

The Ages 981

Chapter 981 - Ghoul Gate, Open

As night fell, the moonlight gradually highlighted the corners of Duyue Mansion, making it look like an ethereal immortal abode. All of a sudden, a sharp rumbling came from the east of the mansion. What followed was a cacophony of shrieks and collapsing buildings. There were those who cried out in pain, and those that cried in despair. Huiyue Du and Yusheng Luo were startled as they were absorbing stellar source to cultivate at their yard, so they hurriedly retrieved their totems and paused their cultivation.

"What's going on?!" Yusheng Luo said, startled.

"It must be that killer from yesterday! Does that animal think that the Huiyue Clan is its hunting grounds? We'll put it to death and tear it to pieces today!" Huiyue Du turned and looked in the direction of the chaos. "Wait here, I'll go there and subdue it!"

"Be careful. The killer managed to snuff out Liu Yizhao without anyone noticing," his wife said worriedly.

"I'm no Liu Yizhao, it won't be able to escape tonight." Huiyue Du saw many other comrades heading toward the disturbance. He immediately left the mansion, turning into a beam of blue light. With his totems, he was able to travel at blinding speeds. But not long after he left, he heard a rumble from his mansion followed by Yusheng Luo's surprised cry.

"Dammit!" he roared and immediately turned back. They had just been discussing this matter during the day, and now the killer had come to them on that very same day! "Die, you beast!"

He charged toward his sleeping quarters and unleashed all five of his primalsea fiends. The blue giants wielding tridents immediately dominated the airspace around the mansion. Before even finding the offender, he had caused many parts of his mansion to collapse himself.

Then, Yusheng Luo's totems, the clouddream vines, began chaotically flailing around.

"Luo!" Huiyue Du immediately charged in her direction and saw his wife amidst the storm of flailing vines. However, she was kneeling on the ground and looking at him with a pale, despairing expression. There was a white hand on her head. It belonged to a man in a white robe disguised from head to toe and emanating an ominous aura, his hand still gripped firmly on her head. He looked just like a god of death.

"Let her go or you'll die without an intact corpse!" Huiyue Du yelled in desperation. As he charged toward the two, the man removed his hat with his other hand, revealing a bald, white jade-like scalp that made his head look like a pearl. His pale eyes and lips were expressionless, making him look like a stoic marble statue.

"Who are you?!" Huiyue Du said, shocked at the sight.

"You don't know me?" Bodhi said with a gentle voice. If not for the fact that he was crushing Yusheng Luo's head and allowing her blood to stain his robes, he would look no different from a gentle saint.

"A specter? Where'd you come from?" Huiyue Du said nervously. It was from these words that Bodhi confirmed what the moon guide had said about how nobody else would relate this matter to the Ninefold Hell apart from the moon guide himself. As long as that was the case, no matter how wild Bodhi was during his massacre, the remnants of his kin would be safe and sound. It made things much simpler.

"You still haven't realized?" Bodhi put his hat back on, which somehow made him lose his gentle aura. Now he only looked like a killing machine.

"Realize what?" Huiyue Du said, swallowing his rage.

"She's already dead." He loosened his hand, causing the body of Yusheng Luo to fall to the ground. Her head flopped back and her lifeless eyes were pointed toward Huiyue Du.

Bodhi gave the body a kick, sending it into a corner. The gigantic white wolf that had been waiting there immediately pounced toward it, knowing full well that this was the culprit that had killed her mother.

The sounds of the wolf's jaws crunching down on the body was nightmarish to Huiyue Du. He despaired with rage and almost broke down immediately. "Luo! Luo!" he roared as he charged toward the demonic wolf. But the man in a white robe appeared in front of him and punched out.

Huiyue Du immediately engaged him with his five primalsea fiends. "Die! You must die!" He cried so hard that his voice box almost broke, yet the enemy before him didn't so much as react. He was a cold, calculating machine of vengeance.

"Ghoul Gate, open!" Bodhi said, ostensibly using an ability. He traced a golden circle in the air, which opened to let out countless strands of black hair that lashed out like venomous snakes, wrapping all around Huiyue Du and his totems. Bloody water seeped from the hair into their bodies.

Bodhi swerved ethereally and reappeared near Huiyue Du, sending a punch slamming into his body and shattering his innards. Huiyue Du's eyes widened and he sprayed blood from his mouth onto Bodhi's robe. The countless hairs had now made countless bloody holes in his body. Within a single exchange, Huiyue Du was almost dead. He wasn't even a match! His current state was a complete contrast to the time when he had slaughtered the specters with abandon. Now he despaired even more as a torrent of terror washed over his mind. "Don't kill me! What do you want?!"

"Where's your daughter, Huiye Shi?" Bodhi asked. That question stumped Huiyue Du. Why would someone like that bother to ask about his daughter?

"Answer me."

"No, I can't!" Huiyue Du knew that the specter wouldn't forgive him no matter what. He was dead for sure, and didn't want to bring his daughter down with him.

"I'll tell you a few secrets," Bodhi said, seeing other pursuers about to reach him. "First, your son died because your daughter worked with someone on the Flameyellow Continent to kill him and blame it on the specters. Second, I want to settle the debt of blood with the divine moonrace. I want to make you all go extinct."

The manner in which he uttered the word 'extinct' almost sounded like he was talking about something plain and routine. He didn't give Huiyue Du a chance to contemplate his words, but immediately finished him off with a punch. Then he took all his treasures, including his blade.

"Even if you don't tell me, I'll find her." While finding someone with relatively low status was harder than someone of high status in a city like this, there was still no escape. Huiyue Du collapsed dead, and the wolf soon ate him up.

"Little You, let's keep going," Bodhi said with a smile.

"Daddy..." She wiped off the blood at the corner of her mouth and leaped into his embrace. The two of them disappeared into the chaotic night.

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Tianming and Huiyue Shi were on the way back to the Shiyu Compound when all that went down. Chaotic cries could be heard all over. It appeared that several locations around Huiyue City were disturbed at the same time. Many people were flying around outside, manifesting their totems. Some were hundreds of meters tall, which was an impressive sight for Tianming to behold.

"What's going on?" Huiyue Shi said, shocked.

"It must be the killer from yesterday," Tianming said.

Right at that instant, they heard more cries from a building to their left. Many totems manifested, only to dim and vanish almost immediately. One after another, the divine moonrace fell. The killer who was able to so easily take out Liu Yizhao was now on a killing spree. Yesterday, he had only killed eighteen from the middle class, but now he had killed tens of divine moonrace, indiscriminate of age, status, or gender. They all died horrid, terrifying deaths.

"That's Zhuzhu's house!" Huiyue Shi immediately wanted to rush there.

"Don't go!" Tianming cried. His instincts told him that she wouldn't stand a chance at all.

"It's Zhuzhu's family!" Huiyue Shi's tears began flowing.

"Stop talking! Don't get yourself killed!" He gripped her by her cheeks and pulled her aside. Then, he looked in that direction with Plundering Eye and saw a white-robed man with a girl in his arms leaving the mansion. Soon, other members of the Huiyue Clan arrived and Tianming released Huiyue Shi.

The moment she entered the mansion, she broke out in tears. Her precious friend had perished amidst the chaos. Now that the killer had gone on a rampage, he didn't even bother dealing with the corpses like the others and just killed them and left the bodies where they fell before switching to another place and continuing his slaughter. The pursuers could only follow half a step behind on a wild goose chase.

Someone so powerful to slaughter away at the Huiyue Clan's home base was enough to send the whole city into a panic. Tianming furrowed his brows. While this was the Huiyue Clan's problem and had nothing to do with him, it would definitely get in the way of his plan to settle down and find Ye Lingfeng.

"It feels like the killer's exacting revenge," Tianming concluded as he observed the aftermath.

Chapter 982 - Veneramoon Formation

The moment he said that, even more people were dying elsewhere. The killer was even lashing out against normal divine moonrace in a wild killing spree.

"Huiye Shi!" somebody cried out. Tianming turned back and saw a middle-aged man in a dark-blue robe entering with a pained expression.

"Uncle Huiyue Hai?" she said, stunned.

"Go back to your parents' mansion. There has been a battle there. I'm afraid your parents are gone," Huiyue Hai said.

"What?" She felt herself blackout and almost faint as she slumped weakly to the ground like her soul had left her body. The death of her parents hit far harder than that of her friend. Not only had she lost two people that cared dearly for her, she had also lost the ones she relied upon.

"Bring... bring me back..." She turned to Tianming and pulled on his sleeve with a pleading gaze as if she was clinging to her final lifeline.

"Alright, let's go." She didn't even have the energy to walk, so Tianming carried her on his back. They weren't too far from Duyue Mansion now, so they arrived soon enough. Once they were inside, Tianming set her down.

There were only traces of blood, but no corpses. A few servants stood blankly there. When they saw her return, they kneeled harrowingly and said, "The lord and lady are both gone..."

Huiye Shi slumped down to the ground in the yard. The petals of the cherry blossoms continued indifferently falling after being ruffled by the wind. During that day itself, she had been coquettishly pestering her parents to get her way to get Tianming some status. Little did she know that it would be her last time talking to her parents.

"Waaah..." She began sobbing uncontrollably.

Tianming patted her shoulder, not sure of what else he could do to console her. This had all happened far too suddenly. But at that moment, his body shuddered when he felt a deathly threat nearby.

He immediately turned back and looked in the distance, spotting the white-robed man on top of a tall tower. While his face was obscured, Tianming could tell that he was looking straight at him and Huiye Shi. He couldn't recognize the man, thanks to the distance, but the man was already menacingly charging toward them the next instant.

He's going all out. Is he targeting someone in particular?! Right as he thought that, a large group of people from the Huiyue Clan appeared. There were a few elders that seemed particularly strong.

"Animal!" They finally found the killer. The white-robed man charged toward the mansion's flank as more elites of the Huiyue Clan surrounded him. They had finally found the elusive killer that had been wreaking havoc the whole night.

Countless totems in the sky charged toward the man. This was a battle of the gods that blotted out the entire sky in an instant. Tianming was worried for Feiling's safety, and some paranoid part of him was thinking that she could have been killed without him knowing. As the man was engaged, he dragged Huiye Shi and ran back to the Shiyu Compound.

The sounds of battle continued ringing out behind them as they left. While Huiye Shi was still crying, Tianming was deep in thought. Why did I have a feeling that he was looking at me differently?

Soon, they snuck back to Shiyu Compound. Thanks to the chaos, Feiling had been waiting at the entrance. When she saw Tianming's safe return, she finally relaxed. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, but she isn't."

Huiye Shi was still crying.

"What happened?"

Tianming told her of the day's events. Though he got his identification, Huiye Shi's parents and even Liu Yizhao were now gone. Logically speaking, Tianming should already be safe, but he felt a threat from the man in the white robe even though he only looked like he was targeting the divine moonrace. Tianming looked toward the Duyue Mansion, where the battle was still ongoing, but it was quickly moving from one part to another. The enemy was fast, if nothing else.

"Let me console her for now," Feiling said.

"Alright, I'll leave her to you. I'll go cultivate!"

The chaos didn't have anything to do with him, strictly speaking. He thought back to the matter of Ye Lingfeng. Now that his heavenly will had grown once more, he continued absorbing the stellunar source as the battle raged on. The silvery moonlight began fusing with his tribulation force until he finally reached the tenth-level death phase.

"Only four phases left to go." He couldn't wait to reach the Ascension stage.

"The divine moon hall of the Huiyue Clan should have enough insights for me to reach the twelfth-level death phase, but I'll still have to rely on myself to ascend. Now that Huiye Shi's parents are gone, nobody will know that I came from the Flameyellow Continent, and nobody will care about Huiyue Yin's matter anymore, so I no longer need to hide my power. I just hope this killer doesn't interfere with my plans!"

His mind was sharp and clear from the recent breakthrough. Despite the cruel slaughter that was going on, there was nothing he could do to help. "With so many elites there, they should be able to handle it."

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The next day, Tianming appeared much gloomier than before, thanks to being in the death phase. Huiye Shi was still soullessly huddled in a corner of the courtyard, with Feiling beside her.

"Are you better now?" Tianming asked.

"How could I be?" Huiye Shi said.

"Have they caught the killer yet? Is he dead? Who is he?"

"We got nothing," she said, biting her lip. "He escaped, and we still don't know who he is."

"Then it's going to be worrying. He might just continue his slaughter again."

"We're fine for now."

"What do you mean?"

"Just look above."

Tianming did as he was told and saw a formation encompassing the sky above them. It looked like a pink dome with blooming cherry blossoms, each of them representing countless heavenly patterns.

"Is this a protective formation?" Tianming asked.

"Yes. It's Huiyue City's Veneramoon Formation. Since that person escaped yesterday, the city went under lockdown. No matter who it is, they won't be able to reenter. Anyone that tries forcing their way in will immediately be detected and attacked. Now, anyone outside won't be able to enter," Huiye Shi explained.

"That sounds like a decent plan. What level is the barrier?" The formation looked a little average on the surface, but it was far more complex if one paid close attention. The formation had been passed down over millions of years in the city and was powered by the stellunar source, so it was bound to be powerful.

Chapter 983 - Violetglory Star - Wondersky Realm

"We'll be laughingstocks when others find out we sealed the entire city because of a single killer... Not to mention, keeping the city sealed for the long term isn't a solution. The fact that we're being forced into a corner like this means that the killer went too far," Huiye Shi said, not answering Tianming's question but wallowing in her own despair instead. Even though the formation had been deployed, the Huiyue Clan had already suffered a lot.

"The formation won't fix everything. It's not like we can keep the city sealed forever."

That was rather troublesome. The Veneramoon Formation had to be dispelled sooner or later. Word of that soon spread and the whole of the Divine Moon Realm, not just Huiyue City, began worrying about this new menace. That night alone, nearly a thousand divine moonrace had been killed. For rulers of the Divine Moon Realm to be slaughtered like that humiliated and enraged the rest.

"I have to mourn for my parents, so you're free to do whatever you please in the next few days. Go to the divine moon hall yourself," Huiye Shi said as she stood up.

"Alright." Tianming nodded.

"I'll be going now," she said gloomily.

"My condolences."

Huiye Shi forced a smile and said, "My parents are dead and I no longer have any backing. I think it'll be hard for me to get you any treasures. At least you'll get to use the divine moon hall."

She then left, crestfallen. Her entire life had been upended within mere moments. The people around her had died one after another. Who would be next?

Tianming and Feiling turned to one another within the Shiyu Compound's courtyard.

"She seems rather pitiful," Feiling said.

"It isn't something we could've predicted. That killer was far too savage. I wonder what sort of grudge he has against the divine moonrace."

"Big Brother, did you see him?"

"I did. Twice, in fact. I felt like he might've been looking at me, but I couldn't be sure."

"Either way, we'll at least be safe as long as the formation is up."

"That's right."

"So how's your progress at the divine moon hall?"

"Not bad, how about you?" Tianming asked.

"Same for me. I might reach the second level soon enough."

"Damn, you're getting so powerful now. I surrender."

Despite the chaos, they went to the divine moon hall unobstructed. From now on their schedule was to go to the divine moon hall during the day and absorb stellar source at night.

"I was able to just barely defeat Huiyue Yin at the tenth-level life phase by working with Ling'er. Now that I have access to the stellar source, I might be able to defeat first-level ascendants myself." Soon, he noticed that his understanding of the Ascension stage was quite lacking. "I'd better read the books Huiye Shi brought me."

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Among the gigantic trees outside Huiyue City, Bodhi stood at the highest point, holding his daughter's hand. Little You seemed so frail that the wind would easily topple her.

"They sealed it rather quickly. The question is how long they'll be able to keep this up? Even if all of the Eightmoon Skycities are sealed, will they be able to seal off the other tens of thousands of cities for me alone?" The thought made him chuckle. His slaughter had completely terrorized them.

"Daddy, can't we just break into the formation?"

"Of course not. Let's head to Yusheng City."

"Okay. At the very least, the three main culprits, including Mommy's killer, have been dealt with," she said.

"There's only the two young'uns that sparked it all left. Since they're both here, it'll save us the time looking for them."

"That's right. The white-haired one is the one who killed Big Brother as well."

"What do you want to do next?" Bodhi asked, gently carrying her up.

"Bite him to death," she said.

"Have you gotten used to it, my darling?"

"I have. I just need to swallow it quickly."

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How should Ye Lingfeng even describe this world? He had no other word for it apart from chaos, endless chaos. It didn't look normal in any sense of the word. There were far too many odd phenomena, such as the twisting space. The path under his feet itself was twisted. There were many grand palaces and buildings ahead of him, but they weren't rooted to the ground. Some were even upside down. Many of the tiles that lined the roofs were scattering into ash. There were all sorts of people before him. Some didn't have heads, some had grass sprouting from their abdomens, and some only had half a body, but even weirder was the fact that they greeted him when they saw him.

"Nice to meet you. First time in the xenomemory space? Remember to come here often," said a horse with half a body as it galloped past him.

Not far ahead of him, a house that had eyes and a mouth swallowed up a passerby. There seemed to be a city of sorts in the distance where people walked along the walls, or even upside down entirely. Ye Lingfeng had been walking in this twisted world for a long time. Beside him, a gust of wind blew. The wind soon turned into the three-headed, six-armed soulfiend with three faces, representing joy, rage, and grief respectively.

"It feels like I'm dreaming. I didn't think a world as weird as my dreams could actually exist in the real world." Ye Lingfeng stretched out his hand.

A fine speck of pollen fell onto his fingers, then bloomed into a flower with a face that asked him, "Nice to meet you. Does my fragrance smell good?"

From those words, Ye Lingfeng knew that his memories were leaking into this world. The soulfiend seemed to groan a few times with some difficulty.

"Are you saying that dreamscapes really exist? So when humans sleep, the caelum no longer records any memory and enters the xenomemory space and roams within it?"

The soulfiend nodded.

"Huh. So if I continue here, I might be able to find an exit."

Thus he continued along this mess of a world for a long time. Along the way, an ant asked him, "Brother Feng, are you worried about forever becoming part of this dreamscape?"

"I am."

"Fear is futile. You won't be able to leave, hehe."

Ye Lingfeng didn't really feel like answering the ant. He closed his eyes and covered his ears as he continued onward, smashing one twisted world after another. Eventually, light pierced through his eyelids, attracting his attention.

"What's that?" When he opened his eyes, he saw a gigantic blob of seven-colored light that vaguely seemed like butterflies in the void. Each time they flapped their wings, countless specks of colored light spread all over.

"Butterflies in the dreamscape..." He continued his walk even faster with a dazed look while the soulfliend wrapped around his body. The closer they got to the butterflies, the bigger they appeared. Half a month later, they could no longer see the entirety of the butterflies; instead, he found himself fast against the butterfly-shaped world, but he wasn't able to enter it. That colored light seemed to form a sort of barrier that kept him apart from the world.

Leaning against the barrier, Ye Lingfeng looked inside. "This is..."

He saw many normal people in the world, cultivating and sparring. He could hear their cheerful conversation. They spoke of things so mundane and normal that they didn't remotely belong to a dreamscape.

"Are they real people that exist in this world?" He wasn't willing to believe it. He hadn't seen any 'real' people since he came here, and wanted to go in to give it a good look. The soulfliend began grumbling once more.

"Are you saying they're all caeli?" Ye Lingfeng turned to the soulfliend with shock as it nodded excitedly. "So you're able to send my caelum to them too?"

The soulfliend nodded again.

"Let's give it a try then!" He sat atop the butterfly world as light enveloped him and the soulfliend made him fall asleep. When he was out cold, an ethereal silhouette appeared above his head. The soulfliend held this ethereal figure with its mist-turned hands and forced it through the barrier.

All of a sudden, Ye Lingfeng woke up in another world. There were sights of nature as well as a sun and moon there. Many young disciples chatted and laughed ahead of him. It all seemed so realistic. He knew that this body of his was only his caelum, but for some reason, it felt like real flesh and blood to him.

"I wonder who made this world of caeli."

While he was still stunned, a voice said, "Hello and welcome to Violetglory Star's wondersky realm. As a disciple of this place, you may obtain legacies, battle arts, and techniques through combat."

Ye Lingfeng was completely flabbergasted. All of a sudden, a formless hand stretched out toward him and pulled him back out into the xenomemory space.

"What'd you pull me out for?" he asked the soulfliend.

The soulfierd merely motioned its gigantic finger in front of his mouth in a hush gesture. Ye Lingfeng hurriedly turned back and saw a huge, headless figure in violet about a hundred meters tall. The creature had gigantic violet eyes on its chest that scanned its surroundings.

"An abomination..." Ye Lingfeng breathed a sigh of relief.

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Tianming continued making progress at Huiyue City. He felt that he would soon break through to reach the eleventh-level life phase.

"It's rather tough obtaining any other cultivation resources, apart from the divine moon hall, now that Huiye Shi's parents are gone."

He took out the spirit core he had obtained all the way back at Red Twill Mountain and toyed around with it. "I've now more or less mastered the Soulshaker Eye. Let's take a look at the Godsoul Canon and see what it has in store for the next level. If I can use the Skypolarity Eye, I'll be able to open a way to the wondersky realm!"

He recalled the voice from the spirit core. "Young man, if you cultivate the Godsoul Canon to the level of Skypolarity Eye, the spirit core shall truly open. You'll be able to reach the wondersky realm at that point and seek out my miraculous legacy!"

Chapter 984 - Divine Will in Albi

A few days later in the divine moon hall at the center of the city, Tianming was surrounded by a million silver moons. Each of the caeli were orbiting his body as the insights from all those ancestors of the divine moonrace flooded past his mind's eye.

The cultivation methods of the divine moonrace differed somewhat from the rootbeast race's. Firstly, none of them had the Beast Vein, Spiritsource, and Unity stages. At the moment of their birth, they already had saint bodies. At the age of two or three, they would begin gaining insight into heavenly will, based on their talent, and begin their path of cultivation. It wasn't surprising, as those three aforementioned stages were the basis of forming a bond between the beasts and the beastmaster, so the divine moonrace who didn't have any wouldn't need those stages. Normal humans that didn't have totems would almost never have saint bodies if birthed from parents who weren't samsarans.

As such, the only difference in their cultivation were the two stages before the Saint stages. In other words, the cultivation methods of the different races merged into a similar path from the Saint stages onward with only slight differences, and this applied to the rootbeast race, the bane race, and the specter race.

Tianming's previous insights, as well as those he had gleaned from various caeli, were all based on the rootbeast race. When he witnessed the caeli of the specters, his horizons had been expanded. Even more so now, after seeing the crystallization of the efforts of the divine moonrace over millions of years. All the wondrous things he had seen allowed him to fill in the gaps of his knowledge at a rapid pace, quickly fueling the growth of his Imperial Will despite the rapid progress he had just recently made. Coupled with the stellunar source, his rise in power was bound to happen.

Huiye Shi was definitely right that if Tianming could rise that prominently on the Flameyellow Continent, he could definitely soar at the Divine Moon Realm, especially with his blessings of the Primordial Chaos Beasts and the Aeonian Grandbane. It was as if a miraculous dragon fish had transformed into an actual dragon during the hours of dawn.

After gathering much of the stellunar source, he began forming the life samsara rings of the eleventh level. He didn't think that he would be able to return to the life phase right after witnessing insights from the caeli in the divine moon hall. Now, his lively vigor had grown even more, allowing his tribulation force to reach higher peaks.

"Lately I've been converting all my tribulation force into the fundamental cosmic force of the stellunar source. I'm growing nearer and nearer to the Ascension stage. At that point, I'll be free from the Welkin plane and able to embrace the world of the astralscape of order. The stellunar source is much more suited for converting energy for the Ascension stage, after all!"

He knew that there was a fundamental difference between the forces of the Samsara and Ascension stages. However, the four Primordial Chaos Beast codices he used to form his samsara rings, coupled with his Aeonian Grandbane and the stellunar source, made up for the qualitative difference.

"At the eleventh-level life phase, I might be able to just barely take on a second-level ascendant."

In the past few days, Tianming had read up on lots of information about the Ascension stage in preparation to reach it. There were twelve levels of the Ascension stage in total. Comparatively, the Samsara stage had twenty-four phases—two in each level—so the power gained from one phase to the next was lower compared to going from one level of the Ascension stage to the next. As such, those in the Divine Moon Realm only considered the Samsara stage to truly have twelve levels, seeing the life and death phases as only parts of the levels. Even so, it wasn't that big of a difference apart from the way it was called. That difference might not matter to anyone but Tianming, for he might be the only person at the eleventh-level of the Samsara stage that could rival ascendants.

The difference between levels of the Ascension stage was much more pronounced, with second-level ascendants far more powerful than first-level ascendants. Tianming was able to face off against a first-level ascendant at the tenth level of the Samsara stage, and a second-level ascendant at the eleventh level. If he reached the death phase, he might have an even easier time against a second-level ascendant, though being able to rival a third-level ascendant would be a reach.

"I reckon I need to reach the twelfth-level death phase before I'm able to face off against a third-level ascendant." That was the reason the Divine Moon Realm, and even Orderia considered the Samsara stage to only have twelve levels rather than twenty-four discrete phases. Compared to the Ascension stage, the difference between each phase in the Samsara stage was far too minuscule.

If someone at the Ascension stage claimed to be able to kill an enemy three to four levels above them, nobody would believe it. After all, most peak elites of the Divine Moon Realm were ascendants who, despite their fifty years of prime cultivation time, only reached the first level of the Ascension stage after around a century of cultivation. After that, they would struggle to make breakthroughs for the rest of their lives, much of that due to the sheer magnitude of difference between each level.

"To be able to understand the disparity between each level, one has to first understand the Ascension stage!" Through diving into books and listening to Feiling's explanation, he began to want to know about the Ascension stage more and more. The common understanding was that becoming an ascendant represented a complete change of a lifeform on a fundamental level. The physical body, soul, energy, and heavenly will would all change completely.

All the changes started with the heavenly will. When a cultivator, specter, beastmaster, or totem user grew their heavenly will to full maturity, a fundamental change would occur and their heavenly will would convert into divine will. Reaching divine will represented fully treading a cultivation path and taking the first step into the realm of the stars. They would be able to touch the fundamental laws of the universe and embark upon the path of dissociating from the Welkin plane.

A cultivator utilized a fundamental cosmic force, a force from the universe itself, to strengthen their own heavenly wills and reserves of energy. Heavenly will and divine will were derived from an understanding of the natural laws that governed these energies and forces. Spiritual energy, stellunar sources, and nova sources alike were all natural forces that could be converted into energy to be stored within the body. In that sense, the body of each individual cultivator could be considered its own microcosmic universe. The orbit of the billions of heavenly bodies were concentrated into heavenly and divine will. Once the fundamental cosmic force entered the body, it would form tribulation and ascension force. The order of the heavens could control the fundamental cosmic forces in the universe!

The only reason the fundamental cosmic forces didn't explode or collapse into instability and swallow the masses was due to the heavenly laws that controlled them. Each cultivator's energy was only able to be utilized by them in a stable state within the saint palace because the cultivators had learned the ways of heaven through heavenly will to control the forces. In other words, the more power one wanted to control, the more heavenly laws one would have to understand.

In that sense, if a person were able to learn the heavenly laws and control the forces in their own body, each person would be their own universe. Through ancient tomes, Tianming finally understood the foundations of heavenly and divine wills. Basically, the cultivator was only trying to mimic the universe by controlling the forces using its laws.

On the Flameyellow Continent, he couldn't see the chaotic flows of the universe, nor its foundations. But now he clearly understood the relationship between him and the universe. Heavenly will wasn't some abstract concept someone had come up with on a whim. Only by distancing himself from the Welkin plane would he be able to see the true form of the universe.

That was why the Ascension stage was so important. It was at this stage that cultivators would truly be able to use their heavenly will to witness the primordial state of the universe. If the ones who flew in the sky were gods, then the Ascension stage would be the first stage of godhood.

The transformation began when heavenly will turned into divine will and spread out across the sea of consciousness. After that, it would dissipate into billions of fragments and seep into the cultivator's body. Bodies were formed from countless discrete units that the eye couldn't see. Each of those discrete units would be infused with divine will and be able to store power. The cultivators of the astralscape of order called each of these discrete units an albus.

Albi could be infinitely small or large. Once each albus possessed divine will, it would become a simplified version of the universe able to store fundamental cosmic force. In other words, divine will existed inside albi.

Each albus would be able to form new saint palaces that stored energy. That was the key to breaking through to the Ascension stage. That way, the body would grow to be able to store far more energy than before. Once the new energy entered the albi and fell under the control of divine will, it would form an astral disc, which was a new energy vortex akin to saint springs.

Every single albus had its own astral disc, in the middle of which was the divine will. For instance, once Tianming became an ascendant, his Grand-Orient Sword-shaped heavenly will would transform into divine will, which would split up into billions of fragments that infused each and every one of his albi within their astral discs. In other words, cultivators would have billions of energy cores, each with their own astral discs.

Every astral disc had infinite growth potential, assuming that the divine will was capable of controlling the power stored within. For each breakthrough in the Ascension stage to be possible, one would have to grow their divine will. All ascendants had astral discs, and the force within them was called astralforce, which was far superior to tribulation force.

Huiyue Yin, Bodhi, and the rest all used astralforce. Bodhi had come from the Ninefold Hell and had a high level and powerful divine will, so the astralforce he could use was incredibly powerful. He simply lacked access to a fundamental cosmic force, so after he came to the Divine Moon Realm, he was able to absorb a lot of it in a short time, thus becoming so powerful.

Different cultivators had different methods of achieving progress, but at their core, all of them were trying to gain insights into the laws of the universe.

Chapter 985 - Twelve Levels of Ascension

The Ascension stage was so powerful because of the astral discs that could be used to absorb stellar source. That transformation was also what differentiated a saint body from a divine body. The divine bodies of Great Emperor Xuanyuan and Xuanyuan Xi were basically formed entirely of astral discs.

The divine moonrace considered the start of their cultivation to be the Saint stages, but there were four major levels rather than the three separate Saint stages of earth, sky, and empyrean. As they still possessed saint bodies at the Samsara stage, they considered the Samsara stage as the last of the Saint stages, though it was just a nominal difference at best.

Though, the divine moonrace didn't think that they started on a relatively high level on their cultivation. After all, they didn't need to form beast veins or unity fields with their lifebound beasts. Instead, they believed that normal humans started far too low beneath them. They looked down on the world below, but they didn't think too highly of themselves in comparison.

Once one reached the Ascension stage, their body with heavenly will and saint springs would be converted into one with divine will and astral discs. That was the hallmark of divine bodies. It was also said that the terra, caelum, and vita would all undergo some changes.

According to the information Tianming had, the twelve levels of the Ascension stage had something to do with the astral arrangement of the lower levels of the cosmic aether. Long story short, the stronger the astralforce, the easier it was to escape the bindings of the Welkin plane to reach the Divine Moon Realm, and eventually Orderia, in the astralscape of order. The Divine Moon Realm was situated in the 'middle' part of the lower areas of the cosmic aether, called the Brightmoon Sky. Beyond that were the Dipole and Trisource Skies.

For those who were able to reach the Brightmoon Sky, where the Divine Moon Realm was, they would be first-level ascendants. If one was able to reach the Dipole Sky, they would be second-level ascendants. Those that could reach the Trisource Sky were third-level ascendants and so on.

As such, the twelve levels of the Ascension stage were named for the skies they could reach. The four lower skies were namely the Brightmoon, Dipole, Trisource, and Quadseal Skies. The four center skies included the Pentarcenic, Hexaunity, Heptaglory, and Octasaint Skies. The four higher skies were the Nonahonor, Decapath, Lifecycle, and Orderian Skies respectively. In other words, the name for the eleventh level was Lifecycle Sky, while Orderian Sky was the name of the peak of the Ascension stage.

At that point, the astralforce in one's body would allow one to completely free themselves from the binding of the Welkin plane to reach the Orderian Sky, or in other words, the astralscape of order. As for the eleventh stage, Lifecycle Sky, it was the bottom layer of the highest level. It was said that the Divine Moon Realm was the only world in the lowest star layer. However, the many other star layers might have many different astral worlds. There was no way that the eleven star layers above the Divine Moon Realm were empty. Orderia definitely had many other outposts in the layers above, but they were probably impossible to see due to the sheer distance that separated them from the Divine Moon Realm.

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Huiye Shi said that Liu Yizhao and her late mother Yusheng Luo were both at the sixth level, Hexaunity Sky. Her father, Huiyue Du, was at the seventh level of Heptaglory Sky. "For that killer to be able to kill my dad so easily, he must be at least Nonahonor Sky, or even stronger."

With that, Tianming had a renewed understanding of the Ascension stage. "To save Feng, I must at least be at the level of Nonahonor Sky..."

Since he wasn't even an ascendant yet, who knew how hard it would be for him to accomplish that. That was only a distant dream for most other people, for they would find it hard to reach the four higher skies even after spending five centuries, let alone challenging Sovereign Xi, who was even able to reach Orderia. According to Huiye Shi, Sovereign Xi had to be at least at the twelfth level, Orderian Sky, to be able to head there.

Tianming decided that he would go according to his original plan, that is, to ascend to godhood before thinking about anything else. Now that he was at the eleventh-level life phase, he only had three more to go, or one and a half in divine moonrace terms.

"As for totems, I might have to wait around a month. I wonder how my Aeonic Grandbane will change if I successfully reach the Ascension stage. Will I finally be free of the curse?"

He began looking forward to it. Nowadays, the matter of the killer was still fresh on their minds. After the slaughterfest, the Eightmoon Skycities sealed themselves up one after another. By now, three of them had been sealed up, and the other cities across the Divine Moon Realm were on guard.

Word was that Sovereign Xi had even sent out many elites to wait in ambush for the killer's reemergence. Many thought that the killer was a rogue astral bandit, one of the most terrifying people in the astralscape of order. Even so, that had nothing to do with Tianming, who was making the best use of the resources he could get to rapidly improve. He had even brought the Hexapath Sword Insight Rock on his person and kept practicing the final two strikes of the Hexapath Samsara Sword, Hadean Reincarnation and Empyrean Reincarnation.

"I just need a little more time!" For him to be able to fight off second-level ascendants at the age of twenty-three, he was easily far more talented than any of the divine moonrace.

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Night soon fell, and Tianming prepared to return to Shiyu Compound from the divine moon hall. He looked up and saw the sparkling Veneramoon Formation that protected the city. Without it, the divine moonrace wouldn't dare to resume their daily lives. Though, everyone knew that the formation couldn't be kept up forever.

In fact, it was rather laughable. Since the slaughter had begun in other cities, the standard greeting among the divine moonrace was the question,

'Is the killer caught yet?'

Tianming walked along the streets of Huiyue City as he continued pondering the insights. Within the lifebound space, Ying Huo and the others were having fun. Now that there were four of them, the atmosphere was rather merry. The grey egg in the corner also began showing more cracks, though it was as timid as ever, constantly watching its siblings and vanishing whenever any of them approached.

As Tianming continued, he saw three people ahead of him blocking his way. Paying them no heed, he attempted to circle around them, only for them to move to stop him in his tracks. He looked up and saw three divine moonrace youths who were about Huiyue Yin's age, between their thirties to fifties. As far as they were concerned, those under half a century old were considered youths. Huiyue Yin, for instance, looked no different from a normal twenty-year-old.

"I saw you emerge from the divine moon hall, but yours is a face I don't recognize. Have you been added to the clan registry?" asked a silver-haired youth who had his arms crossed coldly.

Tianming had seen many divine moonrace in recent days, and this fellow was among those with the most offensive personalities. He also seemed much younger than most other ascendants, being around Huiye Shi's age and level of maturity.

"I have," Tianming answered.

"Show me your clan talisman," the youth said.

"Here you go." Tianming didn't want any trouble. He presented his green talisman to the youth.

"Hand it to me. I'll check it to prevent anyone who doesn't belong from entering the divine moon hall," the youth demanded.

"That isn't necessary. My talisman is always inspected whenever I enter the hall," Tianming said. He had a feeling that the three were trying to cause trouble for him, but he had no idea who they were.

"Enough nonsense. Your talisman, now."

Tianming had no choice but to hand it to him. The youth didn't even bother closely inspecting the talisman and looked Tianming up and down instead. "Which sewer did you crawl up from? Which of the divine moonrace are you leeching off?" Questions like those were rather common among the younger divine moonrace.

"I reside at Duyue Mansion and I'm with Huiye Shi," he said.

The three of them looked at each other and broke out laughing. The silver-haired youth clenched the talisman and took it into his spatial ring. Then, he smiled and looked at Tianming. "Do you know who I am?"

"Not really."

"I'm Huiyue Yu. I'm sure you've heard of it," he said proudly.

Too bad Tianming shook his head, which displeased Huiyue Yu. He came up to him with a hostile look and used his astralforce to apply pressure on Tianming. "What level are you at now?" he asked teasingly.

"Twelfth-level life phase," Tianming said. He didn't want others to know that he could fight those above his level.

"Oh? I guess you took care of your looks. Apart from your apparent youth, you really don't seem that impressive. It looks like she's after your body only then."

Tianming seemed to understand something; this fellow apparently considered him a love rival. "Please return my talisman to me."

"Don't be hasty. Let me ask you another question, friend." Huiyue Yu patted him heavily on the shoulder.

"Ask away," Tianming said nonchalantly.

"Have you consummated your marriage?"

"What difference does it make?" Tianming asked.

"If you have, I'll feel disgusted and kill you."

"What if I haven't?"

"If not, I'll be glad, then kill you all the same." It looked like he wasn't giving Tianming any choice. The other two joined in the laughter.

"Bro, you're not going to let him off alive, are you?"

"It's all his fault for hogging Shishi for so long."

"Sounds like this outsider hasn't even touched her yet. Let's just kill him. There aren't many who know Shishi already has a man, so you still have a chance."

Huiyue Yu smiled at the suggestion and blew a puff of air at Tianming's face. "I was just joking. Come with me and I'll take you out of Huiyue City. All you have to do is not show your face here again."

Even an idiot would know he was trying to get Tianming out of the city before killing him. Chances are, they wouldn't dare to kill him until they left the compound of the Huiyue Clan. After all, they wouldn't be able to reenter the city after leaving the formation.

"Are you going to completely ignore Huiyue Shi's thoughts on this?" Tianming asked.

"It's too bad Shishi's parents are gone now, so nobody's got her back. She's pitiful and vulnerable now, so it's my chance!" Huiyue Yu said. He stretched out his hand and tugged on Tianming's face before slapping it. "Enough nonsense! Follow me!"

Chapter 986 - Luxgladius

Tianming came to understand that the death of Huiyue Shi's parents had greatly affected her standing in society. Huiyue Yu, whose family background hadn't initially matched hers, now no longer cared about what she thought. If it were back then, he definitely wouldn't have dared to touch Tianming.

"Go!" When Huiyue Yu took a few steps and noticed that Tianming hadn't followed, he raised his eyebrows.

"He already slapped your face. What are you going to do about it? Want to obey?" Ying Huo said angrily.

"What're you talking about?! Let's mess them up! The worst that can happen is we run! Nobody knows that we come from the Flameyellow Continent anyway!" Tianming answered. Now, it was just him and Feiling. There was no way he would tolerate a slight like this. He didn't believe that they would dare to kill him now that he was officially accepted among the divine moonrace. Naturally, he wouldn't actually start a fight. Instead, he chose to turn around and head toward where there were more people. Huiyue Yu had thought that Tianming would obey him, only to see him run so easily. Though they were still laughing, their faces soon turned dark.

"Looks like he doesn't know what's best for him." Huiyue Yu began feeling like he had overestimated Tianming's intelligence.

"He's a mere samsaran. Let's save the trouble and break his saint palace and his dick. Let's see if Shishi still wants him as a eunuch," said Huiyue Yan. He, along with Huiyue Xiao, was Huiyue Yu's friend. However, he was somewhat older than him and was in his fifties. Back then, he used to hang out with Huiyue Yin. Among them, Huiyue Yu's talent was the best; he was among the most talented of the Huiyue Clan in his generation.

"Alright." Huiyue Yu figured that crippling and castrating him achieved the same thing as killing him.

"Don't blame me, Shishi. Your parents are gone now, and you no longer have anyone to count on. I'm helping you by getting rid of this burden so you can come to my family for support instead."

With that in mind, Huiyue Yu approached Tianming with his arms behind his back, his friends following behind him, chuckling. During that time, Tianming had made his way back to the divine moon hall. There were some tens of divine moonrace nearby, some of whom were older.

"Everyone, stay out of our business! This is an outsider that somehow managed to slip in. I'm going to chase him out," Huiyue Yu announced. The rest turned a blind eye as a result. After all, Tianming didn't have a crescent moon stigma. Even if he was a family member of a divine moonrace, it wasn't an uncommon sight for them to be picked on in the Eightmoon Skycities.

"Before we hit the dog, we must look at their owner. Now that the owner is out of the picture, we can do as we please," Huiyue Yan said with a smile.

The others watched as Huiyue Yu caught up to Tianming. He believed that killing Tianming would be as simple as a single move, being an ascendant himself. It was bound to end quickly, and nobody would mind. He punched him and sent him flying tens of meters away.

"Oh? He isn't dead?" No samsaran had been able to withstand his astralforce-infused punch before. He didn't think too much and continued his assault, one punch after another. Yet, oddly, Tianming was able to easily shake off his power and appeared completely uninjured.

The bystanders even saw it and said, "End it quickly. Don't mess around outside the divine moon hall."

They thought that Huiyue Yu was intentionally toying with Tianming. When Huiyue Yu heard that, he felt a little anxious. He growled and summoned all five of his totems. They were five gigantic swords that flashed brightly, letting out a deafening hum. They were his totems, the luxgladii, and were rather high ranking among sword-type totems. They would be able to swiftly behead any man or beast the moment they were summoned. Huiyue Yu was also armed with a bejeweled silver sword of impressive sharpness. Both his weapon and totems were rather flashy.

"You lowly animal. How could you rely on selling your body to rise in status? Have you no dignity? I'll strike you down, and you have no right to resist!" he roared as he swung his divine sword toward Tianming in tandem with his five sword totems.

Tianming's eyes seemed to flash. The condition he had been waiting for was finally here. He didn't want to be messed with, but he couldn't act too hot-headedly to resolve the matter. So, he intentionally got an audience and allowed himself to be 'toyed with' for a while before finally striking back.

Drawing the Grand-Orient Sword, he glared at his foe and said, " Huiyue Yu, if Shishi's parents were still here, would you dare mess with me? Someone like you who takes advantage of other people's loss has no right to be with Shishi! Even if you kill me, she wouldn't pick you!"

Those words stunned the onlookers. Huiyue Du was among the higher-profile people to be killed by the mysterious killer, and the death of the couple had shocked the entire Divine Moon Realm. They also knew that Huiyue Shi had just been orphaned. When Tianming framed Huiyue Yu's actions, it made him really look bad. Unquestionably, Tianming had the moral high ground. Many people immediately cast a doubtful look at Huiyue Yu, though none of them stepped in to stop him on account of his talent.

"Good going! With that said, you can beat him up to your heart's content!" Ying Huo said.

"Of course. I've seen people like Fang Taiqing and Dugu Jin. A snot-nosed brat like this can't possibly hope to outpace me intellectually." There was no way he would allow himself to be beaten up over a minor dispute over his status.

"Beat him up!" Though Tianming looked tragic, he was inwardly smirking as he summoned his four lifebound beasts. Putting aside Ying Huo and Meow Meow, who hardly grabbed any attention, the appearance of the Radix World Tree and Primordial Terraqua Dragon was rather impactful, to say the least. Everyone knew that no matter how impressive totems were, they would have a hard time facing off against lifebound beasts assuming their cultivation levels were the same. Totems allowed for quick cultivation, as the cultivator wouldn't be held back by the beast's progress, but they suffered shaky foundations as a result. Thus, a totem user usually had to be a few levels higher.

Tianming claimed to be at the twelfth-level life phase and had four lifebound beasts, so it didn't feel wrong for him to fight on Huiyue Yu's level. Upon seeing the beasts, Huiyue Yu knew why he wasn't able to kill Tianming in an instant.

"So this is how you cultivate? With animals in the mud? Intermingling your veins? How disgusting!" he mocked. In the Divine Moon Realm, totems were king. They often mocked the rootbeast race there.

"I'll stick my claws in you! Then you'll know what's dirty!" Ying Huo yelled. Even though it was small, its sharp voice almost hurt Huiyue Yu's ears.

The luxgladii soon faced off against the Primordial Chaos Beasts.

"Go!" The moment Tianming gave the command, Lan Huang, who had been cooped up in the lifebound space for too long, revved its Kilofold Rings and charged, causing many tremors outside the divine moon realm.

"Flesh and blood, eh? How weak," Huiyue Yu quipped when he struck. He used two of the five sword totems for a sword art to counter Lan Huang's charge.

Chapter 987 - Millennium Starflash

Nonstop clanging could be heard as the two luxgladii clashed against the Kilofold Rings, letting out countless sparks. The gigantic beast even bit one of the two glowing sword totems, too.

"What?!" Huiyue Yu immediately retrieved his two sword totems, only to drag Lan Huang along with them. Had he not avoided it in time, his throat would have been torn to shreds by the spinning rings. What was worse were the countless vines in the sky that entangled the other three luxgladii, completely dominating them in terms of power. No matter how much he willed it, he wasn't able to pull his swords free. How could his lifebound beasts be so powerful?! He doesn't have astralforce!

He didn't understand it at all. Lan Huang didn't only have tribulation force from the Primordial Terraqua Codex, it also had its impressive body. As for Xian Xian, while it couldn't match Lan Huang in strength, it was far ahead in terms of its sheer number of vines. In terms of total power, Xian Xian would win out.

Within a single exchange, Tianming had sealed off five of the luxgladii with his two lifebound beasts, completely putting the inferiority of totems on display, at least as far as combat was involved. Though,

any advantage when it came to cultivation speed afforded by totems was completely dwarfed by Tianming's insane rate of progress.

Huiyue Yu was still stunned from the turn of events, and Tianming, Ying Huo, and Meow Meow didn't give him a chance to snap out of it. "Huiyue Yu, you went overboard in messing with Shishi!"

He was fighting in Huiyue Shi's name, so he didn't need to hold back. Ying Huo used Sixpath Infernal Lotus while Meow Meow struck with Chaos Disaster. No matter whether specters, totems, or lifebound beasts were stronger, that didn't matter when Tianming was involved. The two abilities blasted out at full power before Huiyue Yu could snap out of it and use his astralforce.

"Come and help me!" he yelled in his moment of crisis. Huiyue Yan and Huiyue Xiao were both flabbergasted. They quickly snapped out of it and went to Huiyue Yu's aid. The two of them were some ten years older than him, being near their fifties, though the two of them had one bane-ring fewer. Even so, their cultivation level was roughly the same.

Huiyue Yan's totems were oxenflame fiends. When he drew his flaming war blade, four flaming ox-headed humanoids appeared and charged toward Tianming. Huiyue Xiao, on the other hand, had plant-like totems like Yusheng Luo's, called maplewoods terrors. They were orange-red maple trees that seemed to grow from his body, with their leaves serving as hidden weapons. He shot them toward Lan Huang and Xian Xian.

In essence, Tianming was fighting one against three, the three of whom had thirteen totems in total. It had started off as an inconsequential act of bullying, but now it was a grand show. Though some seniors wanted to come up to stop them, when they saw Tianming using such odd methods, their interest to watch the battle unfold grew. As they assumed Tianming to be around a century old, they didn't give his power too much thought. Had they known his real age, they would be freaking out. Instead, they watched as Tianming faced off against enemies far more than his number.

Tianming had Ying Huo and Meow Meow take on Huiyue Yan and Huiyue Xiao and got Lan Huang and Xian Xian to release the two sword totems to face off against the oxenflame fiends and maplewood terrors instead. He himself, on the other hand, would take on Huiyue Yu and his five luxgladii, which seemed to wound Huiyue Yu's ego greatly. "I've never seen an outsider act so arrogantly in the territory of the divine moonrace!"

"Oh? There's a first for everything." Tianming didn't bother arguing too much.

"Insolent!" Huiyue Yu roared as he charged along with his totems with weapon in hand, executing the Millennium Starflash. The sword he held had a powerful thrust, while his five sword totems had a wide reach. Tianming basically had nowhere to retreat to. The move seemed to let the characteristics of the swords shine even more than the Hexapath Samsara Sword. It was as if Tianming had been brought to a world filled with twinkling stars, all of them akin to a fatal sword strike. There were so many stars that it was blinding to the eye, along with sharp sounds of slashing.

Comparing Huiyue Yu and Huiyue Yin, who were both on the Brightmoon Sky level, he felt that the former was a little stronger. However, Tianming had made two breakthroughs since his arrival a few days ago and was far more powerful than before. He triumphantly raised his sword as the six swords came toward him.

With a glare, he split his sword into two and let his sword intent surge. His left hand held the black Grand-Orient Sword, which swept forth and formed nine vortices of sword ki. Each of them was darker than the deepest depths of hell, within which the cries of ghouls and demons could be heard. The golden sword in his right hand whipped up another nine vortices, within which were volcanoes, pots of boiling oil, freezing waters, bladed mountains, and windstorms. All the vortices formed the eighteen layers of Hades. This was the fifth strike of the Hexapath Samsara Sword, Hadean Reincarnation!

The moment he executed the move, its power clashed with Millennium Starflash's and completely overcame it. The luxgladii were sent flying off, with one of them breaking into two. Despite the damage sustained by the totem, it was still recoverable thanks to their ethereal nature, as opposed to lifebound beasts, who would immediately die if torn into two. Even so, the broken luxgladius was still out of commission for the rest of this battle.

As the sword ki simmering in the eighteen layers of hell overwhelmed the sword totems, Tianming himself closed the distance with Huiyue Yu almost instantly. His surging golden sword clashed with Huiyue Yu's, while the black sword in his left hand coursed toward Huiyue Yu's face with the flat, directly slapping him.

The loud clap was followed by a splutter of blood that came from the nearly complete deformation of Huiyue Yu's mouth. He was sent flying off and smashing into something along the way. When he got back up, he was battered and bloodied. Even the sword in his hand was knocked off somewhere by Tianming. It was a horrid loss!

More than the stinging pain on his face, Huiyue Yu felt utter humiliation. Never in his life had he imagined he would be defeated by a samsaran, not to mention a beastmaster who had his beasts busy taking care of other things! Meanwhile, his beasts had dealt with Huiyue Yan and Huiyue Xiao, beating them up. Tianming had fought one against three and won! Was that really a feat a samsaran was capable of?

Everyone turned to look and saw Ying Huo badly beating up Huiyue Yan. His four oxenflame fiends were entangled in battle with Lan Huang, but thanks to the Greenspark Tower, they were scarcely able to wound it; instead, they were pummeled into submission. Meanwhile, Huiyue Xiao was shocked and charred black by Meow Meow while his tree totems were overwhelmed in sheer numbers by Xian Xian's Radiant Vines and Bloodrain Swords. The maple leaves weren't able to harm it at all. The fact that they were still alive meant that Tianming had shown restraint. He couldn't just kill them in their backyard, after all. The onlookers were awed by the refreshing sight of a beastmaster and his beasts overpowering the totem users.

"A samsaran managed to dominate three disciples at the Brightmoon Sky level!"

"Huiyue Yu was among them, too, a peak disciple! How did he do it?"

"I heard that the rootbeast race were stronger at the same level, but not to this extent, right?"

"Shishi found a capable man. However, the rootbeast race's cultivation seems a bit low. He must be at least a century old by now." Quite a few people had gathered to watch and gossip about the show.

"Come to think of it, it's rather embarrassing for Huiyue Yu to lose to his love rival, isn't it?"

"It's not really a big deal. He isn't even thirty yet, so suffering some setbacks is fine. The two of them aren't really in the same league to begin with."

"Huiye Shi really was a bit short sighted."

Hearing the discussion made Huiyue Yu feel rather bad. He picked up his sword as rage simmered in him. He met Huiyue Xiao and Huiyue Yan's gazes, still intent on attacking despite their loss. Right then, Huiye Shi finally arrived. The moment Tianming had been surrounded, her friends had told her about what happened, causing her to rush here.

Nervously, she looked at Tianming and asked, "Are you fine? Are you hurt? Why're they picking on you?"

Seeing her so anxious and angry for his sake made him acknowledge her. "I'm fine, but I don't think they're finished yet."

They would've died if it weren't for his restraint. Yet even now, they still wanted to vent after their utter defeat.

"Huiyue Yu, what are you up to? Did you get a brain tumor? Who do you think you are to mess with him?" Huiye Shi snapped.

"Who's the one being bullied?! I was the one who was beaten up! I won't live this down!" Huiyue Yu howled.

Chapter 988 - Granny Yuehe

Now that Huiye Shi's parents had been killed, nobody knew that Tianming came from the Flameyellow Continent, nor remembered Huiyue Yin's death. As such, Tianming felt safe showing powers on the level of an ascendant.

"Haha, are you three losers? How could you be defeated by him even though your levels are much higher than him? Don't you feel shameful? If it were me I'd have left crying to avoid more embarrassment! If you dare harass him in the future, I'll let him cut your hands off! You were the ones who instigated this in the first place! If we get our seniors to settle this, you'll be the ones judged to be at fault!" Huiye Shi roared, much to the three's embarrassment and anger. Either way, they weren't able to overpower Tianming anyway.

"What are you boasting about? So what if you got a wild man who's centuries old? Aren't you ashamed? If I were his age, he wouldn't be fit to even serve as my shoes! I thought too highly of you, your tastes are actually this crappy. Women like you who sleep with dogs and pigs aren't a good fit for me! Scram!" Huiyue Yu argued back.

"Haha, if he's dog feed, you're someone who can't even match up to dogs and pigs!" she snapped back. When it came to arguing, she had never been one to pull punches. She then hugged Tianming's arm, blew a raspberry at the three, and left.

"Wait!" Huiyue Yu fumed. Right as he spit out a mouthful of blood, a middle-aged man in blue appeared beside Huiyue Yu. It was his father, Huiyue Hai, Huiyue Du's cousin.

"Shishi," Huiyue Hai said.

"What is it, Uncle Hai?" Huiye Shi asked. The divine moonrace placed lots of importance in customs and hierarchy, so she didn't dare snap at him.

"We convened at the council yesterday and it's been decided that you will come under my guardianship, now that my cousin is dead. I'll be in charge of your cultivation and growth from now on." Huiyue Hai sighed at the mention. "Your father has given me much guidance since my childhood, and I'm really grateful to him, and sorry for what happened to him. The least I can do is to make sure to set you on the right path instead of letting you go astray. You'll move to Haiyue Mansion and I'll personally oversee your cultivation until you turn fifty."

Huiye Shi blanked out for a moment and shook her head. "No need. I'm not a child and I can take care of myself."

"Nonsense! You're still young and reckless. If I don't make sure you hold up to the rules, how can I face your father in the next life? No matter how much you hate me for it, I have to correct your course."

"What're you talking about? I don't want to live with you! I have my own place! I want to live my own life!" As she spoke, tears began flowing.

"This is the decision of the council. If you have anything against it, bring it up to them. Your parents rendered great service to Huiyue City, and you're their direct descendant. Nobody wishes for you to waste your life with those unworthy of you."

"I don't need your pity! I'm living a good life!" She didn't want to hear anymore and pulled Tianming with her.

Some seniors nearby advised Huiyue Hai to let her calm down first. "It isn't appropriate to rush such things."

"That's right. Children are rebellious at her age. You have to be more patient with them."

"The only worry is if she gets led astray by others! I really would've disappointed my cousin then," Huiyue Hai said. "Everyone, Shishi's really disobedient, and for that, I'll ground her and teach her what's right."

"Do what you please. It was the council's decision, after all."

"Thank you for all your understanding." Then, Huiyue Hai headed toward Huiye Shi, seemingly wanting to grab her to go with him. He was at least as powerful as Liu Yizhao. He grabbed her by her arm and casually pushed Tianming smashing into a wall.

"Let me go!" she raged.

"Come home with me."

"You aren't my dad! You have no right to lord over me! Save me! Save me!" She didn't have any way to resist his power at all; her shrieks reverberated throughout the area.

At that moment, an old, yet gentle voice rang out from the street in the distance. "Huiyue Hai, let her go. The child has grown up. It's her choice what she wants to do."

The others turned toward the voice and greeted her with respect. "Granny Yuehe."

The moment Huiyue Hai saw her, he let Huiye Shi go. Respectfully, he said, "Yes, Granny. I was merely concerned."

"Who knows whether you're trying to get back at Huiyue Du through his daughter?" she said plainly. She was someone of advanced age. Once the divine moonrace reached the Ascension stage, they would be able to live up to a thousand years. The old woman with the cane was at least seven centuries old, and at her age, much of her cultivation had diminished. But despite being far past her prime, she held high prestige as an elder of the divine moonrace.

Hearing her words, Huiyue Hai grimaced. "Granny, you misunderstand my intentions."

"Misunderstand? I'm old, but not senile. Hours before Huiyue Du's death, I heard that you fought with him over your children's engagement. Haven't you always felt that he looked down on you? I find it really suspect that you suddenly stood up to be such a caring uncle all of a sudden. I wasn't at the council yesterday, so the matter of your guardianship is void. You have no say over this child from now on."

At her age, she had seen all sorts of things. Her words hit hard and made Huiyue Hai blush. His intentions had been completely laid bare.

"Understood, Granny." Even though it was embarrassing, this was something he had involved himself in. Nobody asked him to take out his frustrations toward his late cousin on Huiye Shi, after all.

Huiye Shi ran back to Tianming and fearfully looked at Huiyue Hai. Tianming stroked her on the back of her head to calm her down. "Who's that granny?"

"She's the mother of the current clan leader of the Huiyue Clan. Even the clan leader listens to her," Huiye Shi said.

"Then you're safe now. Go thank her."

"Alright!" She nodded and ran to thank the old woman, tears and snot still on her face.

The old woman treated her gently and turned to Tianming. Smiling, she asked, "So that's the husband you picked for yourself? I've seen him fight. He seems decent. Where is he from?"

"Granny, he is a human from the Soulwell Mountain under Yusheng City's jurisdiction. His lifebound beasts are formed with blood pacts. He's actually also one of the bane race, but he hasn't awakened his totems yet. He's joined the divine moonrace and is already in our clan registry."

Yusheng Luo had helped register Tianming in the registry, though Huiye Shi still wanted to formally introduce him, especially on the matter of blood pacts.

Chapter 989 - Midsummer Snow

"So his lifebound beasts are actually formed with blood pacts?"

"Then he doesn't have much room to grow."

"How did someone like him manage to trick Huiye Shi into falling in love with him?"

The moment blood pacts were mentioned, many of them shook their heads in disapproval. Soulwell Mountain was known to be a really impoverished place where the oldest natives of the Divine Moon Realm resided. There were also rootbeast race and bane race presences there, but they usually had few bane-rings. Not to mention, as they didn't have divine moon radiance there, most of the bane race weren't able to awaken their totems, so they relied on blood pacts to improve combat prowess. Cases resembling Tianming's cover story weren't that rare, but they would be looked upon badly by the divine moonrace.

"I still feel that Shishi needs to be disciplined," someone said.

But upon hearing Tianming's alleged background, Yuehe didn't seem too bothered. She asked, "How old is this child?"

Huiye Shi gave it some thought. Now that her parents were no longer there to support her, many would seek to pressure her with their status and that would affect her cultivation. As long as I don't reveal that he has seven bane-rings and his lifebound beasts are all natural born, he wouldn't be taken by the celestial orderians and he can save his little brother. It should be fine! She didn't know that Tianming was a decabane, not a heptabane.

Huiye Shi answered, "Granny, Tianming is only twenty-three this year, five years my junior. He's a genius I happened to encounter. After I brought him back, my dad had planned to give him full nurturing, only for that accident to happen."

"Twenty-three?" Yuehe seemed stunned. She knew that Tianming didn't behave like someone of advanced age and had her guesses, but his actual age was only a third of her estimation.

"Twenty-three?!" Huiyue Hai, Huiyue Yu and the other divine moonrace were all stunned. Some couldn't help but laugh out loud.

"Is Shishi a fool? Would she believe it if he told her he was eight years old?"

"It looks like her body's the only thing that matured during puberty, not her brains."

"And to think she even believed him and told us about it... I can't even... Hahaha!"

For a non-divine moonrace beastmaster from the sticks that utilized blood pacts to be able to defeat Huiyue Yu, he had to be at least a century old, or even three. Putting aside the Huiyue Clan, none of the divine moonrace would be able to fight a first-level ascendant at the age of twenty-three. Huiyue Yu was already number one among peers his age.

"Granny, just give him a test and we'll prove it." Huiye Shi was annoyed at the chatter and gossip. Their arrogance really got on her nerves, though she behaved almost exactly the same when she was back at the Flameyellow Continent. Yet she was the one who had ended up being dominated by Tianming.

"Very well." Yuehe took out a spherical formation much like the one Huiyue Du had used before and tossed it to Tianming.

Now, I'm going to show my hand. I have to, or I'll be belittled like always. This granny seems rather decent. If she can have my back, I'll have an easier time. As he thought that, Tianming stepped into the formation.

The divine moonrace in general had never been directly antagonistic toward him. They just found his age claim to be laughably ridiculous. Many of them, including Huiyue Hai and Huiyue Yu, were shaking their heads, laughing, thinking that Huiyue Shi must have been blinded by love.

As they watched, one light after another appeared near Tianming's head. If he was over a century old, there would be more than a hundred starry lights. However, the lights stopped at seventeen. After thirty breaths' time, the formation hadn't changed at all.

"Granny, use another. This one might be busted," someone said.

Yuehe knew that the formation couldn't have been mistaken. She immediately had her doubts and used a different formation, only for a similar result to come about. The third time, Huiyue Hai used his formation and it still showed Tianming to be seventeen years old. Huiyue Shi had tried with a few other formations back then and the results were the same.

They then used a fourth formation to test Tianming. He could feel that the more formations he was tested with, the more the way they looked at him changed. Eventually, some of them were completely at a loss for words.

"This... this can't be possible... right, Dad?" Huiyue Yu said with his throat so dry that it felt like ants were crawling in it.

"I don't know!" Huiyue Hai roared. Yuehe's presence was troubling enough to him already, and now it had gotten even worse.

"For someone to be near an ascendant in power at the age of twenty-three and be a rootbeast race that uses blood pacts? Is he the strongest of his age across the entire Divine Moon Realm?"

The crowd was utterly confused, and much more shocked than Huiyue Shi's parents. Back then, while they knew he was young, they had no idea he was able to defeat ascendants. They figured Tianming had a really bad foundation for cultivation.

Even though Tianming wanted to cultivate with a low profile rather than bother with senseless fights, he had been forced into a corner. Coupled with the fact that Huiyue Shi's parents were gone and they had lost their backing, he decided to show his hand. Otherwise, he would be chased out of the city by Huiyue Yu alone. But despite not going all out, the age test showed him to be only seventeen, a year younger than a few days ago. No matter how hard he tried keeping a low profile, it seemed that fate just didn't want to play along.

Much like pregnancy, talent was hard to hide. Anyone would be able to see the bulging belly of talent. Everyone was staring at him blankly; now, even if he claimed to be twenty-three, nobody would believe him to be that old. For the divine moonrace, fifty was considered young, so Tianming might as well be a seven-year-old child, albeit one that had somehow gone through puberty.

"Granny, he's really amazing," Huiye Shi said weakly, noticing that the situation was growing out of hand.

Yuehe shook a little and waved for Tianming to come to him. Then she stretched out her hand to touch Tianming's face, arms, belly, and thighs. She even put her ears close to his chest to listen to his heartbeat. She chuckled, patted him on the chest, and said, "This youthful vigor is like that of a newborn baby! He's definitely not older than twenty!"

The others couldn't believe what they were hearing.

"How did you cultivate? You don't have any access to caeli, right?" Yuehe asked.

"I don't know. Maybe it's natural born?" Tianming said.

They were speechless once more. Before today, nobody had known who Tianming was. But now the whole city, maybe even the capital, Divine Moon Skycity, would hear of this insane seventeen year old.

"How has your cultivation been going lately?" Yuehe asked.

"I just managed to visit the divine moon hall a couple of times and am making great progress toward the Ascension stage."

"Very good! Give it more effort. If you need any more help, have Shishi come to me. I'll support you fully when it comes to your cultivation."

"Thank you, Granny!"

Now, it was settled. He had the support of the mother of the leader of the Huiyue Clan, one of the main branches of the divine moonrace. With her word, nobody of the likes of Huiyue Hai would be able to touch Tianming any longer. The father and son were feeling their faces tingling. The impossible had become reality.

Huiye Shi was also relishing in how things had turned out. "So this is how it feels to faceslap a genius... It's great...."

"Shishi, take care of your man and keep him close, understand?" Yuehe said.

"I won't ever let him out of my sight!"

Everyone laughed. They had all thought that Huiye Shi didn't have a bright future, due to her lackluster talent. But now they were counting on her to keep Tianming in Huiyue City and immediately changed their attitudes, as if they hadn't been the ones mocking her moments before.

"Alright, let's disperse," Yuehe said.

"Understood, Granny."

The crowd spread out and went their own ways.

"Goodbye, Granny," Tianming said respectfully.

"See you around, young man." Yuehe smiled and quickly left with her cane.

As Tianming saw her off, he suddenly noticed a youth in front of the old woman looking at him. He was dressed in a crimson robe and had a fox fur around his shoulders. He also had waist-length white hair, making him the picture of a handsome man. His features were hard to forget, having both masculine firmness and feminine beauty. The most unique parts were his crimson eyes that looked like two blood moons, which gave him a slight air of demonic mischief.

Tianming saw three red dots under each of his eyes. They looked like a string of tears, as if he was constantly crying tears of blood. In total, there were six dots on his face, each of them containing bountiful power. It was probably the manifestation of his bane-rings.

He was a hexabane and the only person apart from the Li family to have more than five, and they were worn obviously and proudly on his face.

Chapter 990 - Jie

When Tianming spotted him, the man walked toward Yuehe and supported her as she walked away.

"Ah, I haven't seen Brother Jie for a long time. He looks as good as ever," Huiye Shi said dreamily. Winking, she turned to Tianming and said, "Before I got to know you, I was his number one fangirl! My biggest dream was to get married to him!"

"Jie?" That seemed to be the youth's name.

"That's right. He's Granny Yuehe's grandson. Not only is he a hexabane, he also has the rare Bloodmoon Talent, making him basically akin to having six-and-a-half bane-rings, only one half fewer than Sovereign Xi!"

"Is he really powerful?" Based on his instinct, the youth did feel really impressive.

"Of course! He became an ascendant long ago. Now he's only in his forties, but he's already reached the Quadseal Sky level. Some say he may even be at Pentarcenic Sky! Huiyue Yu can't possibly compare to him. It's said his talent should be among the top three of all youths in the Divine Moon Realm. Not to mention he's quite the looker, too."

"Pentarcenic Sky, huh? Not bad." Given the man's current age, he should have been around Tianming's level in his twenties. Traversing through the Ascension stage was akin to attempting to ascend to the heavens. The common saying of a task being as difficult as trying to scale the heavens was related to the difficulty in advancing during the Ascension stage.

While Huiyue Yu was at the first level now, he might not even reach the third level by the time he was Jie's age. Tianming got a grasp on what counted as a true genius after seeing Jie. They were far more powerful than what anyone on the Flameyellow Continent could possibly imagine. Even so, it definitely wouldn't compare to the celestial orderians, who had access to nova source.

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The soft night breeze carried the fragrance of flowers and tea through the courtyard. Yuehe was lying in her reclining chair with her eyes closed, enjoying the breeze's gentle brush. Beside her was the red-eyed youth, currently making tea.

Moon tea was a specialty of the Divine Moon Realm. It could nourish the body and extend lifespan to an extent. No doubt it would be treated like precious treasure on the Flameyellow Continent. For the divine moonrace that was fussy about all things refined, premium moon tea was a necessary component to supplement the night's ambience.

After the youth was done brewing the tea, he handed it to Yuehe. "Granny, please enjoy your tea."

The old woman took a light sip and turned to look at the youth. "What's on your mind, child? Tell me."

"Granny, I'll be fifty in a year." The red dots under his eyes seemed to shine bloodily in the night, making him look even eerier.

"I know. I've been counting," she said as she stroked his head gently.

"By then, I'll be sent to live at Xi Palace and won't be able to see you any longer."

"Do you not wish for that to be the case?"

"I don't. It isn't my desire to go to Divine Moon Skycity."

"Being able to serve Sovereign Xi is something most people can only dream of, you know."

"But I'll lose my freedom and self. I'll be reduced to nothing but a servant, a plaything. In the past few centuries, many have been sent to Xi Palace. They can never leave and have to stay deep within its confines all their lives."

"I'm sure all that's just an excuse. The truth is, you've fallen for someone, right?"

"I have indeed."

"How could any girl possibly compare to Sovereign Xi? You've seen her before. She's the most beautiful woman in the Divine Moon Realm. Even her age doesn't taint her beauty. Even now, countless people are mesmerized by the sight of her visage. Is the one you fancy remotely comparable? Even with her many partners, just being able to spend a single night with her would be paradise."

"Sovereign Xi... is indeed beautiful, while the person I like is normal, exceedingly so. Yet I want to spend my life with her. I want to serve Huiyue City. I want to have my own life, not serve someone else with it."

"I understand how you feel. However, the Huiyue Clan has no way to refuse Sovereign Xi's will. Do you understand?" Yuehe said with a sigh.

"I do. But everyone knows this, right? The divine moonrace from other branches, and even genius humans of other races that she takes in all eventually turn dull and boring. Some even develop mental afflictions and waste away until nothing more is heard of them. They're as good as dead. Who knows what Sovereign Xi did to them? I feel like this is a ploy to cull potential from everyone else to make sure that their branch alone is powerful! I heard an uncle of mine, your most talented son, went to the sovereign. Did you ever get to see him again? Do you even know if he's still alive? Is Sovereign Xi truly a sovereign, or is she a demon in disguise?" he said passionately.

"Nonsense. Make sure you don't utter these words to anyone but me. It'll only bring trouble, understand?" The mention of his uncle brought back old wounds in her.

"Yes." He closed his eyes. "Granny, in the past two centuries, all the male geniuses that stick out and have six or more bane-rings can't escape fate's judgment, right?"

"Yes. This is the reality we have to live with," she said melancholically.

"But today, I think I figured out a way to change my fate."

"What is it?"

"Someone who's only seventeen, but managed to defeat an ascendant and also looks decent. Doesn't this youth show much more promise than I?"

"Are you talking about Li Tianming?"

"Yes. I heard that Sovereign Xi also loves the rootbeast race a lot. She's sick of young divine moonrace men."

"That is indeed the case. She has proclaimed that she wants a genius from the rootbeast race. Her past hundred concubines have all been from the divine moonrace."

"Not to mention, he's far too young. We all know that Sovereign Xi likes them as young as they come. Seventeen sounds like an age of innocence and purity. We can give it our all to nurture him and spread word of his miraculous feats to draw her attention. Then I'll find a chance to ruin one of my totems so that I'll be considered a pentabane. That way it won't be too obvious, right? She'll have the perfect replacement for me, too."

Yuehe pondered in silence.

"Granny, I don't wish for a life like that. I'm terrified. Please, save me," the youth said as he kowtowed.

Yuehe breathed a deep sigh.

"Granny—"

"Your plan is sound. It's too bad that Li Tianming is rather young, and the talent he shows is really odd. It's hard to judge his full potential. If he can defeat you and even be the one to destroy one of your totems to make you a pentabane, that would seal the deal. Otherwise, Sovereign Xi will see through all of it. If that causes her to turn her wrath on the Huiyue Clan, we'll be in deep trouble."

"It'll be fine! He still has time, so let him try! I might not even need to be defeated as long as he can show overwhelming talent, right? If Sovereign Xi really does fall for him, I might not even need to cripple myself, right?"

"Let me talk about this with your father."

"Please do!" He clutched the old woman's hands tightly. The only reason everyone told him that earning the sovereign's attention was the best thing that could happen to him was because they didn't dare to say that he would be in for an eternal nightmare. Even his father didn't dare to mention it and had to

maintain the facade of this being a blessing. After all, if he was the slightest bit unhappy or unwilling to enter the palace, someone had to pay the price.

"Granny, I want to provoke Li Tianming," Huiyue Jie said.

"Why?"

"To make preparations, so that he can one day destroy one of my bane-rings and crush my genius. That is how I'll be liberated from unending suffering," he said with a heavy look.