

## The Ages 881

### Chapter 881 - Trifold Trueflame Formation

Tianming found it rather weird that Po Suo had given up the chase after they left the lower levels of cosmic aether. She remained at the border of the lower levels of cosmic aether and coldly stared at Tianming before turning to return.

"Is she going to let me off just like that?" Even though she might not necessarily have caught up, she could at least have tried. "That means she must have something even more important to do.... More important than killing me."

Things were going more and more beyond his comprehension.

"Should we go back?" Feiling asked.

"What if they've set a trap for me to jump into?"

He didn't dare send anyone else to scout the place out, either. The two ghoulish kings were far too strong to risk it. Even Fang Taiqing might not be able to survive an encounter with these two.

"I should head back to Taiji Peak Lake and ask Xuanyuan Dao about this." He returned to Soulburn Hall as quickly as he could.

"Tianming, didn't you head out to Fuling City?" Xuanyuan Dao asked.

"Sect Master, remember the matter with the black hole stars? I wanted to see if I could access the ninth one just now, but do you know what I saw when I got there?"

Xuanyuan Dao shook his head, so Tianming told him what had happened.

"A ritual? And they knelt to that person?"

"That's right."

"What does Her Eminence say?"

"She doesn't know either."

"That doesn't sound right. What kind of person but a god could make those two kneel?"

"What in the world is that five-colored star? Why does it resonate with the Heaven Cauldron? Does the Archaic House of Xuanyuan contain any records of it?"

"There have been a few ages of chaos throughout history, and we were even almost wiped out once. We've basically lost all our records of the past," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"This is something we'll have to learn about as soon as possible then. I believe the enemy will attack Taiji Peak Lake soon."

"Then I shall arrange for a meeting immediately."

"Is the Yinyang Demon Sect still attacking?"

"They are."

"Was Li Caiwei abandoned by the ghoulish kings or something? Why is she still attacking even though Hexapath has already ceased their assault?"

"She's really cunning and has her own plans."

"How about this—I'll go to Fuling City now and end the battle there before going back to the five-colored star to see if the two ghoulish kings are still there. It'll take some time for them to gather their samsarans here anyway, so I should make it in time."

"Alright."

So much had been lost throughout history that there were countless retellings about what happened to the demon race of old. With so little time to spare, Tianming immediately got on Meow Meow and flew toward Fuling City.

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The three sect masters summoned all the second- and third-origin tribulation elders for a meeting at Tribulation Peak. There, Xuanyuan Dao shared what Tianming had discovered.

"They knelt?" Everyone was utterly confused.

"The imperial son could've been mistaken, right?"

"No, he couldn't have. Everyone, put your minds together and help figure out what could be inside the five-colored star," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"Wasn't there a claim that the treasures Great Emperor Xuanyuan left for us are inside?"

"That's right. The imperial son has gotten quite a few of those already from the Kilostar Domain."

"Why do I get the feeling that whatever's inside won't be good for us, though?"

"Could that figure have been the Nonahall Specter?"

"Their god has been dead since a hundred thousand years back. It can't be."

"Either way, it's a trump card of sorts for them."

"What's the point in finding out anyway? We still have to defend this place either way."

"With the sheer size of the force of samsarans they showed at Pentaphase, we'll be dead as soon as we leave Taiji Peak Lake."

"That's a good point."

After an hour of deliberating, they still had no clue whatsoever.

"Since it has something to do with our founding ancestor, could it be the demon race from two hundred thousand years ago?"

"Impossible. Legend says that they were completely wiped out by the founding ancestor back then."

"Not to mention, the Nonahall Divine Realm has nothing to do with the demon race. They're all three meters in height and have green faces and tusks. More importantly, they don't have lifebound beasts."

"Yeah, makes sense."

"That explanation requires too much imagination. Not to mention, I've seen those two old folks' lifebound beasts before."

"Blood pacts don't make for powerful lifebound beasts, after all."

Fang Taiqing asked, "Xuanyuan Dao, do you think the demon race is still around?"

"According to the seniors in our house, they've been completely exterminated," he answered.

"What about you, Jian Wuyi? The Draconis House of Jian also participated in the demon extermination way back."

"It's too far back. Let's focus on realistic possibilities. If the founding ancestor had the ability to seal away a whole race, why wouldn't he just kill them off instead?" Jian Wuyi said.

"Makes sense. The theory is too fantastical," Fang Taiqing said.

"Do you have something in mind?" Xuanyuan Dao asked.

"Say... if we tell Feng Qingyu and Li Caiwei about our theory that the demons are within the five-colored star, do you think they'd believe us?" Fang Taiqing said.

"No way in hell, unless we have evidence for it. If you don't believe it yourself, they'll never believe us and betray their alliance over it. Traitors are dealt with even more harshly than enemies. Without evidence, there's nothing to be discussed," Jian Wuyi said.

"Guess we'll have to wait for the imperial son. He said he'll go back to the star after those two leave. If he manages to enter, the truth will get out," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"I believe they'll only leave when the samsarans of those five divine realms are gathered and ready to attack Taiji Peak Lake." Fang Taiqing stood up and announced, "Everyone, our fight for survival is not far off. Taiji Peak Lake has already taken in a hundred million people who'll help power the Ninefold Formation. Let our foes send their tribulation elders here to die!"

"Yeah!"

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A tense siege was taking place at Fuling City. The solar master, Qin Fengyang, personally commanded an army of two million for the siege. In terms of might and number of tribulation elders, the Yinyang Demon Sect and Archaiion Sect were close candidates for second place, with the former inching slightly ahead. Even the Hexapath Sword Sect paled slightly in comparison, and the only reason they were treated as equals was their sect master, Feng Qingyu. Qin Fengyang wasn't that powerful personally, being weaker than Li Caiwei, but he was young.

Within the formation of Fuling City, he was currently engaging the divine marshal of the Snowsprite Legion, Wen Renqian. Fuling City was defended by a second-origin tribulation pattern formation called the Trifold Trueflame Formation. Three spirit hazard phoenixes soared within the formation, fighting Qin Fengyang alongside Wen Renqian's lifebound beasts.

By now, many Biritual warriors were scaling the walls of the city, threatening to topple them. Qin Fengyang valiantly charged forward with his flaming warblade; his capabilities as an eleventh-level life phase samsaran gave him an edge over Wen Renqian. Not to mention, the Trifold Trueflame Formation wasn't as powerful as the Sun-Moon-Star Formation to make up for their difference in strength. Wen Renqian would no doubt lose if this went on.

"Solar Master, our imperial son is going to arrive any time now. You'll lose countless men when that happens, so why bother?!" Wen Renqian spat in anger.

"Even if Fang Taiqing comes along with him, I will take Fuling City!" Qin Fengyang roared.

## **Chapter 882 - Eternal Destiny**

"Looks like you won't learn until it's too late!" Wen Renqian said.

"Where did you get all that confidence from? Li Tianming alone? The Nonahall Ghost Sect had me attack this place and didn't send any further orders. I shall do as they say and continue conquering your lands. If they want to attack your Taiji Peak Lake, that's their business. All I want is to expand my territory here. This place used to belong to the Biritual Divine Realm anyway, Fuling City included!" Qin Fengyang said.

"Do you think you're the boss of the Yinyang Demon Sect? Someone's getting arrogant!" Wen Renqian mocked. Her words hit a sore spot of his. Though Li Caiwei had wanted to hold back the war efforts, Qin Fengyang believed that the Nonahall Ghost Sect would focus their efforts on Taiji Peak Lake because of their recent heavy loss. In the end, the Yinyang Demon Sect wouldn't get any more territory with their help, so they would just take it for themselves. There's no way they would return the lands they had already conquered either.

"Die!" He charged toward Wen Renqian with his blade in hand.

"Divine Marshal!" Wen Renqian was the only beauty among the nine divine marshals of the realm, and her subordinates were all nervous about her safety. At that moment, a white-haired, black-robed figure descended from the sky.

"Imperial Son!"

"He's finally here! Victory is ours!"

Fuling City erupted into a grand cheer as the light of hope shone upon them. Almost immediately, the light from the Trifold Trueflame Formation glowed much brighter, something that took Qin Fengyang aback. For them to claim victory just because of his arrival, Tianming was being treated like the god of Archaion! However, Qin Fengyang didn't waste too much time mulling over it and charged straight for Tianming.

"You want to take me on? Do you think I'm a push—" Before he could finish, Tianming equipped the Dragonhide and came striking down with his Grand-Orient Sword using the Ninesky Beastsoul Formation. The immense power of the strike caused shockwaves to spread across the city. "That's too fast!"

In fact, Tianming wasn't the one going fast; Feiling was slowing down time, instead. Qin Fengyang hurried to parry the move. When the blades clashed, the power of the nine fearsome formation beasts came flooding through with so much force that it snapped Qin Fengyang's warblade in half. What remained of the force sent Qin Fengyang slamming to the ground, causing it to crack and give way beneath his feet until he was forced to his knees!

"Uugggghhh!" Before the solar master could collect himself, Tianming sent him flying with a kick to the face. It was a pathetic display indeed. Even though Qin Fengyang was only an eleventh-level life phase samsaran, he was still a sect master and the second strongest fighter of the Yinyang Demon Sect. Yet he had been forced to kneel and sent flying after a single exchange, utterly shocking everyone present. However, those from Archaion were long used to the ridiculous feats of their imperial son and they cheered loudly. The morale of the Biritual troops tanked almost immediately.

"It's said that he can kill a million people at once!"

"Run!"

The enemy troops were already running before Tianming even had a chance to use Vitasteal. He had practically saved Fuling City from their dire situation in an instant.

"Imperial Son!" Wen Renqian greeted this 'kid' respectfully.

"Once they retreat far enough, start evacuating the city. I'll go to the other fallen city to rescue their captives," Tianming instructed.

"Understood."

As for Qin Fengyang, he had left with his subordinates after suffering that disadvantageous bout. He had bet that Tianming would remain at Taiji Peak Lake and wasn't as powerful as the rumors had suggested, but the bet had come back to bite him in the ass. Given his personality, running was the first thing he did.

The moment Tianming showed up at the city, the enemy troops had begun their retreat. That meant that they would probably abandon the other fallen cities as well. His arrival had caused their morale to instantly vanish, thanks to the rumors of him being able to kill enemies by the millions. Right now, almost every cultivator of the Flameyellow Continent considered him a threat.

"Since it won't take much time, I should check if those two old geezers have left." Right as Tianming was about to leave, he turned back and saw a pink-eyed girl flying toward him from the horizon with a sensual smile. "Are you a pervert? Dress your age, old hag!"

"How I dress is my business, boy." Li Caiwei rolled her eyes.

"Are you here to hunt me down again to quench your lewd thirst for my young body, like last time? I'd advise against it. You saw how badly Qin Fengyang lost, right?"

"I saw it myself, so spare the boasting. Come to think of it, you've been carrying out one ridiculous feat after another since leaving the Kilostar Domain. What a monster. I'm completely convinced of your power," she said.

"Then what are you here for?"

"Nothing, really. I suppose our next orders from Nonahall will come soon, so we'll be meeting again at Taiji Peak Lake. There'll be many others there that I'm sure you'd like to kill, so I doubt I'll be first on the list."

"Well, actually, there's something I feel compelled to inform you about. Do with this information what you will: it's best that you don't get your troops or subordinates to die in vain when the time comes."

"Oh? Let's hear it then."

Tianming told her about the communication ritual he had witnessed.

"It's that damned grey star again!" Li Caiwei immediately furrowed her brows after hearing about it.

"It appears that you have doubts about the grey star as well."

"Even if I did, I wouldn't tell you about it! You're the enemy!"

"Suit yourself. I don't need you to warn me about it either." Tianming turned to look at the sky. It was a secret he would have to investigate himself.

Right after that, a messenger came to Li Caiwei. Glancing at Tianming, he said, "Sect Master, there's an important matter you need to hear."

"It's fine, let him hear it," Li Caiwei said with a smile.

"The orders from Nonahall are that you bring every samsaran we have to Taiji Peak Lake. The elites of the five sects will gather for a joint attack against the sect."

"Oh, alright." Smiling, she turned to Tianming and asked, "Afraid now?"

"You're still smiling like that even though you're about to get sold out? You're counting the coins they got paid for selling you like an oblivious fool, too." Tianming smirked and turned to leave. "My advice to you is to stay at the rear instead of the front. Don't let your people be the first to be vaporized by the Ninefold Formation. We have hundreds of millions of people powering it."

"You little—" Before she could even finish the cuss, Tianming was already gone. "Well, he sure can run fast."

She squinted in thought for a moment. "A communication ritual, eh? There's definitely something up. Now I won't take the vanguard position no matter what!"

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There were only three people within the Nineghoul Skypalace at Specter Mountains, namely Di Zang, Po Suo, and Zi Xiao. The former two had just returned and Zi Xiao was there to receive them.

"Where's Jian Wuxin?" Di Zang asked.

"He has the perfect Regal Specter Bloodline. After consuming seven million lifebound beasts, he can equal my power using his physical strength alone," Zi Xiao said excitedly. Though, he seemed a little troubled when he continued, "If it weren't for the misfortune that came to Si Ling and the other four, we would've had around thirty million lifebound beasts to feed to him by now. Jiang Wuxin and the corpse puppets would be enough, and we wouldn't even have to count on Jian Wuyi."

"Well, they have their own elites, after all. All the costs we've incurred are within expectations," Po Suo said.

"That's true. It's almost as if Li Tianming himself is a miracle," Zi Xiao said.

"Zi Xiao, head to the ten cities near Specter Mountains and seal them. Have all the beastmasters chased out of their cities and get them to leave their lifebound beasts behind," Di Zang ordered.

"But, this...."

"Let Jiang Wuxin feed on them until he reaches his limit. That way, he'll only be matched by those on the level of the gods."

"But they're all citizens of our divine realm..."

"They're just beasts. Livestock. They're all the same, whether they be from our realm or others'," Di Zang said with a smile.

"Zi Xiao, Third and the rest are gone. You're the only one left who has the luxury of evolving to become a higher lifeform," Po Suo reminded.

"Understood!" Zi Xiao said emotionally. "I'll carry out the task immediately! There should be at least fifty million lifebound beasts in the ten cities!"

"On your way, then."

By the time Zi Xiao left, the sun was setting. Po Suo and Di Zang watched the setting sun from the entrance of the Nineghoul Skypalace.

"Old mate, is it about time to loosen our grip on the death phase?" Di Zang asked.

"If we do, we'll recover our full power but only have a month of life left before the death phase claims us," Po Suo said.

"It's fine. That's enough time for us to fulfill our final mission. How many years have we feared even lifting a single finger ourselves, all while waiting for this day?" he said with a smile.

"Far too long. The time we have in the life and death phases is the cruelest of laws of the world. It's too terrifying. It's too bad that we no longer have any hope of ascending in our lifetime," she said as tears streamed down her eyes.

"It's fine. History will remember us. We'll be the heroes that saved the glorious specter race! Our descendants will remember us, now and forever!"

"While death may one day tear us apart, we'll stand and fight as one until then!" They held each other's hands tightly as they basked in the setting sunlight, allowing their flesh and bone to crack and shift.

Meanwhile, Tianming was on his way to the five-colored star once more.

### **Chapter 883 - Astral Shift**

"Finally, nobody's in my way." Tianming circled the surrounding area a few times to be doubly sure that Di Zang and Po Suo had left.

"Hmph, if they hadn't gone back to deal with their matters, I would've gone to their realm to wreck shit." Now that the two were gone, the monochrome formation from before was gone as well. All that remained was the light emanating from the star. Tianming stood outside the five-colored formation and looked around until he spotted the ninth black hole star. It was still embedded in the formation.

"Thankfully, using my Plundering Hand to open the formation won't damage it in any way." That was one of the many talents of the Sky Plunderers. This was the Skysource Hellshaker Formation, and it was far beyond the level of tribulation pattern barriers. Whether the Plundering Hand could pry it open was still unknown, even though Tianming had absorbed the Archaionfiend Eye.

"If I can enter, even if the ninth black hole star doesn't contain anything, I'll still be able to find out the truth about what's inside this star!"

He stretched his left hand towards the formation. "So this is a god-level formation, huh...."

His palm looked like it was sinking into liquid metal the moment it touched the formation. Even though the liquid metal didn't seem to harm him, it looked like it would require a great effort to pry open a hole large enough for him to enter. As he fiddled with it, he suddenly had an epiphany.

"This entire formation is formed from layers upon layers of heavenly patterns. I wonder how many patterns there are in total on a formation so large. Heavenly patterns are manifestations of heavenly will, which are in turn just simplified heavenly laws themselves. Looks like I'll have to spend some time looking into its mysteries.

Ever since coming to Archaion, he had been focusing on nothing but survival, thanks to Feiling's identity. But now he had seen Yi Xingyin's amazing exploits and was inspired by the deep mysteries of a god-level formation. His passion for the patternscribing field began growing once more.

"Big Brother, I looked into formations quite a lot during my days at Soulburn Hall. I might be able to meddle with some tribulation patterns if I borrow some of your power," Feiling said.

"Alright. The two of us make such a good pair—we're perfect for each other!" As he said that, he stuck his left hand deeper into the formation. By now, his arm was enveloped in that sea of heavenly patterns.

"How's it going?"

"I should be able to open it, but I'll need time to slowly undo the structure of the formation." He squeezed himself deeper inside.

The formation was not unlike a thick wall. It took Tianming about an hour to reach the location of the black hole star. Even though it was his innate talent, he didn't understand how he could just pry open a sea of heavenly patterns that others could only dream of touching.



"It's taking time, but the fact that I was able to pry it open at all is good news. This formation was made by Great Emperor Xuanyuan, eh? I wonder if that voice who said he was waiting for me at the end of the last black hole is his...." His eyes glowed with passion as he continued unraveling the heavenly patterns, gradually getting more and more used to it. Soon, the black hole star was right in front of his eyes.

"I'm almost there!" The power of the black hole star actually forced the surrounding heavenly patterns some ways away, leaving behind an empty area. He tore open the last patch and was finally through. Now, he was right in front of the black hole star. Before he could even give it a good look, the force from the black hole pulled him in.

He didn't resist it at all, but allowed himself to be swallowed up by the darkness and soon lost trace of the slightest bit of light. As he expected, he was being sent through some kind of passageway. Soon, his surroundings grew more and more visible. He saw an ancient battlefield once more.

Countless cultivators who used to be enslaved like livestock stood up in rebellion against the heavens to change their destinies, eventually overturning the reign of the demon race. The demons in the murals grew clearer and clearer. Most of them were three meters in height with green faces and tusks. Some had many eyes, while others had many arms. A few even had wings and claws. But one thing was for sure: they all looked terrifying. It was as if all of them possessed the power to level mountains. What was worse was that Tianming could see stars inside their eyes!

"Why does it remind me of Jiang Wuxin's Fiendgodmorphize?" Back when Jiang Wuxin had fused with his wolf to become a werebeast, he looked a little like these demons. It wasn't that the demons all looked like werewolves; instead, their bodies all had some properties of other beasts. They were both humanoid and bestial at the same time. In some of the murals, they could even unleash terrifying abilities on top of using battle arts.

"Not to mention, they also seem a little like Feng's infernal soul race!"

He gave it a few more looks and found that they looked really similar. However, he couldn't say for sure whether they were of the same stock. The infernal soul race was said to be a fusion of beastmasters and lifebound beasts. However, most of their fusions were failed ones. Apart from Ye Lingfeng, the others all looked really weird. As for the demons, while they had different individual features, they all seemed like terrifying lifeforms. Even though he was only seeing them through murals, he could spot a few demons that looked just like humans, both in terms of height and the lack of bestial features.

The scenes seemed to depict humans sacrificing their lives to obtain a hard-fought victory. At the end of the passageway, he saw a towering man in a dragon robe riding five dragons as he led the billions of people to crush the demons. There were a few star-like figures beside him that looked incredibly powerful.

Who might they be? When he thought that, an odd image appeared. The defeated demons weren't killed. Instead, they escaped towards the sky where the gigantic grey star was! The images flashed quickly by. By the time the man in the dragon robe led his armies to the grey star, the star let out a mist that swallowed the humans and killed them. The entire star began descending from the sky like a gigantic beast. It was as if the demons were able to turn the tables when they were fighting on the grey star.

At that moment, the dragon-robed emperor soared to the sky with his five dragons. Leading his glowing subordinates, he raised the Heaven Cauldron and focused it on the grey star, causing a five-colored formation to manifest.

Then, the image darkened. When light returned, countless blood dragons gnawed at the five-colored formation, angering the emperor and causing him to massacre all of them. A formation of blood formed as blood rained nonstop, surrounding the five-colored formation. The star turned blood red as a result, and began shrinking until it was so small it might as well not exist any longer.

From that day onward, the thousands of stars in the sky fell into what came to be known as the Kilostar Domain. That was where the visions completely stopped. Tianming was completely shaken by the revelation. "So this five-colored star is the prison of the demon race!"

That was a shocking truth. "Nonahall's true aim wasn't to kill the goddess at all. It wasn't territory either. Their true aim is to let the specters return to the human realm! That's why Ghoul King Di Zang knelt to that figure!"

As he understood too little about the history of the continent, this was something he had never considered before. The legends about the demon race felt completely foreign to him. But now the truth was right before his eyes. This conspiracy caused him to shake with terror.

"The Heaven Cauldron! That's why they started the war!" He couldn't want to do anything more than to return to Taiji Peak Lake immediately and tell them the truth.

At that moment, a light appeared ahead of him on the passageway. The whole place quieted down and he stood firm in front of that person. The man in the dragon robe opened his eyes, all three of them, and the one in the center glowed with five colors.

"Great Emperor Xuanyuan...." Tianming took a deep breath.

"O' successor of mine, come to me," beckoned the man.

Tianming stepped forward, wavering from side to side. However, the emperor's gaze didn't follow him. He figured it wasn't a real person, just like the apparition of the Hexapath Sword God. This was probably a final recording of his will before he left this world.

Tianming shot him a gaze of utmost respect. He was a man that had defined his era, as was apparent from the murals on the passageway. His contributions to humankind far outstripped the nine gods that came after him. Without him, humanity never would have prospered. Tianming could feel the archaic pressure coming from his gaze as if he had traveled back two hundred thousand years in time.

"Greetings, Founding Ancestor."

"After two hundred thousand years, the stars shift once more on the grandest scale. On this day, I have a grand mission to entrust to you." The emperor's voice rang throughout the whole place.

## **Chapter 884 - Final Gift**

Tianming listened to the emperor speak with the utmost respect.

"The fact that you were able to come here means that two hundred thousand years have passed since the day the demons were sealed. The moment the Blooddragon Sealing Formation reaches its limit, divine tribulation manna will appear in the Kilostar Domain to attract the inheritor of the Dragonhide," the emperor said, looking in Tianming's direction. It seemed that the recording wasn't aware of the state of the Kilostar Domain. It was apparent that he was not alive at all.

So the blood-colored formation is called the Blooddragon Sealing Formation, and the ultimate tribulation manna is actually divine tribulation manna... It also sounds like the Kilostar Domain opened because he planned it long ago? Does that mean even if we hadn't chosen to open the domain, the formation would've collapsed either way and caused the domain to be destroyed? Many thoughts flashed through Tianming's mind at that moment.

Back then, he had many doubts about the Kilostar Domain. For instance, if Great Emperor Xuanyuan had planned to open it up, why would others like Dugu Jin be allowed to enter and destroy the Blooddragon Sealing Formation? It turned out that the formation was bound to crumble anyway, sooner or later. It did seem to have been on the verge of collapse the moment it appeared. Tianming calmed himself and continued listening.

"After the collapse of the Blooddragon Sealing Formation, those of the specter race that remain will definitely try destroying the Skysource Hellshaker Formation. However, I will continue to uphold the Ninefold Hell with my divine body inside the Heaven Cauldron, so may my descendants protect my body and the cauldron to prevent the specters from returning to the human realm!

"As long as my body is guarded, the Skysource Hellshaker Formation can hold for another hundred thousand years. But once it's destroyed, the formation will definitely collapse within a thousand years. If enough specters attack the formation from within the moment my body is destroyed, the formation might crumble right then and there. By then, the million-year nightmare we humans endured will once more come to plague us."

Tianming nodded seriously. This was the crux of the situation, and he committed it to memory. The divine body must not be destroyed! He recalled that Xuanyuan Dao and Ouyang Jianwang each had a key to the Heaven Cauldron.

"I can't tell if my descendants will still exist two hundred thousand years later. I don't know if they still carry the Xuanyuan blood. As such, all I can rely on is bringing you here through the Dragonhide. The Blooddragon Sealing Formation will definitely crumble, but before that, you shall obtain the cultivation resources I've prepared! You must strengthen the House of Xuanyuan and protect my divine body!"

Tianming finally understood why the emperor had hidden the treasures away, instead of leaving them in the hands of his descendants. There was no saying whether his descendants would use them all up before the time was right, or worse, have it stolen by others.

It's no wonder I was able to obtain the ultimate tribulation manna after obtaining the Dragonhide, and even access the treasures and black hole stars in the domain.

This was yet another method the emperor had employed to ensure that his kin would get the treasures he'd left behind. Great Emperor Xuanyuan definitely couldn't even guess that the Kilostar Domain would

eventually fall into the hands of the specter remnants that had been left behind. Fortunately, Tianming had been able to singlehandedly slaughter his way through it.

"I also left some star maps behind, but I expect them to be stolen within the span of all this time. Our history will no doubt be rewritten in one form or another. But no matter. The star maps are merely red herrings. Only the wearer of the Dragonhide will be able to pass through the nine black hole stars and obtain everything!"

It was no wonder Nonahall had the star maps. It appeared that the emperor's descendants had fared worse than he expected. They lost the maps, and even forgot that they existed! That aside, from the sound of it, it seemed like the emperor had left far more treasures behind apart from the hundred thousand tribulation artifacts and ten thousand plus tribulation manna.

"Where is it?" Tianming wondered as he looked around. The emperor's figure began disintegrating into three objects.

"Descendants, whether humanity survives with its dignity intact or becomes livestock will depend on you all. What many hail as godhood is merely the next stage of Ascension. The infinite is not something anyone can grasp, especially not an infinite life. It's my greatest regret that I'm unable to stand with you during the coming days of crisis. While others might add to or change my story, I want you to remember that I was a native, born and raised in this world. I love my home, and have protected it and our fellow humans for two hundred thousand years. I hope you will defend them for the next two hundred thousand. If I allow myself to be a little optimistic, the specters might've perished before the formation collapses."

The emperor burst out in hearty laughter at the notion. "These three gifts are for you."

By now, the emperor's body was nowhere to be seen. Only his voice remained, sustained by the heavenly patterns. The truth was out and Tianming finally understood the gravity of the situation. He was even more enthralled by the founding ancestor's impressive deeds.

He looked at the first item that floated towards him with full admiration. It was a dragon-shaped ring—a spatial ring, in fact.

"I was practiced in the arts of forging and heavenly patterns. This is my humble creation, the Skydragon. Even though it's a divine artifact, it isn't that useful apart from having lots of space. Within the ring is a lot of the spoils that we received after the demons were sealed away, including tribulation pattern tomes, tribulation artifacts, and tribulation manna. Since you've been acknowledged by the Dragonhide, you must be of decent character. Bring the treasures to the Xuanyuan house. Anyone who takes part in defending my divine body deserves a share of this, too."

Tianming received the ring and gave it a casual look within, only to be stunned by the sheer density of items inside. So what we got from the domain was just scraps! This is where the real treasure was!

There were easily millions of tribulation artifacts alone within, each one with at least three or four tribulation patterns, and the highest of them having fifteen. The tribulation elders of the Archaion Sect only numbered two hundred and fifty thousand at most. If he brought this back, all of them would get new weapons!

There was also tons of manna, easily over a hundred thousand. However, the most impressive thing was the sheer volume of tribulation pattern tomes within, which could be used during combat. Nowadays, tribulation pattern tomes were rare, as the number of patternscribes who could make them was dwindling. This ring contained more of those tomes than all of them scattered across the continent combined. Taiji Peak Lake would be much better defended if he brought all of this back, and this was only the first of the three gifts.

Thank goodness the folks from Nonahall wouldn't be able to get all this even with the star maps. The founding ancestor's plan really held up well across the past two hundred thousand years. The only thing the emperor hadn't been able to predict was how Tianming was stopped before he could reach the ninth black hole star, followed by the collapse of the Blooddragon Sealing Formation. It took him until now to make his way here. Thankfully, he was a sky plunderer. Otherwise, these treasures would've been sealed under the grey formation above forever.

The second gift was a precious gem, within which were six white mists. One of them was human shaped while the other five were dragon shaped. "These are the caeli of me and my lifebound beasts. After reaching ascension, the caelum will become invulnerable and last forever. Once you bring it back, release the caeli into the Old Deepstar Path. My insights will then guide my descendants to further heights. That is, assuming the Old Deepstar Path still exists."

"Caeli!" Tianming received the gem carefully. The founding ancestor was truly faced with a huge dilemma. Despite having so much he wanted to pass on to his descendants, there was the risk of losing it to the sands of time. Thankfully, the Old Deepstar Path was still in the sect.

"I'll definitely take it back to them," Tianming mumbled.

"Right now, I can't be sure if the Heaven Cauldron and my divine body managed to survive these past two hundred thousand years. Perhaps my body was destroyed and caused the Skysource Hellshaker Formation to collapse before the Blooddragon Sealing Formation. Maybe the specters have returned to the human realm once more. Not being able to see what I've been working toward two hundred thousand years into the future is my biggest woe. All I can do is wish you good luck.

"Why were two keys made for the Heaven Cauldron instead of sealing it away for good?" Tianming asked.

"While it's thought that I was the one who forged the Heaven Cauldron, I merely borrowed it. Without it, my divine body wouldn't be able to last that long. Those two keys will be needed when the time comes to return the cauldron to its rightful owner. If my descendants still possess them, make sure they take care of them well." It wasn't so much a reply as a scripted explanation.

"Understood." Hmm, he didn't mention who he borrowed it from though.

Back in the passageway, there were some people covered in starlight near the emperor. They seemed to have descended from the Kilostar Domain itself. Perhaps it had something to do with them, but the question about who they were remained.

Right as he thought that, the third gift arrived. It was a white pendant shaped like a crescent moon that felt a little cold to his touch. "What's this?"

He didn't know what material it was made of at all.

## **Chapter 885 - Divine Moon Realm**

"Descendant..." the emperor's voice echoed once more. "The allies that helped me set up those two formations to seal the demons and secure humanity's victory came from the Divine Moon Realm. Listen well. Should you fail to prevent the specters from returning to the human realm, the humans will definitely not be able to resist their might. If that day ever comes, bring this moonjade to the Old Deepstar Path to open the Moon Astral Gate. If those from the Divine Moon Realm are aware that the specters aren't extinct yet, they'll definitely send help. That is the only hope we humans have. Make sure to never offend them!" He made sure to emphasize the last sentence.

"Where could the Divine Moon Realm be?" Tianming wondered. Was it out in the cosmic aether?

The emperor, seemingly having heard his question, said, "Just look up at the moon."

The moon seemed to be so distant it hung above the layer of stars beneath.

"So, the world of two hundred thousand years ago basically had the Flameyellow Continent at the bottom, the grey star above it, and the Divine Moon Realm even further up?" It seemed the world was bigger than Tianming had imagined.

Soon, the area began shaking. Tianming continued moving toward the light where the exit was. The emperor's voice grew deeper. "Descendant! I'm far too fearful at imagining what could have happened to the world in your day. I grew up in hardship and lost the peaceful days I spent with my parents, wife, and brothers, all for the sake of bringing about our triumph. I lost everything and will only live on in the memories of others. However, I have no regrets.

"The reason for that is that we survived. All of us who fought and died for our dignity will never come to regret it. We changed our fates and refused to remain slaves. We're no longer the livestock of others, and our descendants aren't guaranteed a life of suffering. Our race used to be forced to procreate and cultivate so the specters could enjoy our lifebound beasts as delicacies.

"You wouldn't know how agonizing it was to live in those days without experiencing it yourself firsthand. Our forebears weren't even allowed the luxury of ending our own life on our own terms. Do you know what the greatest pain is? It's living after losing your brothers and sisters that cultivated with you over centuries. They don't eat humans, only lifebound beasts. Those left behind are never able to shake off that trauma."

Lifebound beasts were sentient beings that cultivated with their beastmasters. The bond between them and their beastmasters was something that would inevitably develop. They weren't just simple animals; they were partners for life. There was no way Tianming would be willing to see Ying Huo and the rest slaughtered and eaten. Tianming didn't know why the specters didn't just eat masterless wildbeasts instead. Perhaps they just weren't as nourishing or tasty, or maybe they just chose to eat lifebound beasts out of spite and hatred.

By now, Tianming was at the shining light. Great Emperor Xuanyuan continued, "So, do you understand now? They are the hunters and we are the hunted. Even though we were born as prey, we can't afford

to lose! Who knows how much agony will result as a consequence of failure? The Flameyellow Continent has been our home since aeons ago. The Ninefold Hell is a newcomer. Their star descended from our skies. They are the invaders, yet they claim to be the masters of the continent!

"For the sake of our descendants' ability to live a life of freedom and dignity as sentient beings, you must endure! Don't ever lose! Only those who experienced what life was like back then know true despair. I beg this of you as your ancestor."

This was Great Emperor Xuanyuan. Tianming saw him as a dignified and powerful monarch, and seeing him beg sent chills down his spine. It was a sign of how much he truly loved his home and kin, and that was something which moved Tianming dearly.

Closing his eyes, Tianming mouthed an oath: "I will. I will definitely endure!"

Then the light flashed and he was out of the black hole star. His whole body felt empty all of a sudden before a sensation of death assaulted him.

"That's right! Every time I leave the black hole star, I'll be sent to another place... Since it was sandwiched between the formations, where have I been sent to now?!"

He was currently in absolute darkness, as if he was in a basement that had been abandoned for countless years. There were all kinds of weird stench that made his stomach churn.

"Where in the world is this?" He looked down through the thick grey mist with his Plundering Eye. There seemed to be a mountain range below him, and there were countless large green and red eyes scattered all over. When he looked above, he saw a five-colored formation. That could only mean he was now in the Ninefold Hell!

"Fucking hell!" He never would have thought that the black hole star would send him in here, the world of the specters! He hurriedly held his breath and forced his shaking body to calm, then immediately turned back toward the five-colored formation above. Right as he took two steps, he heard a rough sound from beneath him and was subsequently assailed by a stench.

His face paled as he looked down. The countless eyes were glaring at him, more and more of them by the second! Even though he wasn't one to sweat much, his entire forehead and even his palms were wet with perspiration.

Come to think of it, he had been having a rather lucky streak recently. Yet during such a crucial time, the heavens seemed to play a prank on him and sent him right into the Ninefold Hell. One could only imagine what the specters, who had been imprisoned for more than two hundred thousand years, felt when they saw a live human in their world.

"A human...."

"Kill!"

"Kill!"

Harrowing cries echoed with the pent-up hate of two hundred millennia, shaking the entirety of the Ninefold Hell.

## Chapter 886 - Battle of Taiji Peak Lake

Back in Archaion, the order to evacuate the cities saw most of the citizens escape into the wilderness. As the frost around the peak had yet to melt, most of the realm was still blanketed in snow. The cold winds and the hiding commonfolk made the snowy nation in the north seem exceptionally quiet and lonesome.

From such a far distance, it was hard to see any sign of human activity. Amidst the land of frost, tribulation artifact warships from the five divine realms sailed straight toward Taiji Peak Lake as fast as they could, carrying countless samsarans within them. Those warships were considered treasures by the various sects, each having at least thirteen tribulation patterns and able to move quickly while carrying large loads.

The fact that the elites of the five divine realms were rushing toward Taiji Peak Lake meant they were committed to utterly eradicating the Archaion Sect, with Nonahall in the lead. Di Zang and Po Suo struck like swift lightning when the time finally came.

They had reached Taiji Peak Lake five days earlier than the Archaion Sect's predictions, with an elite, hate-filled army. From within the Ninefold Formation, they could see that the entire area was surrounded by the samsarans of the five divine realms in its entirety. All those tribulation elders had released their tribulation beasts, each one larger and fiercer than the last. The insects, avians, land and marine beasts gathered together and emanated such a terrifying killing intent that it made it seem like Taiji Peak Lake was about to be swallowed whole from afar. The enemy tribulation elders patrolled the surrounding area on their lifebound beasts, the sky included.

Nonstop roars shook the entire sect and could even be heard from within the Ninefold Formation, making for a rather terrifying pre-battle atmosphere. Thankfully, ever since what had happened at Tianming City, the sect had been preparing Taiji Peak Lake's surroundings for combat. A historic battle was about to take place, and every witness to it shook with nerves. It was as if the entire world had forgotten to breathe.

Soon, the elites from the five divine realms were gathered up. Apart from a select few left behind to guard their realms, most of the elites had come to join the battle. Among them, Nonahall was the most powerful faction, having at least half a million samsaran elites, which was twice Archaion's number. Among them were four hundred thousand normal tribulation elders below the fourth level, more than a hundred thousand first-origin tribulation elders, five thousand second-origin tribulation elders, and over a hundred third-origin tribulation elders, while Archaion only had a total of roughly a quarter million.

Apart from Nonahall, Biritual had the second largest group with more than two hundred and sixty thousand samsarans with around fifty third-origin tribulation elders, putting them on par with Archaion. Following them was the Hexapath Sword Sect with around two hundred thousand samsarans and roughly forty third-origin tribulation elders. As for Quadform and Heptastar, they were more or less akin to Triflair, Pentaphase, and Octagram, each having only around twenty third-origin tribulation elders and some hundred thousand samsarans in total.



In other words, the enemy had four times Archaion's number at around a million samsarans, while Archaion and its allies had half a million, at best. The enemy had roughly two hundred peak third-origin tribulation elders, while the defenders had half that number, which made for rather bad odds. However, that wasn't the full picture of the battle.

There were also near a hundred million civilians in Taiji Peak Lake who were more or less empyrean saints, as well as the Ninefold Formation. They weren't fighting an open field battle, but rather a historic siege. As Nonahall had lost their corpse puppet army, they would have to take the full brunt of the formation's power using their samsaran forces alone, which gave Taiji Peak Lake the actual edge in battle.

Everyone in Taiji Peak Lake was pumped and ready to fight. The only worry they had was that not all of the samsarans from Triflair, Pentaphase, and Octagram would dare to come reinforce them in fear of their own territories being attacked by Nonahall. The fact that they sent some help, despite such circumstances, was already a huge display of camaraderie, something the Archaion Sect would surely remember and appreciate.

However, even if Nonahall didn't have the advantage in battle, their elites were long used to being number one. Coupled with the hate they felt, their fighting spirits were no less strong. Most of them were zealously loyal to Di Zang and Po Suo as well, and were filled with confidence at being able to stand on the same battlefield as the two ghoulish kings. They were rubbing their hands together and getting ready for the slaughter. Their arrogance even seemed to bleed over to their allies from Heptastar, who bore just as great a hatred toward the Archaion Sect.

However, Biritual, Quadform, and Hexapath didn't share that sentiment and maintained some distance from Nonahall. Unlike their crazed counterparts, the elites from those three sects seemed much calmer in comparison, as they had their own respective pillars of authority. Quadform, for instance, had Sect Master Long Youyue, but everyone knew that her husband Dugu Jin actually called the shots. Dugu Jin was a twelfth-level death samsaran, and those in his sect believed he was the strongest person to ever have lived. Hexapath, on the other hand, had Feng Qingyu as their moral support. Lastly, while Li Caiwei of the Yinyang Demon Sect didn't command as fearsome a reputation as the other two, she was still relatively young and filled with potential. Not to mention, her sect's cultivators took pride in being the second divine realm to form in history, and they stood proudly and firmly by her side.

The elites from all the sects were standing at the very front of the army, and ahead of them was the ghoulish king dressed in purple, whom others had often seen. However, the ones people were truly paying attention to were Po Suo and Di Zang. The two ghoulish kings looked much different than before when Tianming encountered them. Now they looked like a young couple—the man was tall and fit, with a head of black hair and sharp eyes, regaining his regal air from his younger days. The woman had a sensual, slender figure and her long, white hair fell to her waist like a waterfall. Most alluring was her skin that seemed as smooth as silky milk, covered with the luster of the most beautiful of pearls. She was almost as eye-catching as Li Caiwei.

The two looked perfect, as if they were made for each other. It was hard to believe that these two were actually the two old ghoulish kings, Di Zang and Po Suo, people who had lived for centuries. Their transformation had only earned them more awe and respect. However, those who were in the know

knew that they were going all out. No matter whether they won or lost, they wouldn't be able to live for much longer. Now that they were all there, Di Zang finally gave the order: "Surround them."

Those two short words caused every elite to immediately mobilize and spread out. As they did so, Li Caiwei went to Feng Qingyu. "Senior Feng, there's an odd rumor I heard from the Monorigin Sect. Do you believe it?"

"The one about the demon race?" Feng Qingyu calmly asked.

"Yes."

"I bet they're just afraid of losing, for them to make something like that up. No matter how foolish Nonahall is, even they wouldn't betray their fellow humans for an alien race. If the specters really return, Nonahall would crumble too. There's nothing for them to gain. Not to mention, even whether the so-called demons did exist is something of a debate. It all happened two hundred millennia ago, after all. Perhaps Great Emperor Xuanyuan only exterminated his enemies and demonized them, instead. You know that history is written by the victors, right?"

"Demonized?"

"It's simple. For instance, the side that wins today will tell their descendants that they were fighting on the side of justice against evil demons. I've read tens of books and dissertations about the existence of demons, and the conclusion I came to is that rewriting one's history to tell a different story is something humans have always excelled at. Our forebears from two hundred millennia ago were much craftier than us when it comes to propaganda, it seems."

"Then how do you explain that thing that's hanging in the sky?"

"I believe it's a treasure left behind by Great Emperor Xuanyuan, and the Monorigin Sect holds the key. Do you believe me when I say that's the real reason this battle is being fought?"

"If you're so certain, I'm starting to become convinced of it myself," Li Caiwei said.

"Good. Good. If we work together, we might be able to demand a bigger share, too."

"Sounds good. The question is whether we really have a winning chance today. Why do I have a feeling like we're jumping to our deaths?"

"You don't have to worry about that. Those two must have a special method they can use to neutralize the Monorigin Sect's advantage. It won't do us any good if we can't breach their defenses, right?"

"True. You speak a lot of sense, Senior," Li Caiwei said respectfully.

"Haha...." Feng Qingyu turned and left.

## **Chapter 887 - A Toast Before the Slaughter**

"Senior Feng, what should we do on the very off chance that the demons are really imprisoned within that star?" Li Caiwei asked as she followed him.

"Oh, then I guess we'll either run or kneel in submission if that's the case," Feng Qingyu said.

"Come on, is that what the strongest man on the continent should say?"

"I lost that title that day at Tianming City." By now, Feng Qingyu had reached the formation of elites from Hexapath. They were like a sharp sword pointed at Taiji Peak Lake. The other sects had all made their preparations too, and were looking toward Di Zang, who had his hand raised with a firm gaze. This was the calm before the storm.

"Attack!" he ordered the combined army. The grand battle had begun. Countless abilities were launched at the Ninefold Formation, sending deafening explosions all over.

Only Birtual had held off their attack, all of them looking at Li Caiwei, who was a little confused. She grit her teeth and looked at the five-colored star with her fists tightly clenched as she pondered her dilemma. "Neither option seems appealing at all.... Which choice should I make?"

Looking ahead, she saw Taiji Peak Lake, which the Birtual Demon Sect had lost. It used to be their home, and was something their forebears had wanted desperately to reclaim. But looking above, she felt an immense fear of the unknown.

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Atop the Heaven Cauldron at Heaven Sacred Mountain stood two men side by side, namely Ouyang Jianwang and Yi Xingyin. Behind them was a five-colored pillar of light that shot skyward and illuminated the entire sect. In front of them were many colorful formation spirit threads spreading throughout the sect, which the many folk of Archaion and their lifebound beasts protected. They looked at the enemies outside the formation without the slightest hint of fear.

"Brother, do you know why they still came to fight this suicidal battle even though you crippled them at Tianming City? Is Nonahall so proud that they've lost their mind?" Ouyang Jianwang said as he put down the sword in his hand.

"Impossible." Yi Xingyin seemed to be in deep thought. "Ouyang, the fact that we managed to deal huge blows to our enemies doesn't mean that they're fools. We just made the best use of the opportunities available to us and took them by surprise. For them to launch an assault on the Ninefold Formation despite being at a disadvantage means that they must have some kind of trump card that we aren't aware of."

"The problem is that we're in a passive position. We can only defend and we have no idea what trick they might have," Ouyang Jianwang said.

"That's right."

"I wonder how that brat is doing after going to that five-colored star. If he discovers some secret from the black hole stars, he might be able to improve our chances."

"Oh well... I'm crippled now, and you can't exactly leave either. All we can do is wait and see." Yi Xingyin weakly shook his head.

"If you were fine like before, you'd be controlling the Ninefold Formation from Tribulation Tower right now, right?"

"Yeah. Such is life. We gain some, we lose some. That's all there is!"

"Don't be so pessimistic, Brother. You gave your all for Archaion, and that's already enough!" He patted Yi Xingyin on the shoulder and urged, "Come, drink!"

Yi Xingyin held the wine cup and took a deep breath as he looked at the army coming down on them from above. "Ninefold Formation, please hold strong...."

If the formation collapsed, Taiji Peak Lake would be defenseless, leaving the civilians helpless against the terrifying samsaran enemies. No swarm tactic would work against elites like them. Even if it did, they'd suffer huge casualties.

"Given the current situation, the sect will be done for once the formation goes down. But don't worry. Jian Wuyi is standing guard at Tribulation Tower now. I heard he made a breakthrough last night and reached the eleventh-level death phase. Now, he's on par with the other two sect masters, so he should be able to take care of anyone that comes. Not to mention, Fang Taiqing is coordinating the formation core there, too. It's safer than it's ever been," Ouyang Jianwang said.

"I'm just worried that Fang Taiqing will do something drastic."

"No way. The people from Biritual are itching to take his life, and they're outside knocking. Betraying us at this point does the Sterling House of Fang absolutely no favors. Not to mention, Nonahall must be itching to get rid of him too. They won't accept his surrender anyway. There's no way they'd turn against Biritual for the sake of the Sterling House of Fang."

"Let's hope that's the case. I already split the formation core and handed control to Xuanyuan Yu and Xuanyuan Xiao. Those two control four layers of the formation, while Jian Wuyi controls the other five."

"It can't get any better than this. Apart from Xuanyuan Dao, who's guarding Her Eminence, everyone from the Archaic House of Xuanyuan is guarding Tribulation Tower. Things should all be in place."

Yi Xingyin pondered a little more and reluctantly agreed. "Ouyang, part of the Yinyang Demon Sect's aim is to take the Heaven Cauldron, right? Will you be alright defending it alone?"

"Don't worry, I'm already attuned to the cauldron. Unless Di Zang and Po Suo come themselves, I'll be able to take out any number of people that dare approach. Even though I'm no genius, I'm basically invulnerable as long as I'm near the cauldron," he said with a confident chuckle. "I've been protecting this old piece of junk for more than a century and fed it so much fine wine. It'll definitely return the favor when the time comes."

Ouyang Jianwang squatted down and stroked the patterns of the cauldron with a warm smile.

"The founding ancestor's divine body is inside the cauldron. You must defend it well."

"That's right. The key's in my saint palace, so as long as it doesn't rupture, the key won't appear. As long as I'm alive, nobody can touch the divine body. Not to mention, one key alone won't work. The Nine Dragon Formation where Xuanyuan Dao's at is much stronger than any layer of the Ninefold Formation."

"Alright, I guess the rest is up to the heavens!" Yi Xingyin looked up at the sky as the war cries rang out. "The battle's finally starting."

Those simple words marked the worst storm the whole continent had yet seen. Almost all of the continent's samsarans were now gathered here.

"Brother!" Ouyang Jianwang put his arm around Yi Xingyin's shoulder without the slightest hint of fear as he watched the various abilities explode against the formation and forced Yi Xingyin to chug some wine before drinking some himself and tossing the wine jar off the cauldron.

It broke with a crisp sound when it landed at the same time as he drew his sword. Then he valiantly pointed it at the clouds and recited, "The sole luxury, left for lowly ones like me, is a toast before the slaughter."

### **Chapter 888 - One Man Army Fang Taiqing**

Many disciples of the sect weren't aware that there was a tower hidden deep within the mountains near Tribulation Peak. Tribulation Tower was usually closed off, and was only opened during times of war. The entire tower was well-protected by a tough formation from the outside, for the formation core of the Ninefold Formation lay within. Currently, all the formation spirit threads of Taiji Peak Lake were gathered there, where twenty of the sect's fifty-odd third-origin tribulation elders stood guard.

The hundred million civilians were more than enough to power the formation to its limits, to the point that tribulation elders didn't have to chip in themselves. The twenty plus third-origin elders, along with Jian Wuyi, Xuanyuan Xiao, and Xuanyuan Yu each had their own part of the formation to control. Thirteen of those elders were from the Xuanyuan house, five were from the Jian house, and the remaining two were unaffiliated with any of the three houses. It was plain to see that none of them were from the Fang house, as part of Fang Taiqing's own decision to dispel any suspicion or doubt.

The formation core was far too important, and not letting any from his house participate while they were still suspects due to recent events was a way to show loyalty to the goddess. Among the two hundred and fifty thousand tribulation elders of the sect, some eighty thousand were surnamed Fang, so the Sterling House of Fang did occupy a rather important position in the sect. As long as Fang Taiqing could prove himself in this battle, their house would have a bright future in Archaion.

Xuanyuan Dao had considered guarding the formation core, too, but felt that the goddess' body was more important. Not to mention, someone still had to monitor the Nine Dragon Formation. Xuanyuan Lake represented the ultimate legacy of the sect, after all, not to mention the Hexapath Sword Insight Rock that was within it. Thanks to the war, the sect had even moved the Old Deepstar Path into Xuanyuan Lake. If they were able to move the Heaven Cauldron, they would have already done so as well. The safest spot in the sect was no doubt within the Nine Dragon Formation.

While the sect itself might still exist after the Ninefold Formation was breached, the legacy of two hundred millennia would be completely gone if the Nine Dragon Formation was destroyed. Not to mention, even if Xuanyuan Dao wasn't at Tribulation Tower himself, the others of his house were there to take charge.

As Yi Xingyin was now out of the picture, Jian Wuyi was put in charge of two additional layers of the Ninefold Formation to defend against the first wave of enemy attacks, leaving Xuanyuan Xiao and Xuanyuan Yu in charge of the remaining four layers.

The Draconis House of Jian had been loyal to the Xuanyuan house for more than two hundred millennia and had always maintained a low profile, humbly contributing to the sect. So, as the Sterling House of Fang began earning the sect's suspicion, Jian Wuyi's contributions only boosted his house's reputation even more. How he held back the most powerful ghoulish king, Si Ling, to help Tianming kill her had attracted many people to his side. After all, Si Ling was someone that terrified many in Archaion even more than Xue Yi or Zi Xiao. Jian Wuyi had more or less been considered incompetent and didn't leave much of an impression, yet now he was suddenly hailed as a hero and elevated to the level of the other two masters of the sect.

Within Tribulation Tower, the corresponding formation cores of each layer were being deployed. Jian Wuyi led the five third-origin tribulation elders of the Jian house, including Jian Wufeng and Jian Qingyuan, and the five third-origin tribulation elders of the Xuanyuan house began powering the five outermost layers of the formation, though Jian Wufeng and Jian Qingyuan were a little stronger than third-origin tribulation elders, strictly speaking. Xuanyuan Xiao, Xuanyuan Yu, and the remaining ten took care of the formation cores of the inner four layers. Countless formation spirit threads began gathering the power of the civilians, causing the nine formation cores to grow bright with terrifying power that shook the entire Tribulation Peak.

"The enemy is attacking!"

"Hold on! Launch a counterattack!"

"The Cloudveil, Frostseal, and Windblade Formations are at full power!"

"Kill them! Show them who they're really going up against!"

Even though the formation cores were sealed off, their power was able to shake the entire battlefield, especially the first three layers of the formation. The Cloudveil Formation was the first, and it had the effect of making the enemies hallucinate. Many samsaras fell prey to its mental tricks. The Frostseal Formation was the signature of Archaion, inspired by its frosty weather. As for the Windblade Formation, its sharp winds would be further enhanced by the chill of the Frostseal Formation to deal double the damage. Through these formations, even those who weren't tribulation elders could make the enemies taste painful defeat.

The elites of the four sects, including Archaion, were only spotted at the fourth and fifth layers of the formation. The enemies, who had been worn down by the earlier layers of the formation, had to be punished by the next formation layer as well as enemy combatants, which made for quite an arduous charge. Despite their numbers, they were slowly being spread thin thanks to the formation layers, allowing the Archaion Sect to hold the advantage. Not to mention, even if the elites at the fourth or fifth layers were beaten back, they could still retreat through the layers without any resistance.

"They want to take Taiji Peak Lake with only double our numbers? Are they insane?"

When the samsaras flooded into the formation, things played out as most people had expected. Even the tribulation elders from Nonahall were feeling the bite. This was the reason why the allegedly powerful Nonahall couldn't wipe out the Archaion Sect that easily.

"They're insane to still try attacking with only their elites after losing their corpse army."

"Die!"

"Exterminate the ghost sect!"

War cries continuously rang throughout the battlefield.

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The sounds of war permeated the entire battlefield. Standing in front of the army, Fang Taiqing raised his colorful lance. His long, black hair suddenly glowed brightly before it began shining in multiple burning colors. He was no doubt the strongest one alive with the Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline.

Behind him, his four different-colored phoenixes ignited their wings. He now looked like a flaming war god, something that reassured and greatly boosted the morale of the tribulation elders on his side. He and his four phoenixes and their eight blazing wings looked like they could take on a whole army, sending waves across the entire battlefield and reminding everyone that he was the strongest fighter of the sect, despite not being from the Xuanyuan house.

Many elites had been born in Fang Taiqing's generation, namely, Feng Qingyu, Xue Yi, Zi Xiao, Si Ling, Xuanyuan Dao, and Dugu Jin. Among them, Fang Taiqing was undoubtedly in second place, only behind Feng Qingyu. Though, he'd had enough of being in someone else's shadow.

How he appeared today once more helped him assert his status as one of the few rare talents of the millennium. His burning passion gradually spread to the others as well. With a loud war cry, he received the enemy charge with his comrades. The flames of battle burned as Fang Taiqing pierced through the head of a third-origin tribulation elder with his lance.

"Mother, I'm sorry. I have to engage in a slaughter! The best consolation I can give you is to build you a grand tomb after Her Eminence takes over the world! One day, they will remember us not as the three slave houses of Archaion, but as the glorious Sterling House of Fang that fought and sacrificed ourselves for the goddess' glory! That day should come after Nonahall, Hexapath, and Birtual are all gone, right?"

Wherever he went, his phoenixes followed. The two armies were now clashing in full.

"Die!"

Cries of pain and slaughter rang throughout Ninefold Formation. Everything that was playing out was all within the Archaion Sect's expectations. There was no way the five sects would be able to breach the Ninefold Formation, and their confidence grew more and more... until the Ninefold Formation's power was abruptly turned against the elites of the Archaion Sect.

### **Chapter 889 - Fatal Nightmare**

Within the Tribulation Tower, the power the formation was generating could clearly be witnessed. The five layers at the very front were more than enough to greatly impact the attacking army of samсарans. When the battle first started, they were taught a harsh lesson and piled up casualties in droves.

While Nonahall's troops might be able to hold on, thanks to the hate that fueled them, the other four sects' troops, even Heptastar's, didn't dare to charge with all they had and focused on self-preservation.

Nonahall ended up suffering the most casualties, a cause for celebration for those in the Tribulation Tower if there ever was one.

"This time around, our enemy couldn't match the power of our formation with numbers. If even half a million of their samsarans manage to survive, it's my loss!" Xuanyuan Xiao cheered.

"The troops in the other three directions aren't really giving it their all. Looks like they're about to give Nonahall a lot of trouble. I wonder what those two old ghoulish kings are thinking..." Xuanyuan Yu pondered.

"They were too impatient and launched an attack the moment they came. Even if the imperial son can take care of their weaker troops, they can still bring an army of ten million to take on most of the brunt of the formation. At least they wouldn't be fighting such an uphill battle."

"That's right. They were patient enough during the siege of Tianming City. What in the world are they going to try now?"

Everyone still had quite a few doubts about the situation, but the truth that the numbers of Nonahall were being thinned was plain to see.

"Sect Master Jian, give it a slightly stronger push and destroy Nonahall! When Sect Master Fang retreats beyond the fourth layer, you can rest up," Xuanyuan Xiao said.

"Alright, no problem," Jian Wuyi said as he scrutinized the state of the battlefield with his sharp eyes.

Looks like Nonahall isn't able to push on at all... This won't do. His lips curved into a smile. Only with the Ninefold Formation gone can the killing intensify. Let's switch things up!

With both hands, he grasped the formation cores for all five layers and controlled the entire thing. The elders around him only passively helped him out. At the last moment, he shut his eyes and took a deep breath, seeing a green-robed figure in his mind's eye. "Qingyu, the era of the Jian house is finally here."

His calm voice belied the passionate gaze on his face. "Time to turn it up a notch!"

He was now at the eye of the storm. The power generation by the formation spirit threads was now his to control. No doubt, Xuanyuan Xiao and the rest were relieved to see that. As long as Jian Wuyi could push the five layers to their limits, they would definitely obtain a landslide victory.

"Now, let's blast them to the depths of hell!"

The five layers went full throttle. "Now, die!" he yelled with all his being, forgetting himself and letting himself loose after all the repression over the years. He didn't even remember why. He couldn't figure out why even though he got married and had a child and what seemed to be a fulfilling life that many others envied, especially with his wife being someone as beautiful as the coral fairy, he still never felt satisfied. Due to their different views and wavelengths, they always argued. His only moments of peace were when he trained his swordsmanship, and his ambitions and passions only flared up when he recalled the oath he had made to that person in his youth.

"Humans only have one life, so might as well use it to shake the world! Why should our house, the esteemed House of Jian, submit for the rest of eternity? Why can't we be the rulers of the world instead? Hahaha!"



He laughed maniacally and gathered more and more energy from the formation spirit threads in his control. It began uncontrollably surging as the power of the five layers grew, then culminated in an explosion that covered the entire battlefield! The fighters from Nonahall, Quadform, Heptastar, and even Archaion and their allies were caught in the blast! Nobody seemed to notice in that chaos that the entirety of Hexapath's forces were spared by the grand explosion.

"What?!" Everything fell into chaos at that moment, and those in the Tribulation Tower immediately noticed the change. Apart from those of the Draconis House of Jian, everyone was shocked.

"Jian Wuyi, are you insane?! What are you doing?!" Xuanyuan Xiao snapped with a look of disbelief.

"Stop now!"

"Halt!"

Jian Wuyi ignored them and continued laughing. He had been suppressing this laughter for far too long. Xuanyuan Xiao and Xuanyuan Yu looked each other in the eye. Almost immediately, everyone except for the Jians charged toward Jian Wuyi with their lifebound beasts.

"Stop what he's doing!"

Jian Wuyi drew his sword and said, "I've already had my fun, so I'll stop it myself." He slashed the formation cores, easily breaking them as their controller. With a loud rumble, a huge explosion occurred in the Tribulation Tower. Jian Wufeng, Jian Qingyuan and the other three gathered around Jian Wuyi, all of them looking like they were ready to kill.

The formation cores of the five layers, including the Cloudveil, Windblade and Frostseal Formations, all dimmed and crumbled. By then, Fang Taiqing and the rest had only retreated to the sixth layer. Otherwise they would've been completely exposed to Nonahall's troops. The sudden change shook the entire battlefield, making everyone dumbstruck.

"What in the world is going on?"

"The first five layers disappeared? Is this a gift from Archaion?"

"Are they trying to get themselves killed?!"

Those from Nonahall couldn't believe what they were witnessing. They felt a huge wave of hope following their initial debilitating losses, so much so that they went on a killing frenzy, unleashing all the pent-up frustration they'd had brewing since their loss at Tianming City.

"Kill! Die!" they cried as they charged toward the sixth layer. This was really good news for Nonahall, but an absolute, fatal nightmare for Archaion. Though many of its tribulation elders had escaped into the sixth layer and weren't directly attacked, they were still horribly dejected at the sudden turning of the tides. Even the third-origin tribulation elders were completely stumped, let alone the young Heaven Branch disciples, including the recently recovered Xuanyuan Yucheng and Xuanyuan Muxue.

With five layers of the Ninefold Formation gone, it was akin to the sect losing an entire half of its military might.

**Chapter 890 - Ten Years of Swordsmanship, A Lifetime of No Regret**

It wasn't just Nonahall; even Triflair, Pentaphase, and Octagram had suffered an unimaginable blow, and they were supposed to be their allies! What in the world could have happened inside the sect to result in such a thing? How could something like this happen in the Tribulation Tower when all the core members of the sect were there?

"Sect Master!"

Everyone turned to Fang Taiqing, expecting him to give them a reasonable explanation. Yet not even he knew what was going on. Just moments ago, he had been on a killing spree and saw hope of actually wiping out Nonahall's troops, yet this turn of events had suddenly extinguished his fervor.

"There's a turncoat in Tribulation Tower!" His words caused everyone to turn silent. They didn't even have time to react, for Nonahall's troops were already rushing into the sixth formation layer and it wasn't reacting to them!

"Does that mean the ones in the tower are fighting and no longer able to operate the formation?"

In other words, Archaion and its allies would be going up against their enemies without any support whatsoever. There were far too many of them; the sight of the sheer number of enemies made them gasp in shock.

Fang Taiqing's expression darkened. Now, his Sterling House of Fang was at the crossroads of survival. A few among the enemy were now targeting him—namely Po Suo, Di Zang, and Zi Xiao. There was also a young man beside them that terrified even Fang Taiqing. When his gaze met Fang Taiqing's, he saw that the youth had two irises in each eyeball.

"Jiang Wuxin.... Wasn't he the disciple of Feng Qingyu?" Right now, his world was collapsing. This was the second young man apart from Tianming that had ever made him feel utter awe. In fact, Jiang Wuxin seemed even more terrifying in comparison. Fang Taiqing was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

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Back in the Tribulation Tower, a chaotic fight was taking place. The angered elders of the sect, led by Xuanyuan Yu and Xuanyuan Xiao, were fighting off Jian Wuyi and the other five Jian house elders.

"Jian Wuyi, have you gone mad? How do you benefit from this?!" Xuanyuan Xiao spat with rage.

Jian Wuyi had even broken through to reach the death phase just before the battle. That meant he had been preparing for this day for a long time. There were some people who would intentionally remain at the edge of the life phase to get a sudden boost in strength when they broke through to the death phase. However, this was incredibly hard to do at the tenth level and above, where insights on how to progress came few and far between. Jian Wuyi had endured being 'weak' for a horribly long time just so he could go crazy today.

"Benefits?" Jian Wuyi seemed incredibly relaxed, even as he faced off against a few people at a time.

"Well, there really isn't any for me, personally. All I want is to take advantage of this chaos to elevate my House of Jian to the next level."

He wasn't just referring to the Draconis House of Jian. Based on that omission, Xuanyuan Xiao and the rest immediately understood his goals.

"So you're defecting to Fang Qingyu's side? How could you ever serve someone as dastardly as him? Were you tricked?" Xuanyuan Yu said with disbelief.

"Don't forget, Jian Wuyi, the Draconis House of Jian is the main house! The Fengs are traitors to your house! How could you serve traitorous dogs like them?! Your ancestors must be rolling in their graves!" Xuanyuan Xiao was shouting so loud his throat was about to burst. He felt incredibly hurt, having placed his confidence in Jian Wuyi and letting him take on such a huge role in the Tribulation Tower, and even allowing Fang Taiqing to exclude himself from it.

In the past two hundred millennia, the Draconis House of Jian had never once betrayed the sect. Their forebears had stood by the Xuanyuans' side over the course of all their hardships and they were as close as brothers. Even though in recent years, the Sterling House of Fang had started playing a prominent role in the sect, the Xuanyuan house was still incredibly close to the Jian house. Nothing had changed over the course of such a long time.

Even though the founding ancestor of the Draconis House of Jian hadn't ascended to godhood, he had been the right-hand man of Great Emperor Xuanyuan. His descendants had also never been mistreated in the long history of the sect, enjoying the same access to resources as the Xuanyuans. The fact that this betrayal was neither warranted nor expected made it even worse.

Jian Wuyi seemed completely indifferent to Xuanyuan Yu's questioning. "You don't really have to be that surprised, you know. The Jian house produced the Hexapath Sword God. If it weren't for the stubbornness of our seniors, the fractured House of Jian would've reunited long ago and become an even stronger unit. Our ties with the Xuanyuan house have held us back for two hundred millennia. It's about time we parted ways, right? No hard feelings."

"No hard feelings? Hahaha, you expect that from us after trying to bring about our extermination?"

"We just walk different paths. It's only natural to plot against each other. There's no point in talking about this anymore, so I'll wish you good luck." Jian Wuyi ordered the rest and their beasts to retreat. "I left four layers of the formation intact on account of our past relations. All we wanted was to tip the scales of the battle a little, or the House of Jian wouldn't have any chances at all. You'd better hurry and secure what remains of your formation! Farewell!"

He rushed out of the Tribulation Tower with the others, while Xuanyuan Xiao and the rest couldn't even give chase. They still had to sustain what remained of the formation. Currently, the enemy had charged into the sixth layer unaffected. They immediately had to get the remaining layers to work!

"Everyone, we haven't lost yet!" They looked each other in the eye, still spirited and resolute despite their earlier wrath.

"Go!" Hurriedly, they assumed their positions near the formation cores. This was going to be an uphill battle, and a hopeless one without the formation.

"If these four layers are broken, all the civilians in Taiji Peak Lake, our young disciples, and everything in the sect will be exposed to danger!"

The Tribulation Tower was now dead silent, apart from the loud heartbeats of those that remained.

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On the battlefield in the east of Taiji Peak Lake, Feng Qingyu waved for the hundred thousand tribulation elders of Hexapath to stop.

"Sect Master, five layers of the formation are gone. Why aren't we pressing on?"

Many others echoed this sentiment.

"Just stop. We're waiting for someone," Feng Qingyu said. The rest were shocked to see the sword maniac smile for the first time in what must have been his entire life as he looked toward Taiji Peak Lake. It was as if he had heard an answer he wanted to hear. It came from the depths of his heart.

"Who are we waiting for?"

"Someone really important. Our real brothers in arms. Our family from the Jian house. The same blood flows in their veins as well as ours. The same spirit dwells in their sea of consciousness as well as ours! All we have to do now is to welcome them with open arms!"

Could it really be who they thought it was? The others found it rather hard to believe that the main Jian house, who couldn't even accept someone like the Hexapath Sword God, would actually join them.

"So Jian Wuyi was the one who caused the five layers to fall!"

They all began discussing the revelation, still flabbergasted that it had actually happened. They looked up and saw their sect master stand at a high point with his arms behind his back and his green robes fluttering, the smile still lingering on his face. He looked as if he had returned to his youth, that fateful day when two youths from the two Houses of Jian met.

"Are you a Feng? The Fengs of the Tai'e House of Jian?" asked the youth in blue.

"Are you from the accursed Draconis House of Jian?" asked the other.

They crossed swords time and time again, neither relenting the slightest bit from their ingrained stubbornness and refusal to give ground to the other house, until one day, they felt the loneliness suddenly set in and realized how much they missed crossing swords with each other. It was like they had lived their whole lives during that decade of crossing swords. It was a pinnacle of their lives they could probably never return to.