

The Ages 831

Chapter 831 - Where Is Her Eminence?

It sounded as if the Quadform elders weren't in a hurry. After all, there had yet to be a seadragon king capable of picking up the weapon for hundreds of thousands of years. So how could anyone steal the divine artifact? Obviously, the thief must have been one of the seadragon king candidates who had failed to usurp the throne and wanted to make a final attempt.

"Go!"

Long Youyue stood up and flicked her skirt, her blue eyes flashing with a fiery gleam. She had longed for the Godbane for a long time. As soon as she walked out of the hall, there was a sudden red light up ahead.

"The Godbane has moved!"

The expressions of tens of thousands of tribulation elders altered drastically as they all stared blankly in the direction of the Seadragon Temple, then back at Long Youyue.

"Who could've picked up the Godbane?!"

The entire Seadragon Hall was shocked.

In a daze, Long Youyue bit her red lips, her expression turning cold.

"Who could it be? No one's ever succeeded...."

She wasn't even sure she could do it; she merely wanted to try her luck. Breaking through the waves, she rushed toward Seagod Hall with all the tribulation elders following behind her. "Our ancestor has declared that whoever picks up that weapon will be king of the Quadform Seadragon Clan."

"But Long Youyue has just taken the throne. What shall we do?"

"The question is, who's strong enough to actually lift the weapon? There isn't anyone in Quadform stronger than Long Youyue."

If it weren't for the fact that there were few precedents for women to take the throne, Long Cangyuan might not have been able to compete with her. Long Youyue soon arrived near the Seagod Hall.

"Surround Seagod Hall!"

The tribulation elders quickly spread out. More than twenty third-origin tribulation elders all followed Long Youyue into the Seagod Hall. There were corpses everywhere. Long Youyue's eyelids twitched uncontrollably.

With a wave of her sleeve, Long Youyue entered the hall. In the main hall, the ten-meter-tall statue of the Quadform Seagod, Sixiang Poseidon, stood right in front, looking down at Long Youyue.

Under the idol, a man in black and red robes sat on the altar, holding a mighty weapon in his hand and looking at her with a smile on his face. His third blood-red eye between his eyebrows was extremely conspicuous. The instant Long Youyue saw him, she narrowed her eyes and stumbled backwards.

"Dugu Jin...." Long Youyue clenched her fists and stared blankly, her delicate body trembling lightly.

"Do you know why I'm able to pick up the divine artifact? Dugu Jin asked with a smile on his face as he fiddled with the weapon in his hand.

The tribulation elders watching were stunned. They certainly wanted to know why. Their ancestor had declared that the one who picked up the Godbane would be their king!

"Yes, I do." Long Youyue gritted her teeth.

"This weapon originally belonged to the blood ancestor of my clan, but it was passed down to the Quadform Seagod. He isn't its creator. Do you understand?" said Dugu Jin.

"Your clan? What clan?" asked Long Youyue.

"That's not important anymore." Dugu Jin jumped down from the altar and waved his hand. "Let them leave. You stay."

"No, Sect Master...."

Even if their ancestor had left them with instructions, the tribulation elders weren't convinced by an outsider.

"Everyone out," Long Youyue said coldly.

While they were all still hesitating, Long Youyue roared and they reluctantly withdrew. Thus, only Dugu Jin and Long Youyue remained in the Seagod Hall. Long Youyue lowered her head, her voluptuous body slightly undulating. She was almost bewitching.

Picking up one of the corpses on the ground, Dugu Jin walked up to Long Youyue and said, "Is this your man? The head of the Seagod Hall who's in charge of worship? He can't compare to you. He's unworthy."

Long Youyue turned pale. "Why bother? You know in your heart that he and I were forced to get married. We've never really been husband and wife."

"How can an irrelevant person enjoy the title of your husband. I resent him." Dugu Jin threw the corpse under his feet and placed the Godbane down. Then he placed his hands on Long Youyue's shoulders and looked at her with a fiery gaze. "Yue'er, I haven't seen you since the day your father and Long Cangyuan ruthlessly separated us. For more than a hundred years, everyone thought I'd forgotten you, but how can I forget? I made an oath that one day I would come here and take you away. Back then, I was no one. I had no status. I was weak. How many laughed at me? But today, here I am."

"It's too late. We're not young anymore. We've changed—I'm no longer me, and you're no longer you. What's the point in all this?" Long Youyue said blankly.

"No, I'll always be me. I haven't changed." Dugu Jin added, "I was willing to die for you back then, and I'm willing to die for you now."

Long Youyue stared at him for a long, long time, and finally glanced at the Godbane.

"You attempted to assassinate the goddess, so there's no way you can return to your sect. From this day on, you vow loyalty and devotion to me? You'll serve Quadform?" Long Youyue looked at him dubiously.

"No, you're mistaken. Dugu Jin pointed to his third eye and said, "I'm not the same man I was a month ago."

"I can see that you're more powerful now than before. So what? Are you going to leave with the Godbane?" asked Long Youyue.

"Of course not." Dugu Jin stretched out his hand and pulled her into his arms, making it difficult for her to move.

Leaning in toward Long Youyue's ear, he said with a gloomy expression, "From now on, I am king of Quadform. And you'll belong to me from this day forth."

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Taiji Peak Lake in Archaion.

The appearance of the grey star had garnered everyone's attention and amazement. Soon after, a five-colored column of light burst out of the Heaven Cauldron, shooting to the lower starry sky and turning the grey star colorful. It was a shock to the entire divine realm.

Numerous people were gathered beside the Heaven Cauldron, including Xuanyuan Dao, who was overseeing the sect, and Ouyang Jianwang. After the shock and excitement, they were still clueless as to what exactly the grey star was, let alone why the Heaven Cauldron had undergone such drastic changes.

"The Kilostar Domain is gone. If Tianming is still alive and Fang Taiqing and others have succeeded, they might be on their way back now," said Ouyang Jianwang.

"Yes. Watch the Heaven Cauldron." With that, Xuanyuan Dao turned around and left.

"Where are you going?"

"I'll follow the beam of light. I can lend them a hand if they're being hunted," said Xuanyuan Dao.

"Alright." Ouyang Jianwang nodded and closed his eyes. "Yi, my little friend, the both of you must return safely."

After Xuanyuan Dao left, Ouyang Jianwang stared blankly at the glimmering Heaven Cauldron, like the others around him.

"The progenitor's divine body is within the Heaven Cauldron. Does the grey star have something to do with him?"

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The courtyard within Soulburn Hall was a white paradise. A young woman dressed in blue stood under the plum blossoms, her hands clasped in front of her.

"That's in the direction of the Kilostar Domain. Big Brother...." She nervously stared at the grey star in the sky, her heart pounding. "With such drastic changes in the Kilostar Domain, whether he's alive or dead will soon be revealed."

She had never been so nervous in her entire life. Every time she looked up at the grey star and watched it turn into a five-colored star, she closed her eyes and prayed.

"I hope the paper cranes keep him safe!"

At the thought of that, she quickly pulled out several boxes from her spatial ring and opened them in the courtyard.

"Fly. Fly away. Bring him back."

She paced back and forth in the snow, and soon the snow was full of footprints. When she was most anxious, she looked at the star, her eyes turning red.

"Why is this happening? No, I must control myself."

Although she thought that in her heart, the nervousness didn't ease; instead, it deepened. It suddenly occurred to her that he was surrounded by so many elders. Once the sealing formation was gone, it would definitely be very dangerous. At the thought of him disappearing forever, she paced back and forth once more.

"You must come back, Big Brother. We've encountered so many dangers together. We've been doing alright from the day we met till today. You must pull through.... You said that as long as a person has something they care about, they can change their destiny. After listening to your words, I didn't give up in the Tomb of the Ancients. I fought Xuanyuan Xi, so you can't give up."

She was so nervous that she kept muttering almost incoherently.

"I won't be the goddess anymore, as long as you come back. I want to be with you all the time, whether it's dangerous or not. I can face it all with you...."

She picked up numerous paper cranes and held them in her arms. It was noisy outside, but inside Soulburn Hall, there was dead silence. Only Feiling's nervous breathing could be heard in the courtyard.

At this moment, a cold voice sounded behind her.

"If you're not Her Eminence, then you can be with your big brother and live together, isn't that right?"

Feiling's body suddenly stiffened, as if she were struck by lightning. Trembling, she turned around.

She was shocked to see Fang Qingli standing no more than three meters behind her. The elder had approached extremely quietly. Who knew when she had arrived?

"H-how dare you! Who let you in?" said Feiling.

Fang Qingli looked at her coldly. There was a brokenness in her eyes.

“Are you human, god, or ghost?” Fang Qingli asked, her voice trembling.

She walked toward Feiling.

“Fang Qingli, what do you mean?” Turning pale, Feiling quickly backed away.

“I was depressed. Why would Your Eminence love a mortal? I could never have imagined that you’re not a god. You fought Xuanyuan Xi, a goddess. Then who are you? Are you a carbon copy, or did you seize her divine body?!”

Fang Qingli's eyes widened as she continued approaching Feiling, the rage inside her growing. Her words meant that she had been here the entire time. However, Feiling had been so worried that she didn't even notice her.

“What the hell are you talking about? Anybody?” Feiling shouted.

“Shut up!” Fang Qingli suddenly screamed, her body bursting with coldness and her gaze fierce. “So Your Eminence and her disciple are really a disgraceful pair who stole the divine body? Where is Her Eminence?” In an instant, she appeared in front of Feiling and wrapped her hands around the girl’s neck.

“Answer me!”

Chapter 832 - That Divine Light

Fang Qingli didn’t accidentally stray in today. The last time she was there, she had seen the paper cranes.

Feiling had occasionally felt uneasy while Tianming was in the Kilostar Domain. Although she could hide her emotions from everyone else, she couldn’t hide them from Fang Qingli. As a woman, Fang Qingli could see that Feiling’s feelings towards her disciple had crossed the line. In fact, she had secretly entered Soulburn Hall several times.

However, she hadn’t expected Feiling to actually speak out the truth when the Kilostar Domain was destroyed. In fact, this was no coincidence, but the result of her long-term suspicions. Otherwise, she wouldn't have snuck in time and time again.

The words “Xuanyuan Xi” meant that she wasn’t the goddess in Fang Qingli's heart. But she possessed the divine body. What did that mean? At that moment, Fang Qingli's heart was completely shattered, her eyes red. There was enormous strength in her hands.

Feiling seemed extremely calm, her fierce eyes meeting Fang Qingli’s.

“Let go, Fang Qingli.”

“I said answer me!” Fang Qingli insisted.

Red marks had appeared on Feiling's neck due to the sheer amount of strength the palace lord was using.

At that moment, five third-origin tribulation elders of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan entered the courtyard after noticing the disturbance.

The moment they witnessed the scene, they were shocked.

“Fang Qingli, let go!”

“You’re the palace lord of Godservant Hall. How dare you disrespect Her Eminence!”

“Let go of Her Eminence now, or we’ll have to use force!”

Five beastmasters and eleven dragons immediately surrounded Fang Qingli, making sure the courtyard was impenetrable. In truth, they found the situation incredible. Anyone who entered Godservant Hall would live to serve the goddess their entire life. This was their sacred mission, and Fang Qingli had always performed well.

“Have you gone mad? Stop fooling around with Her Eminence,” a third-origin tribulation elder named Xuanyuan Hong shouted angrily.

Fang Qingli couldn't help but laugh. "You probably never could've imagined that she's not a god. From the very start, she has never shown the majesty of a god. Your ancestor Xuanyuan Xi has never returned. This is just her divine body."

Upon hearing that, the five of them looked at each other.

"Are you mad? Or is the Sterling House of Fang going to rebel?" Xuanyuan Hong's emotions were on a rollercoaster ride. The five of them stared at Fang Qingli as they drew closer, and couldn't help but turn to Feiling.

“Fang Qingli, it's not too late to plead guilty. How can the palace lord of Godservant Hall behave so disgracefully? You dare offend me! Your sin is unforgivable, but I'll give you a chance for all your years of conscientious work." Accustomed to her identity, Feiling had long since spoken with the majesty of a god.

The situation was just as she had expected. None of them believed Fang Qingli's nonsense. After all, Feiling's position in the sect was deep-rooted. With Tianming, the imperial son, who would choose to believe the Godservant Hall's palace lord over her instead?

“Do you hear that? Fang Qingli, let go. You still have a chance!”

“Don't be confused. Whose benefits have you received? If the Heaven Branch sect master knew what you're doing, he'd probably die from anger!”

The tribulation elders frowned, afraid to blink.

Fang Qingli suddenly roared with laughter; it was a prelude to madness!

“Now." Xuanyuan Hong had a bad feeling. Thus, the five tribulation elders and their lifebound beasts sprang into action.

Fang Qingli's lifebound beast rushed out and spouted violent flames, blocking their path for a brief moment.

"You're really good at acting. They're giving it their all. None of them believes the truth!" Fang Qingli's hands were shaking.

"The truth? Before I was eighteen, I really had no memory of my previous life. It's only normal to be with him. I don't know how a fool like you could come up with a story of me seizing the divine body. Fang Qingli, to put it bluntly, this is a misunderstanding. I'll explain everything and I won't blame you."

Feiling said sincerely.

"That's enough. My instincts tell me that you aren't her. There's no need to pretend! I don't know how you managed to pull it off. Right now, all I want is to send this deicide to hell!"

The words "fight Xuanyuan Xi" made Fang Qingli certain. She was fanatical when it came to Her Eminence, perhaps even more than Xuanyuan Yuheng. If the god in her heart had been killed, waiting for a hundred thousand years and serving the temple was pointless. If it was a scam, it would collapse her entire world. And what caused her even more despair was the fact that no one believed her!

If Feiling refused to admit the truth, Fang Qingli would never have a chance. Once she let go, she would never be able to seek justice for the true god.

Additionally, Tianming had shown superb performance in the Kilostar Domain. Even if Her Eminence and the imperial son were to come together, they would make the perfect couple. Who would care about Xuanyuan Xi when Tianming returned?

"Stop!"

"You're crazy! Let go of Her Eminence!"

The tribulation elders surrounded her.

If she weren't in control of Feiling, they would have subdued Fang Qingli a long time ago. In the blink of an eye, her phoenix was severely injured and the five elders reached out to grab Fang Qingli.

"Die, you shameless thief!"

Fang Qingli gathered the power of a tenth-level life phase samsaran into the palm of her hand. It was impossible for Feiling, who had just entered the first-level life phase to resist her power. A harsh crack sounded. She had wanted to break Feiling's neck but never imagined that it would make such a sound.

Fang Qingli was shocked because she had failed. How could Feiling's neck be as strong as a top tribulation artifact?

Eyes wide, Fang Qingli suddenly noticed that Feiling's smooth neck resembled the texture of a brick wall. There was no way her nails could penetrate Feiling's skin.

"This is..."

Fang Qingli stared intently as the young woman before her shone with a white light. Her flesh was so hard it seemed as if her body was a city.

"Demon City!" Fang Qingli was stunned.

Rumor had it that Xuanyuan Xi was born without a lifebound beast, but was accompanied by the Demon City. Today, Fang Qingli finally saw the legendary city. It was inside Her Eminence's body. Just when she was about to crush her neck, the Demon City had unexpectedly emerged...

"Lowly slave, how dare you commit deicide!"

When Feiling suddenly looked up, her eyes burst with a dazzling light that instantly pierced Fang Qingli's eyes.

"Use your eyes and see clearly who I am!"

As Feiling spoke, she touched the back of Fang Qingli's hand with her right index finger. The seal on her fingernail was released and an invisible torrent poured into Fang Qingli's body.

"Your Eminence...."

Fang Qingli's eyes stung. As a tingling sensation washed over her scalp, she opened her eyes once more, only to see Feiling shrouded in a dazzling white light. She seemed to be standing above a vast eternal city. Majestic and dignified, she looked down on Fang Qingli in contempt like a god that had existed throughout time, wielding power over millions and millions of lives.

"This is the true god!" Fang Qingli finally smiled.

She laughed unbridledly, as if she had finally obtained the answer that made her most satisfied. However, when Feiling's fingernail hit the back of Fang Qingli's hand, her palm seemed to vibrate before turning into white dust.

From her hand, to her arm, the effect then spread through her entire body. In a short period of time, Fang Qingli's body had turned into dust.

"Greetings from this humble slave, Your Eminence...."

Before her head finally disappeared, she was still smiling as she uttered her last words. Then, Fang Qingli was gone. How could she survive when even her corpse had disintegrated?

Such a scene caused the green phoenix to let out a miserable cry. It screamed and shot toward Feiling. But with a stretch of her finger, a white light suddenly pierced the phoenix's head. Starting from the wound, the phoenix's huge body dissolved; there wasn't even a trace of dust left behind. All of that had happened in an instant.

When Fang Qingli and her green phoenix had disappeared, the courtyard descended into silence once more.

"Your Eminence...."

Xuanyuan Hong and the others were completely stunned, their eyes filled with confusion. They immediately fell to their knees, not daring to raise their heads. Even one glance at the young woman that seemed to be standing high above the clouds made them tremble.

The sound of Feiling's cold laughter drifted into their ears.

With a sudden thud, all movement ceased and only dead silence remained.

"Huh?"

Only then did the tribulation elders dare look up. They saw that their goddess had fallen to the ground, her breath weak—she was unconscious.

"This...."

The five of them looked at each other, their hearts turbulent.

"Was that Her Eminence's true appearance?"

"How terrifying. The Godservant Hall palace lord was turned to dust..."

Even though Feiling seemed to have fainted, they didn't dare step forward.

"I'm going to see the house king." One of the third-origin tribulation elders quickly left.

As soon as he reached the door, he noticed a group of people approaching rapidly. From a glance, he could tell that the three great sect masters had returned. They were accompanied by Xuanyuan Yu, Xuanyuan Xiao, and others. Most importantly, the imperial son was there. This was definitely great news.

In fact, the moment Tianming had returned, cheers had spread throughout the entire sect. However, he was thinking of Feiling and hurried back to Soulburn Hall. Of course, such great news must be shared with Her Eminence first. But as soon as he arrived at the door, he saw a light shine from Soulburn Hall. Everyone felt like their hearts were in their mouths. They dashed past the tribulation elders and rushed into Soulburn Hall.

Chapter 833 - Death Without Account

Tianming's true strength rivaled that of a third-origin tribulation elder's now, so he was by no means slow. The moment he entered the courtyard, he saw Feiling collapsed on the snowy ground. Almost immediately, blood rushed straight to his head and he anxiously charged toward her before Xuanyuan Dao and the others could even react, ignoring everything the others had to say. Only when he noticed that she was still breathing did he breathe a sigh of relief. But for some reason, her presence felt really weak.

Wasn't Ling'er in the Samsara stage already? Why has she regressed to being an empyrean saint? he wondered. What in the world had happened?

"Her Eminence is fine," he said as he carried her back indoors. He had wanted to give her a surprise by returning alive, only to be met with such a sight.

"Thank goodness." Xuanyuan Dao and the others eased up when they saw that she was fine.

"Xuanyuan Hong, what happened here?" Xuanyuan Dao asked. Fang Taiqing and Jian Wuyi were nervously looking at their surroundings.

"House King, you would've seen it if you'd returned just moments earlier...." He turned to Fang Taiqing with a pained look.

"What did you see?"

"Her Eminence displayed terrifying power just now. It was too frightening."

"Is that it?"

"No...." He turned to Fang Taiqing once more and bit his lip.

"State what happened." Xuanyuan Dao looked around and asked, "Where is Fang Qingli?"

"House King.... Well, we were standing guard outside like usual. Palace Lord Fang of Godservant Hall had been inside for quite a while. All of a sudden, we heard Her Eminence's summons and immediately came in, only to see the palace lord attempting to kill Her Eminence like she had lost her mind. She claimed Her Eminence was a fraud! We pleaded for her to stop and even Her Eminence said she would forgive her transgressions, yet she didn't listen at all. So Her Eminence let out a burst of power and completely vaporized the palace lord and her lifebound beast...."

Another third-origin tribulation elder added, "Sect Masters, let me add that I've felt something off about Fang Qingli in recent days. She had come here today in a distraught state of mind. Either Nonahall managed to buy her over, or she probably held resentment for the imperial son because of Fang Xingque's matter. She was the palace lord of Godservant Hall and has been contributing to the sect her whole life. We never thought she would ever do something like that."

When they finished, the entire courtyard fell silent. Tianming knew that Fang Qingli had definitely discovered Feiling's identity. However, their standing in the sect was now far more secure than before, and Fang Qingli alone wouldn't be able to shake it that easily. Though, he really hadn't expected Feiling would have such a close brush with death. The two of them had been on a rather lucky streak so far, but it was bound to end sooner or later. While he didn't know what power she possibly could've used to kill Fang Qingli, it didn't matter. Someone as important as her was now gone, and during a time when the sect required the Sterling House of Fang more than ever. It would no doubt be troublesome. Tianming turned to look at Fang Taiqing.

Fang Taiqing calmly took it all in and asked, "Is there no trace of her body?"

"No.... Sect Master Fang, please remain calm. After regaining consciousness, we're sure Her Eminence will explain everything. The five of us here witnessed it ourselves. As for the palace lord, we have no inkling as to why she would do something like this. Those were just our guesses, and not accusations by any means," Xuanyuan Hong said.

"There must be a good explanation for it," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"That might be so., but she's dead now. We can no longer hear her side of the story..." Fang Taiqing said.

"Let's just wait for Her Eminence's explanation for now. I'm sure you've seen her current state. She'd cultivated to the fourth-level life phase initially, but has now reverted to the Empyrean Saint stage. That must be a side effect of being forced to use some kind of technique to defend herself."

That was one of the points in Feiling's favor. There was no way she would pay the price of losing cultivation for such an elaborate setup to get rid of Fang Qingli. There was also no doubt that Fang Qingli

was the one at fault, but the fact that all eyewitnesses were members of the Xuanyuan house might make them less reliable in Fang Taiqing's eyes.

"Let's just wait it out for now," Xuanyuan Dao said.

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As someone who knew the truth of the situation, Tianming felt even worse. "Now that she's dead, the matter's resolved. Still, did Fang Qingli really go mad? Even if she realized something was off, couldn't she have waited for us to come back first? Why did she try to kill Ling'er just like that?"

"Maybe she felt nobody would believe her no matter what. By the time we return, she might've lost all chances to even touch her," Ying Huo reasoned.

"The main thing now is that whether Ling'er is Xuanyuan Xi or not no longer matters. We're part of the sect through and through."

"It might not be important to you, but it's a different story to Fang Qingli. Just think about Xuanyuan Yuheng. He didn't care about the bigger picture at all, only his goddess and his faith."

Tianming stood at Feiling's bedside and watched the rest think things through. "I've never left her for such a long time before. Even though I'm always treading the thin line between life and death, she's been waiting here all along. Ling'er probably dropped the act and got caught by Fang Qingli due to how worried she was."

However, it wasn't something he blamed her for. Nobody could perfectly control their emotions at all times; there would always be times when one had to rest and relax.

"Either way, it's great that she survived."

After waiting for more than two hours, Feiling gradually awoke. "Big Brother...."

Tianming immediately shushed her and indicated that there were others outside. She nodded, her mouth shaking from trying to assert control. Tianming could also barely hold back. He dreamed of hugging her and telling her what he had experienced, but the situation now didn't allow for it. It truly didn't feel good to have to hold back.

"Your Eminence, I have returned safely."

"All is well, then." She took a deep breath and put on a plain smile.

When the others outside heard what happened, they came to wait at the entrance. Feiling stood up a little shakily, still somewhat weak. Tianming helped her walk to the entrance.

"Your Eminence," the rest greeted.

"At ease." Her gaze fell on Fang Taiqing. "Heaven Branch Sect Master, I am truly sorry for what happened to your mother. She offered me no choice at all. I had to expend ten cultivation levels using a forbidden art to save myself. It will require a great amount of time for me to recover from that."

Fang Taiqing kept his head lowered without showing any expression. "Understood, Your Eminence. Might Your Eminence know what could have prompted her to do such a thing?"

Feiling shook her head. "I am completely unaware. When she came today, she had been mumbling some jumbled nonsense and attacked me without rhyme or reason. Please investigate if she has come into contact with some foreign object that could have affected her psyche, or if she was cultivating using techniques that could have ill effects."

"Understood."

"I am truly apologetic for what transpired, but I had no luxury of choice. The Sterling House of Fang is an important part of the sect. I can promise that if your house does well in the upcoming war, you will be heavily rewarded all the same. I see the Sterling House of Fang, Draconis House of Jian, my Xuanyuan house, and the rest of the sect as equals."

Feiling had made really generous concessions, and Tianming knew her reasons for doing so. Something like that could only distance the Fangs from the sect even more, so she was hoping to assure them that they were still considered loyal members of the sect.

"We are eternally grateful for Your Eminence's trust. The Sterling House of Fang will go through hell and high water for Your Eminence's sake without question," Fang Taiqing said.

"Don't just do it for me. If we manage to unite the Flameyellow Continent one day and rule it well, all will benefit from your deeds."

"Yes!" Fang Taiqing nodded.

Killing Fang Qingli seemed to have only added more credibility to Feiling's impersonation of the goddess, and inspired the confidence of many more in her status. Tianming knew that if Feiling didn't promise the Fang house that much, the situation could get even worse. As for whether it helped at all, only time would tell.

Chapter 834 - Vaporize

Right after Feiling's explanation to the sect masters, Tianming told her about what happened within the Kilostar Domain and the grey star, though she wouldn't know the intricacies of those mysteries either. Some others believed that the five divine realms would soon launch a real attack, and that they should ready their troops to defend against their inevitable invasion.

"Sect Masters," Tianming removed most of his spatial rings and handed them to Fang Taiqing, "these are the tribulation manna and artifacts I got from the Kilostar Domain. I hope they'll be of help."

They quickly began inspecting the contents of the rings.

"The quality is amazing."

"These will definitely greatly increase the power of our peak elites."

"Had these treasures fallen into enemy hands, the consequences would've been terrifying. Yet the imperial son not only killed two ghoulish kings and a sect master, he even got so many treasures. This is an unparalleled achievement."

Every single thing Tianming had done in the Kilostar Domain was destabilizing, to say the least. Apart from the huge blow to the five divine realms, what he did had also greatly boosted the morale of the sect's fighters and the faith of their allies. They had all cheered for his return.

"The other three sects also contributed greatly during our rescue attempt. We promised to reward them for their efforts. They're still waiting outside, so we'd better go now," Fang Taiqing said.

"Good." Feiling nodded.

Jian Wuyi, who hadn't had any sense of presence during the meeting at all, left with Fang Taiqing.

When they were gone, Xuanyuan Dao said, "Your Eminence, I didn't think Fang Qingli would do something like that. Given our current situation, we have to be vigilant against the Sterling House of Fang all the same."

"I know," she said.

"Sect Master, did you hear about the retrieval of the founding ancestor's Kilostar Photondragon?" Tianming asked.

"Of course I have! You're amazing, Tianming."

"Here you go." Tianming tossed the trident to Xuanyuan Dao.

He marveled at the weapon with awe. Everyone wore expressions filled with worship and respect.

"Give it a try," Tianming said.

"What do you mean?" Xuanyuan Dao asked.

"You're a descendant of the founding ancestor. While other people might not be able to use it, maybe you can."

"That won't do. The founding ancestor left this for the imperial son. I couldn't—"

"Don't need to hold back. To be honest, it displayed terrifying power in the Kilostar Domain when it could draw from the power of the stars. But now, it's probably weaker than the sword in my hands, so it's a burden to me. But if you can use it to its full potential, it might make us much stronger as a whole."

"Xuanyuan Dao, take it," Feiling said.

Since the two of them had made themselves heard, Xuanyuan Dao stopped holding back. In actuality, he was already on the edge of going crazy. Never would he have dreamed of holding the weapon of the founding ancestor. It was the strongest divine artifact to exist in legend! When he grabbed it, the trident shook and sent a wave through Xuanyuan Lake.

"How is it?" Tianming asked.

"It worked... the founding ancestor has acknowledged me..." Xuanyuan Dao said with disbelief.

"How much power are you able to use?"

"If I familiarize myself with it, I might end up stronger than Fang Taiqing and become the strongest fighter in the entire sect."

"That's even better!" That was the main reason Tianming had wanted to hand the trident over. So far, Fang Taiqing was the strongest elite in the entire sect, but he was a lone person. Having a peak elite from the Xuanyuan house would definitely be incredibly helpful during a time of crisis.

"Then familiarize yourself with the trident," Feiling instructed.

"Understood, Your Eminence. I will not disappoint." Xuanyuan Dao knew that learning to master Photodragon was far too important, especially after today's incident.

Finally, all of them were gone, leaving Tianming and Feiling alone. Just as he was about to give her a hug, she hurriedly left, then returned after some time.

"What's going on?" Tianming said.

"Fang Qingli was spying on me. I was afraid of it happening again, so I went to check. Nobody's hiding around as far as I can tell."

"What are you talking about?"

"I... I folded a thousand paper cranes to pray for your safety, but she saw them. I even mumbled about fighting Xuanyuan Xi at the Tomb of the Ancients...."

"You airhead...." Tianming gave her head a light smack.

"I know it's my fault... I'm horrible—"

"Don't say that. She had her eyes on you, so this day was bound to come." Tianming pulled her to the bed and had her sit on his legs, his arms still around her waist. Her familiar fragrance and sensation felt almost dreamlike.

"You must've had a tough time in Kilostar Domain, huh...." She leaned against his chest with a pained look.

"Nonsense. I'm more invigorated than I could've ever imagined. I got to kill a bunch of old freaks every day and they all went running when they saw me. That aside, Ling'er, tell me how you were able to deal with Fang Qingli."

"Look." She stretched her right hand out and raised both her middle and index fingers.

"What's the big deal? Does it represent us being together?"

"What're you talking about? It's the seventh seal."

"Huh?"

Tianming held her fingers up and looked closely. The seal on her right middle finger had long been undone and the ability was called Heavenly Unity. The seal on the index finger was also undone.

"What kind of ability is it?"

"It's called Vaporize."

"A double-edged sword, eh? So you lost ten levels to get rid of Fang Qingli?" Before this, Feiling didn't have a specific offensive ability. However, Vaporize seemed to have even heavier side effects than Soulburn.

"That's right. My samsara rings just collapsed and my separated life- and deathsprings fused back into saint springs. My tribulation force is all gone, and I'm back to using empyrean saint ki," she bemoaned.

"That's a huge loss."

"But that's not the key."

"What is?"

"Big Brother, don't freak out when I say it, okay?"

"Alright."

"When I was being choked, I felt a little dizzy and my mind was muddled. It seemed like Perpetia City appeared for a moment to stop Fang Qingli from striking me. Then my consciousness waned even more as the seal on my nail began unraveling. I couldn't really control myself back then. I didn't intend to harm Fang Qingli at all and only wanted her to let me go, but my hand just didn't do what I wanted it to. I felt like the one who killed Fang Qingli wasn't me at all," she said, looking deeply into his eyes.

"Then who is it?"

"It's her... Xuanyuan Xi."

.....

After the treasures were distributed, Fang Taiqing returned to Sterling Hall. There was a demure woman standing outside waiting for him.

"Yuqing, I feel a little confused," he said.

"What's going on?"

He told her about what had happened. So far, only a few people knew about Fang Qingli's death, and the members of the Xuanyuan house naturally wouldn't spread it. If Fang Taiqing and Jian Wuyi kept quiet about it, nobody would know.

"Did Her Eminence really say that?" Fang Yuqing asked.

"Yes."

"Now, there aren't any remains of your mother left.... We can't even put her to rest properly. Sigh, how did it end up like this? We can't even do a proper investigation now that not a single bit of her is left. Who could've possibly affected her psyche like this?"

"Given my understanding of her, only the goddess could make her do something like that."

"What do you mean?"

"The only way she would've done that is if Her Eminence was no longer the goddess she worshipped. That's the only reason she would attempt to wipe her out at any cost. Only Xuanyuan Xi could possibly make her do something of this caliber. That might be a sign that Her Eminence isn't the Xuanyuan Xi she worshipped."

"Who is she if she isn't Xuanyuan Xi?"

"Who knows? Hmph!"

"Then should we expose it?"

"What's there to expose? Don't you understand? As long as the Xuanyuans claim she is the goddess, that'll be the truth. No matter what she is, she will be considered Xuanyuan Xi as long as she can ascend to godhood. I understand that much. What I don't understand is the pathetic worshipful attitude all those people have!" He tightly clenched his fists with a look of hostility on his face. "I was worried Mother would be too stubborn, so I planted a seed of doubt in her. I didn't think that just when I was about to mellow down after seeing the imperial son's amazing performance, she'd be the one to lose it. I was the one that doomed her."

"Don't say that," she said, hugging him in consolation. After a while, his expression returned to normal.

"Did you make up your mind?"

"I did."

"How's it going to go?"

"It's simple. We'll wait and see what they can achieve. If they can pull through, I'll serve them. But if they can't win, they can't blame me for stabbing them in the back! No matter whether they win or lose, the Sterling House of Fang must not fall!"

"Isn't that a little extreme? Surely there's a middle ground between fervently serving them and completely betraying them."

"It isn't extreme at all. We have to commit to our choices all the way to survive and prosper. While our house is large and powerful, it's also insignificant in the grand scheme of things, and has only survived in the shadow of others. There's no way we can change our fate without sailing with the wind. Do you want us to be considered one of the three slave houses of the goddess our whole lives?"

"I don't—"

"Very well. If they can't hold on and the realm ends up falling, I can use my mother's death as justification for revenge. The Sterling House of Fang shall not submit! As for news of her death, we'll keep it quiet as long as the Xuanyuan house doesn't announce it either."

"Alright."

"Let's go home," he said, taking her hand. "My dear... I have one last question."

"What is it?"

"Did you make up your mind about this just today or long before?"

"That's no longer important."

Chapter 835 - Fulfilling

It snowed roughly half a year at a time in Archaion. Even though it should be spring in the third month, during which the south had gotten rather warm, Taiji Peak Lake was still covered in the same snow-white blanket. It was pure white all the way to the horizon.

Having returned to the sect, Tianming no longer had to live so tensely as he had when he was fending for dear life. However, Feiling's recent change brought him new worries.

Currently, he was sitting on the roof of Soulburn Hall with Feiling close by him. They were practically glued together, allowing him to indulge in the faint, yet charming fragrance she exuded.

In the courtyard below, Xian Xian's black roots were buried deep into the earth as it began ravenously gorging itself on roasted wildbeast meat while its spiritform laid in Feiling's embrace, chewing the air as if it was really eating something.

Meow Meow, on the other hand, had spread its body lazily on a large rock, basking in the little spring sunlight they got, while Lan Huang flipped itself over and spun around like a top as it laughed heartily like the purest of children, though it was loud and annoying to say the least. Lastly, Ying Huo was comfortably stretching its body on the roof; its wing was still bandaged up. This was the kind of peaceful life Tianming had dreamed of living while he was in the Kilostar Domain. It was too bad this wouldn't last, for the five divine realms would no doubt come for payback after their horrendous failure. The whole sect still hadn't fully comprehended the terror they had wrought; the sects were still a looming threat.

"Ling'er, didn't Feng and you wipe her out back at the tomb?" Tianming asked. The spring sunlight highlighted the defined lines of his face. Perhaps due to all the slaughter he had engaged in, his current visage seemed far fiercer than before, especially his heterochromatic eyes that seemed terrifying even though he wasn't the slightest bit angry. Other disciples now unconsciously saw him as someone on the level of third-origin tribulation elders.

"That's right. I even saw her vanish into nothingness myself. But...." Feiling bit her luscious red lips.

"But what?"

"Now that I think of it, even though she was eradicated, fragments of her soul seemed to have invaded my own. Even though she's gone and I'm in control, she seemed to show up when I was in danger. It feels really weird, unlike the time before we entered the tomb. Back then, she was controlling me in full and I completely lost consciousness. But this time, I can't even be sure whether it was me or her who killed Fang Qingli. I can't tell who that rage and anger belonged to. It feels like we're one and the same, with the only difference being she's from a hundred thousand years ago, while I'm the one that came after. Our experiences forged us to have different patterns of thoughts and behaviors, but the foundation of our being still seems identical," she said, leaning against his shoulder.

"That's why even though her divine soul is gone, her being is still somehow around and she's able to subconsciously affect your actions?"

"That could be it, but it's just a guess at the end of the day. Whether she'll rise again to take my place isn't something I can say for sure." Feiling sighed and continued, "This world is far too complicated. Why can't it be simple and let me live in peace?"

"Great power comes with great responsibility. Thinking back, before we came to Archaion, the two of us were carefree and without worry. But now, the sect has helped me advance by leaps and bounds, Great Emperor Xuanyuan in particular. You also took Xuanyuan Xi's place, so you have to assume her responsibilities as well. You have to be a real goddess."

"Spoken like a reliable person! I have much to learn from you," she said, shooting him a look of admiration.

Tianming had grown so much that he was a completely different person from the time the two had met. Back then, his mind was filled with nothing but revenge, causing him to see the entire world with nothing but hate. But now his worldview factored in many more things, like altruism, justice, and protecting all sentient life. He was cultivating on the most righteous path and was accountable to all sentient life. To repay them for their blessings, he knew what kind of person he had to strive to become.

"We shouldn't forget our origins and who we are. It's important to always be able to trace our way back to them." Feiling pulled his hand into her own and tightly held it, smiling when they met each other's gaze.

"If this is all that life has to offer me, there's nothing more I could possibly ask for." Tianming felt that no matter what choice he made, Feiling's opinion would always mirror his.

"I don't want to be something you settle on. I want to be something you can't live without," she said mischievously and winked repeatedly.

"Oh, really? You think you're up for the challenge?"

"It doesn't matter. I decided that I'd be anything you need if you were able to return from Kilostar Domain."

"Oh? I didn't think my little girl had grown so much that she knows how to flirt now."

"Oh, no, I'm just an amateur. I'm not nearly as accomplished as you are."

They chuckled and burst out laughing. That was a really familiar phrase.

"Ouch!" Tianming suddenly cried and suddenly drew back his hand.

"What's wrong?" she anxiously asked.

"There was a thorn on your hand!"

"No there isn't!" she said after checking her hand.

"I beg to differ. How could a beautiful rose like you not have a few thorns?"

Feiling blanked out for a moment, then snapped, "Idiot! Where did you learn such cheesy lines?!"

.....

Three days later, Tianming settled down and continued cultivating. His Imperial Will had grown to a new limit.

"I'm finally at the sixth-level life phase." He and his beasts had all broken through again, and the invigorating effects of the life phase once more overwhelmed that of the death phase. His samsara rings had also grown larger again. While he no longer had death tribulation force, he was filled to bursting with far more energy than before. Having returned to the life phase, his body returned to its youthful and powerful state. Those younger than him weren't nearly as powerful, while those on his level were decades older. He was the first in the history of the continent to reach this level of power at his age.

"I believe I can now fight ninth-level life samsaras one-on-one. Coupled with Ling'er's Spiritual Attachment, I can even take on ninth-level death samsaras! Her powers are growing even more powerful now, after all. As for killing people like ghoulish kings... I might as well dream on. The Kilostar Domain was but a fleeting dream. I have to wake up from it and return to reality, or I'll die a horrible death."

The path to sovereignty was paved tile by tile, after all.

"I guess I'll have a harder and harder time breaking through from now on. The path to godhood is filled with countless obstacles, after all."

Even with his talent, it wouldn't be an easy climb now that the Old Deepstar Path no longer did much for him.

"My latest breakthrough was thanks in large part to killing so many tribulation elders and Xue Yi. That old fool loved drinking blood and committed quite a lot of sins as a result. While he couldn't compare to Ye Bodhi, I still got a lot of good karma from it, which made my Imperial Will grow really quickly."

He turned to look to the south. "If they use dastardly methods that harm the common folk during the war and create opportunities for me to earn good karma, they better not blame me for profiting off the war! If they ignore what's right in this world for the sake of their own desires, the heavens will send judgment toward them to balance things out."

Tianming believed that the path of godhood definitely wasn't one that opportunistic evildoers would be able to achieve. "Let's wait and see."

This wasn't just his blind confidence in himself. Instead, it was his faith in the fairness of karmic fate.

"As long as Ling'er is with me, the only ones in the sect stronger than me are the fifty third-origin tribulation elders." Even though he wouldn't be as powerful as he had been within the Kilostar Domain, he was the only one after Xuanyuan Xi to achieve this level of power at his age in the history of the continent. As for the nine others who had managed to achieve godhood, they only did so at the ages of a hundred and above.

"Ling'er's mission was to rapidly cultivate and ascend again, but Fang Qingli threw that plan out of whack. She's ten levels weaker now, and the five divine realms are about to launch their all-out attack. There might not be time for her to catch up now."

Though, Tianming didn't mind if it meant she would be able to tag along with him. All she had to do was leave her innate godchild body behind and inform Xuanyuan Dao about it. Xuanyuan Dao was always

standing guard outside Soulburn Hall. He didn't even dare to leave to explore the Kilostar Photodragon's uses.

After Feiling used her Spiritual Attachment, he left Soulburn Hall.

"Where are we going, Big Brother?" Feiling asked, hidden within Tianming's body.

"Ever since you came to the Nine Divine Realms, you haven't left Soulburn Hall. I'm going to take you to see the sights in the sect!"

She let out a hearty cry from sheer relief; it was stifling, being cooped up for a whole year. Tianming took her all across Taiji Peak Lake's forests, mountains, and snowy plains. He even went shopping for clothes and accessories for her. Occasionally, Feiling would dispel the Spiritual Attachment to move about on her own, her face full of smiles.

Nowadays, Tianming was a peak figure in the sect and he attracted worshipful looks everywhere he went. His meteoric rise was just like something out of legend!

"Big Brother, I have something to ask you."

As night fell, he gave her a piggyback ride across the snowy plain that looked like it had a slight blue hue. "What is it?"

"When can the goddess and imperial son openly be together with each other?" she asked optimistically. She had spent much time hidden during the day.

"Just wait a little longer. Perhaps not before I'm able to overcome a couple of third-origin tribulation elders." If word of their relationship got out, it would be a huge scandal. He couldn't be sure whether everyone in the sect would be able to accept it. There was no way they would allow someone like him, a disciple, to date the object of their faith. It might even be so shocking that it would deal a huge blow to the sect's morale.

"Okay!"

"Don't worry. If anything, I'm even more impatient than you about being able to get intimate."

"I wonder. Weren't you going to give that Muxue an ultimate tribulation manna?" she mouthed with a pout.

"Oh, you're jealous? I won't give it to her then."

"No way. She lost a lifebound beast for your sake. How could you break your promise like that? Trust is fundamental to human relationships, you know."

"Ah. I'll begrudgingly give it to her then! Hahaha!"

"I knew it. You're just messing with me." She grabbed his ears from behind and began pinching.

"Stop, Ling'er! Don't move!" he said with a sudden, stern voice.

"What is it? She hugged him even tighter now."

"Ah, it's really fulfilling! They sure filled up well!"

"What are you talking about?!" Right after she said that, she blushed. "Put me down."

"I didn't say anything. I'm just saying my life now is really fulfilling! Get your mind out of the gutter!"

Feiling was completely speechless.

"You little Li!" Xian Xian's voice came ringing out from his lifebound space. "Don't lie! You're talking about her melons!"

Tianming froze. "Who taught you to say that?!" he asked with a grimace.

Chapter 836 - The Hundred and Eight Cities

After he returned to Xuanyuan Lake, Tianming visited Xuanyuan Muxue's residence and got Ying Huo treated by Xuanyuan Yu. Xuanyuan Yucheng and Beigong Qianyu, as well as the other friends he made during the Number One Summit, were there too.

"Tianming, you really are insane. After you went to the Kilostar Domain, you far outpaced us, and even killed ghoulish kings."

"One word: hyper badass!"

"That's two words, haha!"

They had thought that Tianming would be harder to get along with after he had grown even stronger, but they didn't expect there would be barely any change. After talking to them about his experiences for a bit, it was time to leave, so he had Xuanyuan Muxue send him off. He wanted to give her the ultimate tribulation manna that could make a lifebound beast reach nine hundred and ninety-nine stars privately, after all.

The blizzard had long stopped, but the snow remained piled up. They walked side by side across the snowy landscape and eventually reached the entrance.

"This here is for you," Tianming said as he took out Frosty Mercurius from his spatial ring.

"What is it?" When she stopped, her hair fluttered in the wind and she tucked it behind her ear.

"It's what I promised you. Ultimate tribulation manna."

"I heard your lifebound beasts now have nine hundred and ninety-nine stars. Is that true?"

"Yeah." He handed her the manna. "You're the best friend I've made here in the Archaion Sect. Please take this. All four of my lifebound beasts already used one, so I no longer have a use for it."

"You could've gotten so much treasure if you sold this instead."

"Aren't you underestimating me a little? Given my status now, there's no treasure that can possibly catch my eye."

"That's true."

"You were pretty straightforward with me before, so don't even start being all polite and hesitant with me."

"Alright, thank you. You're such a fine gentleman, Tianming." She carefully received the manna. It was something so precious it could even change her fate. Even just holding it made her feel a little lightheaded.

"Praise me too much and it'll go to my head," he said, then took out a seventh-grade tribulation manna. "Take this too. Use it as a buffer for your beast's first evolution. I worry that it won't be able to take the ultimate tribulation manna from the get-go."

Having received something even more precious, she didn't hesitate to take the seventh-level tribulation manna. "I'll accompany you for the rest of the stretch then."

"Sure thing."

They headed toward Soulburn Hall and made their way across the frozen surface of Xuanyuan Lake.

"I heard that the five divine realms mobilized the full extent of their forces and are officially going to start the war within a few days."

"That's right, but don't worry. Taiji Peak Lake is protected within the Ninefold Formation, so it won't be breached that easily."

"I'm not too worried about this place. Instead, I'm more concerned about the hundred and eight cities in the realm. If our enemies use the savage method of killing people and beasts and making them into puppets to be used in a siege, the whole of Archaion will fall. If they do that, we'll have no choice but to leave the sect and protect the citizens of the realm," she said with a slight downcast look.

Apart from Taiji Peak Lake, which was where the realm's governance was centered, there were a hundred and eight other cities, each one the population center of their respective areas. During wartime, most of the citizens in each area were moved to the cities, each of which was equivalent to a small sect. They were stationed with members of the Archaion Army, as well as their own garrison, and had defensive formations, though they weren't comparable with Taiji Peak Lake's.

Over the past hundred thousand years, few conflicts had involved the common folk, being centered mostly around the sects and their members. Even if a city was taken, they would usually only pillage resources and wouldn't kill unnecessarily, targeting only soldiers. Civilians usually just surrendered and were left alone. Yet, when Nonahall had started their expedition into Kilostar Domain, they were also massacring everyone in cities—whether they be soldiers or civilians—turning them into undead puppets to boost their might and numbers.

"In other words, they've cast away their humanity for the sake of their greed and victory. If it weren't for the fact that you dealt a heavy blow to them in the Kilostar Domain, they might even go much further than that." Xuanyuan Muxue was unquestionably worried about the divine realm. This was the home she had grown up in, and she would defend it to her death.

"I bet what happened in the Kilostar Domain will only serve to inflame their anger even further. Those heartless crooks will only retaliate even harsher. You'll see how cruel they can be."

"Tianming, there's something I really don't understand. How can they be so cruel and callous toward fellow humans like themselves? Is humanity evil by nature? Is there not a single kind soul among those in the Nonahall Divine Realm?" That was a really gloomy thought for her to ponder.

"Evil definitely exists, and there are many evil people in this world. They trample on others for the sake of obtaining power and force others to submit their riches and beauties to them. They even sell their own souls and cast away the dao in their hearts to derive power from others' suffering. They can only feel secure by gaining enough power. But that's a path of no return. I'm not saying that everyone in the Nonahall Divine Realm is like that. However, I've seen many of them who don't have any bottom line and will inflict any kind of cruelty. I'm sure there are kind folks among them who still remain pure and just even amidst all the filth, but those people usually don't tend to survive, so they rarely come to power. Muxue, would you believe it if I told you that killing with abandon is rather addictive?"

Nobody was born evil. However, most people were shaped by their environment, and an evil environment begot evil people.

"I guess that's true. I heard that most people in the Nonahall Divine Realm don't think what they're doing is cruel. Apparently they consider it a good quality to have."

Tianming fell into deep thought. After a while, he said, "Muxue, this time around, they tried to dangle killing Her Eminence as bait and were really intent on swallowing up our entire realm. Part of that was due to their core instinct. However, they haven't used such cruel methods in the past ten thousand years. I'm guessing there must be some kind of reason, besides their nature, that's making the ghoulish kings resort to such crazy measures like these."

"What could it be?"

Tianming pointed above. Looking up, they could see the five-colored light shooting out from Heaven Cauldron toward the grey star's formation. "Yesterday, I told the elders at Tribulation Peak that the enemy's motives are definitely related to the Heaven Cauldron. Don't tell anyone else about it, though."

"Alright, I know. Looks like this whole thing goes far deeper." Having newfound resolve, she took out Frosty Mercurius and handed it to Tianming. "Friend, I'm giving this back to you."

"Why?"

"I'm worried I'll waste it."

"What do you mean?"

"My brother and I asked our mother for permission to head out to the city at the border three days from now."

"What'll you be doing there?"

"We're members of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. If someone is needed to stop the advance of those demons, we're willing to take up the task and go to the front lines. We've been in the sect for almost twenty years and have enjoyed the best resources and nurturing the sect has to offer. So, we can't hide away in Taiji Peak Lake. I need to do my part, too. If someone has to die, let it be me so that the innocent can live," she said matter-of-factly, backdropped by the silent night.

"You're still too young, Muxue. It's not yet time for you to bear these burdens," Tianming said after a long pause.

"I'm not young anymore. If I don't do this, I'll regret it for life. Tianming, you're not the only one who wants to be a hero. We do, too. You can't dissuade me, and my mother has already agreed to it."

"You have my respect."

During a time of crisis, even young folks like them felt the need to grow up and help shoulder the burden. The Xuanyuan house had propagated for more than two hundred millennia, and every single one of them had inherited the undying spirit of their founding ancestor from all those years ago.

"Take it. There's little chance I'll survive, so giving it to me would only be a huge waste. This is something capable of making a sect master," she said, her hand that held the manna still shaking. Even though it was an undisputed treasure, it wasn't something she was fated to have.

"Keep it."

"It'll really go to waste. I'm not worthy of it." The border would be the first place to take the brunt of the enemy offense, after all.

"Take it," he said, pressing her fingers against Frosty Mercurius. "How many will be going to the border with you?"

"Around hundreds of second-origin tribulation elders, five thousand first-origin tribulation elders and twenty thousand normal tribulation elders. Those of us who are samsarans can join the normal tribulation elders."

"You and who else?"

"My big brother, Sister Qianyu, and a few more from our house. You're acquainted with all of them."

"Alright. I'll join you at the frontlines, then."

"No. You're the imperial son. You can't go, right? Your status is paramount."

"If I say I can, I can."

.....

The building at the tallest point of the Nonahall Ghost Sect at Specter Mountains was called the Nineghoul Skypalace. That was where the ghoulish kings convened to discuss matters of the sect, as well as host honored guests.

Today, the palace was far rowdier than usual. It was normal that the first and second ghoulish kings weren't there to discuss matters with the other seven, and while today was no different, there were a few other guests there with them.

Chapter 837 - Objection

Of the seven ghoulish kings, Xue Yi and Qing Ming were no more, replaced instead by a girl in white and an old man in black. Those two sat at the very top seat, having the highest standing among them. The other five ghoulish kings stood by their sides.

Only four other people were allowed entry to the Nineghoul Skypalace, namely Feng Qingyu, Li Caiwei, Changsun Shengqiong, and the new Quadform Seadragon King, Long Youyue. They were here as the representatives for their sects, and were at the top of their respective sects, unlike the Archaion Sect or the Triflair Sect, which each had three sect masters. Those present had been engaged in discussion for quite a while.

Zi Xiao stood up and said, "Let's go over the results of our discussion. So far, the Pentaphase Divine Realm has been beaten into submission and can be ignored. Their fighting spirit is already broken. As for Triflair and Octagram, Quadform and Heptastar shall deal with them. However, you only need to surround them to frighten them, and don't actually need to attack. Sect Masters Long and Changsun, you two shall join me in the main force. We'll march our grand army in five different directions at the same time to swallow up the Monorigin Divine Realm's hundred and eight cities!

"Even if their main force hides within Taiji Peak Lake, we're more than capable of breaking through the Ninefold Formation with sheer numbers. As for Pentaphase, Triflair, and Octagram, we'll go after them and split their spoils and land among ourselves after dealing with Monorigin, since they were stupid enough to take Monorigin's side. Come to think of it, they must believe that we're trying to go after their small sects first. Let's subvert their expectations and go straight for the main one! What do you all think about the plan?" Zi Xiao looked around the room when he finished.

"Who's going to launch the first waves of attacks?" Feng Qingyu asked.

"Us," Zi Xiao said. "We've breached ten cities in Pentaphase and prepared quite a huge number of puppets that we can use as cannon fodder. We'll start by attacking the south of the Monorigin Divine Realm and head north to the sect from there."

"I have some thoughts about that," Feng Qingyu said, looking down at his sword-knife-filled finger.

"Go ahead, Brother Feng," Zi Xiao said after looking at the expressionless first and second ghoulish kings.

"With our five factions, taking all hundred and eight cities in the Monorigin Divine Realm should be no problem. I also think the casualties from attacking Taiji Peak Lake itself will be acceptable within reason. So, it appears to me that your sect making more puppets will come at a huge cost of time we can't afford to waste, so I hope you'll stop using this forbidden art."

"Brother Feng, do you feel bad for the people?" Zi Xiao asked.

"Even the innocent have the right to survive."

"But we're going to use those from the Monorigin Divine Realm, not the Hexapath Divine Realm."

"They're innocent people all the same." Feng Qingyu looked at the rest and said, "What are you three's thoughts?"

"Senior Feng is definitely powerful enough to defeat our enemies without having to commit atrocities before the heavens. I'm on your side on this," Li Caiwei said.

"I don't really think it matters, especially in the early stages. We have to make the Monorigin Divine Realm pay to break their belligerent spirit," Changsun Shenqiong countered, though it was obvious he was only taking Nonahall's side because he wasn't nearly as powerful as Li Caiwei or Feng Qingyu and hence didn't have their leverage.

"What about you, Sect Master Long?" Zi Xiao asked.

"I don't care either way," Long Youyue said.

Zi Xiao looked at the other two ghoulish kings at the top.

The white girl said in her old voice, "We'll do as Sect Master Feng suggests. However, that will make our battles harder. We might need the Hexapath Sword Sect to commit more to the war effort."

"What if I involve myself in the battles?" Feng Qingyu asked.

"That would be ideal. Who'll be able to stop Sect Master Feng? Your cultivation is unparalleled."

"Surely you jest, Ghoulish King Po Suo. I am inferior to the two of you. I wonder when you two will make your moves."

"You are indeed humble, Sect Master Feng. Thanks to our advanced age and the burdens of the death phase, we're draining our own lives with every move we make. So, we have to make sure to use it when it really counts," said the old man in his childish voice.

"The two of you are almost half a millennium old and have persisted in the death phase for more than sixty years. There must be some amazing technique you're using to extend your lifespan. I do wish you'd grant me the honor of learning about it one day," Feng Qingyu said.

"'Tis but a crude technique, nothing worth marveling at," said the old man.

Feng Qingyu no longer continued pushing the matter. Now, the hall was once more silent. Seeing that being the case, Zi Xiao said, "Since we're in agreement, we should begin preparing for the march."

Right then, Long Youyue said, "Everyone, I have an objection I'd like to bring up."

The ghoulish kings were rather surprised, for Long Youyue was the one with the least leverage or backing to speak of all of them. If even Long Cangyuan had no choice but to be an obedient mutt, she had even less right to make demands.

"Let's hear it," Zi Xiao said coldly.

"According to our prior agreement, Hexapath and Biritual get to divide the territory of Monorigin among themselves, while Heptastar also gets a third of Pentaphase's territory. However, our sect will only be getting a fifth of Octagram's land, yet we have to contribute manpower and lives to the effort. I find it rather unfair for us," she said callously.

Everyone turned to scrutinize her.

"Is that all?" Zi Xiao said.

"Yes."

"Then get out of my sight if you're done."

"Is that so?" Long Youyue stood up and continued, "Then Quadform Divine Realm shall be leaving the alliance." She immediately turned and left.

"After you leave this building, you'll be dealt with in ten days and Quadform Sea Sect will have a new sect master," Zi Xiao said.

"Oh? Go ahead and try," she said with a fearless smile.

Right as she was about to leave, the white-robed Ghoul King, Po Suo, asked, "So what is it that you want?"

"I want all the territory belonging to Octagram Divine Realm," she said after turning back. Despite the sheer laughability of the statement, nobody made a sound. She had no right at all to make a demand like that, so the fact that she had meant she was confident she had the leverage for it.

"Very well. Let's be direct. Show us how you intend to convince us you deserve it," Zi Xiao said.

"The person outside shall show you why," Long Youyue said.

"Oh? There's someone outside?" The seven ghoul kings and three sect masters looked at the entrance curiously as heavy footsteps were heard approaching.

Chapter 838 - Specter Race

The thick doors of the entrance of the Nineghoul Skypalace were slammed open by a man in a black and crimson robe as he entered. He had a third eye in the middle of his forehead. Almost instantly, he appeared next to Long Youyue. She took a step back behind him, showing obvious deference.

"Dugu Jin," Zi Xiao said with a smirk. "To think that a tribulation elder of the Monorigin Sect would become the new king of Quadform. Does the rest of the Quadform Sea Sect agree?"

"I'm still the sect master, but now, we are husband and wife," Long Youyue said. Even so, it was obvious that the master of Quadform Divine Realm was none other than Dugu Jin himself. It didn't really matter what status or title he held.

"Oh, then I have to congratulate you," Zi Xiao said with a furrowed brow. He took a few more glances at Dugu Jin and said, "So, you think you deserve the entire territory of Octagram just because you have Dugu Jin on your side?"

Apart from Archaion, the other three divine realms were what Nonahall was gunning for. They were only willing to give away a part of Heptastar, so there was no way they'd let Quadform take so much territory away from them.

"Ghoul King Zi Xiao, I'm basing my claims on this." Without a sound, a deep-red trident appeared in Dugu Jin's hand and filled the entire building with a killing aura.

"Godbane? Interesting," said the old man as he looked at the weapon with some surprise.

"Ghoul King Di Zang, do you want to have a taste of its power?" Dugu Jin asked with a smile, looking at the first ghoul king. The entire Flameyellow Continent had been living in the shadow of Di Zang and Po Suo for centuries. Throughout their reign, the only person who could rival them in power and pose a threat to them was the Hexapath Swordfiend, yet Dugu Jin had dared to utter such words.

"A divine artifact is no doubt impressive, but its strength depends on who's wielding it," Zi Xiao said calmly.

Dugu Jin didn't respond and merely stared at Di Zang rudely with his third eye.

"Come," Di Zang said.

"Apologies in advance for my embarrassing display," Dugu Jin said, before the trident in his hand shook, instantly unleashing a blast of bloodshade dread ki toward the ghoul king. The air itself seemed to tear apart with a loud hiss.

Di Zang stretched his hand out without wasting any time, seemingly sucking the ki into a black vortex in his hand. The whole place quieted down all of a sudden, as if the tension in the area had been relieved. But the next instant, Di Zang's chair seemed to crack and be reduced into powder, forcing him to stand up. He squinted as he looked at Dugu Jin and smiled. "Not bad. Times of crisis polish talent. It seems that you made some huge gains in Kilostar Domain, skipping two levels and reaching the final threshold before godhood. Both you and Feng Qingyu have a chance of ascending."

"Ghoul King Di Zang, you flatter me. The two of you are the ones who are closest to ascension," Dugu Jin said.

"You're mistaken. The two of us carry an enormous burden of sin. The heavens wouldn't take kindly to our ascension. We're only barely holding on," Di Zang said with a plastic smile. Apart from him, the other ghoul kings and sect masters, Feng Qingyu included, completely changed how they looked at Dugu Jin.

"The Dugu Jin from before was a peak elite at best, yet now you're among the best of the best and are inferior only to actual gods. It seems that the Nine Divine Realms have arrived at another golden age. Never has there been so many twelfth-level death phase samsarans living in the same era before," said Po Suo. She turned to Feng Qingyu with a smile. "Sect Master Feng, since you already have the necessary insights to reach this level, there's no longer a need for you to suppress your cultivation. Break through and join us in reveling in the might of the twelfth-level death phase!"

"I'm not as daring as the three of you. Maybe... we'll see in the future." Unlike the others, Feng Qingyu could break through to the final level and phase at any moment. However, entering it was the same as dying if one couldn't ascend. Even the two ancient ghoul kings were struggling and using inhumane methods to extend their lifespan. Dugu Jin, on the other hand, used to be at the eleventh-level death phase, only to jump straight to the next death phase and become far stronger than before.

"What we really need is power we can rely on. Many elders who are stuck at the life phase enter the death phase the first moment they can, only to end up dying for real. It's better to hold back sometimes." No matter what they said, Feng Qingyu was determined to hold on. It simply wasn't the time for him to enter the death phase.

Either way, Dugu Jin's power had truly changed their attitudes toward Quadform. Having reached the last death phase, his combat power, coupled with Godbane, possibly made him stronger than even Feng Qingyu. Even though he had only grown two levels, it was an ungodly increase in power that propelled him straight to the ceiling of the world.

"Octagram's territory is relatively small. I wonder if Quadform qualifies to take it over now," Dugu Jin said, going straight to the point.

The ghoulish kings turned to each other, seeming rather hesitant. After a lengthy private discussion, Di Zang said, "As long as Brother Dugu contributes sufficiently with Quadform, I believe that Sect Masters Feng, Li, and Changsun wouldn't mind either."

In other words, they had agreed. Octagram had nothing to do with Feng Qingyu, so he naturally wouldn't mind. It sounded like Nonahall was making a huge concession to Dugu Jin on account of his power.

"Thank you, everyone. Additionally, I have a very small request," Dugu Jin said. The ghoulish kings definitely didn't take kindly to it. Compromising on Octagram was already a huge display of generosity on their part.

"Let's hear it," Di Zang said.

"The Kilostar Photodragon won't be of any use to either of you. I believe you also aren't aware that I do have some... let's say, blood relations... with the Xuanyuan house. That's why, after we breach Archaion, would you mind leaving that artifact with me?"

The whole building fell silent and a few of the ghoulish kings' faces began to sour. Even if they couldn't use the Kilostar Photodragon themselves, they wouldn't easily hand it over.

"We will go by our initial agreement. Whoever obtains it gets to keep it," Di Zang said.

"It would be ideal if we could agree to hand it to me even if that was the case," Dugu Jin said.

"That won't do. It wouldn't be fair to the other three sect masters," Di Zang said, refusing.

"The two of you, can we speak in private?" Dugu Jin asked.

"Come." Di Zang and Po Suo entered the inner part of the building, followed by Dugu Jin.

The three strongest fighters on the continent faced each other in the secret room.

"Blooddragon Sealing and Skysource Hellshaker," Dugu Jin said with a smile.

"You seem to know quite a lot," Di Zang calmly said.

"It's been two hundred thousand years. As the Archaic House of Xuanyuan was almost wiped out once, their actual history has been almost entirely lost. That's why even though the 'Ninefold Nether' has appeared, they have no idea what's going on. Yet even though my Blooddragon Clan is few in number, we retain the complete history," Dugu Jin said.

"So you are aware of what we're trying to do?" Po Suo coldly asked.

"Of course. The two of you are the remnants of the specter. With the dissolution of the Blooddragon Sealing Formation, all that remains is for the Skysource Hellshaker Formation to be destroyed. After that, your specter race will be able to once more return to the human realm," Dugu Jin said fearlessly.

"I see that you know even more than the ghouls," Po Suo said.

"Dugu Jin, the Blooddragon Clan used to be the right hand of Great Emperor Xuanyuan, yet your ancestor betrayed him at a crucial moment and brought all his plans to ruin. In a fit of rage, he massacred most of you and used your dragon souls to make the Blooddragon Sealing Formation, causing your forebears to suffer for an eternity without the release of death. Is that right so far?" Di Zang asked.

"Yes, but that's all far in the past. It's not as simple as a 'betrayal' as you have put it. History is written by the victors, after all. You wouldn't understand."

"Whether I understand matters not. All I want to know is where you'll stand, knowing our intentions," Di Zang said.

"If I tell Feng Qingyu and Li Caiwei about your plans, they'll immediately break off with you. The whole continent will become your enemy. Even though Nonahall is powerful, not even you would want that, right?"

"That's right. So?"

"Actually, I don't wish to stand against you," Dugu Jin said, smiling as his third eye glowed red.

"Why?"

"The hundred thousand ancestors of mine have two hundred thousand years' worth of pent-up hatred, which all flooded into my soul. Ever since leaving the Kilostar Domain, I've been tortured by it almost every day. Do you know what they wish for me to do?" Dugu Jin's voice sounded deranged.

"Pray tell."

"They want revenge. They want the fiends to return to the human realm and for all the descendants of the tyrant to be exterminated. They never wanted the human race to win. All they want is for everything the tyrant built up to come crumbling down. The weak human race's only rightful place is to be lowly cattle!"

"But you're also of the human race," Po Suo said.

"I heard that you specters forcefully integrated the human bloodline to be able to survive here. You even used blood pacts to bind lifebound beasts to put up a convincing act. As long as the specter bloodline returns, you'll be able to become specters once more. If I contribute to your cause, I wish to be made a specter as well."

"You seem to know a lot," Po Suo said, genuinely surprised.

Di Zang and Po Suo exchanged glances. "Then, do you still want the Kilostar Photondragon?"

"No. In fact, I don't even want Octagram. What I really want is to become a specter," Dugu Jin said with a face full of smiles, a hundred thousand blood dragons swirling in his third eye.

Chapter 839 - Tianming City

After the three left the secret room, their expressions appeared normal. It was hard to tell who had been persuaded.

"It's time to go to war," said Di Zang.

They left the Nineghoul Skypalace and went outside. Looking up, they saw a huge, five-colored star in the sky, floating above the Specter Mountains.

There was a five-colored beam of light in the north that was connected to the star like a rope binding the star to the Flameyellow continent.

"Before we go to war, let's get things straight. What exactly is that?"

Li Caiwei pointed to the five-colored star in the sky as she turned to Di Zang and Po Suo.

"In the Kilostar Domain are treasures left by Great Emperor Xuanyuan. Now, the Heaven Cauldron has formed a five-colored column of light. Perhaps we'll know what's on the star when we finally get our hands on the Heaven Cauldron," said Zi Xiao.

"That's it?" asked Li Caiwei.

"Except for the tribulation artifacts and manna, everything else in the Kilostar Domain has been destroyed. According to records, there should be more treasure than just that. I'm guessing it's all on that five-colored star," Zi Xiao replied.

"We mustn't allow the Monorigin Divine Sect to get their hands on that treasure. They certainly already have an advantage with the Heaven Cauldron. We must station our men in the Kilostar Domain," said You Ying.

Li Caiwei smiled. It wasn't clear whether or not she believed the ghoulish kings.

Two hundred thousand years was such a long time. There had been so much turmoil up to this day. One could only learn ancient history from a bunch of drawings.

Li Caiwei glanced at Feng Qingyu. Since he didn't say anything, she couldn't be bothered to speak either. With Dugu Jin's rise, she could clearly feel the Yinyang Demon Sect's fall in status, as well as her own. She didn't even realize that all of her doubts had originated from a few words that Tianming had said to her.

"It's unlikely the Archaion Sect knows about the secret of the Heaven Cauldron and the five-colored star. But they might learn the truth when we go to war...."

The divine realms had fully dispatched their troops. With the current situation, she couldn't change anything on her own. After some contemplation, she looked up and glanced at Dugu Jin.

"He can privately speak to the two ghoulish kings. Does that mean he knows things I don't? Is the purpose of this war really to kill the goddess, reshuffle the cards, and divide up the world?"

The fate of the Birtual Divine Realm had arrived at a fork in the road. She was burdened with the choice of which path to continue on.

.....

At Xuanyuan Lake, Tianming hid Feiling's innate godchild in the depths of Soulburn Hall after he was done packing. Then he left, with Feiling attached to him, ready to go to battle.

"Tianming." Someone was calling him.

He turned around and saw Xuanyuan Dao standing at the entrance of Soulburn Hall. Dressed in gold, he held the photondragon in his hand.

"I'll ask you one last time, are you sure you want to go?" Xuanyuan Dao asked loudly.

"Sect Master, I have decided. I must go!" Tianming smiled.

"It was Muxue who gave you this idea. I must give her a good beating." Xuanyuan Dao shook his head.

"She didn't suggest anything. It was my own decision," said Tianming.

"You know that the main forces of the sect must stay in Taiji Peak Lake. Fang Taiqing, Jian Wuyi and I can't leave. If you go, it's like entering the Kilostar Domain all over again. War is ruthless and there'll be no one to protect you. If you go, your life and death will be left to fate," said Xuanyuan Dao.

"It doesn't matter. I'm used to it," said Tianming.

"You're the imperial son. We might be able to persist for a year or two. If you stay in the sect and put all your effort into cultivating, you'll be able to make a bigger difference after you've made progress," said Xuanyuan Dao.

"Sect Master, I can't wait that long," Tianming replied.

"Alright then." Taking a deep breath, Xuanyuan Dao looked at the brave young man with a new set of eyes. "May the founding ancestor bless you!"

"Of course!" Tianming said resolutely.

"Since you're going to the south, head to Tianming City. It's the greatest city in the south of the realm and the closest to the southern border. The enemy's forces have already assembled outside the border. Their first target is Tianming City. My brother, Xuanyuan Xie, is situated there. He's leading the five-hundred-thousand-strong Fienddragon Legion. He'll look after you," said Xuanyuan Dao.

The name "Tianming City" had a history of thirty thousand years. It was merely a coincidence that Tianming shared his name with the city. He had seen the map of Archaion, and Tianming City was located at the frontlines. Once the war started, Tianming City would definitely be the first place attacked by the enemy.

Xuanyuan Muxue and the others wanted to head there. Once the enemy broke through the first strategic town in the south of Archaion, the cities behind it would only continue falling. The Archaion Sect was under attack on three sides; however, the most concentrated efforts would certainly come from the south because the Nonahall and Hexapath armies were already assembled there.

"Sect Master, I'll go to Tianming City!"

With that, he left decisively. The young man finally disappeared from Xuanyuan Dao's sight.

"As the imperial son, he finally managed to escape from danger and should've stayed here, but he chose the most dangerous place instead."

In these troubled times, everyone had their own mission. Taiji Peak Lake was the foundation of Archaion, thus Xuanyuan Dao was needed there. Since Tianming couldn't be of any help in the sect, he chose to go to the most dangerous place of life and death: the battlefield. Such courage would probably surprise the five divine realms.

"Imperial Son, you must live...."

.....

On Tribulation Peak, the first batch of tribulation elders to support Tianming City had already assembled here. Among them were twenty thousand normal tribulation elders, consisting of first-level to third-level samsarans; five thousand first-origin tribulation elders, and hundreds of second-origin tribulation elders. There were a total of more than twenty-five thousand people there, all of whom were experts.

This group of people were led by three third-origin tribulation elders. Tianming was well-acquainted with one of them—the palace lord of Deepstar Hall, Yi Xingyin. Although he had suffered heavy injuries in the Kilostar Domain, he'd managed to recover in a short period of time and was headed to the battlefield. Hidden under his handsome and gentle appearance was a strong and resilient heart.

The other two third-origin tribulation elders were Dao Yuanyi and Chen Cangshu, both deputy palace lords of Deepstar Hall and Yi Xingyin's friends through thick and thin. The two elders were unsmiling and solemn.

Their assembly was completed without too much emotional talk. Because they knew the imperial son was joining them, they didn't try to advise Tianming when he showed up. On the contrary, many of the elders looked at Tianming with passionate gazes.

Many among them had received tribulation manna and artifacts brought back by Tianming from the Kilostar Domain. The tribulation manna in particular had helped them break through their limits and grow stronger.

"Brother, you're the kindest person I've ever met!"

Among the crowd were several young faces, most of whom were disciples of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan.

As soon as Tianming arrived, Xuanyuan Yucheng gave him a big hug.

Chapter 840 - The Fienddragon Legion

"It feels like being back on the Nether Battlefield, fighting side by side with you again. I hope we're not holding you back," said Xuanyuan Yucheng.

"When the time comes, you must protect yourself," Tianming replied.

"Of course. We must kill more of those bastards so all our injuries are worthwhile," said Xuanyuan Yucheng. Beigong Qianyu walked beside him. She was Jian Wuyi's daughter and the only one from the Draconis House of Jian among the young disciples.

Tianming noticed that Xuanyuan Muxue's eyes were red as if she had been crying.

What's wrong?" Tianming asked.

"Before we set off, my mother heard the news that you're going to the south. She lectured me and said I was the one who instigated you into walking to your own grave..."

"What a good use of the word 'instigate'!" Tianming smiled. "Was your transformation successful?"

"I succeeded with the seventh-grade tribulation manna, but I think I'll hold off on the Frosty Mercurius," said Xuanyuan Muxue. She was afraid she would waste such a precious item if she died.

Before leaving, Xuanyuan Xiao had spoken to them.

"Do me a favor, Tianming," said Xuanyuan Xiao.

"Please speak, Palace Lord," Tianming replied.

Xuanyuan Xiao pulled out a gold tribulation artifact and placed it in Tianming's hand.

"What's this?" Tianming was stunned for a moment. It felt rather familiar.

"This is Yuheng's Draconic Swordbreaker. Plunge this into the battlefield for me. I dreamt of him. He says he wants to go to the battlefield." Xuanyuan Xiao smiled.

Tianming put away the Draconic Swordbreaker. Xuanyuan Xiao hadn't dreamed of anything; he was just trying to fulfill Xuanyuan Yuheng's long-cherished wish.

After Tianming had acquired Xuanyuan Yuheng's Astral Will, everything about him was entrenched in Tianming's Imperial Will. Life was sometimes unclear. If Tianming had come to the sect in another way, perhaps the two might have become friends.

"I hope you young ones don't waste your youth."

With a wave of his hand, Xuanyuan Xiao left.

Soon after, Yi Xingyin had completed the count.

"Let's go!"

More than twenty thousand people soared into the sky and traveled south. Blood pounding through their veins, they would never stop. Groups of experts set off in three directions—east, west, and south.

They knew that choosing to leave Taiji Peak Lake meant putting their lives on the line to defend the Archaion Sect and all of its citizens. Despite the trials and hardship, they had no complaints.

On the Heaven Cauldron, a drunk man with disheveled hair stood beside the five-colored column of light, a jar of wine in his hand and wine all over his clothes.

"Brothers, I can't be of help. All I can do is offer a toast and a poem for you!"

Footsteps shaky, he wrote messily in the air with his sword and mumbled, "Endless clouds of Qinghai darken the mountains of snow. Far away stands Jade Gate Pass at the lonely outpost. The armors have been pierced through by sands from years of war. We shall never return without taking Loulan, no!" [1]

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On the way south, most of the elders were silent. Tianming traveled with Xuanyuan Yucheng and the others.

"The enemy's current operations are unfavorable for us." Xuanyuan Yucheng gritted his teeth.

"What do you mean?"

"A few months ago, they attacked Pentaphase. We originally thought they were trying to break our alliance. However, they didn't continue their previous approach but instead got the Heptastar Aerial Sect and Quadform Oceanic Sect to intercept the Triflair and Octagram Sects on their way to support our forces, deterring them. At the same time, they restrained the Pentaphase Earth Sect in the Pentaphase Divine Realm and bypassed them. That way, we have to deal with the full force of Nonahall, Sixpath, and Biritual all on our own. If our allies head out to support us, they'll fight them. But if they don't, Quadform and Heptastar will join the rest of their forces in encircling and suppressing our troops," Xuanyuan Yucheng explained.

"So we're their main goal," said Tianming.

"Of course. After all, they're trying to kill Her Eminence. Additionally, we're the strongest. After dealing with us, attacking our allies will be easy. The three sects will either head out and fight to the death or surrender midway," said Xuanyuan Yucheng.

"Kill Her Eminence?"

After his experience in the Kilostar Domain, Tianming believed that their goal might have something to do with the Heaven Cauldron.

"The Nonahall and Hexapath legions have assembled on our southern border. Their specific numbers are unknown, but continue to increase. Most importantly, they refined three million corpses in Pentaphase, which will soon attack the five cities in the south. Tianming City, which we're now heading to, is of great strategic significance. Once it falls, there'll be no other obstacles in their way. The situation will only get worse if they continue to use brutal and inhuman methods, refining corpse puppets after destroying and massacring the cities," said Xuanyuan Yucheng.

"I have a question. Why don't they just fly to Taiji Peak Lake and attack us with everything they've got?" asked Tianming. Matters of war were completely different from individual battles; he wasn't proficient in this area.

"That wouldn't work. First of all, Taiji Peak Lake's Ninefold Formation isn't that easy to break. Secondly, if they attack us, we have a large number of troops and powerhouses stationed throughout our hundred and eight cities. If there's an opportunity for us to attack them in the front and rear, they'll sustain severe damage. That's the purpose of urgently transferring our people and moving citizens from

ordinary towns into the big cities before the war begins. There's a defensive formation in every city. We're united and have tens of millions of people in each city supplying power to their formations. Even if our enemies want to break the formations, they would have to pay a heavy price." Xuanyuan Yucheng explained.

"I see. The power of ten million people...."

Even if most of them were at the Heavenly Will or Earth Saint stage, it would still be enough. Despite that, Xuanyuan Dao and the others couldn't leave Taiji Peak Lake, because they couldn't rule out the possibility of the enemy attacking there with a large number of powerhouses. That was the reason it was important to have people protecting all hundred and eight cities.

They were afraid of the enemy's ruthlessness, using forbidden techniques to refine the corpses of beastmasters and dead beasts. All lives would be in danger once they broke into the city.

Due to the existence of the defensive formations, their enemies would have more casualties if they decided to attack the cities. War wasn't just a competition of numbers. Sometimes, the defensive formations could indeed turn the situation around.

"It's a pity, the cities can only hold tens of millions at most. There's still a large number of people hiding in the mountains and jungles. If they encounter the enemy's army, they'll have no way out. Of course, if the city falls, it would be even harder for them to escape, given their means," said Xuanyuan Yucheng.

Gathering a large number of people in the cities was the most they could do. Although there was the Ninefold Formation protecting Taiji Peak Lake, it was impossible to accommodate every citizen of Archaion. Additionally, the journey would take too long.

Right now, each city was one of Archaion's strategic bases. If the enemy tried breaking into the cities to take advantage of their momentum, Tianming City, which would be the first to bear the brunt of their attacks, was of strategic significance. Because of that, the Fienddragon Legion was stationed there.

"There's half a million elite Fienddragon warriors in Tianming City, and half a million Tianming City defenders. We also have Yi Xingyin's Sun-Moon-Star Formation. Even if we don't know how many troops there are behind the corpse puppets and beasts, we must persist!" said Xuanyuan Yucheng.

"Is Tianming City's defensive formation the work of Palace Lord Yi?"

"Of course. Why else would he come to the front when he's still healing from serious injuries? It's so he can stabilize the Sun-Moon-Star Formation! Only he can create a powerful formation capable of dealing with millions," Xuanyuan Yucheng explained.

"The Sun-Moon-Star Formation is a third-origin tribulation pattern formation, easily comparable to the first three folds of Taiji Peak Lake's Ninefold Formation," said Xuanyuan Muxue.

"Yes, I have confidence in his skills."

Tianming glanced at Yi Xingyin. He was a talented, handsome middle-aged man, and also a tough guy!

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When night fell, Tianming finally caught a glimpse of Tianming City, the southernmost city of Archaion. It was a white city rising from the horizon like a giant, built on the mountains, majestic and vast. It was the southern gate of Archaion.

From a distance, the city walls were mottled, proving that this city had endured countless attacks throughout its history. But it still stood tall and majestic.

Perhaps because they shared the same name, Tianming fell in love with the city just by looking at it. He felt that it was much like himself. It stood on the highest mountain and overlooked the tiny individuals in the south, bearing the spirit of one man against ten thousand.

In this troubled world, it was the first to stand in the way of the enemy's northward movement. Looking up, Tianming headed toward the south-facing gates of the city. Dark clouds and loud cries were coming from that direction.

An endless grey mist filled the heavens and the earth; the dark clouds above the city signaled the coming of a storm. The amalgamation of all those mournful screams bore through the city walls and into the hearts of the people.

Tianming had spent most of his time in Taiji Peak Lake. This was the first time he had seen the real Archaion. In fact, the people here were no different from those of the Decimo Dao Nation, except for being stronger.

Countless people gathered together to populate the world. Top experts like Yi Xingyin and Ouyang Jianwang all originated from such a place. Therefore, they might love the mortal world more than those of the three major clans. Yi Xingyin was still pale, but he was here.

They only had a third of their team left. The other two-thirds headed to four nearby cities. Since Tianming City was the most important, Yi Xingyin, Dao Yuanyi, and Chen Cangshu would join the battle there.

“Yi!”

Above Tianming City, a man with tousled hair dressed in black gold armor and a fiery red cape led a large group of people to meet them. He had a third golden eye on his forehead.

The man was slovenly dressed and had an unrestrained air to him. His smile was rather wicked and domineering. He was one of the nine great divine marshals of Archaion, Xuanyuan Xie, the marshal of the Fienddragon Legion.