

Unfathomable 431

Chapter 431

“So we are here, in the lands of the unknown...”

A man with an extensively long beard floated around while holding a staff made from wood. At the tip, there was a large round blue orb that this staff wrapped around. The old man looked out into the distance, his eyes shining brightly with a blue hue as he examined the situation.

“Grand Wizard, we have managed to transport the magical gates, we can proceed.”

“Ah, Sir Basil. Make sure that the regiment of Paladins is ready, we have some visitors, I don’t know if they are hostile, I will greet them first while you make the gate ready, we might need some reinforcements.”

“As you command, lord Argus!”

A man dressed in shiny white armor made a salute to the floating man. While it didn’t look that the knight could fly on his own, he was mounted on a horse with wings. Both of them radiated a strange energy that was similar to Qi yet different.

The man referred to as Argus floated forward. With his magical capabilities, he noticed a group of twenty people flying this way. They didn’t seem to be simple humans as most of them were flying on swords with one, in particular, standing out.

‘This place is very peculiar... The mana here is very thick, casting spells should be quite easy. This might really be the promised land of magics that the legends have foretold!’

Argus smiled to himself but his expression quickly turned sour. While his men were down on the ground and preparing the grand magic for protection, potential enemies were approaching.

“Identify yourself, from which sect do you hail from?”

The old man flew forward to intercept the approaching natives. He was sure to quickly put some distance between himself and the place where they had come from. They had traveled through a wide tunnel of energies that was quite wide.

At the part that they came out, the land looked somewhat devastated. All to the sides were massive elemental storms that even this grand wizard had no hopes of subduing. But, when all of them looked ahead they spotted lands with lush forests and ample water.

“I welcome thee, my friends, I mean you no harm.”

Argos smiled at the group of people but he never let go of his grand staff. The people that flew over stopped before him but were clearly on guard. He did not know them or how they would react to his magic but if it was possible he would rather not get into conflict with them.

“Friends? Who are you? This is the territory of the great Crimson Blood Spider Sect! You don’t look like a member of the other sects... are you a rogue cultivator?”

The men that he was talking to had a certain air around them. Their robes were pitch black and on the back, they had a red insignia that looked like a venomous spider. Argos could sense the killing intent that these people were radiating, it was clear that they weren't the gentle type.

"A cultivator? Like in a garden? No, my name is Argos, I come from a faraway land and I would wish to..."

"Silence! Do you think we are fools! Did you think we wouldn't sense those people? You dare!"

Before he could even start, the diplomatic approach had fallen through. He didn't know how but through means unknown to him one of the people there could sense the paladins working in the distance.

Normally as a grand wizard, he would know if something like that happened as there would be mana used. These people on the other hand felt somewhat different, they weren't using mana the same as he was. It was clear that they possessed powers alien to him, but this didn't mean that he was frightened.

"My friend, just calm down I'm sure we can..."

"Silence, you will come with us or face our poison."

A shroud of green miasma started surrounding all of these people while Argos remained calm. He could not go with them, it was clear that if he surrendered then he would either die or be imprisoned by these natives.

"I'm afraid I'll have to refuse your offer..."

He replied but as soon as he did, the natives that were flying on the swords bolted towards his position. There was something strange with the rings that they were using. Argos felt something akin to spatial magic as they swished their hands to produce weapons.

Regretfully for the attacking cultivators, there weren't dealing with the average magus. The moment they tried getting close they found themselves being repelled by an invisible barrier. Even though they tried, any attacks performed against this mana-barrier were useless; they even received a rebounding effect that caused damage to them instead.

"I guess it can't be helped, go to sleep."

The floating wizard pointed out with his staff and performed a very quick chant. The moment he was finished a strange violet haze appeared around the core formation cultivators that were trying to attack him. It covered their faces and in a matter of moments, they were in a deep slumber.

"What is this technique? Watch out brothers, this old man isn't that simple!"

Argos swung his staff around and quickly disabled every one of the sword-flying cultivators. But then when he attempted to do the same to what looked to be the leader his spell was repealed.

Soon a battle ensued between the two old men, one slinging strange poisonous arts that when touching any of the flora quickly died. The cultivator from the Crimson Blood Spider sect was astonished. Tried he did but he was unable to pierce through that mana barrier that was produced.

His enemy on the other hand didn't have any problem pelting him with long-ranged attacks. They all had a strange feeling to them, similar to Qi yet different. Soon enough he found himself engulfed in a massive ball of flames and had to retreat. Luckily for him, the old man that he was fighting with didn't seem to be interested in chasing after him.

"I will remember this, you will rue the day you met me!"

But as he was escaping, he felt something. There was something coming his way, even though he noticed it, it was too late. A golden bolt of energy pierced through his chest without any resistance whatsoever.

"H-how could this be... how could a nascent soul master like me fall so easily..."

The poisonous cultivator could feel it, his nascent soul had been irreparably damaged. Somehow this attack could even affect his soul and it was clear that he would soon die. Before the darkness took him, he glanced towards the point from where this attack came.

There he saw a strange man wearing glistering golden armor. The attacker was still in his throwing position and after he straightened out a golden spear appeared in his hand, probably returning to him after the deed was done.

"Argus, you are too soft, we can't let any of these savages live, they will clearly alert their allies and come in bigger numbers."

The old wizard looked at the dying man that promptly fell down into some bushes. Then back to the man dressed in full plate mail armor with only his helmet missing. His looks were quite stunning, long locks of golden locks and a chin that could cut diamonds.

"Lord Lucius... so I see that the Golden Braves have managed to get through the gate."

This wasn't the only man dressed in golden armor, several others started popping out and quickly dispatching the men that he put to sleep.

"Wait..."

Argus shouted out but the men in golden armor ignored his calls.

"Wizard, don't forget that you are only here to give aid, you are nothing more than an advisor."

The man named Lucius proclaimed while also shouting to the group of golden knights to leave one man alive.

"One is enough, we will question him, make yourself useful Wizard and make him speak with your magic if you do now wish for this savage to suffer."

Argus gave out a sigh as he continued to watch. The teleportation gate had been opened, his only duty was to make sure that the area was livable for the main force to arrive. With The coming of the golden braves, his role was now marginal.

From here he could see that the people from his side were slowly entering through the teleportation gate. While his reason for coming here was to pursue knowledge, the kingdom he was a citizen of wanted something else. They desired riches, power and prestige.

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“We greet the Golden Dragon!”

“Ah yes.”

Zhang Dong was now back in the flying city of the Azure Emperor. With some guidance, he was now on the way to the secret room that he had visited before. After the talk with his brother, it was clear that the Long Clan did not see it his way.

His reasoning for teleporting here instead of his own area of influence was one. The map that the Long Clan possessed showed a detailed representation of the empire and the bridges between them. He didn't really have enough time to examine it when he was here the first time.

‘Bob, I need you to examine that map and if you can copy it to some extent, I can't keep returning here to look at it.’

‘Affirmative.’

Now with the help of his new title the gates to the Long Clan were open to him. He could wander through the halls unimpeded to some extent that is. When confronted with some of the grand elders or the Azure Dragon faction they didn't seem to like him that much.

This was probably due to the fact that it was a hard pill to swallow that there was something on the same ground as the Emperor. In this world devoid of any deities people looked to cultivators and immortals instead. The Azure Emperor was akin to a god in this land and now there he came, someone that could affect the balance.

“How may I help you?”

This was his second time here but he did not really know the way towards that area. At the time being, he was standing at something similar to a reception area.

“Ah yes, could you fetch one of the high elders? Tell them that the Golden Dragon, Long Dong is here, best if it's someone that could show me around...”

Previously his brother the Azure Dragon showed him the way but as the war effort was slowly underway. He needed to know his way around this place, maybe even gather some allies if there was a reason to retreat here with his closest of kin.

“Oh wait, never mind, I see someone that can do it instead...”

Zhang Dong looked to the side and spotted someone familiar.

“Hey there, Long Shen was it? Mind giving your uncle a small tour?”

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“What? Won’t give your favorite uncle a hug? Have you been practicing your swordsmanship? Maybe if you do, you will be able to be as good at it as your uncle!”

“Y-you...”

Long Shen, the oldest son of the Azure Emperor, looked quite dejected after Zhang Dong shouted out at him. There were other people around this place and also around this young master. They of course knew who the Golden Dragon was so they could not say anything without being talked to.

“What, you are so glad to see me that you are at a loss for words?”

Zhang Dong moved closer while somewhat strutting as if he was in a rush. His nephew recoiled in horror as he clearly wasn’t sure what to do. Previously he attempted to embarrass Zhang Dong but it all came to bite him and his siblings in the end. Now this man that his father held in high regard was before him again.

“Don’t be so stiff, are you worried about what happened in the past?”

“Well, I...”

“Don’t worry about it, we are family are we not?”

Zhang Dong slammed his palm against Long Shen’s back which made the young man stagger forward. The people in the back gasped out in shock as they couldn’t believe it. They somewhat expected their young master to recoil in anger but instead, he just fixed his clothes without saying much.

“Y-yes, we are family... Did you want something from me, uncle? If not, then I will be on my way...”

“Actually, I do need some directions and I think my cute nephew probably knows his way around this city!”

“C-cute?”

It was quite strange, in reality, Long Shen was older than Zhang Dong that was close to being forty. It was hard to measure the age of nascent soul masters that ascended in their early years thus no one made a fuss.

“Yes, now could you show me the way to one of those three elders? I think one of them should be able to guide me further.”

The three old bags that whined to the Azure Emperor were probably the best bet of him getting to that map chamber.

“One of the three elders? Ah yes...”

To Zhang Dong’s surprise, the young master didn’t seem that against showing him around. Either he was feeling forced due to his status or perhaps he had become a better person?

‘Probably closer to the first one, he isn’t that good at hiding his emotions.’

While he wanted to tease the man some more, it would be better to not go overboard. He didn't want to waste any more time than he had to. If he continued to alienate Long Shen they might get into a fight which he would probably win but could leave the Azure Dragon's son unable to continue.

"Ah yes, Elder Laixie should be close by."

Without further ado, the two left while the young master's company removed themselves. While they could stick around him when someone like the Golden Dragon appeared they couldn't just follow if he didn't tell them that they could.

'Elder Laixie? It's probably that old woman.'

Both Zhang Dong and Long Shen were nascent soul masters, it didn't take long for them to cover a lot of space. Even then it was somewhat hard to maneuver through the large crystal tower that housed hundreds of thousands of people in it. While it was quite gigantic from the outside, it was even larger on the inside.

The elder that he was looking for was in one of the many chambers that had spatial technology on it. The area on the inside of it was many times larger than he had expected, it was somewhat similar to what the spot he met the Azure Dragon was.

The only difference was that it was obviously a fake environment. He could feel that the sky was just an illusion as well as the sun that was shining down on him. The whole place looked like a vacation villa with a forest around it but even though it seemed that it stretched for many kilometers it was about one in diameter.

'I guess something like the Dimensional Regalia isn't easily created even for the Long Clan.'

Keeping in mind that he was going to the residence of one of the top three elders, it meant that they probably were granted access to their clan's most treasured technologies and magics.

"This is where the elder lives, I'll excuse myself then..."

"Ah yes, have a nice... and he is gone..."

Zhang Dong was stuck looking at the spatial magic and integrated formation that he didn't react to that well. During this time that took only a few seconds, Long Shen decided to remove himself from the area. When using his spirit sense he could feel his nephew rocketing away at full speed.

"He must be shy..."

"Hello, is anyone here? Is Elder Laixie here?"

He talked while walking towards the building on the small hill. The people that lived here probably realized that he was here as he felt something scanning his body for clues as he entered. Of course, it wasn't able to as he shrouded his body with a thin layer of protective Qi. The people here knew that someone entered but they didn't know who exactly.

"Who are you? Long Shen already left?"

The voice that he heard belonged to the elder that he had met for a short time. Surprisingly she was the only person here and didn't even bother to come to greet him.

"Yes he did, it is me, Long Dong, you know, the Golden Dragon..."

While the woman didn't tell him that he could go in he continued to slowly walk towards this large mansion. The woman was a top elder of the clan but she was in theory below him in status. Even though it was only on paper, she would normally have to lower her head before him.

"I don't think we had an appointment..."

He continued to move forward, the gate was wide open and on the inside, he saw the old woman wearing a more traditional robe. She was tending to her garden of spiritual herbs but mostly just looking at some that were radiating Qi.

"Yes, I must apologize for that but I need someone to help guide me, I would like to..."

As he tried to continue he saw the old woman look at him sternly. She moved her finger to her mouth as if she wanted to tell him to be quiet. Then he also realized that she had been whispering while looking at a certain closed flower.

"That flower is... a spiritual sunrise lily?"

Thanks to his deep knowledge of all things thanks to all the books he read, he was quickly able to identify the plant. The woman was a bit surprised and this was probably due to this flower being mostly mistaken with a similar one named the sun lily that was slightly different.

Now that he looked back to the fake sun above, he could spot that it was certainly more red than usual. After adding two and two together it was clear what the woman was doing.

"Ah, is the elder Laixie trying to grow the sunrise lily?"

"I see that the Golden Dragon is very knowledgeable, you probably know that this flower needs to be brought up in near silence and tranquility to develop the sunrise seeds inside."

"Ah yes, they are quite the rare seeds that can be turned into various elixirs to nourish the fire aspect."

"Yes, I'm not sure what you came here for Golden Dragon, but I must remain here because this is a critical point in the life cycle of the sunrise lily."

He could tell that the old woman was nourishing the plant with some of her Qi. This also explained why this place was deserted a loud noise could cause the flower to not produce any seeds. It took many years to just grow one flower as it wouldn't bloom if there were more of its kind around it.

"That is true but..."

It was clear that he wouldn't get the woman to budge from this place. Then when he tried to explain himself the woman continued to shush him. It didn't seem that the war that was here made these elders worry too much for some reason. They were certainly convinced that even if all failed they would be safe in this fortress of theirs.

Thus the only way to make this old lady move was to bring this flower to bloom. Thankfully with the amount of knowledge that he had gained he would be able to do such a thing. The biggest problem would probably be to make her agree to it.

“Ah yes... her isn't that the Azure Dragon? oh no, why is he wearing that alluring dress?”

Zhang Dong pointed into the distance behind the old woman. She of course was taken aback by something so preposterous but was also unable to not look in that direction. The notion of seeing the handsome Azure Emperor in some kind of dress was probably too much. While curiosity got to her, he quickly went for it.

“There is no one there... wait w-what are you doing!”

The old woman screamed out in shock as she saw Zhang Dong quickly pluck the flower from the ground. To her knowledge this would certainly make the plant die, it was something that she had nourished for many years but before her eyes, it was now gone.

“Oh don't you worry, just give me a second I'll have it bloom before your eyes.”

She was furious with him and even though he said that it would be fine, she pulled out a sword instantly.

“I don't care who you think you are!”

“Now let's not be hasty grandma, just give me a moment...”

The flower was out of sight in his hands as he started nourishing it with a combination of select elements. He was sure that it would work even after plucking it from the ground but the old woman went crazy.

“Hey now, that was dangerous...”

He dodged a swing from her blade while flying away. The woman started chasing him around this area and he was even forced to leave it. Soon the whole crystal tower where the main long clan was based was in an uproar. Mentions of their grand elder chasing after the emperor's brother quickly reached everyone.

“It's hard to concentrate like this, if I didn't know better I'd think you really wanted this lily to die!”

“Stop with the excuses!”

They flew long and wide. Even other elders and clan members started chasing after them but soon they all stopped as a strange phenomenon occurred. The area was covered in a crimson-like haze that resembled a rising sun.

“T-this is... the rising of the heavenly lily? But it was only a regular sunrise lily...”

The old woman stopped flying while her jaw dropped, from within the palms of the man she was chasing an unbelievable phenomenon was taking place which prompted her to pass out on the spot.

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“H-how...”

An old lady was clutching a radiant flower with seeds that were pulsating with a strange power. After chasing a man that hailed as the Golden Dragon for destroying her treasured herb, she was now left speechless. She didn't know how but the Sunrise Lily that could be used for various pills and elixirs had transformed almost before her eyes.

"It's a Heavenly Sunrise Lily..."

"That's why I told you to wait..."

Zhang Dong was standing in front of the old woman that continued to stare at the glowing flower. It was so bad that he even had to give the old lady a poke on the shoulder to wake her up from her trance.

"You should better put that flower into stasis, even though it has bloomed it won't last forever you know."

"Ah... you have my gratitude."

The old lady quickly used a special technique on the flower that would help it last longer before putting it into her spatial ring. Afterward, she looked at him with a strange glint in her eyes.

"I must apologize for my previous outburst, I let emotions cloud my judgment, please accept this apology Golden Dragon."

Laixie clasped her hands together while bowing her head quite low. There were various people looking out from the side. The two caused quite the ruckus in this large crystal tower that housed most of their inner clan members.

"Elder Laixie admitted her wrongdoings?"

"S-she is showing allegiance to the Golden Dragon?"

Most of them didn't know what was going on. This one was one of the top three elders in the whole clan. They had only seen her bow her head before the Azure Emperor, now she was doing it before his so-called brother. Not many people had really accepted the new player in town that was Long Dong but now after seeing one of the elders bowing before him, they were starting to take him seriously.

"Ah yes, it's fine. Don't sweat it old girl but I didn't really come to you for the flower, I need some directions you see..."

The old woman nodded but wasn't sure what Zhang Dong's request was as she didn't really give him time to explain himself.

"Directions, where would you like to go?"

"When I first came here, my brother brought me to a chamber with that map, could you show me the way there?"

"You wish me to direct you to the secret war room?"

The old woman started rubbing her chin. It was clear that the area with that map was not just something that everyone could visit. But he was convinced that his status should help him gain access to that area.

“Ah yes, now I remember, you had left quite abruptly after the speech, the Emperor was planning to give you access to the War Room. Very well let me guide you towards it.”

‘It seems like I was worrying for nothing.’

Apparently, he was already granted access to this war room. He feared that he would be denied it, but after further consideration, he had already seen the map when the Azure Emperor gave him a short tour.

When leaving that area they just walked to another teleporter that let them outside which was also the reason why he didn’t know where it was exactly. He did check his system map but not like he could bust through the walls of this tower, the long Clan would probably see it as treason or something.

Thus he headed out while following after the old lady. This time around he was sure to pay attention to where he was going. The old woman guided him through what was the giant crystal tower, both of them ended up in some kind of strange large chamber with quite the high ceiling.

There were actually quite a bit of people here. It looked to be some kind of hub and in the distance, he could see people getting on teleportation platforms. They quickly disappeared while covered in blue light. Zhang Dong had to give it to the Long Clan, while his own sect was somewhat advanced they didn’t hold a candle to them in scope.

‘They must be using a massive amount of spiritual energy to run all of these teleporters, then there is that protective barrier and god knows if not more...’

His first opinion of this place might have been faulty as they did clearly build this place to last. It was clear that this was the reason why no one was taking the war that seriously. Perhaps they even had some way of fleeing that made them even more confident.

“Greetings Elder Laixie, what brings you here today... and isn’t that the...”

“Yes, this is the Emperor’s brother, Golden Dragon Long Dong.”

While he had grown accustomed to saying his new name, he still found it strange when other people said it out loud. It was even more peculiar when this name came from an old lady like this.

“I’m sorry honored Golden Dragon, We didn’t expect that you would grace us with your radiant self today!”

The people behind a counter that the old lady brought him to started prostrating themselves before him as usual. He just waited for all the ass-kissing to end before his guide could continue.

“Please give the honored Golden Dragon his identification treasure, it should have been prepared beforehand.”

“Oh?”

Zhang Dong was a bit surprised but it seemed that moves to accommodate him had already been done. Perhaps he should have stayed a bit longer here but if he did, then he would probably not been able to intercept those invaders.

“Ah yes, let me see. Here you go, please place your hand on the crystal orb.”

The clerk that was here brought out a light blue orb that fit more with a wizard than a cultivator setting. He looked at it, then scanned it with his spiritual sense and discovered that it was some kind of scanning device. There didn't seem that there was a problem with it, thus he just placed his hand on it.

To his surprise, it worked in a similar fashion as the scanners at his own sect. He could feel that this item was trying to read his spiritual sense in some way but if he so desired he could just block it.

“Ah yes, we have your identification crystal with us.”

After the orb did its scan the person behind the counter went to a side room. He could hear sliding doors opening which then were followed by silence. After about five minutes the person returned while holding a small yellow crystal in his hand. On it was the symbol for the Golden Dragon which clearly belonged to him.

“It does seem like it's for me, I reckon these will allow me access to the teleportation arrays around this crystal citadel?”

He asked while somewhat knowing the answer. Others were moving around this area and when they attempted teleportation they always brought out similar-looking crystals. They were all blue and somewhat uniform in design, it was clear that his was a bit more special.

“That's right, just hold your crystal in front of the seeing orb and you will be able to use it.”

With the crystal in his hand, he turned to the old lady that came with him. He was somewhat aware of what this item would help him do but it was always best to ask for confirmation.

“Let me explain, everything that is important is locked away. There are several layers of protective arrays that seal off the most important places to any non-main clan members.”

The old woman continued to explain while they went towards the largest teleportation station in this area. It was supposedly the only one that would allow him passage into the war room. While he was curious why the Azure Emperor was able to get him there without going through this one area, it was clear that it was due to his title of Emperor.

This area was watched and any teleportation attempt would be logged in the clan database. Even his first attempt and the destination that he was taking was probably going to be marked down. Even this golden crystal would probably not allow him to go unseen.

He was greeted by more cultivators as he approached the console. The old lady gave him some instructions while also telling him that he should be able to visit the war room all by himself now through this place.

It was a strange feeling as he was able to somehow connect through his spiritual energy to this system. In his mind he could see several places that he could access thanks to his golden crystal. But even with it, there were some places that he was not allowed to venture into, most of them belonging to the other three elders and the Azure Emperor.

Finally, after digging through it he selected the war room. With nothing else to do, the old lady bowed again before removing herself from this area. It didn't seem that she was bothered by him visiting one of

their secret locations anymore but that was probably due to there being many nascent soul leveled elders guarding it at all times.

‘So here we are...’

Once more he was back in this place, the biggest difference was quite obvious. The moment he appeared two nascent soul masters gave him the stink eye. But the moment they noticed his face they quickly turned away.

‘I guess my fame travels fast.’

It was clear that someone like him would be known around this place. Being a new big player in town he would garner interest from a lot of people.

‘There it is... this doesn’t look good...’

What he was interested in was the map though, even though there were more guards the map was paramount. Just like before it was there and shining but there was a big difference to the one that he previously saw.

There were various red areas on it, each one at the border. When he moved closer he focused on the place where he tracked Wang Long to, there too he saw the red mark, it was clear that these were the tunnels leading to the other empires.

‘There are none around the area of my sect though...’

He noticed that down to the south of the empire where the location of his city was, there were no closeby red marks. Only at the north, east and west sides did he spot the bridges. The closest one that he could see was the southeast one that would align with the empire of cultivators that he visited for a short time.

‘Okay then, Bob get to work, we need to analyze this map before anyone kicks us out.’

He ordered his Ai while placing his hand on the large table in the middle of the room. From it a holographic map was being projected, if he could figure out what made this thing tick he wouldn’t need to rely on this Long Clan as much.

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‘Well, that cost me an arm and a leg...’

Zhang Dong looked at his ever-dwindling spirit point pool. After teleporting all over the place and finally scanning the map he was running on reserves. Luckily it was a worthy investment as now he would be able to copy the design.

It was something that he didn’t fully understand, the map was connecting to something in this world. It wasn’t satellites but something similar, it was receiving information that created this display. Without his Ai there would be no possible way of him accessing this outer source.

Bob gave him a roundabout explanation of how this worked. They were in a sense just using the Long Clan maps password while accessing this database on the outside. There didn't seem to be any firewalls or roadblocks that prevented two of these maps from existing at the same time.

Zhang Dong's best guess was that whoever created it either didn't believe that anyone would be able to copy the design or didn't care. Besides a system user, there would probably not be anyone capable of doing this. The system users were part of this whole predicament and perhaps there even was a way to buy a similar map on the system store.

'That about covers it... should I go or look around some more...'

There were other people in this room with him, while at first, they did seem somewhat unwelcoming after a while they just started ignoring his presence. With the war having started they probably had other things to worry about. But for some reason, they didn't really seem to be panicking too much.

'This war room is a bit too silent... I'd expect there to be some grumpy-looking general shouting at people and ordering them to move out...'

The Long Clan's main area was right in the middle of the empire. The enemies were flowing in from all directions and there seemed to be more than just three empires flowing in. From what he could tell there were five or six of them.

From the east side came the ones that he interacted with, the toothy ones. From the west side, there was the Emerald Phoenix Empire that he had visited before. This empire came from the upper east side while from the bottom east there were sightings of strange men in golden armor. Then from the north, he also heard of two distinctive camps being formed.

Zhang Dong's city was in the southwestern regions. There he would either meet with the monster-like people that he already touselled with or another empire altogether. In his mind, it would be better to face off against opponents that he had already met.

They were all body refiners that weren't that great at attacking from range. Those bony body spears might have looked deadly but in reality, it would be hard to hit a very mobile cultivator from range. The best way would be to keep distance as they were clearly more suited for close-quarters combat and pelt them with a vast array of ranged attacks.

"So, about that Goliath thing that my brother mentioned..."

"I apologize but this is not something I can give you information on Golden Dragon. The Azure Emperor is the only one that can answer your question and at the moment he is away."

Before leaving he was also interested in this thing that the Azure Emperor mentioned. From the name, he figured it to be some kind of large beast or construct? Maybe it was some kind of huge flying ship that would make his Argonaut look like a child's toy? Regretfully no one was willing to disclose any information and he was not too keen on hanging out with his brother that much.

While Long Qing seemed like a cheerful fellow to hang around with, he wasn't much different than other cultivators. This he proved by denying aid to him, it was clear that he only cared about his own city and the people living in it.

The map in this chamber clearly showed the movements of the invaders but they were just waiting. From what he could tell, they were anticipating the middle-sized sects and the smaller clans to all be forced back towards the middle of the empire.

Probably after gathering all the nascent soul masters under their own banner would they start their counterattack. He wouldn't be surprised if the Heavenly Crane Sect along with the Long Clan forced the smaller sects to act as meat shields.

They would probably send out some of their nascent soul masters to direct them. Only if the situation became dire, would they act and offer up some of their own resources. This wasn't a bad plan but this depended on the strength of their opponents. If they waited too long, the enemies could become too powerful to resist and at that point, they would have lost most of the middle-sized sects.

'What about me... I can't just fly around and rescue people...'

Zhang Dong found fault in this tactic but he also couldn't deny it. As a leader himself, he knew that everyone was working with limited resources. They couldn't just offer up aid and put their cultivators at risk to save other sects. Without knowing if the other party returned the favor later it was better to not risk losing your devoted sect brothers.

'I guess I'm not that much better than these guys...'

After giving out a sigh he remained in this chamber for a moment to look around. Besides the map, there wasn't really anything of note. Without having any allies in the Long Clan, there was not much he could affect.

He could either try waiting here to convince his brother to help out but he was sure that he would be told to take his people and move them here. But they would probably only allow him to bring the most elite members from his sect and family. The rest of the citizens would be then left to fend for themselves.

"Well, tell my brother that I'll be returning to my own sect."

The man he was talking to looked to be in charge here. He was not one of the three high elders that he met before. Luckily he was taking his status as the Golden Dragon seriously.

"I will pass on the information so that it reaches the Azure Dragon's ear, but it would be faster if lord Golden Dragon visited the Azure palace himself, the Emperor should be coming back soon, it shouldn't take more than a week."

"A whole week?"

"Yes, because of the coming invasion we must be careful of anyone trying to infiltrate our area, only the Emperor has enough skill to see through disguises."

"Ah, is that so..."

It seemed that Long Qing served a similar role of a spy detector like he did to his own sect. There would probably be a lot of panic due to these invaders. During this, it would be smart to replace some of the refugees with spies.

In this world filled with disguising techniques, some of the prominent cultivators could even be replaced. If such a thing occurred they would be sitting on a time bomb without knowing when someone would stab them in the back.

'I guess I could just call him with my system... but not like he can show me his superweapons while he is out...'

Zhang Dong had gone through all the books and through some of the clan's secrets. He did not know everything but it would need to be enough. Without any proper pull here, there was also no way of prying away some of the clan's resources out.

For the time being, he would need to rely on his own people. They had been taking over the lands of the once active Dark Palm Sect, now these lands were theirs.

"I'll be leaving then."

After checking everything out he decided to use the teleportation station to get out. The crystal they gave him was also very interesting and Bob was already trying to examine it. It would require more spirit points to crack so for the time being it was put on the backburner.

...

"Husband, you have returned? Are you alright? Have you been eating enough?"

After getting out of the war room, Zhang Dong went to a more secluded location and teleported back to his new home. He used the faction teleportation to arrive at the location of his wife. The moment he popped out, Liena jump on him as if she was afraid that he was a ghost or something.

"Eating? Well, I didn't really have time to make any stops but don't worry, I had somebody nourishing pills with me."

He could only smile while petting Liena on the back. During his chase for Wang Long, he made many stops along the way but not to take a break. For someone of his caliber, this would be enough as at this point his body was far removed from regular humans. He could survive months, perhaps even a year without eating anything.

"How are you though? Have the kids been good?"

"The children? Yes, every day you are out they ask me where you are... I'm slowly running out of excuses, you should go visit them if you have the time. You do have time now, right?"

"Well..."

Zhang Dong gave out a sigh, he would really like to enjoy his time with his children and lovely wife but he couldn't. There was so much going on outside that he didn't know if they would have a home to return to the next day. Any of the empires could pop up in their lands and it would end in a bloody conflict.

"I'm not sure I will have that much to spare in the coming days, you know what is at stake yourself..."

Everyone had been informed about the state of affairs. The evacuation of the sect didn't go through last time so they didn't need to worry about that anymore. Their citizens from the city started flocking back though as they were left in the forest area to survive in tents while battling beasts in the wild.

"I know but at least show that you are alive, it will mean a lot to them."

Zhang Dong nodded as he knew that to his family he was gone for five years. He had returned only recently and they were probably worried that in the coming war he would vanish yet again. His relationship with his kids had been somewhat rekindled but he knew that if he wasn't there again it would quickly deteriorate.

Thus he made a decision to go see his children while also contacting various members of his sect via his system. Someone like him that was a powerful cultivator could easily multitask so playing patty cake with his daughter and talking to Huo Qiang at the same time wouldn't be that hard.

'So, you have secured it?'

'Yes, it looks the same as it did. Will we be going through the tests again? I don't think we can enter it at this point, will the juniors be tasked with this?'

Huo Qiang asked while looking at a familiar ruin. It was the same one where he and Zhang Dong met for the first time and also the place where part of the Dark Palm sect just vanished. Now it was in their territory and waiting to be explored again.

Chapter 435

'That will be enough.'

'Are you sure Patriarch? We could still take over more of the lost lands?'

'No, this will do, the more land we have the harder it will be to defend. The spirit stone mines will do nicely and also remember to take any thunderstones that you find.'

'As you command, Patriarch.'

Zhang Dong closed the connection with Zhang Zhi that was wrapping up their hostile takeover. Most of the Dark Palm Sect's old lands had been reclaimed by his people. He was not interested in the cities though, what he wanted was access to the secret ground he once visited.

There he hoped to find some help to get him past this coming crisis. If not help then perhaps some answers concerning the true nature of this world that he was in. With the secret ground now being in his own territory and his new status as the Golden Dragon, there was no one to stop him.

"Daddy?"

"Ah sorry, did I space out?"

He looked down, there in his lap was his young daughter. She wasn't the only person he was with, his son was playing in the courtyard with the new toy robot. It seemed that the youngster wasn't as scared of him anymore.

"Hmph! You should pay more attention!"

Zhang Xiu puffed out her cheeks while turning her head away from her father. The two were playing some cards, a game that he himself brought into this world. His child was quite smart but even she couldn't beat someone that was using spirit sense to peek at their cards. That is if he actually used to win but instead, he let the child be victorious instead.

"Haha, daddy was just sad that he lost so much, you're just too strong Xiu."

Xiu started smiling brightly after getting praised by her father. The little girl was quite fond of challenging people to various exercises. He didn't know where she got it from but whenever she lost in anything she would pester the person for a rematch until victory was hers. Thus it was better to surrender unless he wanted to have her cling to his thigh to constantly ask for another go.

"Why don't you go play with your brother while mommy and daddy talk?"

"Okay!"

The small girl left after Liena spoke up. After the kids were away playing, she posed a question.

"Are you really going to try to enter that secret ground by yourself?"

"I see that word goes around..."

"Did you really think you could hide this from me?"

Zhang Dong gulped as he didn't really want to tell his wife that he was placing himself at risk. The place he was going was sort of a no man's land. After the Dark Palm Sect discovered it and even after their downfall other sects and clans attempted to claim it.

Even though some of them managed to get past the initial part just like the Zhang Clan did, it was a dead end. Each time when it was finished there would be a giant suction force sucking people through a large gate. Afterward weeks, months, and then years would pass without anyone coming back.

Due to this, the area had been deemed a hazardous zone, no one was allowed to enter it. The sects had lost many nascent soul elders to the strange trap. They were unable to figure out if they were doing something wrong and Zhang Dong had a suspicion that no one besides him could actually get past that locked gate.

"I will be fine, I will just teleport back here if something goes wrong."

"You didn't 'just' teleport the first time you went missing."

"Well... that was a bit..."

"Different? So there are places that you can't just get back from!"

His wife narrowed her eyes at him while he turned his head away. It was true the system he was using wasn't omnipotent. The place he was going to was built by a previous user that was somehow able to hack it. It wouldn't be strange if that person knew a way to keep him from teleporting out of there but in Zhang Dong's mind, the danger was minimal.

It was that secret ground that set everything in motion. The first cube that he absorbed set him free of the system that was now different. His theory was that he was probably the only person that would be

accepted by that immortal abode. The whole place was probably made as a test for his kind. Only people with an altered system would probably be allowed to fully enter it.

"I'm just going to check it out a bit, I'm not going to use the testing ground, I hope to find a side entrance..."

Zhang Dong started to explain himself to Liena. She knew that he wasn't just a regular cultivator, his old name was also revealed a long time ago/ In his mind the testing ground was just bait to get system holders in. There might be a different entrance that he could go through now.

"Fine, go and leave me and the kids again, we will be just fine!"

"... Don't be that way my wife, I'm not doing it for selfish reasons, I think the knowledge there could help us through the coming war."

Liena puffed up her cheeks in a similar fashion to her daughter which made Zhang Dong chuckle. While he knew where she was coming from, it had to be done. The mysteries buried in that strange place could help them through this coming event and this might be also the last time he would be able to examine it. When the war started there might not be space to maneuver, it could be even destroyed during the fighting.

"Fine, but you better contact me regularly!"

Finally, his wife gave in as she knew that there was no way to stop him from going. But he would certainly not put himself at risk there. The situation was not so dire for him to grasp at straws yet. He was strong enough to battle with the toughest nascent soul masters on the continent already. His cultivation was constantly increasing and with more spirit stones coming over, he would only continue to progress.

Thus after having a moment with his wife and kids he set out to the place where it all started. To his knowledge, the secret ground was later named the ghostly immortal's abode. It was rumored to have been created by a long-dead cultivator and everyone that tried to venture past the gates had never returned.

Time was of the essence so he used up the last of his spirit points to teleport to Zhang Zhi's location. Thankfully his most trusted retainer had been tasked with securing spirit stones for him.

"Zhang Zhi greets the Patriarch!"

While the samurai was not surprised by him just popping out of the blue, the other sect members were. The moment they saw their silver-haired leader they dropped their heads. Not everyone was used to seeing him but Zhang Dong had already gotten used to how much he was revered in his own sect.

"At ease, I think you have some spirit stones for me?"

Zhang Zhi nodded while handing him a spatial ring. Inside there were many large and small spirit stones along with thunderstones that were just crystallized lightning energy. With these in his position, he could finally resume nourishing his cores. After absorbing so much holy energy and soul energy he was only missing lightning to make a small jump.

"I will be entering the secret ground myself, make sure that I'm not bothered by anyone."

“T-this...”

Instead of a resounding ‘Yes Patriarch.’ he received a lukewarm response. Zhang Zhi apparently didn’t agree with this plan and he knew why.

“You don’t need to worry, I’m not going to be taking any tests that this immortal’s abode offers, I’m just going to see if I can find a side entrance, if I can’t find anything I’ll just return.”

“As you wish.”

It was clear that Zhang Zhi was opposed to letting him just wander in there on his own. But the other cultivators would just get in the way. Then if he found a side entrance, he wasn’t sure how the abode would react to non-system users like his sect members. They might find themselves whisked away like all the other nascent soul masters before them.

After taking the spatial ring he made his way towards the secret ground. Even before entering it he could feel the presence of a formation here. It had been created to keep lower leveled cultivators out but for him it was child’s play.

Soon he ended up at the exact location where his old clan ship arrived. Zhang Dong stopped for a moment as the memory had been imprinted in his brain. On one side he remembered his now-wife Liena sticking out her tongue at him. Then in another location was Huo Qiang that was surrounded by women and alcohol.

“Time really does fly, I didn’t think I would be returning here.”

In all honesty, Zhang Dong would rather spend his time with his family than be out adventuring. If it wasn’t for the impending doom he would just be homemaking toys for his son while trying to catch up.

“Before this all started I never thought I would have my own kids... I guess some good came from this strange world...”

He shook his head to snap out of it. This was not the time to reminisce about his old life that he hardly remembered. The old him from earth wasn’t there anymore, his new persona of Zhang Dong had since taken over while Matt was now a distant memory.

‘Bob, be sure to scan the area for any potential entry points.’

‘Affirmative.’

While getting closer he took out some of the spirit stones from the spatial ring he received. Soon they turned to dust as he absorbed them for more spirit points. With his reserves replenished he would now be able to teleport back to Zhang Zhi if there were any problems.

“Still looks as gloomy as I remember...”

He passed through the entrance, the place was deserted. It was clear that no one had enough courage to make another trip. But with his knowledge and the help of his little AI partner he was sure that there was something he could find here.

‘Hidden entrance point found, forwarding data to the map.’

No sooner did he enter the abode that he received a message from Bob. His system map was marked by him instantly, it seemed that there really was a way to enter for him. Now it remained to be seen, was there something there to help him or would this be a dead end.

I've decided to pause Patreon for the next month which means that my stories will be on hold for about a month. If you want more info please go to the Patreon link.

Chapter 436

"Are you sure we are going the right way?"

'Affirmative, the entrance is exactly 457,45 meters north-east.'

"Ah yes, sure it is..."

Zhang Dong looked at the red marker on his minimap. While what Bob said might have been true he was calculating the distance in a straight line. At this moment in time, he was walking through some dark corridors filled with cobwebs.

This part of this secret ground was unknown to him as he had never visited it before. The last time he was here they were all shoved into the testing chamber and teleported away. All the other passages were blocked off by the Dark Palm Sect cultivators. Finally, after all these years he was able to examine this place in detail.

There was actually a series of corridors under the whole structure. When looking at his map he was now somewhere under the trial chamber. Apparently somewhere under here, there was a secret entrance that the Dark Palm Sect didn't discover.

"Some of these tunnels had been dug up, probably they were trying to find another entrance like me."

It was clear by how it looked down here that the Dark Palm Sect and perhaps the sects that came after it were excavating this site. There were half-finished tunnels everywhere, it was clear that they tried to dig their way behind that large chamber door.

"This rock structure... No wonder they were itching to get in."

Zhang Dong punched one of the walls after injecting his fist full of Qi. The ground shook but instead of the wall being smashed into pieces his knuckles were injured. The material that the walls were made with was clearly something above the level of regular cultivators.

The stone was incredibly hard but not the same as the one that he discovered at the cube location. There was also no dark spot in his minimap which confirmed his theory that this was something else. The person that made this structure was probably someone with a system like him. It was possible that he either bought the knowledge on how to build this place from the system store.

He arrived at his destination. Many tunnels were leading to this large cavern that had been dugout. He could see at least half a kilometer of nothing but white walls from left to right. The cultivation nuts clearly didn't give up lightly and tried to find some kind of weak spot here but weren't able to continue.

'This makes it seem that the immortal abode is here and it doesn't just teleport us to some kind of distant location.'

These white walls spread in all directions. He could feel some spiritual energy that was reinforcing them and absorbing any hits that he delivered. In most cases, such structures required some sort of power source to keep their effects. But it could also just be some special material.

“It should be somewhere here...”

He floated up into the air, the walls were quite smooth and uniform in all directions. On the ground, he could see some destroyed tools such as pickaxes that were probably used to attempt a breach. With the help of his minimap marker, he was finally able to find the entrance spot.

“Well then, do your thing, Bob... I don’t really feel anything out of the ordinary here...”

After pressing his palm on the smooth wall he tried to examine it with his spiritual sense. There wasn’t anything that he could spot, it was clear that without the system he would be unable to venture any further.

‘Interfacing... please wait...’

Zhang Dong felt a bit apprehensive about overusing Bob. It was still unclear to him what this AI program was. For the time being it was helping him, without Bob he would have been unable to return from that other world. But this also didn’t mean that this being wouldn’t somehow betray him in the future.

There were stories of cultivators leaving a slither of their being in items. Then they would use some occult means to inject them into other cultivators. Slowly they would grow in power and finally at a certain juncture they would strike. When the cultivator was at a weak point they would try to overtake their very soul and body. What if Bob was leading him into certain doom and the person that made him would try to take over his body?

‘That’s a possibility but with how big my soul has gotten I’m not sure if they will have it easy...’

This was a possibility though it was somewhat far-fetched. For the time being, he could only throw this reasoning to the back of his head while venturing forward. As he was worrying Bob finally was done with his interfacing and a strange sound of pressurized air came from the wall.

‘...Task complete, opening... please stand by.’

He flinched slightly as a door appeared before him. It opened upwards while accompanied by screeching. It was clear that this opening had not been used for quite some time, even some dust had crept in.

‘I guess here goes nothing...’

It was finally time to take the plunge inside, he couldn’t really see much as there was no light. Even though he tried to use his spiritual sense to see what was inside he couldn’t see anything past the entrance. There was probably some kind of high level formation blocking him from peeking inside.

‘Well, I found a side entrance as I told you, I’ll be going inside now, I’m not sure how long it will take me.’

‘Please be careful.’

As he ventured forward he made sure to inform his wife as he promised. He wasn't sure how long it would take him or if he would be able to use his system to communicate with her after entering his place.

Finally, he propelled himself gently forward and vanished into the darkened room. As soon as he was inside the entrance closed behind him. Now on the inside, his golden aura lit the way forward as it was clear that the space he was occupying had not been used for many millennia.

'The air in here is stale...'

He found himself in another corridor to the side he could see something orb-like stuck to the wall. It was some kind of round crystal that he was somewhat familiar with.

'Bob... Can you turn on the lights?'

After a moment these round objects that were embedded in the wall started to flicker. Even though they were clearly unused, they still were in working order. The path forward continued to be illuminated before him and in the distance, he could see a fork in the road.

'Before that... can you hear me?... hello...?'

Zhang Dong frowned as what he had feared came true. He could not contact his wife or anyone else from his sect. It was clear that this person that made this was going against the person that made the system. Thus it was natural that he would have something in place to block it from interfering.

Even then he had hoped that thanks to Bob he might be able to contact his wife and others. But even with the hacked version of the system he could not. Perhaps he would need to gain full access to this immortal abode before he could send his message.

'Are you still working Bob?'

'Affirmative, all systems are nominal. The faction function is being blocked, do you wish to examine the issue?'

'Yes do that while I look around.'

Without anything else to do he moved forward. The corridor was now quite bright and even though there were no cobwebs here the place seemed quite old. It was clear that whoever lived here before was long gone.

At first, the corridor was mostly empty with the same sense blocking walls keeping him from peering outside but soon he ended up at a fork in the road. While he could see the end of the path he came from, this one stretched for far too much for him to see.

There were three paths he could take, one leading forward, one to the left, and another one to the right. He looked up in hopes of finding some kind of sign but there was none. It was clear that whoever made this place didn't care about intruders knowing their way.

'Everything in here is made from this strange material, I can't sense anything...'

He could only narrow his eyes while floating up. The corridors were about four meters wide and ten meters high which allowed him to see further in. While two of the paths were the same there was something he spotted on the right side. Instead of the white walls, he noticed something out of place which made him decide on this way.

'Is that... glass?'

It was somewhat surprising but he was sure that he was seeing a reflective surface from a distance. After arriving at the spot, the thing he discovered put things into perspective.

"Wait, isn't this... I've been there before..."

What he saw was not a room or anything but a wide expanse of land. It was a forest area, the same exact zone that he was sent to when he was taking the trial with the other core formation cultivators at that time.

What he found was a window that gave him a clear look down but the distance from the landmass below was quite tremendous. There must have been some kind of spatial formation here as there was far too much land down there.

Below him was the vast area where he met his wife and Huo Qiang. The memories of battling strange monsters and the trials with the seven sins folded his mind. He quickly recalled some key landmarks which were actually there. The only strange part was that there didn't seem to be any monsters around.

"Maybe only when the trial gets triggered from the outside do the monsters appear?"

This place probably took up a tremendous amount of spiritual energy to run. It would be smart to turn it off while there are no people taking the test. The area was also shrouded in darkness and only thanks to his enhanced vision and ability to see in the dark could he see anything.

He was at the right place but where should he go? The paths continued in various directions and there was no way to know where to go. His minimap was also not showing him the way as the system blockers extended past the communication blocking.

"This might take a while... but perhaps I should go in the direction of that final trial?"

Without knowing where to go, he decided to go towards the zone where he faced off against the pride demon. There he found all of the current books and scripts that made him what he was today. Perhaps there he would find some more answers.

Chapter 437

"It's not as big on the outside as it is on the inside, a strange sight to behold..."

While floating through the wide corridor Zhang Dong spotted more windows into the trial grounds. They were spaced out by somewhat a large distance but this distance seemed to expand by at least ten times when he peeked to the inside.

This was the first time that he saw this kind of spatial formation that was divided. While he traveled a hundred meters in the corridor it was as if he went through a whole kilometer on the inside.

He continued to look but there were no of those monsters to be seen. The inside was in some kind of stasis that would probably only be removed when a group of cultivators came to challenge the test.

Then finally after going in one direction he came before a door. It was not closed to him and he didn't need to use Bob to hack it either. After entering through it he found himself in another area with more windows. There he could spot areas that he had already visited, ones that he faced of the seven deadly sins-themed bosses.

Like the other areas, there was nothing in the rooms and the signs of combat were gone. He tried to recall those days, some of them were spent battling the monsters. He could clearly remember damaging the surroundings in some of the fights but it seemed that this place could somehow repair itself.

"Is someone living here that repaired it? or is there some kind of formation that can put it back into place?"

Even if there were some type of beings doing the repairs he expected them to be more like the monsters. The easiest way would be to create some automatons that performed restorative efforts after a test was done. From what he knew, the tests couldn't be carried out constantly. This place clearly needed time to repair itself for the next batch of combatants.

"Should I try breaking through it..."

After tapping on the glass a couple of times he realized that it was also made from some strange material. It was not as hard as the walls though and would probably be unable to resist his punches. The trials didn't allow nascent soul masters in them so these windows might not have been made resistant enough.

For the time being, he decided to not cause trouble. Perhaps if he attempted this the whole place could become active or some kind of defensive mechanism could be triggered. If the walls could be made from this strange resistant material then perhaps so could defensive constructs.

Thus he arrived at a flight of winding stairs that brought him up, there he also discovered the library from where he borrowed most of his current knowledge. All the books were still there and if other cultivators were here they would probably already be busting through the windows to get to those old scriptures.

But this didn't seem to be the end so he continued to go up. The whole place was giving him a strange feeling. He clearly wasn't able to see these glass windows when he was on the other side but from here he could peek inside of the testing ground with ease.

It was as if someone or something was watching them battle for their lives for their amusement. But perhaps this was something of an age long past, this whole place looked deserted. There was no sign of anything living going through these corridors, the whole place was probably just operating on some old directive.

"That's quite a drop..."

He continued to go up the stairs for some time but they didn't seem to end. It was clear that he had entered through another spatial formation that extended this tower of stairs even further. But without any directions, he could only continue and finally after about an hour of traveling he arrived at the end.

“Only the worthy may pass?”

There were actual words written above this chamber, their meaning didn't really matter but there was something peculiar about it. The words were not in mandarin, no they were in English.

After coming to this world he had seen some strange mix of cultures that didn't fit the theme of this world. He realized that this was probably due to many other system users shaping their cities to fit their more modern style. Seeing English words was not out of the ordinary but it also made it obvious that they were meant for people like him.

Thus he took a step forward and placed his hand on the large door ring. The moment he did, he could feel an outward force scanning his body. Before he knew it, there was a click, and as he started pulling the door quickly creaked open.

With haste he let go of the ring-shaped door handle but even when he waited for something to attack him there was only silence. With slow steps he moved forward to peek inside and what he saw was not something that he expected.

“This room... Is that a beanbag chair?... This...”

The room wasn't that large but it reminded him of his old apartment. There was a gaming chair right next to a desk with three large curved monitors. Nothing was turned on but the PC that the monitors were connected to would probably have some nice RGB coloring.

This room reminded him of the secret one that he made at his own sect. It seemed that whoever lived here had a similar longing for their old life as a gamer. To the side, he could also spot a large bed and a projector next to it probably used to watch movies or perhaps spy on the people performing the tests.

“I guess this is the place where the system user hung out?”

The chamber wasn't too big and there were some windows there. When peeking out of them he had a clear view at the last area where his old Zhang Clan did their tower defense session. But after going around a couple of times he couldn't really find anything, it seemed that he would need to turn that computer on to see if it worked.

‘Bob, can you sense something?’

‘Negative, unable to connect.’

“Hm... oh, haven't seen this in years...”

Hidden away to the side was something that he used to be familiar with. It looked like an old console but in actuality, it was a router. Even though he wasn't that pedantic about his man cave where he only placed monitors in, the rest wasn't really fashioned to mimic the look of technology from his old world.

He felt like he was back home, the thoughts of returning back from work to only turn on his computer and play games for the rest of the day flooded his mind. But it was a flood of stagnant memories of not doing anything interesting every day. Probably if he was not so bored with his life back there, he would have ignored that e-mail as some spam attempt.

But this wasn't the time to reminisce about his old life. The person that he was before was now only a small part of his persona. His whole family and sect depended on his next few decisions and he needed more information to decide.

The computer along with the router were turned on by him and even though these things were quite old, they did work. He saw a strange logo on the monitor that looked like some kind of crystal flying sword which was probably the calling sign of the person that created all of this.

It didn't take long for the PC to boot and place him in the operating system, but there was a little problem.

"Password? Hey, Bob could you... wait..."

At first, he wanted to have Bob use some of his magic to hack into this system but he noticed a question sign to the right side. On it was a tip for the password. He grabbed what looked to be a gaming mouse and placed the cursor over this question mark.

"Guess What Came In The Mail Today?..."

He had to pause for a moment before realizing that he probably knew what the answer to the password was. He slowly hovered his fingers towards the keyboard that was lit up like a rainbow and started typing.

"This guy sure is something..."

Zhang Dong wanted to facepalm after writing in the password. The person he was dealing with had a similar juvenile sense of humor as he did before. But he wasn't sure if the person ever expected someone to come here and look through his computer.

He was greeted by a background of a rather voluptuous lady dressed in some ribbons that covered most of the naughty parts in a strategic fashion. There wasn't really that much on the desktop that he could see besides a few folders and what looked to be executables.

There was no use staring at them so he started clicking away. The first thing he clicked was an icon of a camera, it took only a moment for it to show him some kind of software with hundreds of small icons.

When clicking one he was shown the inside of the training ground that for now, was devoid of much movement. Luckily the plants were still alive and there was some kind of small breeze so he could see some small amount of movement.

After clicking through it he was sure that this was the monitoring system. While he found all of the places that he visited before he could also see the outside of this secret ground. He could even see Zhang Zhi in the distance patrolling the area and unaware that he was being watched.

There were also some chambers that he hadn't seen before. One of them looked to be something like a dining area, then there was a large pool with crystal clear water with waterfalls. But even after clicking through place after place, he didn't discover any signs of life or any leftover automatons that could tell him what had happened here.

"This one... I think this is behind that large gate..."

At least the secret to what was behind the door that sucked those cultivators in was revealed to him. He clearly recognized the other side of it which led to a large teleportation platform. There wasn't anything in there, it seemed that anyone that was sucked in had been teleported to another location.

"Not much to find here... what does this folder have..."

He turned his attention from the camera system to one of the folders that was named 'Old videos'. After clicking he found a massive amount of old footage that came from other trials. There was even footage of people dying or being sucked into that teleportation chamber.

Then after fiddling through some of that footage he found a subfolder. It seemed that this was what he was looking for. After going into it, he found some recordings and from the thumbnail, he could see that the person was sitting in the same chair he was in. It looked to be some type of video diary of the person that created this place, it was finally time to see what this was all about.

Chapter 438

"Testing, one...two...three... Think it's working... this feels kind of strange."

Zhang Dong was looking at a person in an old video. There was some kind of date on it but it didn't make much sense to the system they had now. This made it seem that this was recorded before the current dating system was put in place.

'The current dating system dates back to a hundred thousand years, it probably started right after the last war between empires. If the timer gets restarted every hundred thousand years, there is no way of knowing how old this is.'

First, he took a good look at the person that was recording himself. Just like any other system users that he had seen, he was quite handsome. It was clear that the people chosen for this position wanted to make themselves look the best and he was the same.

The person looked more like a traditional cultivator but he wasn't that young. His hair was a mix of black and silver that had appeared due to age. Either the person had gone with the elder option in his e-mail or he had just spent quite a bit of time in this world. But judging that it would probably take many years to build a place like this, he was sure it was the latter.

He didn't look as old as some of the elders, at most he was about fifty. But it would be hard to tell his true age with just the appearance. Nascent soul masters lived to around a thousand years and depending on their cultivation they could keep their youthful look even into their older years. This person had the system with them, so even here he could already be nine hundred.

"I did it, I have managed to create this testing ground. With it I will be able to find more people like me, by that I mean people with a system! I know that you are out there, I can't be the only one..."

It seemed that this person was really the one that figured out the secrets of the system but as it was starting to get to the good part, the video was cut off. Zhang Dong realized that this computer was quite old and even if it looked fine from the outside there was a limit at which data could be stored.

When he tried to click the next video after it, he was shown a corrupt image with no sound. Other ones wouldn't even start playing and Bob was also unable to reconstruct the corrupt data.

'It's already a miracle that this thing didn't crumble into dust, it's at least a hundred thousand years old...'

Without much to do, he continued to go through the many videos one by one. Finally, he was able to play a part of it, in this video, the man looked a lot older. His skin had some wrinkles and his hair was now almost fully gray. His eyes also looked tired, it was as if he didn't sleep for some time.

"Log number 59... ah whoever cares, not like anyone will ever see this... but anyway..."

The man gave out a sigh while leaning back in the gaming chair recreation.

"I have been unable to discover any other people like me, it has been many thousands of years, no one was able to finish this trial and no other system could be discovered. I have been putting myself into stasis to prolong my life but there is a limit on how much time I have...End log"

The video cut so he continued to the next one.

"Log number 245... I'm getting tired, so I went outside to stretch my legs... my old sect is no more, I don't recognize anyone... I don't think anyone from my bloodline is alive anymore..."

"567... It has been a hundred thousand years... the war cycle has repeated... but no other of my kind has appeared and I know the reason. I have made an error in my calculations, unless I cut off from the source no one will come... without a new system user the empire has no chance of winning, they have retreated into the center but they will survive... I know what I must do..."

"569... I know how to remove myself from the system but I'm too old to survive the procedure. Only when close to death is this possible and by prolonging my life artificially I will certainly die, I must leave this in the hands of someone else. I have updated the trials but I'm unsure if it will work... there are too many variables that could go wrong... I have decided to ascend."

"571... I am planning to ascend today, this will be the last time. Even after living for this long, I do not wish to die, I am afraid... I know that something is waiting for me, I don't know what it wants and why it created this game-like world, I know that there are others like me but I'm unable to travel to them at this point, I only hope that the person watching this can meet me on the other side..."

"The ascension to the immortal realm is impossible for anyone other than a system user. I made a discovery, there were several realms between the immortal realm and the nascent soul realm that had been stricken from history. Without this knowledge, it is impossible for regular cultivators to bridge the gap. The step from the nascent soul all the way to the immortal realm is certain death."

"Only if you give yourself to the system, is ascension possible but what awaits on the other side, I don't know... After ascending you will be forced to leave this realm, it will be unable to contain your new realm and reject your very being. I hope that I'm wrong and what waits for me on the other side is not certain death but I'm out of options, I have no way of prolonging my life anymore so I hope this message reaches someone who can pave a new path..."

After going through all of these videos he had an idea of what had been happening here. Each video showed the man being older and older. It seemed that he was using some type of device to halt his aging, something akin to cryogenic sleep.

The man would put himself to sleep for thousands of years and come out on certain occasions to check if the testing ground brought any system holders out. He also spoke about altering the system but being unable to fully cut himself from it. He was still connected which was the reason that he was unable to find any other system user.

This made him remember that fateful day when he was cut away from the system. He must have been injected with this man's program but only when he almost died did it sever him from the source. He had almost died back there but he was somehow able to survive which was a miracle of its own. The person here was unwilling to go through the process himself and chose to ascent to a higher realm.

This was a very widespread trope in the xianxia world. There were certain limits to the world the main protagonist always found themselves in, after reaching that ceiling what remained was to go through it. This would be done by reaching a higher realm of power and then ascending to a brand new world.

Then they would find themselves somewhere with more realms and new locations to discover. Their adventure would continue again where they would have more time to progress and go against stronger foes. It was like a perpetual adventure where there was no one to it until the person became a full-fledged god-like being that could do whatever they wanted.

The person also confirmed one of his theories, there were other realms beyond the nascent soul level. It did seem strange to him that there was a massive leap from the nascent soul level all the way to the immortal realm. But it seemed that this was by design, it was supposed to limit the non-system users from ever achieving this degree of power.

"This timeline, he ascended somewhere around the time there was a war between the empires..."

The Azure Dragon had informed him that the battle had been mostly lost in the old days. Only by sacrifice and bunkering up in the previous capital were they able to last through it all. This would mostly mean that this person built this secret ground two hundred thousand years ago and it lasted to this day when the new war had started.

Somehow this man had probably been victorious in his version of the empire war. Then he figured out how to hack the system before attempting to make contact with other system users. He was probably trying to gain some allies to figure out what everything was about.

Zhang Dong was unsure of the extent of this man's hacking capabilities. He was unable to totally strip himself of the system but it didn't seem that any of the watchers were utilized to get to him. Perhaps because he wasn't causing any world-ending calamities or altering the rules of the world, there were no repercussions.

When he visited the world of sword and magic, he was a being that affected the power balance. Perhaps only when someone past the nascent soul level threshold would the system mods become alert. His current enhanced core formation realm might be a problem now because if he ever made it into the higher realm, it could go against the rules.

"I guess I'll have to prepare... but this doesn't really give me any answers..."

These revelations weren't anything new to him. In some sense, he knew more things than this person as he had actually visited another world. It was apparently a miracle that he was even alive after the incident in this trial.

But it did bring up some questions, what was waiting for him out there. If he reached a new realm here would he be forced to leave his family and friends behind? It was apparently impossible to sustain oneself in this world after attaining the immortal realm. What was waiting out there for him? It could be just another world to explore and have fun with or death.

"Not like I want to be immortal... if I can see my kids grow up and have their own families..."

He gave out a sigh as he didn't really care that much about living for longer than a thousand years. What he was fighting for was his new family, if he could assure their survival then it was enough. But if this world could be erased at a snap of a finger was also a possibility.

For now, he decided to look around some more. Perhaps there would be more information about the coming war. The person that created this testing ground certainly said that they went through their own adventure. If he could find some new weapons to aid him in the coming battles, then it would still be a very fortuitous encounter.

Chapter 439

'There really isn't much here...'

Zhang Dong, was now looking at a room that had been turned upside down. After going through the PC he attempted to find other information that could at least help him out of the current problem.

The person living here was probably the same that he saw after running into the first proper cube. At the twilight of his years, he decided to ascend to the immortal realm as he could not fully cut himself away from the system.

There were some possibilities here, the man could have been over-exaggerating of what happened after one ascended. He could have still been alive to this very day. This old man was convinced that there was something out there and that it was out to get him. If he transcended the nascent soul realm fully, he was done for.

From Zhang Dong's perspective that was one of the possibilities. There were various other worlds out there besides this one. This person might have just been transported into the next stage of the adventure and with the increased realm could have lived to this day.

There were traces left of him in those energy cubes that were trying to contact him. While he wasn't sure if it was the same person it pointed towards him. There was no new information in this room that he didn't already know. If he didn't visit the other world before coming here he would probably be shocked to make this discovery.

'This guy probably didn't keep many books or notes around...'

He started rubbing his chin after looking at the room that he turned upside down. The person he was dealing with was a system user. The system could store all the information in the user's brain. There was no purpose of writing things down or keeping any outside data storage.

What he was looking, for now, was any old records about the war that this old system holder went through. The computer that was working the data was encrypted and corrupt. He had Bob try to examine it all but there was just too much to go through.

It wasn't possible to divide the important information, he could only order Bob to decrypt from the start to the end. If he got anything worthwhile out of it that was unknown to him, the first batch of information could just give him a list of useless techniques that he already knew and not the historical records he needed.

He wanted to unplug this ancient computer and take it with him. There was a small problem as it was connected to the router which granted him access to the cameras in this place. It also could be used to open some previously hidden rooms that led out of this room. Thus for the time being he decided to leave it here, after he was done exploring he would decide if he would take it with him.

It seemed that everything had been plugged into this PC but it was an ancient treasure. It had probably been two hundred thousand years since this place had been constructed. This device could be just as old and it was slowly falling apart. The materials that they were made with were strange and unfamiliar to him.

'I guess I can only continue, can't put a teleportation point here. It was clear that this person didn't want other system users to just be able to invade his home.'

After using the computer he was able to open a side room. The door slid to the side to reveal another corridor that he was now going through. This time around the journey was a lot shorter.

"Was this the rest of his home?"

When he walked out he was greeted to an overgrown mansion, it was covered in various plants and vines. This place had not been put into stasis which probably caused everything to continue growing. Besides the plants he could not spot any life signals though, not even insects existed.

This home looked like a regular house that would probably be able to contain a family of four or five. There was a wooden fence along with a garage that was open. In the garage, he could see a replica of an old car model that he once saw in a magazine.

"Did he remake his old family home here?"

It seemed that the cultivator that created this place had a longing for his old life, one that was stronger than Zhang Dong's. He cherished his current new family more than the one he left. This made sense as this man did put himself through some kind of life-prolonging process.

He clearly didn't care that much about the people here, if he did growing old with them would probably be more important than leaving. To Zhang Dong doing something like outgrowing his children would feel strange, he would rather pave the way for them so that his kids had a brighter future.

But this did align with this person's goals as well, he needed to know what was out there. A chance of this world being erased at a whim was a possibility. From what he could tell that only when a system user was dead or ascended was another one chosen. Thus if he killed Wang Long something that he had not planned could come to pass.

‘What if this world was reset or put into a new state of being by an overseer...’

This was one of the biggest fears that he had now. What if the death of Wang Long put everything at risk that he had fought for. What if instead of letting this world continue there would be a reset switch pressed and everyone that he loved disappeared?

Previously he was not sure about Wang Long’s origins but now after watching the videos it was clear. The man clearly stated that unless the original system user was somehow severed from the system a new one would not be summoned.

Through his encounter with this place, he had died and severed the connection to the system. He had become a free agent while Wang Long was now the current official system holder. When he died another one would be summoned but the second scenario was already playing out, the war between Empires had been started.

When the thread connecting him to the main system was erased he was still a core formation expert. There weren’t that many changes that he made to the world, there was no reason to reset the scenario. Wang Long could just start from another location as not even a year had passed since he was summoned to this world.

But now there was a big difference, if he died in the middle of this struggle would the world be altered by an outside force? This was a possibility, he needed more answers, for the time being containing Wang Long in a prison would be the better option but also harder to accomplish.

He finally continued inside, the whole place was overgrown with weeds and signs of corrosion was everywhere. This home looked like it had come from some kind of dystopian future. The moment he went to open the door the hinges came off and the whole thing fell down.

On the inside, grass and vines were everywhere. The stairs to the second level had collapsed and everything here certainly didn’t last the test of time. Nothing looked usable and it was clear that this was just a place that this person used to relax.

This was not why he came here, after going through that pc there was supposed to be a special chamber that he was looking for. There was supposed to be an entrance here. He finally found himself in what looked to be an office. Old destroyed books and a half-collapsed desk were there.

On the desk, he spotted a picture frame that depicted a family of four. Somehow the picture had survived to this very day, it had to have been made with more resistant materials. On it, he could see two kids with their parents. The boy that was next to the father reminded him somewhat of the old man that he saw in the videos.

“This must have been his previous family, he certainly longed for the good old times... the entrance should be behind the bookshelf...”

After glancing at the photo he moved to the wall, there he discovered another passage to a large white room. The walls looked to be made with the same hard material.

“Hm, perhaps this stuff can’t be made into anything else than this white wall?”

He hoped to find some indestructible weapons for the coming battles but perhaps these walls were specially made through some contrived way that didn't translate into smaller items like swords. This room was large and down in the middle, there was some kind of container.

"This is..."

This container had many large tubes connecting to it which hadn't aged that well either. From the PC he used this was clearly the stasis room which meant that this container had been used to prolong this man's life.

He somewhat expected to see some old bones that were leftover but instead he only found some rags. The material had decomposed through the years but it was certainly something that was worn before.

"Was this the place where he also ascended?"

The container looked a bit more modern with its design, the metal it was crafted from was somewhat rusted over but the shape had been kept. This looked like some kind of cryogenic pod that the creator of this secret ground had probably used to sleep through many thousands of years.

The tubes that were connected to it had faint traces of spiritual energy in them. Zhang Dong thus theorized that this device was somehow absorbing spiritual energy from some kind of source.

"There it is!"

When he followed the residual spiritual energy he arrived at the wall, but this time around this wasn't a dead end. With the help of Bob that came from this place, he was able to access a hidden panel that revealed a hidden power source.

"A nucleus."

It was one of the cubes that he always looked for. These small treasures could store a lot of energy and last through the ages. His predecessor knew this well and certainly used it to power at least part of this place.

At first, he was planning to take it and absorb all of the spiritual energy it had. There was a small problem as he didn't think that it would have much power left. If he removed it from here, the whole secret ground could collapse or become open to any invaders from the outside.

"I guess it's good to know that it's here, I could use it as a trump card if I ever need it but for now it is probably safer here than in my possession."

There were still some spirit stones for him to go through. Advancing too fast could also bring the ire of an overseer on him. Thus, for now, he would let this relic rest here while he sought after other options for the coming war.

Chapter 440

"This really does look quite eerie..."

Zhang Dong was rocketing forward while surrounded by a golden shield of light. After going through the old house he had managed to figure out a way to get into the trial ground. But regretfully there was not much that he could use here.

The whole place was devoid of life and in some kind of stasis. Even the plants that seemed to be alive were surrounded by some uncanny energy.

‘Did he use the same technology that kept him alive on these plants as well?’

While he could enter this area while shielding himself with his spiritual energy, the rest was covered in some kind of strange aura of stasis. Bob was trying to analyze it and he also found some old research material that could help him figure it out later.

This strange energy was probably the reason why this place survived for this long. All the monsters and creatures that he had encountered here were probably just constructs made from spiritual energy. After the trials were done they would vanish and the whole place would start recharging itself.

The cube that he found in the room with the pod was the focal point of this whole place. Even now it was generating power while also taking it from somewhere. Probably another hidden spirit vein was buried deep underground that even his system scanner couldn’t reach.

After flying through the air he found the places where he met his wife and other friends like Huo Qiang. If he wanted he would even be able to go to the section where he met the seven sins and where the library was. For now, he decided to not as he had already scanned every book that it had, there was nothing to gain from there.

It would be better to keep this place operational and powered up. Even though it was now in his lands this could give his enemies an edge. But they were not system users and not above the person that made this secret ground. They would even find themselves trapped and then sucked into the teleportation array.

“This is disappointing but maybe I can use this thing...”

What he was looking at was a deactivated map. It was the treasure that was used by his clan members for the tower defense system. Even now it was able to produce a holographic image of the areas surrounding it but he was thinking of using it differently.

“It’s strangely similar to the one at the Long Clan, perhaps this guy had lifted the design?”

Zhang Dong could only speculate but it looked like the system user that he saw in the videos had used some of the designs here. This thing was either copied over or just bought from the system store and then altered. With the help of Bob he would be able to access it, then reprogram its functions to mimic the map at the Long clan.

“I’ll be able to monitor the whole empire, that thing was able to even track the movements of the invaders...”

This would probably be one of the most important items that he could get. It would allow him to predict the movement of his enemies and act accordingly. With the real-time holographic map, he would know where to place his forces before anything happened.

It was nicely preserved and still in working order. The stasis that this place was placed in probably helped preserve even magical treasures like this. With some skillful hand movements, he used his spiritual energies to levitate this while map into the air and then quickly deposited it into his spatial ring.

“Doesn’t seem that there is anything else that interesting here, I wish I could take this fortress with me but it probably won’t work without being connected to the secret ground... unless...”

Zhang Dong had taken the bulky map with him but there was still the small fortress that was used for the tower defense part of the trial. It was used by his people to create defensive structures after killing monsters.

Clearly, the killing of monsters did nothing as everything was fueled by spiritual energy here. It was just fake currency and the secret lay in the secret ground itself. Then, if he could take this small fortress with him, could he recreate the system to quickly fortify his own sect? Perhaps he could feed it other things than spirit stones to make it create cannons out of thin air like during the test?

He had come prepared to take some bigger structures with him. Around his neck was a medallion that looked strangely similar to the dimensional regalia. It was a heaven grade replica of the immortal treasure with the same function. The space inside it was vastly smaller but it would be large enough to take this structure with him.

This procedure would be somewhat harder and require more spiritual energy but at this point in his life, Zhang Dong was quite powerful. The whole structure trembled as it rose into the air while being covered by his golden aura. The medallion around his neck started glowing as it shot out a beam of blue light.

When the beam collided with the large structure it started to quickly surround it with light. After the building was submerged in the light it vanished. After peeking inside he could see the building standing on a large plot of land.

The inside of this treasure was about a kilometer in diameter which was quite enough for several of these structures. His plan was to have Bob analyze both the map along with the fortress and connect them to his own system. Through it, he hoped to mimic the functions of the tower defense system.

This is why he took away the map first as he wanted to disconnect it from this structure and then later place it at his sect ground. There he needed his people to monitor it as he still wanted his generals to do most of the strategic planning for him.

“I guess this is for this part...”

Zhang Dong looked at the empty region devoid of any life. He tried to recall the area where he had faced the demon of pride and burned up his life energy to save the people here. It brought a smile to his face as it showed him that he had it in him, the drive to help others over himself. But now things were somewhat different, with a more tightly knit family he didn’t know if he wouldn’t put them over the lives of his other sect members.

It was time to leave so he continued with his search. He visited all the places that he had been through as well as some other hidden away secret stashes. There were some hidden away locations with some treasures like weapons and old pills. These he had probably missed while stressing out to get back to his clan during his time here.

While the books from the library were mostly useless, the swords and spears could be used by his people. Everything that was of some worth was tossed into his spatial rings or the regalia replica. The items that he was taking were mostly of earth grade but even they could tip the balance in the future.

After spending some time flying around the testing ground he was satisfied with his earning and retreated back into the room where he found the computer. At first, he wanted to leave it be here but after discovering the room with the cryogenic pod he had changed his mind.

As long as he didn't remove the cube that was powering the whole structure the whole secret ground would still somewhat work. Though after he removed so many treasures it would be impossible for anyone to finish this trial. If anyone was sucked in, they would find a defensive structure to keep the monsters away, they would be forced to use only their own martial prowess.

"So, you are positive that if I remove this I won't trigger some kind of defensive mechanism or get me stranded here?"

"Affirmative."

Bob replied in his cold robotic voice while he was looking down at the bunch of monitors and cables. It seemed that the person that made this didn't think that anyone would be getting in here so there were no defensive measures. Which was somewhat strange as he did seem concerned with the 'higher being' that was out there.

'Perhaps he convinced himself that his system was impenetrable from outside?'

Getting in here was truly impossible for people at the nascent soul level. There was probably no one that could get in here unless they had something like Bob.

'Maybe he didn't care or didn't believe that the higher being could be stopped even if he tried?'

He could only shrug at his attempts of putting things together. Thus he focused on gently taking the whole computer and all the other items like the router along with the monitors and even the gaming chair. The whole room made it into the replica regalia while also keeping all the cables connected to the proper sockets.

"There, that should do it... everything seems to be in order..."

The person that left those videos was not as knowledgeable about the world as he had hoped. The old man was unable to cut away from it and instead ascended into the immortal realm, probably with the help of the system and thousands of years of gathering spirit points.

This war seemed like the main event that would give the system holder enough points to push through. But it also didn't feel like it was handing the victory over on a silver platter either. The scouting party that he battled with was not an easy opponent, even for him that had managed to reach about the power level of a great circle nascent soul master.

Finally, the time to return home came so he headed out of this empty room. Just as Bob mentioned the area didn't shut down and he was able to return to the place that he entered through.

He did not have to go through the other corridors anymore as he had searched through everything. There were some plans of the secret ground on the PC and they confirmed that he would be unable to find anything of worth.

With the help of Bob, he opened up the entrance and left this place for now. The cube would continue powering this area and if anyone dared to take the trial they would probably perish or be teleported to another location.

“Hello, yes I’m fine, I’ll be coming back now, please gather some of the engineering staff, I need them to look at something.”

After coming out he notified his wife of his well-being. It was time to get everyone informed and to prepare, soon the war would commence, the time was nigh.