

The Ages 621

Chapter 621 - Number One Pavilion

Tianming stepped into the Earth Branch for the first time when he got back from Xuanyuan Lake. As soon as he entered, he realized that the Human Branch was ten times larger than the Earth Branch, but the branches had an equal number of spiritual energy fountains.

As a result, the Earth Branch was covered with thick spiritual energy mist, making it look like a celestial realm. The mist was so thick that it limited his vision.

"I heard that the Heaven Branch has the same number of spiritual energy fountains as the Earth and Human Branches, but the Heaven Branch only has five hundred disciples and is only a tenth as big as the Earth Branch. So everyone practically has a fountain of their own. The Archaion Sect has a realistic system for training their disciples, and those who are talented will be granted more resources while the mediocre will be buried. No wonder everyone in the Human Branch wants to climb up.

"In the Achaion Sect, only disciples from the Earth Branch or higher will be respected. As for the Human Branch, their only way out is joining the Archaion Army and fighting for the sect." The Earth Branch had fifty thousand disciples, and everything here was better than the Human Branch. There were all kinds of facilities available that made this palace look like an actual sect. The entire Earth Branch was covered in snow under the blizzard, which made for a magnificent sight.

As long as I become an Earth Branch's disciple, I'll be able to cultivate in the Old Deepstar Path for two hours a day. Two hours is enough, but I still have another layer of identity now as the faction lord of the Swordking Faction. So my time isn't limited. The Earth Branch's Old Deepstar Path starting point is at the end of the Human Branch's path. The Astral Wills here belong to stronger ancestors.

Tianming was filled with expectations for the Earth Branch. The Earth and Heaven Branches were practically bound together, with the Earth Branch's core ground being the Heaven Cauldron.

Tianming decided to head to Sourceglow Hall first, but he wasn't familiar with the Earth Branch so he had to ask for directions before he finally managed to find Sourceglow Hall. He realized that many people in the Earth Branch knew him, and they had probably watched the Human Branch's faction battle. So they were looking at Tianming with a strange gaze.

"You managed to live to this day? It sure wasn't easy for you," a woman chuckled after Tianming asked her for directions.

"Yeah, it hasn't been easy. Thank you, Senior Sister," Tianming thanked her and headed toward Sourceglow Hall. Along the way, many people looked at him and exclaimed how lucky he was.

"What, aren't those geniuses from the Sterling House of Fang known for how overbearing they are? Why is he still alive?"

"Beats me."

"Probably just luck. He won't last long, though."

“The Archaion Sect belongs to the three houses, and small houses like ours don’t dare to offend the ordinary disciples of the three houses even if we’re talented. We’ll know what’s going on if he’s gone in two days.”

Tianming arrived at Sourceglow Hall while they were discussing among themselves.

“Here’s your emblem as an Earth Branch’s disciple.” Sourceglow Hall was where disciple’s information was stored, and disciples received their emblems there. Every newly-promoted Earth Branch disciple had to report there to officially join the Earth Branch.

“Thank you, Palace Lord,” Tianming said. The palace lord of Sourceglow Hall was an old woman called Gou Yuqiu. Tianming didn’t know who she was, but she was rumored to be a dedicated person, and she would check on all the Earth Branch’s disciples.

However, she didn’t pay much attention to Tianming. After recording Tianming’s identity, she said, “Tianming, go and pick an earth pavilion to stay in. It’ll be your root in the Earth Branch in the future.”

“Yes.”

Tianming took the emblem and went to pick his earth pavilion. The residences for Earth Branch’s disciples were four times larger than the Human Branch, and everyone practically had a peak to themselves.

But when Tianming came out of Sourceglow Hall, he ran into an ‘acquaintance.’ His body was hunched and his face was pale, decorated with blood and despair.

“Fang Xingying,” Tianming called out.

“Mhm?” Fang Xingying raised his head, and he immediately took a few steps back when he saw Tianming.

“Where are your teeth?” Tianming couldn’t help laughing. “Why’re you like an old granny now? Is that the latest fashion?”

Fang Xingying tried gnashing his ‘teeth,’ only to hurt himself in the process. He glared at Tianming and turned to leave.

“Hey, don’t go.” Tianming chased after him. “Aren’t you trying to assassinate me? You don’t have to be polite with me.”

“Don’t provoke me,” Fang Xingying said.

“You’re overthinking. Let me guess, did Fang Xingque pull out your teeth since you failed to kill me?” Tianming patted his shoulder.

“Looks like you have a talent for guessing,” replied Fang Xingying.

“Haha, your boss seems terrible. Don’t work for him anymore. He’s not worthy of your loyalty,” Tianming replied.

“What do you know? Care about yourself and your life while you can. Don’t poke your nose into someone else’s problems.” Fang Xingying quickened his steps, but Tianming came and blocked his way again.

“Don’t force me,” said Fang Xingying.

“Do you hate Fang Xingque?” Tianming asked with his eyes narrowed into slits.

“What’s it got to do with you? You think you’re smart?” Fang Xingying raged.

“Nah, but the enemy of an enemy is a friend. That means we’re friends now. Why don’t you tell me who this Fang Xingque is? Who knows, I might be able to kill him.” Tianming smiled.

“You?” Fang Xingque laughed.

“I can tell that you hate him. It didn’t feel good having your teeth removed, right?” Tianming asked.

“You really want to know who he is?” Fang Xingying narrowed his eyes when Tianming exposed his thoughts. Now that he thought about it, Tianming should have a similar identity since he had the sect master of the Human Branch protecting him, right?

“Speak.”

“He’s the son of Heaven Branch’s sect master and the grandson of Godservant Hall’s palace lord. He’s one of the few in the Archaion Sect with the strongest background!” Fang Xingying said.

It was sad, as he was also the grandson of Godservant Hall’s palace lord. But he had never been paid any attention.

“Wow, that’s a strong background. So why’s someone like him going after someone insignificant like me?” Tianming asked.

“He had a cricket battle with his friends in the Dimensional Battlefield, but you stood out and humiliated his ‘crickets,’ embarrassing him before his friends. So he’ll naturally be coming after you,” said Fang Xingying.

“Does he have nothing better to do? Since when would someone playing with crickets go after crickets himself? This proves that he’s not a human being, but a cricket himself,” Tianming laughed.

“No one dares to provoke the disciples of the Sterling House of Fang because of Fang Xingque’s vengeful personality,” said Fang Xingying.

“So arrogant?”

“Wouldn’t you be arrogant if you were the son of Heaven Branch’s sect master and grandson of Godservant Hall’s palace lord?” Fang Xingying asked.

Well, I’m the eminent’s husband, and I don’t see myself being arrogant... Tianming commented inwardly before asking, “Is he done now? Does he know that I’m under the protection of the Human Branch’s sect master?”

“He didn’t believe me.”

“So that means he’s still coming after me?”

“What do you think?”

“Simple. I’ll help you beat him up and pull out his teeth one day,” Tianming smiled.

“Haha!”

“What’re you laughing about?”

“He has the Sterling House of Fang’s Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline. He’s only sixteen this year, and he’s already in the Samsara stage. In terms of talent, he’s ranked in the Archaion Sect’s top three,” said Fang Xingying. His fists were balled together when he mentioned the Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline. He was trying his best to keep himself composed.

“Wow, that’s impressive,” replied Tianming.

“See you later.” Fang Xingying continued walking away.

“Wait. I’m looking for a vacant Earth Pavilion. Do you have any recommendations?” Tianming asked.

“There’s one beside mine,” replied Fang Xingying.

“Alright. We’ll be neighbors then.”

“You’re sticking yourself to me?”

“Don’t say that. I’m new in the Earth Branch, and there’s many things I don’t know about. So I’ll come ask you if there’s an opportunity,” Tianming said in a sincere tone.

“Becoming friends after fighting each other?”

“Yeah.”

“Come on then.” Fang Xingying had no idea about Tianming’s identity, nor did he know how long he could stay alive for. But no one had taken the initiative to become neighbors with him since he was young; he would already have died if he hadn’t fawned over Fang Xingque.

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With that, Tianming officially moved next to Fang Xingying. As flashy as he was, Tianming naturally put up a plaque with ‘Number One Pavilion.’

The pavilion was massive; it was practically a snow-covered mountain. Aside from buildings on the mountain, there was also a lake-sized hot spring.

Tianming fell in love with it at first sight, and he imagined taking a dip in it with Ling’er.

Fang Xingying lived on the next mountain over. His place was remote, as he liked the silence and lack of disruptions in his cultivation.

“The sect has a rule that Earth Branch disciples can take a Human Branch disciple as a servant, or even a maid. Although becoming an Earth Branch disciple’s servant won’t give you more resources or any changes to their identity, they can at least enjoy the rich spiritual energy here.

“Many Earth Branch disciples, especially the males, have a female disciple from the Human Branch as a maid. One seeks improvement in her cultivation, while the other seeks beauty, a mutually beneficial relationship. That’s also a way out for Human Branch disciples. I heard that anyone who becomes an Earth Branch disciple’s servant will have a higher chance of being promoted to the Earth Branch. Reality is truly harsh, but....” Tianming grinned and continued, “Maybe I should bring Xiaoxiao over to be my maid!”

“Holy shit, you shameless lecher! Are you going to go for a ‘maid play?’” Ying Huo was dumbfounded.

“Boss, don’t force me to rat you out to Ling’er! I know biology, and I can vividly describe how you have fun with Lin Xiaoxiao,” Meow Meow chuckled. “From today onward, you’re finished if you dare to disturb my sleep!”

“I support your idea, boss! I want to play with Big Sister Youyou!” Lan Huang chipped in.

“Screw you guys!” Beads of sweat rolled down Tianming’s forehead. “Many people saw me together with her in the faction battle, and I’m just worried that Fang Xingque will go after her instead, since he can’t do anything to me. After all, I can’t possibly drag her down in the mess I created, right?”

“Hehe!”

“We know, we know. You don’t have to explain.”

“Xiaoxiao is actually pretty cute.”

Tianming was left speechless by them, and wondered if he should give them a beating. But right at that moment, a loud voice came from outside. “Li Tianming, come out!”

The voice belonged to Xuanyuan Yuheng.

Chapter 622 - Tribulation Manna

Tianming had intended to visit the Heaven Cauldron with the Swordking Faction’s emblem now that he had settled down, so why had Xuanyuan Yuheng come looking for him? When Tianming came out, he saw Xuanyuan Yuheng standing there, dressed in white.

Despite standing in the snow, the snow that came near Xuanyuan Yuheng all melted. He was staring at Tianming with his three blazing eyes.

“What’s the matter?” Tianming asked.

“These are the tribulation manna bestowed to you by Her Eminence.” A spatial ring appeared in Xuanyuan Yuheng’s hand and he tossed it over.

Tianming reached out with his black arm. When his hand came into contact with the spatial ring, the immense force behind it knocked him into the nearby wooden pillar. If Tianming had used his right hand, it would have been penetrated.

“Did you eat shit or something? Why do you have such a fiery temper?” Tianming smiled.

“You’re still not worthy,” Xuanyuan Yuheng sneered.

“Alright, alright. I can’t be bothered with you anymore. You can get lost now.” Tianming returned to his house and shut the door.

Xuanyuan Yuheng did not leave immediately after the door was shut. He was still staring at it with a distorted gaze, and his eyes gradually became bloodshot.

“Two third-grade and one fourth-grade tribulation manna! Even I haven’t gotten a fourth-grade tribulation manna yet, but Her Eminence bestowed something like that to him so casually?”

Since when did the winner of the Human Branch’s faction battle get such a rich reward? How was this fair!? The three branches competed with each other for resources, and now there was someone else outside the system. He had guarded the eminent’s statue for twenty years, but she wouldn’t even take a look at him.

When Xuanyuan Yuheng thought of how he had lived all these years, he rejoiced when someone that looked like the statue finally appeared. But now everything was equivalent to a bucket of water pouring down his head.

“Your Eminence, I, Xuanyuan Yuheng, am your loyal believer. I’m even willing to offer my life and soul. I only hope that you can take a look at me, just one look!”

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Three papers appeared in Tianming’s hands, and they were introductions for the three tribulation manna. Looking through the introductions, Tianming narrowed his eyes into slits. “There’s a fourth-grade tribulation manna?”

He remembered that Feiling had said three third-grade tribulation manna. Tribulation manna was powerful, and lifebound beasts in the Empyrean Saint stage could only withstand second-grade tribulation manna at best. But Feiling had confidence in his lifebound beasts and gave him third-grade ones. But now, there was even a fourth-grade tribulation manna!

Because there’s a temporary shortage of third-grade tribulation manna? What kind of bullshit is that? Are you trying to kill my lifebound beasts on purpose? Tianming pondered. This should be handled by Xuanyuan Dao, the sect master of the Earth Branch.

Ying Huo and the rest could give it a try, if they were third-grade tribulation manna, and they would receive greater benefits if they succeed. But the fourth-grade manna was risky, and they might die. There were examples of failure in lifebound beasts’ evolutions, especially using tribulation manna because the power was intense.

“I wonder if Ling’er knows that Xuanyuan Dao gave me a fourth-grade tribulation manna,” Tianming muttered.

“Well, that doesn’t matter. We’re only using the tribulation manna to unlock the bloodline shackles, and the chance of us not being able to bear it is low,” said Ying Huo.

“This is a fourth-grade tribulation manna that we’re talking about. Are you sure?” Tianming asked.

“Of course. I’m the eldest, so I naturally have to take on the toughest one,” Ying Huo said while patting its chest.

“You’ve recovered from your injuries?”

“It’s been four days, and I’m mostly fine now.”

Tianming pondered briefly, then replied, “Let’s have Meow Meow and Lan Huang try with the third-grade tribulation manna first. You can take over if they can’t bear it, and we’ll get them to change the tribulation manna.”

“Sure.” Ying Huo nodded. This wasn’t a joke. They only had eighty-odd stars, and they were going to go for over three hundred, or even four hundred stars in one go. The evolution was too great.

“You’ll definitely benefit greatly if you manage to evolve. Especially you, Ying Huo,” Tianming laughed. He wasn’t afraid of a challenge.

“Ling’er is really a cash cow,” Ying Huo exclaimed.

“Yeah.” Tianming nodded.

“So are you still going with the ‘maid play?’”

“Get lost!”

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Tianming first took the third-grade tribulation manna out of the spatial ring. But how powerful was tribulation manna? It was something that had to be sealed in heavenly pattern formations! The three small formations were roughly twenty centimeters in diameter, and they were trembling!

One must know that most empyrean manna were dead objects, and they could only stir a mist in their surroundings at most. But the three tribulation manna were like three ferocious beasts charging around in the heavenly pattern formation, and Tianming could see the manna’s changes through the formation.

The tribulation manna on the left was black, and looked like a lightning beast. The one on the right was like a starry sky that shone brightly. Lastly, the one in the middle was like a ball of fire. While it blazed, it constantly released astral ki that caused the formation to violently tremble.

Tianming took out the three papers and made a comparison. His gaze fell onto lightning tribulation manna on the left. “The Shadowless Thundersoul can form ‘Myriad Electrode’ in the body to strengthen all lightning abilities. At the same time, it can grant lifebound beasts terrifying speed. Upon evolving, the lifebound beast’s speed will practically be unparalleled.

“Third-grade tribulation manna can further be categorized into ten levels. The Shadowless Thundersoul is the highest level, and it can grant a lifebound beast more than three hundred and ninety stars, close to tribulation beasts with four hundred stars,” Tianming sneered.

Even the third-grade tribulation manna was the best. Was Xuanyuan Dao trying to get on Feiling’s good side, or was he trying to kill Tianming’s lifebound beasts?

“I like this one!” Meow Meow’s eyes lit up.

“You want to be quick?” Tianming smiled.

“Of course!” Meow Meow replied.

“Your future wife might not be too happy about that,” Ying Huo chuckled.

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing. Hehe.”

Tianming knew that this tribulation manna was extremely suitable for Meow Meow, and the cat would become a speed demon if it succeeded. The Myriad Electrode could allow it to absorb more lightning and strengthen its abilities all around.

He then turned to the tribulation manna on the right. “The Infinite Stardragon Diagram. It can shroud a lifebound beast in the Infinite Stardragon Diagram, allowing it to use the power of stars to strengthen and defend itself.

“The planet represents a small world that was formed with the unity of mountains and rivers. The stars can gather to form a sea of stars, and they can transform into mountains and rivers. The lifebound beast would have a body like a sea of stars upon succeeding in its evolution.

“This tribulation manna is also one of the best, and it can also allow a lifebound beast to evolve into three hundred and ninety stars at the very least.” Lan Huang rejoiced when it heard Tianming reading out the introduction. It had been taking a beating frequently, and it was already yearning to have a more powerful body.

Lastly, Tianming’s gaze fell onto the fourth-grade tribulation manna. Its name was the Skypiercing Diablos Feather.

“It can transform all of the lifebound beast’s feathers into the feathers of Diablos. It’s solid and comes with skypiercer ki, which has a strong penetrative ability. It can even tear through the defenses of tribulation armor and snap tribulation weapons. Upon evolving, not only would a lifebound beast have a solid defense, but it could also pierce through flesh. Upon successful evolution, it can allow a lifebound beast to possess over four hundred and ten stars.” Just the description alone seemed terrifying.

“Skypiercer ki? Penetrative?” That was very important to Ying Huo. The Wings of Agni were too weak to deal with tribulation beasts, which affected Ying Huo’s execution of its ability. But if it was equipped with the Skypiercing Diablos Feather, then all the feathers in its body could be used as swords.

“Wow! I like that!” Ying Huo’s eyes glowed. Tianming and Ying Huo exchanged a glance, and they couldn’t help muttering at the same time, “It feels great being the eminent’s husband!”

Or rather, it felt great living off a woman. “Where can we find another wealthy woman like Ling’er in this world? No wonder Xuanyuan Yuheng was glaring at you earlier. He’s clearly jealous! Haha!”

According to their plan, Tianming had Meow Meow and Lan Huang try theirs first. He unlocked the heavenly pattern formations, which unleashed a terrifying aura from the tribulation manna. In that split second, all sorts of phenomena began converging.

Fortunately, not many people were nearby, or they would be startled by the commotion created by the tribulation manna. The one who sensed it clearest was Fang Xingying; he was startled while he was

cultivating, and he saw lightning and astral flares gathering in the mountain beside his. There also seemed to be two colossal beasts hovering in the air.

"Tribulation manna? Where'd he get them from?" He knew that Tianming's lifebound beasts were only empyrean beasts. "They must at least be third-grade tribulations manna for there to be such terrifying phenomena! Did the sect master of the Human Branch give them to him? Who the hell is he exactly!" Fang Xingying narrowed his eyes into slits. "Perhaps he might really be able to help me take revenge."

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Back at the Number One Pavilion, Tianming urged Meow Meow and Lan Huang to return. "Stop looking at it. Start devouring them and return to the lifebound space! Low profile, remember? We have to maintain a low profile!"

"Tianming, we know to keep a low profile. But why are you not keeping a low profile?" Ying Huo asked.

"That's because my strength doesn't allow me to!"

"You go in as well and keep watch on the two of them."

"What about you?"

"Me? I'll be going to the Heaven Cauldron."

Tianming opened the door, holding onto his fourth egg. He left the Number One Pavilion and looked at the Heaven Cauldron. The Heaven Cauldron was located at the center of Taiji Peak Lake, and was easy to find.

Chapter 623 - Poet, Ouyang Jianwang

Half a day later, Tianming finally found the entrance of the Heaven Branch. The branch itself was sealed off with a top-tier heavenly pattern formation, forbidding entrance by anyone aside from disciples or seniors of the Heaven Branch. The sole entrance was called the Heaven Dao Gate.

Tianming, as a disciple of the Earth Branch, had no right to enter, so he raised the faction lord's emblem.

"You can only go to the Heaven Cauldron after going inside. If you go anywhere else and end up offending disciples of the Heaven Branch, nobody will care even if you get yourself killed," said a senior by the gate.

"Understood."

It was only after coming to the Heaven Branch that Tianming realized that the Earth Branch was far inferior; even though the Heaven Branch was such a small area, it held more than three hundred spiritual energy springs.

"Damn, the spiritual energy in the surroundings feels like it's pouring down like rain."

It almost seemed a little foggy everywhere they looked. However, Tianming could still see a tall mountain in the distance, atop which stood a large black cauldron. That was none other than the Heaven Cauldron. He began making his way there immediately.

"Isn't that a little too big?" Tianming said, noticing its gigantic proportions the closer he was to it. It was no wonder that it could store so many spirit hazards. The mountain was called Heaven Sacred Mountain. When he finally climbed it and reached the bottom of the cauldron, he felt an ancient and powerful aura coming from it.

"I wouldn't be surprised if this was a divine artifact." The Old Deepstar Path was one such artifact as well.

There were countless engravings on top of the cauldron, depicting many different lifelike beastmasters and lifebound beasts. It was probably depicting a battle. Tianming could even feel the atmosphere of the battlefield with a single glance.

"Who's fighting against who?" He couldn't really tell; while the beastmasters and lifebound beasts were quite clearly depicted, their opponents were shrouded in a kind of black mist, seemingly blurred in comparison, though Tianming could still feel a hint of fear.

He looked down and saw many layers of heavenly pattern formations surrounding the way into the mountain.

"I guess the entirety of Heaven Sacred Mountain is filled with such formations. The Archaionfiend Eye is definitely within!" Tianming felt his head hurt from the troubles that were to come. "I might be able to break through the formations with my black arm, but there seems to be too many. Not to mention, what happens if I cause a commotion and get discovered? If somebody is guarding the space, won't I be walking into a trap by going straight in?"

He decided that there were too many unknowns about obtaining the eye, so he couldn't be reckless yet.

"I only have one chance and I must make sure that everything is perfect. I should only act when I'm fully familiar with the heavenly pattern formations in this mountain, as well as the Heaven Cauldron."

There were many powerful samsarans in the Heaven Branch, so it would be too eye-catching for an empyrean saint like him to be here. He wouldn't be able to so much as walk around without being scrutinized, to say nothing of taking the Archaionfiend Eye.

"This won't be easy." He had long known that the assignment that Li Muyang had given him wouldn't be something as easy as sneaking into the place, taking the eye, and slipping out again. "I suppose I'll just dip my toes in for today."

The only way for him to sneak in to steal the eye was if he was completely familiar with the situation, including the place's conditions as well as where everyone would be at all times. If he stumbled into a place where he wasn't supposed to be, he would most likely be killed straight away.

"I should be patient." He turned his sights back to the Heaven Cauldron. Countless types of spirit hazards were stored within it. It was a place for disciples of the Heaven Branch to cultivate body refining techniques. Tianming put the colorful egg in his hand back into his lifebound space and prepared to make his way up.

At that moment, countless seething glares came from behind him. He turned back to look and saw six disciples from the Heaven Branch standing ten meters away.

"I didn't think that I wouldn't notice them until they were so close to me!" It went without saying that these disciples from the Heaven Branch were incredibly powerful. Tianming could tell with a single glance that the youth standing in the middle of the group was proud and domineering. He had a head of colorful hair and a piercing gaze, instantly allowing Tianming to identify him as the most spoiled brat of the bunch. The youth's eyes practically spelled lawlessness.

"Fang Xingque?" Tianming said without a hint of fear, narrowing his gaze.

"Oh, you know who I am?" Fang Xingque said, a little surprised.

"Everyone in the Archaion Sect knows you. You're really famous!" Tianming said with a smile.

"You seem to have a pleasant mouth." Fang Xingque exchanged glances with those around him and laughed, then continued, "so what's an empyrean saint like you doing in the Heaven Branch?"

"Stop putting out that act. I'm sure you know me and have seen how I beat up the other disciples from the Sterling House of Fang. Sounds like you're throwing a tantrum over it."

The atmosphere instantly grew cold. All the other disciples beside Fang Xingque were also members of the Sterling House of Fang, elite ones in fact. However, they seem to be rather listless right now.

"You are the bravest person I've ever met," said one of them.

"Wow, you actually dared to snap back at Xingque. Impressive," said another.

Fang Xingque himself remained stunned for a good moment before he broke out in laughter. "Go, go, one of you. Cut his hand off and pull out his tongue. Then, pluck out all of his teeth and even his eyes. Bring them back to this young master. I'll show him who I am," he said, his shoulders shaking from the laughter.

"Let me do it," said a man clad in green.

Tianming, however, had a really powerful bodyguard and wasn't the least bit afraid. As far as he was concerned, all he had to do was to bring up 'Her Eminence' and nobody in the Archaion Sect would cause him trouble.

But just as his enemies were about to approach, a beam of sword ki shot down from the top of the Heaven Cauldron.

"Aaaagh!" cried the man who tried to approach, his palm pierced through by the sword ki, revealing a bloody hole.

"Stop messing around in my turf and scram!" said a drunken, but domineering voice.

Fang Xingque started and said, "Understood, Tribulation Elder Ouyang." Turning to Tianming, he said, "You were lucky this time, but you'll never be able to leave the Heaven Cauldron for the rest of your life. Hahaha..."

"You're too rambunctious. You must've been brought up rather badly," Tianming said.

"Is that an insult against my father and seniors that I hear?" Fang Xingque seemed to be ruffled up again.

Tianming looked at his colorful hair and beautiful, rainbow colored robes that appeared to be made of many different feathers. It looked like a top grade defensive tribulation artifact.

"I have a poem for you. Listen up," he said.

"A cultured one, are you? Out with it. I'll give it a listen."

Tianming smiled and said, "Chicken-feathered robes, a Brave of Heaven Branch wears, breath of irony."
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Everyone fell silent again.

"Wonderful poem! Wonderful indeed!" said a voice from the top of the Heaven Cauldron, followed by applause. The clapping of hands felt like slaps on Fang Xingque's face.

The other disciples couldn't help but take a look at his feathered robes. Though they were about to burst out laughing, they forced themselves to stay silent, afraid of offending Fang Xingque.

They watched as Fang Xingque clenched both his fists and glared at Tianming. He felt like he had never been so angered in his whole life.

"Do you not care about losing your life at all?" Fang Xingque said in a hoarse voice.

"Stop exaggerating. You already want to kill me, so why should I bother being polite to you? Just scurry away and stop embarrassing yourself. I'm sure that a braindead scion like you must've been babied all your life. You should learn some dignity from Xuanyuan Yuheng, understood?" Tianming mocked.

"Good, very good, very very good," Fang Xingque said as he chuckled uncontrollably.

"It was nice meeting you, too. Have a good day," Tianming casually said as he waved in annoyance and flew up toward the Heaven Cauldron, leaving Fang Xingque and the rest flabbergasted.

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Come to think of it, the height of the Heaven Cauldron seemed to be beyond five hundred meters. It was quite a strain for Tianming to fly so high, but he kept on.

"What's this?" he said, continuing to look at the blurry depictions of the so-called enemies. Soon, he reached the top of the cauldron.

There was an old man in tattered clothing in front of him, lying on top of a sword as he poured wine into his mouth from a gigantic wine pot. "So you like to make poems too, young man?" he finally said after finishing his large gulp, face completely flushed.

"Tribulation Elder, I am but an amateur. My understanding of poetry can't even begin to be compared to yours. The legendary poem 'Of Swords and Wine' is a timeless classic that stands out among the rest," Tianming respectfully said.

Before he'd come, he had asked his neighbor, Fang Xingying, about the Heaven Cauldron, and learned about this person, the guardian of the Heaven Cauldron, Ouyang Jianwang. He was one of the three tribulation elders that stood at the top of the sect. There weren't many of them in the entire sect. When Feiling had returned as their goddess, Ouyang Jianwang was among those there.

While he was an unparalleled expert in the way of the sword, he wasn't a member of the Draconis House of Jian, having started from humble beginnings. In his youth, he was a legendary figure in the Archaion Sect that had made his way from the Human Branch all the way to the Heaven Branch. Jianwang, or, 'sword king', wasn't his real name, but more and more people called him that to the point that they had forgotten his actual name.

The man watched Tianming as he respectfully greeted him. He definitely knew that he was the one Feiling had brought back as a 'disciple'. "You have potential, young one. You have a good eye for these things, too. When I get back, I should test out my poetry and alcohol tolerance against yours."

"I might not be a good partner to test against, but I'll be glad to receive any guidance, Tribulation Elder."

"Alright, on your way now."

Tianming almost cursed out loud from the sudden change in attitude. He bid Ouyang Jianwang farewell and looked ahead at the sword ki pool that was several times the size of the one he had seen before. Though, it didn't only contain sword ki, but many other spirit hazards as well. It was a true sea of spirit hazards, having a mixture of fire, lightning, wind, ice, water, metal, and many other types of spirit hazards together, forming a rather terrifying sight.

"This looks much scarier than the sword ki pool...." Even the spirit hazards on the top layer had tens of saintly heavenly patterns, with some even reaching a hundred.

Without saying anything else, Tianming directly stepped into the pool and almost immediately felt the spirit hazards tearing at his flesh. It was so painful that his teeth chattered.

"I heard that it's only going to get far worse down there. Spirit hazards with tribulation patterns are much deeper."

He continued sinking even deeper. "Is there anything you need here, little friend?"

The colorful egg in his lifebound space rolled around excitedly, much to Tianming's joy. He immediately sank even deeper and eventually saw tribulation spirit hazards when he reached a thick layer of black flame.

The moment he touched it, he screamed in pain. Even his Aeternal Infernal Body charred at a visible rate when burned by it. It was among the most painful sensations that he had ever felt.

"Did you come here to kill yourself? Why did you dare to resist a tribulation spirit hazard without an empyrean gold body?" said another Heaven Branch disciple in the distance in disbelief.

Tianming also noticed the problem. He couldn't take it at all. "Fourth, how deep is the spirit hazard you need?"

The egg merely rolled around, unable to communicate.

"It said it's at the bottom," Ying Huo said.

"All the way to the bottom?!" Tianming nervously said. "I'm only a third of the way down and can't continue beyond the tribulation spirit hazard. Won't the one at the bottom burn me up completely?"

"Can't you just hide in Prime Tower and let it sink?"

"That won't work. First, I still won't be able to go out. Second, I need to engage in symbiotic cultivation with Fourth, so my body must be able to take it or problems will arise. Now that my stage is much higher, it won't be as easy for Fourth to reach the Emyrean Saint stage right away. It'll be much harder than before," Tianming said, troubled.

"Then what can we do?" Ying Huo asked.

"Well, based on the fact that we're only a third of the way down and the spirit hazards will only become even more powerful the deeper we go, the ones at the very bottom must have quite a few tribulation patterns. My guess is that as long as I can reach the fourth level of the Emyrean Saint stage and use a good body refining technique, it might just work. It must at least be better than the Invincible Sword Body. That technique is no longer as good as what we have here. I wonder how long it'll take me to be able to reach the bottom."

"Damn, so we still have to wait after all," Ying Huo said, consoling the colorful little egg.

"Of course. Did you think raising you guys is easy?" Tianming had no choice but to leave for now. "It's fine. If Fourth needs a powerful tribulation spirit hazard, that means it's very powerful. It will no doubt be of great help when it is born."

"I guess we have no choice, my poor little girl." Ying Huo continued stroking the egg, which seemed to jump and angrily knock Ying Huo on the head before scurrying away.

"Hey, it's not my fault, you know!"

"Haha, Ying Huo, you'd better be prepared. If it dares to hit you before it's even hatched, you might have some tough days to come," Tianming joked.

"Well, we can always talk this out, can't we? Can't you slow down your training? We'll let it hatch later," Ying Huo whispered, then felt another hard bump on the back of his head.

Ying Huo rolled around the ground in pain, on the verge of tears.

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"Goodbye, Tribulation Elder," Tianming respectfully said.

"Kid, remember to come back for a poetry battle with me," Ouyang Jianwang said.

"I wouldn't dare," Tianming said, before he hurried away.

"I have to find a way to get a powerful body refining technique!" He knew that trying to hatch the fourth egg was bound to be a huge challenge. He returned to the Earth Branch after leaving through the Heaven Dao Gate and headed to the Number One Pavilion.

Meanwhile, hidden in the snowy wilderness, a few people suddenly appeared, among them Fang Xingque. "My friends, the show is about to begin. Let's have lots of fun!"

1. A senryu 5-7-5 poem I wrote [the literal translation wouldn't be particularly poetic]

Chapter 624 - Blazing Fast Cat

The six of them, led by Fang Xingque, were all powerful disciples of the Heaven Branch. Any one of them would be able to prance about unobstructed in the Earth Branch.

"Isn't it embarrassing for Heaven Branch disciples like you to lay out in the wild waiting for me?" Tianming said, not the least bit panicked.

"Now that's weird. Don't you know that the appropriate reaction right now is to plead in fear? Li Tianming, you must've led a life without any hardships up to now," Fang Xingque said.

"You think I'm scared of a chicken like you? Well, I might just be if you squawk a few more times."

With Fang Xingque's high status and pride, he definitely wasn't the kind of person who could stand being provoked. He would definitely lose if he got into fights off insults with Tianming. Since his birth, he had been praised to the high heavens. Nobody had ever used such horrendous words to describe his appearance, though he didn't give up. Instead, he was so mad that he breathed furiously. His other five pals were also glaring at Tianming.

"Die!" Fang Xingque said as his face contorted. He had wanted to slowly torture Tianming until he died, but now he couldn't wait a second longer. From a few hundred meters away, he turned into a rainbow-colored blur as he charged at breakneck speed. As far as he was concerned, Tianming was as good as dead.

However, a little black cat appeared in Tianming's hands. It seemed harmless, with big blue eyes that accentuated its cuteness on top of the little tongue, nose, and beanie paws. Its claws were red and its teeth were pretty rainbows, making it seem rather weak.

Fang Xingque seemed to remember that this was one of Tianming's lifebound beasts. With a bright, blood-colored flash, a lightning bolt shot out of the black cat's eyes at him. He smiled and easily evaded it, but he wasn't expecting the bolt of lightning to suddenly turn back and strike him in his neck. "Ugh!"

It was Soulchasing Hellthunder. Once it entered his body, the lightning bolts spread throughout his veins and wreaked damage all across his body, instantly paralyzing him. The pain he felt in his organs was mortifying. However, the attack wasn't able to truly harm him, thanks to his powerful bloodline, though it did slow him down. The pain felt just like a venomous insect squirming inside his body.

How could his lifebound beast's ability be so powerful?!

Fang Xingque's eyes widened when he suddenly saw the sheer number of stars inside the black cat's eyes. The small eyes made the stars look even smaller, but the eyesight of a samsaran could easily see that the black cat had close to four hundred stars!

That can't be right! That cat was only an empyrean saint beast during the faction battles! Not even my lifebound beast has that many stars, and that's after Granny spent so much time finding me tribulation manna!

Fang Xingque couldn't believe what he was seeing, which only slowed him down even more. Just then, the little black cat turned into a mist of black smoke before his eyes. All of a sudden, a ferocious

presence filled the atmosphere as black thunderclouds gathered overhead. A gigantic feline beast with blood-red eyes towered before him.

Fang Xingque could finally see the proper number of stars: three hundred and ninety-seven! It was really close to four hundred! The beleaguered young master could feel the countless electrodes within the beast's body, each one containing limitless lightning.

The huge beast roared loudly at him, causing thunder and lightning to go wild. Countless bolts of black lightning struck the ground, causing an avalanche. Fang Xingque quickly jumped into the sky and saw Tianming sitting on the back of his lifebound beast.

Tianming turned back and saw him. "Chicken, if you aren't happy being called that, try and chase me down! If you can't, you're my grandson!"

The others paled at that remark; Fang Xingque's grandmother was actually Fang Qingli of the Godservant Hall. How could Tianming proclaim to be his grandfather? Not to mention, Fang Xingque's father was the sect master of the Heaven Branch, Fang Taiqing, and an important figure in the Archaion Sect. Thus, Tianming's words were akin to the most blasphemous of insults! However, Fang Xingque wouldn't wait for his seniors to punish Tianming for him; he wanted to do it himself, slowly enjoying the process.

"You think you can run?" he spat as he charged, eyes bloodshot. The other disciples of the Heaven Branch quickly followed behind.

"Meow Meow, let these Heaven Branch disciples see how truly fast the Shadowless Thundersoul is."

Meow Meow's evolution had succeeded. Though its appearance didn't seem to have changed much, being about the same in its Regal Chaosfiend form, it did seem to be more or less a yet to mature tribulation beast. The greatest change was within its body, where there were an additional ten thousand electrodes, allowing it to store lots of lightning and convert it into chaos lightning, which could exponentially increase the power of its abilities.

At the same time, the Shadowless Thundersoul caused electric paths to manifest thanks to Myriad Electrodes, increasing its speed to terrifying levels. Even though it was only a level one empyrean saint beast, not even a samsaran like Fang Xingque could catch up. Tianming gripped its fur tightly as they vanished beyond the horizon. His hair fluttered amidst the thunderclouds as icy-cold droplets of rain pelted his face.

"So? Am I fast?" Meow Meow asked excitedly. It had mischievously stopped and waited for Fang Xingque to catch up, only to speed up again right before being caught, leaving him firmly in the dust.

"That's amazing. I hereby proclaim you the Blazing Fast Cat!" Tianming said as he turned back and saw Fang Xingque loudly screaming like an enraged c.o.c.kerel.

"I still can't match up to him in combat right now, but I managed to leave him in the dust all the same. If it weren't for Ling'er, I would really have to submit myself to him or I wouldn't be able to survive," he said with a forlorn expression.

Fang Xingque and the rest were still cursing at him from behind.

"Hey, grandson, stop chasing your grandpa. I have no money for you. Don't be mad! If you want milk, go suck on Granny's milkers!" Tianming took the chance to vent his frustration towards Fang Qingli.

Fang Xingque was so mad that he spat blood and crashed into a giant boulder. "If I don't kill you in this life, Li Tianming, I swear not to reincarnate as a human in my next life!"

"These people have issues. They need to see a shrink."

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This had been the most exciting day in all sixteen years of Fang Xingque's life. He was so angry that he was practically bleeding from his orifices. When Tianming was gone, he knelt on the ground and started bawling his eyes out.

"Xingque, this...."

"I'll kill him! I'll wipe out his entire extended family!"

"He seems to have a powerful backing. Even his lifebound beast has three hundred and ninety-seven stars, far more than yours!"

"I don't care! If I can't kill him, I'll get Grandmother to do it! If she won't do it, I'll kill myself and end our lineage with me! She won't have a choice!" Fang Xingque smashed the ground nonstop in a rage.

The other disciples of the Sterling House of Fang merely watched. It started with no grudges at all, yet it turned out like this. The two of them were far too stubborn and neither would let off, causing the situation to escalate out of control. Everyone knew how much Fang Qingli spoiled her precious grandson. Otherwise he wouldn't be behaving in such a manner.

"Don't tell my dad about this, got it?" he said, glaring at the rest like a fierce wolf.

"Yeah." They simply nodded.

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Tianming eventually made his way back to the Number One Pavilion. "Even though I didn't get much today, I at least know my next goal. I have to reach the fourth level and get a good body refining technique so that Fourth can hatch as soon as possible. Also, I need to check out the Archaionfiend Eye more often. Perhaps Ouyang Jianwang knows something about it. I should try to get him to reveal something about it if I have a chance."

"Yahoo!" Meow Meow was still zipping about the snowy landscape, trying to test the limits of its newfound speed. A black lightning bolt could be seen zipping left and right, leaving a lot of sparks behind.

"Its actual body is much faster than its Regal Chaosfiend form!" Tianming exclaimed. As expected of a top grade level three tribulation manna. If Meow Meow could grow so fast, he couldn't wait to see what the other two would be able to achieve. Meow Meow had been the fastest to evolve. It said that the process was quite painful, reaching seventy percent of the threshold of its tolerance.

"I guess that's an acceptable risk. I wouldn't let Ying Huo attempt this if it was at eighty percent."

Tianming finally agreed to let Ying Huo refine the Skypiercing Diablos Feather to start its evolution process.

"This might push Ying Huo to its limits." Tianming had Meow Meow return to his lifebound space to watch over Ying Huo, as he felt rather uneasy about it.

Just as Ying Huo started, Lan Huang successfully evolved. Tianming went to the hot springs outside and let it out; no building would be large enough to contain it.

Chapter 625 - Complete Power Up

With a loud wham, a gigantic beast appeared in front of Tianming. He had to look up so far that his neck almost snapped. The strong sun after the snowstorm made him a little dazed.

"Swimming!" Lan Huang said before it jumped into the hot spring, only to cause such a big splash that all the water from the hot spring was emptied out.

"Huh? Why'd the pool turn into a puddle?" Lan Huang asked in a booming voice, turning its two heads around curiously.

"That's because you grew bigger...."

Tianming felt even more troubled; Lan Huang was far too huge. How could a tribulation beast that wasn't even mature yet, with only three hundred and ninety-four stars, be close to Fang Qingli's phoenix in size? He recalled her phoenix had almost eight hundred stars.

"It wouldn't surprise me if Lan Huang's within the largest size class of lifebound beasts in the whole sect, perhaps even the largest in the entire Flameyellow Continent!"

That difference was far too stark; Meow Meow and Ying Huo were no doubt among the smallest, and were even more dwarfed by Lan Huang. Tianming estimated the distance from its head to tail was two hundred and fifty meters, with the tail itself taking up half that distance.

"Dang, even this fool's length matches that 'lucky number'!" [1]

Tianming couldn't help but give him a beating. The hot spring he had wanted to bathe in with Feiling was ruined when it jumped in.

He closely observed the changes that weren't just limited to its size; the most obvious was the change in its draconic scales. The scales in the sea and on the mountains on its back as well as on its heads, claws, and tails seemed to shine with an astral l.u.s.ter. It was almost like someone had plastered a star map all over it. The stars were so dense that they could be seen everywhere on its body. No doubt, Lan Huang's defensive power had risen even more thanks to the stars fusing into its body.

"Let me test out your defenses then."

"Boss! Don't go too hard... I'm scared of pain!"

"Just shut up!" Tianming slashed with the Grand-Orient Sword, only to hear a loud clang. The instant of the clash, Tianming saw that the stars all across its body gathered at the point of the strike. Not only had it blocked the attack, it even managed to deflect it.

"Waaah! It hurts!" Lan Huang screamed at ludicrous volumes.

"Keep quiet..." Tianming didn't know how to respond. There wasn't a single wound on it. Even though I didn't use much power, it still managed to block the Grand-Orient Sword. With its size, most people shouldn't be able to pierce its Infinite Stardragon Diagram. Lan Huang can finally fulfill its true calling as a damage sponge!

"Wow, I look handsome!" Lan Huang had just noticed the sparkles all over its tails. All of a sudden, its eyes widened. "I wonder if I can bite my tails?"

It then started chasing its tails in circles, causing many buildings in the surroundings to shake and begin toppling over.

"Stop! Stop!" Tianming had run out of tears to cry. These three are all fools... I hope the fourth one will be kind to me...

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Since Ying Huo might need more time for its evolution, Tianming left the Number One Pavilion and went to the Human Branch alone.

"Faction Lord, I'm your fan!"

"You're so handsome, faction lord!"

Tianming had become quite a celebrity in the Human Branch. He returned to his previous residence and knocked on Lin Xiaoxiao's door.

"Xiaoxiao," he called out.

There was no response. He opened the door and was speechless when he saw her shriveled on the ground unconscious, with her face pale.

"Other people feel refreshed after breaking through, yet you look like you're about to die from it...."

He picked her up and put her over his shoulder before preparing to return to Number One Pavilion.

"Nice to meet you and your lady, Lord!" a disciple of the Swordking Faction greeted.

Tianming had considerably improved their lives and was now their faction lord, though they still addressed Jian Xueyi in that manner too.

"Hey, phrasing," Tianming said, not wanting to be misunderstood.

"Apologies. Good day, Faction Lord, Faction Lady!"

He was speechless.

"Why don't you princess carry her? It looks like you're carrying a bag of rice."

Tianming couldn't take it any more and summoned Meow Meow, put Lin Xiaoxiao on its back, and had it zip away at lightning speeds. When he was about to enter the Earth Branch, the guard asked, "Isn't this

inappropriate? You knocked her out and want to make her your maidservant by force? How are you different from a thug?"

Tianming showed him the Human Sacred Seal.

"Fine, here's a servant emblem. Go on your way."

When Tianming got back, Lin Xiaoxiao suddenly awoke. She seemed a little nervous, but calmed down when she saw him. "Where are we?"

"The Earth Branch."

"I shouldn't be able to enter as a disciple of the Human Branch, though...."

"You can now that you're my maidservant. Serve me, do my laundry, and feed my pets and you'll get the right to live here. Here's your emblem. I already got it settled for you."

"Forget it!" She felt really humiliated.

"Hehe, you can never escape my grasp. Submit to your fate!"

She stared at him in abject horror.

"Come on, it's just a joke. I offended some people, so I was worried you'd be dragged in. Might as well follow where I go. I have many rooms here, so pick one."

"Okay, I'll go look for a room."

"Don't go back to the Human Branch for the time being."

"Got it."

"What level are you at?"

"The fourth."

"It looks like you'll die if you keep on going like this."

"Worried about me?"

"Nope."

"Then don't bring it up."

"Well aren't you a feisty one?"

She glared at him and turned to leave. She hadn't been going to the Old Deepstar Path lately. In fact, she had stayed home for the most part. Tianming figured that the lifebound beast of hers had some special method she could use to break through.

"Meow Meow, your mission is to watch her and listen to what she usually says," Tianming instructed.

"No! It messes with my sleep schedule!" it snapped, shaking its head furiously.

"Would you rather have your balls messed with?!"

"You think you can catch me now?" the black cat snickered.

"Dammit, you're disobeying me now?!" Just as Tianming wanted to grab it, it vanished.

It seemed that cats didn't have owners, only butlers, and it applied all the same to Meow Meow. He could only count on Ying Huo to act as a spy.

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A day later, Ying Huo finally finished evolving after struggling for quite some time in the lifebound space. The moment it flew out, the surrounding temperature rose. If it weren't for its small size, Tianming would have thought he was facing some kind of great beast.

Outwardly, it hadn't seemed to change much, but Tianming could feel that its feathers were now on a completely different level. They were now Diablos feathers that burned like molten steel. Not only were they hot, they also contained Skypiercer Ki that could cause pain just from the sight of them. The dense Diablos feathers covered its entire body, making it impenetrable, while the ones on its wings were sharp as swords. Coupled with the Wings of Agni, they could even rival tribulation artifacts in sharpness.

There was no doubt that Ying Huo was far stronger than before. It was particularly terrifying to imagine how much more powerful its Skyscorch Featherblast would be. With its small body, it would even excel at assassinations. While it was small, its defense could rival Lan Huang's. The only disadvantage was that it didn't occupy a lot of space, making it less useful for blocking attacks. Regardless, being small allowed it to remain in hiding, making it even more terrifying especially considering it could execute battle arts.

Tianming counted four hundred and eighteen stars in its eyes. Now, all three of his lifebound beasts had evolved. "Let's test out your Skypiercer Ki."

"Don't cry if it hurts too much. I don't want Xiaoxiao to think I'm bullying you," Ying Huo said sneakily.

"Haha, hit this spot," Tianming said as he pointed at his black arm. He would never actually take an attack from Skypiercer Ki using his own flesh.

Ying Huo then thrust at the arm, causing it to shake furiously.

"That was intense!" Not even Xuanyuan Yufeng's Dragonking spear, with two tribulation patterns, had that kind of effect. When Ying Huo got an empyrean gold body and reached the Samsara stage, the penetrative power of its Skypiercer Ki would be even more powerful.

"Haha, praise me more!" Every time it evolved, the bloodline in Tianming's body improved. His body was one that combined the strengths of all three Primordial Chaos Beasts.

They quickly started symbiotic cultivation to fuse the Aeternal Infernal, Genesis Chaos, and Primordial Terraqua Bodies together. It also considerably elevated their bloodlines. This time around, Tianming had gained quite a lot; he could tell that his constitution and talent had greatly increased.

"The talent coming from having Primordial Chaos Beasts is truly well rounded. I feel that all my attributes have been rather evenly boosted. On the other hand, the talent from my Lifesbane mainly comes in the form of excellent comprehension."

Tianming now felt as if he himself had become a Primordial Chaos Beast. The next day, all of them reached second-level empyrean saint.

"Two more levels to go." Tianming was filled with confidence.

1. 250 is a Chinese slang that can also mean 'fool'.

Chapter 626 - Legend of the Ancient Deepstar Godbody

"I probably won't be able to reach the bottom of the Heaven Cauldron by relying on the empyrean gold body alone. I need a powerful body-refining battle art. The Invincible Sword Body doesn't strengthen my physique, so I need something similar to Xuanyuan Yufeng's Onyx Draconian Art." Tianming recalled how powerful Xuanyuan Yufeng's physique was when he transformed into an Onyx Draconian.

"Ling'er already gave me the tribulation manna, so it's not appropriate for me to ask her for stuff. I've already caused some uncertainties with the tribulation manna, so I should keep a low profile." Tianming stood up and went to take a look. He had already settled Lin Xiaoxiao.

"I'll be going out. Remember to clean the place up. It's been a long time since anyone stayed here," Tianming instructed.

"Got it," Lin Xiaoxiao replied obediently.

"Be meticulous about it, alright?"

"Yes, Young Master." Lin Xiaoxiao was practically gnashing her teeth when she said those words.

"Hey, you look pretty cute when you're angry." Tianming left the Number One Pavilion for the mountain next door, where Fang Xingying was cultivating.

"What's the matter?" Fang Xingying came out of the corner and looked at Tianming indifferently.

"Where can I find a good body-refining battle art?" Tianming asked. He had been progressing swiftly. Just as he got familiar with the Human Branch, he had already come to the Earth Branch, and Fang Xingying was the only person he knew here.

"You can find it in the Tririgin Hall. There's Tririgin Halls in the Earth and Heaven Branches. You can buy samsara body-refining battle arts as long as you have money, or take missions like hunting beasts or guarding the borders and hunting fugitives," said Fang Xingying.

"I can spend money to buy them in Tririgin Hall?" Tianming remembered that he could only exchange for battle arts in the Human Branch through official channels, and he couldn't buy them with money.

"Of course. Do you have tribulation crystals?"

"Nope." Tianming had already used up all the pocket money Feiling had given him. The assassin had appeared before he could even take more, and Tianming lost his opportunity to contact Feiling.

"Then do you have contributions?" Fang Xingying asked.

"I didn't have time for that."

"Then what the hell are you asking for?" Fang Xingying smiled.

“There aren’t any free ones available?” Tianming asked.

“Do you want empyrean saint battle arts? I can give you two.”

“No thanks. They’re too weak for me.”

“Then there’s nothing I can do to help,” Fang Xingying replied.

“Think about it again and see if I can obtain peerless battle arts by being handsome alone,” Tianming said with a smile.

“There is one place.”

“Where is it?”

“In your dreams.”

“Bah. I’ll be going now.” Tianming turned around and left.

“Oh, I did think of one place that’s free,” Fang Xingying suddenly said.

“Go on.”

“The Deepstar Pool is opening soon, and there’s two places available this time. The Deepstar Battlefield will open the day after tomorrow, and you’ll be able to enter the Deepstar Pool to cultivate the Ancient Deepstar Godbody if you can obtain a place. The Ancient Deepstar Godbody is the strongest body-refining battle art in the Archaion Sect. It’s the Archaion Sect’s signature art. It’s famous, one of the Nine Pinnacle Battle Physiques in the world,” said Fang Xingying.

“What? Slow down. There’s too much information. Firstly, what’s the Deepstar Pool?” Tianming immediately went into the details when he heard of the Ancient Deepstar Godbody.

“The Old Deepstar Path’s core, where the astralsources are born.”

“What’s the astralsource?”

“It’s something strange. It has the power of tribulation patterns and spirit hazards, along with the essence and appearance of spirit ores. People call it a combination between spirit hazards and spirit ores. The Ancient Deepstar Godbody’s fundamentals are to absorb the astralsources into the body and forge the physique into an astral body.

“Upon greater mastery, you can even pluck the stars out of the sky and travel through outer space. You can even control the Deepstar Pool to become the master of the Old Deepstar Path! The strength of the Ancient Deepstar Godbody depends on how many astralsources you absorb. The astralsource is limited, which is why there’s only two spots every time.” Fang Xingying explained.

“So powerful? I can even fly to the stars upon greater mastery?” Tianming asked.

“Those are just legends. How should I know if it’s true?” Fang Xingying replied.

“How is it compared to the Hexapath Samsara Sword?”

“They’re not of the same kind. One is an ordinary battle art, while the other is a body-refining battle art. But they’re equally powerful,” said Fang Xingying.

“Okay, I’ve decided to get that. How do I get a spot?” Tianming asked.

Fang Xingying did not reply but held back his laughter.

“What are you laughing about?” Tianming asked.

“I’m just joking with you. It’s impossible for you to participate because the registration is already closed. Furthermore, it’s limited to those under the age of twenty. You’re already overaged, right?”

“When’s the deadline? Where do I register?” Tianming asked urgently.

“Sourceglow Hall. Look for the palace lord to register. But the registry closed before the Human Branch’s faction battle. The Deepstar Battlefield will open the day after tomorrow, and there’ll be at least twenty thousand people entering,” said Fang Xingying.

“Holy shit! How unlucky!” Tianming felt terrible that he couldn’t catch up to this wave.

“Speaking of which, you can just get the sect master of the Human Branch to add you in. He’s not giving you a spot, and registering is nothing for someone of his status,” said Fang Xingying.

“You’re right.” Tianming didn’t even need Jian Wuyi’s help.

“But you’re already overaged, and it won’t be easy to handle that. If that wasn’t the case, then even those in the Samsara stage can participate in it, and they’d definitely take it. I’m afraid that not even the sect master of the Human Branch can help you resolve the issue of your age,” said Fang Xingying.

“How is age determined?” Tianming asked. He had hidden his real age before in the Grand-Orient Sect, and no one knew exactly how old he was in the Decimo Dao Palace.

“The Sourceglow Hall has a heavenly pattern formation to test the age of your bones. There’s no way you can fake it,” Fang Xingying replied.

“Oh.” Tianming wanted to give it a try because he had the Aeonic Grandbane, not to mention that he also had a unique physique. So he wouldn’t know how old he actually was unless he tested it. With that, he turned around and left.

“Hey, you’re really going?” Fang Xingying asked in a daze.

“Yeah.”

“I’ll be honest with you. You shouldn’t bother wasting your time.”

“Why?”

“The Deepstar Pool’s quotas are prepared for talented Heaven Branch disciples. Earth Branch disciples are just there to make up numbers. Twenty thousand people going after two places, do you have any idea how difficult it’ll be? In the Archaion Sect’s history, there were only three times where Earth Branch disciples obtained the spots...” said Fang Xingying.

“You’re saying that they’re reserved for people like Fang Xingque?” Tianming turned around.

“That’s right. He’s only sixteen, and he’s one of the popular candidates to get a spot. But there’s many Samsara stage disciples under the age of twenty in the Heaven Branch. In terms of strength, Fang Xingque can only be ranked in the top ten,” said Fang Xingying.

“No worries. It doesn’t hurt for me to give it a try,” said Tianming. He was still under the impression that he would be in the Earth Branch for a long time. But he didn’t expect that he would be facing Heaven Branch’s geniuses the day after tomorrow. After all, those people represented this continent’s elites!

“That’s normal. Everyone has the same thoughts as you,” said Fang Xingying.

“Do you have any other ideas?” Tianming asked.

“Nope.”

“See you later then.”

.....

There weren’t many people in Sourceglow Hall since the registration had ended. Tianming came in and looked for Gou Yuqiu.

“What are you doing here again?” Gou Yuqiu asked.

“Palace Lord, I’d like to participate in the ‘Battle of Deepstar,’” Tianming said straightforwardly.

“The registration is already over,” said Gou Yuqiu.

“The sect master of the Human Branch asked me to participate,” Tianming took out the Human Sacred Seal.

“Okay. Go test your age. It’ll break the rules if you’re overage, and even the Human Sacred Seal will be useless,” said Gou Yuqiu.

Tianming guessed that this old woman’s status wasn’t low, and she was probably a tribulation elder. After all, everyone else knelt when they saw the Human Sacred Seal.

“Where do I take the test?”

“That room over there.”

Tianming entered and found himself in a spherical space. When he stepped in, the heavenly patterns began burrowing deep into his bones. Not long later, a total of twenty heavenly patterns appeared on the screen.

“Twenty years old. Count yourself lucky,” said Gou Yuqiu.

Tianming immediately rejoiced when he heard that. “As expected, my body grew younger due to the Aeonic Grandbane. But it’s probably also related to the Primordial Chaos Beasts’ bloodline.”

He immediately looked at Gou Yuqiu and asked, “Then, was my registration successful?”

“It’s done. Head to the Abyssal Battlefield with everyone else the day after tomorrow and wait for the Deepstar Battlefield’s opening. Here’s the registration token, and you can use it to exchange for an

Astral Formation to enter. Don't lose it." Gou Yuqiu tossed a token over with the word 'Deepstar' engraved on it.

"Thank you, Palace Lord."

"No need to thank me, let alone get excited. It's where Heaven Branch disciples compete, and you're only going there to broaden your view and get beaten up. It's nothing worth being excited about," said Gou Yuqiu.

"Okay, then I'll be taking my leave." Tianming left.

Gou Yuqiu burst into laughter. "This stinking brat even dares to scold Fang Qingli, that old bitch, asking her grandson to drink milk. That's so satisfying, I like it."

Tianming knew that the elders paid attention to his behavior.

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Tianming returned to Fang Xingying and waved the registration token in his hand, "Look, what's this!"

"You succeed?"

"That's right."

"It's good to have a backer. You're not the sect master of the Human Branch's illegitimate son, right?" Fang Xingying asked.

"I can't tell you anything. Why don't you guess?" Tianming smiled. "You going?"

"I naturally am. This is a precious chance to be beaten," said Fang Xingying.

"Don't bullshit. You've already been beaten up pretty often," Tianming curled his lips.

"You...!" Fang Xingying gnashed his teeth, because Tianming's words jabbed into his sore spot.

"Come, tell me how the Deepstar Battle works?"

"Go in and get beaten up before coming out. Then enjoy how the Heaven Branch disciples trash everyone from the Earth Branch." Fang Xingying rolled his eyes, then continued in a meaningful tone, "We're going in to be toyed with."

Chapter 627 - The Days I Miss Ling'er

"The Heaven Branch disciples are that arrogant?" Tianming rubbed his nose.

"There's hundreds of thousands of disciples in the Archaion Sect, but only five hundred Heaven Branch disciples. Everyone's about the same age, but they can stand at the pinnacle of the Archaion Divine Realm with their talent. They'll become masters of hundreds of millions of people, sooner or later. So it's natural that some of them are arrogant," Fang Xingying said with an envious tone.

"How many of them will be participating in the Deepstar Battle?"

“Those over thirty have to leave the Archaion Sect to decide their future. Many Heaven Branch disciples are between twenty and thirty. There are only about a hundred of them under twenty. So they’re basically the top hundred in the Deepstar Battle,” said Fang Xingying.

“The Deepstar Battlefield is located in the Abyssal Battlefield?” Tianming asked. The Abyssal Battlefield was a mirror to the Flameyellow continent, which was proven since the Nine Divine Realms were also mirrored through the bottomless holes.

“That’s right. The Archaion Sect sealed off a region with the Deepstar Formation, and that’s the Deepstar Battlefield,” said Fang Xingying.

“Are there demon beasts in the Deepstar Battlefield?”

“There are. The demon beasts are one of the tests in the Deepstar Battlefield. That means you’ll be eliminated if you’re defeated by them.”

“So, how does the ranking work?” Tianming finally asked something important.

“The seniors of the Deepstar Hall will implant an Astral Formation in the disciples’ bodies, which will be activated when the disciple faces mortal danger to protect them. But that also means the disciple is eliminated. At the same time, you can obtain points by defeating others. The two with the highest points on the ranking after a month will be given the spots,” Fang Xingying said with expectation on his face.

“So simple?” Tianming asked. That was similar to the faction battle, just that he would be alone by himself.

“It’s not as simple as it sounds, as many factors will be taken into consideration. Furthermore, it doesn’t matter how many people you’ve taken out; if your Astral Formation is activated, you will be considered eliminated. So even if you’re first in the rankings, you can still be eliminated. Others might even besiege you. It doesn’t matter how many people are attacking you, the one who activates your formation will take the points,” said Fang Xingying.

“You’re saying that you’ll obtain ten points if you defeat ten people, and I’ll take your ten points if I defeat you?” Tianming verified.

“That’s right.”

“That’s exciting. That means you’ll get more points by the stronger disciples, and at the later stage of the battle, everyone will have many points on them,” said Tianming.

“Those weaker disciples in the Earth Branch are all betting on luck. But it’s a pity that this kind of opportunity is rare. After all, the cultivations of the first and second on the ranking won’t be too far apart,” said Fang Xingying.

“You’re right. Only the strong can reach the top under these rules,” said Tianming. This wasn’t the same as the faction battle. You could ignore the other factions in the faction battle, but you have to fight in the Deepstar Battlefield, and you can’t afford to lose!

“There’s something even more exciting about it,” Fang Xingying smiled.

“Oh? Go ahead and share it with me.”

“The Astral Formation will guide you to your enemy’s location within a range of ten thousand meters, and the other party will also know your location in the last three days. That means it’ll be a big messy fight, and the rankings change drastically during that period,” said Fang Xingying.

“They really know how to play,” Tianming sighed. That meant that he couldn’t even relax even if he had a high ranking.

“The last rule is the one that’s the most exciting,” said Fang Xingying.

“There’s another rule?”

“Yeah. The Astral Formations of the first and second in the ranking will shine brightly in the Deepstar Battlefield, and their locations will be revealed to everyone. That means their effort will go down the drain if they’re defeated, and those who replace them will also have their locations revealed. In a nutshell, it doesn’t matter who ascends to the first and second rank, everyone will target them until the battle comes to an end.”

“Isn’t that too tough for the first and second on the ranking?” Tianming clicked his tongue.

“Only the strongest, smartest, and those who know how to grasp opportunities will come out on top. These kinds of rules are prepared for them. So even if your cultivation is slightly weaker, you can still come out on top if you have other advantages. Then again, you can also reach the peak if your strength is unparalleled,” said Fang Xingying.

With that, Tianming had an idea of how the Deepstar Battle works.

Going to the Abyssal Battlefield for a month will affect my cultivation in the Old Deepstar Path, and it’ll affect my cultivation’s progress. But there’s nothing I can do about it. I can only go for it for the body-refining battle art and my fourth lifebound beast!

It was obvious that Tianming benefited greatly from the Old Deepstar Path, and the Abyssal Battlefield’s spiritual energy couldn’t be compared to Taiji Peak Lake. Participating in the Deepstar Battle meant that his cultivation would fall even further behind.

However, the birth of a new Primordial Chaos Beast was more important. The battle would start the day after tomorrow, and Tianming planned to look for Feiling. After all, they would be separated for a month. But before that, he had to return to the Number One Pavilion.

“Xiaoxiao, I’ll be participating in the Deepstar Battle tomorrow, and I probably won’t be back for a month,” said Tianming.

“Okay.” Lin Xiaoxiao felt that was great, since she could go into seclusion for a month and give him a surprise when he came back.

“The Earth Pavilion has an Earth Formation. It’s not strong, but it’ll cause a huge commotion upon being attacked. I’ll bring you over to the formation’s core. You can cultivate there and activate it when required,” said Tianming.

“Okay.”

“Remember to clean up the place. Don’t slack.”

“Got it!”

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In the Hexapath Sword Palace located at the Xuanyuan Lake, Tianming came as per usual to comprehend with Feiling opposite him. She had Xuanyuan Dao and Fang Qingli beside her, staying three meters around her to protect her safety.

“Your Eminence, I’ll be participating in the Deepstar Battle tomorrow, and I might not be able to come here next month,” Tianming said respectfully before he left.

“Okay.” Feiling nudged her lips toward Tianming, with her back facing Xuanyuan Dao and Fang Qingli.

“Deepstar Battle? Don’t you know that you can come out in between?” Fang Qingli suddenly spoke out.

“I can come out?” Tianming’s eyes lit up. “I’ve just joined the Earth Branch, and I don’t understand much about it.

“The game will last for a month, and you can activate the Astral Formation at any time, aside from the last three days, as long as there’s no one within three thousand meters of you. You can get someone from Deepstar Hall to bring you out, but you can only use it once a day. Furthermore, you can’t leave the battlefield for more than four hours,” said Fang Qingli.

“You can do that?” Tianming was overjoyed by the unexpected surprise. Not only could he see Feiling, but he also wouldn’t hold up his cultivation.

“The Heaven Branch disciples are making huge progress every single day, and they need the Old Deepstar Path to cultivate. So we can’t hinder their cultivation,” said Fang Qingli.

Tianming finally understood. So it turned out that it was because of the Heaven Branch disciples that a rule was in place that benefited everyone. That way, Tianming could participate in the battle while coming out every day to cultivate in the Old Deepstar Path.

As for why it could only be used if there weren’t any disciples within three thousand meters of radius, that must be to prevent people from using it to escape and leave the battlefield. So Deepstar Hall wouldn’t care about someone if there was anyone within three thousand meters of them.

It could also be used to verify if the surroundings were safe, but only once a day. At least until the last three days.

But people might not leave if they need to gather more points, Tianming thought. On the contrary, he wasn’t in a rush. He knew that strength was the foundation to everything. But this rule made Feiling happy, since she could still see Tianming.

“Then I’ll continue coming to the Hexapath Sword Palace to comprehend,” said Tianming.

“Yes. You can’t be negligent, since you obtained the Hexapath Sword God’s fortune,” said Feiling. But what she really meant was for Tianming to come and see her often, even if they could only look at each other. That was something Feiling had also been looking forward to in her dull cultivation.

“Yes, Your Eminence!” Tianming nodded. He was leaving, but he still wanted to take a risk. He said, “Your Eminence, I have some doubts about the treasure that you bestowed me. I wonder if you can help me with it?”

“Take it out,” Feiling stretched out her hand.

“Yes.” Tianming took out the Prime Tower and placed it in Feiling’s hand. They were close, and he knew that Xuanyuan Dao and Fang Qingli were both staring at him. He would die if he had any other intentions.

“What do you want to know?” Feiling was nervous when she touched the paper at the bottom of the Prime Tower.

“There are three tribulation patterns at the bottom of the tower, and they’re extremely complicated. I can’t understand them,” said Tianming.

“You’re only in the Empyrean Saint stage, so there’s no rush yet. Comprehend it again when you’re in the Samsara stage.” Feiling handed the Prime Tower back to Tianming. They had a rapport, and the note was passed to Feiling. It was risky, but they couldn’t bear the feeling of not getting close to each other despite loving one another.

“Then I’ll be taking my leave now.” Tianming left.

On the other hand, Feiling continued comprehending for half a day before returning to the Soulburn Hall. She said, “I’m a little tired recently, and I’ll be resting. You guys can wait outside.”

“Roger.”

Her bedroom was protected by heavenly pattern formations that wrapped around her layer by layer. Xuanyuan Dao and Fang Qingli stood outside and didn’t dare to infringe on Feiling’s privacy. Even a god would be uncomfortable being followed all around like this.

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Back in the palace, Feiling opened the note and saw what was written on it. She held her mouth as tears started rolling down her cheeks when she read the note.

If someone asks me the four days I miss Ling’er, I’ll answer: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter.

If someone asks me the three days I miss Ling’er, I’ll answer: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.

If someone asks me the two days I miss Ling’er, I’ll answer: Day and Night.

If someone asks me the one day I miss Ling’er, I’ll answer: Everyday.

Chapter 628 - Brutal Game

It was the first time Tianming came to the Abyssal Battlefield in the nine divine realms. He felt that the Abyssal Battlefield here was very different. First was the sky—it wasn’t just the thunder spirit hazard, but there were storm, flame, ice, and thunder spirit hazards. The weaker ones had ordinary tribulation patterns, while the stronger ones had dozens of them.

Although these spirit hazards were incomparable to the ones in the Heaven Cauldron, they were present in much higher quantities. Not only the sky, but spirit hazards would erupt from the ground as well.

The Heaven Cauldron's spirit hazards were collected from the Abyssal Battlefield, and there were many spirit ores here, even some with tribulation patterns. They were the main materials to forge artifacts.

Spirit hazards, spirit herbs, and spirit ores were crucial cultivation resources. Divine realms would fight for those resources, and the best spirit hazards were collected in the Heaven Cauldron. The countless spirit hazards here did look majestic, but they were useless to Tianming.

"Let's bring some back to the Decimo Dao Palace if I can return in the future. The spirit hazards here are simply too much." He still remembered the lightning spirit hazard Meow Meow had absorbed when it was born was only at the level of red heavenly patterns at best.

But Tianming's attention was elsewhere: the Deepstar Formation. The Deepstar Formation looked like an artificial star, making it look like there was a starry sky above your head when you entered. From the outside, it looked like a spherical astral object that looked boundless.

"I heard that the Deepstar Formation is twenty times the size of Taiji Peak Lake! Furthermore, this is a genuine battlefield, not an illusory domain." The Illusory Battlefield back in the Human Branch was only ten times as big as Taiji Peak Lake.

This meant that the twenty thousand participants have a lot of room to move about. Aside from the last three days, the rest of the time would be for tracking and hunting. They could even use spirit hazards and demon beasts to set up traps.

"It's also a win if I make use of demon beasts to defeat them before making the last hit. This way, even weaker disciples can defeat the stronger ones!" There were too many possibilities in this battle.

Tianming was standing among the twenty thousand people with Fang Xingying beside him. There were people all around them, and none of them exceeded the age of twenty. Standing before the formation was a group of masters. There were roughly two hundred of them, and they belonged to Deepstar Hall.

Deepstar Hall managed the Old Deepstar Path, and they were the host of this game. It was said that they had a tribulation artifact, the Star Hooking Rod. It could stretch a long distance and bring out eliminated disciples.

"The Deepstar Hall's palace lord, Yi Xingyin, is actually here himself!" Fang Xingying exclaimed, and Tianming followed his gaze and saw a middle-aged man wearing an astral robe. He had fair skin that seemed like the stars. He even seemed to have become one with the Deepstar Formation behind him.

"Deepstar Hall's palace lord was the best tribulation patternscribe in the Archaion Sect. The Archaion Sect has two threesource tribulation patternscribes, and he's one of them," said Fang Xingying.

"Tribulation patternscribe? They're stronger than patternscribes?" Tianming asked.

"You're really ignorant."

"Cut the crap."

“Tribulation patternscribes are above patternscribes, and they’re graded from onesource to threesource. Threesource tribulation patternscribes are the strongest in the Flameyellow continent! The tribulation formations created by them far exceed heavenly formations created by patternscribes. They’re entities who can manipulate a tribulation pattern’s power,” Fang Xingying said in a revered tone.

Tianming couldn’t help taking another glance at Yi Xingyin when he heard what Fang Xingying said.

“The Archaion Sect has nine divine halls. The Godservant Hall and Deepstar Hall are two of them. The nine palace lords’ positions are only second to the three sect masters, and they’re even higher than Tribulation Peak’s tribulation elders,” Fang Xingying continued.

“Is Sourceglow Hall one of them?”

“Yeah. Sourceglow Hall manages the Earth and Heaven Branch disciples’ recruitment and structure. They’re ranked the last of the nine divine halls. You’ve seen palace lord Gou Yuqiu, and you didn’t know that?” Fang Xingying said with disdain.

“What’s the Godservant Hall’s ranking?”

“First.”

Tianming now knew why Fang Qingli was so aloof. Tianming now understood most of the Archaion Sect’s structure. There were three sect masters, nine hall palace lords, tribulation elders, and the Archaion Army’s nine divine marshals.

At that moment, Yi Xingyin was handing out the Astral Formations to disciples. Just from his surname alone, everyone could tell that he was like Ouyang Jianwang; he wasn’t someone from the three clans.

Yi Xingyin was fusing Astral Formations into the disciples’ bodies and telling them to enter the Deepstar Formation.

“If you’re severely injured, the Astral Formation will go into a protection state and protect the owner from all attacks?” Tianming asked.

“No. empyrean saints won’t be able to do anything to the Astral Formation in protection state. But Samsara stage disciples can break through the formation and kill.”

Tianming was taken aback by that. He asked, “You mean Heaven Branch disciples can kill people?”

“Yes, as long as they’re faster than the seniors in the Deepstar Hall.”

“Why is that?”

“That’s to distinguish ranks and privileges to inspire Earth Branch disciples to reach Samsara stage and become a Heaven Branch disciple. What’s the matter? You think it’s cruel?” Fang Xingying asked.

“The winner is king, and they can control the life and death of others. It’s not cruelty, but reality,” said Tianming.

Twenty thousand disciples were waiting in line. Suddenly, someone called out, “The Heaven Branch disciples are here!”

Tianming turned to see over a hundred youths rushing over under the leadership of Human Branch's sect master, Fang Taiqing. With Fang Taiqing leading the way, their aura was even more ferocious. Wherever they went, Earth Branch disciples would give way and let them cut the queue.

"Xingyin, I'll leave these children to you," said Fang Taiqing. The Heaven Branch disciples under his management might be few in number, but they were the sect's elites.

"Please be reassured, sect master," Yi Xingyin replied in an amicable voice.

"Alright then." Fang Taiqing turned around. "Perform well. Don't embarrass the Heaven Branch."

"Yes, sect master!" everyone said confidently.

Fang Taiqing then glanced at the rainbow-haired boy in the crowd, who was forced to lower his head from his stern gaze. After he finished speaking, Fang Taiqing quickly left. Yi Xingyin said nothing when the Heaven Branch disciples cut the queue since it didn't affect anything. He then continued fusing Astral Formations into the disciples. Among the crowd, Tianming saw Xuanyuan Muxue. She wore a white dress and a light blue cloak. After she obtained her Astral Formation, she stepped into the Deepstar Formation without a word.

"Xuanyuan Muxue is one of the youngest disciples in the Heaven Branch. She's only a few months older than Xingque, and she has a high status in the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. She's a genius to be nurtured, the same as Xuanyuan Yuheng," Fang Xingying said while enviously looking at the Heaven Branch disciples.

"Is Xuanyuan Yuheng overaged? Why isn't he here?" Tianming searched the crowd and failed to find Xuanyuan Yuheng.

"He has already been to the Deepstar Pool and formed an Ancient Deepstar Godbody," said Fang Xingying. The Ancient Deepstar Godbody was only a cultivation technique, the strength depends on the amount of astral sources absorbed.

"Isn't the Deepstar Battle only held once a decade? He won when he was ten?" Tianming sounded his doubt.

"Of course not. It's because he performed well in the Archaionfiend Trial and obtained the qualification to enter the Deepstar Pool," said Fang Xingying.

"Archaionfiend Trial? Is it related to the Archaionfiend Eye?"

"That's right."

"What's it about?"

"No idea. Anyhow, it's something that only those from the Archaic House of Xuanyuan's Trioptic True Dragon Branch can join. It's related to their third eye, and it's located in the Heaven Sacred Mountain," said Fang Xingying.

Tianming's eyes lit up when he heard that. He made up his mind to find out more about the Archaionfiend Trial. Who knew, it might be his opportunity to obtain the Archaionfiend Eye. Everyone from the Trioptic True Dragon Branch had three eyes, and so did he!

“Disciples of the Sterling House of Fang, gather around me!” Fang Xingque yelled. At least four hundred people stood out from the Earth Branch. In addition to those from the Heaven Branch, they had nearly five hundred people!

Among the Sterling House of Fang’s disciples, Fang Hongxuan and Fang Bihan were the worst. All five hundred here were better than them.

“Everyone listen up. We’ll pay back whoever dares to touch our men when we’re out!” Fang Xingque declared and swept his glance into the surrounding.

“Isn’t that a little too arrogant?” Tianming was speechless.

“The Draconis House of Jian doesn’t have many people, but they’re almost on the same level as the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. But the Archaic House of Xuanyuan’s seniors are stricter, and they have a solid foundation. They’re very particular about their character,” said Fang Xingying.

Different clans have different spirits. Suddenly, Fang Xingque turned to look at Fang Xingying.

“You, come over,” Fang Xingque said.

“Shit. I’m doomed!” Fang Xingying had already tried his best to hide behind Tianming, but he was still discovered. In the end, he could only go up and get slapped.

“Why’d you hit me?” Fang Xingying asked.

“You’re standing together with him? Are you stupid?” Fang Xingque asked.

“I tricked him into entering the Deepstar Battlefield for you so that you’ll have an opportunity to deal with him. Can’t you see that?” Fang Xingying gnashed his teeth.

“You’re serious?” Fang Xingque’s eyes lit up. “I’ve wronged you. You’ve done well this time.”

“Yeah.” Fang Xingying held his face. He didn’t return to Tianming, but entered the Deepstar Formation together with the Sterling House of Fang’s disciples. Before Fang Xingque entered the formation, he turned to look at Tianming and sneered.

“What a fool.” Tianming couldn’t be bothered with him. No one could catch up to Meow Meow in the Deepstar Formation, yet Fang Xingque wanted to touch him?

Chapter 629 - Fang Jingjing, Thirteen Years Old

An hour later, Tianming was standing in front of Yi Xingyin.

"Oh, it's you," Yi Xingyin said.

"Palace Lord, do you know me?" Tianming asked curiously.

"You are famous, you know. I heard Ouyang and Granny Gou praise you before." Naturally, he was referring to Ouyang Jianwang and the palace lord of Sourceglow Hall, Gou Yuqiu. "Your registration emblem, please."

Tianming handed it over. Yi Xingyin pressed the Astral Formation into Tianming’s body. It was a rather mystical power that formed a thin layer on his skin, making it glow slightly like starlight.

"Now go in," he said.

"Yes, Palace Lord."

Normally, his spatial ring would have to be checked, but Yi Xingyin simply waved him through. Tianming smiled and stepped into the Deepstar Formation.

"Why do I have the feeling that the seniors that aren't from the three great houses treat me rather well?" Ouyang Jianwang, Gou Yuqiu, and Yi Xingyin seemed rather amicable toward him. One of them was a tribulation elder, while the other two were palace lords. Not to mention, Ouyang Jianwang was even the protector of the Heaven Cauldron.

He didn't overthink it and passed through the Deepstar Formation. Feeling a strong breeze, he was blown up into the skies. When he reached the ground, he was deep in the battlefield. Looking up, he saw a sky full of stars. The ground beneath him was gray with gravel, and the flowing water was black. He saw tall mountains in the distance; the battlefield wasn't just a flat plain. Instead, there were all kinds of terrain, with high mountains, deep oceans, ravines, and valleys all over the place. There were even many black, towering trees thrusting out of the ground like demanding claws. He even heard the cries of countless wildbeasts.

"It's said that the area within the Deepstar Formation used to be called the Myriadbeast Abyss, due to the fact that there were a hundred thousand demon beasts, many of them empyrean or even tribulation demon beasts." A.d.u.l.t tribulation demon beasts could be compared to samsarans. Beasts of all kinds had prepared a 'grand welcome' for the disciples of the Archaion Sect. They seemed particularly agitated, possibly thanks to the Deepstar Formation.

"Let's start hunting!"

Tianming had Meow Meow and Ying Huo come out of his lifebound space. It wasn't appropriate for Lan Huang to come out, as he wanted to maintain a low profile and if Lan Huang showed up, it would make Tianming a very large target.

"With Meow Meow's speed, I'm practically undefeatable. Even though my power and level is among the lower end of the Earth Branch, I can at least choose to run from the people I don't want to engage!"

Meow Meow's evolution was just the thing Tianming needed now. He could easily ride it after it turned into a Regal Chaosfiend.

Ying Huo lay flat on Meow Meow's back, looking really impressive with its Skypiercing Diablos Feathers. "Onwards!"

"Chicken Bro, you'd better hold on tight," Meow Meow said mischievously.

"Just charge!"

With a spark of lightning, Meow Meow charged at breakneck speed.

"Aaaaaah!" Ying Huo had overestimated its abilities. It flailed around nonstop during the ride. "Wait! My hairstyle!"

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Two hours later, Tianming could see with this third eye that someone was hiding in the fog far ahead. Even though he couldn't pinpoint his opponent's location, like he could in the illusory battlefield, it at least enhanced his eyesight a lot.

"Time to break our fast."

At the end of the day, the Deepstar Battle was basically a battle royale. Tianming had decided that he would fight anyone he came across, and run if it was someone he couldn't defeat.

Almost instantly, he appeared in front of that person. Taking a closer look, he saw that it was actually a teenage girl. She wore a short green skirt that revealed her fair thighs and sported a beautiful head of short hair.

"Forget it," Tianming said and immediately turned tail. That girl was far too young for him to be able to fight her.

"Aren't you Li Tianming?!" the girl suddenly said as she walked out from the shadows.

"You know me too?" Tianming felt that he was famous now.

"I don't just know you. I'll be your nightmare," she said with a cold smile. It seemed that she wasn't a soft, dainty girl like he had initially thought for her to have such a sinister expression.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Fang Xingque's cousin, Fang Jingjing," she said as she approached. "I won't kill you. I'll capture you alive for my cousin. It will be of huge contribution."

"Fang Xingque's cousin, eh? So Fang Xingying is your elder brother, right?"

"That piece of trash? There's no way. My father is one of the nine great divine marshals, Fang Yuming!"

So the sect master of the Heaven Branch, Fang Taiqing, had quite a few siblings, among them Fang Xingying's father, who was probably the least impressive of the bunch. The nine great divine marshals were people who held the highest position in the Archaion Army. They probably had similar authority to the lord of Deepstar Hall, if not more, given that they had a writ to control the troops. It was no surprise that Fang Jingjing was so arrogant.

"You mean to say you won't let me leave?" Tianming asked.

"You can't leave. You humiliated my cousin, so all you can do is die right here."

"You're only fifteen! How could you be so savage?"

"I'm thirteen!" she proudly said.

A thirteen-year-old who was an empyrean saint and a disciple of the Earth Branch? She would definitely become a disciple of the Heaven Branch and a samsaran in a few short years. There was no doubt that she was among the most talented in the entire divine realm.

"You're already thirteen and nobody's taught you humility yet? Arrogance is the downfall of many, you know."

"Arrogance? Killing you doesn't even come close."

"Fine. Even though bullying a little girl like you is a little embarrassing, you need to be taught a lesson," Tianming said.

Fang Jingjing merely smiled. In the next instant, she drew her weapon and thrust it toward Tianming's eyes while summoning her lifebound beast at the same time. It was a green phoenix, but it wasn't as large as Meow Meow's current form and only had two hundred and fifty stars. That was already rather impressive, given that she was a seventh-level empyrean saint. That star count was pretty high for the Earth Branch, where no lifebound beast had more than three hundred stars.

Her lifebound beast was called an eightwing greengod phoenix. Its eight green, flaming wings sent storms all across the place and threatened to cause lots of destruction. Had Ying Huo and the rest not evolved, it would be really hard to deal with an opponent with three times their star count. However, Ying Huo had nearly double its star count now. No other beast could match its four hundred and eighteen stars in the entire Deepstar Battle.

"I'll take it!" Ying Huo said.

"Be careful. A seventh-level empyrean saint is in the third phase. Their lifebound beasts will awaken their own saint springs and have a boundless amount of saint ki. They might even be more powerful than their beastmaster!"

The saint ki of a lifebound beast was mainly used to execute abilities. The larger the saint spring, the more powerful a beast's abilities would be.

There were three phases of the Empyrean Saint stage. In the first phase, their lifespan would reach five hundred years. During the second phase, they would develop empyrean gold bodies. During the third phase, their lifebound beasts would awaken their saint springs, not to mention the physical enhancement they got at the second and third phases. Beastmasters, on the other hand, only got an empyrean gold body at the second phase, and had to use a body-refining technique to barely achieve parity with their lifebound beasts. The gap would only be widened further at the seventh level.

When the phoenix used its ability, Greenfire Bladeriver, Tianming felt how impressive it was. It was in a wholly different league than Xuanyuan Yufeng's three lifebound beasts, thanks to the lifebound beast's saint spring.

With a loud rumble, green flames and winds formed a river of blades and came flowing toward him. Fang Jingjing's sword went with the flow of the river and moved even more ferociously. "A weakling like you really shouldn't overestimate yourself."

The way she smiled, she didn't look like a thirteen-year-old girl at all. At that moment, the Regal Chaosfiend appeared before her, sending countless bolts of black lightning blasting out as it used Misty Hellthunder. The lightning bolts converged into a wave and amplified each others' power, giving it a far greater boost than any beast saint spring ever could. Not to mention, Meow Meow's star count far exceeded the phoenix's.

The attack came crashing down with a loud rumble, completely swallowing up the Greenfire Bladeriver and almost instantly crashing into the phoenix. If Meow Meow was just a normal cat, the phoenix would

be no different than a little sparrow. Meow Meow bit down on the phoenix with its Myriadfiend Venomfangs and caused it to shriek. Even though it attempted to retaliate with its own ability after the fangs punctured its body, it wasn't able to do anything against the Ninefold Chaos Thunderscape. It was completely dominated, to the point that even Tianming was shocked.

"Hell, I didn't think it'd grow so much stronger after this evolution!"

By then, Ying Huo was engaging Fang Jingjing. Her tribulation artifact had an impressive two tribulation patterns, but she wasn't able to pierce Ying Huo's feathers at all. "Little beauty, are you trying to help me scratch an itch?"

"You're asking to be killed!" she snapped.

Ying Huo's body shook and countless feathers shot out as it used Skyscorch Featherblast, forcing her to back off. Despite her efforts to knock the feathers away, she got struck thrice. One of her thighs got hit and was bleeding profusely, and her face was also grazed.

"Aaaagh!" she cried in pain.

"Don't worry. A gentlechicken like me treats ladies nicely!" Ying Huo retracted its feathers and used Infernal Haze. Even though it was only using Shenxiao Sword Art, it had more than five thousand strands of Invincible Sword Ki infused within. Coupled with its Skypiercing Diablos Feathers, its thrust could even pierce her head, much to her terror.

The horror of Ying Huo's star count had only just dawned on her. "More than four hundred...."

Ying Huo's thrust caused her Astral Formation to activate to protect her. It even extended to cover the phoenix that was in Meow Meow's mouth and pulled it into her lifebound space. However, it was already close to dying.

Fang Jingjing stood on the spot and watched Tianming like a fool. She knew that he had three lifebound beasts, but he only needed two to deal with her. Her worldview came crashing down as she shook from the frustration of Ying Huo's star count. Perhaps nobody in the Heaven Branch had a beast that powerful.

"I... I...." She was about to cry from the humiliating battle.

"You were so arrogant I thought you'd be powerful. Guess I was wrong," Tianming mocked.

"You! You deserve to die!"

"Shut up. If it weren't for the Astral Formation, I would've pulled your tongue out."

She grit her teeth and watched as Tianming casually left, unable to do anything about it. What Tianming didn't know was that his lifebound beasts' star counts had caused a huge commotion outside the Deepstar Formation.

Chapter 630: The Sterling House of Fang

Like most other battlefields, the Deepstar Battlefield had an audience. Just like the Human Branch, the Earth Branch also had its own Dimensional Battlefield. Within it was the Starlord Formation, the

Deepstar Formation, and each disciple's personal Astral Formation. Through the Starlord Formation, all the disciples that weren't participating, including the seniors, could see the disciples within the Deepstar Formation.

The Starlord Formation had a few hundred viewpoints, which were basically screens that showed a specific part within the Deepstar Formation to the audience from the outside. For instance, if the Starlord Formation showed the viewpoint of Xuanyuan Muxue, her personal Astral Formation would work with the Deepstar Formation to show a visual projection of her surroundings on the Starlord Formation.

With a few hundred of these viewpoints, the lord of Deepstar Hall, Yi Xingyin, would be able to select the most exciting fights to show to the audience, who could pick from among a few hundred choices. For instance, Fang Jingjing's surroundings were projected on one of the viewpoints, and it happened to show Tianming as well.

Currently, the Deepstar Battle had just begun, so not many were already fighting. All of these formations were actually the creation of Yi Xingyin, who was a third-grade tribulation patternscribe.

"The palace lord's patternscribe abilities are amazing. The scenes are so clear."

"It's only a shame that no voices can be heard, otherwise it'd be perfect."

"It's already amazing that we get to see something like this. We can even see the number of stars in the lifebound beasts' eyes."

There were quite a lot of people in the audience, even though it was only the first day. Among them were around four hundred Heaven Branch disciples. Though they were too old to participate, they were actually rather young, being in their twenties.

.....

At the highest point of the Dimensional Battlefield was where the best viewpoint was located. Within that room were two men who stood back to back. One of them was dressed in a long, green robe that had rainbow-colored embroidery of a phoenix on its back. He seemed really refined as he looked below and observed the Deepstar Battle. He was none other than the current house king of the Sterling House of Fang, Fang Taiqing.

"Yuming," he yelled.

"What's the matter, Brother?" Fang Yuming said, standing beside him respectfully.

"How are the recent movements of the Yinyang Demon Sect and the Hexapath Sword Sect?"

"The demon sect has been a little antsy lately, but the sword sect is laying low. Those two hate us with a passion; we took Taiji Peak Lake from the former and the Sword Insight Rock from the latter. They must've been acting behind the scenes for quite some time."

"Be prepared. Once they finish their joint planning, they'll attack us soon."

"Understood. I'm just worried that Her Eminence's return will be pointless if the Archaion Divine Realm is no more."

"Enough nonsense," Fang Taiqing said.

"Brother, will it be fine if Her Eminence is dead?"

"I told you to cut it with the nonsense!" Fang Taiqing snapped, glaring at him.

"Got it. However, that's the eminent of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, not ours. I'm sure you know the price the ancestors of our Sterling House of Fang had to pay by serving the Archaic House of Xuanyuan."

"Fang Yuming, are you an idiot? How could you have these thoughts when Her Eminence just experienced an assassination attempt? Do you know what they'll do to us if they catch you saying something like that? Our entire house will be implicated!"

"So you weren't the one who did it?"

"I'm not so foolish as to take that kind of risk. Not to mention, Mother is serving Her Eminence constantly."

"I see. Either way, Her Eminence is just a particularly talented girl, isn't she?"

"Yes and no. Let's just observe the battle."

"All right. By the way, lately, the Pentaphase Earth Sect's army has been spotted heading north. The scouts report that the Pentaphase Divine Realm is also plotting something. These three divine realms neighbor ours. If they ever reach an agreement, we might be overwhelmed. Brother, you weren't at the border, so you wouldn't know, but our troops' morale is plummeting."

"Even they can't hold back anymore, eh? The Pentaphase Earth Sect is the cruelest of them all. We'd better make sure our south is well defended."

"I'm not assigned there. I'm dealing with the Yinyang Demon Sect's side."

"I see. What about the Triflair, Quadform, Heptastar, Octagram, and Nonahall Divine Realms?"

"They're currently observing the situation. To be frank, they're just opportunists. In times of chaos like this, everyone wants a slice of the pie. At the end of the day, the tenth goddess, Xuanyuan Xi, is the root of the disturbance on the Flameyellow Continent. Too many people want her dead," Fang Yuming said eerily.

"Are you dissatisfied?"

"I just think the good old days weren't so bad. Why should the Sterling House of Fang sacrifice so many for the goddess of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan? Even if we win, the victory belongs to them."

"You'd better speak these words to nobody else but me. Not even our mother. She's been brainwashed by Godservant Hall since her childhood. If you go against her, she'll even kill you."

"I know. I wouldn't be so hateful if I didn't have to see her being so obedient to the goddess."

"How long will you stay this time?" Fang Taiqing asked.

"I'll return to the borderlands after seeing Jingjing."

"She just entered the Deepstar Battle."

"I know. I'll get Yi Xingyin to secretly sneak her out tomorrow. It's been a long time since I've seen her."
Fang Yuming smiled at the thought of his daughter.

"You've been fighting for our divine realm these past few years and haven't paid much attention to her."

"Aren't you the same, Brother? These children were brought up by their mothers. It explains why they're so spoiled."

"They really should be disciplined. They shouldn't be acting like a bunch of idiots at their age. Would you believe what Yi Xingyin said when I asked him to leave the spot for Xingque?"

"He said no?"

"He said that his creed is to be a fair person, and what I was asking of him would make him break it,"
Fang Taiqing said with a laugh. His brother also joined in.

"His brain must be rusting from all that research on formations he's doing. Outsiders usually have to submit to reach their current positions. However, Yi Xingyin has been quite lucky to survive tens of sword strikes from me back when we were in the Heaven Branch. Does he think he can do whatever he pleases now just because he has a little power? Who does he think calls the shots in the Archaion Divine Realm?"

All of a sudden, the audience cried in shock.

"What is the commotion about?" Fang Yuming asked.

The folks outside were discussing it already.

"Four hundred and eighteen stars? Who's that?"

"I don't recognize him."

"The seventh level Fang Jingjing was actually defeated by two of his two lifebound beasts!"

"The other one has three hundred and ninety-seven stars!"

"Not even disciples from the Heaven Branch have that many, right? I recall that the highest one was three hundred and ninety!"

"Looks like this person is called Li Tianming. He just rose from the Human Branch and even killed Xuanyuan Yufeng, one of the members of the Trioptic True Dragon Branch in the faction battles!"

"What's his background?"

"Who knows?"

Fang Taiqing heard it all. He pointed at one of the viewpoints in the Starlord Formation and said,
"Jingjing was defeated. Did you see that person?"

"I did. That's a lot of stars. Whose illegitimate son is that? Xuanyuan Dao's? Jian Wuyi's? He doesn't look like someone from the Trioptic True Dragon Branch, so he must be Jian Wuyi's, right?" Fang Yuming

said. He made sure to take a few close looks at the white-haired youth who had defeated his precious daughter. He wouldn't forgive someone who would harm her lifebound beast so badly.

"Neither. He's someone Her Eminence brought back, allegedly because she wants to take him as a disciple for his amazing talents. Most interestingly, he can already defeat a seventh-level empyrean saint even though he was just a sky saint when he arrived. His speed of improvement is staggering," Fang Taiqing said.

"Her Eminence has only been back for a month. Did he break through eight levels in a month?"

"No, I think he's just a first or second level empyrean saint. He's just capable of defeating people above his level. It probably has to do with the two precious artifacts Her Eminence bequeathed him, or perhaps he's from a strong bloodline."

"What artifacts?"

"A sword and a tower. Nobody knows how many tribulation patterns they have. It seems that Her Eminence favors this young man quite substantially."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Brother, would you dare give him a bit of a hard time?"

"It won't do. Her Eminence ordered Jian Wuyi to protect him. Who would dare?"

"To that extent..."

"Otherwise, she wouldn't have had Xuanyuan Dao personally give him grade three tribulation manna," Fang Taiqing said.

"They'd better watch out. Her Eminence can't even look out for herself, yet this kid thinks he's a big shot in the Earth Branch."

"I, however, am more interested in his two artifacts."

"I see. I'll go escort Jingjing first, now that she's already out."

"Go ahead. Defend the borderlands well. The ones the Yinyang Demon Sect hate the most is our Sterling House of Fang. We definitely can't lose to them."

"Okay," Fang Yuming said before he left.

Fang Taiqing stood at the window and continued watching the Starlord Formation. "Mother, you hold the goddess in too high a regard. One day, I might just become a god myself."

He zeroed in on someone using the Starlord Formation's viewpoint: Fang Xingque.

"Since when was a sect master of the Heaven Branch like me not even allowed to get a spot for the Deepstar Battle for my own son?"

He proceeded to laugh maniacally alone in the room.

