

The Ages 691

Chapter 691 - Great Emperor Xuanyuan

"It's mainly thanks to the sword Her Eminence gave me," Tianming said.

"It's definitely not the sword, but you," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"Either way, just consider me a third-level life phase samsaran then."

"It's not the same...." Xuanyuan Dao furrowed his brows. "If I'd known that was the case, I would've announced an even longer extension. I didn't think you weren't at the ninth level yet. That way, you won't be able to break through to the Samsara stage...."

"Sect Master, let me try using these two weeks to become a ninth-level empyrean saint then."

"I suppose that's all we can do. Do your best. The others don't believe that you alone can change anything, but I do. I've placed my hopes on you and got ridiculed for it. Don't disappoint me," he said with a sigh.

"I can't promise anything, Sect Master, but I'll do my best."

"Good!" He gave Tianming an encouraging shoulder pat.

"Sect Master, can you tell me what the situation is right now?"

"Let me summarize. Five of the divine realms have clearly expressed that they want to wipe out Her Eminence. The Biritual Demon Sect and Hexapath Sword Sect in particular want more than that. They want revenge and are trying to get the rest to exterminate our sect, most of whom don't wish for a fight to the death with us and only want Her Eminence dead. Nothing good is going to come of this, only death."

"I see. The other three are Quadform, Heptastar, and Nonahall, right?"

"Yes. As for Triflair, Pentaphase, and Octagram, they're our allies for historical reasons. While they won't be able to help us with Her Eminence's matter, at least they won't be likely to betray us. However, I'm sure they're hoping that we can abandon Her Eminence too."

"Got it."

Biritual and Hexapath wanted all out war, and Quadform, Heptastar, and Nonahall wanted Feiling's death. The others were watching from the sidelines without getting involved.

"Sect Master, what of our internal affairs?" Tianming asked about a sensitive topic.

"You wish to know?"

"Yes, especially the Sterling House of Fang's attitude toward all this."

"Fine, I'll tell you. Fang Taiqing and his house desire for Her Eminence to lead us all to conquer the continent to some degree, but their selfish attitudes haven't changed at all. We can't count on them

during a crucial time like this. If things turn out well for us, Fang Taiqing will be all too happy to play the hero and defend Her Eminence. Otherwise, he'll turn his back on us. That's just how it is. However, he won't tell anyone of his stance right now."

"Why did he decide to host the Number One Summit then?"

"He said he wanted the young generation to take some risk and use this chance to test out the other divine realms' stance on us. We did fulfill the latter objective today, at the cost of forty disciples. He thinks it was worth it."

"So he was using us as cannon fodder after all."

"There are some things that aren't openly talked about, but known by everyone. Fang Taiqing basically wants to see how our sect will react when we're put under real stress, how many will give up and how many will wallow in fear and terror. He achieved his goal. The whole sect is in chaos now, and there are only a few that still have spines."

"Isn't he worried that Her Eminence will give him trouble for this in the future? Would she really lead someone so troublesome like that to conquer the continent?"

"At the very least, we can be thankful he hasn't done anything drastic yet. The Sterling House of Fang is indeed powerful, and a core of our sect's foundations. Not to mention, if he goes more and more overboard, we'll know how pessimistic he is becoming. We all know what's going on, but there's nothing we can do about it."

"Does Her Eminence know about it?"

"We don't dare to speak about this before Her Eminence. Among those that died today are some from the Sterling House of Fang as well. There's nothing we can say about it since they also paid their part of the price."

Basically, Fang Taiqing wasn't just selfishly furthering his ambitions without any cost to himself either. However, Xuanyuan Dao still couldn't be sure of his final leanings yet.

"There's also something else that puts Fang Taiqing in a bad position."

"What is it?" Tianming asked.

"The Yinyang Demon Sect hates the Sterling House of Fang to the bone and wants to wipe them out for good. That means Fang Taiqing will have a hard time leaving us with any hope of survival for his house."

"I see." The situation was indeed rather messed up with different people having their own goals. It was too bad that Feiling, while worshipped as a goddess, had no real agency of her own in the matter. Her fate would be decided by the sect's whims.

"What about the Draconis House of Jian?"

"They have a grudge against the Hexapath Sword Sect, so they'll probably side with us. However, Jian Wuyi has always been a rather secretive person. Who knows to what extent he'll stand with us?"

Tianming nodded. "Sect Master, I have a good relationship with a few tribulation elders."

"You're talking about Yi Xingyin, Ouyang Jianwang, and the rest, right?"

"Yes."

"They're the true heroes. The sect has only been able to survive for such a long time thanks to pillars like that, rather than the parasites that grow on them. No matter how strong the pillars, the parasitic vines are just vines in the end!" He calmed himself down a little and continued, "Don't worry, we've already reached out to them." This was quite uncharacteristic of the proud Archaic House of Xuanyuan, but Xuanyuan Dao had made the move nonetheless.

"Are you afraid, Sect Master?" Tianming asked.

"Afraid of what? We all die, eventually. Such is life trapped in samsara. I've lived enough and have few regrets in life. The Archaic House of Xuanyuan will not relent while we strive to protect Her Eminence. Tianming, you weren't born in our house, so you don't know what Her Eminence means to us. The Xuanyuan house was only able to rise to prominence thanks to the two ascendants we produced. Everything we have is thanks to them. Otherwise, a weak and pathetic clan like ours would've long been lost to the flow of time. Even though Her Eminence hasn't contributed much to us so far, she managed to ascend at the age of twenty and will always be our lasting pride. We're willing to protect Her Eminence until what was lost is found again. Within ten years, she will surely be able to prove herself with miracles once again and help our house propagate for another million years!" His expression was one of intense zealotry and determination.

"Sect Master, as long as Her Eminence is around, the Archaic House of Xuanyuan won't be disappointed." While Feiling wasn't actually Xuanyuan Xi, it made no difference at this point.

"Of course. Her Eminence is our progenitor, after all," Xuanyuan Dao said with pride.

"I'll head to the Old Deepstar Path now, Sect Master."

"I'll wait for your good news."

.....

Tianming entered the path from the entrance in the Heaven Branch and reached the part near the Deepstar Pool, where the Astral Wills were most concentrated. He passionately looked up at the stars, incensed by what had happened earlier in the day.

"Ancestors of the Xuanyuan house, please aid me in shedding my sainthood to become a samsaran. I know that you can all hear me! Your descendants are facing a huge crisis, so I hope your heroic souls will awaken! I'll definitely repay this favor with my life!" he said sincerely.

He wasn't sure if he was imagining it, but the Astral Wills that gathered around him all seemed to be from members of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. Now, he would no longer be leaving. He sat cross-legged on the path and wielded his sword in hand, allowing the myriad stars to circle around him as he rapidly took in their experiences. It seemed like they were talking to him as his Imperial Will absorbed them.

He had seen far too many lives and felt the hardship experienced by this ancient clan from antiquity, relishing in their stubborn will to survive and rise to prominence time and again. Every one of them had

the stigma of the first ascendant. From them, he learned the history of the first to ascend to godhood on the Flameyellow Continent.

"The first god was known as Great Emperor Xuanyuan. Two hundred thousand years ago, the human race was weak. It's said that the demons used to exist alongside us, culling our numbers wherever we went. They were the dominant species and fed on our lifebound beasts. Great Emperor Xuanyuan rose from humble beginnings and became a god, creating symbiotic cultivation and sharing it with his kin in the process. He's the Progenitor of Humanity! He ushered in the age of humans and wiped out the demons, creating the Heaven Cauldron and crushing the remnants of hell. From then on, the Flameyellow Continent was ruled by humanity!"

Tianming had just learned of how impressive the roots of the Xuanyuan house were. They were the origin of humans as they were today. The burden of that surname was far too heavy. Over the past two hundred millennia, they had risen and fallen time and again. Who could imagine that someone would succeed the Great Emperor Xuanyuan as a god, only to lose that power, resulting in the crisis they were facing today.

"Xuanyuan Yufeng, I take my words back. There is an eternal clan in this world."

Tianming's mind followed where the Astral Wills of the Xuanyuans took him. Eventually, eight whole days had passed and he encountered a unique Astral Will that was far too young. It was the Astral Will of Xuanyuan Yuheng that had only been in the Old Deepstar Path for a few days. For all the passion and potential he'd had, he had perished right before the Number One Summit.

"Li Tianming," Xuanyuan Yuheng said as he wrapped his arms around Tianming's head, putting his forehead against his. "I know you killed me, but it matters not. Now, you're the one who must protect Her Eminence. From now on, carry my dreams and convictions with you. Follow Her Eminence, follow Great Emperor Xuanyuan. Let the Archaic House of Xuanyuan propagate into eternity!"

Chapter 692 - Lady in the Soulburn Hall

The ninth level of the Empyrean Saint stage was the Saint stage's pinnacle, and the time that Xuanyuan Dao fought to gain for Tianming was crucial. With the sect facing danger and their disciples dead, everyone had a ball of fire burning in their chests.

"Xuanyuan Yuheng!" They were two completely different people, but they were the same at this moment. Xuanyuan Yuheng's knowledge might not be comparable to the elders of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, but it was fresh.

It was like a meteor that lit up the surrounding Astral Wills around Tianming, allowing their souls to fuse into Tianming's flesh, bones, meridians, and Heavenly Will. After eight days of bitter cultivation, Tianming finally made his breakthrough.

"Ninth level of the Empyrean Saint stage!" Tianming's breakthrough was smooth, and the saint ki in his saint springs had reached the pinnacle. The fusion energy was unprecedented among the Empyrean Saint stage.

His infernal saint spring was like a volcano with magma flowing in it, the regal chaos saint spring had tens of thousands of lightning bolts roaring incessantly, the primordial saint spring was majestic with mountain ranges and a vast ocean, and the radix saint spring was a mixture of red and white energy with the power of seven other flowers hidden in the depth.

“This is the power of the peak Empyrean Saint stage?” Tianming felt the surging energy coursing through his body.

“The Old Deepstar Path, Deepstar Pool, Tribulation Sword Body, Hexapath Samsara Sword, and even the Eight Desolation Fienddragon Whip.... All of it had come from the Archaion Sect, especially the four top-grade tribulation mannas. Mother says that I must repay favors. The sect’s internal affairs don’t matter to me, I’ll do my best and fight for those who are worth it!”

There wasn’t much he could do about the battlefield among the older generation, but he had to do his best. Now that he had reached the ninth level of the Empyrean Saint stage, Tianming left as soon as he stabilized his cultivation. The first thing he did was to look for Xuanyuan Dao.

“Sect Master Xuanyuan said previously that he has a way for me to make a sprint to the Samsara stage as long as I’m at the peak of the Empyrean Saint stage!” The peak Empyrean Saint stage wasn’t his goal; the Samsara stage was the beginning of becoming a god.

“There’s still six days left until the Nether Battlefield opens. Let’s just hope that I still have time.” Tianming sped towards the sect at the highest speed. He only wanted to surpass himself.

.....

Along the way, the Archaion Sect’s disciples all hung their heads low with depression, while the disciples of the other eight divine realms were having a great time in the Archaion Sect. It was rare to see such thick snow in some of the divine realms, and they were having a great time in the forest.

The news of over forty deaths among the Heaven Branch’s disciples had spread out. Everyone was curious how many people would be left after the summit was over.

.....

The surface of Xuanyuan Lake was frozen. Tianming quickened his pace and saw the entire Archaic House of Xuanyuan gathered beside the Soulburn Hall. Aside from beastmasters, there were also many lifebound beasts flying in the sky. They were glaring daggers at anyone who came.

Tianming came to the Soulburn Hall after passing through several layers of heavenly pattern formations. This showed how seriously the sect treated Feiling’s safety. The atmosphere was intense, but the elder’s brows loosened up when they saw Tianming’s arrival.

“Tianming, are you here to see Her Eminence?” The Soulburn Hall was guarded by Xuanyuan Muxue’s mother, Xuanyuan Yu.

“Senior, I’m here to look for the Earth Branch Sect Master. But I’ll pay Her Eminent a visit first,” said Tianming.

“Okay, wait here. I’ll go make a report.” Xuanyuan Yu came out soon after and led Tianming in. When they stepped into Soulburn Hall, it was covered with several layers of formations. Feiling was in her palace, which served as her cultivation chamber.

“Let Li Tianming come in. You guys leave us alone.” Feiling’s voice sounded out.

Fang Qingli, Xuanyuan Dao, and five other masters were around. Aside from Fang Qingli, they all belonged to the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. They exchanged a glance and hesitated. After all, Tianming could threaten Feiling with his strength. Feiling had only just reached the Empyrean Saint stage.

“Leave,” repeated Feiling.

“Yes!” Xuanyuan Dao cupped his hands together and left with the masters from the Archaic House of Xuanyuan and Fang Qingli.

“You aren’t afraid that someone will manipulate Tianming?” Fang Qingli said unhappily.

“Her Eminence knows her current situation. We just need to abide by her orders,” replied Xuanyuan Dao.

Fang Qingli pursed her lips together. Xuanyuan Dao’s words had sounded sarcastic.

“Since Her Eminence isn’t panicking in this situation, it means she knows the situation well. We just have to be responsible for our task,” continued Xuanyuan Dao.

“Do I need you to tell me that? I’ve accompanied Her Eminence in the Godservant Hall for three hundred years!” Fang Qingli retorted.

“That’s good then.”

.....

Tianming was a little emotional as he waited for everyone to leave. According to his thoughts, it would be dangerous for the two of them to meet alone. But there was no need for them to care about it anymore, since it was a perilous time. The situation was no longer the same as before, and he suspected that some had even started doubting Feiling’s identity.

The door opened with a creak, revealing a white-clothed lady in the palace. She wore a faint smile as her eyes turned red with unshed tears. It had been way too long, and she could finally be herself today.

“Big Brother.” Her gentle voice melted Tianming’s heart. It sounded so unfamiliar.

“Ling’er.” Tianming came to Feiling. The few steps felt heavy, and he smelled the fragrance coming from her when he stood before her.

Feiling was biting her lips and had tears welling up in her eyes. She held onto the door with one hand and stretched the other toward Tianming. Her hand was shaking as she stretched it out.

“It has been tough on you.” Tianming took a step forth and embraced Feiling. She was never a god. She was just his Feiling, and she had never changed. They were only doing this for survival. For Tianming to cultivate peacefully, she had to endure all the loneliness.

"It's fine, Big Brother." Feiling leaned her head on Tianming's shoulder. It was a familiar warmth that he would never forget.

"Feiling, you're basically imprisoned in Soulburn Hall. I'm sorry that I said I'd protect you, but here you are in danger. I don't know what to say...." Tianming had held his emotions in his chest for a long time now.

"Big Brother, please don't say that. It's been my destiny since we entered the Divine Tomb. It was inevitable that I would return to the Archaion Sect. So how can you be blamed for it? I already find it blissful that I managed to survive the Divine Tomb and can travel around the world with you. I know that it's a difficult time right now and you're under great pressure. But Big Brother, can this danger be compared to Xuanyuan Xi? I managed to survive back then, and I believe that we'll make it through this time. There are many opportunities and possibilities. I believe in you. I believe in Li Tianming. I'm willing to go through all this with you. Big Brother, this is just a trial, and the sun will eventually emerge. I'll be waiting for that time with you."

Feiling wasn't afraid of hardships. On the contrary, she resolved the knot in Tianming's heart.

"But it must be hard on you to be alone all the time, right?" Tianming asked.

"You're right. Life is lonely and boring here. After all, I don't have any lifebound beasts. But I'm not afraid whenever I think of how Big Brother is working hard outside. I'm not afraid as long as I know that you must be thinking about me. Because I believe that Big Brother is my hero, and he'll protect me no matter what!" Feiling leaned on Tianming's chest and looked at his face with shining eyes.

"Thank you. I have no regrets since we're together," said Tianming with his voice trembling.

He felt terrible whenever he thought of how Feiling was suffering loneliness here. But her unwavering belief in him was what he admired the most about her.

"Big Brother, I have been working hard lately. I've been spending all my time cultivating. I don't know how far I can go or what I can change. But I want to be able to help, even just a little. It's all worth it as long as I can be with you longer," smiled Feiling.

Chapter 693 - The Heaven Cauldron's Secret

Putting her arms around Tianming's waist and hugging him tightly, Feiling lifted Tianming off the ground. She winked and squeezed out a smile. "Big Brother, did you see that? Ling'er has muscles now! I can throw you into the sky with no problems. So be careful, or I might snap your Grand-Orient Sword if you dare to bully me."

Lowering his head to look at Feiling being 'barbaric,' Tianming ultimately couldn't hold it back in and laughed out.

"Then I'll crush your 'heavenly pattern barriers,'" he retorted.

"Hey!"

“Hello? Are the two of you done? Flower Sis was just born and what are you two doing? It’s inappropriate for a child to see!” Ying Huo laughed.

“Holy shit!” Tianming actually forgot to shut his lifebound space off. That meant the four of them had been watching all along.

“The fourth egg hatched?” Feiling’s eyes lit up when she heard that.

“I’ll let you take a look at her,” said Tianming as he summoned Xian Xian’s spiritual body.

“Half-mummy!” Xian Xian already knew what she was going to call Feiling and put up her most adorable look as she dove into Feiling’s chest.

“Half? You’re saying there’s another half out there?” Feiling’s face tensed up as she glared at Tianming.

“He’s half my daddy and half my big brother. That makes you my half-mummy and half-sister-in-law!” Xian Xian had successfully confused herself.

“Alright. Wow, you’re adorable!” Feiling lifted Xian Xian’s spiritual body with her hands.

“Hehe. Half-mummy is so pretty. I want to crush your ‘heavenly pattern barriers’ too!” Xian Xian exclaimed with excitement.

Feiling blushed and changed the topic, “Big Brother, have you given it a name?”

“Not yet. You can give one,” said Tianming.

“Okay!” Feiling was overjoyed. Raising Xian Xian in her hands, she looked at the little fairy for a long time before she suggested, “The flower on her looks like a daffodil. What do you think if we call her Xian Xian?”

She looked at Tianming with expectations, hoping to be praised for her naming sense. In the end, Tianming was stunned as he looked at her blankly.

“What’s wrong?” Feiling asked.

“I’m already called Xian Xian,” Xian Xian looked at Feiling blankly.

“Ling’er, let’s talk.” Tianming had allowed Feiling to name Xian Xian on purpose, but he never imagined that she would go with Xian Xian. The coincidence was ridiculous, and only meant that Feiling was related to that person from Perpetia City and the Radix World Tree. He then told Feiling about what he had seen in his dreams.

“Really? But I can’t feel anything. I only thought of the name when I saw how she looked like a daffodil,” said Feiling.

“Mhm?” Xian Xian tilted her head. She stared at Feiling for a long time, then said, “Why do I sense a familiarity with half-mummy? Your voice sounds like that person from the dream.”

“What’s going on?” Feiling was dumbfounded.

“The lifebound city that Xuanyuan Xi has is the Perpetia City. The Radix World Tree and Perpetia City were destroyed by that black hand. That person in Perpetia City must’ve reincarnated as Xuanyuan Xi,

and that's how you came to be. So if Xuanyuan Xi is your previous incarnation, then the person in the city was your origin," explained Tianming.

"Xuanyuan Xi's previous incarnation was related to a Primordial Chaos Beast?" Feiling was dumbfounded.

"This is only speculation, there's no proof. You don't have to overthink it. It's already good that we can survive in the Archaion Sect. Ling'er, the sect is filled with internal and external threats, and we can only rely on the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. I'll try to find as many helpers as possible. I want to do much more at the Number One Summit. I'm already in the ninth level of the Empyrean Saint stage, and we don't have much time left together. I'll have to fight soon," said Tianming.

"Okay." Although Feiling nodded her head, she still tightly held Tianming's hand. Tianming also didn't want to release her hand. But his gut told him that he was racing against time.

"Big Brother, I can see everything from the Skyeeye Formation. You can't lose and die. Otherwise Ling'er will accompany you to the underworld," said Feiling as she bit her lip.

"Hush." Tianming pinched Feiling's cheeks. "Wasn't it so touching earlier? Why did you suddenly lose your confidence in me? You're not allowed to say that. Wait for me. I'll come back a hero and pick you up under everyone's gaze. No one can take you away from me."

"Okay, I got it. I'll come running to you when you get back." Feiling narrowed her eyes into slits from her smile.

"I'll crush you!" Tianming stretched his hands out and grabbed them before he disappeared.

"Argh!" Feiling blushed. She felt a little dizzy from the electric current coursing through her body. By the time she recovered from the shock, Tianming was already nowhere to be seen.

"Dammit! I'll let you have a taste of my muscles next time!" Feiling glared at the door with her lips pursed. Her eyes had turned red without her knowing.

.....

"Sect Master, I've reached the ninth level." That was the first thing Tianming said when he came out.

"Really?" Xuanyuan Dao had seen many geniuses in his life, but he had never seen a monster like Tianming.

"It's all thanks to the blessing of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan's ancestors," replied Tianming.

"I can see your determination, since you came to see me. But I have to warn you that it'll be dangerous, and you might lose your life. Are you certain?" Xuanyuan Dao asked.

"I am," replied Tianming.

"You're gutsy. You don't even fear death." The more Xuanyuan Dao came in contact with Tianming, the more he exclaimed at Feiling's eyesight.

"Sect Master, it isn't that I'm not afraid of death. I'm just confident in myself," said Tianming.

“Are you sure you know what to expect?” Xuanyuan Dao asked for verification.

“I don’t. Let’s get going, we don’t have much time left,” replied Tianming.

“You have guts, I have to give you that,” exclaimed Xuanyuan Dao as he got Tianming to follow him. They headed straight to the Heaven Cauldron from the Xuanyuan Lake. The enormous cauldron appeared before Tianming once more. He knew now that it was actually forged by the first God, Great Emperor Xuanyuan.

“Follow me.” Xuanyuan Dao took the lead, and Tianming followed behind him.

Tianming saw the sculpture on the Heaven Cauldron, humans and beasts carved into it and enemies shrouded in fog. They must depict demons.

Great Emperor Xuanyuan created the symbiotic cultivation system for mankind to rise and destroy the demons, ushering in two hundred thousand years of prosperity. Tianming felt his blood boiling whenever he came to the Heaven Cauldron.

“Ouyang, come and open up the Heaven Cauldron with me,” Xuanyuan Dao said to Ouyang Jianwang.

“Sect Master, we might each have a key, but my key belongs to the Tribulation Peak, and I don’t have the authority over it,” said Ouyang Jianwang.

“I want to let Tianming make a breakthrough to the Samsara stage under the imperial tribulation’s pressure.”

“Let me think about it first,” said Ouyang Jianwang. He glanced at Tianming then closed his eyes.

“The entire sect is at stake. Why the hell do you even need to think about it?” Xuanyuan Dao glared.

“Sect Master, many people have been commenting about your recent decisions. But this also shows your boldness. People say that Xuanyuan Dao is stubborn and signifies the falling of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. But the sect is in danger, and the other two Sect Masters have hidden themselves. On the other hand, you stood out fearlessly. Personally, I’m filled with admiration for you,” said Ouyang Jianwang.

“So?”

“So I’ll follow you,” Ouyang Jianwang grinned.

“Then hurry up. Stop wasting time here.” Xuanyuan Dao grabbed Tianming and jumped into the cauldron. When Tianming turned around, he saw Ouyang Jianwang insert a key into the spirit hazards before he followed behind. They passed through layers of spirit hazards and reached the bottom of the Heaven Cauldron.

“Mhm? Where’s the lifewood essence?” Xuanyuan Dao and Ouyang Jianwang were both shocked.

“I lost it,” Tianming covered his face.

“The keyholes are out.”

“Keyholes?” Tianming looked down and saw two notches at the bottom of the Heaven Cauldron. As they spoke, Xuanyuan Dao and Ouyang Jianwang each took out a key, one black and one gold key. When the two keys were inserted, the Heaven Cauldron jolted and revealed a black crater. Tianming now knew that the Heaven Cauldron’s core lay beneath the spirit hazards.

“You two go down. I’ll stand guard here,” said Ouyang Jianwang.

“Okay.”

Xuanyuan Dao called out to Tianming, and the two of them jumped into the black passage.

“Sect Master, what’s in the Heaven Cauldron?” Tianming landed on the ground. The surroundings were dark, and there seemed to be a secret chamber. Clearly, it had been a long time since anyone was there, judging from the dust.

“You don’t know?” Xuanyuan Dao asked with an odd expression.

“Should I?”

Xuanyuan Dao smiled and said, “There aren’t many people in the world that don’t know what’s in the Heaven Cauldron.”

“Then why don’t you tell me?”

Xuanyuan Dao took a deep breath before he explained, “The Heaven Cauldron contains the divine body of the first God, Great Emperor Xuanyuan.”

When he spoke, the darkness in the Heaven Cauldron suddenly vanished. A bright radiance lit the room, and Tianming felt like a colossal being was staring at him.

Chapter 694 - The Emperor and his Five Dragons

When Tianming turned around, there was a person sitting on a throne. Or rather, it was more appropriate to call him a god. He wore an imperial black and gold robe and had a violet crown on his head. His face shone like an autumn moon, his brows were like painted ink, and the pressure coming from him was intense.

He had died over two hundred thousand years ago, but his corpse was immortal. Tianming guessed that it must have something to do with his divine body and the Heaven Cauldron.

The man sat at the center of the Heaven Cauldron, glowing with golden brilliance. He also had five dragons beside him. The dragons were all coiled up beside him, and their enormous size nearly filled the entire Heaven Cauldron. The heads of the five dragons were gathered beside the emperor with fangs bared.

The dragons had different colors—gold, azure, blue, red, and brown, representing the metal, wood, water, fire, and earth elements. It wasn’t hard to guess that the man was Great Emperor Xuanyuan, and those dragons were his lifebound beasts.

Great Emperor Xuanyuan had five lifebound beasts, and he was the only known quintuple beastmaster in the Flameyellow continent's history. It was said that the maximum number of lifebound beasts a beastmaster could have was five.

Furthermore, if Great Emperor Xuanyuan wasn't strong, how could he start a new era? It was intimidating seeing a figure from two hundred thousand years ago sitting before him surrounded by five dragons.

Tianming felt a boundless impact on his soul when he turned around. It gave him a misconception as though he was looking at the Primordial God-Emperor. The Primordial God-Emperor was a giant of a thousand meters tall.

Tianming saw the difference between them when he looked closely. But they shared something in common: they both possessed the Imperial Will. Great Emperor Xuanyuan was the only person with the closest temperament to the Primordial God-Emperor among everyone he had met.

Great Emperor Xuanyuan's corpse was still emitting such divine might, even when he was dead. Tianming couldn't imagine how powerful he was when he was still alive. He was someone who started a new era, someone who was known as the progenitor of mankind. So he was naturally an emperor.

There was folklore. The emperor had risen with his five dragons and exterminated the netherworld to begin a new era. That wasn't just the Archaic House of Xuanyuan's legend, but the entire Flameyellow continent's. Even the name 'flameyellow' came from the Great Emperor Xuanyuan.

"Aside from the goddess, we only have our ancestor's divine body preserved in the Heaven Cauldron. This is the sacred ground of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan and the Archaic Divine Realm," said Xuanyuan Dao with pride.

"You could also say that this is the entire Flameyellow continent's sacred ground, right?" Tianming asked.

"In the past, yes, but nobody acknowledges it now. The other eight divine realms also gave birth to their own gods, and too much time has passed. They chose to forget the contribution of our ancestors to the world and forgot the fact that it was the Archaic House of Xuanyuan who led the world to a new era," sighed Xuanyuan Dao.

"Yeah." Tianming respectfully nodded.

"Come, pay your respects with me."

"Yes." The two knelt and kowtowed to the progenitor of mankind to express their respect.

"Our ancestor is the strongest god. None of the other nine who came along could compete with him. He's the strongest in the Flameyellow continent's history," Xuanyuan Dao explained with pride.

"Yeah, it's impressive." Tianming had respect for that.

"Tianming, are you prepared? If so, we'll begin," asked Xuanyuan Dao.

"Sect Master, how are we going to start?" Tianming asked.

“A ray of imperial tribulation will shoot out from the ancestor and shine on you. It will tear your saint springs in two, dividing them into life and death springs. If you can stabilize the energies without dying, you’ll be in the Samsara stage. During this process, it’s easy for the saint springs to shatter, which will result in death. And even if you make it through, it doesn’t mean your lifebound beasts will. Then again, you have a lot of saint springs, and the chance of you dying is much higher,” explained Xuanyuan Dao.

“Sounds scary,” replied Tianming.

“Yeah. The imperial tribulation is something left to us by the ancestor as his last gift to us. In the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, we have many disciples rely on it to enter the Samsara stage,” said Xuanyuan Dao.

“It’s already been two hundred thousand years. Great Emperor Xuanyuan’s body still has the energy?” Tianming asked.

“I’m not sure. Perhaps it’s related to the Heaven Cauldron. So, do you want to begin now?” Xuanyuan Dao asked.

“Yeah.” Tianming nodded.

“Okay, prepare yourself.”

“Do I need to summon my lifebound beasts?”

“Yes.”

Tianming then summoned his lifebound beasts, which instantly filled the Heaven Cauldron’s interior, especially Xian Xian. Even after the Heaven Cauldron was filled, she still had many branches and vines with nowhere to go.

“The place is cramped,” commented Xian Xian. The four lifebound beasts squeezed together and they looked around.

“Xian Xian, do you see that? That’s a living ghost!” Ying Huo winked.

“Xian Xian is scared!” Xian Xian’s branches started waving around like hands.

“Hehe!” Ying Huo laughed with its wings on its waist.

“Chicken Bro, there’s someone behind you...” Meow Meow suddenly appeared out of nowhere and said in a creepy voice.

This made Ying Huo shiver and hide beneath Lan Huang’s belly.

“Chicken Bro, you’re also scared?” Xian Xian asked.

“What nonsense are you saying? How can I, the big brother, be scared?” Ying Huo coughed to conceal its embarrassment.

“Heads up. Our lives are on the line here,” said Tianming.

“C-c-come, I-let this old corpse open his divine eyes. There’s nothing this chicken is a-a-afraid of!” Ying Huo patted on its belly.

“Chicken Bro, why is your voice trembling?” Lan Huang asked.

“S-s-s-shut up!”

The atmosphere eased up as the four beasts fooled around. But what gave Tianming a headache was the fact that there was a Purple Tower in his saint palace. With his saint palace protected by the tower, would the imperial tribulation be able to enter it?

“Can I keep the Purple Tower?” Just when Tianming thought about it, the Violet Tower outside his saint palace disappeared, returning to the Prime Tower.

Tianming gave it another try before he was certain that he could control the Purple Tower. Tianming nodded his head at Xuanyuan Dao, signifying that he was ready.

Xuanyuan Dao knelt before Great Emperor Xuanyuan’s corpse and started chanting a mantra. There was something unusual about the words; it sounded like an ancient language. Tianming couldn’t understand what he was saying. He could only feel a buzz in his head and he started feeling dizzy.

The mantra sounded like a curse. In the next moment, it felt as though the Great Emperor Xuanyuan had come back to life and slowly opened the third eye on his forehead. The eye actually had five colors that represented metal, wood, water, fire, and earth.

He was the Trioptic True Dragon Branch’s ancestor. That meant his bloodline was the strongest. Having a five-colored eye was unprecedented throughout history.

Before Tianming recovered from his shock, the five-colored eye shot a five-colored beam into his saint palace. When the beam entered his saint palace, it separated into five. One remained in Tianming’s saint palace while four smaller beams separated and headed toward his four saint springs.

Tianming was tied together with his four lifebound beasts by the five-colored beam. Tianming didn’t have time to pay attention or take care of them. After all, he had four saint springs and would be taking the strongest hit from the imperial tribulation.

After reaching the ninth level of the Empyrean Saint stage, the four lifebound beasts’ beast springs were filled to the limit. The size of their springs was three times larger than Tianming’s.

But in terms of quantity, Tianming had the most. After all, he had four saint springs. And if all of them were to be torn apart, it meant he would have four lifesprings and four deathsprings.

The five-colored beam was like a sharp sword traveling in his saint palace. The beam was dangerous as it looked alive and stared at Tianming’s infernal saint spring.

“Come!” Tianming and Ying Huo had already prepared the Aeternal Infernal Codex. The Samsara stage had a unique cultivation method. They had to stabilize their foundation after the saint spring was torn in two, otherwise it would dissipate.

When the imperial tribulation stabbed into the infernal saint spring, Tianming sucked in a cold breath. It felt like he had plunged his sword into his own saint palace and destroyed his saint spring.

There was no pain from the saint spring itself, but from the saint ki going violent. The saint ki roared and smashed around in his body. Just having the infernal saint spring torn apart was chaotic enough, but the

imperial tribulation didn't stop there. It turned to the regal chaos saint spring and tore it in two as well. The next second, Tianming's body was covered in lightning. Shortly after, the primordial and radix saint springs were also torn in two.

The imperial tribulation made an even cut, and it could already be considered stable. But even so, it was a nightmare to Tianming, who was a quadruple beastmaster with four different kinds of energies. Using the imperial tribulation to enter the Samsara stage was easy for ordinary beastmasters, who only had one lifebound beast.

But Tianming's saint palace was in chaos as the four energies turned chaotic. The imperial tribulation had already dissipated after it was done with its mission, but Tianming was in danger due to the chaos in his saint palace. He knew that he would blow apart if he was careless.

After all, Tianming's saint ki was the strongest in history, and he could even use it to fight samsarans. But at such a dangerous moment, Tianming suddenly had an idea.

"Purple Tower, come!"

The Purple Tower that Tianming had just removed returned. As long as he was willing to seal his saint palace, not only could the Purple Tower block out external energy, but it could also stop the four saint springs' energy from erupting.

Chapter 695 - Two Samsaran Phases

Thanks to the stabilization provided by the Purple Tower, the four destroyed saint springs were kept contained. That way, the rampant energies from the ruptured saint springs wouldn't be able to leak out from the tower to harm Tianming's body, which in turn allowed him to continue to focus on stabilizing the four saint springs that had been separated into eight. He didn't bleed, nor did he hurt at all, and his flesh and organs weren't ruptured, allowing him to channel all four of his codexes much more easily.

"For twin beastmasters and above, each of their saint springs have to be split in two and stabilized one by one. But I don't have the time for that since all of my saint springs were split by the imperial tribulation at once. Let's try channeling all four codexes simultaneously!"

Ying Huo and the others didn't have the Purple Tower, so they were already channeling their codexes to forcefully split their own saint springs into life and death springs. Tianming, on the other hand, had the easiest time of them all and could focus his mind on channeling all four codexes. The more time he spent not stabilizing the ruptured saint springs, the more he was at risk of losing control of them and allowing their energies to scatter.

The Aeternal Infernal Codex, Genesis Chaos Codex, Primordial Terraqua Codex, and the Radix World Codex were now working to separate the forces in his saint palace into four, then compartmentalizing them into two each—one for life and one for death. After all of the saint springs were adequately partitioned, he would have completed his first step into the Samsara stage by converting his saint ki into tribulation force.

He now had eight saint springs, four for life and four for death. The lifesprings were filled with boundless vigor, with the force of life gushing out nonstop and even denser than saint ki. All four deathsprings were calm like still water, but within the calm lay a terrifying force waiting to explode and wreak havoc.

"The mark of a first-level samsaran is the life phase samsara ring."

He began forming his first samsara rings. They would encircle the eight springs and serve as foundations for the forces to be drawn from there. Vast amounts of life tribulation force gathered to form them, as each ring needed to contain about the same amount as each saint spring itself. In other words, if his lifespring came to have twelve rings in total, it alone would contain enough life tribulation force for thirteen lifesprings.

When the four rings formed, a terrifying amount of spiritual energy began to gather and convert into force Tianming could utilize. He absorbed so much of it that others breaking through to the Samsara stage couldn't even compare. Now, all four of his lifesprings had one ring each and he was officially a first-level samsaran. The infernal spring had a flaming ring around it, the genesis spring had a ring of dark lightning, and the other two springs also had matching rings.

He felt his power grow magnificently in the process. As life tribulation force filled his flesh, innards, skin, and even hair, life force poured into him and caused him to metamorphose. It was as if he was a wholly different person. After the lifesprings gained samsara rings, the death tribulation force was suppressed. He and his lifebound beasts were now filled with bountiful life force.

"It worked!" Tianming cried in elation. He had made the right decision. Even though the imperial tribulation was terrifying, he had managed to weather the blow with Purple Tower and his four codexes. He wasn't really at much risk from the get go. He had just broken through to the ninth level of Empyrean Saint that morning, meaning he'd risen two levels in a day. It was thanks to Great Emperor Xuanyuan that he had managed to leap into the Samsara stage straight away. While he didn't catch a direct glimpse of Ying Huo and the rest, they informed him through their link that they were fine. Tianming hadn't suffered even the slightest blowback.

"Let's stabilize the power and allow the rings to finish securing themselves around the lifesprings and stabilize it." He reeled in his emotions and guided his four beasts to further stabilization efforts.

Right at that moment, Ying Huo said, "What in the world is this?"

"Chicken Bro, are you talking about the words on top of the deathspring?" Meow Meow asked.

"Oh, I have one too!" Lan Huang said.

"Words?" Tianming looked and saw some ancient text hovering above his eight springs.

"Is it the Aeonic Grandbane?" He looked at his arm and saw the tribulation rings still there. The text within his saint palace was the same as that on his tribulation rings. They definitely had something to do with the Aeonic Grandbane.

"So Aeonic Grandbane reacted to the Samsara stage after all." However, he didn't know what it meant. Carefully, he prevented his power from touching the text.

All of a sudden, Lan Huang cried out in pain. Tianming hurriedly turned back and saw him huddled up in pain. Tianming felt the life tribulation force in him gradually being suppressed as death tribulation force formed within him.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"It hurts!" Lan Huang cried with its two heads. But soon, the death tribulation force around it faded before being replaced with life tribulation force once more.

"What did you do?"

"I used the force in the deathspring on those texts, causing them to fuse into the spring. Thankfully I stopped channeling it. That was close!" Lan Huang patted its chest with its claws in relief.

"You three, don't even bother trying that," Tianming ordered as his brows furrowed. Carefully, he used a little death tribulation force on the ten ancient characters like Lan Huang had done. The instant they connected, the words fused into the death tribulation force, seemingly putting the force on the verge of explosion.

The four deathsprings began violently swirling as they tried to forcefully draw in spiritual energy to form death samsara rings. He was bathed in so much negative energy of blood, death, violence, and cruelty in an instant as if he was the god of death. He figured that he would be able to reach the first death phase if he allowed it to continue. Even though it would be amazing if he could break through three times in one day, he felt the terrifying reality of it.

The Lifesbane he was suffering from seemed to grow ten times stronger after contacting the death tribulation force. He noticed that his body was aging at hundreds of times the normal rate to the point that the changes were visible to the naked eye. He might live out three hundred years' worth of his lifespan within two short years! It was a double-edged sword that explosively boosted his power at a huge cost to his lifespan. It was no wonder Lan Huang had cried out in pain. His lifeforce was practically being drained away.

"So this is the true tribulation of the Lifesbane.... It's no wonder they call it the most terrifying tribulation of all." Tianming was aging at more than a hundred times normal. It was hard to predict what other changes would come. "I thought the problems of Lifesbane were already behind me.... Who knew it'd come back at a time like this? Does that mean I'll only truly be free of it after I ascend to godhood?"

It appeared that the stages of sainthood were only the foundations of Lifesbane, and it only truly began at the Samsara stage. He hurriedly cut off the connection between Lifesbane and the deathsprings, or he would end up like a dead husk soon enough.

"I guess that if there's one benefit to it, it's that I can enter the death phase at will to strengthen myself. I wonder what else I can do?"

Now, he was certain he could enter the death phase whenever he wanted to at the cost of dying of old age in two or three years. That meant he would live out the prime cultivation time before the age of thirty in a short month or two, unless he could advance past the death phase.

"Dammit! It's breakthrough or death for me! My Aeon Grandbane is merciless as usual."

After some consideration, he decided he wouldn't rush into the death phase. The feeling of his life draining away was too hard to bear. He felt like he was constantly bleeding out in that state. Even if he could defeat his enemies, he would end up no better than dead himself.

"Alright, I'll only use it when I really need it. At least I'll be in peak condition in the death phase, even if only for a little while."

He took a deep breath and separated the ancient characters from his deathsprings. Now that all of them were in the life phase, Ying Huo and the rest were even more powerful, thanks to their Primordial Chaos Beast bloodlines. While he had both life and death tribulation forces in him, his body was primarily filled with life tribulation force thanks to the life samsara rings. His death tribulation force would only be used for the most dire of circumstances, for should he choose to employ it, it would overwhelm his life tribulation force—when the number of life and death samsara rings were equal, the death rings would dominate.

In other words, cultivators will suffer if they don't have more life samsara rings than death rings.

Chapter 696 - Animacorpus Eradication

Xuanyuan Dao stood at the entrance, watching every change that occurred in Tianming. He finally breathed a sigh of relief when Tianming stabilized his first-level samsara cultivation.

"Congratulations, Tianming. I suppose I should congratulate myself for making the right choice too," he said.

"Sect Master!" Tianming was filled with gratitude. Without Xuanyuan Dao's generosity and trust, he wouldn't have been able to make so much progress.

"No need to thank me. You did your best, so this is a result of your own efforts."

"Understood!" Tianming didn't need to prove anything.

Xuanyuan Dao stared at him with a passionate gaze. "Best of luck in the Nether Battlefield."

"Alright." That word alone was his promise to Xuanyuan Dao and the entire Xuanyuan house, as well as to himself and Feiling.

"By the way, I think I felt some death phase waves just now. What was that about? It isn't possible to cross the life phase and reach the death phase in one go."

"I don't know either, but there shouldn't be a problem now that I've stabilized the life phase."

"Alright, let's go then."

The next instant, the Heaven Cauldron returned to its previous darkness. It was so dark and quiet that one wouldn't be able to see their outstretched fingers.

Xuanyuan Dao had begun flying back up, with Tianming following behind. He subconsciously used his third eye to look at Great Emperor Xuanyuan, only to shake with fear and struggle to breathe. For some

reason, he felt like he had seen Great Emperor Xuanyuan open his eyes in the darkness. When he looked again, it seemed like it was just his imagination.

Before long, Xuanyuan Dao asked him to hurry. He couldn't exactly be seen here, given that he wasn't a descendant of the Xuanyuan house. Either way, he had managed to gain quite a lot from his time here. Within only eight days, he had managed to break through to the Samsara stage.

There were many top geniuses participating in Number One Summit, and by now, Tianming would be unmatched by anyone on the continent of his age. As for the strongest of participants, they were about twenty-six years of age and Tianming was now on even ground with them.

.....

The two of them returned to Xuanyuan Lake. Xuanyuan Dao immediately entered Soulburn Hall. With the hardest part now behind them, Tianming was free to spend the next few days training as he pleased. The first thing he did was head to the Hexapath Sword Palace. The place was completely empty. Even the Sword Insight Rock, which the Tai'e House of Jian desperately wanted to reclaim, lay completely untouched at the bottom of the lake.

"Senior, I'm here to visit you again," Tianming said, breaking through the sword barriers with his left hand and causing the rock to morph into a white-haired old man.

"Yeah, you may go now."

"Let me demonstrate the Mortal Dao Sword. Please check if I got it right."

"Yeah, you may go now."

"Alright, here goes."

"Yeah, you may go now."

Tianming immediately executed the move. Throughout his many battles, he felt that his mastery of the technique was now incredibly high. With his swords of life and death, he attacked the Hexapath Sword God with boundless sword ki. That instant, billions of sentient lives seemed to appear all at once, swallowing the Hexapath Sword God whole and vaporizing him entirely.

Just as Tianming was wondering where he had gone, he heard a loud "Wonderful!" ring out beside his ear. Turning around, he saw a brand new Hexapath Sword God smiling at him.

"Senior!"

"Successor of my legacy, you have mastered the essence of the Mortal Dao Sword and fulfilled my requirement. Now I will teach you the second move of the Hexapath Samsara Sword."

"Thank you, Senior!"

"The second move utilizes the Ghost Dao, the realm of the hungry ghosts, as its core. This move focuses on using the sword of death for slaughter as a way of life. It is called Animacorpus Eradication. The name is a reference to the move being able to wipe out the target's soul and body at the same time. One

sword for the living flesh, and one for the eternal soul. With the lament of the countless hungry ghosts and the damned, the sword of life consumes the flesh while the sword of death consumes the soul!"

The old man seemed really pumped and confident in the move he had devised. When the swords struck, countless ghastly hungry ghosts would open their mouths and claws wide in anticipation. Even a single hungry ghost was more terrifying than countless sentient beings, not to mention millions of them, and that was still only the first strike of the move, which would be followed swiftly by the second strike, during which the countless spirits of the damned lamented the world with their tongues poking out. The sheer might of their begrudging curses was hidden in the strike, able to wipe out the soul of any being.

Animacorpus Eradication was less flashy than the Mortal Dao Sword, but definitely far more effective. Tianming had seen it all too clearly, and countless permutations of the move emerged in his mind. After practicing the Mortal Dao Sword so much that the visualization came so easily to him, he could easily remember Animacorpus Eradication. Once the Hexapath Sword God finished the move, he stood still and smiled at Tianming.

"Then, I shall be leaving, Senior."

"Beautifully done, young man."

Did his repeating phrase change? "Senior, your balls are gone."

"Beautifully done, young man."

"I'm going to kiss you...."

"Beautifully done, young man."

He found it to be lots of fun. After messing around for a bit, he turned to leave as the same repeated words echoed in his mind.

.....

In the coming days, Tianming regularly visited the Deepstar Pool, Heaven Cauldron and Fiend Palace. Soon, the two week recovery period would be over.

"The Nether Battlefield opens tomorrow. After reaching the Samsara stage, my body is filled with life force, allowing me to absorb astral sources and tribulation sword ki even more easily. I now have five hundred astral sources, so my Ancient Deepstar Godbody is even more powerful now, probably more powerful than any other participant in Number One Summit. I also have a thousand strands of tribulation sword ki, a tenth of what Ouyang Jianwang has, and he's already a hundred. I'll definitely exceed him one day!"

Additionally, Archfiend now had six tribulation patterns, making it a really powerful weapon for the Samsara stage. It had absorbed too much of the essence of the Archfiend Eye, causing it to exude a natural aura of dread. Coupled with the Soulshaker Eye, it would be even more oppressive.

"If I can master the Animacorpus Eradication to attack the soul, I'll have nothing to worry about with regards to offense."

As he had the Soul Tower, he wasn't afraid of his soul being attacked either.

"Four Primordial Chaos Beasts, Aeon Grandbane, Grand-Orient Sword, Prime Tower, Godsoul Canon.... That puts my talent far above everyone else. There's nobody I can't catch up to now."

That was how he could defeat enemies five or six levels more powerful than him. Any one of those alone would make him an unparalleled genius, let alone all of them.

"These two weeks have been most beneficial. Sect Master Xuanyuan really did me a huge favor. Since he faced lots of pressure making that possible, it's time I repay him. The disciples of those five divine realms better wash their necks. I will repay the blood debt soon enough."

.....

That night, Xuanyuan Dao called him out of the Fiend Palace. "Why are you still cultivating now?"

"What else would I be doing?" Tianming said.

"The forty-seven Heaven Branch disciples that'll be going to Nether Battlefield have gathered to discuss their strategies. You should join them. Allies are imperative in the Nether Battlefield."

"Alright. Where will I find them?"

"I'll take you there and introduce you to them."

Soon, they arrived at Xuanyuan Yucheng's residence. The others had been there for a few days.

"Sect Master!" they greeted when Xuanyuan Dao brought Tianming in.

"No need for formalities. This is Li Tianming. He wasn't here the past few days, so I've brought him here to introduce him to you all."

"Understood!"

Feng Qingyu's disciple was the one with the highest status among those killed by the Archaion Sect, so Tianming had helped them vent their frustrations quite a bit. The Hexapath Sword Sect's disciples had killed many of their own, after all, so most of them had a good impression of him.

"Have you picked a leader yet?" Xuanyuan Dao asked.

"Sect Master, I'm the temporary pick for now," Xuanyuan Yucheng said.

"It's a huge responsibility. You're to spare no effort, understood?"

"Yes, Sect Master. I'll give it my all!" Xuanyuan Yucheng proclaimed.

"What about vice leaders?"

"They're Fang Yuewei, Beigong Qianyu, and Fang Chenjing respectively."

The sect allowed them to pick their own leaders, since they would be more willing to listen to them rather than anyone directly appointed by the sect. That was all too crucial, as the group couldn't function effectively without firm leaders. If everyone did what they wanted, they would fall apart. Currently, the four leaders were the four strongest on the Heaven Ranking, two men and two women.

"Let Li Tianming be one of the leaders too," Xuanyuan Dao said.

Chapter 697 - Ninefold Nether Battlefield

"Sect Master, vice leaders have to lead a team of more than ten people," Xuanyuan Yucheng said.

"I know. He can do it, trust me," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"Understood!" The disciples turned to Tianming once more.

"I will be leaving for now. Make sure to stand united. Don't fight for yourself. Only by fighting for the group will you survive. The pride of the sect is resting on your shoulders," Xuanyuan Dao said as he walked to the entrance. "I hope that I see all of you back alive after the second phase."

"We will, Sect Master!"

They were fueled by the anger of seeing their dead comrades. The blood feud had set a spark in their spirits. No matter what clan they had come from, they were all hot-blooded young folks. They left the complicated politics to their seniors, all they had to concern themselves with was revenge, survival, and pride. They would never forget the humiliation and mockery they had received that stayed embedded in their hearts like a thorn. After leaving the Skyorigin Battlefield, their pride had been wounded and stained.

"Welcome, Li Tianming," Xuanyuan Yucheng said as he came forward to give him a hug.

"Apologies for coming late."

"It's fine. Make up for it by killing a few more fellows like Feng Daoyi."

The other disciples laughed at the comment.

"I will. I'm worried I won't be a good vice leader, so I hope Brother Yucheng will help guide my way." Leading a group was a huge responsibility, after all.

"Li Tianming is really easygoing."

"As expected of Her Eminence's disciple."

"Looks like you've been cultivating hard these past few days and managed to become a samsaran. I bet you can defeat third-level death phase samsarans now."

"Everyone here admires your talent. Even though some are a few levels stronger than you, they aren't your match."

"Your rate of improvement really is shocking."

Everyone huddled around him and began talking. However, Tianming didn't really say much himself and merely paid attention to the briefing about the upcoming battle. He memorized his forty comrades, all of whom were older than him. Most of those who had qualified for the second phase of the summit were third-level samsarans and above, all of whom were past twenty-five.

"Tianming, nice to meet you." A woman about twenty-seven years old in a red dress came to his side. She seemed only slightly older than him and wore a beaming smile. Her mannerisms were also frank and direct, making her out to be a rather attractive older sister type. She was Beigong Qianyu.

"My cousin Lingchen often brings you up. He really thinks highly of you, and you deserve all the praise you've gotten, too. During the Deepstar Battle, you were only around Lingchen's level, but now you're caught up to me. How ungodly fast is that?" she said.

Tianming could hardly believe who she was; this was Jian Wuyi's daughter! In terms of status, Beigong Qianyu and Fang Yuewei were the highest, being daughters of sect masters. The reason Jian Wuyi's daughter had the Beigong surname was because his wife was one of the three celestials of the Triflair Celestial Sect. She held a similar status to Jian Wuyi in that sect. The Archaion Sect relied on that marriage tie to remain in good standing with the Triflair Celestial Sect. Beigong Qianyu was the only one of Jian Wuyi's children to keep the Beigong surname.

"Thanks for the kind praise, Sister Qianyu," Tianming said.

"Brother Tianming, we'll be in your care from now on," she replied. Even though Tianming didn't really know what the Draconis House of Jian's stance was on Feiling, he at least felt that the young ones like her and Jian Lingchen were rather decent folk.

As they spoke, two others watched them from a distance. One of them was Fang Yuewei, cold and calm as a lotus. Beside her was a handsome young man with an intense gaze that made him seem rather cruel and merciless. He was really close to Fang Yuewei and was possibly her lover. That was Fang Chenjing, third rank on the Heaven Ranking and the son of one of the divine marshals of the Archaion Sect, Fang Shenyu. Fang Shenyu, who Tianming had defeated in the Deepstar Battle, was Fang Chenjing's younger brother.

"What in the world is Sect Master Xuanyuan thinking, making him a vice leader? Even if he's contributed a little and reached the Samsara stage, he's not familiar with his enemies or allies. Not to mention, his youth makes him reckless," Fang Chenjing said.

"It doesn't matter now," Fang Yuewei said.

"Does the matter of your younger brother still concern you? Even though Xingque was quite disrespectful toward you, he was still your younger brother."

"It's not a big deal anymore. Let's focus on what counts."

"Looks like it really doesn't matter to you anymore, but it still does to me."

"We can only survive if we stand united. Stop messing around."

"Why don't we just leave with all the disciples from the Fang house? We'll be able to move much faster with smaller numbers and might just survive that way. What do you think?"

"I won't be going."

"Have you been brainwashed by them too? For all they said about your so-called glory and passion, they're still letting you die in their fights."

"No. It's because Yuan'er and the others died in the Skyorigin Battlefield. It's a grudge I have to repay."

"If you put it that way, you also have a grudge against this rookie."

"Chenjing," Fang Yuewei said sternly, "enough. I know what I'm doing, alright?"

"Fine. But I want you to understand this about where I'm coming from."

"What about it?"

"I don't care about grudges or whether they survive. I just want us to live past this," he said sentimentally.

"Alright. If we live through this, let's get married."

"Wei'er...."

Fang Chenjing had been waiting to hear that for far too long.

.....

The second phase of the Number One Summit was finally beginning. More than four hundred of the most powerful geniuses on the Flameyellow Continent would be facing off against each other in the Nether Battlefield.

At dawn, the various factions entered the Dimensional Battlefield. The three sect masters of the Archaion Sect and the various lords and elders entered from the east walkway. At the same time, some ten people entered from the other direction.

Fang Taiqing, Xuanyuan Dao, and Jian Wuyi stopped in their tracks as they stared back at the group of people that had just come. They were from the Yinyang Demon Sect. The two sect masters of the sect were both there, their thirst seemingly visible to the naked eye. For some reason, everyone from the Archaion Sect laid eyes on one of them: a girl dressed in thick white clothing. Her hip-length hair was as straight as a tall waterfall, with phoenix hairpins that glittered alluringly. Her eyes were calm and clear, complementing her enchanting smile. A light hint of pink was visible in her eyes, further enhancing them as objects of desire. Her gaze seemed to speak and peer through the deepest depths of others to arouse their deepest desires.

She was no doubt a most enchanting beauty in terms of both looks and aura. It was as if her presence alone demanded the worship of all. Though she looked like a young girl in every respect, she was someone who had been cultivating for ages.

Despite the superficial positive aspects of her looks, Fang Taiqing and the others' gazes were fraught with caution. Even though they had more people on their side, the numbers seemed to have been equaled by her presence alone. In comparison, the male sect master beside her seemed all too normal; everyone had their eyes drawn to her, rather than her counterpart. All too nobly, she looked wistfully at the three sect masters of the Archaion Sect and pursed her lips. "To be honest, I don't really want all of your disciples to die."

They just stared at her quietly.

"That's because if they all die, you'd be so terrified you'd surrender immediately and hand the beheaded girl of yours to us right away. I know Nonahall thinks it's better this way, but it's too boring for me. I'd prefer it if you protected your little goddess instead. You know why? I want to wipe you out for good, the whole Monorigin Sect. Now don't give up before we've fought for real, alright?"

Her cohort laughed when she finished.

"The Nonahall Ghost Sect will apply pressure on you and even try to convince you, but I trust your three sect masters aren't spineless cowards. Please don't surrender and kill your goddess yourself. I beg you, alright?" She carefreely led her subordinates away.

.....

An hour later, Tianming and the other disciples came to the Number One Battlefield once more. The battle was officially starting. According to the regulations, the disciples of the Nonahall Ghost Sect would enter first. They had the largest number at around eighty. The one with the fewest combatants was the Quadform Sea Sect, having only twenty or so people, much fewer than the Archaion Sect.

Gradually, they stepped into the Ninefold Nether Battlefield. Everyone watching from all across the Flameyellow Continent cheered excitedly. This was the battle they had been waiting for.

Chapter 698 - The Little Swordfiend

At the entrance of the Nether Battlefield, a total of forty-five Hexapath Sword Sect disciples were about to enter. They seemed relaxed, gathering in groups of twos and threes, laughing and playing, not at all serious. Two young disciples, a man and a woman, were talking to each other.

"Senior Brother, don't forget what you promised me. You must help me acquire a tribulation artifact with four tribulation patterns. My weapon is broken."

"You don't have to worry, but shouldn't you show a little appreciation?"

"What do you want?"

"For example, you could come with me and see the world after the Number One Summit."

"Naughty! You're up to your tricks again."

"Get your mind out of the gutter. I don't mean anything else."

"If that's the case, I want a few more treasures!"

"Don't worry. We have to be courteous to those from other sects, so we can't take away what's theirs. But if we run into the Monorigin Divine Sect disciples, we'll definitely kill them all!"

"Everyone's looking for them, so whoever finds them first is lucky."

"Indeed! The elders have said the more we torture them, the better. The matter is over if they're so terrified they send out their so-called goddess. It'll be even better if they stubbornly continue on. We'll fight and destroy their stupid sect."

"Yes, you're right! They should pay for taking away the Hexapath Sword Insight Rock."

They were nearing the Nether Battlefield, yet still laughing and jeering, mocking the disciples of the Archaion Sect in the distance.

Right in the front of the crowd was a young man in black. He was tall, thin, and plainly dressed—all in all a man of ordinary looks. However, the disciples of the Hexapath Sword Sect were very respectful toward him and treated him as their guide. His eyes were covered with a black cloth, so they remained concealed. He almost seemed like a sword in its scabbard, as if his sharpness had been put away.

In fact, almost every disciple participating in the Number One Summit knew him. He was Jiang Wuxin, the number one disciple of the Hexapath Sword Sect, the godson and disciple adopted by the Hexapath Swordfiend, Feng Qingyu. Of humble birth, he nevertheless possessed enormous talent. When his entire family was massacred during his most destitute period, he stumbled upon an opportunity that allowed him to rise and enter the Hexapath Sword Sect. In the face of countless challenges and opportunities, he emerged like a legend, relying on his willpower of steel. It was rare for someone outside the Tai'e House of Jian to possess his current status. Jiang Wuxin was known as the Little Swordfiend.

The tenacity beneath those ordinary looks, as well as his obsession with swords that made him very much like Feng Qingyu, were the reasons he was given such a title. Of course, it had more to do with another matter—he had deliberately blinded himself to cultivate the sword.

Apparently, he cultivated the heart sword, so he didn't want his eyes to interfere. Without his eyes, he could experience the world with his heart and temper his sword. Thus, he was closer to his sword. Facts had proved that god wouldn't forsake geniuses who were cruel to themselves.

Today, not only had Jiang Wuxin taken revenge, he had also been adopted as Feng Qingyu's only godson and cultivated as the heir of the Hexapath Sword Sect. This was an incredible feat for a foreign disciple without roots in the sect.

However, how could the Tai'e House of Jian not consider that? Although the Little Swordfiend looked rather ordinary, and was even blind, he had two beautiful, charming wives, both of whom were top beauties of the Hexapath Sword Sect.

Without a doubt, the two were direct descendants of the Tai'e House of Jian. Their parents were top figures in the Hexapath Sword Sect, second only to the Hexapath Swordfiend, and the two were actually twin sisters. That way, although Jiang Wuxin hadn't been born into the Tai'e House of Jian, he was husband to two of the Tai'e House of Jian's princesses and a member of his wives' family.

He was a most powerful son-in-law.

Right now, there were two women similar in height standing next to Jiang Wuxin, one on his left and the other on his right. The two women, one in green and the other in blue, were gorgeous, with fair skin, graceful figures, and had a dazzling brilliance to them. Compared to Jiang Wuxin, the fact that they were descendants of a powerful family could be seen from their appearance and demeanor. Although their looks were very similar, one was pure and lively while the other was dignified and elegant; their temperaments were completely different.

The two girls standing together made for such a beautiful picture that the disciples of the Hexapath Sword Sect couldn't help but look at Jiang Wuxin with envy from time to time. However, they weren't jealous because of how ruthless Jiang Wuxin was. He was almost a replica of the Hexapath Swordfiend. This was the kind of man who placed the sword above all else, even his life. He had risen from the very bottom of the Sixpath Divine Realm, even experiencing a period of time as a beggar. Who would remain unconvinced?

Jiang Wuxin looked cold, but in front of his sweet wives he spoke slowly and behaved gently. The older sister was Feng Shuoyu, who was dignified and composed, gentle and pleasant. The younger sister was Feng Linyin. Sweet and pretty, she held Jiang Wuxin's arm, her body leaning on his shoulder. Her silvery laugh sounded from time to time.

"Xiaoyin, put away your laughter. We're about to enter," said Feng Shuoyu.

"Alright, Big Sister." Feng Linyin nodded.

"Yu, do you have something on your mind?" Although Jiang Wuxin couldn't see, he was sensitive at heart, due to his blindness, and considerate to any changes in their moods.

"I suddenly thought of Yi. As fellow disciples and siblings, we were very close. He was the youngest and should've had a boundless future, but now he's left this world." With her head lowered, Feng Shuoyu sighed.

"Didn't I promise to kill all the Monorigin Divine Sect disciples and avenge my junior brother?" said Jiang Wuxin.

"Yes, especially that Li Tianming! As long as we bump into him, he'll come to a miserable end right before the eyes of the entire Monorigin Divine Sect! Wuxin said he'll take his skull and place it as a sacrificial pot in front of Yi's grave!" Feng Linyin's eyes were filled with resentment.

"I know. We'll definitely get our revenge. Sending those Monorigin Divine Sect disciples to battle is equivalent to driving them to their deaths. I just can't bear the loss of Yi. He was our youngest junior brother and Aunt Qian's child. No matter how many of these bastards die, we won't get him back," said Feng Shuoyu.

"Yu." Jiang Wuxin grabbed her hand. "Such a tragedy happened because I couldn't do anything on the Skyorigin Battlefield, but the Nether Battlefield is different. Now that Yi is gone, we can only avenge him by killing more of them. This time, I'll pierce my sword into their foundation, so they'll be terror-stricken at the sight of the Hexapath Sword Sect."

"Alright, I believe in you. There's nothing you can't do. It's a miracle that you've appeared by our side." Feng Shuoyu smiled.

"Big Sister, you're so good at talking it makes me look stupid!" Feng Linyin seemed dissatisfied.

"Don't be jealous. I envy how close you are to Wuxin. Ease up on the mischief, or you'll influence his cultivation," said Feng Shuoyu.

"Big Sister, don't you understand? Wuxin says it's also a form of sword cultivation. The only difference is, this sword releases at the end of a long session."

A poor boy rising to the top of the sect, becoming the number one disciple, winning the two daughters of a major clan, and becoming an elder's godson was simply the blueprint for every poor boy's dreams. And Jiang Wuxin had realized it all.

...

When entering the Nether Battlefield, disciples would also be checked for heavenly pattern tomes that violated the rules. However, they were allowed to keep certain nonlethal ones that could be used as signals.

After an entire night of getting acquainted, Tianming, Xuanyuan Yucheng, Beigong Qianyu, and the others had become very familiar with each other. They were the leaders of the Draconis House of Jian and Archaic House of Xuanyuan disciples. Getting acquainted with them meant Tianming was on pretty good terms with the disciples of these two great clans.

There were also many disciples who weren't part of the clans. Because Tianming was considered the only deputy commander among the non-clan members, they gathered around him, looking to him for guidance. Even if Tianming's strength were discounted, they admired him for the fact that he had killed the Hexapath Swordfiend's disciple.

The only ones who were difficult to get along with were the Sterling House of Fang disciples. Although Xuanyuan Yuheng and Fang Xingque were both dead, their attitudes toward Tianming were completely different in the face of a crisis involving the sect. Fang Xingque was the son of the Heaven Branch sect master, so his status was higher than Xuanyuan Yuheng's. However, Tianming didn't care about that. Xuanyuan Yucheng was their leader, and Tianming would listen to his arrangements.

After the inspection, the last batch of the Archaion Sect disciples stepped into the Ninefold Nether Battlefield. Tianming already understood the rules. Last night, Xuanyuan Yucheng had come by to explain them.

"Every layer of the Ninefold Nether Battlefield has its own risks, trials, and disasters. The layers are the bloodpool, volcano, frost, metalstar, thunder, windblade, darknight, incandescence, and swamp. Once the disciples of the nine sects enter the Nether Battlefield, they'll be randomly sent to one of the layers, which will become their battleground. No one knows which Nether Battlefield lies adjacent to theirs. It requires investigation and exploration. As soon as the battle begins, a hell tree protected by heavenly patterns will be born in the Ninefold Nether Battlefield. For example, if we're sent to the volcano layer, we must immediately find the hell tree, because the hell barrier formation that protects the Archaion Sect disciples will start shining if the tree is destroyed by the enemy. As long as others enter the volcano layer, they'll be able to locate all our disciples and we won't be able to escape. Therefore, the hell tree is the focus of our protection as well as the core of contention. Destroy the enemy's hell tree and you can immediately obtain thirty points, which is equivalent to defeating thirty opponents! The Nether Battle only has four hundred participants in total, and the hell trees are worth a total of two hundred and seventy points. Thus, anyone who destroys a hell tree is very likely to get a ticket to the final battle!"

Chapter 699 - Micro-War

"The Nether Battle lasts for ten days. During this time, we won't be given any hints. We won't even know how many points we have, let alone how many other participants have. Only when the Nether Battle ends will the top thirty-two enter the final battle. However, you should know that the significance of the Nether Battle doesn't lie in how many of us make it through to the final battle, but how many of us survive. Therefore, our goal is above all to survive. We must protect the hell tree so we won't be attacked from all sides."

Tianming understood that. It was actually very exciting. Not only did they have to defend their own hell tree, they also had to enter other layers and attack their opponents' hell trees. That was the only way they could ensure a high score.

"Do you know why we've designated a commander and deputy commander?" Xuanyuan Yucheng asked.

"I don't."

"The battle is too chaotic. In order to ensure disciples of the sect enter the final battle, we mustn't allow the points to be spread out. When the time comes, our teammates will help us subdue our opponents while we deliver the killing blow, so our points accumulate. The fewer points the others have, the better," Xuanyuan Yucheng said.

"They're very loyal and selfless to be willing to do this," Tianming said, looking at his teammates.

"Yes, we have no choice. The Heaven Ranking is a competitive ranking based on strength. Because they believe in us, we must give it our all and live up to their trust. This is the rule of the Number One Summit. Only by working together can we go further. We have a great responsibility," said Xuanyuan Yucheng.

It's no wonder Xuanyuan Dao made Tianming a deputy commander. That way he would be qualified to earn points instead of being a catspaw.

Additionally, Tianming had learned during his conversation with Xuanyuan Yucheng that the points in the Nether Battlefield were different from the Deepstar Battle. Although they were also destroying individual formations, no matter how many points their opponent possessed, they would only get one point if they defeated them.

However, the opponent's points would be cleared, and the loser eliminated. They could no longer attack or participate in the final battle. Additionally, when entering the Nether Battlefield, the hell barrier formation within them was very different from the astral formation.

The hell barrier formation was supported by the beastmaster's own strength. The stronger the beastmaster, the more powerful the hell barrier formation and the harder it was to break it. Only when the hell barrier formations of both beastmaster and lifebound beasts were removed would their attacker obtain one point. What was more exciting is another rule regarding the hell barrier formation.

"The first fatal attack will expose the opponent's hell barrier formation, which will protect that individual. At that point, the opponent can no longer attack or move. Their points are cleared and they'll be eliminated. The victor scores one point. However, if you choose to continue attacking and break the hell barrier formation, your opponent is eligible to fight once more, even to the death. However, it won't result in any points. They'll also no longer have the opportunity to enter the final battle. If your

hell barrier formation is forced out by an opponent whose hell barrier formation is also exposed, you'll also be eliminated, but your opponent won't be given any points. After all, they're already out of the competition. Therefore, in the Nether Battlefield, killing is inherently risky. It takes a total of three attacks to kill—the first to expose the hell barrier formation, the second to break it, and the third to kill. If you don't succeed by the third time and your opponent escapes, they can continue fighting for their sect. However, they are considered to have embarked on a dangerous path, one without any protection. Because killing is risky, participants in the previous Number One Summits would stop once they expose their opponent's hell barrier formation. But this time, they'll kill us, even if it takes three attacks!"

At this point, there was no doubt about that, especially for Tianming. Even if they had to kill ten times, they wouldn't relent.

"When the hell barrier formation is broken, it's tantamount to embarking on the road of life and death. It has nothing to do with the final battle, but with survival." The Number One Summit's rules gave them the opportunity to kill, thus increasing the violent nature of this grand convention.

This wasn't a gathering to swap pointers, but a micro-war of the Nine Divine Realms!

"No matter how many lifebound beasts a beastmaster possesses, as long as one hell barrier formation is broken, the rest will be destroyed as well."

Exposing the formation and breaking it were two completely different things. The former meant being eliminated, while the latter signified the intention to kill. Tianming sensed the ruthlessness of the rules. They were sparring, until the formation was broken. But once it was, then it became a life and death battle!

...

The moment they stepped into the Nether Battlefield, hell barrier formations automatically appeared on Tianming and his four beasts, melting into their bodies.

"We can only enter the final battle if our hell barrier formation isn't exposed."

Tianming could feel the formation dancing on the surface of his skin. It was a cold force, as gloomy as the Ninefold Nether Battlefield before him.

"Come with me!"

Xuanyuan Yucheng shouted from the front. Together, they crashed into a vortex—the real gates of the hell formation.

For a time, a tidal wave pulled them down. It took the concerted effort of all forty of them, hand in hand, to resist being swept away by the wave.

Tianming held Beigong Qianyu's hand, as well as another male disciple. From the temperature of their skin, he felt the passion raging in their blood.

"Brothers and sisters, I won't lie. This is a battle of life and death! However, this is a most regrettable life. No matter who lives or dies, the people who survive will carry our dreams and live on. The Archaion Divine Realm will never die! We will tower over the rest of the continent!"

Xuanyuan Yucheng's gruff, yet moving voice was audible within the dark wave. They tightened their grips; all forty of them were linked together. Under the eyes of the entire Flameyellow Continent, they arrived at their Nether Battlefield.

"Fool." Beigong Qianyu's voice sounded in Tianming's ears.

"Do you like him?" Tianming asked with a smile.

"Yes. Everyone knows, yet he's the only one who doesn't," said Beigong Qingyu.

"You're both from great clans. With your status, can you two be romantically involved?" Tianming asked.

"Not at all, the possibility of this happening is almost zero. But I like him! He's loyal and gallant, but gentle at heart, isn't he?" said Beigong Qianyu.

"I envy you! Here's wishing you happiness. Go with my blessings." Tianming laughed.

As they spoke, their bodies stabilized. Tianming looked around, only to realize that they had arrived at their destination.

"We're in the swamp layer." They were all pleasantly surprised.

"The swamp layer? What are the advantages?" Tianming asked.

"There are only swamps in this layer and few natural hazards. It's easier for us to hide in as well. This is the bottom layer of the Ninefold Nether Battlefield, so it isn't in the core battle area. The only neighboring layer is the frost layer above us, which makes it rather safe," said Beigong Qianyu.

"That's good."

"However, there's advantages and disadvantages," added Beigong Qianyu.

"What are the disadvantages?" Tianming asked.

"Once the others know that we're in the swamp layer and flock to us, the hell tree is more exposed because this area is open. Thus, we're vulnerable to attacks, and will have trouble defending. It's easy to hide ourselves, but not the hell tree. So I don't think it's any good. Previously, it would've been good to get away from the central region of the battlefield and secretly score points. But this time, everyone is eyeing us. At present, no one knows where the other sects' disciples are, but trouble comes in the later part, after countless confrontations with each other. Regardless of everything, the hell tree must be protected. Otherwise, hiding in the swamp won't mean anything," said Beigong Qianyu.

"I understand." Tianming nodded.

At that point, after discussing with the others, Xuanyuan Yucheng solemnly said, "Don't rejoice just yet. Compose yourselves. Although the swamp layer is at the bottom, it'll be even more difficult for us if people know we're here. You must make sure to hide yourselves. Let's act according to our original plan. Divide into three teams and look for the hell tree first!"

"Yes!"

Each team consisted of about fifteen or sixteen people. Xuanyuan Yucheng led ten disciples from the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, and several external disciples. Fang Chenjing and Fang Yuewei formed a team with fifteen disciples of the Sterling House of Fang. Beigong Qianyu formed a team with seven disciples of the Draconis House of Jian, and other external disciples. Although Tianming was also a deputy commander, three teams were enough. Since Xuanyuan Yucheng trusted his abilities, he arranged for Tianming to work with the weaker Beigong Qianyu.

There was a division of labor between the three teams. Because Fang Chenjing and Fang Yuewei's team was made up entirely of Sterling House of Fang disciples, they were rather unified and seemed to possess the strongest combat capabilities. Thus, their main mission was of a defensive nature. They were to be stationed beside the hell tree to protect it upon locating it.

Xuanyuan Yucheng's team was mainly engaged in long-range reconnaissance and combat, because they were the most determined and least afraid of death. They could block off the battle outside without revealing the location of the hell tree.

Beigong Qianyu's team was mainly responsible for short-range reconnaissance and combat. They would be on guard near the hell tree, sandwiched between the two other teams, ready to support the front and back, and at the same time acted as a second protective barrier for the hell tree.

Not everyone could remain beside the hell tree once they found it, since they wouldn't know how many intruders they had. Additionally, they might reveal the location of the hell tree.

By systematically distributing their people, they were able to detect their enemies in advance, and even lead them away. In fact, it was impossible even for the Nonahall Ghost Sect with the largest number of people with more than eighty top disciples to send all of them out to sweep the area. Disciples had to be stationed at the hell tree for protection.

So as long as the Archaion Sect defended with all their heart and stayed where they were instead of going hunting in other layers, assuming they weren't besieged and managed to protect the hell tree for ten days, it was tantamount to resisting the oppression of the five great divine realms as well as defending their glory and goddess.

That was their mission.

It was only ten days; they weren't completely hopeless. Perhaps many considered them cannon fodder, but at least they didn't think so. In Tianming's opinion, they were fighters!

"Let's begin!"

The three teams split up and set off.

Chapter 700 - Oh No

"Right now, every sect is looking for their own hell tree, but there are also sects that head directly to the other layers, looking for others' hell trees. Once they find one, they'll destroy it and immediately obtain thirty points. That forces their opponents into a dead end with nowhere to hide. The sects with more

participants, such as the Nonahall Ghost Sect, will certainly spread out at once. This is a race against time.”

All Tianming had to do was look up to see the dark clouds rolling in the sky. There were many passages in the clouds, from which other disciples could descend and attack the swamp layer. Tianming released Meow Meow and Ying Huo out of his lifebound space. Ying Huo was small and less conspicuous than a beastmaster. On the other hand, Meow Meow was instructed to transform into its Regal Chaosfiend because what Tianming currently required was its speed.

“I’ll lead the way.”

“Pay attention to your safety and send a signal if you find it.”

With that, Tianming quickly left. While remaining in position with his teammates, he surveyed his surroundings with his third eye. The signal utilized light from a heavenly pattern tome, but only the commander and deputy commander actually knew what its specific meaning was. All the others had to do was follow along.

The swamp layer wasn’t small at all, and the search took six hours. Finding the hell tree was the focus of the Nether Battle. The more time it took, the more danger the entire team would be exposed to. It was very likely that others had entered the swamp layer and were also looking for it.

“Those who are watching the battle with the Skyeeye Formation probably know where the hell tree is, as well as where the other sect disciples are. Watching the battle from their perspective is even more exciting. So, where’s the hell tree?”

Tianming’s conjectures were right. Whether it was the Dimensional Battlefield of the Heaven Branch where the strong gathered, or the entire Flameyellow continent, everyone was watching in anticipation.

Some sect disciples had even begun fighting. After all, aside from the Archaion Sect, the Kilostar Domain’s ultimate tribulation manna was also a target of the eight divine realms. By the six hour mark, many teams had found their hell trees and begun deploying their defenses.

Meanwhile, Tianming and Meow Meow dashed across the muddy swamp. In truth, the swamp layer was so flat, one could see very far into the distance. There wasn’t a mountain in sight. If it weren’t for how far away they were in the beginning, they would have already discovered the hell tree.

“The tree!”

Finally, Tianming made his first contribution by finding the hell tree in the swamp layer. It was a black tree with no leaves, only dry branches and a swaying trunk that was protected by a transparent light barrier. The transparent barrier was a heavenly pattern formation. Apparently, a beastmaster at the fourth-level life phase could break the barrier after thirty seconds of attacking, then destroy the hell tree at will.

“Sister Qianyu, over here!” Tianming shouted.

“The hell tree?” Beigong Qianyu quickly walked over, her eyes lighting up as she ignited a heavenly pattern tome to send a signal.

This method could easily reveal their location, so their signal directly ascended to the sky. One couldn't determine from which location it was sent, but the color itself represented the sign they had previously agreed upon. The signal itself would inform them of their position.

The three teams had undertaken the task simultaneously, so it was possible to calculate their position. Before the others arrived, Tianming and sixteen other people were defending the hell tree. Soon, Xuanyuan Yucheng, Fang Chenjing, and Fang Yuewei arrived, one after the other.

"Good job." Xuanyuan Yucheng then turned to everyone else and said, "Let's act according to the plan. The first team will follow me to set up a long range defense. The second team will circle around, while the third team is to be stationed next to the hell tree. Fang Chenjing, Fang Yuewei, I'll leave this area to you."

"No problem," Fang Yuewei replied.

"Alright, enough nonsense. If the hell tree is destroyed, we'll all die. There's no way we'll be careless," said Fang Chenjing.

"Alright, let's get to it then." Xuanyuan Yucheng led his team in investigating and exploring the surrounding terrain as well as setting up their first line of defense in the distance.

However, their numbers weren't high, after all. With such a defense, outsiders could still infiltrate the area. Thus, Tianming and Beigong Qianyu's second line of defense was very important. Refraining from venturing into other layers to attack and score points was considered very pragmatic.

"Let's go, Li Tianming." The disciples of the Sterling House of Fang settled down, hiding in the marsh, while Tianming and the others set off.

Since they were situated somewhere nearby, they could see signals from both sides. All sixteen of them spread out to ensure that everyone could see the person closest to them.

"Li Tianming, you're on your own. Stay close and make sure to hide. Watch for any movement near the hell tree. The swamp layer is too flat, and I'm afraid people might still sneak in even with our current arrangement," said Beigong Qianyu.

"Alright."

Tianming adhered to her plans. Seeing that Tianming's lifebound beast was fast, Beigong Qianyu gave him the task of working alone. Of course, Tianming's most important mission was to act as the link between Beigong Qianyu and the Sterling House of Fang's disciples to ensure the safety of the hell tree.

Climbing on top of Meow Meow's back, Tianming roamed through the swamp, paying attention to any movement in his surroundings. He was extremely tense.

...

The hell tree couldn't be hidden, but the Sterling House of Fang disciples could conceal themselves in the marsh, some near, some further away, all of them vigilant.

"Are you willing?" asked Fang Chenjing.

"What?" Fang Yuewei seemed confused.

"Since they're in the front, they'll get all the points when a battle breaks out. Meanwhile, we wait here, unable to score any points. We won't be able to enter the final battle," said Fang Chenjing.

"You're still thinking about entering the final battle?" Fang Yuewei was stunned.

"I'm just voicing my opinion. God knows if Xuanyuan Yucheng is deliberately aiming at us," Fang Chenjing retorted.

"It's very dangerous outside, there's a risk of death. I think his arrangement is reasonable, so stop blabbering. You sound so small-minded," Fang Yuewei replied.

"I'm small-minded? I'm doing this for our own good, so they know that the Sterling House of Fang aren't mindless fools to be taken advantage of," said Fang Chenjing.

"Oh." Fang Yuewei couldn't be bothered to argue.

Time quickly flew by. The first day passed quietly. They didn't know what was happening in the other layers, but it was peaceful in the swamp. Although it was rather boring, their ultimate goal was to survive the ten days. Boredom was a kind of good fortune.

"I wonder if Xuanyuan Yucheng has met any disciples from the other sects," said Fang Yuewei.

"It's been really quiet. I'm guessing they've been idle," said Fang Chenjing.

They were more relaxed and no longer hid in the swamp, gathering in groups of two and three to pass the time. The Nether Battlefield didn't seem as violent and bloody as they had expected. Each person could only participate in the Number One Summit once in their lives. They had previously been spectators.

In the midst of all the boredom, a group of people suddenly appeared in the west.

"The hell tree!"

Among the crowd, a woman with a delicate voice exclaimed. At the sound of her voice, the Sterling House of Fang disciples broke out in cold sweat.

"Send out the signal!" Fang Chenjing quickly shouted at Fang Yuewei.

Fang Chenjing was nervous. At a glance, they could see that there were at least thirty people in the group. The disciples of certain sects didn't even add up to thirty.

"What the hell are Xuanyuan Yucheng and Beigong Qianyu doing outside! There's such a huge group here, but I don't see them doing anything!" Fang Chenjing was angry enough to vomit blood.

Right then, Fang Yuewei sent out the distress signal. Both teams recognized their opponents.

"The Monorigin Divine Sect!"

"The Hexapath Sword Sect!"

Both teams exclaimed at the same time. The enemies with enmity seeped in blood had encountered each other beside the Archaion Sect's hell tree. Fang Chenjing and Fang Yuewei's expressions turned ugly.

Tension filled the air. Their opponents' eyes lit up, like hungry wolves. A battle of life and death was inevitable. The Hexapath Sword Sect disciples were ecstatic, their eyes red with killing intent.

"It's the disciples of the Sterling House of Fang. Kill them all!"

"Kill!" There was no room for talk. Battle broke out on the spot.

The sisters, Feng Linyin and Feng Shuoyu, were the commanders of the Hexapath Sword Sect team.

Their base camp was located in the frost layer. Since there was only one level below them, their first task after locating their own hell tree was to determine which sect had been sent to the swamp layer.

Feng Shuoyu and Feng Linyin's most important task was to send out a large force to sweep through the swamp layer. After completing their task, they would return to guard their hell tree while Jiang Wuxin ventured into the upper level to collect points.

There were seven levels above them. For the purpose of protection, Jiang Wuxin, whose strength was irrefutable, temporarily guarded their tree. They could never have imagined that their primary goal, the Monorigin Divine Sect, would be located in the ninth layer right below them.

"Big Sister, there's only a dozen of them. The others have obviously left. We should take the opportunity to destroy their hell tree. That way, they're all finished! Let's join hands with the other sects in torturing them one by one!" Feng Linyin's eyes lit up.

"Get the others to hold them down. We'll destroy the hell tree together!" Feng Shuoyu said decisively.

The hell tree was their prime focus.

"Let's go!"

A large number of lifebound beasts from both teams appeared at once and the Hexapath Sword Sect began their attack. The presence of the hell tree meant an almost inevitable end for the Archaion Sect disciples. The Hexapath Sword Sect disciples were immediately filled with vigor.

...

Tianming was wandering around when he noticed the signal from the hell tree.

"Oh no!"

Beigong Qianyu had noticed the signal as well. While sending out another one, Tianming ordered Meow Meow to head to the hell tree at maximum speed.

After transforming into a tribulation beast, Meow Meow's speed had soared once more. Ranked first in the entire Nether Battlefield, its speed was unsurpassed. In the midst of all this, Tianming drew out the Grand-Orient Sword and held Archfiend in his left hand.

In the blink of an eye, he had rushed over. There was a fight next to the hell tree.

"Thirty Hexapath Sword Sect disciples!"

His expression altered drastically. Regardless of the opponent's strength, their advantage in numbers allowed them to free up several people to attack the hell tree.

Tianming watched two attractive women attack the hell tree barrier. Their moves were aggressive, bursting with life tribulation energy. At the very least, they were at the life phase.

The Archaion Sect would be finished the moment the hell tree was destroyed. Tianming's eyes turned red.

"Trying to kill us? I'll send you to your deaths first!"