

The Ages 761

Chapter 761 - No Pain, No Gain

Another meeting had been held at Tribulation Peak, but Tianming wasn't in attendance. After he returned to Soulburn Hall, Jian Wuyi and Fang Taiqing came to him. They were just about to talk about the Kilostar Domain.

Ever since Dugu Jin had made his move, the Archaic House of Xuanyuan had planned to forbid entry into Xuanyuan Lake to anyone not from the house. But since the alliance with the other sects was formed, the non-Xuanyuan sect masters had to report many things to Feiling, so they were allowed entry for convenience. Others apart from those two weren't allowed to enter the Nine Dragon Formation.

Whether Xuanyuan Dao trusted the two sect masters or not, they were still powerful and influential in the sect. The house kings were important figures in the sect, whose help would be required for many things in the future.

Based on the current situation, it seemed that the other three divine realms were willing to commit to the alliance with them, so there was no need for the Sterling House of Fang to turn their backs on Archaion at all. As for the Draconis House of Jian, they had been loyal to the sect since its founding and had fought beside the Archaic House of Xuanyuan for ages, so they were considered loyal.

The three masters were about to meet up with Feiling to discuss the matter of the Kilostar Domain. After Tianming entered, he stood to the side and listened to the discussion.

"Your Eminence, Yi Xingyin and five other third-origin tribulation elders have scoured the entire five-hundred-kilometer diameter around the Kilostar Domain and stationed scouts there. The moment the enemy is seen approaching, we will have sufficient time to retreat unscathed. Most of the tribulation elders are now of the opinion that we should take this risk to obtain the treasures within the domain, which might help us decrease the casualties we will suffer in the upcoming war," Fang Taiqing said.

Feiling had waited a long time for Tianming to return. Now that he was here, she felt much more calm. She gave it some thought and turned to Xuanyuan Dao, who said, "All the information suggests that we can easily obtain the ultimate tribulation manna, and even attempt to unlock the domain. Our men are also ready, so it seems like there isn't any downside to this at all. However, this is a little too weird. There is no way Nonahall would let us go there just like that. They should know more about the Kilostar Domain than we do, which makes this even fishier. I believe it to be rather risky."

"I'm of the same opinion. Though, some of the tribulation elders believe we shouldn't miss this opportunity," Fang Taiqing said.

"Opinions on that are varied. They are aware of the hidden risks, but they seem to be prioritizing the potential gain from obtaining the treasures rather than the imperial son's safety," Xuanyuan Dao said.

They didn't seem to have a consensus. Feiling turned to Tianming and asked, "Tianming, are you in a rush to obtain the ultimate tribulation manna?"

"Not in particular," he said.

"Then you should not leave for now. Who knows what our enemies are plotting if they're just letting it be?"

"Yes, Your Eminence." Tianming knew that this was just her not wanting him to risk his life. The sect was split on whether to send Tianming to open the Kilostar Domain before they had sufficient information to truly determine how risky that endeavor was. That lended itself to two possibilities: either their judgment was compromised by the allure of treasures, or they didn't really care about the sect's wellbeing at all.

Since Feiling had given her decision, Fang Taiqing could only abide by it. He bowed and said, "Your Eminence's considerations are well founded. I will go to Tribulation Peak to announce the decision now."

"Good. We can have those near the Kilostar Domain continue monitoring the situation."

"Yes, Your Eminence."

The 'good news' Yi Xingyin and the others had brought back was that the sect had managed to control the area surrounding the domain and eliminated all possible dangers nearby. Logically, it was hard to imagine their enemies having other traps laid for them given those premises. Yi Xingyin and the other five third-origin tribulation elders had done their best to surveil the surroundings; however, their goddess's decree to have Tianming stay back for now was law. Ever since the announcement of her decision, Tribulation Peak no longer dissented on the matter.

The sect masters left, leaving Tianming and Feiling within the inner formation.

"Big Brother, are you unhappy that I decided myself to not let you go to Kilostar Domain?"

"Of course not. I've been thinking about it lately, too. To be honest, I think Senior Yi Xingyin's assessment on the situation is really reasonable, but it's almost too reasonable. Fang Taiqing is right that there must be something fishy underneath the whole affair that they just somehow aren't able to detect. The enemies must have some really special method that's beyond the grasp of our imagination, just like the Archaionfiend's last-ditch effort to escape that I completely didn't see coming."

"I see. All is well then."

"Tribulation Peak is too big and has too many tribulation elders. It isn't easy to tell who's loyal and who's a spy. If we have informants in the other eight divine realms, they no doubt have some in ours as well. From now on, we should really be careful at every step. As long as our enemy doesn't act, we shouldn't as well."

"That's right. Our informants report that the armies of the other divine realms seem to be moving toward the Pentaphase Divine Realm. Xuanyuan Dao said that they might not attack us first and instead opt to make an example out of Pentaphase, which is why they've come to discuss this with us so urgently."

The matters of war were often complicated. Given Tianming's status, all he could do was talk to her about it while the real decisions were made by the three sect masters and nine divine marshals.

"The Pentaphase Divine Realm, huh...." Tianming recalled Zhao Tianxing and Jiang Qingqing.

"Have you made it to the third-level life phase?" Feiling asked.

"Yeah."

"To be honest, I have a feeling you'll ascend much sooner than me. Most people haven't really picked up on that fact and are still worshipping me as a goddess. I believe that's your biggest asset. I hope the sect can last till the day you'll be able to call the shots."

"It won't be that simple. The Samsara stage is split into four sections, from first to third, fourth to sixth, seventh to ninth, and tenth to twelfth. Breaking through will only get progressively harder. I've been at the third-level life phase for a month and I'm feeling a little lost. The heavenly will from the Old Deepstar Path is also getting less and less useful, so there definitely isn't an easy way forward."

First- to third-level samsarans could only become normal tribulation elders. The majority of those at that level were in the Archaion army. Those who reached the fourth to sixth levels would become first-origin tribulation elders, seventh to ninth levels second-origin tribulation elders, and third-origin elders beyond that. There were only around fifty third-origin tribulation elders in the sect, with most of the peak elites on the Flameyellow Continent, like Ouyang Jianwang and Yi Xingyin, being at that level. Currently, Tianming could be compared to a sixth-level life samsaran, as most first-origin tribulation elders were no longer his match.

After experiencing so much, his demeanor had been sufficiently tempered to the point he was able to remain sufficiently calm during such a situation. He calmed down at the sight of the snowy landscape and hoped for the best.

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In the wilderness outside Xuanyuan Lake was a man in a starry robe, standing in the snow. He stretched out his fair and slender fingers, touching the air in front of him. It was Yi Xingyin. He smiled and turned his hand around, causing the dragon-shaped spatial heavenly patterns before him to swirl.

"The Nine Dragon Formation seems to be able to tell who I really am. I can't destroy it either, given the identity I've chosen to adopt. This is a pain indeed. As expected of the 'prestigious' Archaic House of Xuanyuan.... They're the descendants of Great Emperor Xuanyuan, after all."

He smiled and pulled his fingers back. "This is troubling. After spending so much effort using the Dreamheart World to take Yi Xingyin's place and risk being checked by you lot twice, you're telling me I can't go wherever I please? The treasures of the first divine sect are just right there, yet they're so cowardly and cautious... how infuriating."

He stretched lazily, appearing a little more seductive than a man like him would suggest. "Dammit, and I have to shower them with praises, too. To think I thought I could take that child back.... It looks like this is a huge waste of time."

His face was filled with nothing but frustration. All of a sudden, he shook his face and smiled.

"Whatever. I promised them I'd do it, so I will. Let's take a risk then."

He couldn't help but chuckle when he thought of the white-haired 'child'. "That child really is mysterious. He managed to steal the key of the Kilostar Domain from right under Nonahall's noses, and ruined their treasure-hunting plans too...."

He knew that the Kilostar Domain was Nonahall's highest priority before they launched their assault. After all, the odds would be stacked even more in their favor if they had the treasures it promised. All they needed to do was to stop Feiling's growth in the meantime, and everything else would be on track.

'Yi Xingyin' was wearing a face full of smiles. "However, I really need to thank him. If it weren't for him obtaining the key, there's no way I'd get a starmap from Nonahall. Luring the snake out of its hole would be ideal, but since you choose to stay in that hole, I'll have to drag you out. No pain, no gain!"

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After the Archaionfiend had vanished, the sect remained peaceful. The undercurrents of war were still brewing in the background, however, and the four sects had readied their best defenses. Nowadays, apart from the strongest elites, few could travel freely in the divine realms. Taiji Peak Lake, for instance, was defended by a nine-layered formation that didn't allow entry to any outsiders. The Nine Dragon Formation was a legacy of the founding ancestor and a symbol of their history and greatness, and was one of the cornerstones of the sect. Now, it would be operating at full capacity.

Chapter 762 - Fatedream Shawl

The sky was unbelievably clear, so much so that nobody could remember the last time they had such calm weather. However, the cold was still bone piercing and the landscape was still covered in snow like usual.

Outside Xuanyuan Lake on the snowy plains, Tianming was crossing swords with a man dressed in gold. His sparring partner seemed dashing and brave, and somewhat resembled Xuanyuan Dao. He was Xuanyuan Xuanyi, the son of Xuanyuan Dao.

Xuanyuan Xuanyi was forty-three this year and was a sixth-level life samsaran, making him a first-origin tribulation elder. Before the age of thirty, he used to be at the top of the Heaven Branch's ranking when he was at the fourth-level death phase. When his prime training period was over, breaking through had become more and more difficult, so he'd only made three during that thirteen year period. Even so, he was still among the fastest-improving people across the entire continent, with few of his age being able to match his prowess.

As his growth had slowed and the insights from Old Deepstar Path grew less useful, he'd had to rely on nothing but himself to cultivate. However, he had developed quite a lot in terms of style and technique after lots of fighting to hone his skills, which made him an expert in combat.

He had practiced certain moves tens of thousands of times, to the point of complete mastery, and was also a sword user, making him the perfect sparring partner for Tianming in his training of the Ninesky Beastsoul Formation. Sparks flew as their swords clashed; so far, Tianming hadn't managed to manifest the formation one bit.

"This technique of yours seems really deep. Where'd you learn it from?"

"Her Eminence taught it to me."

Most people didn't know about the existence of the Hexapath Samsara Sword and attributed Tianming's techniques to Feiling instead. Even if they did know, they wouldn't expect a mere mortal like him to be able to learn the most powerful sword art made by a god.

"I'm envious. Watch out for this move then!" The youths of the Xuanyuan house mostly had heroic personalities, and that, paired with Xuanyuan Xuanyi's experience in the military, only embellished that trait of his. When fighting one on one using the Ninesky Beastsoul Formation, Tianming wasn't able to defeat him. However, if they were fighting seriously, he stood a chance if his lifebound beasts could join the fray.

After an hour, the two of them were panting from exhaustion.

"This won't do... I can't even defeat a young fellow like you. I really need to rest. Let's continue this tomorrow," Xuanyuan Xuanyi said.

"Alright."

"You're not that old yourself, you know," Xuanyuan Yu said.

"Aunt Yu, don't even start. Tianming's growth is godly, to say the least. Just last month he was still a Heaven Branch disciple, but now he can defeat most first-origin tribulation elders. He might be able to catch up to you soon, too."

"That'd be even better," she said with a smile. Beside her was Jian Wuyi's younger brother, Jian Wufeng, but he rarely spoke.

At that moment, Yi Xingyin came to them.

"Palace Lord," Tianming greeted.

"Imperial Son, please just address me by name," he said.

"That won't do." Tianming paused for a moment in thought and said, "Thanks for going through twice the trouble for the matter of the Kilostar Domain."

"You don't have to be so polite with me. I understand that Her Eminence has reservations about this, and one can never be too careful."

As they spoke, Xuanyuan Xuanyi took his leave, leaving Jian Wufeng and Xuanyuan Yu to stand listlessly at the side. Protecting the imperial son was a tedious and uneventful job indeed, especially considering the fact that the sect was basically sealed off. The risks Tianming would be exposed to were far and few in between. Not to mention, he spent most of his time in the Deepstar Pool and Soulburn Hall. As Yi Xingyin was a familiar face, the two of them didn't pay too much attention to him. Tianming seemed to be having a rather good conversation with him.

"Palace Lord, I'll be making my way to Soulburn Hall to continue cultivating now."

Yi Xingyin hurried forward and said, "Are you in that much of a rush? Let's talk a little more. I'm a little curious about you now." "Palace Lord?" Tianming suddenly noticed that something about his smile was off. His instincts told him he was in danger, but it was already too late to make some distance. Is Yi Xingyin being controlled? It didn't seem possible when he thought about it. After all, he was a third-

origin tribulation elder and among the top ten strongest in the Archaion Sect, so nobody on the Flameyellow Continent should be able to puppet him around. Did that mean he was doing it willingly?

It all happened in an instant. A shawl suddenly appeared from his sleeve. It was ethereal and dreamy and it looked like it covered the entire sky, immediately confusing his vision and binding him up, leaving only his head exposed. It was a peak-grade tribulation artifact; Tianming saw fifteen tribulation patterns on it! The enemy's power was far beyond his imagination and he couldn't move at all. Not only that, it seemed to bind his lifebound space and stopped his beasts from leaving, forcing them back the moment they attempted to come out.

"Stop struggling, brat. It'll hurt." Now, Yi Xingyin's voice sounded like a dainty woman's as his visage began to morph and shift. Soon, 'his' bones cracked as they moved into place and her innards also reconfigured themselves. The person now appeared shorter, with a slimmer face and a full bosom. It was a complete change of gender!

"It's the Fatedream Shawl! That's Li Caiwei!" Xuanyuan Yu cried in shock.

"We've been infiltrated! It's the Yinyang Demon Sect's Li Caiwei!" roared Li Wufeng as he charged in. Soon, roars of beasts could be heard all over Xuanyuan Lake. It could even be heard all the way from Soulburn Hall.

"Save the imperial son!"

The sounds of chaos reverberated throughout, shattering the month-long peace in the sect. Many people rushed toward them. Tianming was in the eye of the storm as he watched this pink-eyed 'girl' with awe. How had she managed to trick so many powerful elites and approach him without them noticing? It was also his first time ever witnessing that transformation ability of hers. It immediately occurred to him that the person that had approached him was never Yi Xingyin to begin with, but it was already too late. There was nothing he could do when one of the most powerful people on the continent had come to abduct him. He could only count on someone else to save him.

Why would she even dare to attempt something like this on their home turf anyway? Almost instantly, she pulled the shawl toward her, and Tianming along with it. Xuanyuan Yu and Jian Wufeng were already closing in to surround her. Jian Wufeng's swordbeasts entered his sword, while Xuanyuan Yu's two ice dragons were out and ready to attack; all of them had about eight hundred stars.

"Lunar Master, you shan't escape!"

Chapter 763 - Pursuit

"Oh, really? You'll have no issue with me trying, then." Li Caiwei dragged Tianming along as she evaded. Right then, Jian Wufeng's sword was slashing toward Li Caiwei's throat. Her pink eyes flashed for a moment and Jian Wufeng hurriedly closed his eyes, but his sword didn't slow down at all.

"Come, kill your precious imperial son for me, won't you?" She pulled Tianming in front of her just as the ferocious sword ki was about to touch her. Before the blade even cut into Tianming, the ki alone caused many bloody streaks to appear on his face, forcing Jian Wufeng to stop his strike.

"Li Caiwei is trying to abduct the imperial son!"

When news of that spread, more and more people gathered. Li Caiwei must've been really desperate to do something so risky, but no doubt part of her decision was backed by her own confidence. However, Xuanyuan Yu and Jian Wufeng alone had kept her busy for quite some time. She quickly dashed backward after using Tianming as a shield, with Xuanyuan Yu and her dragons tailing them, unleashing multiple abilities at once. However, Li Caiwei kept waving Tianming around, forcing them to stop the attacks.

"Don't even bother escaping! Our Nine Dragon Formation is activated. You won't be able to leave! It's pointless!" Xuanyuan Yu cried.

However, Li Caiwei didn't seem the least bit bothered. She zipped across the snowy landscape like an illusory shadow, dragging Tianming behind her. A dragon breath swooshed past her, chilling her for a split second before she broke out of the blizzard. By now, more and more people were giving chase and some had even circled around in front of her to intercept her.

"How exciting." She smirked as fragrant mist began emanating from her body. Tianming knew how terrifying she truly was, as he was right by her side. Li Caiwei was a prodigal daughter with countless astounding feats to her name, and the fact that she dared to openly abduct him in the sect was a testament to her courage.

The fragrance was a hallucinogenic toxin that caused anyone that smelled it to have countless visions. Even with Tianming's Soul Tower, the world he saw still shifted and morphed. The ones with weaker resistance to the technique were rendered completely immobile, allowing her to easily slip past them and reach the very border of the Nine Dragon Formation at the edge of Taiji Peak Lake. Once she broke out, the rest would have a hard time catching up to her.

After forcing a few elites of the sect away, Li Caiwei charged into the first layer of the formation, the Truefiend Dragonbind Formation. Within it, a black mist began forming dragon-like spirit hazards that attacked her in unison.

The fact that she snuck in by adopting Palace Lord Yi's identity means that she was able to trick the Nine Dragon Formation. However, she won't have that easy a time with brute force, Tianming thought calmly. He wasn't too bothered yet, as Li Caiwei's aim was obviously to force him to open the Kilostar Formation, so he should be fine until then at least. I hope someone comes to stop her soon!

Tianming had a feeling that she was a master of formations. She moved seductively as she evaded fatal blows without exerting the slightest bit of unnecessary effort. Tianming, suspended behind her, felt her hair brushing against his face like blades. It hurt so much that he cursed all eighteen generations of her ancestors.

"Huh, you still appear to be rather calm," she said with a smile.

"The fact that the famous lunar master came to abduct a little junior like me is something to take pride in. Not to mention, there's so many people chasing us down, so why should I be anxious?"

"You have a way with words, I'll give you that, brat." As she spoke, she crossed into the next layer of the formation completely unscathed. While the formation was good at stopping a large number of people

from passing through, it didn't seem to have much of an effect on her. She seemed to know the formation far too well and always narrowly avoided the obstacles thrown her way, as if she'd rehearsed for it all. She definitely hadn't come unprepared.

"Oh, guess you're not going to be able to escape after all," Tianming said when he saw the flash of a sword coming their way, behind which were four large phoenixes. Each of them had nine hundred stars. Standing right in front of them was a man in green robes that was covered entirely in flames. The flash of the sword was none other than Jian Wuyi, and the one behind him was Fang Taiqing.

"Li Caiwei, let the imperial son go!" Fang Taiqing cried from behind them.

"The three great slave houses! Forget it!" She smirked as the sword flash sealed off her escape route. She tied Tianming to her back and angled him in whichever direction the attacks were coming from. "Well? Are you even trying to hit me?"

"Don't get too cocky just yet!" Fang Taiqing said when he finally caught up after Jian Wuyi intercepted her. He was much stronger than Li Caiwei, but she didn't have any intention of engaging him at all and focused solely on escape.

Now, Tianming was tied fast to her back and even his face was pressed against the back of her head. He couldn't see anything; all he could smell was the fragrance she emitted from before and it felt rather nauseating. Not to mention, her quick movements were a little too fast for him. All he heard was the wind swooshing around him and the explosions of abilities as Li Caiwei made it through one layer after another, with Fang Taiqing, Jian Wuyi, and hundreds of other tribulation elders chasing behind her.

The countless explosions of a fight between the strongest elites on the continent caused quite a huge spectacle and reminded Tianming of how puny he still was in the grand scheme of things. Not to mention, the youngest among them was Li Caiwei, who was only about a century old, but the pursuers were all geniuses in their own right, too.

Tianming was being flung around so hard that he was about to go insane. From time to time, the attacks from Fang Taiqing and the rest would strike him, but would mostly be mitigated by the Fatedream Shawl. Otherwise, he would've long been torn apart. The whole chase lasted fifteen minutes.

All of a sudden, Tianming smelled blood and heard Li Caiwei cry out in pain. Blood even dripped onto his face.

"Fuck this shit!" she cursed with a shaky voice, obviously injured in some capacity. It turned out that her abdomen had been pierced by Jian Wuyi's sword flash, which had left a bloody hole behind, and a green flame burned on her left arm. That was the Sterling House of Fang's strongest flame: the Sterling Godflame. It completely charred her left arm before melting it into a bloody mush. That was a huge price for her to pay as a result of the risky move she had pulled, and it was all thanks to Tianming not going to the Kilostar Domain.

"Let me go or you'll definitely die!" he growled.

"Shut up, you!" She grit her teeth and continued to escape. She was in the territory of the Archaion Sect and couldn't afford to be held back. Even Feng Qingyu would die here without a doubt if he was overwhelmed, let alone her, but she was doing it all for the starmap.

"Li Caiwei, let the imperial son go and we'll spare you! Otherwise, you'll know no mercy!" Fang Taiqing roared. Now, a few third-origin tribulation elders were catching up and attacked at the same time, among them Xuanyuan Yu and Jian Wufeng.

"Then kill him first!" She didn't intend to stop in the slightest, but used Tianming as a shield instead. While she had many pursuers, they couldn't do much so long as Tianming was held hostage. The pursuit continued with her suffering some minor injuries, but not enough to make her give up.

Eventually, she reached the last layer of the formation, much to Fang Taiqing and the others' frustration. They had only just found out that she had been impersonating Yi Xingyin the whole time—something they could never have imagined beforehand. And with Tianming held hostage, they had no other option.

"Sect Master, if this goes on, she'll escape the formation! What do we do?"

"She's already injured, so she'll eventually wear herself out! Don't panic!"

As long as they had an opportunity to heavily wound her, all would be well. All of a sudden, the sky brightened and Tianming knew that she had managed to leave the Nine Dragon Formation.

"Keep on chasing! I'll be waiting to see your troops all wiped out! Fang Taiqing, you'd better not run like a coward! I want to watch you die!" she cried as she soared away from Taiji Peak Lake.

Kilostar Domain was high up in the skies, and that was where she was heading. Meanwhile, the elites of the sect kept giving chase, with Jian Wuyi's swordbeast-infused longsword homing in on them. His strike was too fast.

"Haha!" Li Caiwei struck with her palm and stopped the sword, but Fang Taiqing came from the other direction. The phoenix feather in his hand pierced through space and embedded itself in her arm, causing her to let out a somewhat erotic moan of pain, but she didn't stop gaining altitude.

There were too many pursuers and she couldn't defeat them all, so summoning any lifebound beast would be pointless and might even slow her down. Borrowing the force from deflecting Jian Wuyi's sword, she continued rising and widened the distance between her and her hundreds of pursuers.

It was a truly shocking feat, one that had almost cost her life. Her face was pale from the injuries she had suffered, but Tianming felt that she stood a good chance in succeeding in bringing him to the Kilostar Domain.

Chapter 764 - Dire Straits

When news got back to Soulburn Hall, the entirety of Xuanyuan Lake was shocked. Tianming had actually been abducted from right under their noses! When so many elites of the sect had left in a hurry, they instantly knew what was going on.

Xuanyuan Dao returned after a short chase only to see Feiling with a panicked and worried look. "Did you rescue him? Is Tianming alright?"

"Your Eminence, Fang Taiqing and Jian Wuyi have given chase, along with a hundred tribulation elders. I worry that there's other spies in the sect using Tianming to lure the elites away, so I didn't dare move too far away from Soulburn Hall," he said with a furrowed brow.

"It's fine. You should go, too. We have to save him no matter the cost!" She was finding it harder and harder to control her emotions. There was no way she could calmly deliberate on this now that Tianming's life was in danger.

"Your Eminence, there's enough people giving chase. Not to mention, I alone won't be able to be much help, so staying here is for the best. Li Caiwei definitely intends to use Tianming to open the Kilostar Domain, so he will be safe until then. We can only put our trust in Fang Taiqing and the rest now," he said helplessly.

"Is there nothing we can do but wait?" She bit her lip, her eyes filled with hate as she stomped around with heavy breathing. Xuanyuan Dao and Fang Qingli didn't dare to utter a sound. "Leave, leave!"

She knew that she could no longer control her emotions, and she didn't want them to see her like this.

"Understood." They had no choice but to leave the inner formation and stand guard outside.

With the hall now empty, Feiling leaned against a pillar and slumped down with her fists clenched and tears flowing. "Why...? We were so careful, but they still won't let us off..."

The worst part was that she had been able to face hardship with him together before, but now she couldn't even leave Soulburn Hall. She was a caged bird, suffering the greatest torture of worrying for her loved one.

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Outside Soulburn Hall, Xuanyuan Dao and Fang Qingli stood without speaking. Their goddess's reaction was too obvious. That definitely wasn't something a master would feel for a disciple. She seemed like a panicky young girl that couldn't control herself at all.

"Don't think too much about it. Her Eminence passed away in her previous life at the age of twenty. Even after a hundred thousand years, she's still only a twenty-plus-year-old," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"Yeah," Fang Qingli said, nodding.

"Have you heard of anything like what Li Caiwei did? I know there's people who are experts at disguise, but Li Caiwei could even change her height, figure, gender, aura, and cultivation, effectively making her appear like a completely different person. Not even we could see through the disguise."

"At the very least, there have been no records of something like this in the past two hundred thousand years of history. If we go further back, it's the age before beastmasters. We don't have the slightest idea of the techniques that existed back then."

"Fortunately she had to reveal herself to act, otherwise it'd be far too terrifying. Perhaps the only reason she didn't enter Soulburn Hall was the Nine Dragon Formation. We have to be vigilant against something like this on the battlefield as well."

"Let's hope she's the only one capable of a feat like this then."

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Tianming didn't know how long had passed throughout the pursuit. All he knew was that, while Li Caiwei was hurt, she soared nonstop after leaving the Nine Dragon Formation. Now, the pursuers couldn't really do much to harm her with her using Tianming as a shield. Had she been escaping alone, she wouldn't have been able to run so far, either. Now, the elites of the sect had finally witnessed the might of the millennium vixen!

"Senior, your surname is Li just like mine. We might be distant relatives! Can't you let me off just this once?" Tianming felt really dizzy, tied to her back and with the wind hitting his face so hard.

"Why'd you have to become the goddess' disciple then? You deserve it! If you were my disciple, you wouldn't have to worry about your safety."

"Nah, I don't trust you. Your disciple Chu Xiaoqi ended up killed after all." Killed by him, no less.

"Hahaha... You're really testing my patience. Let me be direct: you got caught. It's over for you. You think your surname schtick will work? Well, maybe in the next life," she said.

"I guess it's worth it. Being tied to you limb to limb like that for so long is enjoyable for me, to say the least."

Even though he was wrapped up in the Fatedream Shawl, he could still smell the fragrance coming from her. If his life weren't in danger, he would definitely be enjoying it to his fullest.

"Is that so? There've been countless men who have toyed with me. Do you know how they ended up?"

"Pray tell."

"They suffered a fate worse than death." After that, Li Caiwei no longer wasted her breath on him, lest her attention divert and allow the others to catch up to her. Her conversation just now had cost her a lock of hair from Jian Wuyi's latest attack, causing Tianming's mouth to be stuffed with strands of them.

"Come on, Senior, don't stop speaking. I'm only twenty, you know. I'm still filled with vigor. Don't you want to have a taste of this slab of young meat? Come to think of it, your waist really is amazing. Are you sure you're already a hundred?" Tianming kept on yapping.

"I'm only ninety-nine!" she snapped, chuckling.

"Ah, then you could be my grandmother already. You're really getting the better end of the deal, being able to feel up my baby-smooth skin like that."

"Shut up." She couldn't tolerate him any longer and wrapped his mouth up in the shawl as well. Just then, Fang Taiqing appeared in front of her and slashed with his large, green blade, almost catching her forehead. She managed to dodge in time, but she suffered a cut to her shoulder.

"You three slave houses just wait! One day, I'll tear you all to pieces!" Had she not tied Tianming behind her and limited her movement, she would've long retaliated against her pursuers.

"Let the imperial son go and you'll get to keep your life!" Fang Taiqing said.

"Haha, you think you can mess with me just because you have more people on your side? We're almost to the Kilostar Domain, so it'll soon be your turn!" Li Caiwei said with a flash in her eyes.

They were nearing the starry skies above. The trees, mountains, and rivers were nowhere to be seen, replaced instead by an endless starscape. They were almost to the Kilostar Domain, after all, and few people passed through that area. Those of Deepstar Hall that were stationed there saw them and asked, "Sect Masters, why are you here?"

Seeing that they were chasing Li Caiwei down, they hurriedly tried to intercept.

"Why'd you come back?" Fang Taiqing said.

"Sect Master, those from the five divine realms are here and they occupied the entrance of the Kilostar Domain! We had no choice but to mount a hasty retreat. Now, access to it is forbidden!"

"Sect Master, they even sent some out to pursue us and they've almost caught up."

"The five ghoulish kings of Nonahall are also here, including Feng Qingyu, Long Cangyuan, and Changsun Shengqiong."

The ones from Deepstar Hall were really anxious. Since the enemies had made their move, continuing their pursuit would be incredibly dangerous and they risked being wiped out. If that happened, Archaion wouldn't even stand a chance at all. Fang Taiqing looked at Jian Wuyi, both of them incredibly troubled. They could already see the enemies coming their way; there was no time to hesitate at all.

"Fang Taiqing, once this brat opens the Kilostar Domain, I'll kill him! If you wait down there, you might even be able to catch his head!" Li Caiwei said with the most seductive of smiles. She was trying to goad him into continuing the pursuit.

"Sect Master, we can't keep on! If we do, we'll be dead for sure!"

"There's too many of them! If we get killed here, it'll be the end of Archaion!"

"Sect Master, we have to leave now. At least the goddess is still with us."

They couldn't afford to hesitate at all.

"You all should hurry back to the sect. Wuyi, take them with you."

"What about you?"

"I'll try to see if there's any chance I can still get him back."

"Be careful," Jian Wuyi said. Then he called for the rest from Deepstar Hall to return to the sect with him. The tribulation elders also stopped their pursuit without needing to be told.

Li Caiwei had managed to abduct Tianming from under the noses of their most powerful elites, and even made it out of there. It was a huge triumph for her, and a humiliation for the Archaion Sect. While she had used Tianming as her shield, nobody would nitpick on the details. All that people would remember was that the sect had managed to lose their imperial son to a lone woman, which would no doubt severely affect their troops' morale.

Tianming had just raised their morale by inheriting Great Emperor Xuanyuan's legacy, only for all of that to be nullified by this incident, leaving them probably worse off than before. Too many people would be discouraged by this. They all knew that the Lunar Master had a reputation to be feared, but even they hadn't expected something this ludicrous could even be possible. Even though she had been rather heavily injured, her feat was something even the toughest of men would envy.

Now, Fang Taiqing alone continued the chase while the rest gave up and returned. Those from the five divine realms didn't travel far, either. Once they received Li Caiwei, they immediately returned to the entrance of Kilostar Domain, which showed how much they valued it.

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At the entrance of the domain, Tianming could hear lots of cheering for Li Caiwei. Almost immediately, the shawl around him unraveled, giving him back his freedom, but one look at his surroundings and he could only smile in resignation.

While he could walk about now, he was completely surrounded by more than two thousand of the most powerful elites of the five divine realms. Most of them were on the level of second-origin tribulation elders or above, including the five ghoulish kings, Li Caiwei, Long Cangyuan, and Changsun Shengqiong. They were among the most powerful cultivators on the continent, so how would a young junior like him be able to escape?

Chapter 765 - Heartscourge Worm

There were too many enemy elites around Tianming, eyeing him like predators eyed prey in a playful manner. Their age averaged around a hundred and he seemed like a harmless bunny to them. Apart from beastmasters, there were also many lifebound beasts all over the area, all of them with six to seven hundred stars and sporting humongous sizes. They had basically sealed off any and all places Tianming could escape to; he wouldn't be able to slip away even if he was as small as a mosquito.

The five ghoulish kings were dressed in large robes and covered in an aura of death, while the Hexapath Swordfiend, Feng Qingyu; Solar Master, Qin Fengyang; master of the Heptastar Aerial Sect, Changsun Shengqiong; and many other peak figures, all had their attention focused on Li Caiwei, who had managed to abduct him alone. They looked at her bloodied and injured form with respect and awe.

"As expected of the most beautiful and powerful lunar master in the past ten thousand years. Even while injured, your beauty still shines through. The blood on your face makes you even more charming," said the red-robed ghoulish king, Xue Yi.

"Stop flattering me with empty words. No matter how beautiful a girl is, those of you from Nonahall only see us as material to make your zombie puppets. Now, I brought you the key, so you'd better hand over the starmap," she said with a smile.

She had risked everything, and even got hurt, though she would be able to recover from most of her injuries. Only Fang Taiqing's divine flame, that was still burning on her arm, would be harder to deal with. However, getting a starmap would make it all worth it, and it was Nonahall's turn to fulfill their

promise. Naturally, there was little they could do but what they had promised, for she could still kill Tianming at a moment's notice.

"But of course. Lunar Master, you've contributed much and are our ally, so we'll naturally give your sect the starmap of the Kilostar Domain," Xue Yi said. He took out a sparkling parchment and handed it to Li Caiwei as Long Cangyuan and Changsun Shenqiong watched enviously.

Tianming witnessed it all and finally understood what was going on. Not only had Nonahall not given up on the Kilostar Domain, they also had a starmap that seemed like it would be of great use within it. That must mean that Yi Xingyin had also been captured without anyone else in the sect noticing the first time he had come to scout the domain out. The question was, what had happened to him in the end?

Tianming didn't see him among the crowd, so there was a good chance that he was already done for, gone just like that without so much as a whimper. Such was the cruelty of a world at war.

There were many precious resources in the world that were sought after by everyone, and the more one controlled, the more power they could project over others. Ambitions and fervent desires ran deep in everyone's blood. To obtain the treasures within the Kilostar Domain, Nonahall would be able to resort to any method.

Li Caiwei had no doubt rendered them a huge service by bringing Tianming, to the point that she was awarded the starmap, which just showed how big an impact Tianming defeating Yama had on the Nonahall Ghost Sect. Thanks to Li Caiwei, however, they had managed to turn things around again. It appeared that he would be killed soon after he opened the Kilostar Domain.

I wonder what I can do to survive now.... Tianming closed his eyes, knowing there was a good chance that this was the end of the road for him. He turned back and saw the Kilostar Domain right before him. There was a starry mist that looked a little like a veil. It was none other than the Kilostar Formation, which had been constructed by the nine divine realms.

Beyond the veil of mist were countless shining stars that were so blinding it was an impressive sight to behold. Tianming felt a little dizzy just looking at it; it was far more impressive and ancient than he had imagined.

Ever since he had obtained the Dragonhide, his Ancient Deepstar Godbody had improved at a much faster rate. In the past half month, he had absorbed almost four thousand astral sources into his body, strengthening it to the point that it was tougher than many seniors' own. His tough body was a huge asset in combat. The main point, however, was that it was also able to absorb and utilize the power of the stars. Here, he was like a star himself.

I wonder what's hidden within the domain.... As he was thinking, Li Caiwei and the Nonahall Ghost Sect had finished their transaction. Now, he would be handled by Nonahall. Everyone watched as Ghoulish King Xue Yi approached Tianming. He wore a long red robe with a red hood that covered much of his head, so all Tianming could see was part of his face, which was surrounded by a bloody mist. His mouth seemed larger than most people's by some measure. When he smiled, the corners of his lips seemed to stretch all the way to his ears. His mouth seemed wide enough to fit two fists within it.

"Oh honored Imperial Son, how does it feel now that you're about to die?" Xue Yi said as he gave his shoulder a pat.

"It isn't as bad as I expected."

"Haha, you guys heard that?" The ghoulish king's laughter spurred the rest to laugh with him, including Tianming. He was already helpless and in their captivity, and had had his agency completely stripped from him, so he no longer cared about anything like dignity or respect.

"I was expecting an oath from you instead. Something along the lines of 'if I survive, I'll make sure all of you die in the most horrible way imaginable' or 'I'll raze your divine realms to the ground'."

The others laughed heartily once more.

"You sure like to tease me, Senior, though I must say it's pointless. I already lost, so I've accepted my fate."

"You have a point. I didn't think a little fellow like you would be able to cause us so much trouble to be honest. For you to be able to even do this much is a testament to your talent. For that, you have my respect. I suppose it's time for you to fulfill your purpose before you die, so I won't keep messing with you. Get to work!"

A hole opened up in Xue Yi's palm as a bloody, wriggling worm burrowed out from it. It looked a little like a leech and its head had a ring of sharp, gruesome teeth. It seemed like the child of a broodmother lifebound beast.

"What is this?" Tianming asked, his eyes twitching as he began to panic.

"It's a heartsourge worm. Its favorite food is live hearts, and it takes one slow bite after another. It can take up to ten days and nights for it to finish a meal, causing its host to die a most painful death. During those ten days, you'll start harboring tens of thousands of thoughts of regret. You'll even regret being born. Unfortunately for you, you'll die either way at the end of the tenth day."

"Isn't that rather pointless? You already said you'd stop messing with me," Tianming said.

"That's what I would've done, but Yama was my disciple, after all. I have to exact justice on his behalf, don't I? As you were born in the sticks of the Flameyellow Continent, you might not be aware of the Nonahall Ghost Sect's motto, right? Our policy is to pay others back ten times what we owe them. However, you killed so many of our disciples. I'm actually letting you off easy by using the heartsourge worm on you, got it, my little friend?"

"Amazing, truly amazing."

"I know you're already panicking and are just putting up a front. No matter. Just pray that you reincarnate into a better life next time, perhaps even into our sect! If you stand on the winning side, you won't be as unlucky as you are now, eh?" Xue Yi said as he smacked the back of his head twice.

"Got it. Thank you for your lecture, Senior. I'll make sure to remember it," he said, a little dizzy from the harsh smacks.

The others burst into another round of laughter, ecstatic at seeing the so-called imperial son in such a pathetic state. That was how Nonahall usually operated. The word 'cruel' simply didn't exist in their dictionary; this was just another normal day for them.

As they mocked and laughed at him, Xue Yi choked Tianming and fed the worm into his mouth. All he felt was searing pain coming from his throat before he lost all sensation. The parasite had wormed its way into his body, but now he couldn't tell where it was. It was over!

"Does that feel good?" Xue Yi asked while squeezing his mouth.

"It does," Tianming mumbled. He hadn't felt so humiliated in a long time. He would never forget the voice of someone who put him through so much shame.

The ghoulish king chuckled at Tianming's unyielding spirit. "You, oh you, so young and foolish. I truly envy your naivete. I know you feel fine now, but that's just because the worm hasn't started working, you see. The real show's still about to come."

"So? What would you have me do?"

"Simple. Look over there. That's the Kilostar Formation."

"I see it alright." Though Tianming sounded like he was having a normal conversation, he was filled with so much killing intent he found it hard to control.

"Go inside and locate the formation core. Use your formation heart to deactivate the formation, and your mission is over. If you're obedient, I'll shorten the ten days of torture to one. When the pain finally starts, it'll dawn on you how much of a difference there is between ten days and one. It's different on a conceptual level. I must say, you truly are lucky to have an opportunity like that to atone for your sins."

"Can't you all go inside with me?" Tianming asked.

Chapter 766 - Come In and Get Me

"Hehe, child, do you think you can escape that way? With the heartscurge worm inside you, there's no need for you to overthink things in the small part of your life that's left," Xue Yi said. Even though it wasn't a direct answer, it was clear enough to Tianming.

Only he could enter the Kilostar Formation, or it would destroy itself and wipe out the ultimate tribulation manna. Since the manna had appeared, all nine divine realms began paying attention there. However, it wouldn't be easy for Nonahall to control the whole place by themselves, so that was how the Number One Summit was conceived. The Archaion Sect was the one that had come up with the Kilostar Formation. Little did they know it would cause Nonahall so much trouble down the line.

If I'm the only one who can enter.... Tianming was feeling much more relaxed.

"You're free to make the choice yourself. I'll let you taste the power of the heartscurge worm for a day. If you become obedient after that and open the barrier, I'll shorten the remaining nine days of your 'bliss' into one. But that way, you'd be needlessly suffering for another day. Young man, heed your senior's advice. Don't do something you'll come to regret."

Tianming took a deep breath and said, "I'll go in."

"That easily?" Xue Yi was a little startled himself. He had thought that Tianming would stubbornly resist up until the very last moment.

"I believe in how cruel you are. It's definitely far beyond my imagination."

"Not bad, you understand your situation clearly after all. I've underestimated you."

"Yeah."

Just like that, Tianming stepped into the Kilostar Formation as everyone watched. Feng Qingyu, Li Caiwei, Long Cangyuan, and the rest eagerly watched the youth walk toward his death. Once the formation was deactivated, he would be dead for sure. After all, the ghoulish king's lifebound beast, the heartscourge fiend, was rather notorious. Now that Tianming had been infected by the worm, death was his only recourse. The rational choice would be to end his suffering as soon as possible; to do otherwise required the kind of bravery that many seniors didn't have. Most people had to first suffer through a lot to truly know the extent of the world's cruelty.

Standing before the Kilostar Formation, Tianming stretched his hand out to touch it. The formation heart within him appeared and he was absorbed inside. Now, he was completely surrounded by it. He suddenly burst out laughing as the pent-up pressure within him vanished, replaced by unending rage. He turned back and glared at all the rest, before finally resting his gaze on the red-robed man.

"Ghoul King Xue Yi!" Tianming snapped with savage fury.

"What's up?" Xue Yi asked with a cold smirk.

"Fuck your mother!" His insult seemed to cause the stars around them to shimmer.

Everyone was stunned. The ghoulish king's jaw dropped, then he chuckled and burst out laughing.

Everyone quickly joined in the laughter.

"You're more of a comedian than anyone gave you credit for!"

"Calling you 'special' would be a huge understatement."

"Ahaha, forget it. Let him throw his tantrum. Young folk like him always think themselves to be their seniors' betters, after all. They simply haven't seen what society is truly like."

"He really pulled one over on you, Xue Yi!"

The atmosphere was livened up by what Tianming had said. After laughing hard for a good while, Xue Yi waved and said, "Fine, alright. I'll let you get away with that. It's not like you can unsay that insult. Just get to work and deactivate the formation."

"If there's anything I'll deactivate, it's your mother's balls!" Tianming said with a serene smile without a hint of anger. They were all shocked once again, but this time nobody laughed.

"Did a tumor grow in your brain or something? You can't truly believe that we have no way to handle you just because we can't enter the formation, do you? Aren't you forgetting about the heartscourge worm?" Xue Yi said.

"What worm? You mean that pathetic little noodle you call your dick? Ah, that's a new low even for me."

They stared daggers at him, not one of them laughing. He really didn't know what was coming for him. Even Xue Yi seemed less conversational than before.

"Xue Yi, you overestimated him."

"At the end of the day, he's just a brat who hasn't learned his lesson. Give him a taste of it."

"He's too young, after all. He probably broke due to the pressure."

"Just give him a taste and he'll know what the right thing to do is."

The elites were all of the same mind. Xue Yi's heartsourge fiend was the terror of the entire Flameyellow Continent. Even the other ghoulish kings feared it. Once a heartsourge worm entered the body and began feasting on the heart, death wouldn't occur immediately. It would fuse with the heart as it slowly devoured it. Effectively, no mass was lost at all; the target's heart would just be converted to a part of its body. When the feeding process was finally over, the worm would effectively function as the heart of the host, but it would no longer be the host's own.

Tianming knew how terrifying something like that was. However, the others weren't aware that the Dragonhide was covering his heart. They also didn't know that he had a Primordial Chaos Beast that specialized in feasting on flesh!

Right as the worm was about to begin eating, a branch suddenly sprouted from Tianming's chest, upon which a blood lily bloomed. The hellish flower looked like thousands of swords tightly bunched together. However, the truly shocking thing was the bloody worm impaled by the petals! It was still struggling in pain.

The next moment, countless black roots sprouted from Tianming's chest and pierced the heartsourge worm, instantly devouring it and leaving nothing behind. The elites of the five divine realms were completely flabbergasted at the sight, dead silent even after the roots reentered Tianming's body.

"Thank you, Xian Xian," Tianming said with a relaxed smile.

"No need! If you have more delicious meat for me to eat, tell me sooner! That bug tasted so good! Even though it can hide well, it can't run from my little mouths! Hehe, even if he sends in ten thousand of them, I can eat them all up and still want more!" It puffed out its cheeks, as if it was still not satisfied with the meal.

"Haha, you saved my life! I'll definitely reward you handsomely."

"Yay! I'm so happy! This is the greatest day of my life!" Xian Xian said as it happily danced around in his lifebound space. Granted, the others outside weren't privy to the telepathic conversation he was having with Xian Xian.

Tianming's heart was protected by the Dragonhide in the first place, so the heartsourge worm wouldn't have been able to do anything anyway. However, it could still feast on his other organs. But with Xian Xian's help, there wasn't anything it could do but be eaten.

The elites dumbfoundedly looked at his smiling face as their expressions turned grimmer and grimmer. Xue Yi in particular seemed to be about to vomit blood.

"Well? Come on, then! Beat me up! Oh wait, you can't, you dumb pigs!" Tianming snapped, looking straight into his eyes, raising his voice.

The bloody aura around Xue Yi boiled to a peak. He kept his wide mouth shut as his face visibly contorted. Everyone knew how infuriated he felt. Now that the heartscourge worm was gouged out, there was nothing he could do. There was nothing any of them could do.

"Ghoul King Xue Yi, I'm talking about you. Fuck you and all your ancestors. You're so pathetic. Why put up that front if this is all you can amount to? Come in and kill me, why don't you? Oh wait, do you even have the balls to do that? What? Unhappy? Wrinkly turtle-dick."

Tianming was the only one speaking, making his insults even harsher to the ear. The rest could only rage without being able to do a thing.

Chapter 767 - An Unexpected Turn

The elites of the five divine realms were all respected by billions. But now, a mere kid like Tianming was insulting and taunting them all he wanted. Needless to say, they were boiling with rage. That was especially true for Ghoul King Xue Yi, who had suffered the most humiliation.

Thanks to the Kilostar Formation, Tianming had once again gained the upper hand and his life was no longer threatened. While the credit of resolving the crisis mostly went to Xian Xian, Tianming's composure throughout was enough to irritate the seniors.

Geniuses weren't the most valuable resource in the Flameyellow Continent. With enough resources and the right lineage, plenty of geniuses in their twenties and thirties could be raised. That was also the reason why it didn't matter that plenty of juniors had died during the Number One Summit. It wouldn't have that much impact on the five divine realms. As such, seniors were generally all high and mighty before juniors.

In the conflict between the major powerhouses, Tianming alone had managed to disrupt their plans multiple times. To those like Ghoul King Xue Yi, that was no different from being toyed with by a kid.

As annoyed as the seniors were, they didn't lose their minds. Instead, they exchanged a few glares.

"You won't be laughing soon, you brat. The Kilostar Formation can protect you now, but it can't protect you forever. With us guarding the entrance, you can spend the rest of your life there. Without the right resources, your cultivation will only stagnate, and you can forget about being the elite of your generation," said Li Caiwei.

"So what? I'm younger than you, and I'll easily outlive you," Tianming shrugged.

"What a joke," the Quadform King, Long Cangyuan, snickered.

"Where's Yi Xingyin?" asked Ghoul King Xue Yi as he looked at the other four ghouls.

"I arranged for him to be escorted back to the sect. We planned to show him some 'hospitality' before making use of him during our assault on Taiji Peak Lake," said a scrawny Ghoul King in green robes.

"Ask them to send him back immediately." Ghoul King Xue Yi said.

"You plan to threaten that boy using Yi Xingyin's life?"

"We can give it a try. Young men like him are usually quite emotional, so it might crack him. Who could've thought that he could deal with the heartscourge worm? This was my mistake."

"Don't worry about it, that brat just got lucky. No more than three people in this world are capable of dealing with that worm of yours," said the Ghoul King in green, "but do you think he is close enough to Yi Xingyin to be affected by this?"

"According to our intel, they're quite close."

"Understood, I'll arrange for him to be sent back here immediately. Let's not waste our time in the Kilostar Domain."

As the two spoke beneath their breath, they quickly formulated a plan. Following that, the thousands of seniors just stared coldly at Tianming. No matter what he said, none of them reacted and the scene was dead silent.

"This will be problematic." Tianming shook his head. Even though they couldn't touch him for now, he noticed that they were completely ignoring him after their discussions. The chill in their eyes told him he was far from safe.

At least I'm out of their control for now. Worse comes to worst, I still have the Prime Tower to save my life. There's no way they'll give up on the Kilostar Domain, so they can't possibly break the Kilostar Formation to kill me, Tianming thought as he wandered about in the Kilostar Formation, trying to seek a way to survive.

"I wonder how Ling'er will react when she hears about this..." Tianming sighed. It was unfortunate that the Archaion Sect wasn't as safe a place as he thought. He glanced at Li Caiwei, only to see the beauty looking back at him with indifference. Not many people could resist her beauty, but to Tianming she was the person that landed him in this crisis.

"If one day I can rise to the top of the Flameyellow Continent, I'll make sure every single one of you pays ten times the price for this."

He could choose to close the Kilostar Formation, but that wasn't necessary.

"Let me check out the ultimate tribulation manna."

Tianming ventured deep into the Kilostar Formation until he noticed five dazzling radiances from the end of the formation. Behind the radiance, there was a black vortex—it was probably the gate to the Kilostar Domain. As he approached the end of the formation, the outline of the manna became clearer.

Between the ultimate tribulation manna and the formation was another formation that stopped Tianming in his path. He recalled Xuanyuan Muxue telling him that this was the last obstacle between

him and the manna, and he would need an hour to break this barrier. It wasn't part of the Kilostar Formation, but part of the domain itself.

"I'll need to break this barrier to obtain the ultimate tribulation manna, and only with those can I unlock the Kilostar Domain," Tianming thought to himself.

The Kilostar Formation was a joint effort between the nine divine realms, and any power that broke the formation would also destroy the barrier and the ultimate tribulation manna within it. Breaking this barrier would have been a piece of cake for the Ghouls, but it was more than enough to stop Tianming from taking the manna... or was it?

As a descendent of the sky plunderer race born with a black arm, no formation could ever stop Tianming. He ignored the barrier and instead looked at the five ultimate tribulation manna.

"These ninth-grade tribulation manna are said to be the best one can find across the entire continent. Each of them is capable of giving a lifebound beast over nine hundred stars."

Tianming was just a short distance away from the five tribulation manna that were supposed to be his. He saw five brilliant stars, arranged based on the elements. There was a flaming star at the bottom, a freezing star at the top, a platinum star toward the left, a dark star to the right, and right in the center was a yellow star surrounded by a ring. The five manna were interlinked with one another, as if they belonged to the same set. Whether they were a gift from nature or made by gods, no one could tell.

There were lifebound beasts in the continent, like Fang Taiqing's, that had over nine hundred stars, and they had no doubt evolved using ninth-grade tribulation manna. But even that didn't seem that rare, compared to this entire set of tribulation manna.

I should be able to grab those without opening the Kilostar Domain. They can't risk breaking the formation, as the self-destruct mechanism of the formation will destroy me together with the ultimate tribulation manna. But if I try evolving my lifebound beasts on the spot, I suppose they'll be too mad to care about anything else, Tianming thought. In other words, he would be dead for sure if he evolved his lifebound beasts right here.

Nevertheless, Tianming deemed that it was necessary to gain possession of the manna first. If he was lucky it might even be a chip he could use to bargain with. Without hesitation, he started clawing at the Formation Barrier with his black arm.

"What is he doing?"

"There's no way this kid can break the barrier."

"From past experience, even a cultivator at the tenth-level Samsara stage will need an hour to break that open."

"Let him waste his time."

The seniors from the five divine realms couldn't care less about Tianming's futile attempts. But just as they finished speaking, Tianming easily tore a hole in the formation and stood before the gate of the Kilostar Domain. The ultimate tribulation manna were within his reach!

"How is that possible!"

This junior from Archaion had taken them by surprise once again. How did Li Tianming continually do the impossible? His methods of removing the heartscourge worm and opening the barrier were simply unheard of.

“It’s still fine for now, but what if he dares to use the manna on his lifebound beasts now?”

“We can’t allow that.”

The situation was tense once again, and killing intent shot out of Ghoul King Xue Yi’s bloodshot eyes.

“Then we’ll try to trade Yi Xingyin’s life for those five manna. He’s just a kid, so we should be able to scare him.”

It wasn’t just Tianming’s wits or techniques that were causing them trouble, but his composure and maturity. Not many teenagers could resist their lures or threats, but Tianming was unlike any other junior they had ever had to deal with. The crowd began looking grim once again.

Just then, things took an unexpected turn. As Tianming walked towards the five ultimate tribulation manna, they shone even brighter than before. Suddenly, Tianming’s Dragonhide automatically appeared on his body, and like a magnet, it drew the manna flying toward him.

“What’s happening?” Tianming was in shock. He’d just entered and things had immediately gone out of control. Before he could react, the five ultimate tribulation manna had fused with his Dragonhide and disappeared. The armor gleamed with starlight, as if it had absorbed all the stars in the sky.

“Are the ultimate tribulation manna perhaps related to Great Emperor Xuanyuan?”

Tianming didn’t think it was possible. They were two hundred thousand years apart after all. But off the top of his head, he couldn’t find any other explanation for the current phenomenon.

But that wasn’t even the end. As the manna completely fused into his Dragonhide, the black vortex suddenly erupted with a brilliant five-colored light!

Chapter 768 - The Kilostar Domain Opens

The black vortex was now a brilliant multicolored vortex, like a starry whirlpool in the middle of the night sky. The next moment, a hole opened up in the middle of the vortex, slowly expanding until its diameter reached eight meters.

Tianming could feel an ancient aura sweeping out from the vortex, and he saw thousands of stars twinkling within.

“The Kilostar Domain is open?”

But he hadn’t even touched the ultimate tribulation manna. Yet without a doubt, he could tell that a new world was waiting for him beyond. That wasn’t necessarily good news for him, as the opening of the domain could only mean trouble and he couldn’t control it.

Needless to say, the seniors outside were beaming with excitement.

“It really is open,” some of them screamed. Despite having lived for so many years, they could no longer control their thrill after seeing the domain open. They were initially worried that Tianming could use the ultimate tribulation manna against them. Now that would no longer be a point of concern, since the Kilostar Domain was open.

“As much as the ultimate tribulation manna are worth, they’re nothing in comparison to the treasures inside the domain. Now that the gate is open, the barrier and the manna have fulfilled their purposes. Damn it!” Tianming cursed.

Just moments ago, he had thought he was in a safe place. Now he could see thousands of people charging toward the Kilostar Formation—the five Ghouls, Feng Qingcai, and Li Caiwei included.

“If they destroy the Kilostar Formation, I’m doomed for sure,” Tianming concluded. The only way for him to avoid being caught in the explosion was to hide in the Kilostar Domain.

Without hesitation, Tianming jumped into the starry vortex. The next moment, the thousands of seniors broke into the formation, causing an explosion that shredded the formation apart. If Tianming had been any slower, he would have faced the same fate.

Tianming felt his body sinking once he entered the domain. As he looked up, he could see the beams of light caused by the explosion, as well as hear the commotion caused.

“Time to run!”

Tianming’s top priority was to find a place to hide from the seniors hunting for him. He used the third eye on his palm to keep watch behind him while he observed the domain that had unfolded in front of him.

What used to be a blurry mix of color was now a mixture of shining stars. They were scattered across the sky, with some big enough to fit a dozen Taiji Peak Lakes, meaning they could easily accommodate three million cultivators. There were other stars in the distance that were smaller, and Tianming needed to get closer to properly ascertain their size.

The size of the domain was comparable to an entire Divine Realm. That explained why Li Caiwei needed the starmap to explore the domain. The sight of a thousand stars across the endless void was a grand view, its scenery completely different from the kind one would observe in Archaion.

“Maybe I should hide on one of the stars? What if I just bury the Prime Tower somewhere and stay there for a couple of years?” Tianming sighed.

Due to the explosion of the formation outside, his enemies had yet to enter the domain. Tianming needed to make use of every second he had, or he would be an easy target.

At that instant, Tianming felt a weird sensation. That space there... something was odd about the domain.

As he looked around, he saw fissures floating around. Grey gas flowed within them, and the notion of space seemed to be nonexistent inside. The fissures were scattered across the domain, but they were especially concentrated near the stars. Some even formed webs, giving the domain a fragmented look.

“It was said that this is an ancient battlefield in the cosmic aether. Are these perhaps spatial tears? This world looks like it’s been destroyed.”

When he walked past one of the tears, Tianming felt an attractive force. He tried throwing a tribulation artifact in, and it was immediately torn apart.

“Damn!” Tianming could feel himself sweating. These spatial tears were all over the place, and he even saw new ones forming.

“Could it be that the opening of the Kilostar Domain has caused the tears to manifest even faster? At this speed it’s going, there’s no way the domain survived for two hundred thousand years.” Tianming guessed as he carefully traveled while avoiding the tears. It would be a real tragedy if one of them tore him in half.

Just as he was thinking about it, a fissure opened just three centimeters in front of his abdomen. It was about a meter long, but it was as thin as a hair.

“That was way too close...” Tianming sighed. He wanted to get out of this damned place, but those seniors from the five Divine Realms were already catching up. It was too risky to hide on the nearby stars, so he had no choice but to escape even further in.

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Ghoul King Xue Yi was the second person to set foot in the Kilostar Domain. The second he entered, a formation appeared on his body out of nowhere. Five dragon patterns flowed into his body, turning into five fearsome beasts that went straight into his saint palace. Three of the dragons went for his lifspring, while the other two entered his deathspring. He felt the five dragons twisting and turning inside his body, sealing many of his samsara rings.

Ghoul King Xue Yi’s face turned pale immediately. As he turned around, he saw the same colorful formation forming on Feng Qingyu, Li Caiwei, and everyone else that had entered. All of them felt the dragons entering their saint palaces.

“What the hell is this?” Ghoul King Xue Yi was stunned.

Chapter 769 - Pentadragon Seal Formation

When Ghoul King Xue Yi looked around, Tianming was nowhere to be found. That didn’t bother him, since the gate to the Kilostar Domain had been blocked off. With nowhere to escape to, Tianming would likely meet his end. The more important thing for them now was to hunt for treasures.

“There’s some kind of protective formation that acted on us the moment we stepped in. Give me a second,” said the ghoulish king in green. He exited the domain and re-entered a short while later. “The formation disappeared the moment I left the domain. It seems that this formation will restrict our saint springs while we are inside here, making us a lot weaker.”

“Li Caiwei, you are the expert on formations here. Do you have a way to get rid of this?” Feng Qingyu asked, drawing everyone’s attention to her. They had initially all rushed to look for treasures, but the abnormal phenomenon had stopped them in their tracks.

“There’s no way of breaking this unless one of us is stronger than the person who set it up. I also figured out the purpose behind this formation.” Li Caiwei answered.

“Which is?”

“Look that way. This is a fragmented world where space is fractured. If we exert too much force here, it might hasten the destruction of the domain. The formation is protecting the domain by restricting our strength.”

“In other words, we must bear with this formation, both for the sake of Kilostar Domain and for our own good,” replied Ghost King Xue Yi. The destruction of the domain was the last thing they wanted.

“That is correct.”

“How much of your strength can you use now?” asked Ghoul King Xue Yi.

“Well, not much,” Li Caiwei answered. The five Divine Realms were competing for the resources inside the domain, so none of them wanted to reveal their true strength. Since the other four realms were only collaborating with Nonahall, they too wanted their own share of the treasures here. In fact, their pact stated that once they entered the domain, the rest would be fair competition between them. That benefit was also the reason Li Caiwei had risked her life to abduct Tianming in the first place.

“Who here isn’t affected by the formation, come out now,” Ghoul King Xue Yi commanded, gathering a group of cultivators before him.

“Seems like all those under seventh-level samsaran, including seventh-level death phase, aren’t affected by the formation. It’s likely that they don’t possess enough power to disturb the domain. For all those stronger than that, the number of dragons will be affected by the exact stage, up to a maximum of five dragons?” Ghoul King Xue Yi speculated. He wasn’t sure about the others, but the five dragons in his body were suppressing his strength to that of a seventh-level death phase samsaran.

That said, the formation was only capable of limiting their tribulation energy. The difference in skills and techniques would still ensure that a regular seventh-level death phase samsaran would be no match against them.

“Whatever it is, the good news for us is that the domain is open. We should also transfer all those in the sect who are seventh-level samsarans over,” the Ghoul King in green robes suggested.

“Correct. We should also block off the entrance of the domain and make sure no one from the other four realms can enter,” Ghoul King Xue Yi said with a ghastly glow in his eyes. “Actually, there’s one more thing I’m concerned about.”

“Which is?”

“Great Emperor Xuanyuan’s lifebound beasts were five dragons corresponding to the five elements. The Human Emperor's Dragonhide was made from the scales of those five dragons after his passing. When Li Tianming entered just now, the Dragonhide automatically appeared and absorbed the ultimate tribulation manna, opening the Kilostar Domain for him. Even the five dragons inside my saint palace correspond to the five elements. Do you think it’s just a coincidence?”

“Clearly, Kilostar Domain has got something to do with Great Emperor Xuanyuan!”

“But why isn’t that information recorded by our ancestors?”

“Beats me. Maybe those records were destroyed. After all, Great Emperor Xuanyuan was the one who defeated the specter race, so we must defeat his descendants if we want to achieve our aims.”

“In that case, that’s more reason for us to trap and kill Li Tianming here!” Ghoul King Xue Yi sneered.

“I informed the scouts to bring two-thirds of those from the sect who are seventh-level samsarans here. I’m sure not even a fly can escape from us now. Even though he’s still a kid, he holds many treasures and we can’t afford to let Feng Qingyu or the others get hold of them,” said the ghoul king in green.

“We needn’t worry since we easily outnumber them. Since the domain is open, we should continue our attack on Pentaphase. The least we should do is to make sure those four realms have no additional manpower they can send here. Without them disturbing us, we can easily achieve our purpose here....”

“Who would’ve thought that the return of Archaion’s goddess was in fact an occurrence in our favor? Without her, we wouldn’t be able to gather the five realms so easily.”

“It’s been eight years since the appearance of the ultimate tribulation manna, and now is our best chance!”

“They’ll return to us soon!”

“Once the tunnel opens, all that’s left is the Heaven Cauldron....”

As he spoke, a fervent flame blazed in Ghoul King Xue Yi’s eyes.

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Back in Archaion, Fang Taiqing had just returned to Soulburn Hall. He saw the young girl with dark red eyes staring at him from her throne. He wasn’t sure if it was just his imagination, but she looked way more intimidating than he remembered.

“Your Eminence, Tianming escaped into Kilostar Domain due to some strange behavior of the ultimate tribulation manna. The domain is now guarded by sentries from the five realms, with two ghoul kings and a thousand tribulation elders. It will be close to impossible for me to go in and rescue him. But Your Eminence need not worry. The young man is capable of performing miracles, and he even managed to deal with Ghoul King Xue Yi’s heartsourge worm unharmed. I don’t think he will die in there,” explained Fang Taiqing.

At least he was alive! That was good news for Feiling.

“One more thing,” Fang Taiqing continued with a serious look. “We have received important updates from our informant. The Kilostar Domain is gradually disintegrating, and a sealing formation is acting on all those beyond seventh-level samsarans to restrict their power. The stronger they are, the more they will be limited by the formation. Since that is the case, Tianming’s chance of survival will be even greater. Many signs have shown that he has received Great Emperor Xuanyuan’s blessing, so please rest assured....”

While that was comforting news, it wasn’t enough to calm Feiling down. She wouldn’t be at ease until she saw him back alive and well.

“So are we leaving him there to his own fate?” Feiling asked.

“Your Eminence, we would like to rescue him immediately as well. But before that, we need to plan our next moves. The enemies have already sent troops to the Kilostar Domain, and they have set up formations there. We are losing in numbers, and if we leave the sect’s protective formation, we can easily be wiped out if we get caught. We simply can’t afford to pick a battle with them right now. The best we can do is select an elite troop and try sending them into the domain.” Feng Taiqing answered.

“One more thing, Your Eminence. Troops from Nonahall, Quadform, and Heptastar are currently sieging Pentaphase. Pentaphase is heavily outnumbered, and they risk being attacked any time now. Their messenger has already arrived requesting help. We simply can’t afford to divert more manpower to the Kilostar Domain at this point in time,” Xuanyuan Dao added. Everything suggested that it would be close to impossible for them to rescue Tianming.

“I understand.” Feiling pursed her lips.

The atmosphere was tense in Soulburn Hall. The focus of the war was slowly shifting from Feiling to the Kilostar Domain. Wasn’t Nonahall’s goal to rule the continent, or did they intend to first obtain the treasures in the domain before attacking Archaion?

“Your Eminence, the envoys from Triflair and Octagram will be arriving soon. We will need to discuss our next course of action carefully,” Fan Taiqing said.

“Hm.” Feiling nodded. She waved her hand, signaling for them to get out.

“Please excuse us,” said the audience as they left Feiling alone.

Feiling rose from her seat. Alone, she walked across the corridor to the outdoors, where it was still snowing. She took a deep breath and her skin took on a mysterious glow resembling an eternal energy. As she looked up into the sky, a divine beam shot out of her reddened eyes. A perpetual city could barely be seen glowing inside her body.

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Far away, in a lonely snow-covered field was a tomb with the words ‘Here Lies Fang Xingque’ engraved on it. An elderly lady placed a plate of peeled fruits in front of it. There was a loving smile on her face.

“My grandson, the world is now a strange place. It’s a shame you didn’t get to see it.”

As night fell, she rubbed the tomb as if it was the head of a child. Her expression was filled with love and adoration.

“But grandma’s world can never be the same again. Then, what’s the purpose of this world?” She shook her head.

Soon, she hopped onto the blue phoenix that landed beside her, and together they disappeared into the distant clouds.

“This world... doesn’t have any gods.”

Chapter 770 - Dying for Archaion

Tribulation elders from the five divine realms were standing guard vigilantly at the entrance of the Kilostar Domain. Their respective lifebound beasts seemed to completely seal off the entire area. There were five factions there altogether, with Nonahall having the most people at around four hundred of their elites.

The sect masters among them had already entered the domain, while two of the ghoulish kings remained outside. One of them was among those who were watching the Number One Summit live: Ghoulish King You Ying.

The cultivators there seldom spoke, all having plans of their own. However, a sudden explosion unceremoniously broke the silence. A sea of blood had suddenly appeared near where the elites of the Quadform Sea Sect were gathered and it continued spreading throughout, swallowing the entrance of Kilostar Domain.

"It's the power of a tribulation pattern tome!"

"Who did this?!"

Almost in an instant, the wave of blood came washing over. Quadform's lifebound beasts hurriedly fired their abilities at it in an attempt to reduce the wave to dust. In the end, the sea of blood was reduced to countless individual droplets that showered down without causing any harm.

"Hehe..." many of them chuckled.

"Nobody asked them to rush into the domain before we arrived."

"That's right," said a voice from the entrance of the domain. The others turned to look and saw a man in red entering it.

"Dugu Jin!" someone cried as he vanished through the entrance. The sea of blood was a misdirection for him to slip in all along!

"As expected of one of the top three elites in Archaion. It's said that he's even stronger than Xuanyuan Dao," said a ghoulish king dressed in orange.

"His power is indeed formidable, but the question is, what are his intentions?" You Ying said with a worried look.

"Yeah. Where does his allegiance lie? Didn't he orchestrate both of Xuanyuan Xi's assassination attempts?"

"Let's not overthink it and strengthen our defenses so that nobody else can slip in like that again."

"Our reinforcements will be arriving soon, right?"

"Yeah. It should take at most two more hours for us to finish setting up a defensive formation here."

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Outside the Archaion Sect, Ouyang Jianwang glared passionately at Xuanyuan Dao, who was within the Nine Dragon Formation, and said, "I want to go to the Kilostar Domain!"

"Of all the people that can afford to take that risk, you alone are not one of them," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"On what basis?!"

"You're the guardian of Heaven Cauldron, and you have to defend the founding ancestor's body. Your key is something you must defend with your life and you can't afford to let it fall into the hands of others."

"But my brother was captured! How can I rest easy!? Sect Master, I can't afford to idle while my Brother Yi is in their hands!" he pleaded in a hoarse voice.

"So you think the rest of us are just sitting idly by? Tianming was forced to enter the Kilostar Domain. Now, he no longer has any value to the enemy. They're already wary of his growth, so they'll no doubt try to get rid of him there. Even so, what do you suggest we do? I'm the house king of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. I have to prioritize Archaion as a whole. Even if I wanted to play the hero and charge in suicidally, what would happen to the others here if I were to leave? What about Her Eminence? Do you think I'll be able to relax by leaving Fang Taiqing and Jian Wuyi here?"

"So does that mean there's nothing we can do at all?"

"We just have to play our roles. You should stick by your own role beside Heaven Cauldron and defend it. It's your life's mission. You don't have to worry about anything else." He turned and returned to Soulburn Hall.

"Then what is your life's mission?!" Ouyang Jianwang asked.

"Dying for Archaion!"

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Within the Kilostar Domain, Tianming had lost count of how many spatial tears had passed him by. The stars around him felt like they were embracing him. Each of them were distinct from one another. There were stars that brightly burned thanks to the countless active volcanoes spewing out lava nonstop, as well as those that seemed blue and frosty thanks to the layers of spiky ice that dotted their surfaces, making them look like blue sea urchins. There were some that shone bright like gold and were covered in blades, and some that looked like balls of lightning whose thunderous booms could be heard from a distance. Even the smallest of them seemed to have ten times the area of Taiji Peak Lake, while the larger ones were about fifty times as big. Tianming had never imagined the Kilostar Domain would contain such sights.

"To think that such a wondrous place exists in this world...." It really looked like there were thousands of stars all around him! From here, he could look down to see the sights of the Flameyellow Continent from on high. It was a view so beautiful that even the best of poets would struggle to commit its sheer beauty to words.

"The mortal world is a beautiful place. Those that live in hell must be struggling to imagine how beautiful it truly is." It reminded him of Ye Lingfeng somehow. He recalled that when he had brought him out of

Infernal Soul Purgatory, even the most insignificant blade of grass, ant, or flower would make him stare with wonder. "I wonder how Feng and Qingyu are doing back at the Divine Capital? It's a shame that I was immediately wrapped up in this huge conspiracy right after coming to the Nine Divine Realms. I almost lost my life back there, too. I guess those two will have to wait even longer before they see me again. Looks like I failed my promise to her as her elder brother!"

He missed them. Thankfully, he had Ying Huo, Meow Meow, Lan Huang, and Xian Xian by his side. Those four seemed completely oblivious to their perilous situation and were still playing around within his lifebound space. The little grey egg, on the other hand, remained hidden in the corner, looking coldly at its brothers and sisters with its two black spots that seemed like eyes.

"I'll pick you then." Tianming came to a star that was covered in volcanoes, carefully evading the net-like spatial tears as he descended to its surface. When some lava passed him by, he noticed it was covered in saintly heavenly patterns. It seemed to be a saintly spirit hazard. But with his Ancient Deepstar Godbody, he wouldn't have to worry about it and directly submerged himself into the lava. "Let's pray that they don't spot me here!"

He sank deeper and deeper. His tough body, coupled with Ying Huo's Infernal Armor, gave him the courage he needed to sink down. "Damn, this is hotter than I thought. My body's tougher than many seniors, and coupled with my Aeternal Infernal Physique, I doubt many will be able to find me here."

It was finally time to play the waiting game.

"Stop idling about and hand me my ultimate tribulation manna!" Ying Huo said impatiently. It was overjoyed at all the lava around it as it excitedly flapped its wings.