

The Ages 641

Chapter 641 - Hidden Undercurrents

Zhao Yijue felt a little overwhelmed by the loud cheers of the audience.

"His lifebound beast is too strong."

"That bird might be even stronger than its beastmaster."

"Fang Chenyu is the strongest disciple of the Earth Branch. Yet Tianming managed to defeat both him and Xuanyuan Cangcang, emerging as the strongest disciple in the Earth Branch within twenty short days!"

"Back when he was still in the Human Branch, he didn't seem even remotely that strong when he was fighting Xuanyuan Yufeng...."

"What kind of insane background does he have?"

Everyone was talking about Tianming. Zhao Yijue knew that his performance today had completely shocked the Human and Earth Branches. Even the disciples of the Heaven Branch were talking about him. Zhao Yijue saw Jian Xueyi and a few other female disciples of the Draconis House of Jian cheering and praising Tianming nonstop.

"He's my little brother. I'll introduce him to you all when he comes back," Jian Xueyi proudly said.

"It's a promise. You have to get close to someone like him who can even overturn a situation like that," said one of the female compatriots.

"Sure, you can get close to him, but don't overthink it. Someone else already has his heart."

"It can't be you, can it? If so we would have to start sabotaging you."

"You little!"

Jian Xueyi started to mess around them.

"Hey, stupid Xueyi, where are you putting your hands?!"

"Oh, you've grown big."

Zhao Yijue looked at her a little unpleasantly. He had attempted to woo her for years, and even though everyone thought they were the perfect pair, Jian Xueyi simply didn't like him.

"So? Convinced now?" Jian Xueyi said after she returned, tired from all the messing around.

"I am. His performance today was far more impressive than the one doing the faction battles," Zhao Yijue said with his head lowered.

"I don't know why you're so jealous of him. He's a good person."

"I know."

"Oh well, he won't hold it against you anyway now that he's risen to prominence," Jian Xueyi said, her slender figure and long limbs accentuated by her robes.

"What do you think will happen to him later?"

"What do you mean?"

"The spot at the Deepstar Pool."

"It's hard to say. Fang Xingque is going to overwhelm him with hundreds of others like a gangster, and nobody dares to touch him. As for Xuanyuan Muxue, rumors say she's reached the death tribulation phase. I worry that nobody in the Deepstar Battle is her match," Jian Xueyi said.

"I see."

"However, Tianming offended the son of the palace lord of the Judgment Hall, a core ally of Fang Xingque. Not to mention, he even said something really savage to him. This won't be easy to resolve."

"You don't need to worry about it. Perhaps he really does have some kind of background. Otherwise going against Fang Xingque is tantamount to suicide."

"That's right. Fang Xingque is arrogant, reckless, and has a really bad character, always throwing his weight around. However, he's strong in his own right and has a lot of influence."

It was common knowledge that, while the disciples of the Sterling House of Fang were arrogant, their seniors had no intention of disciplining them. After all, they would calm down sooner or later after their rise, but they wouldn't even stand a chance to rise up to the top if they held back in their youth.

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Back in the Deepstar Battlefield....

"Young Master Xingque, Young Master Xingque!" Fang Shuyu had stumbled the whole way back to him. Her pink skirt was covered in dirt and grime and her hair was messy, making her look really haggard.

Currently, Fang Xingque's group had around four hundred people. Among them, he walked proudly, like a tyrant.

"What are you doing, screaming like that? Where is your class?" Fang Xingque said, looking disdainfully at Fang Shuyu. He was feeling rather annoyed after chasing Xuanyuan Muxue for so long without any results. He knew that the audience was definitely laughing at him for his vain effort.

"Young Master Xingque, something went wrong!" Fang Shuyu said desperately as her tears flowed.

"By the way, shouldn't she be with Chenyu? Weren't they going to deal with Li Tianming?" someone said.

Fang Xingque only just managed to recall it. He had been so focused on taking first place that he'd forgotten about Tianming entirely. "Say whatever you came to say. Did Chenyu run into a disciple of the Heaven Branch?"

"No, he—"

"Out with it!"

"Young Master Chenyu was defeated by Li Tianming and two of his lifebound beasts have been killed! He even had his tongue cut out! It's too horrible!" she said exasperatedly, completely silencing the others who were talking around her, causing them to turn to her.

"Were you seeing things? Are you sure it wasn't your imagination?" Fang Xingque said with a laugh.

"I swear it's true! Li Tianming even wanted me to pass you a message," she solemnly said.

Fang Xingque's gaze grew cold. Everyone could see how badly he was shaking, showing that he was completely enraged.

"He said that as long as he lives, you'll never be able to get a spot in the Deepstar Pool," she said in an almost hushed voice.

Even though it sounded like a joke, nobody dared to laugh.

"Say that again?"

"He said that you'll never be able to get the spot of the Deepstar Pool—"

"Damn his mother! Gaaah!" Fang Xingque foamed at the mouth and spat on the ground before suddenly coming forward, grabbing her by the collar, and giving her a slap on the face. She cried out in pain, her eyes almost popping out.

"How dare you threaten me? Who do you think you are?" Fang Xingque said as he glared at Fang Shuyu.

"Young Master Xingque, I... I'm not Li Tianming... Waaah...." She was so terrified that her face was completely pale.

"Buzz off!" Fang Xingque said and tossed her aside. Everyone moved to the side when he drew his sword and began smashing everything in sight, watching him throw a tantrum without so much as daring to twitch.

"Since when have I ever been mocked like this? Been so laughable?" he said, glaring at the others.

"Calm down, Xingque," said a Heaven Branch disciple. He knew that Fang Xingque had a short temper because of his age.

"Fine, I'll calm down...." Even though he was taking a deep breath, his eyes only grew redder. He was still fuming with rage.

"Chenyu isn't weak at all, so that means Li Tianming must be growing rapidly.

"So rapid, he's even faster than my Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline?!"

"That seems to be the case. I really wonder what makes him so talented in cultivation."

"Let's not overthink it. He's antagonized me, so I'll leave Xuanyuan Muxue aside and deal with him first. Since he dared to kill two of my brother's lifebound beasts, I'll cripple him!" Fang Xingque said, then pulled Fang Shuyu over again. "Can you still find him?"

"Yes. He said the reason he didn't wash off the powder is because he's waiting for you to look for him," she said.

"Dammit!" Fang Xingque was about to explode again.

"Xingque, come over here for a bit," said a woman dressed in orange who suddenly stepped out and waved at him.

"Sister Yun." Fang Xingque had the others leave and kept only the Heaven Branch disciples beside him. Sister Yun was among them.

"Your father has sent word," she said.

"What is it?"

"He wants you to leave Xuanyuan Muxue alone for now and focus on killing all of Li Tianming's lifebound beasts."

"That's exactly what I was planning on doing. As expected of my father, he really understands me. With him having my back, this won't be a problem. The few hundred of us and all nine Heaven Branch disciples will go after him. I'd like to see where he can run."

"That is right. The sect master also instructed for you to not underestimate him and deal with him as soon as possible, given how fast he improves."

"All right. Did my dad say what his true identity really is?"

"No."

"I wonder why not?" Fang Xingque found it a little weird. He knew that someone had Tianming's back, otherwise he wouldn't be so daring.

"I don't know either. Just do as he says."

"That's right. My dad's already given me his word. I doubt anyone in the sect has more influence than him," Fang Xingque said with a look of adoration. "My dad is right. There's no such thing as justice, only power and position that can garner respect and fear. I'll aim to become someone just like him!"

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After Tianming left the Deepstar Battlefield, he trained at the Old Deepstar Path for two hours before going to the Heaven Cauldron. On the way there, he noticed that his notoriety was growing. Disciples of the Heaven and Earth Branches all stopped to look at him, but they didn't stop him. Instead, they looked at him perplexedly.

"It is obvious that they don't want to get too close to me because I've offended too many disciples from the Sterling House of Fang."

As Tianming walked past, he heard the whispers.

"It's not like I have a choice. To make sure Fourth can hatch, I need a spot at the Deepstar Pool. The conflict was inevitable."

After witnessing that vision, Tianming had much more hope for the fourth egg. He had come to Heaven Cauldron to see how deep he could go into the spirit hazard pool with his empyrean gold body, even without a body-refining technique.

"To reach the bottom, I'll need an Ancient Deepstar Godbody." He was really looking forward to it. As he was rising up to the Heaven Cauldron, he held a bottle of fine wine, but Ouyang Jianwang was nowhere to be seen.

"He must've left on an errand."

Then Tianming dipped into the Heaven Cauldron. The spirit hazards around him sizzled against his body, but he endured and continued on. Most of them were fire, lightning, water, and earth type, all of which he could endure rather well nowadays.

"I think I'm a third way down!"

After that were the tribulation hazards. "This is where I had to stop last time."

He grit his teeth and continued down. Nearby was a black flame tribulation spirit hazard called a Boneshave Flame. It could burn his body and shave his bones. The sour feeling of pain was hard to describe.

"Do or die!"

Chapter 642 - Tribulation Sword Body

Tianming felt like his bones were on fire. He was hurting so much that he was sweating all over. "I still have fire resistance, so it won't really burn me that badly. Even so, it still hurts a lot! However, I feel that I'm able to take it much better than I could before. Let's go on."

He grit his teeth and endured the pain.

"I suddenly realized that you can really take a lot of punishment," Ying Huo said.

"Of course. You'd understand if you were in my shoes. Putting the three of you aside, Ling'er and my situation is akin to suicide; it's like I'm already halfway into my coffin. There's many assassins in the sect, and the three great houses don't see eye to eye. They all have their own sinister intentions. Not to mention, the other eight divine realms are after Ling'er's life. Thanks to all that, I have no excuse not to endure, no matter what comes my way. A true man stands up for his whole family!"

"I feel like you are overinflating your status in the family," Ying Huo said with a chuckle.

"Nonsense." Tianming couldn't be bothered to argue with it. He was currently facing immense pressure from all sides and had no choice but to endure.

"Sigh, it's not like I can't understand where you're coming from. We're on an arduous path and may fall at any moment. Your responsibility as our leader is truly heavy."

"It is nothing. For now, it seems that they're still fighting among themselves, so all we have to do is to build up whatever advantages we can get. I hope that after the dust settles, I'll be able to rely on my

own power to protect myself. Most importantly, I want Ling'er to be able to live as herself without being scrutinized by an old woman and a middle-aged man. She's no doubt suffering like this, so I'll do all I can to change it."

Tianming continued to descend despite the pain, a resolute expression on his face. "I've doubted myself far too many times. Without you guys, without the Grand-Orient Sword and Prime Tower, and without Lifesbane, I'm nothing. Others might think that I simply got lucky, despite being a nobody. But at least, I know I am someone who doesn't fear death."

"Those words are meaningless. We have a symbiotic relationship and our fates are linked. Just as you rely on us, we also rely on you. Let me say that I admire your character. You have your own charisma, your own sense of justice and righteousness. There's no one else like you in this world," Ying Huo said.

"I really can't get used to a crook suddenly getting so serious."

"Yeah. A crook like you also suddenly got sentimental on me. I'm not used to it myself."

"Just you wait. I'll pull out all of your feathers!"

"And I'll peck your balls out!"

As they continued descending, Tianming felt like he was losing all sensation.

"I'm two thirds of the way down." Even though there was some way left to go, the tribulation spirit hazards had pushed him to the limit. "I think I need a body refining technique for the rest. Even if I try forcing my way down, I'd only end up dead. I'll just come back at a later time."

Tianming was afraid that something would go wrong during the hatching. The pain from the tribulation spirit hazards was secondary. When he emerged from the Heaven Cauldron, he looked like he was burned all over.

"Holy crap, did you turn into a roast pig?" said a familiar voice.

Tianming turned to look and saw Ouyang Jianwang. "Brother Ouyang, let's drink," said Tianming as he quickly served up some wine.

"Stop joking around. You're as black as charcoal and it's sending chills down my spine," the man said as he laughed.

"All right. I'll take my leave then."

"Don't go yet, I wrote a new poem. Fancy a match?"

"You can go first."

Ouyang Jianwang put both his arms behind his back and began.

"To take down bandits

"Go first for their

"Leader.

"To insult others

"Go first for their

"Mother."

Tianming composed a response.

"The pain when the flower is picked

"Is felt only once.

"After that comes waves of pleasure."

Ouyang Jianwang seemed rather confident about the next one.

"Even the thickest lump of metal

"Can be ground to a needle

"By the three thousand women in my harem."

Tianming answered with this:

"I embarked on a long search for it,

"My boots breaking from wear,

"Only to find it hanging under my nose."

Ouyang Jianwang seemed impressed. "Wonderful! You seem to have improved. I finally found a fellow kindred spirit after dabbling in the art of poetry for years. Young man, I really admire you."

"You flatter me, Brother Ouyang. I'm but a humble beginner. I still have much to learn to be able to come close to you."

"You're the one who knows how to flatter, so much so that I'm even feeling really good about it. I've decided to pass on a body refining technique to you."

"That sounds a little random. Don't you have to think about something like that a little longer?"

"I see. Upon further consideration, I'll retract my offer."

"Please don't, I was just joking."

"Sit down and listen." Ouyang Jianwang leaned down into his chair, rocking it as he drank his wine.

"Most body refining techniques focus on strengthening the physical body. However, there is a rather rare kind that involves taking spirit hazards into the body. Not only will it increase your body's toughness, but you can also use the spirit hazards to attack. Do you know about it?"

"I do." Tianming demonstrated this by focusing a beam of Invincible Sword Ki on his fingertip. He knew that Ouyang Jianwang had been paying attention to him. The poem battles were actually a kind of test. Some people didn't need to fight; all they needed was to talk to a person to know whether they were kindred spirits. The poetry was a medium to see how well they fit together.

"This sword ki is only average. First, your technique isn't good enough. Second, too many of your spirit hazards only have saintly heavenly patterns, no tribulation patterns."

"I see. What should I do?" Tianming wouldn't let go of any opportunity to grow stronger. He was the kind of person who paid back his debts a few times over, as in the case of Sage Chen.

"I have a body refining technique that's rather similar to the one you have, but more complex and powerful. You will be able to control even stronger sword ki and unleash even more power. You can even do so with a simple twitch of your eye. Watch."

As Ouyang Jianwang spoke, a strand of sword ki shot out from his left eye into the Heaven Cauldron, causing waves to ripple out.

"That is impressive!" That blast would have vaporized him.

"It's called the Tribulation Sword Body. Basically, you take in sword ki with tribulation patterns into your body. It is something you can do in parallel to training a body refining technique that can strengthen your body. You can use one to stabilize the body and the other to attack."

"I see."

"Here's the manual. Take it and study it. The key to the technique isn't your swordsmanship, but rather your constitution and willpower. Only the most handsome, talented, and determined people can utilize the Tribulation Sword Body to its full potential. For example, I'm one of them."

"I understand talented and determined, but what does being handsome have to do with it?"

"Figure that out yourself," Ouyang Jianwang said cryptically.

"I've got it. People who call themselves handsome must have really thick skin, which makes it harder for sword ki with tribulation patterns to pierce through."

"You little rascal!" Ouyang Jianwang facepalmed so hard that his mustache shook.

"Please calm yourself."

"I didn't think you'd work it out so quickly. Train hard and you might just achieve a hundredth of what I have."

"Might I ask what level you're at, Brother Ouyang?"

"I now have ten thousand strands of tribulation sword ki, so I have quite a few tribulation patterns."

"The problem is, I don't have any access to tribulation sword ki. How should I train?" Tianming asked.

"Of course I won't give you the technique without providing you with the means to train it. Come, I'll take you there." He dragged Tianming into the Heaven Cauldron past the spirit hazards and reached a specific area. "My sword ki pool is ahead. It's my personal property and protected by a heavenly pattern formation. Others can't enter, but you can."

"How many strands are inside?"

"Ten thousand. You won't be able to use them up in your lifetime."

"Impressive. I have another question."

"Ask away."

"Can my lifebound beast train with me?"

"Is your lifebound beast the monster?"

"It's a little ugly, but I wouldn't call it a monster."

"Ugly? That is pitiful. I'll allow it then. Otherwise, its life would be too tragic," Ouyang Jianwang said.

"Understood!"

Right after that, Ouyang Jianwang tossed him inside the pool. "Probably best to assimilate at least one strand of tribulation sword ki before returning to the Deepstar Battlefield."

"Okay."

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Within the formation, Tianming and Ying Huo were a little horrified at what they saw. There was a pool a few times the size of the one they had used before, and any one of those sword ki spirit hazards were more powerful than Tianming's Myriad-Demise Sword. The pool's bubbling almost sounded like the low growl of many wild beasts.

"Is it too late to back out of this?" Ying Huo asked.

"Nope."

"Should we drag Tortoise Bro into this?"

"I worry that my eardrums would burst," Tianming said, shaking his head. Contrary to its humongous size, Lan Huang had puny pain tolerance.

"Come to think of it, why is Ouyang Jianwang being so nice to you?"

"There's no point in thinking about it. As long as he does what he says, we don't have to worry. It is not like we're losing out from this opportunity anyways."

"Makes sense." Ying Huo gulped audibly. "Can I watch a demonstration of you doing it first?"

"Just go in!" Tianming grabbed it and jumped, closing his eyes as they fell into the pool.

"Aaaaaaagh!" Their cries echo throughout the formation.

Ouyang Jianwang seemed quite pleased to hear it. "He dared to call me average looking? I hope he relishes the pain."

However, something odd happened. The cries seemed to disappear all of a sudden.

Chapter 643: Avenger

Two hours later, Tianming emerged from the barrier, looking really haggard.

"Young man, how does it feel to take what it has to offer?" Ouyang Jianwang said, sitting with his legs crossed.

"Quite refreshing," Tianming said.

"Wow, you're even boasting. Come and let me see if you managed to even absorb one strand of tribulation sword ki."

"One? That's impossible."

"Weak," Ouyang Jianwang said derisively. "Young people these days are pathetic. They can't even take one bit of hardship. Back in my day, I—"

Before he managed to finish, he saw the dozen strands of tribulation sword ki in Tianming's hand. No, there were fifteen in total, each one stronger than his Myriad-Demise Sword.

"What the hell?! Why'd you pretend to fail?!" Ouyang Jianwang snapped.

"Sorry, it's a habit."

"Amazing. I knew my judgment wasn't mistaken.... Wait, were you only there for two hours? Doesn't that mean you could've absorbed even more if you had the time?" Ouyang Jianwang said, his mouth widening as the realization dawned on him.

"Calm down, I say, calm down."

"What in the world!" Ouyang Jianwang stumbled off his chair and looked at him blankly. If it went on like that, Tianming might stand a chance to top his record of ten thousand strands of tribulation sword ki!

The real reason behind Tianming's sudden increase in endurance was definitely thanks to his empyrean gold body, which allowed him to take on some of his Primordial Chaos Beasts' constitution. It took Ouyang Jianwang quite a while to accept that fact.

"Hear me out. You have to take the spot in the Deepstar Pool no matter what," Ouyang Jianwang said, suddenly sounding serious.

"Why?"

"I want to see how many astral sources your body can take in."

"Got it."

"There isn't much time left. You have to go back to the Deepstar Battlefield. From now on, come here to train the Tribulation Sword Body for two hours every day."

"Understood. Thank you, Brother." Tianming bowed.

"Remember to bring wine and poems."

"Alright...."

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As Tianming was headed to the Abyssal Battlefield, he ran into Fang Xingying. "Why are you out here? Have you been eliminated?"

Fang Xingying nodded.

"Who did it? I'll beat them up for you."

"Are you certain?" Fang Xingying seemed a little nervous and pale as he crossed his arms.

"What do you mean by that?" Something felt off to Tianming.

"Li Tianming, I heard you defeated Fang Chenyu. Everyone's talking about how quickly you improve. I know your talent is definitely superior to even the Sterling House of Fang's Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline."

"So?"

"You have a good backing and lots of power. Not to mention, your relationship with Fang Xingque is past the point of no return, right?"

"That's right."

"Shall I find a chance for you to kill him without anyone noticing? I promise I can arrange it without anyone finding out after the Deepstar Battle." His hands shook nervously as he spoke.

Tianming fell silent. "Do you hate him that much?"

"I do! Unbelievably so! Did you know? The Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline belongs to me! I am the true heir, but they took everything that belonged to me and gave it to Fang Xingque, and even forced my parents to die! I live only to avenge them. Please help me, I beg you!" Fang Xingying knelt and pleaded, as if Tianming was his only remaining lifeline.

"Who are they?"

"Fang Taiqing and Fang Qingli, my grandmother! Hahaha! I hate them so very much!"

"Why? Aren't you also a member of the Sterling House of Fang?"

"My father is only average, while Fang Taiqing is the sect master of the Heaven Branch. That's why his son is thought to be far more suitable for the Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline. I was too dumb back then, and didn't know how to speak for myself. All seventeen years of my life, I've been living in a nightmare. I beg you, I beg you!" Fang Xingying said as he kowtowed nonstop.

Tianming was about to say that was too cruel, but he didn't. It was something in the past, and he wasn't the arbiter of what was cruel or not. Fang Xingying was just a pitiful person and Tianming couldn't empathize with him, not having experienced what he had.

"Li Tianming, are you going to help me? I definitely won't betray you."

"Just calm down for now."

"What do you mean?"

"Calm down. I don't have much of a relationship with you, so asking me to kill the son of Heaven Branch's sect master is a little too much. I need to think about it more first," Tianming said as he helped him up. While he did have some conflict with Fang Xingque, it wasn't to the point that he would kill him. He knew that Fang Taiqing had lots of power and influence in the Archaion Sect. Killing Fang Xingque would cause too much commotion. He and Feiling were currently in a rather perilous state, so they had to tread carefully every step of the way.

What he didn't expect, however, was that Fang Xingying would push his hand away. "Li Tianming, you're a coward! You also fear them! Everyone in this world is afraid of cruel people like them, including you!"

Tianming felt his head start to hurt. "Actually, if you really want revenge, you should empty your mind first. You've fallen into despair, but there's a lot of chances in life. Don't let yourself be mired in madness. If you can't even control yourself, only your enemy will benefit," Tianming said. This was something he had experienced before, so he knew how it felt.

"Haha.... You and your empty words. Do you know what I've suffered?"

"Fang Xingying, think about it, is our relationship so close that I'd kill someone for your sake? You are not a child anymore. Try to be more mature." Tianming felt his rage building up. He didn't know what to say to him.

"Hehe.... Forget I said anything today. I misread your character," Fang Xingying said as he stood up and walked away.

Tianming watched as he left. "There's many avengers in this world. What they should really do is to try to control themselves first."

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Five days later on the Deepstar Battlefield, the last days of the battle were getting closer and closer. Tension was high in the audience and many didn't want to leave their seats.

Even now, Tianming was still keeping to his own pace. But to save time, he got rid of the powder on him so he wouldn't be pestered by Fang Xingque. What he did earned him quite a lot of mockery and laughter among the audience, who thought he was afraid despite his arrogant words days before, not that Tianming could hear any of it. He was really calm and did whatever he had to. He had been thinking about Fang Xingying for the past few days, wondering if he'd hurt him by turning him down so quickly.

"Whatever, I'll stop thinking about it. I'm already in so much trouble, so I can't afford to get involved in other people's troubles." After finally letting it go, he felt much better.

He was cultivating within the battlefield. But before he made a final push, someone approached him from afar. Tianming saw a man accompanied by four women. The man seemed about as young as Fang Xingque and the rest, around sixteen or seventeen. He looked bright and handsome, and his slender figure was clad in a white robe. He seemed like a pretty boy whose beauty was hard to obscure despite his daintiness.

There were four beauties around him, each of whom felt different from the others. One seemed mature and alluring, and the other was petite and cute. There was also a short-haired, handsome woman with a

bombastic figure, and a quiet and gentle one whose gaze was really calming. Tianming almost couldn't take his eyes off the eye candy.

Those four pleasing women were protecting the young man in white, making for quite a rare sight. More importantly, all of them were Heaven Branch disciples. The aura of the Samsara stage was obvious and dense.

They felt like sharp swords, so Tianming figured that they were from the Draconis House of Jian. Unlike Jian Xueyi, however, these were disciples who were able to join the Heaven Branch before the age of twenty. They must be core members of the house, otherwise they wouldn't look so impressive compared to normal Earth Branch disciples. As the disciples of the Draconis House of Jian maintained a rather low profile, Tianming didn't know who they were, but they definitely knew him.

"Hey, don't run. Come make some friends," said the young man in a gentle, pleasing voice. As he spoke, they were already before Tianming.

"Who are the other four?" Tianming asked.

"They are all my girlfriends!" he said gleefully.

"I see. It doesn't really matter to me. I think you're a fine lad, so I wouldn't mind being your friend," Tianming said with a smile.

Right after that, all of the girls pulled on the young man's ear, causing him to wince in pain. "Sorry, it's my fault! I'll introduce you again!"

When they let go, he cleared his throat and said, "That was a joke, by the way. These are my godsisters. I'm their godbrother."

At that moment, Ying Huo popped out of the lifebound space and said, "I could've sworn you guys are sleeping with each other."

"Huh?!" All five of them glared at Ying Huo.

"I'm really sorry!" Tianming hurriedly said and stuffed Ying Huo back in his lifebound space.

"Your birdie is really cute..." the young man awkwardly said, ignorant of the double entendre.

"Umm... so you are?" Tianming hurriedly changed the subject to avoid awkwardness.

"I'm Jian Lingchen. My father is the palace lord of Tribulation Artifact Hall, Jian Wufeng. My uncle tasked me to protect you. I know who you really are."

"Is your uncle Jian Wuyi?"

"Bingo! You got it right!"

Tianming had seen Jian Lingchen's name before. He occupied the third spot on the rankings.

Chapter 644 - Have it my Way

The Deepstar Battle was close to the end, and there were only two or three thousand people left in the battlefield. Almost everyone had been eliminated after close to a month of fighting, and they soon turned into the others' points.

But those that remained were elites. They were either Heaven Branch disciples, or Earth Branch disciples standing at the top of the pyramid. Fang Xingque was ranked first, with one thousand eight hundred and fifty-three points, Xuanyuan Muxue was second, with one thousand five hundred and eighty points, and Jian Lingchen was third, with eight hundred and thirty-one points.

Those in the top hundred were all Heaven Branch disciples, and every single one had defeated at least dozens of others. Those in the top three were from their three respective clans. Among them, Fang Xingque had a team of hundreds, along with nine Heaven Branch disciples, that forcefully put him first.

Many people felt that cheating like that was shameful, but there was nothing they could do about it. Jian Lingchen wasn't old, and he might not necessarily be stronger than other Heaven Branch disciples. But there was a reason he could stand in the top three. That was because he had four sisters supporting him and forcefully bringing him up in the rankings.

Although he was also using external help, he wasn't as unrestrained as Fang Xingque. Perhaps due to how Jian Xueyi treated him, and the fact that he cultivated the Hexapath Samsara Sword, Tianming didn't really mind the disciples from the Draconis House of Jian. In addition to Jian Lingcheng's innocent smile, it was easy for others to gain a favorable impression of her.

"Brother Tianming, my father secretly told me that you were brought back by Her Eminence. Is that right?" Jian Lingchen came up with a wink.

"That's right." Tianming nodded. It wasn't a secret, so there was nothing Tianming had to hide about it.

"Wow, even the eminent appreciates you. My respect for you is like endless spring water," Jian Lingchen said enviously.

"Do many people know about it?" Tianming asked.

"Not many. My dad told me to keep my mouth shut, so I only told my four godsisters about it." Jian Lingchen winked at the four girls.

"Your godsisters are all so beautiful," Tianming smiled.

"Hey, hey, hey, keep your impure thoughts to yourself. The four of them are my future wives," said Jian Lingchen.

"What the hell?" Tianming widened his eyes and asked, "Are you serious?"

"Well, I can't help it since I'm so handsome. There's many girls wooing me, and they're all great beauties. So I don't have a choice but to accept them all. At least I'll be covered in the rain and dew." Jian Lingchen coughed.

"The world isn't fair."

"Calm down, calm down. Ordinary people like you have to keep yourself composed. After all, jealousy will make you uglier, and you won't be able to attract any beauties," Jian Lingchen smiled.

“Why are you guys acting so sneakily?” the mature one among the four women asked.

“No. Big Sister Nichang, we’re praising you guys’ beauty!” Jian Lingchen smiled while shrinking his neck. After that, he turned around and whispered to Tianming, “You have to be nice to women. Praise them more and the family will become harmonious.”

“Alright, that’s enough. I don’t need you to teach me how to strike up a conversation with girls,” said Tianming.

“I heard what you did to Fang Chenyu, not to mention that you have a conflict with Fang Xingque. It just so happens that I want to get that idiot off the ranking. So I’m thinking of joining hands with you. We have five Heaven Branch disciples here, wouldn’t it be better for us to work together?” Jian Lingchen said straightforwardly.

“You have the guts to face Fang Xingque?” Tianming asked.

“Why not? Don’t listen to him boast about himself, sounding off like the Archaion Sect belongs to him. Who doesn’t have a capable father nowadays? Our parents all have some status, so which of them will lower their seniority to interfere in the younger generation’s affairs? He’s shameless enough to use hundreds of people to rise in the rankings, and I’m not on his side. So why can’t I compete fairly?” Jian Lingchen said.

“That sounds about right. After all, you have the Draconis House of Jian and Human Branch’s sect master supporting you. Conflicts between the younger generation are trivial matters,” said Tianming.

“So what do you think? Us joining hands to deal with Fang Xingque in the last three days. Since you were able to defeat Fang Chenyu, you must be approaching the strength of a Heaven Branch disciple,” said Jian Lingchen.

“Sure, but I won’t be working for you. I won’t hesitate if there’s an opportunity to activate his Astral Formation,” Tianming said straightforwardly.

“That’s simple. If he’s defeated and the points go to you, then wouldn’t it be resolved if I beat you up? Haha, I have four godsisters here.” Jian Lingchen smiled.

“Then I’ll also deal with you if you obtain his points,” said Tianming.

“Sure, as long as you have the capability to do so. I look down on people like Fang Xingque the most, acting so arrogant like he’s everything. The Deepstar Battle is ruined by that piece of garbage!” Jian Lingchen said with disdain.

“You’re saying that when the rankings are revealed on the last day, those going after Fang Xingque might be intimidated by his group and give up? So you’re saying that you need someone to take the lead?” Tianming asked.

“That’s right. I’ll take the lead at that time, but I need someone to join me,” said Jian Lingchen.

“You’re pretty bold. Why not go after Xuanyuan Muxue?” Tianming asked.

“I never hit women. Women are gifts of art created by gods. So how can you beat them?” Jian Lingchen said.

“What if she beats you up?”

“Well, I guess it’s the arrangement of fate to have intimate contact with her fist,” said Jian Lingchen.

“And what if someone tries to crush your balls?” Tianming asked with a smile.

“No way, they have to be beaten up....” Jian Lingchen immediately had beads of sweat rolling down his forehead.

“Haha....” Tianming found this fellow interesting, and he didn’t mind working together with him. After all, there were so many people on Fang Xingque’s side, and he really needed an ally to touch him.

“Brother, do you mind me asking you something? Logically speaking, Fang Xingque should know about your identity. So why is he still acting so arrogant toward you?” Jian Lingchen asked curiously.

“I’m guessing that he still doesn’t know about it.” Tianming smiled.

“Probably. After all, the seniors are all unwilling to talk about anything with regards to the eminent,” said Jian Lingchen.

“I don’t think he’d lower his head even if he knew it,” said Tianming. His identity wasn’t stable enough, so he could only be considered a special existence at best.

“That’s right. This guy is used to being an overlord.”

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There were two days left until the final battle, and Tianming planned to stay here together with Jian Lingchen. With that, Tianming slowly got to know Jian Lingchen and his four godsisters.

The intelligent and charming one was Jian Nichang, the short-haired, irritable one was Jian Liuyang, the gentle, quiet one was Jian Wenjing, and the sweet and lovely one was Jian Yini. They were all core disciples of the Draconis House of Jian, and their ancestors were linked with Jian Lingchen’s ancestors.

Along the way, Tianming followed behind while he pondered over Heavenly Will. “Lingchen, he’s been cultivating along the way, and he’s slowing down our pace. Why do you have to bring him along?”

“Why don’t you get rid of him? After all, he’s still not comparable to a Heaven Branch disciple. I don’t doubt his future achievements, but he’s still an empyrean saint in the Deepstar Battlefield. He’ll be a burden following us, and the gap between you and the top two will only increase.” Jian Liuyang turned to look at Tianming unhappily.

“It’s alright. Why do you guys still care about catching up to them now? There’s no way we can catch up to them right now. Let’s wait for the last three days,” said Jian Lingchen.

“He has a huge conflict with Fang Xingque, and I feel that we can watch the show from the side. This person’s identity is too sensitive, and he killed two of Fang Chenyu’s lifebound beasts. The Sterling House of Fang will definitely target him. So why are you interfering?” Jian Liuyang said.

“Most importantly, he might not be able to do anything with his strength. It’s not worth getting involved in the conflict just for a friendship,” said Jian Weijing.

“Do all of you share the same thoughts?” Jian Lingchen asked.

“I feel the same too!” Jian Yini said.

“You guys are afraid of Fang Xingque?” Jian Lingchen asked unhappily.

“It’s not that we’re afraid, but we don’t want to create any other conflicts other than fair competition. Otherwise, when the Deepstar Battle comes to an end, they’ll keep coming at us, and it’ll be vexing. There’s nothing special about Li Tianming’s capability, and he has an aggressive temper. It’s easy for you to get caught up in a mess to make friends with such a person. I believe that your father and uncle wouldn’t recommend you do that,” said Jian Nichang.

“That doesn’t matter. I find him pretty pleasing to the eye. Just let me have it my way this time, alright?” Jian Lingchen said coquettishly.

“Alright, alright, as long as you're happy. But we won’t agree to it if he wants to drag you down.”

“I heard that his improvement is quick, but seriously speaking, there’s a difference between the Empyrean Saint and Samsara stages. It’s still unknown if he's an absolute genius before he reaches the Samsara stage.

“I’m afraid that he’s being targeted by Fang Xingque in the Deepstar Battlefield and will be crippled by him. After all, this fellow started it, so he can’t blame others for doing the same to him.”

“Let’s not think about that for now. We just need things to be chaotic and find an opportunity to help Lingchen get Fang Xingque’s points.”

“The Deepstar Pool’s spot is very important, and we have to do our best!”

“Let’s take the risk once for Lingchen.”

Jian Lingchen was touched by their words and hugged the four girls. He only lamented the fact that he only had two hands and couldn’t have enough fun.

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“Tsk, tsk,” Ying Huo smiled.

“What’re you laughing about?” Tianming asked.

“Look ahead.”

Tianming raised his head and saw Jian Lingchen hugging a girl in each arm.

“Holy shit. Am I here to be a third wheel?” Tianming smiled bitterly.

“Come and curse his kidneys with me!” Ying Huo said with a dark face.

Chapter 645 - Final Days

There were four more days until the Deepstar Battle came to an end. On this day, the spectator seats were nearly filled, with all kinds of discussions everywhere. The place was mainly filled with Earth Branch disciples, as the Deepstar Battle was practically the most important battle for them.

“Muxue.”

“Hello, Muxue.”

Many people were surprised when they saw Xuanyuan Muxue coming out when there were only four days left. She was currently in second place, but she received the most respect of anyone on the battlefield.

“She’s really powerful, obtaining all the points by herself.”

“Yeah.”

The disciples were all looking at Xuanyuan Muxue with admiration. But she just quietly walked to the Heaven Cauldron. She waited briefly before a white-clothed youth walked out with bloodshot eyes.

“Big Brother Yuheng,” Xuanyuan Muxue smiled.

“How many points do you have now?”

“One thousand seven hundred and twenty. I’m in second place, three hundred points away from Xingque.” Xuanyuan Muxue tightened her cloak around her.

“They have so many people, and only so few points? What an embarrassment.” Xuanyuan Yuheng walked over to Xuanyuan Muxue. He looked at the snowy mountain ahead and asked, “The final battle begins tomorrow. Are you confident?”

“It should be fine. I’m already prepared for it,” said Xuanyuan Muxue.

“That’s great then. The Deepstar Pool is pretty good, so don’t miss this opportunity,” said Xuanyuan Yuheng.

“Big Brother Yuheng, I’d like to discuss Li Tianming’s matter with you before the final battle,” said Xuanyuan Muxue.

“Go ahead.”

“Can I be ruthless if I run into him? I can break through the Astral Formation,” said Xuanyuan Muxue.

“No,” Xuanyuan Yuheng said with dark eyes.

“Why?”

“The house king personally warned me to forget Li Tianming and concentrate on preparing for the battle,” said Xuanyuan Yuheng.

“Are you afraid of the eminent?”

“No. It’s the relationship between the Tribulation Peak, Sterling House of Fang, Archaic House of Xuanyuan, and Draconis House of Jian. The eminent belongs to our Archaic House of Xuanyuan, and

Tribulation Peak has a lot of authority. But who knows if Sterling House of Fang is giving their best? So the house king intends to use Li Tianming to test the Sterling House of Fang's attitude, and it just so happens that he has a tense relationship with Fang Xingque," said Xuanyuan Yuheng.

"So you're saying to let this chess piece mess up everything and see their reaction?" Xuanyuan Muxue asked.

"That's right. Tianming is nothing, but he carries the authority of Her Eminence. Anyone that tries touching him will be challenging Her Eminence's authority. So don't do it yourself, let the Sterling House of Fang do it."

"Then did my elder brother die for nothing?"

"For the time being," replied Xuanyuan Yuheng.

"Oh."

"Are you uncomfortable in your heart?"

"I'm not. I don't actually hate him. I just feel that it's stupid going against someone that belongs to the eminent. But when I think about my elder brother, I feel that I should do something about it," said Xuanyuan Muxue.

"Look at how the Tribulation Peak's tribulation elders respond. The three sect masters were chosen by them, and even Fang Taiqing fears them. The house king is afraid of this clan of cowards. They surrendered when the eight divine realms applied pressure, and they also capitulated before the Yinyang Demon Sect," said Xuanyuan Yuheng.

"Yeah, it's best to unify everything since we're facing trouble now. Everyone knows about it, but no one knows what the Heaven Branch's sect master is thinking," replied Xuanyuan Muxue.

"A human's heart is unfathomable. But anyone who dares to go against god will die a terrible death," Xuanyuan Yuheng said with bloodshot eyes.

"I heard the eight divine realms will try to do something during the Number One Summit. You must be under great pressure, right?"

"I'm still managing it well. I'm not old, and that battlefield is mainly under the control of those from twenty-six to thirty years old," said Xuanyuan Yuheng.

"If only Big Brother Yuheng was born a few years earlier. If that was the case, you could support the entire Heaven Branch by now. Our side is too weak to face the eight divine realms now."

"That's obvious. You're only seventeen, and you'll be better than me if you have another ten years," said Xuanyuan Yuheng.

"Yeah."

"No matter what, whoever wants to touch Her Eminence will have to go through me. I'll exterminate their entire clan!" Xuanyuan Yuheng said with his eyes narrowed into slits.

"Big Brother Yuheng, is it good for you to be a blind believer?"

“What’s wrong with it? Do you know what a god is?” Xuanyuan Yuheng asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Sovereign of the world. They represent invincibility!”

“Then have you set down the unhappiness in your heart?” Xuanyuan Muxue asked.

“No.” Xuanyuan Yuheng lowered his head with hatred. “I also want to have the eminent’s authority.”

“Then bear with it for now,” Xuanyuan Muxue said.

“Muxue.” Xuanyuan Yuheng suddenly raised his head to look at her. “Put down your hatred and befriend Tianming.”

“Why?”

“It’s easier to kill a friend.”

“And what happens after that?”

“Wait for an opportunity, one where he no longer has the eminent’s authority.”

“Oh.”

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The Deepstar Battle’s finale was about to arrive. On this day, the spectator seats were filled, and elders and tribulation elders were around as well. They were there to accept disciples based on their performances. After all, anyone who could enter the Deepstar Battlefield was an elite, and none of them exceeded the age of twenty!

Sourceglow Hall’s palace lord, Gou Yuqiu, and Ouyang Jianwang were in a chamber. One of them was serious, while the other looked drunk.

“What do you think of Li Tianming?” Gou Yuqiu asked.

“Which aspect are you talking about? His temperament? Talent? Or future?” Ouyang Jianwang asked.

“All of it.”

“They’re all the best, especially his temperament. The only downside to him is his cultivation,” said Ouyang Jianwang.

“All of it seems to be similar to Her Eminence. Her Eminence’s cultivation is also low right now, and she needs time,” said Gou Yuqiu.

“We’re in a passive position right now, with internal and external troubles. There’s still an assassin that we’ve yet to find so far,” said Ouyang Jianwang.

“The external troubles are clear. What’s troublesome is the internal troubles. The Draconis House of Jian controls quite a bit of military power, and we can’t have anything go wrong with them,” said Gou Yuqiu.

“Fang Taiqing participated in the last few conferences, and he even spoke nicely. But when the time comes, they’re also an uncertain factor,” said Ouyang Jianwang.

“Let’s just observe. There are so many people on the Tribulation Peak, and everyone is there to defend the Archaion Divine Realm. Since Fang Taiqing can be chosen, that also means he can be removed. The sect master of the Heaven Branch’s position isn’t hereditary,” said Gou Yuqiu.

“They also have quite a few people in Tribulation Peak.”

“Just bear with it for now. Drag it out, and it’ll be better for the eminent.”

“What’s the eminent’s current cultivation right now?”

“I heard she’s a sky saint now.”

“Soon enough. It’ll only take a few more years for her to return to godhood.”

“But who can hold up the Archaion Divine Realm for those few years?” The two exchanged a glance and shook their heads.

“Speaking of which, why should outsiders like us worry so much?” Ouyang Jianwang laughed.

“Don’t lie to yourself. The Archaion Divine Realm is our home, and even if the sect is chaotic, it’s still our home. If we can’t even protect it, then how are we any different from animals?” Gou Yuqiu said.

“What are you talking about? Furthermore, the Yinyang Demon Sect hates the Sterling House of Fang. So it won’t be easy for them to surrender if anything happens. The Yinyang Demon Sect will definitely destroy their phoenix clan if there’s an opportunity,” Ouyang Jianwang smiled.

“It’s time. Let’s just watch the Deepstar Battle for now,” said Gou Yuqiu.

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In the Sterling House of Fang’s secret chamber.

There were many seniors gathered here. There were divine mentors and tribulation elders here. They all had a high position in the Archaion Sect. The crowd below was already in an uproar because the last three days had come. The Deepstar Battlefield was bustling, and not even hundreds of perspectives were enough for everyone.

Fang Taiqing sat on the main seat among the hundreds of masters there. Beside him were others, like Judgment Hall’s palace lord, Fang Shenyu.

“House King, Yuewei is here,” someone came in to report.

“Let her enter.” Not long after, a woman came over to Fang Taiqing. She was slender and had brows like ink paintings, and was wearing an emerald dress. Her highlight was her colored hair. It was gentle and bright, adding a unique charm to her temperament. It was naturally because of the Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline.

“Father.” The lady bowed. Her name was Fang Yuewei.

“How’re the preparations?”

"I'm already doing my best," said Fang Yuewei.

"We'll have to rely on you to uphold the honor and dignity of our Sterling House of Fang," said Fang Taiqing.

"Understood." Fang Yuewei's eyelashes trembled.

"You can lose to anyone, but not the Yinyang Demon Sect or the Quadform Oceanic Sect.

"Understood."

"Sit down," Fang Taiqing said.

"Yes." Fang Yuewei sat on the chair.

"Have you found Xingque?" Fang Taiqing asked.

"I have."

"What do you think of your younger brother?"

"Decent, I guess. He'll be better than me when he's my age." Fang Yuewei lowered her head.

"Yeah." Fang Taiqing nodded. "Yuewei, your temperament is too gentle. How good would it be if you're a man instead?"

"Dad, I won't fall behind." Fang Yuewei lowered her head and gritted her teeth.

"Say that to me again after the Number One Summit."

"Yes, father." Fang Yuewei slowly balled her fists in her sleeves.

Chapter 646 - Imperial Sword Prison

The ranking appeared in the sky with a tremor. This time, it would stay until the whole event had come to an end. Everyone could see the entire ranking, even the spectators outside.

The first place Fang Xingque had two thousand one hundred and eighty-nine points; second place was Xuanyuan Muxue, with one thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight points; third was Jian Lingchen, with nine hundred and ninety-nine points; fourth place was Xuanyuan Yutuo, with eight hundred and seventy points; and so on.

Every point represented one eliminated person. So there weren't many people remaining. But the pinnacle confrontation was even more exciting.

"Xuanyuan Yutuo, Jian Chenzhong, and Jian Mugucare are disciples of the tribulation elder, Dugu Jin, and all three of them are performing greatly."

"All three of them are in the top ten on the rankings. Dugu Jin's seven disciples are all in the top twenty, and they'll definitely be the second strongest group if they come together."

"They're actually together, all seven of them."

“Holy shit!”

“Dugu Jin is truly worthy of being the youngest tribulation elder who went through tribulation. Rumor has it that he only lost to Fang Taiqing by one move when he competed for the position of Heaven Branch’s sect master back then. With his strength, challenging to become the Human Branch or Earth Branch’s sect master will be easy.”

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Jian Lingchen stood together with the four ladies and looked at Tianming, who was cultivating his sword art in the river. Tianming held the Grand-Orient Sword and entered into a meditative state.

“What is he doing? Making a final attempt? It’s already the last three days, and enemies will discover us the moment they’re in range. Yet he wants to cultivate now?” the short-haired Jian Liuli said in an unhappy tone.

“Is he pretending to be cool in front of us? This fellow seems a little stupid. Doesn’t he know that we only have Lingchen in our eyes?” Jian Yini said bashfully.

“Should we go first? We’re wasting time here.” Jian Nichang said.

“Hey, why aren’t you guys listening to me at all? Have some patience,” said Jian Lingchen.

“Yell at us again and I’ll twist your ear,” said Jian Liuyang.

“No, don’t. I’m sorry!” Jian Lingchen started sweating. He might have all the affection gathered on him, but he didn’t have any right to speak in this relationship.

“Let’s just wait. We’re not in a hurry,” said Jian Lingchen.

Tianming wasn’t pretending to be cool. The Grand-Orient Sword was undergoing drastic changes internally because the fourth black gate had opened.

Tianming awakened the Imperealm Sword Formation on the third gold gate back in the Divine Tomb, and it had already been some time since then. So as he had gradually grown more familiar with the Grand-Orient Sword, his effort had finally paid off.

“I initially wanted to put my bet on the Tribulation Sword Body, but it’s more stable now.” Tianming’s consciousness was standing before the fourth black gate. After unlocking this gate, Tianming was only left with the last one, the transparent door right at the center.

Tianming looked at the black gate and gently pushed it open. Everything began unfolding before his eyes, and he was stunned when he looked at it. There was a stone plaque in the door, one side black and the other gold. The heavenly patterns were densely packed together like a prison.

Three words appeared in Tianming’s mind: “Imperial Sword Prison?” The Grand-Orient Vortex, multitask, Imperealm Sword Barrier, and now the Imperial Sword Prison. When Tianming opened his eyes, he saw densely packed black heavenly patterns on the Grand-Orient Sword gathering on the sword’s body, forming a sword-shaped prison.

“How powerful is it?” Tianming still needed verification. “Everyone, please wait a moment.”

Tianming entered the river. Aside from powerful demon beasts in the river, there were still some ordinary demon beasts, like second-order demon beasts. Tianming fixed his target on an azure dragon and thrust the Grand-Orient Sword toward it.

He was trying to see how powerful the Imperial Sword Prison was. In that split second, the sword-shaped heavenly patterns on the Grand-Orient Sword poured into the dragon and formed a prison on its scales. The black and gold heavenly patterns began wandering on the dragon's body and instilled tremendous pressure on it. The dragon couldn't move and gradually sank.

"Mhm?" Tianming was pleasantly surprised when he saw this scene. "Being hit by Imperial Sword Prison binds and seals the energy flow. Even..."

The Imperial Sword Prison flared up with a single thought, converting into Grand-Orient Sword Ki and wreaking havoc in the dragon's internal organs, ultimately killing it.

"Anyone the Imperial Sword Prison hits will be crippled on the spot. My opponent won't be able to use their saint ki, and their lives will be under my control. Not even the seniors of the Sterling House of Fang can remove it. The Imperial Sword Prison will kill its host if anyone tries to remove it." Tianming's thoughts gradually cleared up. Those weren't just speculations, but he had tested personally.

"Wow, this is surely a powerful sealing technique!" His opponent would be under control as long as the Imperial Sword Prison was planted, and Tianming rejoiced. He then sat down to comprehend the heavenly patterns on the black gate.

"Imperial Will is the Grand-Orient Sword's foundation, and these heavenly patterns can quickly enrich it." Tianming realized that the effects of the fourth gate were significant. It complemented the gold heavenly patterns from the third gate well, which significantly improved his Heavenly Will's growth, and he made a breakthrough an hour later.

"Fifth level of the Empyrean Saint stage now. Three stages in a month, even faster than when I was in the Unity stage!" Tianming's thirst began growing. He knew that everything he had right now was due to his hard work, and that was the reason why he worked harder than anyone else.

He didn't have a choice, because he had loved ones to protect. Cultivating was a tedious chore, especially comprehending Heavenly Will. The whole process was taxing, but it felt great when he made breakthroughs.

"My effort finally paid off. There's no end to Heavenly Dao." Cultivating felt the same as absorbing tribulation sword ki, and he continually had to tell himself to persist.

"I'm finally qualified to shine the brightest in this battlefield now." Tianming smiled. He had already unlocked his empyrean gold body, and this breakthrough would allow Ying Huo, Lan Huang, and Meow Meow's physiques to grow stronger. As he was feeling happy about his progress, he saw the four ladies standing beside Jian Lingchen with their faces darkened.

"What's the matter?" Tianming asked. "Did Jian Lingchen cheat on you guys? I'll beat him up for you guys."

"Bullshit! We're all irritated because we had to wait for you. Lingchen might be embarrassed to tell you honestly, so let me do it. We all regretted bringing you along with us," Jian Liuyang said.

“We’re not rushing to reincarnate, so why are you guys in such a hurry?” Tianming smiled bitterly.

“How can we not be in a hurry? Someone almost caught up to Lingchen!” Jian Nichang said.

“Oh? It’s all my fault then. Alright, I’m done. I won’t cultivate anymore starting now,” Tianming smiled. It was his fault for making them wait for him, not to mention that they were ladies.

“You’re the one who said that! Do you really mean it?”

“Yes, yes.”

Jian Lingchen then finally felt relieved and said with a bitter face, “Brother, it’s not easy bringing you along. We initially planned to find a few helpers over the past few days, but you spent all the time cultivating.”

“Haha, it’s fine. I alone am equivalent to a hundred,” said Tianming.

The four ladies laughed. Jian Yini said, “Go ahead and boast all you want.”

“Let’s go. Time to leave!” They finally started their last three days in the Deepstar Battle.

“It’s easy for us to bump into someone with the Astral Formations lit up. The battle has already started, so let’s join in quickly.”

“We have five Heaven Branch disciples, so we might be able to catch up to Xuanyuan Muxue if we go all out.”

“That’s right. She’s alone.”

“Yeah! Let’s catch up to her!”

The ranking kept changing all the time, and the Deepstar Battle had grown a lot more exciting. Half an hour later, their Astral Formations reacted and pointed them in a direction.

“Over there!”

“It seems to be a group of seven.”

“Quick, chase up to them!” Of the four ladies, there were three who had impatient personalities. So they immediately went after the group without a second thought.

The other party had clearly discovered them as well, because both parties were getting closer to each other.

They’re practically invincible on the battlefield with five Heaven Branch disciples. Two more days. It’ll be fine when Fang Xingque and Xuanyuan Muxue’s locations are exposed on the last day, Tianming thought. He wasn’t in a hurry and followed behind, studying the sword-shaped heavenly patterns on the Grand-Orient Sword.

Right at that moment, Tianming suddenly heard Jian Lingchen yell, “Run!”

"You want to run? Dream on!" a cold voice sounded out that left Tianming dumbfounded. Who could scare five Heaven Branch disciples from the Draconis House of Jian to this extent? Well, there shouldn't be anyone aside from Fang Xingque's group of hundreds, right?

"Brother, run! We're finished!" Jian Lingchen ran back anxiously.

"It's all your fault! Just what kind of luck is this?" The four ladies' faces looked ugly.

"What do you mean?" Tianming asked.

"It's Dugu Jin's disciples up ahead! All seven of them!" Jian Lingchen said morosely.

Chapter 647 - Mysterious Swordbeasts

Tianming didn't really react, as he didn't know who Dugu Jin was. Were his disciples really that famous?

As he was thinking about it, Jian Lingchen and his four sisters dashed past him, leaving him far behind as he stood there. Based on the reaction from the Astral Formation, the pursuer was right ahead. Tianming looked up and saw seven Heaven Branch disciples coming his way. All of them were really powerful and fast, being samсарans. They ran so quickly that the ground cracked and shook.

"Li Tianming!" Jian Lingchen called out, only to grimace; Tianming was already surrounded.

"Lingchen, let's go! We can't afford to bother with him anymore! He would just have to stall them for us! He has Her Eminence's backing after all." Jian Nichang said.

"It won't do! We said we'd be allies! Running away by myself doesn't conform to my creed as a swordsman," Jian Lingchen said as he turned back.

"You idiot, you're really making us mad!" The four girls looked at each other with a troubled expression. "We shouldn't have taken Li Tianming along with us. Sheesh, let's go back."

And so, they rushed back.

"Li Tianming, don't you know to run?" Jian Liuyang said angrily, holding her urge back to pull his hair out.

"Why would you run when the dishes are served? I think they're at least in the top twenty. If we take them all down, we'll profit!" Tianming said as he glared at the seven, who slowly spread out and surrounded the six of them as they summoned their lifebound beasts. Both sides had many points, and they might even stand a chance against the first and second ranks.

This scene was now the main focal point of the audience. Deepstar Hall had a viewpoint for each of them, instantly attracting everyone's attention.

"They'll definitely fight under such circumstances. The loser will be eliminated and the winner will rise!"

The audience cheered. It would be a battle between twelve Heaven Branch disciples. Those young fellows would be huge figures in the future.

"This is getting really interesting. One side is the disciples of a tribulation elder, while the other is the core members of the Draconis House of Jian."

"Even though Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu are from the Draconis House of Jian, they aren't really highborn and wouldn't have a chance to perform, but Elder Dugu Jin saw potential in them. I'm sure they're quite unhappy with the core members of the house."

"They have long dreamed of proving themselves with Jian Lingchen."

"Fight!"

"Jian Lingchen's chances are far too low. Not only does his group have one person fewer, Li Tianming isn't a Heaven Branch disciple."

"Jian Lingchen is two years younger than Xuanyuan Yutuo, Jian Chenzhong, and Jian Mugu. Even though they're about the same level, Jian Lingchen has more talent, but he's at a disadvantage."

"The others around him are women, too...."

Jian Lingchen's group was under a lot of pressure. "You have no choice. We must fight the best we can and leave no regrets! They won't get my points so easily," he said.

The twin brothers before him laughed. They were both tall and slender, with really sharp brows. One was dark and the other was fair. They both had hawk noses and long, slender fingers that seem rather worn out, a sign of their hard work.

Compared to them, Jian Lingchen did indeed look like a rich kid. Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu weren't their original names; Dugu Jin had given them new names.

"Senior Brother Yutuo, leave Jian Lingchen to us. He's in third place and is the top genius of the Draconis House of Jian under twenty years old with his Quadrasword Talent. Compared to him, we're relatively unknown and would like to challenge him," said the fairer Jian Chenzhong.

"You're pretty smart. Most of their points are with Jian Lingchen," said Xuanyuan Yutuo, the leader of the seven Heaven Branch disciples. He had a really big physique and stood almost two meters tall with really well-defined musculature, a messy head of dark red hair, and a fiery third eye, a sign that he was from the Trioptic True Dragon Branch.

"Senior Brother, please understand, this is really important to us. We only want to prove ourselves to the Draconis House of Jian. After this, the two of us will do the best we can to push you to first place," said Jian Mugu in a hoarse voice as he glared at Jian Lingchen with hate and envy.

"Fine, go ahead. Just leave Li Tianming to me," Xuanyuan Yutuo said as his third eye locked on to Tianming. "Yufeng was a brother of mine. Even though his cultivation was rather weak, he was also one of the Trioptic True Dragon Branch. I must have someone answer for his death."

The other disciples with them weren't members of the three great houses, but the fact that Dugu Jin paid them any heed was because their talents were far higher than normal disciples. There were very few in the Archaion Sect that could become a Heaven Branch disciple before the age of twenty.

"Go!"

Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu both had their eyes on Jian Lingchen. His four sisters shielded him, but they were facing off against too many. The other four disciples of Dugu Jin each took on one of the

sisters, forcing them away and opening the way for Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu to attack Jian Lingchen and take his points.

"You two crooks! How dare you side with outsiders?!" Jian Nichang cursed so furiously her body shook.

"What do you mean outsiders? Since when did the house treat us like one of them? Jian Nichang, the four of you share one man. I haven't heard of anything so shameless, so you have no right to ridicule us. We all know that your parents are just trying to lick the boots of Jian Wufeng," Jian Mugu mocked.

"Nonsense! Jian Lingchen is far more talented than the two of you could ever be!" Jian Yini said angrily as she fought.

"Then let him prove himself!"

They had trained so hard and the day had finally come. There was nothing more liberating for them than defeating Jian Lingchen before an audience of so many. They summoned their lifebound beasts, finally giving Tianming a glimpse of the legendary swordbeasts of the Draconis House of Jian.

The reason they were called swordbeasts was that they were a special kind of transformed lifebound beasts. It was the sign of talent for those of the Draconis House of Jian. When they reached the age of fifteen, some of their lifebound beasts would be able to awaken the bloodline of the swordbeasts, thereby becoming one.

The swordbeast talent of the Draconis House of Jian was denoted by the number of swordbeasts they had. Just because someone had three lifebound beasts didn't mean they would have Trisword Talent. That would only apply if all three of their lifebound beasts evolved into swordbeasts.

Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu both had three lifebound beasts. However, their talent was probably rather low, as they were from branch families. But if they ever managed to awaken it, their fates would change.

Swordbeasts were strong because they could change into swordbeast spiritforms and enter their beastmaster's weapon. Even though they would have fewer fighters, the benefits of the fusion were definitely worth it, especially when they had more swordbeasts.

For instance, Tianming saw that Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu had three lifebound beasts each. Jian Chenzhong's were three gold rhinoceri, and could cause a great deal of damage to the terrain just by stampeding. Jian Mugu, on the other hand, had three silver elephants, all of them huge and having more than three hundred and ten stars. However, all of those lifebound beasts turned into lights that entered the tribulation greatsword and longsword of Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu, respectively. The two swords now contained the will and power of their lifebound beasts and worked synergistically with their beastmasters, making them far stronger than any normal combatant.

"So Jian Lingchen has Quadrasword Talent?" Tianming said as he watched. As expected, four qilin lifebound beasts appeared beside Jian Lingchen, each one with more than three hundred and forty stars. They were crimson red, inky green, water blue, and dark purple respectively, ostensibly of different types.

"A quad beastmaster, eh...." Tianming had heard that quad beastmasters existed in the Nine Divine Realms, but he didn't think that Jian Lingchen would be one. Not to mention, he had Quadrasword

Talent. Tianming watched as the four qilin lifebound beasts turned into spiritforms and entered his sword. Now his aura far exceeded those of the other two. It was no wonder that they wanted to gang up on him even though they were samsarans at the life phase of the first level.

"Those with Swordbeast Talent are among the strongest in the Draconis House of Jian. Even those four girls with high status don't have it."

As Tianming was marveling at the swordbeasts, the battles had begun. "Lifebound beasts are truly mystical. There's even plant species. I'm sure I'm but an ignorant bumpkin in the Nine Divine Realms."

It only meant that Ying Huo and the other Primordial Chaos Beasts could speed the change even more in the future, starting with the fourth rare plant species lifebound beast.

To avoid being injured by the shockwaves from the intensifying battle between Jian Lingchen and the other two brothers, Tianming moved further away.

"Li Tianming," said a young man, furiously glaring at him.

"Come on, I'm just a weak empyrean saint. Why did you leave the boss to me?" Tianming said exasperatedly.

"You should think yourself lucky. It's an honor to be dealt with by me," Xuanyuan Yutuo said.

"Fine. I like you for being so direct. Come on then!" Tianming said.

Xuanyuan Yutuo stepped forward and two crimson dragons appeared beside him. They were giant flarehorn dragons. Each of them had a sharp horn on their heads. They were huge and powerful and covered in thick dragon scales, making them especially suited for brutal close combat. Xuanyuan Yutuo, standing between them, was covered in dragon scales himself, becoming a terrifying crimson draconian.

Chapter 648 - Lifeflame Dragonform

That was another signature body refining technique of the Trioptic True Dragon Branch. Xuanyuan Yutuo stood in the middle of his beasts, acting as the core of their formation. His crimson scales burned hot. They were so thick that they made his hands look like dragon claws, resembling Tianming's black arm a little.

This was Lifeflame Dragonform, a kind of dragonform technique unique to the Trioptic True Dragon Branch that made them much more physically powerful and let them use ocular arts, a special kind of battle art that gave them a distinct advantage. After dragonforming, Xuanyuan Yutuo was two and a half meters tall and virtually impenetrable. However, his third eye seemed really calm.

"As expected of someone from the Trioptic True Dragon Branch. He feels so different from Xuanyuan Yufeng and those from the Sterling House of Fang," Tianming said after observing.

Their hearts were really stable. For instance, even though Xuanyuan Yutuo's dragon lifebound beasts were huge and imposing, their gazes were deep as the ocean and not the least bit angry or savage, applying a firm pressure on Tianming. The two dragons each had more than three hundred and thirty

stars and were third order tribulation beasts, which made them inferior to Meow Meow and Lan Huang. However, their beast saint springs had been split into life and death springs.

As they were still in the life phase, they had one samsara ring above their life springs that gave off a rich and boundless life energy that was far more powerful than empyrean saint ki. Not only that, the same also applied to Xuanyuan Yutuo, allowing him to easily unleash power from a samsara ranked art.

"Xuanyuan Yutuo, you're the first samsaran opponent I've encountered." Tianming felt that the life energy coming from him was completely different from the half-baked energy of Fang Chenyu.

"You think too highly of yourself. Someone destined to be defeated by me isn't worthy of being called my opponent," Xuanyuan Yutuo said with a deep voice as he took out a blood colored bat covered in spiky dragon fangs and tribulation spirit hazard flames. "This is the Fatal Talon, a tribulation artifact with four tribulation patterns. What about yours?" he asked, looking at the Grand-Orient Sword.

"You don't deserve to know," Tianming said, mimicking the exact same arrogant tone that had been used on him.

"Interesting."

Xuanyuan Yutuo dragged the fiery weapon across the ground, looking furiously at Tianming. The audience was quite pumped to see him approach.

Before the fight had even begun, Tianming already had Ying Huo and Meow Meow on his shoulders. Even though they were small in size, their star counts shocked everyone.

When the two dragons tried flanking Tianming, Lan Huang burst out; it alone was far larger than the two of them. Immediately, Lan Huang used Primordial Soundwave, causing even Jian Lingchen's ears to ring from afar. He had to admit that Tianming showed true courage.

"To think that an empyrean saint like him is fighting a samsaran.... He won't have an easy time."

Immediately after the soundwave, Lan Huang used its Primordial Wheel, causing lots of rock and stones to gather on Lan Huang's body as he spun faster and faster with the Kui Mountains facing out, turning into an impressive saw blade and flying toward the two dragons, who confidently charged in only to be sent flying in an instant and smashing into a mountain in the distance. They were so badly battered that they breathed flames in rage, forming a sort of fiery prison.

Right after that, Lan Huang used Azure Oceanic Purgatory and tried dragging them into the water, but only managed to catch one. The other dragon flew up and was immediately met with the charge of a black, lightning beast covered in layers of Chaos Disaster stored up by Ninefold Chaos Thunderscape.

Even with its thick scales, the dragon still ended up foaming from its mouth and charred from the severe electric shocks.

"His lifebound beasts are just empyrean saint beasts! How could they be so powerful?!"

"I heard he's just become an empyrean saint himself. Not even a genius would be so ridiculously powerful!"

"What kind of lifebound beast would engage a Giant Flarehorn Dragon alone? This is ludicrous!"

The audience members who were initially watching the fight between Jian Lingchen, Jian Chenzhong, and Jian Mugu immediately looked away as Lan Huang stole the limelight.

"That leaves Xuanyuan Yutuo alone to face Li Tianming and his bird!" They watched as Tianming and Ying Huo ganged up on him.

"I'm far too powerful now. I don't even know what moves to use against you," Tianming said.

"Just keep boasting," Xuanyuan Yutuo said as he used his spiked bat to execute a samsara ranked battle art, Sky Dragon Hoard. All of a sudden, it was like ten thousand dragons swirled around the skies. When he attacked, his third eye shot out a red beam as it used an ocular art that had the effect of burning souls. This was Xuanyuan Yutuo's double combo attack. It was unmatched when coupled with his tough, refined body, and had earned him his place in the top five on the leaderboard of the Deepstar Battle.

However, Tianming's sea of consciousness was protected by the Soul Tower, so the ocular art was useless, completely unbeknownst to him.

"Boasting, you say? Then you'd better prepare yourself."

Tianming's white hair shimmered under the lustrous illumination of the Deepstar Formation. He raised the Grand-Orient Sword and infused it with more than a hundred and fifty strands of tribulation sword ki, utilizing Tribulation Sword Body with his full force as the Grand-Orient Sword clashed with Fatal Talon.

Even though Tianming had only used the relatively normal Shenxiao Sword Art, the awesome power of tribulation sword ki pierced straight through the defenses afforded by Xuanyuan Yutuo's life tribulation energy. After three audible clashes, the hand that held Fatal Talon was bleeding profusely as he was sent flying back hundreds of meters. Even though Tianming seemed far smaller than his opponent, he was a real beast.

"Watch my sword!" said a harrowing voice from behind Xuanyuan Yutuo.

"How dare a lifebound beast use a sword art against me?" He immediately turned around and punched, causing the air around him to explode utilizing his life tribulation energy.

"Naive!" Ying Huo said as it used the Hexapath Samsara Sword with a hundred strands of tribulation sword ki and its impressive Skypiercer Ki, thrusting straight into Xuanyuan Yutuo's finger.

He cried out, feeling like he had been pierced by a metal rod. His dragon scales fractured, revealing his bleeding hand.

"Eat my spit!" Ying Huo said as it further layered its attacks with the Sixpath Infernal Lotus. The six flames covered Xuanyuan Yutuo in his entirety, charring him so badly that he no longer looked like a crimson dragon.

"You're too weak," said the sorrowful voice behind him.

"Nonsense!" Xuanyuan Yutuo was heavily shaken. He retrieved Fatal Talon in a panic and manifested his life energy in the form of a dragon.

"Xuanyuan Yutuo, you aren't fit to be my match," Tianming said as he slashed with the Grand-Orient Sword, knocking off more than a dozen dragon fangs from Fatal Talon, shaving it flat on one side and disarming Xuanyuan Yutuo entirely.

Tianming flicked his sword around and thrust it into his target's abdomen, but the Astral Formation appeared before it could go beyond two centimeters, marking Xuanyuan Yutuo's defeat at the hands of Tianming. He had defeated a samsaran only four short months after the faction battles.

Eighty percent of the audience stood up when they saw Xuanyuan Yutuo's Astral Formation appear. Both of his hands were still bleeding and he was wearing an expression of shock. He had been defeated too quickly and felt horrible about it. Not knowing what it truly meant, he knocked crazily on the Astral Formation. "I'm not convinced of my loss! You had an extra lifebound beast and ganged up on me! You didn't really defeat me!"

Tianming had made it look too easy, in part thanks to Xuanyuan Yutuo underestimating him. It was a most horrendous defeat.

"You still want to fight? Then I don't mind granting your wish!" Tianming charged and shot out all of the tribulation sword ki gathered at the tip of the Grand-Orient Sword toward the Astral Formation protecting Xuanyuan Yutuo, shattering it and sending him flying and rolling across the ground haggardly.

Chapter 649 - Dawnbreaker Sword Art

"He actually broke through the Astral Formation? He's as powerful as a samsaran!"

"Of course. If he wasn't at least that powerful, how could he have defeated Xuanyuan Yutuo in the first place?"

Hushed whispers rang out through the audience as they discussed the turn of events.

Xuanyuan Yutuo hurriedly picked up his Fatal Talon, but his hands were still covered in blood. He turned back at his dragon's roar only to see that the two of them had been beaten back the moment Ying Huo started going to aid Meow Meow and Lan Huang. All they could do was cry out in pain and shiver before the might of the Primordial Chaos Beasts. They shriveled together as their scales were violently torn off one after another. At that sight, Xuanyuan Yutuo spat out another mouthful of blood, now completely powerless and tossing Fatal Talon away as a sign of giving up.

"Li Tianming, you truly are impressive. I accept my loss. It took me nineteen years to distinguish myself from Xuanyuan Yufeng, but it only took you one month to catch up and humiliate me. Nobody but you has made me yield in all my life. As expected of the one Her Eminence favors! I'm fully convinced!" he said in a defeated voice.

"It seems you're not unreasonable. Otherwise I would've tested out some new tricks I learned on you," Tianming said.

Originally, he had planned to use the Imperial Sword Prison on him, but doing so after his surrender would only be an unnecessary humiliation. Even though Xuanyuan Yutuo's Astral Formation had been

broken by Tianming, the seniors approached to fish him away from the battlefield, as he had been eliminated.

He really rose to prominence just like a god. I'd even believe it if someone told me he was a god's reincarnation! Xuanyuan Yutuo thought and felt a little better about his loss. Losing to someone like that wasn't humiliating. After all, the looks of shock were still present on the faces of the audience, including the disciples and even the seniors.

"He just became an empyrean saint not long ago, yet he's already managed to defeat a samsaran...."

"Has he been hiding his power this whole time? If not, then this would be truly terrifying."

"What do the seniors say about this?"

"I don't know. My divine mentor was here just now, but suddenly left after Xuanyuan Yutuo was defeated. I think he must've gone to talk to a friend about it."

"This is simply divine.... What kind of background does he have?"

Even though the battle had ended quickly, it was enough to rocket Tianming's fame in the whole sect. His rise during the faction battles wasn't too impressive, but the Deepstar Battle was a whole different story. Even then, all Tianming cared about was his points. They were now in the final stages of the battle.

"Wow.... Was defeating Xuanyuan Yutuo really such a feat?" he said as he saw that his rank had risen to fourth place. Now, he had nine hundred and fifty-one points. He had tasted how quickly he could rise in the rankings after defeating someone strong. Turning back, he saw that Jian Lingchen was having a rather hard time fighting Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu and his eyes immediately lit up.

"Friend, leave one of them to me," Tianming said.

"Li Tianming, did you get jacked up on drugs? How'd you get so fearsome all of a sudden? I'm utterly floored!" Jian Lingchen said, having watched Tianming's battle. He shot Tianming an intense gaze and blushed heavily.

"What's with the blushing? Overexerted yourself?"

"No, I'm just embarrassed.... No, I mean to say this junior here is utterly terrified," he said incoherently.

"Can you just... shut up...." Tianming didn't know if his double entendres were intentional or not.

The casual conversation infuriated Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu.

"Are you even taking us seriously?" Jian Chenzhong snapped.

"You'll do. Come to papa," Tianming said with a domineering point of his finger.

"I'll mess you up!" Despite what he said, Jian Chenzhong immediately exchanged glances with his brother and ran. It was clear that they were terrified after seeing Xuanyuan Yutuo defeated, so staying would be of no benefit to them.

"Li Tianming, just you wait! Let's see who'll have the last laugh!" Jian Mugu yelled.

It wasn't just them. Even the four Heaven Branch disciples that were fighting Jian Lingchen's godsisters had fled in different directions. The sudden change was almost laughable in comparison to the bravado they had shown before. Dugu Jin's disciples had always had a fearsome reputation in the Archaiion Sect, but their unanimous 'strategic retreat' was a sign that even they had been shocked by Xuanyuan Yutuo's defeat.

"Want to run? Have you asked my cat whether you can do so?" While Tianming's own speed wasn't really comparable to theirs, he had Meow Meow. With a wave of his hand, the Regal Chaosfiend came running. Tianming pointed to Jian Chenzhong as his first target, given that he was ranked fifth and had the most points among them. Meanwhile, Jian Lingchen chased after Jian Mugu.

"You shan't escape!" Tianming declared, much to their surprise. "Keep them from running!"

However, it seemed that the four godsisters chose not to pursue their former opponents. Instead, they ganged up on Jian Mugu with Jian Lingchen.

"Dammit." Tianming gave up on the others and chose to deal with Jian Chenzhong. "Now, don't run."

Meow Meow moved at terrifying speeds and soon caught up.

"Li Tianming, I don't have a grudge with you. Why are you targeting me?!" Jian Chenzhong said.

"Who's targeting you? I only want your points. Don't flatter yourself," Tianming said.

"Why don't you give me a chance to serve you? I'll help you deal with Fang Xingque!"

"I don't need your help." Tianming blocked Jian Chenzhong's way.

"You think I'm running because I'm afraid? If you really want to fight, there's no saying who'll win yet!"

"Stop boasting and start fighting already!" Tianming snapped before he immediately charged.

Meow Meow didn't join the fight, instead choosing to use this precious time to nod off. After taking a comfortable position on the ground, it said, "Friend, do hold Tianming up for long enough if you can. I really need some shuteye."

"So you alone are fighting me?" Jian Chenzhong said with a gleeful look. All he was waiting for was a careless mistake by Tianming. Even though he didn't seem to have any lifebound beasts fighting beside him, he actually had Trisword Talent, so his golden rhinoceri had fused into his greatsword, the Goldbell Tai'e Sword, making him even more powerful than the four of them combined.

"Come!" Tianming split the Grand-Orient Sword into two and activated the Imperealm Sword Formation, filling his surroundings with sword ki. He also infused his two swords with a hundred and fifty strands of tribulation sword ki as he charged in like a swordmaster using Hexapath Samsara Sword's Mortal Dao Sword. By now, his mastery of the move had matured and its power was only further bolstered by his tribulation sword ki.

Jian Chenzhong countered with the Dawnbreaker Sword Art, charging in like a rhinoceros. His greatsword was as heavy as the sun of dawn, cleaving away the dark of night.

"Get out of my way!"

It would be a clash between a heavy sword and light swords. Tianming's split Grand-Orient Swords were light, fine, and long, making them move so quickly that one's eyes struggled to keep up with their movements as they clashed with the Goldbell Tai'e Sword. The gold sword of life was infused with Omniscient Sword Intent as it clashed with the charge of the golden rhinoceros while the black sword formlessly lashed out with a deathly sword intent.

Jian Chenzhong tried blocking it, only to have his sword break from the impact. His three swordbeasts were forced out of the sword and bloodied all over. Then, Tianming thrust his sword into Jian Chenzhong's head, but it didn't go far as the Astral Formation appeared. Even so, he was still sent flying and rolled across the ground, dizzy from the blowback.

"Too powerful! I yield!" Jian Chenzhong was hurting really badly from the effects of Tianming's sword ki. If it weren't for the Astral Formation, he would already be dead. He looked up to Tianming almost catatonically and said, "Are you... a monster?"

"I'm your daddy!" Tianming couldn't bother with wasting time on him. They didn't really have any grudge to begin with, and he had already gotten the points. Not to mention, there were others to chase down.

Lan Huang was still nearby, and Ying Huo had just returned from giving chase. "These folks really know how to run. Even I wasn't able to keep up," it said.

"It's fine. It's only a matter of time until we find them anyway." Nothing could escape from him as long as he was powerful enough.

"There's only three days left but you're still going to wait? What an idiot," Ying Huo snapped.

"Hey, get off my case. Those four that escaped combined don't have nearly enough points as Jian Chenzhong. It won't matter anyway, since I'm going to take down Fang Xingque. Let's see how many points I have now."

He looked up and saw that Jian Chenzhong and Jian Mugu were among the top ten, while the other four were in the top hundred or two. Xuanyuan Yutuo, Jian Chenzhong, and Jian Mugu had been eliminated. It was no wonder Jian Mugu was done for, considering he was ganged up on. Xuanyuan Yutuo used to be ranked fourth while Jian Chenzhong was fifth, and Tianming had gotten all their points.

"1730 points!" His eyes glowed. Now, he was ranked third, and even higher than Jian Lingchen. Right above him was Xuanyuan Muxue.

Chapter 650 - Final Battle

Jian Lingchen dropped to fourth place. To begin with, he already had a thousand points. Adding Jian Mugu's six hundred, he now had a thousand six hundred and fifty points, just slightly lower than Tianming.

Xuanyuan Muxue had a thousand and seven hundred in the beginning, but her points began to soar in the last three days. There was a high chance that she was defeating Heaven Branch disciples, since she accumulated about two thousand and one hundred points.

But Fang Xingque was the most exaggerated one. In the last three days, they fully brought out the advantage of numbers, suppressing everyone in their way. In a short time, his points reached two thousand eight hundred. He was simply invincible on the battlefield. Furthermore, his points also seemed to be increasing, judging from the current pace. After all, he probably didn't have to do anything aside from dealing the finishing move.

The battlefield also started becoming chaotic. Even Heaven Branch disciples were getting eliminated in the process. Although Xuanyuan Muxue was a few hundred points ahead of Tianming, the changes in the rankings were too great.

If Jian Nichang and the ladies helped Tianming defeat Dugu Jin's disciples, Tianming might be in second place by now. That battle marked Tianming's rise; he was already a dazzling existence, and he was just one step away.

"Isn't he a little too powerful? What do you think will happen if he encounters Fang Xingque's group?"

"Fang Xingque has nine Heaven Branch disciples."

"Xuanyuan Muxue isn't ahead of him by much now, and she probably has to take down Tianming's party to stabilize her ranking."

"That's right!"

While they were discussing among themselves, Tianming joined up with Jian Lingchen's group of five. They had all witnessed how Tianming's ranking rose and how he'd suppressed Xuanyuan Yutuo and Jian Chenzhong.

"I asked you guys to make them stay behind, so why did you go help Lingchen? He's fully capable of handling his opponents," Tianming said unhappily.

"Th-that's because we were worried about Lingchen."

"Yeah, what if he gets injured?"

The four of them hid behind Jian Lingchen with their heads lowered. They didn't dare to look Tianming in the eye. They were so embarrassed that they even wanted to dig a hole to hide in right now.

"We thought you could catch up to them.... We didn't expect you were so strong..." Jian Nichang said, ashamed.

"Sorry that we mocked you previously. Right now, you're the one who protected Lingchen's points," Jian Liuyang also lowered her head. They were all fiddling with their dresses as they stood behind Jian Lingchen.

"Erm.... Brother, why don't we just forget about this?" Jian Lingchen said awkwardly.

"Sure," said Tianming. He saw how Jian Lingchen came back to help when he was surrounded, and based on that alone, how could he possibly pursue this matter with the four ladies?

"I'd also like to apologize on behalf of my four wives for how rude they were in the past," said Jian Lingchen. But for some reason, his apology sounded weird. Rather than an apology, it sounded like Jian Lingchen was flirting instead.

"Apology accepted."

"Then are we still working together?" Jian Lingchen asked.

"Why not? We still have to deal with Fang Xingque," Tianming smiled. The four ladies would have looked at him in disdain before the previous battle, but now none of them dared to utter a word.

"I pledge on my life that I'll follow you." Jian Lingchen cupped his hands together. "I've been with girls all the time, and I realized that you're pretty interesting."

"Go to hell. I'm straight!" Tianming smiled.

Jian Lingchen turned around and looked at the four ladies with a bitter expression.

"It's hard on me!"

"I also want to be in your position," said Ying Huo.

"Why don't I give them all to you?" Tianming asked.

"No thanks. There's no way I can make babies with them. I'd rather go after the little phoenixes on the Sterling House of Fang's side!" Ying Huo said with disdain and flew away.

Tianming continued his journey and looked for more prey. While they were walking, Jian Nichang shook Jian Lingchen's arm and said, "Lingchen, he's your competitor. What should we do about it? He's strong!"

"What should we do? Nothing. It's fair that we're speaking with our strength. I finally made a friend with great difficulty, so why can't you give me some peace? You forbid me from getting close to any women, so can't I have a male friend?" Jian Lingchen reprimanded.

"Sure, sure, sure."

.....

The uproar caused by Tianming's fight with Xuanyuan Yutuo's group lasted briefly before calming back down. They were immediately attracted to another battle. The perspective was terrible in a team fight, and they couldn't see the entire battle clearly.

A black-robed man stood before the window, looking at the Deepstar Formation in a chamber. He looked young, and it wouldn't be exaggerated to call him a young man. One of his pupils was black, and the other was clouded in crimson mist.

He maintained his pose, standing like a statue for a long time. Right at that moment, someone knocked on the door and said, "Elder Dugu, Yuheng is requesting an audience with you."

"Allow him to enter." The black-robed man stretched his muscles and retracted the crimson mist in his right eye. His pupils returned to normal and his temperament underwent a drastic change. He gradually

transformed into an elegant scholar. Then the door was opened, and a white-clothed young man stood before him.

“Yuheng, I have a few questions for you,” said the black-robed man. It was clear that he summoned Xuanyuan Yuheng over.

“Please ask away. I’ll definitely answer everything I know.”

“When you guys went to fetch the eminent, this Li Tianming was only a sky saint, right? And you nearly killed him with a gentle push?” asked the black-robed man.

“That was more or less the case. But he was disrespectful to Lord Qingfeng. I only pushed him gently, and he’s fine since he was a sky saint,” replied Xuanyuan Yuheng.

“Then the rate that he’s improving is horrifying,” exclaimed the black-robed man.

“Yeah. Our house king also thinks that. It means the eminent’s foresight isn’t something that ordinary people like us can comprehend,” said Xuanyuan Yuheng.

“Wonderful. Impressive.”

“Elder Dugu, are you intending to take him as a disciple?” Xuanyuan Yuheng asked.

“What are you talking about? How could I, when he’s the disciple that Her Eminence wants?” The black-robed man smiled.

“Okay.” Xuanyuan Yuheng nodded.

“Back down for now. Do your best in the Number One Summit.” said the black-robed man.

“Yes, Tribulation Elder.” Xuanyuan Yuheng left.

The black-robed man stood before the window and looked at the white-haired youth for a long time. He narrowed his eyes into slits, and the crimson mist started spreading out once more on his right eye.

“Ouyang Jianwang, Yi Xingque, and Gou Yuqiu are intending to get on the eminent’s good side through this young man?”

.....

Tianming was fighting a tribulation beast with Meow Meow. This was the first tribulation beast that they had fought, and it was also a lightning-type demon beast. Meow Meow had failed to awaken any ability despite using over thirty beast souls.

There were two days left until the finale, and Tianming attacked whenever he coincidentally ran into a lightning-type tribulation beast. This was a riverlightning beast. It looked like an alligator and lived in the Abyssal Battlefield’s river. It was a lightning overlord in the river.

The back of the beast was decorated with thousands of spikes with flickering violet lightning. But the moment it exploded, it could kill half the demon beasts in the river. Together with Meow Meow, Tianming slew the demon beast and had Meow Meow refine its beast soul.

“Show some results!” Tianming knocked on Meow Meow’s head.

“Got it! I won’t disappoint you this time.”

“If you disappoint me again... hehe....” Tianming smiled coldly when Meow Meow returned to the lifebound space. The cat’s abilities were powerful, and it had enough abilities. But having more would only make it even stronger.

“Let’s go,” Tianming said.

“Okay!” Jian Lingchen and the four ladies obediently followed. The last day would come soon. Tianming raised his head and looked at the ranking board. The ranking was extremely weird right now because there were only seventy people left, and all of them had high points. As for those with one or two points, they were all from the Sterling House of Fang.

On the current ranking, Fang Xingque was first with three thousand five hundred points, Xuanyuan Muxue was second with two thousand six hundred points, Li Tianming was third with two thousand one hundred points, and Jian Lingchen was in fourth place with one thousand nine hundred points.

They had nearly ten thousand points if the four of them added their points together. Twenty thousand people had participated in the battlefield, and those four had gathered about half of everyone’s points.

The fifth rank frequently changed over the next two days, with candidates being eliminated and replaced. The person in fifth place only had six hundred points at this moment. The Deepstar Pool only had two spots, and there was a high chance that it would go to someone among the four at the top.

The first and second rankers’ locations would be revealed on the last day. The remaining ones were mostly Heaven Branch disciples, aside from Sterling House of Fang. That meant whoever took down Fang Xingque and Xuanyuan Muxue could instantly replace them, even if they only had a single point. This was the most exciting segment in the Deepstar Battle.

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The stars began changing in the sky, and everyone who was hiding saw the changes. Right at that moment, two brilliant rays soared into the sky. The thicker ray represented Fang Xingque, while the slimmer one represented Xuanyuan Muxue.

“The finale has come.”

“Honestly, I think everyone already knows about it. Xuanyuan Muxue is all by herself. No matter how powerful she is, there’s no way she can resist being besieged. So can you imagine how many people will go after her?” Jian Lingchen said.

“That’s not certain. Fang Xingque might have many people around him, but he only has nine Heaven Branch disciples. It’s inconvenient for him to move in a large party, and he could only intimidate others at best,” said Tianming.

“But his threat is effective to many people,” said Jian Lingchen.

“You’re saying that going after Xuanyuan Muxue is more dependable?” Tianming asked.

“That depends on what you think. Then again, I personally want to beat her up. I’m just concerned that there won’t be many people going after him,” said Jian Lingchen.

“You don’t have to worry about it.” Tianming raised his head with a smile, because he saw the two rays approaching each other.