuck in the middle of a death tribulation, breaking through to the next life tribulation will be impossible and you'll die of old age...." He was quite shocked at the revelation. Thanks to the Aeonian Grandbane, he was aging ten times faster than normal. Would the extra ten times from the death tribulation be additive or multiplicative with what he already had? The thought of either sent chills down his spine.

"That's right. Each transition also comes with a huge power boost. Practically speaking, the Samsara stage has twenty-four levels. Once the last hurdle is surpassed, one will ascend to godhood."

"Then can't I just stay at the first life tribulation without breaking through to the first death tribulation?" Even if transitioning to the death tribulation greatly increased one's strength, it was still too huge a price to pay.

"You could always remain an empyrean saint. You'll get to live five hundred years that way. Who wouldn't want to grow stronger and become a god? Not to mention, if you really overcome a death tribulation, your lost life force will return during the next life tribulation, while you grow even stronger. That's why you'll find that cultivators undergoing a life tribulation will be really laid back, while those in their death tribulations will have time for nothing."

"So by switching between life and death tribulations, one gains and loses life force... it sounds really intense."

"That's right. That's why there's only been ten gods in the history of the Flameyellow Continent. It is a journey with impossible odds. To transcend everything, one has to surpass life and death twelve times."

The Trinity Almanac didn't have any information on the Samsara stage, so he had her to thank for enlightening him on it.

"Xiaoxiao, let's say that someone advances to the Samsara stage at the age of twenty. Before transitioning into the first death stage, he would have five hundred years' worth of life force. But after the transition is made, he'll only have fifty remaining, right?"

"Nope. If you take into account the prime cultivation period, there's only around thirty years remaining. Those who aren't able to transition to the second life tribulation at that point will just be waiting for their death. But if they manage to succeed in the end, they'll get back their five hundred years."

"That's hardcore."

"Indeed."

"Then someone with only a hundred years left won't have any hope of overcoming the death tribulation then."

"Many people in that situation choose to stop cultivating at their life tribulation."

"I see. By the way, how do the folks at the Heaven Branch cultivate? Did they start cultivating in the w.o.m.b? How else are they able to reach the Samsara stage at the age of twenty?" This was something he couldn't fathom no matter whatever since meeting Xuanyuan Yuheng.

"That's not the case. People at the Samsara stage will experience a physiological change. Parents at that stage usually find it hard to give birth. The chances are really low, but if they do manage to give birth, the child's talent will be exceedingly high. They'll be born with the constitution of an earth saint. As long as they start condensing heavenly will at the age of three and cultivate daily to race through the nine levels of Heavenly Will, they'll be able to embark on the path of a saint."

"Damn... I didn't think that was possible. So we started at the Beast Vein stage while they started from Heavenly Will?"

"More or less."

"And they only need to cultivate their heavenly will, and not their spirit source?"

"They don't have spirit source. They're born with a saint palace. After finishing Heavenly Will, they'll start filling their saint springs."

"That's insane."

"That's the power of pedigree. Otherwise they wouldn't bother going through the death tribulations so readily. It's all about pride with those elites."

Basically, in the Nine Divine Realms, the most important thing wasn't talent or resources, but rather inheritance. They would inherit heavenly wills at the Old Deepstar Path, and strong bodies from their bloodline. Being born with a saint body was a ludicrous prospect to him.

"Then the folks at the Heaven Branch are all geniuses who embarked on the Samsara Stage in their twenties or thirties?"

"More or less. However, these are the very best on the continent, and their numbers are really low. There's only around five hundred Heaven Branch disciples."

"Five hundred, huh..." Tianming felt a little better about that. Finally, he saw a possibility of him becoming the strongest disciple of the sect. At least that would make it easier for Feiling to take him in as a personal disciple. "How many Earth Branch disciples are there?"

"Most of them are sixth-level empyrean saints and above, so around fifty thousand."

"And Human Branch disciples?"

"Five hundred thousand." All of whom would be geniuses in places far from Archaion, no doubt. Given Tianming's current level, he could still fit in among the youths, apart from those in the Earth and Heaven Branches.

"I should take it one step at a time then." He was in a good spot now. Given his talent and the abundant resources of the sect, he would no doubt quickly grow.

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Soon, they were nearing their destination. All of a sudden, Lin Xiaoxiao stopped in her tracks.

"Getting cold feet?"

"I don't like conflict, so I let them walk over me. Are you sure you want to tag along?"

"It's fine. I'm new here, so I need a guide. You can do that much, right?"

"You messed with the Dragonmight Faction today. The fiercely competitive disciples of the sect won't hesitate to cripple you."

"Do you think I'm afraid?"

"Suit yourself then."

"Come to think of it, who are they?"

"Factions in the Human Branch are basically gangs of disciples. The sect encourages this practice. The Human Branch is basically controlled by the factions, and the Dragonmight Faction's core members belong to the Archaic House of Xuanyuan that has produced two gods before."

"So they call the shots then."

"With House Xuanyuan backing them, they can do as they please. Their faction lord is basically a king in the Human Branch."

"Does the sect master not care?"

"The Human Branch king is only a nominal title. The branch is considered part of the outer sect, anyway, where disciples are allowed to kill each other. The true cores of the sect are the Earth and Heaven Branches."

"Interesting. So it's a huge free for all then. The strong will consume the weak."

"That's correct."

"What other powerful factions are there?"

"The Clearriver Society, Swordking Faction, and so on. The latter is controlled by the Draconis House of Jian."

Tianming recalled that the sect master of the Human Branch, Jian Wuyi, belonged to the Draconis House of Jian. "With all the faction building, you'd think they're going to war with one another."

"That's not too far off. The faction battles are starting soon, so they're recruiting like there's no tomorrow to get more cannon fodder."

"Just when I think the shock factor has worn off, the sect finds new ways to surprise." The Grand-Orient Sect and Decimo Dao Palace didn't allow fights to the death, but this sect pulled out all the stops and even had faction battles. There would be no shortage of strong people rising from the ashes of battle.

"Those that rank first in the faction battles are heavily rewarded by the sect, mainly in the form of being allowed to train in the Old Deepstar Path longer. They'll also get more resources. The higher ranking the faction, the better rewards their members get, and the faction lord gets even more." She sounded rather pumped about the whole thing.

"Oh? What does the first-ranked faction lord get then?"

"The right to enter the Heaven Cauldron."

"Heaven Cauldron?" Tianming didn't recall reading about it in the Trinity Almanac.

"That's right."

"What's inside?"

"Spirit hazards with tribulation patterns, an ocean of them. There's all kinds you can dream of. It's the holy ground of body cultivation."

Tianming's eyes shone. Perhaps one of those spirit hazards could help the fourth egg hatch. Not to mention, body cultivation sounded a lot like training at the sword ki pool. He didn't ask too much about it, but he felt he should learn more about the faction battles.

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At the entrance of the Old Deepstar Path was a blue hall. The entrance was a shining vortex of brilliant stars.

"Human Branch Disciple Li Tianming, one hour per day. If you don't leave within that time, your rights to enter the Old Deepstar Path will be revoked for a month."

Tianming handed his disciple pass to the senior, who didn't bother to even look at him when he made a record. Naturally, he didn't use the pass Jian Wuyi gave him.

"How can I increase the time I'm allowed to train within?" he asked.

"You can either become a deacon in a faction, hunt wildbeasts, or do missions for the sect," Lin Xiaoxiao said.

"Deacons? Sounds like corruption to me."

"You need to actually be capable to be one, you know."

"Sounds awfully superficial of them." After giving it some thought, he decided he would deal with it himself. He followed Lin Xiaoxiao into the galactic vortex.

Soon, the starry sky was shifting and sparkling around him. Tianming found himself standing on a rainbow-colored path that led on endlessly. Above him were countless stars. It was said that each of them was the condensation of the heavenly will of someone who died as a samsaran. These were their Astral Will.

The moment he stepped onto the path, however, the stars shook. Their sovereign had arrived!

Chapter 584 - One Level in Five Days

“What?” Tianming raised his head to look at the starry sky. He sensed a link with the Imperial Will in his sea of consciousness. It felt like he was being worshipped.

“Xiaoxiao, is this how the ancestors’ Astral Will greets newcomers? Isn’t that a little too enthusiastic?” Tianming asked.

“No.” Lin Xiaoxiao lowered her head. There was a trace of helplessness in her eyes.

“What’s the situation now?” Tianming looked at the stars trembling in the sky. It was as if the Archaion Sect’s ancestors were still alive, and they were all looking at him.

“I don’t know. I’ve never seen something like this before,” said Lin Xiaoxiao.

Tianming stopped asking more questions.

“The Astral Will descended by itself?”

“Yeah.” Tianming looked at the stars descending from the sky and gathering in his direction. He could sense that it was the Grand-Orient Sword in his sea of consciousness drawing the stars over.

Looking at the hundreds of Astral Wills coming over to Tianming, Lin Xiaoxiao was dumbfounded. She said, “It was already good if anyone could draw one Astral Will over within half an hour.”

Lin Xiaoxiao wasn’t the only witness to the commotion created by Tianming, but also everyone from the Human Branch following behind.

“Who is he?”

“No idea.”

“What the hell is this? Astral encirclement? Is this an ancestor’s gift?”

“Hundreds of stars gathering together. It’s never happened in the past, but can he even comprehend all of them?”

It was useless for ordinary people to have too many Astral Wills, and it was already good if they could comprehend and observe an ancestor’s heavenly will. Even so, many people surrounded Tianming and inquired about his identity.

Many people were surprised that no one here knew about Tianming, but there were some who recognized Lin Xiaoxiao. When they saw that she seemed to be acquainted with Tianming, they came up and asked her.

“His name is Li Tianming, and he just came to the Archaion Sect,” said Lin Xiaoxiao.

“Just came? A newcomer?”

“That’s right.”

“He should maintain a low profile since he’s a newcomer,” someone commented.

“He didn’t do this on purpose,” said Lin Xiaoxiao.

Tianming was already immersed in comprehending the heavenly will. Time was precious, and ordinary disciples only had half an hour to comprehend before they had to move on. On this Old Deepstar Path, the Astral Will would be stronger the further you go, which reflected the ancestor’s cultivation when he or she was alive.

There were three entrances to the Old Deepstar Path, two of which were from the Heaven and Earth Branches. Then again, the Astral Wills the Heaven and Earth Branches’ disciples had were naturally better. It was rumored that there was even a special place known as the Deepstar Pool.

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Tianming eventually picked one out of the stars around him. These stars had chosen him, and no one else could take them away. He walked into a corner so that he wouldn’t block anyone’s path and began to comprehend.

The star in his hand dazzled, which swiftly drew Tianming’s attention and spirit into it. When the star came into contact with his forehead, Tianming saw scenes starting to flicker before his eyes, along with voices sounding by his ears. He felt as though he was watching another person’s story.

“Jian Fengchi, the Galesword Will. I used the power of wind to create the sharpest blade in the world.” The Astral Will displayed Jian Fengchi’s heavenly will’s entire evolution process, from his birth to the Samsara stage. Tianming was exposed to the entire process of how this person comprehended his heavenly will.

“Brilliant! This is simply brilliant!” Tianming could feel his blood boiling. “The Old Deepstar Path and the inheritances left within are why the Archaion Sect could produce geniuses over the generations.”

It didn’t matter if this ancestor’s cultivation method was suitable to Tianming, because he had gained something just by observing the process of someone comprehending the Heavenly will. “Xiaoxiao said that if I manage to encounter an ancestor who cultivated the same heavenly will as me, it’d be equivalent to having a mentor guiding me in my path.”

Tianming cultivated Imperial Will, and had never heard of anyone cultivating it before. He guessed that he wouldn’t find someone who cultivated the same heavenly will as him in the Old Deepstar Path, but when his Imperial Will came in contact with the Astral Wills, he suddenly discovered something.

The Astral Wills represented the heavenly wills of many people. The stars worshipped me the moment I appeared, so does that mean that these Astral Wills are part of those people, and the heavenly will of these people forms part of the Imperial Will? So if I use the ocean as an analogy, the Imperial Will is the ocean, while the Astral Wills here are streams flowing into the ocean. That means that all of the Astral Wills here are useful to me, and I don’t have to pick one. I just have to observe them.

Upon having that insight, Tianming began patiently observing Jian Fengchi's cultivating process. He looked at how Jian Fengchi persevered in his cultivation until he became a powerhouse in the Samsara stage. His heavenly will's growth didn't contain any of his life experiences, but Tianming could sense the changes in Jian Fengchi's emotions through the Astral Will.

Dao is boundless, and everyone has their own comprehension of it. Tianming was deeply moved after observing Jian Fengchi's heavenly will. So if I want to stand above everyone else, I have to learn from others and accept them with humility.

His experience back in the Theocracy of the Ancients made Tianming think more about the relationship between people. Respecting lives and valuing others; that was how a genuine powerhouse rose from the grassroots. If the help of an Astral Will was limited, then what about thousands of them?

I wonder how quickly others can observe the Astral Wills... Tianming noticed something odd. It felt like an eternity had passed while he observed Jian Fengchi's life, but only roughly sixty breaths had passed in reality. He seemed to achieve a fusion effect with the Astral Wills, and he wasn't just observing like others.

But when he let go of Jian Fengchi's Astral Will, he noticed that the star slowly turned into a bubble and disappeared. It was like Tianming had inherited everything.

It was a pity, but the ancestors left behind too many Astral Wills, and there were at least a hundred thousand of them. Tianming noticed that when others were finished observing, their Astral Wills would return into the sky.

Does that mean I can achieve a fusion effect and absorb them? Is this the reason why I can observe the Astral Will so quickly? He could sense his heavenly will's growth. Although it wasn't as quick as having the genuine heavenly will of everyone flowing to him, it was still better than using the Grand-Orient Sword and Prime Tower. Furthermore, there wouldn't be any conflict; they would fill each other's gap.

"Let's continue!" Tianming couldn't be bothered so much; he still had hundreds of Astral Wills around him waiting to be absorbed. Without him knowing, the Astral Wills around him disappeared, and half an hour had also passed. Tianming had no choice but to leave the Old Deepstar Path.

My time was too short, and I still have room for improvements. I have to find a way to increase my time training in the Old Deepstar Path. Tianming pondered, and he first thought of Feiling.

Let's not ask Ling'er for now and wait a little longer. I'll have to participate in faction battles anyway to compete for an opportunity to enter the Heaven Cauldron. Let's head to the faction's management for now. Tianming heard that only the faction lord on the first rank could enter the Heaven Cauldron.

Not only was the Archaionfiend Eye suppressed in the Heaven Cauldron, tribulation patterns and spiritual hazards could also be found there. So Tianming had to fight for it, if only for those two reasons alone.

He believed he could do it, so Tianming wasn't going to let Feiling use her 'Eminent' identity. He wanted to wait and see how things go. It would be somewhat inappropriate for her to handle something so trifling, so Tianming wanted to leave it for more important matters.

The effects are great even if I only have half an hour here. I have to digest them after going back anyway. Tianming was practically in a secluded state when he came back from the Old Deepstar Path.

He repeated this routine for five days, and in these five days, he absorbed over five hundred Astral Wills, allowing his heavenly will to grow to the seventh level of the Sky Saint stage.

Then Tianming just focused on increasing his saint ki to make a genuine breakthrough into the seventh level of the Sky Saint stage. To remain low profile, Tianming would head to remote places so that it wouldn't be too eye-catching to have hundreds of stars around him, and the Human Branch's disciples had already stopped talking about him.

"It'll be great if I can stay in the Old Deepstar Path for two hours a day. Any longer would be useless, since I still need time to digest my gains." The spiritual energy in the Archaion Sect was terrifying, even without using the fountain. And on the sixth day, Tianming finally stepped into the seventh level of the Sky Saint stage.

"I'll have a lifespan of five hundred years if I can reach the Empyrean Saint stage, and it will be equivalent to having two or three more decades to cultivate. I don't have to worry about the Aeonian Grandbane for the time being then." His first goal was to reach the Empyrean Saint stage. Feiling's status here was only illusory, and cultivation was still fundamental.

"I still lack several battle arts, like a Samsara stage's battle art." Tianming had the Ninesilver Astral Art and Invincible Sword Body for empyrean saint battle arts, and it wouldn't be difficult for him to master a stronger one with his Aeonian Grandbane talent. So he wanted to give it a try with Samsara battle arts.

"I'll have to complete missions and accumulate contribution to the sect to exchange for battle arts here. It's a little waste of time, but it'd be great if I could buy them with money. No matter what, I'm still the husband of their 'Eminent.' It's fine that I have to stay in the Human Branch for safety, but I can't possibly waste my time on missions, right? Let's see if Ling'er has any money when I visit her in a few days and I'll see if I can get some."

Tianming was a realistic person, and he could swiftly increase his cultivation in the Old Deepstar Path. He had decided to spend most of his time there, and missions were just a hassle for him right now. As he was absorbed in deep thoughts, the sect master of the Human Branch, Jian Wuyi, suddenly appeared in his courtyard.

Chapter 585 - The Eminent's Husband

"Tianming, I heard that the Astral Will favors you in the Old Deepstar Path with hundreds of stars gathering around you every single time?" Jian Wudi asked.

"That's right. It's all thanks to the ancestors' grace," replied Tianming.

"Can you even comprehend all of them? You know that it's not good for you to bite more than what you can chew, right?" Jian Wuyi asked.

"I understand. I'll pay attention to it next time, Sect Master," replied Tianming.

"How are you adapting here?" Jian Wuyi asked.

"Great. Everyone here is friendly."

“Friendly?” Jian Wuyi smiled. “Alright then. Work hard on your cultivation.”

Tianming was wary of Jian Wuyi, because he knew the sect master was only polite to him because of the ‘Eminent.’ That was why Tianming had to be cautious before him, and didn’t dare to make any more requests.

“Understood,” replied Tianming.

“By the way, Her Eminence told me to give something to you.” Jian Wuyi took out a spatial ring.

Tianming’s eyes lit up when he saw that and reached out for it. But suddenly, Jian Wuyi’s face turned cold. “Mhm?”

“Oh, thank you, Her Eminence. Thank you, sect master!” Tianming immediately responded. He was a little rash earlier, and had forgotten his manners.

“You’re pretty lucky.” Jian Wuyi handed the spatial ring over with both his hands, showing his respect for Jiang Feiling. After he handed the spatial ring over, he turned and left.

“What did that lass give me after separating for six days?” Tianming looked into the spatial ring anxiously and was nearly blinded. “Holy shit!”

The spatial ring was filled with saint crystals. The inner space of the spatial ring was enormous, and the saint crystals were piled into a mountain. The saint crystals were grain-sized, so how much wealth did this mountain of saint crystals represent? As Tianming was looking through the saint crystals, he noticed a small note left for him by Feiling.

“One day of separation felt like three autumns for me. There’s still twenty-four days before we can meet again, and the days have been tough without you. I miss you so much. I’m afraid you’ll be thirsty, hungry, or bullied. I’ve been living my life cautiously and don’t dare to speak too much, because I’m afraid that I might arouse the suspicion of ‘granny Fang.’ After some consideration, I decided to give you a billion saint crystals, and you’ll get them every month. Consider the saint crystals your salary as my husband, and I took them from my money. Tianming, you’re not allowed to pick up other girls with the money given by me!”

Tianming could tell how much she misses him from her words, along with her threat.

“How sweet.” Tianming tasted happiness for the first time.

“A billion saint crystals a month? Where can you find a rich woman like Ling’er? I don’t want to work anymore. Quick, find me a woman like her!” Ying Huo flapped its wings excitedly.

“Chicken Bro, I also don’t want to work hard anymore. Bring me along...” Meow Meow yawned.

“You? Work hard?” Ying Huo said in contempt.

“Don’t say that. It doesn’t matter how hard I work since I’ve put in the effort either way...”

Tianming gave up counting the saint crystals. There were a billion of them, and how long would it take for him to count every single one? In the end, he decided to just count them by mountains.

He knew why Feiling had so many saint crystals. She had just reached the Saint stage, and saint crystals were the gentlest ore that could be used for cultivating at her level. So it was natural for Fang Qingli and the others to pile her up with resources, wanting her to become a God once again.

“This girl isn’t afraid of danger, to even shove a note in here. But I’ll ignore it this time, seeing that you’re afraid that I’ll have no money to spend.” They had parted in a hurry previously, and Tianming could only see her once a month. He could receive his ‘salary’ at that time, and he wouldn’t need Jian Wuyi anymore.

A billion saint crystals was an enormous amount, and if anyone had so many saint crystals, they would’ve already swapped them into higher currency by now. For example, it would be equivalent to a billion copper coins in Vermillion Bird, which was a terrifying amount to take out. But the Human Branch’s transactions were all done with saint crystals, so these were suitable for him.

“Feels great to have an Eminent for my wife.” While Tianming was feeling satisfied, he was also worried for Feiling. “It’s been tough on her in this period. She has to fight them with wits and courage, and also restrain her thoughts. She’s just a little girl....”

Tianming couldn’t blame her for taking the risk and could only work hard to lessen her load. Calling out his lifebound beasts, he said, “My wife just gave me my salary. Time for us to spend them!”

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Lin Xiaoxiao opened her eyes when someone knocked on her door, but she was at a crucial moment in her cultivation and didn’t really want to bother about the knocking. But when the knock came again, she could only open the door. When she opened a door, an enormous brown dragon head appeared in her view in excitement, “Big Sister Xiaoxiao, I want to play with your lifebound beast!”

But Lan Huang’s voice was too loud and blew Lin Xiaoxiao’s hair in the wind. She knew this was Tianming’s third lifebound beast.

“No. We’re cultivating.” Lin Xiaoxiao closed the door, but another knock came shortly after, and Lin Xiaoxiao could only helplessly open the door again.

This time, it was a blue dragon head that spoke out in a soft voice, “Big Sister Xiaoxiao, sorry for what happened earlier. My voice is a little too loud, and our boss has already reprimanded me.”

Lin Xiaoxiao felt a chill down her spine when she heard the rough, yet soft voice. She asked, “What do you want?”

“I want to play with your lifebound beast. Boss told me that it’s a dragon, and we can ‘heisho heisho!’” Lan Huang said with excitement.

“You!” Lin Xiaoxiao was dumbfounded.

“But what’s ‘heisho heisho?’” Lan Huang tilted its heads.

When Lin Xiaoxiao saw how naive Lan Huang was, she smiled. She tossed the colossal black beast in her lifebound space out and replied, “I don’t know. Ask Tianming yourself.”

“Lin Xiaoxiao!” The colossal black beast was very unhappy and wanted to return to her lifebound space.

“Big Sister, come out and play!” Lan Huang reached out to grab the black colossal beast’s tail and dragged it out.

“Let go of me!” the colossal black beast replied, its eyes turning bloodshot.

“Mhm? So you can actually speak! And there Tianming was saying that your intelligence is lower than mine!” Lan Huang laughed, which caused the entire courtyard to tremble.

“Retard!” The colossal black beast took its tail from Lan Huang’s grip and looked at Lan Huang fiercely. But before the colossal black beast could speak, Lan Huang suddenly charged over and sent it flying.

“Big Sister, I like playing charge the most. You’re big, and we can have a battle!” Lan Huang said with excitement. After all, it often spent its time charging the Soulfieud back in the Astral General Manor.

The black beast was stunned and smashed to the ground before letting out a roar in anger. Then, Lan Huang ran into it again and sent it flying once more.

“Haha! Big Sister, do you like that? I can send you even higher!”

Ying Huo folded its wings up on the wall and watched this scene with a cheap smile. “Who the hell do you think you are? I’ll reveal your true form by letting my Turtle Bro out.” It was clear that Ying Huo had instigated Lan Huang into doing this.

Aside from Ying Huo, Tianming and Lin Xiaoxiao were standing together. Tianming smiled and said, “These two cuties are really naive, and their happiness is so innocent. I’m so envious of them having fun playing.”

“Having fun?” Lin Xiaoxiao held back laughter. It felt fantastic. This extraterrestrial being was currently being humiliated by Tianming, and it still had to control its emotions. After all, it wasn’t as strong as Lan Huang.

“What’s the name of this lifebound beast?”

“Bloodsoul Bolthell Fienddragon,” Lin Xiaoxiao replied.

“You call that a dragon?” Tianming asked.

“Isn’t your turtle also considered a dragon?” Lin Xiaoxiao replied with a question.

“Are you blind?”

“You’re the one who’s blind!”

“You dare to talk back to me?”

“No.” Lin Xiaoxiao looked at Tianming and asked, “Can you get your lifebound beast to come out and play with it more often? You guys can be more intense in playing.”

“Sure. They’re all good friends, so it’s fine,” Tianming replied.

He was practically sure that this lifebound beast was the reason why Lin Xiaoxiao could travel from Vermillion Bird to Archaion Divine Realm. He had come today to probe Lin Xiaoxiao, and now he had decided to let Lan Huang play with the Bloodsoul Bolthell Fienddragon daily.

He refused to believe that he wouldn't be able to figure out Lin Xiaoxiao's secrets. Furthermore, he noticed there was something unusual regarding Lin Xiaoxiao's relationship with her lifebound beast.

Suddenly, Tianming felt a threatening gaze and raised his head to see the Bloodsoul Bolthell Fienddragon staring at him. But in the next second, it was sent flying again by Lan Huang.

"Up, up, and away!"

The Bloodsoul Bolthell Fienddragon wailed. It was on the verge of collapse at that moment.

"Big Sister, Chicken Bro wanted me to ask if you're willing to be his girlfriend?" Lan Huang asked seriously.

"Screw you! It's your girlfriend, not mine!" Ying Huo blushed.

"Oh! Then Big Sister, are you willing to be my girlfriend?"

"Just go die, idiot!"

"No? Up up away!"

After being bullied by the three demons, the Bloodsoul Bolthell Fienddragon was finally free and crawled back, feeling depressed.

"Xiaoxiao, do you know how to get to the Oldwind Street?" Tianming suddenly asked.

It was recorded on Trinity Almanac that it was the Human Branch's marketplace, and there were five hundred thousand disciples there, which made it a prosperous place.

"I know."

"Lead the way then."

"Why? Am I your maid?" Lin Xiaoxiao said speechlessly.

"Then do you want to play 'up, up, and away' with me?" In the end, Lin Xiaoxiao led the way, and Tianming didn't have to find his way blindly with someone guiding him.

"Why didn't the author of the Trinity Almanac add a map? What a waste of effort," Tianming cursed. Still, he wasn't too willing to let Lin Xiaoxiao leave his sight. Whether she was an enemy or friend, Tianming wasn't sure if she had let go of her hatred over the destruction of Lighting Manor.

Life would end upon being killed. It was fine if Lin Xiaoxiao just wanted to live on, and it would be bad if she was killed for no reason.

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Oldwind Street had an elegant name, but it was chaotic and bustling with noise. Disciples of the Human Branch managed the shops along the streets. To put it bluntly, this was a place marked for private transactions between disciples, and things were cheap. It was easy to find a treasure here.

The various factions managed the place. Tianming and Lin Xiaoxiao had decent looks, but the Archaion Sect was filled with strange people. In addition to the fact that they had no reputation, no one paid any attention to them when they walked down the streets.

The Human Branch was too big, and everyone was busy with their affairs. Tianming and Lin Xiaoxiao both arrived at a spacious shop called the Steadfast Pavilion without issues.

Chapter 586 - Steadfast Pavilion

“The name of this shop isn’t bad. Do they sell battle arts here?” Tianming asked.

“They do.”

“Who opened this shop?”

“The Archaic House of Xuanyuan. The Dragonmight Faction is currently managing it,” replied Lin Xiaoxiao. The Archaic House of Xuanyuan had their fingers all throughout the Archaion Sect, and the Human Branch was only one part of it.

“You seem to know a lot.”

“You have to if you want to survive here,” said Lin Xiaoxiao.

“Are you so indifferent even when facing death?” Tianming asked, but Lin Xiaoxiao pursed her lips and didn’t reply to him.

“Let’s go in.”

The Steadfast Pavilion was massive. A place where battle arts were being sold should be quiet, but it was actually rather noisy. As soon as Tianming came in, he saw a group of young men and women happily chatting together. They were sharing interesting things that happened in the Human Branch, such as who made a fool out of themselves.

They were all behind the counter, so they were probably the ones watching over the shop. There were also many disciples of the Human Branch here picking battle arts.

“Pick the one you want and pay for it. Simple as that,” Lin Xiaoxiao said.

“Yeah.” Tianming stepped into the room. He looked through the shelves and noticed a jade stone on every book with the battle art’s name carved on it. There was also a small formation engraved on the jade stone that seemed to be for identification.

“What is that?” Tianming asked, pointing at the jade stone.

“Jade license.”

“And what are they for?”

“Only those with a jade license are qualified to cultivate and use a battle art in the Archaion Sect,” said Lin Xiaoxiao.

“I don’t quite understand.”

"All the battle arts in the Oldwind Street come from the Archaion Sect, and disciples can get them by completing missions and exchanging contribution points for them. And you can sell any battle art you don't need, or you have an extra copy of. Battle arts can be copied and secretly taught. So, to prohibit such acts, only those with a jade license can cultivate the battle arts," Lin Xiaoxiao explained.

"I see.... So you're saying that I'm not only buying a battle art, but also the license to use it? What happens if I practice a battle art without the license for it?" Tianming asked.

"It's fine to practice it, but you'll be punished if someone sees you using it. After all, battle arts and cultivation techniques are part of the sect's inheritance. Disciples can obtain them with contributions for their own use, or for selling. But only one person can cultivate it, and that's the person who holds the jade license. It's recorded whenever a disciple obtains a battle art, so you'll be hunted down if you're found spreading it outside the sect," replied Lin Xiaoxiao.

"Wow. The rules are strict, and it's on a whole other level compared to the Grand-Orient Sect," Tianming commented. There were rules against privately copying and imparting battle arts back in the Grand-Orient Sect, but there wasn't something like these jade licenses. It was probably something that solely belongs to the divine realms.

It was fortunate that Tianming brought Lin Xiaoxiao along. Otherwise, he wouldn't know even if he suffered a loss.

"The sect has strict protections on its inheritance. After all, it's the sole reason they're so powerful," said Lin Xiaoxiao.

"I see. So you're saying that I have to bring the jade license wherever I go to prove that I have the right to use it?"

"That's right."

"So the battle arts here are from other disciples?"

"Only a portion of them. The Steadfast Pavilion buys most of them. After all, the Steadfast Pavilion is managed by the Dragonmight Faction, and they have the most stock," Lin Xiaoxiao replied.

"Alright. I'll start picking, then."

The Steadfast Pavilion was massive, and when Tianming walked around, he noticed that they were mostly all sky saint and empyrean saint battle arts.

"There aren't any samsara battle arts here?" Tianming asked.

"How would I know? Ask them yourself." Lin Xiaoxiao pointed at the group of youths who were laughing together. This shop belonged to them, but they didn't seem to be serious about it.

"They're from the Dragonmight Faction," Lin Xiaoxiao added.

Tianming didn't bother caring about who they were, and also didn't have time to complete missions. Spending money to get battle arts was the best way to save time.

"Hello, do you sell any samsara battle arts?" Tianming asked.

But the youths ignored him, still chatting among themselves. Although a few of them turned to look at Tianming oddly, they soon returned back to their chatter.

“You guys didn’t see that fellow’s expression when I got Second Brother to knock his teeth out. He dropped to his knees immediately!” A pretty girl wearing a yellow coat laughed while covering her mouth.

“Haha, that’s satisfying. Who asked the Swordking Faction to be so arrogant. Why don’t they go around and ask who the boss in the Archaion Sect is!” They were laughing happily among themselves.

Tianming was pissed to see that he was ignored. Was this the way they conducted their business? Tianming lost his patience and patted the table. He asked, “I’m asking if you guys sell any samsara battle arts?”

This time, their laughter finally stopped. A hint of impatience flashed in the eyes of the girl as she turned to everyone and said, “Wait for me for a while. I’ll be right back.”

She put on a cloak and asked, “What the hell are you doing? A Sky Saint like you wants to buy samsara saint battle arts? Are you messing with me here? Are you trying to strike up a conversation with me?”

“Strike up a conversation with you?” Tianming asked. This girl was really confident in herself.

“You’re really here to strike up a conversation with me? Shoo, get lost. I don’t have time to be bothered with you.”

“Stop messing around. This shop is here to conduct businesses, and you’re not sincere at all. I’m here to buy battle arts, and I’ll leave after finding the right one. I won’t waste your time,” said Tianming.

“You sure? Samsara battle arts can only be bought with tribulation crystals. Do you have any of them? Take them out and show them to me then.” The woman seemed annoyed. She didn’t believe that Tianming was a genuine customer.

“Xixi, don’t bother with him. Come back.”

“Hey, who the hell do you think you are? A toad like you is trying to fawn up to a swan like her? You even dare to try flirting with Xixi? Get lost!” The two youths over there shouted.

Tianming’s face became dark. So what if he was a Sky Saint? Did that have anything to do with them? Did he have to be looked down on for buying a battle art?

“Are there any other shops here?” Tianming turned to look at Lin Xiaoxiao.

“This is the best shop around. There are slightly inferior ones, but no one will pay attention to you since you’re not even in the Empyrean Saint stage. Samsara battle arts are the strongest battle arts in the Human Branch, and not many people can cultivate them,” said Lin Xiaoxiao.

“F.u.c.k...” Tianming mainly didn’t want to waste his time. Now that things had come to this, he eventually decided to put up with it for the samsara battle art.

“I don’t have any tribulation crystals. Can I pay with saint crystals instead?” Tianming asked.

“Saint crystals? Then bring out fifty million for me to take a look.” Xixi said while she continued chatting with the youths. The wealth of an Empyrean Saint was usually in millions, so fifty million wasn’t expensive to buy a battle art that transcended the Empyrean Saint stage.

The billion saint crystals that Jiang Feiling gave him was actually a terrifying number, but saint crystals didn’t have much use for Empyrean Saints.

“Open your eyes wide then.” Tianming had money. A small mountain of saint crystals piled up in front of everyone with a flick of his fingertips.

“Enough! Enough!” Xixi was dumbfounded. Even the youths beside her were blankly staring at the pile of saint crystals.

Who the hell would buy samsara battle arts with saint crystals these days? Not to mention by a Sky Saint disciple.

“You’re here on someone’s behalf? Why didn’t you say so earlier?” Xixi was speechless.

“Think whatever you want.” Tianming was started to get annoyed with these people

“Remember to have them give you tribulation crystals next time. Otherwise, I’ll have to count the saint crystals for a long time.” Xixi glared at Tianming and continued, “Wait here. I’ll report this to my Second Brother. He’s the person in charge here, and here’s a disclaimer for you. It won’t be cheap.”

She then ran upstairs and knocked on a door, “Second Brother, someone is looking for samsara battle arts.”

“Who is it?”

“No idea. He got someone to do his errand.”

“The faction battle is about to start, and someone is making a last-minute effort now?” the man behind the door sneered.

“So are we selling it to him? I’m afraid the other party will get stronger because of it,” said Xixi.

“Why not? Why should we turn down an opportunity to make money? There’s only so little time left, and I’ll retire if he can cultivate it in such a short time.”

“Got it!” Xixi returned and looked at Tianming, “Hey errand boy, come with me.”

“Errand boy?” Tianming felt an urge to slap her. But he controlled himself, as he wasn’t familiar with this place.

He followed Xuanyuan Xixi and came to a majestic room. She said, “They’re all here. They’ve been placed here by the strongest in the Human Branch for sale. Each of them cost over millions of contributions, and don’t think of stealing them.”

“Is that how you conduct business? I’ll learn a samsara battle art sooner or later and tear down your Steadfast Pavilion,” said Tianming.

His words immediately made Xuanyuan Xixi laugh out loud. She looked at him and replied, "You're pretty funny. I won't tease you anymore for the sake that you're trying your best to make me laugh. Get your errand done quickly."

Tianming was already cursing at her, and she thought he was trying to make her laugh? Tianming walked in and began looking through the samsara battle arts. Right at that moment, someone appeared behind Xuanyuan Xixi.

"Fu Bo? What are you doing here?" Xuanyuan Xixi asked.

"Greetings, fourth missy. I'm here to look at the person inside," said Fu Bo.

"What's the matter? You took a fancy to him?" Xuanyuan Xixi asked.

"That's not it." Fu Bo looked inside, and rage immediately rose in his heart. He continued, "Fourth Missy, this person is called Lin Feng, and he nearly killed me. I have a grudge with him."

"You serious?" Xuanyuan Xixi asked with her eyes widened.

"Remember the Nine Yang Sword that I was trying to obtain previously? It was all ruined by this person, and I was nearly killed. I'm trying to find ways to kill him right now. Fourth Missy, I'm loyal to you, so you must help me," Fu Bo said solemnly.

"Let me think about it." Xuanyuan Xixi looked around and immediately had an idea. She said, "I got it! Isn't he here to buy a samsara battle art from us? We'll follow after him when he leaves and frame him for stealing our battle art. Give him a beating and send him to the Judgement Hall. Let your father teach him a lesson."

"Thank you, Fourth Missy!" Fu Bo rejoiced.

"It's nothing. This fool is too stupid. The faction battle is starting soon, and he's still foolish enough to run errands for someone. He's practically here asking for a beating."

"But I want to cripple him!" said Fu Bo.

"Do whatever you want. You can have fun with him yourself after I help you take him down." Xuanyuan Xixi looked inside, and Tianming seemed to have made his choice. After a while, Tianming came out holding a copy of a battle art, along with a jade license.

"What's the matter with you? Why are you looking at me so oddly?" Tianming asked.

"It has nothing to do with you." Xuanyuan Xixi looked at the battle art in Tianming's hands and her eyes widened. She asked, "Are you insane? This is the best battle art we've got, and it cost three hundred tribulation crystals. Not even those in the samsara stage can cultivate it successfully. Don't get killed by your employer for buying this."

"How much is that after converting it into saint crystals?" Tianming asked. To him, what Xuanyuan Xixi said was full of crap. If it weren't for this battle art, he would've left this place by now.

"Three hundred million!" Xuanyuan Xixi gritted his teeth.

"Sure. I have a backer, and they have plenty of money," replied Tianming.

Xuanyuan Xixi started feeling a headache. The battle art that Tianming got was the one that her Second Brother instructed not to sell to their enemies, and Tianming had picked it.

Doesn't matter. I'll snatch it back later, not to mention that I even made a profit of three hundred million saint crystals. I'm simply a genius! Xuanyuan Xixi thought.

She watched as Tianming left after making his payment. Looking at the mountain of saint crystals in the hall, everyone in the Steadfast Pavilion was thrown into an uproar.

Chapter 587 - To Whose Whims Shall the Continent's Prosperity be Swayed

The area the Archaion Sect was located in was called the Taiji Peak Lake. The lake was round and split in two halves like a yin-yang symbol, but it could also be split into three circles: the outer circle, center circle and inner circle.

The outer circle was where the Human Branch was, and also the largest of all three circles, taking up sixty percent of its space. The center circle corresponded to the Earth Branch and took up thirty percent of the area, while the inner circle was the Heaven Branch and took up ten percent. But in terms of space in proportion to the number of people in each circle, the Heaven Branch only had five hundred disciples to split the area.

The Human Branch spanned mountains and seas, with disciples' residences built on high altitudes and underwater too. Even so, most of them stayed in the mountains.

Oldwind Street was located in the mountains. Tianming had to pass through vast forests with towering trees, under which who knows how many corpses were buried, to return to his residence. The Human Branch was really lax on discipline, after all, and nobody really cared about what happened in the wilderness.

It didn't help that young cultivators were all rather hot blooded and had short fuses. They were fierce and twitchy, easily getting into fights with one another. Most disciples aimed to leave the lawless Human Branch and join the Earth Branch. Only then would they be considered proper disciples of the sect. If they weren't able to achieve that goal before reaching thirty, their only option was to join the Archaion Army to defend the realm. It was a path with severely limited opportunities for growth.

In other words, the sect was the breeding ground for the strong and powerful of the realm. Only those that showed promise would be allowed to remain in the sect. Even if they left as Human Branch disciples and had far higher status than normal folk, they would lose the chance to stand at the top of the continent.

The Nine Divine Realms weren't peaceful by any metric. In the past two hundred thousand years, battles raged without cease as a result of the constant stream of ore veins, resources, and treasures to be fought over. That was also the main reason the sect had celebrated Feiling's return as a god. The day she returned, the troops at Archaion's border got ready to fight just in case. It was a time that would see the rise of heroes.

One day, a youth from the walled off lands came to the center stage of the Flameyellow Continent and obtained a samsara-ranked art, officially embarking on his path of cultivation as a disciple of the Archaion Sect. It remained to be seen to whose whims the continent's prosperity shall be swayed.

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Lately, the weather was rather cold. As the sect was located near the north of the Flameyellow Continent, half of each year saw near-constant snowfall. Parts of Taiji Peak Lake had frozen over, and it wouldn't take long before frost would cover the whole place. Even the leaves were beginning to yellow and fall.

Tianming's white hair contrasted against his black robes as he walked through the forest. Lin Xiaoxiao wore a black mantle and huddled within it as she walked behind him.

"Walk faster, slowpoke!" Tianming chided.

"Okay." She grit her teeth and quickened her pace.

"Don't you feel miserable wearing that long face all day long?"

"Not in particular."

"Come closer." Tianming couldn't really be bothered about her right now as they walked even faster.

"Stop!" someone called out from behind.

"You asking me to stop?" Tianming turned back and saw eight young men and women coming his way. The leader was dressed in a tight yellow dress and leopard print coat. Depending on one's tastes, it was either luxurious or gaudy.

"That's right, I'm talking to you!" the girl said coldly.

"What's wrong? Did you finish counting the three hundred million saint crystals? Seeing how quickly you chased me down, I'd think you were trying to confess your feelings for me," Tianming said without holding back. They hadn't come with any good intentions.

"Insolence! Do you know who you're talking to now?!" said one of the few men who spread out and surrounded Tianming and Lin Xiaoxiao. Every one of them were empyrean saints.

Tianming now knew that they were able to become empyrean saints thanks to the Old Deepstar Path and being born from parents at the Samsara stage. It was far easier for them to reach this level compared to Li Wudi. It could all be attributed to their luck for being born in Archaion, not their talent, for the more talented ones had long joined the Heaven Branch.

Empyrean saints that could shake the whole Theocracy were just average goons here. Tianming looked at the girl in the middle. Her name was Xuanyuan Xixi and she belonged to the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, the first house of the sect.

Tianming recalled that he hadn't done anything to offend her at all, but when he looked around, he understood what was happening. Standing behind the girl was a large and burly youth glaring at him sinisterly.

"So it's you? I didn't think you'd recover this quickly and come to cause trouble again."

"You're just a rookie and you dare talk back like that. Don't you know where the Human Branch is? Are you retarded or something?" Fu Bo said.

"Stand back, Fu Bo. Why are you the one talking? You make us look like bullies," Xuanyuan Xixi said, glaring at him, then turned to Tianming. "Lin Feng, we suspect that you have snuck into Steadfast Pavilion to steal a samsara-ranked art. If you know what's good for yourself, hand it over. Don't force us to take you down. You'll save yourself a beating if you comply. However, if we do find the stolen goods on you, you'll be sent to the Judgment Hall for another round of punishment."

"Judgment Hall? You mean your parents, right? It's a little harsh for you to beat me up here and take me back to your parents for another round, don't you think?"

"Stop your baseless accusations. We have good reason to mete out judgment. The Judgment Hall is always fair," Xuanyuan Xixi said solemnly.

"That's right," the others chimed in.

"Xiaoxiao, are there many shitstains like them in the Archaion Sect?" Tianming asked.

"Why wouldn't there be? They have their families backing them. Only by getting rid of others can they stand a chance to make it to the higher branches."

"Whew, that's low of them."

Xuanyuan Xixi laughed and said, "Stupid errand boy, you should know better now. If you're afraid, you shouldn't have joined the sect in the first place! This isn't lowly, this is the right of the mighty!"

"It's always better to maintain harmony with your peers. There's no point in harming each other's progress," Tianming said.

"Alright, I'll spare your life! That should be harmonious enough!" Fu Bo said.

"Enough talking! Get him! Anyone that dares touches me, Xuanyuan Xixi, is insulting me! You think this gal is someone you can make a fool off? It's your fault for coming alone, errand boy!"

Tianming had just come from the Divine Capital and hated the Theocrats' descendants with a passion. While he was harsh on his enemies and harsher on himself, he wouldn't throw his weight around like a hoodlum. Yet the Archaion Sect seemed to be in a constant state of gang warfare. Tianming now knew that even though the world was unfair when it came to talent and might, at least it didn't discriminate in terms of intelligence.

There were some that lived longer and gained shocking amounts of experience. However, twenty-year-olds were just that. No matter how powerful they were, they were still brats that acted without thinking about the consequences.

All seven of them, excluding Xuanyuan Xixi, summoned ten lifebound beasts, immediately surrounding him and Lin Xiaoxiao before attacking. There was no avoiding this fight.

"Go to the side and get out of my way," Tianming said as he pushed Lin Xiaoxiao's head and sent her flying.

"What are you doing?!" she snapped as she almost rammed into a tree, her hair all messed up. She knew that Tianming was afraid he would hurt her by accident, but there wasn't a need for him to be that rough.

Immediately, Tianming summoned his own lifebound beasts. Lan Huang started off with Primordial Soundwave. The staggering volume of a seventh-level sky saint beast caused its foes' ears to ring. Then came Azure Oceanic Purgatory, which instantly turned the mountains into an ocean. While some of his opponents had aquatic lifebound beasts, Tianming still managed to cordon off some of them.

Fu Bo didn't know that Tianming had made a breakthrough since their last encounter. As far as he was concerned, there was no way a sky saint could defeat a group of empyrean saints. Just as he finished that thought, a flash of starlight came so quickly that he wasn't able to dodge it, causing him to suffer a lash on his lower thigh.

"Aaaaaagh!" He cried in pain as he grabbed the part that was struck. "An empyrean saint?!"

After Tianming had broken through to the seventh level of Sky Saint, his three saint springs contained enough saint ki to rival a first or second-level empyrean saint, and that was before he used the Grand-Orient Sword. He decided to not rely on the divine artifact. Even though Feiling had told him it probably didn't matter, he wanted to save the trouble.

Instead, he was using the Nine Yang Sword he had taken from Lin Xiaoxiao and hadn't returned. He had saved her, after all, and he was no charity. With the sword in hand, he struck with terrifying speed alongside Ying Huo and Meow Meow.

Meow Meow's ability caused lightning to explode and swallow up the whole area. Amidst the ocean, Lan Huang fought five enemies by itself without relenting one bit, thanks to its huge figure, and it was just a sky saint lifebound beast.

Even without Feiling's aid, Tianming had grown much stronger after breaking through twice. Not to mention, he still had a soul servant to speak of. Lately, he was able to feel its presence and could communicate with it somewhat. He felt that it had some unique abilities, the first of which was the manipulation of his foes' weapons. As it was still weak, Tianming let the soul servant do as it pleased while he slaughtered away with Ying Huo.

"Taste my Sword of Endless Grief!" Ying Huo cried as it mercilessly fought.

Chapter 588 - One Strike to Kill

"Ugh!"

A few men clenched their legs tight together as their eyes almost popped out of their sockets. The cruelty and arrogance they had originally shown was completely nowhere to be seen.

"I've killed more people than the number of rice grains you've eaten. You think you can mess with me?"

Their fighting spirit couldn't compare at all to Tianming's, after the countless battles he'd experienced in the Theocracy and the Grand-Orient Realm. His will had been honed through deathly battles time and again, something the disciples of Archaion Sect had no luxury of experiencing. Not to mention, he was killing fervently crazy fighters of the Nineshades Clan, to say nothing of the weak disciples of the Human Branch he was beating up now.

The Nine Yang Sword was exceedingly sharp. Each time it swept past, lifebound beast and beastmaster alike would kneel and shiver with fear.

"Buzz off!" Tianming looked around and saw that Xuanyuan Xixi's men had all collapsed and were groaning nonstop. Now, she was the only one remaining. The girl in the leopard coat watched him blankly. "What level are you at?"

"The second level of the Empyrean Saint Stage!" she snapped. Though she was surprised, she wasn't frozen with shock.

"The same level as Autarch Qian, huh.... You're a little too dumb compared to him, though. I guess the heavens are fair after all," Tianming said.

"Are you insulting me? An errand boy like you? You think you're a hotshot just because you defeated them?"

"Do I still resemble an errand boy?"

"Lin Feng, are you faking it or do you really not know who I am? Do you know what the consequences of offending me are? I've killed tens of disciples just like you! Nobody dares to even ask about what happened to them! I'm going to teach you a lesson. Do you dare to resist?" she proudly said. It seemed that she was really confident about her family background. In fact, most people took it for granted that members of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan could do as they pleased without consequence, not to mention her elder brother was a deacon of the Dragonmight Faction.

"You've killed tens of them?" Tianming chuckled and pointed his sword at her. "It's not a matter of whether I dare touch you. I'll rough you up today. You're only so rambunctious because nobody's taught you a lesson, right? Usually, I don't mess with people that don't cause trouble for me, but you obviously tried to mess with me. So, I'll give you a lesson. Tuition is free."

"Insolence!" Xuanyuan Xixi got the rest around her to buzz off, then charged into the fray with her lifebound beast, a Pentamount Purgatory Dragon. It was a legendary dragon with ninety-seven stars, ten more than Ying Huo. It seemed that empyrean manna was rather common in Archaion. In fact, there was enough for many lifebound beasts to have hundreds of stars.

The Archaic House of Xuanyuan was the most famous clan on the Flameyellow Continent with a dragon lifebound beast. Around two hundred thousand years ago in the ancient past, dragons were the absolute rulers of the Flameyellow Continent. However, the Nine Divine Realms eventually formed a new world order.

The first god beastmaster had a dragon lifebound beast, and the House of Xuanyuan had descended from this mythical figure. That was why those with the Xuanyuan surname formed a house that was granted the 'Archaic' appellation, for it was a name that had been passed down since antiquity. Apart from the first god, the other nine gods had also ascended during antiquity, the last one to do so being Xuanyuan Xi from a hundred thousand years ago. Ever since her time, no new gods had ascended.

By now, Tianming no longer felt the same pressure and impetus when fighting a second-level empyrean saint. It used to look like an insurmountable peak, but now it only seemed like a small mound he could skip over when he traveled closer to it. That's the meaning of strength! Only the powerful are able to influence others' lives, live with dignity, and protect their loved ones! It was with these thoughts that Tianming clashed with her.

Xuanyuan Xixi used a long spear and boasted a rather impressive combat capability with her mid-grade empyrean-ranked art. However, Tianming's Myriad-Demise Sword came blasting out of the Nine Yang Sword, sending her spear flying. The sword ki swallowed her whole and tore her armor away, piercing into her.

"Aaaagh!" she yelped in pain before collapsing, her face purple and grim. She was enduring the same kind of pain Tianming did when he had trained in the sword ki pool.

"Yiyi, save me!" she said as she struggled to get up. Turning to look, she found that her dragon had been pressed into the water by Tianming's three beasts and was crying out for help.

"Tortoise Bro, I'm pressing it down for you to mount it, quick! You sure are lucky that there's so many dragons around here!"

Lan Huang roared and slashed with Annihilation Godsword, sending blood flying all over the place.

"Hey, that's the wrong sword!" Ying Huo said.

"Chicken Bro, Tortoise Bro is still young. Aren't you a little too corrupt of an influence for him? Not to mention, I think this dragon's a male..." Meow Meow said.

"What?!" Ying Huo immediately darted into the air when it recalled some unpleasant memories from the past. "I don't swing that way! Beat him up!"

Xuanyuan Xixi knelt on the ground when she witnessed the sight.

"Hey, still think I'm just an errand boy?" Tianming raised her up by the mouth. All the while, Invincible Sword Ki still coursed through her body, causing her to struggle in pain.

"Lin Feng, you're going to die. How dare you bully me! You're going to die horribly!"

"Those same lines again? Come on, stand up for yourself! Don't keep relying on others to avenge you, wimp! Well, I'm already used to it. I don't care who you are. My name is Lin Feng! Well, at least many people call me that."

"You scoundrel! Your father must be a damnable crook as well! I bet your mother's a whore that slept with thousands to beget an abomination like you!"

"Dang, that's low class even for you," Tianming said.

"Hah! I bet I got it right!"

Tianming figured that she was probably spoiled so bad that she always got her way. That was why she still dared to snap back. Just as she was about to say something else, Tianming gave her face a slap. It reddened immediately and she spat a few teeth out.

"Feeling better?" Tianming asked, lifting her up again.

"You!"

One slap later, Tianming dropped her to the ground. "Tell me if you need more. Otherwise, shut up."

Xuanyuan Xixi spat out some front teeth this time. Her mouth tasted like blood.

"Even though you look quite cute, you have a venomous soul. It really doesn't suit your body." Tianming smashed her down to the ground again. "Whatever. I'll spare you, since only your mouth's foul. If you dare mess with me again, I'll send you to the heavens."

"Waaaaaah!" She hugged her head and cried as she knelt. Moments ago, she was threatening to beat the teeth out of others, but now she was the toothless one.

Tianming felt that she deserved it, though. She was so used to throwing her weight around that she didn't recognize a wall even as she rammed into it. He wasn't someone that liked to cause trouble, but that didn't mean he was afraid of it. Having survived the battle at the Divine Capital, there was no way he would kneel to her and beg for forgiveness.

"Lin Feng!" someone cried loudly. "Cripple yourself or I'll kill her!"

Tianming turned back and saw that it was Fu Bo. He had defeated Lin Xiaoxiao and had his sword against her throat. Tianming didn't see her lifebound beast, implying that it hadn't come out when Fu Bo attacked her.

"Are you sure?" Tianming headed his way with a cold gaze.

"Of course! Destroy your saint palace now! Otherwise, I'll kill her and you'll regret it for life!" Fu Bo laughed like a maniac, letting the rush go to his head. Lin Xiaoxiao had her hands bound behind her as she looked at Tianming.

"Do you know that I hate other people threatening me with the lives of my friends the most?"

Lin Xiaoxiao's eyes shook when he said 'friend'.

"Your girlfriend's about to die. Still putting up a front?" Right as Fu Bo finished, a rainbow-colored sword ki beam shot towards his eyes. "So quick!"

In an instant, it pierced through his head. The only thing he saw next was the ground. All that remained was an unmoving corpse.

Xuanyuan Xixi and her minions stared at Tianming blankly.

"Let's go," he called out to Lin Xiaoxiao, who was still staring blankly at him. "Go!"

Tianming pulled her along.

"Hold on," she said, almost tripping.

"No way. Running away while pretending to be chased is more exciting."

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A group of people had gathered outside Tianming's residence. Among them was a burly and fierce man filled with killing intent, behind whom Xuanyuan Xixi followed. "Is this the place?"

"It's this one! After he killed Fu Bo, I got people to watch him. He hasn't left the whole time. Uncle Fu, you have to avenge him!" she said with swollen cheeks. She couldn't even enunciate her words properly, which was super embarrassing for someone like her who valued her reputation so much.

"What's he called?"

"Lin Feng."

"Does he have accomplices? I'll kill them too."

"There's one more. She's his neighbor, Lin Xiaoxiao."

"Anyone else? What's his background?"

"I don't know. Fu Bo tried to look into it but didn't find anything. We don't know how he joined the Human Branch. Perhaps he doesn't have anyone backing him," Xuanyuan Xixi said deviously.

"Alright." The man nodded and flew into the courtyard.

Hmph, you dared to mess with me? Let's see how you deal with Uncle Fu! Xuanyuan Xixi thought with glee.

Chapter 589 - You Will Perish Sooner or Later

Tianming stood beside a pavilion in the courtyard. He watched as the burly man landed on the ground and glared at him coldly.

"You dared to kill my son... Was life too peaceful for your liking? I'm Fu Yonghuan, and I'll make sure it's over for you for good." As he spoke, he applied a heavy pressure belonging to someone of the Samsara stage. Even though he looked young, he was already in his seventies. He said nothing else and immediately applied the pressure, intent on taking Tianming away and making him suffer for good.

Just as he was about to reach out to Tianming's head, Tianming took out an emblem.

"The Human Sacred Seal?!" Fu Yonghuan immediately knelt on the ground and shivered as he looked at the emblem with his eyes about to pop out. He then shivered and turned to Tianming, his killing intent from before completely gone. Based on his exaggerated reaction, Tianming recalled how Jian Wuyi had said that the emblem would be able to solve all his problems.

The Trinity Almanac said that the Human Sacred Seal represented the sect master of the Human Branch himself. While Jian Wuyi was nervous and respectful before Feiling, he was a godly existence to the likes of Fu Yonghuan.

"This lowly one didn't know that my lord is with the sect master! Please forgive me for my transgressions!" Fu Yonghuan immediately said.

"Guess your son's death was for naught."

"It was his honor to die by your hand, Lord!"

Tianming narrowed his eyes at his surprise. For him to be able to say something like this showed how highly valued discipline was as a virtue in this sect. What Fu Yonghuan feared more than anything wasn't just his death, but rather his whole clan's.

"You don't have to be so nervous about it. He came to cause trouble for me twice. Had he not threatened me with my friend's life, I wouldn't have killed him." Ending his life was simply the cleanest way to deal with the situation, for one wrong move could have caused Lin Xiaoxiao to die.

"Fu Bo deserved to be punished! Please forgive us, Lord! I will make sure he doesn't get a proper burial!" he said as his tears flowed.

"There's no need to go so far. I won't hold this against you, but I have a request I want you to hear out."

"Anything, Lord."

"Make sure to not let word of this spread, especially the Human Sacred Seal. I wish to maintain a low profile. If word gets out, you'll be doomed," Tianming threatened.

"Definitely!" Fu Yonghuan kowtowed and made sure to commit it to memory.

"Now go."

"Understood!" Fu Yonghuan backed away on his knees until he reached the entrance, then quietly jumped out. Tianming found it rather funny.

"This thing turned out to be pretty useful," he said as he put the seal away.

"Is Jian Wuyi really that scary?" Ying Huo asked. It had seen the man treat Tianming courteously before, so it didn't think he had so much power.

"He probably isn't. Her Eminence is. So this is the Archaion Sect, eh...." He now understood that without anyone watching his back in this dog-eat-dog environment, there was only one way for him to survive: beg for forgiveness.

Being in this environment, trouble would come looking for him even if he didn't seek it himself, especially with the faction battles. He would have to find some allies for it.

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Outside the courtyard, Fu Yonghuan dusted his clothes.

"Uncle Fu? Where is he? Did you kill him straight away? Isn't that being too nice?" Xuanyuan Xixi asked.

He gave her a look and said, "First, you got my son killed. Now you want to get me killed, too?"

"What do you mean by that?"

Fu Yonghuan simply left, not wanting to remain at this location any moment longer.

"Did he kill him or not?" some people approached and asked.

"Let's go in and see!" Xuanyuan Xixi had a bad feeling about this as she pushed the door open, only to see Tianming glaring at her furiously. "You're still alive?!"

"Buzz off!" Tianming gave her a kick square in the chest and sent her flying. As the door slammed closed, she fell and tumbled on the ground.

"Fourth Lady! Are you okay?" those around her came to ask.

"Waaaah!" She broke out in tears, having never been bullied to this extent in the Human Branch before. "Get me my brother! Get him to come here!"

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Tianming could hear her throwing a tantrum outside. "I must've used up all my luck to run into someone like that."

He found it rather troublesome to always be pestered by people like that. He only had two options: lick her boots or resist. However, he was never afraid of them.

"If they want a fight, they'll get one. It's not like their backing can match up to mine in the entire sect, after all."

Given that he had protected Feiling, it wouldn't be unreasonable for her to watch over him in the sect. Though, he wouldn't really need her to involve herself. The Human Sacred Seal would be more than enough.

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In the training room next door, Lin Xiaoxiao stood in the darkness. Her Bloodsoul Bolthell Fienddragon glared at her while it perched on the ground. However, only she knew that it was no fienddragon, but rather the Archaionfiend itself.

"Have you had a taste of death today? Do you know how frustrating it is to be weak and helpless now?" the fiend asked.

"I tasted that long ago."

"And yet, you still don't desire power? Only with power will you be able to alter your fate and stop being whisked around! Just because he's nice to you now doesn't mean he always will be. He's just assessing what kind of threat you pose to him. If you get found out by him, he'll immediately kill you without question!"

"But I have no ill will toward him. I think he's a pretty good person, too."

"Lin Xiaoxiao! Do you have any dignity left? He lifted you up by the throat! How can you think well of him when he was about to kill you? Does working with the Wei Clan to kill your whole family make him a good person, huh?"

"You don't need to bother corrupting me. My mind's clear."

"You! If this goes on, you'll never get my eye! If you can't fulfill your contract then I'll never release those two's souls! They'll never be able to rest in peace!" the Archaionfiend spat angrily.

"Don't go overboard. The worst that can happen is that none of us gets what we want! I'm not afraid of you!" she said with a furious glare.

"What's so overboard about that? Come here, I'll let you in on a secret."

"Just say it!"

"Do you know who he is?"

"Li Tianming. Who else?"

"Hehe... He's from the Sky Plunderer Clan, my clan's arch enemy! Even though I have devolved and become your lifebound beast, my memories remain intact. It was one of their clan that dug our eyes out!" it said with seething hate.

"What clan?"

"Sky Plunderer Clan. Their left arms have hexagonal scales. That's the most obvious sign."

"So is he amazing like you are? Did they come from the cosmic aether too?"

"That's right."

"What else do you know?"

"It won't do you any good to learn of it now. With my current power, we're trapped in the Flameyellow Continent. There's nowhere else to go."

"So, what's your goal?"

"I can be certain that he has come to the Archaion Sect for the Archaionfiend Eye!"

"Why would he?"

"Those of the Sky Plunderer Clan need our eyes to awaken their power. It's shameless thievery!"

"So he'll fight you for the eye?" Lin Xiaoxiao grit her teeth.

"That's right. You won't be his match and will always be one step behind. Back then, you didn't have a rival and could take your time with cultivation. But now you have to surpass him, or your two lifebound beasts will be doomed forever!" it said with a sinister laugh.

Lin Xiaoxiao fell silent as she faced her hate, suffering, and dilemma. "If he's so capable, how can I hope to catch up?"

"I have a way."

"Out with it."

"Even though I've deteriorated a lot, I still have millions of years' worth of memories and cultivation insights. We cultivate along the same path, so I'm able to raise your heavenly will to the very peak. You'll be able to cultivate what I have directly without needing to rely on Astral Will."

Thanks to the limitations of symbiotic cultivation, it needed Lin Xiaoxiao to grow powerful before it could. Beastmasters were the main core of the cultivation pair, after all.

"Then why didn't you do that from the start?"

"There's a chance your heavenly will will collapse and cause your soul to disperse! If not for the presence of a Sky Plunderer, I wouldn't have to take this risk. But if he gets the eye, it'll be over for me! That eye can increase our recovery by ten times!" it said hastily.

"My will's so weak that my soul might just get scattered after all."

"You won't. You'll survive."

"Why?"

"Because even if you fail, I'll continue torturing them. You don't have the right to fail. You have to survive," it said as it continued snickering.

"Wu You, will you control me for the rest of my life with those two?" Her voice sounded torn and hurt.

"Why not? It's not my fault you can't let go of your attachments toward them. Why do you have to be so sentimental? To feel is to sin, young one. The weak deserve neither feelings nor dignity." The Archaionfiend stuck its tongue out and licked her hair, causing a black liquid to drip off it.

"Curse you, Wu You." Her voice was as cold as the depths of an abyss.

"Likewise."

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A gentle breeze blew through the courtyard's pavilion. Tianming felt the soul servant swirl around his left arm; it now considered his left arm its vessel and had been staying there ever since.

Tianming stretched his arm out and took a book out of his spatial ring. It was none other than the samsara-ranked art worth three hundred million saint crystals. On the cover were large words that read: Ninenether Fiendgod Claw.

Chapter 590 - Rise From Insignificance

"Finally, something new!" Ying Huo jumped onto Li Tianming's head and peeked.

"Where's Meow Meow?"

"It discovered a new method of sleeping underwater. It's in the pond now."

"Lan Huang?"

"Next door waiting for its friend to come out. By the way, it seems that Lin girl is preparing to break through to the empyrean saint stage."

"Alright, then just the two of us will train first!"

Meow Meow and Lan Huang both had claws, so both could train in this technique too. However, one was lazy and the other playful, so they couldn't be counted on. Ying Huo and Tianming began tackling the Ninenether Fiendgod Claw together.

"It says here this is a death phase samsara battle art. What does that mean?" Ying Huo asked curiously.

"There are two types of samsara battle arts. One is for the life phase, the life phase samsara battle art. The other is for the death phase, the death phase samsara battle art. Life phase samsara battle arts exhibit the vigor and liveliness of the life phase. They're usually a consecutive series of attacks. Death

phase samsara battle arts exhibit the deathly and extermination aspects of the death phase, and are usually single killing strikes.”

Tianming continued, “We’re just sky saints now. Even if we grasp this technique, without samsara power, we won’t be able to bring out its full potential. Still, it’ll be stronger than empyrean battle arts.”

“Are death phase samsara battle arts stronger than life phase samsara battle arts?” Ying Huo asked.

“Not necessarily. They’re just two categories. In terms of killing power, death phase samsara battle arts do have an edge. This is the only death phase samsara battle art here. The rest are all for the life phase,” Tianming said.

“I don’t have a jade license like you do, so can I still use it?”

“Beastmasters and their beasts are counted as one, so it’s fine. Besides, most battle arts at this level are too complex for beasts, other than you.”

Ying Huo puffed its chest out.

“The Ninenether Fiendgod Claw only has one move to practice. This is the best battle art we can get here. I’ll look for a sword art in the future and see if we can push the Invincible Sword Body even further.”

“Can it still be trained even past the ten thousand mark?”

“Yes.”

“It’s not an empyrean battle art, is it?”

“Probably not. I’ll ask some seniors.”

“By the way, why do you think so highly of this Ninenether Fiendgod Claw?”

“That’s because it suits me. It’s a claw art with a lot of versatility, and it also has a lot of power, as it’s a death phase samsara battle art. Most importantly, it’s complicated, fierce, and carries the effect of confusing the soul. The soul servant is in my left arm now. It can rush into my enemies’ weapons and carry out a soul attack. It’ll be a great combination to use with saint ki and Invincible Sword Ki when attacking. So, this is perfect for me.”

“This is like having Little Feng by your side?” Ying Huo asked.

“Yes. When I’ve stabilized my place here, I’ll bring him over.”

“I just knew you couldn’t forget your Little Feng.” Ying Huo sniggered.

“Silence! Take this claw of mine!”

“Yes, master it and use it on that Lin girl!”

Tianming snapped, “Don’t say anything weird when you see Ling’er.”

Tianming had a bad feeling.

“Seems I have to treat Lin Xiaoxiao worse. I’ll beat her up for no reason now and then, so this chicken doesn’t have something to hold over me.”

Next door, Lin Xiaoxiao shivered.

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In the end, it wasn’t easy to master the claw art. Tianming would take some time every day to cultivate in the Deepstar Path, then immediately return to training the claw.

“The core of death phase samsara battle arts is the will to transcend the life and death tribulations. That can only be grasped at the edge of life and death.” Generally, the comfortable saint stage wasn’t somewhere that could be picked up.

But coincidentally, Tianming’s Aeonian Grandbane aged him at ten times speed! He already felt like he had been experiencing the tribulation for years. Hence, he had a lot of experience that helped in mastering the battle art.

“Transcend life and death to become a god. You need the courage to face death for a death phase battle art. Only those who are unafraid of death can become undying.” Tianming was already feeling that eventual path, even as a seventh level sky saint.

Now, there were only the basic mysteries of the claw art to grasp. “It seems all of the geniuses of the Archaion Sect can’t match up to my Aeonian Grandbane even with all their advantages. People like me and Little Feng are the real geniuses. So... how did Lin Xiaoxiao rise from insignificance like me?”

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“Wahhh, Second Brother, your baby sister’s been beaten up by someone!” Xuanyuan Xixi crawled into a house on Oldwind Street. Her face was swollen like a pig, and all her teeth had fallen out.

She didn’t even reach the house before the door opened. A young man in yellow robes hugged her, but that didn’t hide his long and narrow eyes filled with coldness. He was obviously a ruthless character.

“All my teeth are gone!” Xuanyuan Xixi was crying, her voice so loud that half the street could likely hear.

“I know, I met Fu Yonghuan just now.”

“What did he say? He was pathetic today! He ran away even though his son was killed.”

“Xixi, you’re already twenty-one. Please think. If Fu Yonghuan wasn’t willing to avenge his son, there’s obviously a backing he doesn’t dare offend.”

“He doesn’t dare? Is that what he said?”

“He told me not to find trouble with Lin Feng, and especially not to drag him in. He refused to explain further.” The young man frowned.

“Why is he acting mysterious? What identity can’t be said? What, he’s the sect master’s illegitimate son?”

“How could that be possible? However, the faction battles are about to start. So, let’s not cause problems now. We’ll look at it again after the battles.”

“So what, I got beat up in public for nothing? How will I go out after this?” Xuanyuan Xixi was stunned.

“Can’t you endure for a while?”

“Second Brother, we’re from the Xuanyuan Clan! This is our sect! The faction lord is even our younger cousin. Why is it so hard for you to get some disciple dead?”

“Quiet. Use your head a little. I still have a dozen factions to deal with, so don’t add more things to my plate.”

“But!” Xuanyuan Xixi was furious. “If you don’t help me, I’ll talk about how you violated your own cousin! I know where her corpse is. If it gets out, see if uncle and grandpa don’t kill you!”

“Xixi!” The young man’s expression suddenly turned fierce.

The girl froze, but she said hurriedly, “Don’t be angry. I’m just too miserable. How will I be with my friends in the future?”

“Fine fine. I’ll think of something,” the young man said helplessly.

“Don’t mention this again.”

“Yes.”

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The next day, Tianming was cultivating when he heard a disturbance. He looked next door and saw a large amount of energy gathering. Lin Xiaoxiao’s area was like a giant mouth with an insatiable appetite that gobbled it all up.

“She’s become an empyrean saint?”