

Unfathomable 441

Chapter 441

"You are really a spirit energy black hole..."

'Insufficient spirit points.'

"Yeah... yeah..."

"Patriarch, is there a problem?"

"Ah no Zhi... wait a moment I just need to gather my thoughts!"

Zhang Dong turned around so that no one could see him pull out a palmful of spirit crystals. They quickly crumbled down to the ground as he started absorbing them. He was now in his sects war room, the map that he lifted from the secret ground was here and Bob was hogging all the resources to figure it out.

With the inclusion of the evolving fortress and this map, he was forced to go through all of the spirit stones that his sect had brought over. The mine was being quickly drained of its resources but it still wasn't enough to get everything working. For the time being, he focused the reserves on the map as knowing where the other empires were, was more important.

The people in this exclusive room didn't say anything but they were clearly confused about what their Patriarch was doing. He just kept moving back and forth, sometimes he would touch the thing that he had brought with him and then hide behind the corner to do something. Some of them even noticed some shiny powder on his robe that seemed to increase each time he came back.

"Oh? It's glowing!"

One of the elders pointed to the device in the room that was now giving out a greenish glow. Within moments a holographic representation of the old fortress popped into view but soon it started to flicker.

'There we go'

Zhang Dong gave out a sigh while allowing Bob to connect this holographic map to his system. At first, the image was of the fortress that people used during the tower defense phase of the old trials but soon it began to shift.

"Wait... isn't that our Spirit Spring City?"

The map first showed a detailed representation of the whole city and the sect. Thanks to it now being connected to Zhang Dong's system that had a detailed faction section it was quite precise.

It continued to zoom out as Bob started uploading the data that he lifted from the Long Clan's world map. Soon the whole empire appeared in view as the map's holographic color shifted from green to gold. The radiant glow was a clear indicator that he had managed to fully absorb this technology into his system.

"This is the map of the whole empire?"

"That's right, but this isn't all, just wait a moment, gramps!"

Zhang Jin that looked a bit younger after passing into the nascent soul level asked. Soon red dots started to appear all over the map along with some arrows and different indicators. The arrows were at the border regions and indicated the bridges through which the enemies were slipping in.

It took a few moments for the map to take shape but it painted a picture to everyone. All of the elders left their seats to get closer, everyone knew that the red markers represented their enemies but they did not show the full strength of their forces.

“This treasure... Does it really represent the truth?”

“It should, do you see the red markers, they represent where the enemy forces are located. This map can somewhat measure the concentration of spiritual energy in the area. Thanks to that we can somewhat ascertain the strength of the enemy in that area but it’s not perfect, look over here.”

While explaining Zhang Dong pointed to the area where he tracked Wang Long to. There the concentration of red was somewhat weaker than on the other sides of the empire.

“It might look like the forces here are weak but in reality, they were mostly composed of body refiners.”

“I see, the treasure is unable to accurately measure spiritual energy that is focused inside of a body refiners body!”

Huo Qiang that was rubbing his chin chimed in from the side, the other elders nodded at his statement that was too obvious for them to even mention.

“You are correct, now everyone look over there.”

Zhang Dong pointed to the lower regions of the map where the United Element Sect was. The map was already connected with his system so he could select his area of influence and change its color to blue. With that everyone could clearly tell where the borders of their sect started and ended.

“This is where we are, we must now decide, do we protect all of this land or do we move back and wait...”

The power of the enemy was mostly unknown to these people, so he was sure that they would probably not want to give away even a smidge of their current territory. Cultivators that belonged to factions were highly territorial and would see it as an offense if someone invaded their lands without a proper reason.

“Do we even need to decide? We will just crush anyone that tries to enter our lands!”

Huo Qiang smacked his fist into his palm while puffing his chest out. Even at this very moment, Zhang Dong could tell that his muscular friend wanted to do nothing more than charge into the fray.

“I see that you are itching for a fight Qiang and we might be in for one soon.”

“Do you mean?”

“Yes, look here, these are called bridges and through them, our enemies are coming in. This one wasn’t there before and it is close to our borders. I fear that we might be getting some unwanted visitors soon.”

While at the Long Clan headquarters he had examined the map. There was no indication of a bridge appearing close to his sect but now it was different. A new opening had appeared and it was close to his sect ground. While they still had some time it was probably better to reinforce their defenses at the borders if they intended to spare the locals from seeing bloodshed.

“This area? Isn’t that the border region closest to the Dragon Gate Sect?”

Asked Zhang Liena.

“It does seem that way, I’m not sure if they will be able to defend themselves.”

Zhang Dong looked at the faint red area that was around the big red arrow. It looked like the forces that were pouring in weren’t giving out any strong spiritual signatures but this was the west side of the empire, the same side that the body refiners came from.

“Qiang, would you take some of the elders and...”

“You don’t need to say anything senior brother, I will meet those bastards in battle!”

He could only smile as he saw his red-haired friend pumping himself up for the coming battle. Zhang Zhi was next to him and after meeting his gaze he knew that there would be another babysitting session in store for him.

“Then it’s decided, Zhang Zhi, be sure to inform our friends from the Dragon Gate Sect of the coming danger, if they allow us to help them but you don’t need to go out of your way.”

While he would want to keep everyone safe, he was responsible for his own men. The Dragon Gate Sect was somewhat on friendly terms with his sect so he would give them aid if they required it but he would not force it on them.

He expected the invaders from the other empires to start sending out more scouting parties. Probably if the defenses of the Dragon Gate Sect proved inefficient they would outright attack, if they managed to survive they would probably return with a larger force later.

The map was in working order and the elders in the meeting room started discussing the coming days. For the time being, he decided to listen to their conversation to see what the natives of this world would decide on. It wasn’t much of a surprise though, even when he tried to change them, the ones at the top of the ladder rarely did.

“Patriarch, I’m not sure it’s wise to involve ourselves with the Dragon Gate Sect’s business, we should focus on reinforcing our lands.”

“I agree, the other sects would never give us aid if they were in our position.”

Everyone clearly didn’t want to send any aid, at most they would give them safe haven after their lands were occupied. They would probably welcome any additional strong cultivators into their ranks to then use as meat shields instead of their own. Luckily not everyone was of the same mind as the older members of the sect.

“I for once think we should give the Dragon Gate Sect some aid, they treated us properly I wouldn’t group them with the Limitless Sword Society.”

Zhang Jin voiced his opinion, his grandfather was of the mind that they should show some compassion. The actions of his grandson didn't go unnoticed, he had been helpful to others which gained them some allies.

"This is true but this doesn't mean that we should risk our sect brothers to save them, if it wasn't for our Patriarch they would have not had any problem in robbing our lands!"

Soon a discussion about lending aid to other people in the empire started. While it was mostly chaotic where the elders just continued to shout at each other, Zhang Dong was somewhat glad. In the past there would probably not even be a side that showed any compassion, they would obviously only protect their own assets and ignore the rest.

Now on the other hand, through his own actions, he had shown them that goodwill could be rewarded. While the cultivators kept to themselves they did have some sense of honor. If someone helped them they would feel obligated to return the favor or they would receive bad karma.

"Okay everyone settle down."

Finally, he raised his hand after it was getting a bit too loud.

"Let us discuss a different issue, we need to arm our sect brothers and sisters, some of them need more training while others can be drafted instantly. We will use the merit system to help us with this but I do not wish to force anyone if someone denies the call they will be given an opportunity to leave the sect but if they do, they may never return."

He did not want to force anyone to fight but he would not allow them to come back after victory was achieved. While there probably wouldn't be many deserters he didn't want anyone that would flee and cause others to die in the middle of the fight.

"We also need to discuss our budget, food supply, and other resources, let us get into it..."

Chapter 442

"Lord Xu Qing, the United Element Sect, sent us a message."

People started murmuring around the large hall. On one end was Xu Qing, the current Patriarch of the middle-sized Dragon Gate Sect. Along with the Demon Subduing Sect and the Limitless Sword Society they made up the three powers that were situated around the lands that Zhang Dong's sect was.

Ever since he had taken out Zhan Jie, the previous Patriarch of the Limitless Sword Society, they had remained vigilant. They had kept an eye on that strange Sect that had a somewhat concentrated power base. In their opinion without their Patriarch they were nothing much yet with him, they were a dangerous foe if offended.

In the beginning, they had all of their infiltration attempts foiled. All of their spies had vanished without a trace which forced them to abandon this form of action. It was clear that they were being assassinated inside of that sect. They could not voice a complaint as they would be confirming their fault.

But after years of silence, it seemed that the United Element Sect had become silent. Even after their Patriarch had vanquished a strong opponent in Zhan Jie there were no requests. It was as if the man had vanished which prompted everyone to ponder.

In the end, they could only speculate that he had been injured during the bout and resting in his own territory. That is until they recently saw him during the empire-wide announcement where he was shown off as the Emperor's blood brother.

Xu Qing and his people had quite the panic attack when this came to light. As one of the sects that had somewhat enforced their will on the United Element Sect, they were now frightened. They would not be able to retaliate against someone with the title of Golden Dragon.

If he wished to take revenge on the sects that left them so little after the Dark Palm Sect's demise, they could do nothing but accept their fate. Thus they needed to take any call-outs from the United Element Sect very seriously. Even more, after they pushed the Demon Subduing Sect out of the lands that previously were occupied by the Dark Palm Sect.

"Have they decided to set their eyes on us? What does the message say? and what of their movements?"

Xu Qing asked while looking at the messenger. The man was your regular core formation cultivator and he was quick to voice out the news.

"My Patriarch, as you know we have reports of many nascent soul masters appearing out of the United Element Sect's lands, the number that appeared close to our borders is... fifteen..."

The people from the Dragon Gate Sect sect gasped at this revelation. This was quite a large force considering that the United Element Sect was supposed to be a middle sized sect just like them. But from the information they had gathered the number of nascent soul grandmasters was quickly increasing.

"How many do they have..."

The Patriarch leaned back in his chair while going slightly pale. Such a force would be hard to compete with and from the old reports it didn't seem that these nascent soul masters were of the old generation.

They were still somewhat young and able, which meant that the United Element Sect could be hiding even stronger reserves at their main sect building. They had managed to go against the mighty Soaring Dragon Sect, it was clear that they could not go against them.

"Continue, what do they want?"

Everyone steeled themselves for what the messenger would reply as they feared for the worst. Would they ask for an unreasonable amount of resources? Would they try to enslave them or take away their lands? Maybe even worse, it could be just a war proclamation before an immediate attack.

"They have given us information that we should expect foes arriving from the northern reaches and that they would probably arrive here within the week. They wish to offer their aid in the coming battles if we agree to let them enter our territory..."

"Foes arriving within the week?"

"Do they think we are stupid! Who would believe such an obvious lie!"

“That’s right, they want us to disable the protective formation so that they can have an easy way into our sect grounds!”

The old men and women in this hall erupted in anger after the messenger delivered some of the accounts. To them it was obviously some kind of scheme, if they let those nascent soul masters in, they would probably not live to tell the tale on a later day.

“Silence! Was there anything else?”

Xu Qing was also surprised by this declaration but he managed to keep his composure. He didn’t think that they would tell such a bad lie to make them lower their protective barrier. It was more probable that there was some kernel of truth in there.

“Ah yes my lord, they had sent over a jade with information for the elders, I assure you that no one dared to look inside.”

Xu Qing nodded while looking at one of his retainers on the side. It was a large man with a spear floating to his side. He moved in quickly to take away the jade with what would probably be some more information concerning this issue. The man looked at the jade and scanned it with his spiritual sense before bringing it over to the Patriarch.

“It is safe to use Patriarch.”

Xu Qing nodded while grasping the jade, quickly he went through the information that it contained. His eyes started bulging out as the information flooded into his mind. What was inside of this jade was a shortened version of what was happening in the empire and how the Soaring Dragon Sect was in danger of being attacked by invaders from far away.

Normally he would have agreed with the other elders and thought that this was some kind of elaborate scheme. But this did confirm some of the information that his own spies had dug up. There were already mentions of strange creatures roaming the lands in the north. Other sects had also reported being attacked in various locations in the empire.

He made sure to place spies all over the empire. While his sect wasn’t the strongest out there, they made sure to be one of the more informed ones. Reports of sightings of the Golden Dragon also reached their ears as he had been pursuing someone to the northwest point of the empire.

“Patriarch, you can’t be thinking of opening our gates? This will make us look weak if the other sects...”

“What if the other sects? Do you think they would be able to just turn down the blood brother of the Azure Emperor? We thought he had become a cripple but he had grown into something that we can’t deny, also...”

The request from the United Element Sect was worded rather cordially. That sect was obviously on the rise, they would not need to act that respectfully to get their way. Normally they would have used Long Dong’s famous name to strongarm them into submission.

This they did not do, there could be various reasons for this. One of them could just be a pretense, a way to seem just and honorable. But there was another one that this Patriarch was afraid of, there could be truth in their words.

What if they were on the cusp of being attacked by a powerful foe? What if this Golden Dragon deemed it necessary to lend them his help as he believed that they had no chance of winning?

“We need to bolster our defenses at our northern border first...”

“Patriarch! Can we really believe...”

“Silence!”

The Dragon Gate Sect elders were forced down to their knees by the pressure that Xu Qing was exuding and quickly went silent.

“If it was just the United Element Sect talking then we could just refuse but this is the Golden Dragon we are talking about. You all have witnessed the Emperor’s decree, if this Long Dong wished, he could just take over these lands and we could not lift a finger to stop him.”

“This doesn’t mean that we will just bow down and make way for them, we will examine this situation first. Send the message that we will welcome the Golden Dragon but with that, he keeps his forces outside our lands...”

Xu Qing was somewhat willing to believe in the information that the United Element Sect was giving them. It went in line with what he already knew, this didn’t mean that he was fine with that many nascent soul masters parading around his lands. Long Dong was the Emperor’s brother, he could not stop him from entering as he carried the Long Clan name. Thus the decision was made and it would be carried out.

“W-we understand Patriarch.”

The rowdy elders that bowed their heads as they understood that they could not go against someone that was the blood brother of the emperor. They quickly moved out to send a reply to the United Element Sect.

In it, they welcomed Long Dong into their sect while using some mild words to indicate that they would not wish for his forces to come with him, at least not ones with multiple nascent soul masters. After some back and forth they were given a reply that the man in question would be arriving along with a couple of core formation masters and one other nascent soul one.

Thus the day came that the once strong Dragon Gate Sect had to bow their heads towards a visitor from the south. Most of them would remember the day fondly, the golden aura that he exuded felt quite warm. The people gasped out as they witnessed that magnificent radiance, it was as if a grandmaster descended into their lands to bless them.

There was a uniform gasp by the masses and myriad of cultivators that were on guard. The large Dragon Gates that were a staple of this sect were opened to allow him and a couple of cultivators to fly in.

Even though they were tiny compared to the huge gates that reached up to a kilometer in height, there was something to the radiance these people exuded.

“I greet you my friends from the Dragon Gate Sect, as you might know, I am the Golden Dragon, do not be alarmed I have come in peace!”

Zhang Dong floated forward while making sure to use one of his oldest abilities that was the senior aura. With it, he could ease the emotions of these people that were thinking that he was here to occupy their lands.

‘This is a good start, now to prepare them for the coming battle...’

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“What do you think?”

“About that Golden Dragon fellow?”

“Yes.”

“He clearly just wants to toss his weight around, the bastard just became the son of the Azure Emperor, he can now do whatever he pleases, if it was me...”

“Hah, not everyone is an old bastard like you!”

Two core formation cultivators were arguing with each other while being on guard duty. They were sitting in a lookout tower that helped them look into the deep expanse of this region. Due to the world being so large even this border region was humongous.

A few days ago they had received a visitor at their main sect. His name was Zhang Dong but now he went by the name Long Dong. These two were from the Dragon Gate Sect and word had reached them that he had entered their main sect. The Patriarch had decided to welcome him and open the gates but neither of these two felt happy about that.

“But what could the Patriarch do? If this Zhang Dong calls for the Azure Emperor our sect would be eradicated.”

“This is true and we best not forget that they did manage to defeat the likes of Wang Long...”

The deaths of so many nascent soul masters didn’t go unnoticed. Wang Long revealed himself to be some kind of monster that was even able to make a behemoth like the Soaring Dragon Sect disappear. Then by proxy, the United Element Sect had to be stronger than anyone had originally anticipated.

“What do they truly want? There isn’t really anything that we can offer them that the Long Clan wouldn’t be able to give them, our secret texts should be of lower quality...”

The two cultivators were a bit confused about the entire situation. Why was someone that famous forcing himself into their sect. Was he really just trying to get back at them for the things that they did in the past. To their knowledge their sect was very lenient with them, they didn’t even take any of the Dark Palm Sect’s territory and left it to the other two sects.

“Maybe their pride was hurt that much? Do you think they will do anything brazen?”

“I hope not... my daughter is with child now and they are back at the main sect...”

The two men looked to be in their fifties but were somewhat older. They had a large chunk of their families in the main city, if someone like the Golden Dragon decided to kill anyone there no one would really be able to stop him. But while they were discussing this event they noticed something.

“Hey... did you notice?”

“Notice what?”

“The daily patrol... they should have returned by now...”

One of the elders squinted with his eyes while rising from his seat. He enhanced his eyes and other senses with spiritual energy while peeking into the distance. They were at the border region which had many other cultivators like them patrolling the area. Normally a small group of other sect brothers would have arrived by now and gave a report.

“Come to think of it, they should be here...”

The other man nodded, both of them had been stuck working here for years with no changes. The days tended to blend with each other and time just passed without anything interesting ever happening. Thus only now did they notice that there was something strange happening.

With haste, they pulled out their communication jades to try and call the patrol leader. Even when they tried there was no answer, it was as if there was no one there to receive their call.

“Was there an attack? Or did that idiot forget to take his communication jade with him?”

“Not very likely, should we report this to the main sect or wait?”

The two looked at each other before nodding, it was clear that something was off. Nothing like this had ever happened in the years that they spent here. While the patrols weren't always punctual there were never this late. One of them quickly looked to his communication jade but before he could forward the information a strange sound entered his ear.

Before any one of the two could react a strange spear that looked like it was made from white bone whizzed past them. The speed was truly tremendous, it was an unexpected attack that embedded itself into one of the men's shoulders.

The cultivator cried out in pain as he was pulled with the spear towards the wall through which he was propelled outside. The other core formation expert was quick to react as he heard a second bone spear coming his way. But even when evading, the projectile managed to scrape his side while taking a chunk of his flesh with it.

“We are under attack!”

He screamed with all his might as he tried to alert the people that were here with them. At this spot, there weren't any nascent soul masters, only a couple core formation experts with mostly formation establishment soldiers. They were mostly here as lookouts to call for help if they ever spotted a force that they could not handle.

It was quite rare to get unwelcome visitors, even rarer when they didn't attempt to converse with them. The whole wall was now getting pelted with strange bone projectiles that just went through it like it was made from cardboard.

“Who are they? Who dares to attack the Dragon Gate Sect!?”

The people here called out in indignation at their fate. They couldn't sense their attacker's spiritual energy even though they were getting attacked only when some strange shouts reached their ears were they able to finally spot the enemy.

A strange sound of a horn was heard before the attackers made themselves visible. Their bodies were larger than an average human's and their teeth were quite elongated. At this point in time, there was a swarm of them charging in their direction while some others were chucking bone spears at them.

It was clear that it was some kind of enemy attack, the opponents looked like they were part of some demonic sect as their bodies were disfigured. The call for help was quickly forwarded to the other sect members at the borders but it was met with silence.

"Why is no one answering? It couldn't be..."

The cultivator was clutching his side where the spear took out his flesh. He had quickly eaten a couple of restorative pills but they were working slowly. Normally he would have gotten a reply but now it seemed that the others were having troubles of their own. Either more of these creatures were attacking all the other towers at the border or they were blocking out the communication jades in some way.

Without knowing the situation there were two choices, either they stayed and fought or they evacuated. These opponents were strange as they lacked a steady spiritual energy signature. They had managed to surprise attack them but this didn't mean that they were stronger.

"Defend the border, the elders will surely arrive soon, we just need to halt their advance!"

The injured man called out to the panicking sect members while pointing out with a large saber towards the approaching enemies. But his display of strength was met with resistance, and another bone spear confronted him. This time around he attempted to deflect it with his saber but as he clashed with the strange projectile his large weapon snapped the moment it collided with the white bone.

"Impossible..."

The man pivoted to the side as he managed to escape death yet again, this time the spear of bone penetrated his shoulder just like it did with his sect brother. He was tossed down from the tower along it. While flying through the air he could hear the lamentation of his sect members, they were getting slaughtered by the strange attackers.

When he landed on the ground he found himself in more pain. The spear had lodged itself into the hard ground along with his shoulder. He grasped it with his hand in hopes of pulling it out but his strength was leaving his body. There was some strange liquid on this projectile and it was somehow making his body unresponsive to his call.

"N-no it can't end this way, someone please..."

The man lay struggling on the ground while watching many smaller bone-like arrows rain down from the sky. The hail of javelins was just a little taste as these smaller bolts blocked out the sun as if it was raining.

"Haha, I see that I arrived just in time!"

Before the white death could get close though a quick rise in temperature was noticed by this cultivator. The sky was going up in flames as a huge horned creature appeared between him and the swarm of bony projectiles.

He could hear the voice of a man that was laughing joyfully as this inferno intensified in scope. The arrows that were once there started evaporating in the blink of an eye as they collided with the massive thick red flames that looked like a second sun.

The monster that was radiating this heat seemed familiar. It quickly dawned on this core expert that this creature was a soul beast. It was clear that a nascent soul master had come to save them but there was no such soul beast in their Dragon Gate Sect. Yet he knew it finally, he recalled the name of the second strongest person in the United Element Sect.

“This Huo Qiang will be your opponent, don’t disappoint me now!”

The man’s voice echoed through the skies as the enemy ranged weapons were eradicated from sight. His soul beast remained in place with its hands crossed over one another. It was radiating massive amounts of heat that was focused to the outside of their borders. It was clearly protecting everyone here from the projectiles and doing a fine job.

Soon the core formation cultivator managed to dislodge the spear from his shoulder. The paralyzing effect faded away after a few minutes and he was able to free himself. Without thinking much about it he gritted his teeth and called forth his flying sword. With it, he headed back to the now mostly destroyed watchtower.

There as he emerged from behind the wall he saw a spectacle worthy of legend. A muscular man that was covered from head to toe by flames was mercilessly combating the invaders. His fists rained down on them like small meteors, with each hit another head exploded. It didn’t seem like these boney monsters were a match for him.

“T-this... Huo Qiang from the United Element Sect?”

As he called out the man also noticed that in the distance a flying ship appeared. It was not one of theirs and carried the insignia of the United Element’s Sect. He quickly snapped out of it, this was the middle of the battle and he was a warrior too.

“Brothers and sisters, the United Element Sect has come to aid us, let us fight together with them to protect our lands!”

The man shouted while picking up a new weapon for himself. The battle was not yet won, there were many enemies left for them to defeat and running away would be a blemish on their honor, it was time to show the invaders that they would not just lie down and die.

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‘It’s the same body refiners that I met in the northwest.’

Zhang Dong was looking out from a distance while Huo Qiang was engaged in battle with the enemies. His reasoning for not helping him out was to let his allies train, it didn’t seem that there were any of those unicorn ones in this group of soldiers so he could leave the fighting up to his nascent soul masters.

While Huo Qiang was first to dive into battle he was not the only one. Many of the recently ascended sect masters were spreading out through the borders. Thanks to the working map treasure at their base they could easily monitor the movement of their enemies. They could predict where they would show up and thus shorten their time of arrival.

‘Huo Qiang is doing well but the others.’

He started rubbing his chin while glancing over his faction system. There he moved some of the elder’s names that were battling their opponents into a separate window. Now he could monitor things like their life-bar and even spiritual energy bar.

Huo Qiang was certainly overwhelming the invaders with his plasma ifrit but the other nascent soul masters were still unpracticed. They were using up too much of their Qi while also suffering damage against the commanders of this attack battalion. Luckily for them, the opponents didn’t come in large numbers.

‘They should be able to survive this, if one is in danger I’ll use the teleportation feature.’

This was war so casualties were going to happen. It would be impossible for him to be everywhere and at everytime. His warriors needed to learn to fight for themselves and he could only wish them good luck while offering them more power. For the time being, he somewhat put his own elevation of power to the backburner.

What he needed was more minions to carry out his bidding. The more nascent soul masters he could produce the fewer battles he would need to participate in. His plan was to let his sect members battle the regular masters while he focused on the horned ones that seemed to be more powerful than the rest.

‘Even with the map they are hard to spot, these guys just don’t give away that much spiritual energy...’

When he peeked at the other sides of the empire the enemies there gave out a brighter red glow. The people he was up against though were body refiners that were somewhat hard to get a feeling on. Only when they were in sight would he really know if he was facing a potential threatening opponent or just another soldier.

It was somewhat hard to convince the Dragon Gate Sect’s Patriarch of his intentions. This did cause some casualties as he was not able to send his forces to bolster the defenses at the border. Instead, he had them wait on standby in the distance before jumping in.

Due to this some of the border defenses were overrun in other locations. This one was somewhere in the middle so Huo Qiang was able to get here in time. His men were spreading out to take back the fallen lands. When looking at his own version of the empire map he could see them being successful.

It took some time to clear things up, the whole battle was strange as the enemies tossed themselves into the fray without any fear. They never turned around and continued to charge in a maddened rage towards the enemy that was before them.

‘Is this in their nature or is something else driving them to be like this?’

Zhang Dong had been in some fights and met demonic cultivators that sometimes fought like this. He had witnessed such behavior in their minions that they didn't have a way out unless they managed to do their master's biddings. Perhaps there was a force they feared more than death or perhaps they were convinced that if they ran away, they would die anyway.

"They certainly put up a good fight, at least there were no cowards among them!"

After the battle was done Huo Qiang arrived at his location. He didn't look injured as the strongest cultivator that was there had been below his level. The early stage nascent soul masters had managed to force their first victory as well.

"Is that so..."

"You don't seem happy brother?"

"Well, it was a bit too easy but I might be overthinking things..."

"Can I leave this place to you, they might attempt to launch another attack and now the Dragon Gate Sect won't be able to deny us anymore."

"Leave it to me, Senior Brother! Just send me some booze if it takes more than a few days!"

"Hah, sure just don't drink too much, I need for you to be sober."

Zhang Dong decided to leave things to Huo Qiang here. While it didn't seem that these toothy attackers had fled there still was a chance that some of them might have slipped in. The people in the nearby cities and villages were at potential risk that needed to be cleared out.

While his people were going through their own battles he would return home to see his wife. She had remained back at the sect as they needed to at least leave one of the strongest cultivators behind. Lately, she had been complaining that he was leaving her behind too much yet he did not want her to get involved in the fighting just yet.

"So you are finally back?"

He was greeted by a somewhat cold tone when he arrived back at his new house. His lovely wife was laying on her side while watching the kids play with some toys in the green courthouse. She was in a gazebo-like structure that was supplied with a comfy bed for this purpose.

"You seem mad my wife..."

"Mad? Why would I be mad at my husband that constantly leaves without saying a word."

"Uh, don't be this way... I need to see to our sect members, we are at war now I won't be able to remain at this place for long..."

Zhang Dong moved closer but Liena decided to puff out her cheeks while turning her head away. It was understandable to him that she was mad, her husband had been gone missing for many years and after returning he was off to a war. She was acting like a child now but he knew that she obviously was aware of what was at stake.

"I am here now and I think it's time for you to progress further with your cultivation!"

For the time being, he decided to shift the conversation in a different direction. Liena had remained a bit stagnant with her cultivation after he had left. Tending to the sect and young children had kept her away from training as much. Huo Qiang had passed her up due to not having those responsibilities.

“Progress my cultivation?”

Liena perked up at the mention of her cultivation. She was still a cultivator at heart, so bringing up the possibility of increasing her Dao would always work. Though she quickly turned her head back and continued to pout right back.

“Don’t be like that my wife, I have prepared an area in the Dimensional Regalia, it will be just the two of us.”

“Just the two of us?”

Zhang Dong nodded while approaching his pouty wife and giving her a gentle pat on the shoulder.

“That’s right, granny Maling will tend to the kids so we will have plenty of time to work on your cultivation!”

Her eyes darted back and forth as he could see her reacting favorably when he mentioned that it would be just the two of them. His intent would be to supply her with more spiritual energy so that she could raise herself into the middle nascent soul stage, then spend some time with her to help her set her foundation better.

“... Fine then, let us depart!”

Finally, after some convincing, he had managed to get Liena to move. She now had a bright smile on her face instead of the cute pout. Before leaving they were sure to tell their kids to listen to Maling, who was a bit disgruntled that she could not work on her own Dao now. Zhang Jin was away at the border together with Huo Qiang for the time being, so it was up to the old girl.

Zhang Dong brought his wife over to a nice spot next to a waterfall. The Dimensional Regalia was now a small world in itself. It had many living beings and plants living in it and he was sure to reserve the most beautiful area to help his wife progress through her bottleneck.

But while he and his wife were having a nice moment another scene elsewhere was playing out. In the western reaches of the empire at the recent bridge that had opened up, there was a large fortress that he had seen before.

It was clearly brought over on a large beast worm that had borrowed its way into the ground. There was a small difference though, the inhabitants of this place were not quite the same as the gray-skinned ones that he had made contact with twice.

“So those worthless bastards from the Terakota Tribe are no more?”

“Yes chef, they had made some progress but had fallen in battle, the scouts report seeing a being made of pure flames.”

A man that was wearing light leather armor was talking to someone sitting on a large throne. Both of these 'people' had a red tint to their skin and the one that was on the throne had a large horn protruding from their forehead.

"It doesn't matter, they had lost their chieftain but I thought they could at least pave the path for us better, truly useless until the end."

While the red-skinned man also possessed a set of sharp chompers they were nowhere near as long as the people from the Terekota tribe that Zhang Dong ran into.

"We will need to show our tribes superiority!"

"It will be done my lord, the troops should be ready to march out in a few days, the transfer gate is fully operational."

"Good, what of the golden one? Has he been spotted?"

"No my lord."

"The Emperor has taken interest in that outlander, we will gain much favor with him if we can present him to the Emperor."

The man with the horn on his head leaned back in his throne made of strange metals while smiling. For him and his people, this was an opportunity to rise above all the other tribes. Anyone that brought the man to the emperor would be given a boon.

"We must get to him first before the other tribes discover his location! Now go and make the lands run in the blood of the outlanders, leave no one standing!"

"Yes, my lord!"

Chapter 445

"...Are you paying attention?"

"Huh?"

Zhang Dong along with Zhang Liena were sitting down in the lotus position while holding hands. Both of them had taken some free time during these dire times to progress their cultivation. Mostly they were focusing on Liena's but the Patriarch's wife seemed to be focused on other things.

"You'll have to excuse me but my mind had wandered elsewhere, let us continue."

Liena closed her eyes once more while her husband chuckled. It seemed that she was preoccupied with the fact that they were finally alone in a peaceful spot more than the cultivation process. Soon they managed to resume with the transformation into the middle stage of the nascent soul level.

Thanks to his faction system he was able to somewhat boost her to the limit of her stage. There wasn't much that he needed to do besides that but by helping her circulate her spiritual energy with his own he could further speed up the process and guarantee a smooth ascension.

Both of them rose into the air while covered by a blue glow of Qi. At first, it was a pale color but it soon changed to their own elemental Dao, in this case, green for wind. While he was no expert when it came to wind energy, he was knowledgeable enough to stimulate Liena's Dao with his own knowledge and fill in some of the gaps.

Such a feat was only possible due to his extensive knowledge that he had gained through the years and also because he was very familiar with his wife's body. All of the meridians and spiritual pathways had been already discovered during their life together. He could very easily guide his Qi in gently to push Liena past the threshold.

'There it is... that should do it.'

At the last junction, his hands moved away from Liena's that soon floated further into the air. Her entire body was enveloped in a cocoon of thick green energy that started producing a repelling force. The winds in the area started picking up while she ascended into the middle stage.

Zhang Dong could feel his wife's power rising to a new stage which caused him to smile. The change was quite instantaneous and he could confirm it by checking out his faction window. She was only the second middle stage nascent soul master in his sect which would make everyone in this empire raise a brow in disbelief.

The United Element Sect was a peculiar faction that through his upgrading process could compete with others even at lower levels of power. When he was a middle stage cultivator he could easily battle with late-stage nascent soul masters and win, even the ones on top could be dealt with if he was smart about it.

Huo Qiang and Zhang Liena weren't much different. He had produced immortal grade cultivation manuals for them as well which were similar to his own. While they would trail behind him in raw strength they could easily compete with the masters in this world.

Probably if all three of them had more time, they would have been able to grow into quite the monster trio. If all of them were able to reach the great circle stage before this whole war started, they could probably steamroll any army by just working together as one.

'Can't have it all but this war could take up to a hundred years, so perhaps taking it slow won't be such a bad idea.'

Zhang Dong floated down to the ground while looking up. His wife looked quite enchanting while being surrounded by her wind dao. If they weren't in a hurry he would wish to spend some private time with her but for now, her lovely image was etched into his mind. This would have to last him for the coming days as he intended to join Huo Qiang back at the border region of the Dragon Gate Sect.

"Congratulations my wife, you are now officially a middle stage master but I think that you could wipe the floor with most of the sect leaders from the other sects now."

"This does feel wonderful... but I can feel that you don't wish me to test this new power."

After managing to progress she floated down to land in front of Zhang Dong. It was the truth, she would need to remain here to act as the protector of the city and sect. Someone had to do this task and he would rather have his wife remain here at home than to go outside into the carnage.

The sect's protective formations were strong, no normal cultivator would be able to get through them. It would require a combined effort of many along with siege weapons and even then it would probably take over a month to get through. For this very reason, he wished that she remained with the children. Knowing that she was safe would ease his mind greatly and help him keep a cool head during the future battles.

"Yes, that would be my wish, it would be best if you remained here."

Luckily it seemed that she wouldn't be arguing with him much as she just gave out a chuckle.

"I'll be sure to protect everyone in your absence but if something does happen, return immediately."

She suddenly leaned in pronouncing the last bit a lot louder than the rest. It was clear that she did not want him to play the hero anymore. This was pronounced by her leaning towards him and bopping his nose with her index finger.

Zhang Dong already knew that his lovely wife didn't appreciate that he was going out of his way to help others. There was nothing to gain from those acts and he constantly endangered his own life. The part where he vanished for five years by helping dispose of the last monster probably didn't help either.

"Ah you know me..."

After giving out a nervous laugh he decided to slowly move for a strategic hug. Liena squirmed for a few moments but soon she quieted down. They just stayed for a moment like that before parting without saying anything. While she would consolidate her new realm here he would need to check up on another thing.

Thus he rose into the air and flew away. There were other matters to attend to and the first one concerned the fortress he borrowed from the secret ground. It had the ability to quickly expand defensive measures after being fed spiritual energy which he was hoping to use for the coming battles.

The whole structure had been relocated from the replica medallion into the original. There safe from any distraction he had his mad scientist part of the sect work on it. After gaining access to the map from this very same fortress Bob wouldn't need as much time to hack it. But even then, he needed others to manufacture copies that he could relocate to strategic locations.

After a few moments of flight, he arrived at the research facility. Thanks to the faction system he did not need to worry about security. When he returned there were some new faces that needed to be removed but inside this closed-off world, there was no need to hide from his sect members.

"Greetings Patriarch!"

The moment he arrived he was greeted by people in lab coats. This section of the sect had been established before he disappeared. Due to his old world tastes he had manufactured white lab coats that made everyone look like a mad scientist.

All of them were specialists at crafting and their knowledge was quite extensive. Some of them even reached the knowledge level of their own Patriarch that could devour books like they were nothing. One of them was the leader that also hailed from the original Zhang Clan.

"I don't want to rush you but I'm not sure how much time we have also..."

Zhang Dong looked at a sphere that was floating next to the main scientist. It had various glowing symbols on it and a big eye in the middle. This eye darted around as it looked at various people that were passing by.

“How is the helper that I gave you, was it of any use?”

“Yes Patriarch, you must tell me how you managed to create such an intricate puppet! It’s making our work a breeze!”

This floating eyeball that he was looking at was in reality an extension of Bob. His Ai was able to interface with outside constructs that he had created himself. They were part of his system and he was part of them. Thanks to this he could have Bob help his people out in deciphering the fortress while spending fewer spirit points by doing it directly.

“So did you find something out?”

“Yes we did, please come this way, Patriarch.”

The small group of scientists was eager to show him something. Soon they moved to the area where he took the map from. In its place, they were trying to assemble something less intricate that would be easier to manufacture. The area was now covered by some strange tubing that was connected to the middle part.

There was a large table with a strange rock on it. The color was the same as the walls and it looked like the scientists here had taken it as a sample. It was now gently floating in the air while sometimes changing shape into different forms.

There were cables going out from this table and they were all connected to what looked to be a modern-day computer. It was one of his own designs that seemed to have been improved after five years had passed.

“Is this what you wanted to show me?”

“Yes Patriarch, we weren’t sure what to start with so we decided to examine the walls that this place was made with. Then we made a discovery, not everything is the same, some parts are built from this peculiar mineral.”

From the explanation he got the scientists discovered that the entire fortress is not made from the exact same material. Not every part of it could alter its shape as most of that was focused on the outer walls.

“This treasure can alter its shape after being infused with spiritual energy, please look!”

After hearing a click the table the rock was floating on started to shine brighter. The grayish piece of rock started to quickly react and expand inside. Soon it changed to the shape of a sword.

“Hoh, good work.”

Zhang Dong without thinking reached out to grasp this sword. It felt like a regular longsword but after a few test swings, he noticed that there was something off. Soon the shape started to alter itself again and the construct quickly crumbled.

“As you can see Patriarch, we have to work out some kinks.”

He nodded while removing dust from his robe that it was covered in. His people managed to alter the shape so it meant that they were on the right track. Perhaps soon enough he could deploy a similar fortress for field testing but only if his people managed to recreate the materials that it was made from.

“I will leave you to it then, report to me if you make any progress.”

After his short visit, he was off once more, back outside where the battles were taking place.

Chapter 446

‘I need more resources...’

Zhang Dong was standing with his arms crossed in what he doubted the command center. It was the room with the new world map and a bunch of his own people. After leaving Liena to stomach her new rise in power he was off to strategize.

“Kuo, give me a report, how much did these invaders push into the Empire. Prioritize the areas with spirit stone mines.”

Zhang Kuo was also here, he was responsible for carrying out his orders while also informing him about the state of the Empire. Even though he had the world map in his system he didn’t have the time to constantly monitor it.

He gave his retainer a task to carry out. Kuo would need to monitor the map and inform him about areas rich with spiritual energy, mostly ones that possessed large pockets of spirit stones. The reserves were all spent and the mine that was in the old Dark Palm Sect area was almost spent.

Without the spiritual energy, he would not be able to create more nascent soul masters to aid him in the future battles. Perhaps he was rushing it but if he could get a strong foothold in some areas the enemies from the Empires would have a hard time progressing later.

There was a bridge in the southwest that was closer to his own sect and it was an important strategic location. The toothy monsters that he fought in the northwest area were there and he had already shown that he would be able to destroy their base.

This time around he would need some help from his own people as they had managed to set up their fortress. He wasn’t sure about its defensive capabilities but he expected it to be a harder nut to crack than having to kill off the half-dead monster worm before.

“Ah yes Patriarch, these are the locations closest to our position that have the properties that you listed, this region that belongs to the Shadow Phantom Sect has quite a potent area with vengeful spirits...”

Spiritual energy was not the only resource that he was looking for. Holy energy, soul energy, and lightning energy were the other three that he needed. Spiritual energy was just the easiest to come by but also the worst to work with. It needed to be transformed by the system to what he needed which would waste quite a bit of it in the process.

“Good.”

“Patriarch, can I voice a concern?”

Kuo looked at Zhang Dong and only when he replied did he resume speaking.

“You may speak.”

“Thank you, Patriarch, are you planning to head to these lands? Wouldn’t it be better if you remained at the sect if you fell in battle while wandering through the Empire...”

“I know, I won’t jeopardize my safety but I don’t think that we will get another chance to steal... I mean take the resources back from the invaders. They will be better of use in our hands than if they fall into theirs don’t you think?”

One of the main reasons that he wanted to go there now was that there would be widespread confusion. The middle sized sects were mostly weaker than the invading forces so they would be surely driven back towards their main cities where they would defend themselves.

Then there was the looming danger of Wang Long. What was happening in the northern-west reaches of the empire now? The area was also showing invader movement and they would surely go towards the demonic sect lands as well.

To his enemy, these creatures were spirit point machines. Many of them were at something similar to the nascent soul stage which would surely give him an opportunity to level up fast. In their next battle, he could be faced with many other strange techniques that he might not have an answer to. Thus the only way out, for now, was gathering as much of his own resources as he could.

Perhaps he would be draining the old sects from resources while they were in a state of panic but it was better if they fell into his hands than into the enemies. He was also not sure if the body refiners could even use any of the spiritual energy pockets that were here.

‘Spirit stone mines aren’t the only thing that can store Qi, there are many various herbs, pills, and natural phenomena with similar properties I just need to gather them up while I still can.’

The order was finalized and after saying goodbye to his children he was off again. The first area that he would be going towards was the previously mentioned Shadow Phantom sect.

They lived in a mostly desolate area with not many living creatures around. Instead, there were many ghosts and souls of the dead floating around near a certain location.

Apparently, it was some old battleground on which millions upon millions of beings had perished. The vengeful spirits then started to take shape and change the environment. The creatures there were changed, shifted into something more terrifying. It would be an ample source for soul energy.

Thanks to having a talk with the Dragon Gate Sect’s Patriarch earlier he was free to use their teleportation gates. With them, he was able to quickly appear closer to where the battles were taking place.

At the time being Huo Qiang was patrolling the lands with some of the other nascent soul masters. None of his people had died during the last attack but some had to return to the sect to be treated at the hospital. Their lives weren’t at risk but they would need a few weeks to get their full strength back.

To arrive at this next location he was also getting a shortcut thanks to his new title and connection. The Dragon Gate Sect mostly had good relations with other similar-sized sects. Thanks to this they could connect their teleportation gates to locations outside their own.

“The gate is ready for the Golden Dragon.”

An old man in a robe bowed before him while he looked at the blue water-like surface that the teleportation gates were known for. When he stepped through it he would arrive at the location of The Red Lotus Sisterhood, a middle sized sect that was composed only by women.

They had a trade agreement with the Dragon Gate Sect and thus he would be able to arrive at one of their trade cities. Of course, they already knew that he would be coming, his current name just carried that much weight. Yet without the connections that these middle sized sects had with each other, it would probably take a while to explain everything to them.

His vision blurred as he stepped through the gate. It was just a moment as he found himself on the other side. There he was greeted by quite the spectacle, jade beauties were everywhere and one was paler than the other. Their complexion looked like bright white paint which was even more accentuated by the red clothes and lipstick they were all wearing.

“What the...”

After getting used to the healthier complexion that his own wife and people around her had, their look gave him a scare. He even recoiled a bit after seeing the nascent soul elder that was in the front. She was an old granny that looked like a really shriveled-up white raisin with way too much makeup on. From the Qi flowing in her body, she must have been close to a thousand years old and at the twilight of her existence.

“We greet the glorious Golden Dragon, you have truly graced us with your fabled presence.”

The many women were quick to prostrate themselves before him. While he wasn't sure if it was on purpose, many of them were wearing slimmed-down robes. These robes looked to be cut out in strategic locations to allow people to see some of the voluptuous curves of these ladies. If his wife was here, she would have probably given him a smack to the back of his head for taking in the sights after spacing out for a second or two.

“Ah yes, that's me the Golden Dragon but you don't need to trouble yourself with my presence ladies from the Red Lotus Sisterhood, as the Dragon Gate Sect has already informed you I will be only passing by, there is no need for this grand welcome.”

The vixens knew what they were doing. The moment he was there they were attempting to tempt him with their bodies. The smell of perfume was everywhere and thanks to his knowledge he realized that there were certain rare aphrodisiacs mixed into it all.

This world was cruel and uncertain, even more to the women. The easiest way of gaining power was getting a powerful husband and the backing of their family. Some Sects specialized in diplomacy more than anything else. While this Red Lotus Sisterhood was not particularly strong they had a wide range of connections by marriage. If they happened to be attacked by someone they would quickly gain the help of various powerful families in the area.

It was clear that they had set their manicured hands on this Golden Dragon. He was the new commodity in the Empire and with only one wife. Everyone was already aware that the Azure Dragon didn't take in any more concubines but what of his younger brother?

This was quite the opportunity for any young lady, becoming the concubine of the younger brother of the Emperor would give power to their family. Perhaps they would even be able to carry the Long Clan name.

Long Dong was an enigma to everyone, with the war still not reaching the whole empire they were not aware of the reason that he was here. No one knew that the Shadow Phantom Sect would be soon getting invaded by a race similar to monsters. He had still many kilometers to fly through before he got there and would probably only get there as the fighting had started.

"Our Ancestors wouldn't allow it, please let us welcome you to our lands. Our Sect is known for its hospitality."

The old woman replied while he was thinking about ditching. If he was a single man or prone to cheating this would probably be a good place to have some fun. Yet he didn't take much pleasure in mindless bedroom fun with other women than his current wife. Thanks to the connection with his wife he was able to keep it in his pants and decline the offer.

"No."

He declared in a lower tone which caused the many ladies to panic slightly. They could feel his aura expanding everywhere to indicate that they were starting to cross the line.

"A-as you wish, Golden Dragon, we won't hold you up."

"You have my gratitude, I will excuse myself then."

Thus he left before anyone discovered why he was starting to slowly lean forward, the next location being somewhat spooky.

Chapter 447

"The souls of the damned are unruly tonight, what could have affected them this much, the time of the reaping has not yet come."

A man holding a scythe along with an old-looking lamp with a candle was looking out into the murky darkness. There he could hear the usual screams and lamentations of the spirits. The land before him was desolate, devoid of any living beings.

While to any other sect such a place would have meant certain death to his Shadow Phantom Sect it was the source of their power. Even now a colorless spirit was floating around this man and he still recalled the time that he had captured it to reach the core formation stage.

The people here had developed strange arts to live together with these rage-filled beings. A vengeful spirit was formed when someone's life was taken abruptly and they still had longing for this world. The longer such a spirit became the more probable the creation of its damned form was.

These spirits longed for life and anything that had it. Thus they would quickly gravitate towards any living beings in the vicinity. Only if one could alter their spiritual energy with the correct techniques would they be safe. Otherwise, the ravenous evil spirits that roamed the area would chase them down and swallow all of their essences.

This man was one of the watchers of this desolate area. Not even nascent soul masters were powerful enough to protect themselves fully from the ghostly energy thus their lands didn't see much bloodshed. Besides the phantoms and their sect that was shrouded in many layers of protective barriers and illusionary ones, there was not much here.

While the ghostly cultivators aren't that strong they had enough freedom to reach to the height of a middle sized sect. They didn't wander out from their lands too often as the resources that the other sects possessed didn't really progress their cultivation realm.

They also lacked many natural resources besides the thick layer of ghostly energies that were hard to handle. Thus even though their life was shrouded in darkness they didn't really care about the dealings of the other sects and remained truly neutral.

This caused information not to travel very far and thus they were mostly unaware of the current state of the empire. A few days ago there had been a strange incident in these lands that caused the spirits to act strangely. This man here was dispatched as the more prominent elders were far too busy with their own problems to even care.

"The spirits... they are angry... has someone breached the sanctum?"

The man here was only a core formation elder and his spiritual sense didn't reach far. But after getting this close he could sense that something was happening, someone was battling with the spirits. At first, he thought that perhaps a cultivator from the other sects had been unlucky and lost his way here.

"No, how could this be... the spirits are being altered? Their soul energy is shifting..."

The area with the phantoms was shrouded in greenish energy but there was a pulsing light slowly forming in the middle. It looked to be dark crimson and there were several beings in the middle.

This cultivator had quirky techniques that allowed him to peek through the thick mist surrounding this area. He could see that the people there were different than your usual cultivator. Their skin was all red and instead of ears, they seemed to have something similar to bat ears.

During this very moment, their mouths were gaping wide open. It looked bizarre as what would normally be a human's jaw was part of the mouth and wide open. Their mouths parted at this area to produce a large toothy maw that was somehow gobbling up the angry spirits.

"Demonic cultivators? Why are there so many... I must alert the elders!"

The man quickly pulled out his communication jade to send the message but before he could go with it he felt a presence next to him. With all his might he moved his scythe to his side only for it to be hit by something hard.

This hard thing was much stronger than he anticipated. The scythe that had phantom energies gathered around it snapped in half while he was tossed to the side by the attacker. His arm that was previously

holding the scythe was in a world of hurt but even while flying through the air he kept his eyes on the attacker.

It was one of the red-skinned creatures that he saw eating the souls of the damned. Its hand had elongated nails that were enhanced with somebody refining techniques. Even before he could gather his footing the creature attacked once more.

Large wings sprouted from its back as it propelled itself towards his position. The quickness this creature had was above what he was capable of. The communication jade that he was clutching in his good hand was quickly used. Even though he would surely die the people at his sect would be alerted to their presence.

Soon the man's head was flying through the air. Yet even though his flesh had failed this was not quite the end to his existence. The core that he possessed was a phantom core, through which he would be able to remain in soul form for a short amount of time. It was a lesser form of what a nascent soul master was capable of.

While his form was similar to a vengeful spirit, if he managed to find a new host body he would be able to keep his life. What he needed to do now is to quickly return to the sect ground, being a core formation expert he would be given a replacement body from one of the lesser sect members.

While the person's soul would be absorbed by his, the sect would be given back a stronger more experienced member to rely on. This was not something one could do repeatedly but the first time always had the biggest chance of being successful.

'I must flee before I lose myself!'

The man's spirit jolted towards his sect ground yet the monster that had decapitated him didn't seem fooled. It was as if he could see the soul escaping from the body and continued the chase. Just like with the other souls the creature opened up its mouth to gobble him up.

"This is a delicious hunt, there are so many of them here, ripe for the taking."

Soon the cultivator's soul had been gobbled by this strange invader. He licked his lips as the mouth returned to something that looked more human in nature. The creatures that were gorging themselves on the vengeful souls soon gathered together. The body of the man who was beheaded was grasping something in his hand which was quickly discovered by them.

"They might know that we are here."

"Does it matter? The hunt has only started, let them get ready, it will only make their flesh sweeter and souls taste better. Let their souls be devoured by fear while we devour this appetizer here."

All of the red-skinned creatures here started to chuckle as they thought about sinking their teeth into their prey. The souls of the damned were quite the meal to them and the main reason why they chose to go towards these lands first.

....

'I should be arriving soon...'

After evading the pale grasp of the voluptuous ladies he was close to reaching the lands of the Shadow Phantom Sect. This middle sized sect was not that prominent, they mostly remained in their lands where their powers were the strongest.

This wasn't something out of the ordinary. There were many sects that gathered to places of power and just defended their location from others. Not everyone could boast universal power whenever they traveled. The cultivators tended to alter their techniques depending on the places they trained in, these just occupied a place with some strange phantoms on it.

'There is not much information about this place, but there might be something else that is keeping the decrepit souls trapped here.'

Kuo had given him a report but there was not much known about this place. Universally everyone agreed that the souls were produced from some battle that took place many thousands of years ago, perhaps even before the last war between the empires.

But from Zhang Dong's knowledge, there should be something making the souls stay. Perhaps some creature that had grown in energy past these many years or some kind of strange mineral. There were some options that could aid with his current cultivation problem yet for that to happen he would probably take away the protection from this Shadow Phantom Sect that was relying on the evil spirits as a natural repellent.

'They sound like a semi demonic sect for playing with vengeful spirits which would make things easier. Nevertheless, I need to get stronger and those invaders are already here.'

He didn't like the fact that he would need to strip the people here of their natural resources yet it might have been the only way for the empire to survive. If the invaders didn't get to them, then there also was Wang Long that would probably continue killing people until he had enough spirit points to ascend into the immortal stage.

For that simple fact, he might have to ignore his strong sense of morality and look at the bigger picture. What he could do was simply tell them to relocate towards either his sect or the Long Clan or Heavenly Crane Sect. Besides his own people, he believed that those two factions would be able to defend themselves for the longest.

"Hm, looks similar to those dark lands in that other empire."

Finally, he was here, the whole place was shrouded in dark and the clouds were very thick. Regretfully even though the clouds were dark it didn't seem that there was any lightning energy hidden in them. It wasn't a weather-based phenomenon but an alteration due to the strong vengeful spirit energy that made everything be covered in gray mist.

Before going in he glanced onto his map. Thanks to it he could somewhat tell where he would find the invaders. It wasn't perfect but from what he could tell they were moving towards where the main city of this sect should be.

"Guess the vengeful spirits can't stop their advances?"

Normally a body refiner would have more trouble with phantoms. These creatures that were composed of soul energy were quite different. The easiest way to combat them would be to be able to utilize soul

power by the cultivator. Then the second-best method would be through strong concentrated spiritual energy. Punching the dead souls would not prove very effective.

“Did those toothy bastards have soul energy arts like me? Guess I’ll find out when I get there.”

Soon Zhang Dong disappeared into the grayish mist, his plan was to intercept the attackers before they got to the main sect city. If he was too late, he might have a lot more vengeful spirits to contend with.

Chapter 448

“What are these vile creatures? The phantasm gates have been breached, are they not affected by the soul-draining phenomenon at all?”

A group of cultivators dressed in dark gray robes was looking out into the distance. At this very moment, their protective formation was starting to fail. The illusory one that was there to trap any unwanted guests in a forest labyrinth that constantly changed shape didn’t amount to anything.

The red-skinned beings that looked to be some cross between humans and bats were progressing towards them without stopping for more than a few minutes. It was as if their ancient sect grounds were useless. The ghastly energies that they relied on were being absorbed before them, it was as if they didn’t serve for anything more than a meal for these beings.

“Demonic cultivators? Who are these creatures? They don’t look like any sect that I know.”

Cried an old shriveled-up man that was hovering in the air. His eyes were shut tightly but he radiated an eerie grayish light. The other elders seemed to be seeking guidance from this old man that looked like he lived for more than a thousand years.

“Patriarch, what should we do, if this continues these creatures will be out our doorstep in but a moment.”

“We must defend our lands from these vile creatures, I will not have the sect under my watch!”

The old man’s aura rose up and solidified at the lower end of the later stage of the nascent soul level. Other old elders started being raised from slumber, all of them looked tired and ancient. Due to the soul arts that they were specialized in they could cheat death to an extent. While their cultivation could not go past a certain level they were still powerful.

While the reserve elders of the sect were being raised from their slumber the others continued to monitor the outside. The thick gray mist that covered their lands was thickening out, without the evil souls’ presence their greatest protection was coming undone.

Without this natural defense, their sect would not even be able to defend themselves against the traditional cultivators from the other middle sized sects. If the Shadow Phantom Sect wanted to survive this they could not allow the invaders to progress any further. They needed to protect their sect ground that had been built by their forefathers.

In the background, a strange monolith stood tall. It was covered in strange runes and many grayish souls floated around it. Their loud cries were something that the people living here were used to but today the shouts continued to intensify.

“We must not let the monolith be destroyed, without it we will be unable to remain here!”

This spire that stood there was the true reason for the evil souls. Their great ancestor just took the chance to assemble it right after the large-scale battle in this area was over. Through it, he managed to trap the vengeful souls in this area. Thus without it, this sect would be unable to continue with their old ways.

Their illusory formations were now broken, the defensive barrier that shielded them for thousands of years was now also being absorbed. Due to them over-relying on spirit arts they were now defenseless against beings that used this type of energy as fuel.

All was not lost for them though as a certain white-haired person was hovering above the clouds where the air was thin and even the grayish mist didn't reach. His name was Zhang Dong but most people knew him as the Golden Dragon.

“I managed to get here in time, that must be the reason for all these vengeful spirits.”

He looked at what looked to be some strange spiral spire. Thanks to his knowledge of soul energy he figured out how these people were able to create this sort of area. The monolith was sending out a strange signal that roused the susceptible souls to gather here. It was not something anyone would normally notice unless they were close to it.

“Now this puts me in a bind, if I leave this thing here the souls will gather here once more but if I leave it like this, souls that would normally pass on will also be affected.”

There was a moral dilemma here. This sect clearly relied on this contraption to keep other sects away from their lands, if he removed it they would suffer the consequences later. On the other hand, if he just let it be, some souls that would normally not turn into decrepit ones would be attracted to this place.

After passing through the mist their energies would be corrupted and they would start to change into vengeful spirits. This was something bordering on demonic sect behavior, while it was not affecting the living beings it caused harm to the souls of the mortals that had no protection against this influence.

“I'll have to think about it later, first I need to clear out these...red vampires?”

He did not expect to see these types of invaders. They were still body refiners as the toothy bone spear ones but they were quite different. They looked like more monstrous vampires from old movies that could somewhat alter the composition of their bodies. In their normal state, they were just red humans but they could drastically alter the shape of their jaws as well as sprout wings and change their digits into sharp claws.

“Perhaps just like we have sects and clans, this Empire has other types of segregation?”

Zhang Dong was not sure but this was clearly a different type of enemy that would also have a different way of attacking. The ability to absorb the evil souls was already one of them, thus he needed to be careful. Luckily he did not spot any overly strong variants of these creatures, but if they could transform into something more dangerous was not off the table yet.

“Time to make my entrance...”

Zhang Dong made sure to hide his presence while being in this place. His soul core also allowed him to circumvent any defenses that the Shadow Phantom Sect was proud of but the energy he absorbed through this was still quite low.

The vampire-like creatures on the other hand were gorging themselves on everything they could get. Luckily for him, this energy would not be lost to him as he could still drain it from them instead. It looked like they had gone through more than half of what these lands had to offer. This would be quite the injection of power after he was done with them.

Afterward, he could worry about what to do with the people living here. With the soul energies declining this much it would probably take tens of years for new ones to gather. Yet due to the war that was happening there would probably be a big influx of angry dead people that flocked here.

“This should do it, those spells sure come in handy.”

While everyone below him was making a lot of noise Zhang Dong had taken some time to prepare. His fingertip was glowing faintly as he continued to draw up something that looked like a magic circle.

The sparkly runes and geometrical shapes glistened in the light that was shining above this gray miasma. He made it work to his advantage as he weaved this spell into being. What he needed was a distraction through which he would gain the opportunity to strike.

“That muscle-bound one looks like the leader but the real one... is over there!”

Thanks to his system he was still able to get through all the illusions when it concerned true strength. The leader looked unsuspecting and he was to the side while most of the creatures continued to assault the Shadow Phantom Sect’s grounds. It seemed that he was smart enough to let his minions take the brunt of the defense before deciding to join them in the hunt.

‘Well then...’

Zhang Dong vanished from his spot while hiding his presence. A few seconds afterward the spell circles that he created activated. They shone brightly as a star before erupting into a massive number of thin beams of light. They rained down onto the red-skinned attackers that quickly noticed this light show that was coming from above.

These beams of concentrated energy used the sun to add to their power. While he wasn’t sure if adding sun rays into the mix would do anything, the enemies looked like vampires which would go in line with how these worlds were set up. His shot in the dark was correct as the first monster that one of the rays connected with started going up in flames.

The area where all of this was happening quickly became quite chaotic. The cultivators behind the thin barrier had no idea what was going on. The rays of light evaded their city while showering the outside without mercy. The weaker red monsters were going up in flames while the strongest ones managed to last even through taking multiple hits.

Yet this was but a distraction to keep everyone looking up into the sky. The spells that he placed there would be giving out a firework-like performance for a full minute of time. The enraged red vampire beings quickly homed in at the area that was giving out this light. Quite a few tossed themselves towards it while some fired off their spiky nails in that direction.

This was reminiscent of the bone spears that the other variant of these invaders he witnessed. But even if they hit the correct spot it would do nothing. What was above the miasma was just a large spell array that could not be damaged by physical means.

The leader was one of them, his eyes were also drawn up to the sky where the bolts of bright energy were coming down. He did not move though, it was clear that he was content on letting his people be sacrificed while he examined the situation.

But this would be his last mistake, perhaps if he was together with his small battalion of forces there would be someone that discovered his attacker. Yet he had decided to place himself away in a safe spot without any guards next to him.

This demonic vampire looked like a nice posh butler. At this very moment, his head was flying through the air as it was quickly removed by the person that slipped behind him during the distraction that was created.

There was not even a cry nor was there a big explosion, the body just dropped down to the ground while quickly crumbling into dust. Just like their story counterparts these beings were apparently not so great at handling swords packed with holy and solar energy.

“Well then, now to take care of the rest...”

Zhang Dong smiled while noticing that after decapitating this monster the others turned to him. There was probably some connection between the master and its minions. After he had taken care of him, they looked quite annoyed.

Chapter 449

“They seem disorganized without their leader...”

An orb of shadowy energy that had a red tint to it floated towards Zhang Dong. This was what remained from the vampire look-alike that he had slain. All of the soul energy that this being sucked up was gathered there.

It was highly concentrated and seemed to still be alive, probably some of its being was still in there. It was not similar to any soul that he had ever seen before as it had its own unique fingerprint. Yet it was still made from the same energy and even though it was corrupt he could still absorb it.

This one in particular was brimming with vengeful spirits that had not been fully digested. But when he activated his own soul core they were quickly returned to the basic soul energy that all creatures had. The other creatures were already flying his way but after they saw their commander being absorbed soul and all they stopped.

“What is it? Not so brave when you can’t turn into a little soul and escape?”

It was obvious that these creatures were not easily killed and could in some way survive even if their bodies were destroyed. Probably if he didn’t have the help of his holy energy that he augmented with solar power these monsters would have been hard to kill. Even without examining their bodies, he could tell that they had good regenerative capabilities.

While this red variant of the invaders wasn't as strong as the toothy bastards, they probably made up by being more resilient. Without the proper countermeasures, they would continue to regenerate their health even when facing off against a stronger opponent.

"You won't be able to outlast me in a battle of attrition, now come!"

This was the perfect moment to strike, with sword in hand he took off towards the next target. When the number of enemies was greater it was smart to deliver a devastating blow to one of their generals, then their morale would crumble while he met less of a resistance.

But in this case, this was somewhat redundant. Zhang Dong's all-around strength was not something these foot soldiers could handle. The vast majority of them were around the core formation level with a handful of nascent soul equivalents here and there. Their leader that he had just slain with one swing of his sword would not pose a problem to his wife or Huo Qiang.

"Golden one... it's the Emperor's prey!"

One of the monsters shouted while he charged into the fray. His movements were swift and he did not plan on giving these invaders time to flee or attack. While they were shouting something about an Emperor or calling him the golden one, it was not the time for this.

The people from the Shadow Phantom Sect had a front-row seat. What unfolded before them was a one-sided battle where most of them could only see a golden blur flying around everywhere. Where the blur went hundreds of the red monsters just burst and then crumbled into dust. It was a one-sided execution as the red vampires could not contend with this degree of power.

Yet he did notice a strange similarity to the other variant of the invaders. Even though they had no chance of winning and the enemy was overwhelming them, they did not run. Instead, they continued to toss themselves towards him in a fit of rage. It was as if they didn't care about their own lives in the slightest.

"I know that you can understand me, who is the Emperor that you spoke about? What plans do you have for these lands?"

At the end of the battle, Zhang Dong was left with one survivor. It was one of the more powerful red-skinned vampires that would be around the early nascent soul stage. At this very moment, he was holding him by the neck while trying to get him to talk. The structure of this invading empire was unknown to him so gaining some information from one of their officers would be interesting.

"Y-you... The Emperor will tear you limb from limb!"

But even though he continued to grip harder while also threatening this being with death they didn't not talk.

"Do you really not care for your life? What was that about the golden one and being prey?"

"Y-yes, you are nothing b-but prey for slaughter, the Emperor will drink your blood and feast on your flesh... ugh..."

The ugly person that he was holding was promptly slapped by him as he was getting on his nerves. While he was not talking this didn't mean that he would not later. His sect had many techniques that could

force information out of other cultivators, if they would be successful on this creature remained to be seen.

After a few smacks to the face, the creature was quick to quiet down. He then used his soul core to relieve this being of most of its energy before making him pass out. From his spatial ring, he brought out a large rectangular box that looked like a coffin.

The Dracula look-alike was then promptly deposited into it before he dumped him into the replica of the Dimensional Regalia. While his spatial ring could not house living creatures this spatial treasure could. In it, the monster would be forced to lay dormant until he dumped him at his sect ground. But before that happened he needed to finish up here, the Shadow Phantom Sect was still here and needed some looking into.

Though the mist that was covering this area had thinned out he could still feel vengeful spirits floating in the distance. There was quite the concentration of them in the sect, the large spire in the distance was still operational.

‘Now what do I do with you...’

Zhang Dong floated towards the somewhat damaged protective barrier that the vampire beings had been absorbing. It was truly created from soul energy and probably harvested from evil spirits. There was no corruption here, the Shadow Phantom Sect didn’t seem to be one of the evil sects yet what they were doing was quite close.

Now he needed to make a decision. He could either let them be and have the large spire in the background attract more dead spirits to these lands or he could destroy it. Without this monolith, some of the vengeful spirits could pass on.

What that entailed for them he didn’t know, while he could absorb souls’ energy he did not know where all of their memories went after their passing. Perhaps these souls that he was seeing were not even part of the being that they came from. They could just be blobs of jumbled-up memories that were once a person.

The people in these lands believed in reincarnation. After a soul passed on it would have its memories erased and then reborn. Some strong individuals could retain their memories, sometimes fully but mostly partially. But was it due to the being that created this world or some kind of natural phenomenon that was even older, he had no idea.

In the distance, he could see the robed leaders of this sect. They were all wearing grayish robes with hoods that made them look like some cultist members. The most powerful of them was a really old man. Thanks to his spiritual sense he noticed that the man was a lot older than he should be.

‘His soul is close to two thousand years old, he must have been prolonging his life in some way.’

The man was on the lower end of a late stage nascent soul master. These types of prolonging techniques most of the time drained energy from the practitioner. He would not be surprised that when this man was at full strength he was much stronger. His soul was also strange, it didn’t really fit the body.

‘It’s as if the body is trying to reject the soul while slowly falling apart...’

Then he realized what kind of technique it was. This left quite the bad taste in his mouth, the old man before him had transplanted his soul into someone else's body. The body was trying to reject this soul and slowly decomposing. This kind of method would probably allow this person to prolong his life for some years, ten at most.

'Has this old bastard been jumping from body to body for all these years...'

Zhang Dong moved towards the faint barrier that was between him and the Sect grounds. Just with a little tap of his index finger he opened up a large enough hole to slip inside. The people from the Shadow Phantom Sect were clearly stunned by this feat yet they could not do anything about it.

"W-we thank the Golden Dragon for giving us aid."

The leader was quick to move towards his direction while clasping his hands and lowering his head. To these people that could somewhat measure the soul energy radiating from others, Zhang Dong looked like a true monster. After coming back from the other world his soul was larger than anyone.

"You there, did the owner of that body give away his body freely?"

The old man was asked a question while feeling a pressure that he had never felt before. While Zhang Dong was angry this was not something rare. Many sect members offered up their lives, some thought this was a very honorable act.

This would be true for his own people. He could imagine Zhang Zhi handing over his body if he ever asked him to. The man was already his number one fan and having your Patriarch live on inside your flesh would be the greatest honor to someone like that.

Thus he was still on the fence on what to do here. The old man could have just conditioned his people to think that giving up their bodies to the already advanced elders was the proper thing to do. But not like that sect members on the bottom could do anything if they had no power to speak of.

"Senior that is..."

"Let me ask you all, are you fine with this treatment? Do the juniors from the Shadow Phantom Sect desire to have their bodies taken to serve? Does everyone know about this fact?"

He decided to go with another approach. The old man would probably not tell him the truth but thanks to his senior aura he might be able to affect the juniors in the crowd. They might have been too afraid to speak out otherwise.

Yet, from the expressions on their faces, he knew that they were aware of this fact. No one took a step forward to go against their elders. This was their way of life and it was how they managed to survive all these thousands of years. They were afraid of change, without the old elders that made them strong their sect would not be able to survive and they would be as good as dead.

"I see, I hope that you will change your mind if you manage to survive..."

Without wanting to be stuck here for longer he zoomed over to the monolith that was giving out the strange signal. While he would not destroy it, he could make it less potent. With time the treasure would stop functioning. The people living here would have enough time to find a new way that perhaps didn't cause their own to lose their life.

Chapter 450

‘Did I do the right thing?’

Zhang Dong looked to his back where he saw the Shadow Phantom Sect’s protective barrier. He had already given them the advice to move out of here as more of the red monsters would be coming. There was not enough time for him to hang around this place and protect these people as more regions containing the power sources he wanted were still out there.

The monolith that attracted the angry souls of the dead was already working at a lower capacity. From what he could tell the people from that sect didn’t notice it and when they did it would be too late.

He did not like the way they lived but could he really judge them? Now they would have to find another way to survive, that is if they even made it past this round of the war. The red monsters seemed to be able to easily get through their barriers to attack them.

Now after the whole area had been mostly drained from soul energy they wouldn’t even be able to defend themselves from regular cultivators. The best way of surviving would be to run into the mainland yet he didn’t think that any sect would just abandon their lands unless they were truly positive that the end was coming.

But the more time passed the more information about the borders getting attacked would surface. He could only hope that they took the information to heart and acted accordingly.

‘I should probably stop worrying about others and think about my own problems...’

While he might have caused the future downfall of this Shadow Phantom Sect they would some years before the monolith of theirs stops working altogether. If he didn’t show up they would have been slaughtered so from a certain point of view he had the right to make some decisions concerning them but it was up to them to make the changes.

Thus after sharing with them some of the information that he had, he departed. The elders now knew of the potential danger from the breaches at the borders. It would be up to them and the others there to make a decision. He had spread his voice through the whole city and even the non-cultivators were able to hear the news.

Before they could get rowdy he left them, there was no time to answer more of their questions. They were probably arguing about their plans but going by what happened in these situations most of the time, they would probably bunker up.

Waiting it out when the enemy was too strong and attacking when victory was mostly assured was the motto of cultivators in this world. Unless they were mostly sure about having the greater forces they would bide their time. But when they were assured of their strength they would sometimes abandon all strategies.

‘Well then, I have managed to gather up quite a bit of soul energy from these vampires but I can probably get more...’

During this battle with the red beings, he planned to let a couple of them flee. Then he would follow this one member to their camp and clear it out. Regretfully all of these monsters were thrown into a

berserked state after their leader had died. Probably they had a very clear policy about deserters in their midst so anyone fleeing would probably not return to their hiding place.

‘The passage is here but it would be unwise to go there alone now, their base will be built up by now, at most I could attack some of the smaller bases that they have...’

He could not only go back to his own system map. There he could see faint red blobs, with them having a faint energy signature; it was somewhat hard to distinguish where the exact location of their temporary encampments was.

There was also an annoying thought bothering him, they called him the golden one, it was as if they had seen him before. Perhaps after destroying their first base when they appeared out of the bridge had earned him a name among them. He was supposed to be the prey of their Emperor.

‘They were shouting some strange things about preys and hunts when they were dying... Is this some kind of sport for them?’

The mystery of this side of the empire was slowly unraveling before him. It seemed that they weren’t here for the resources but to perhaps hunt instead. Knowing the motivation of his enemies could aid him in the coming battles.

If they were just doing this for pleasure they would ignore any attempts of diplomacy. He would not be able to offer them treasures or lands, it would make them truly a difficult enemy to fight.

Normally conflicts started for resources or land, the invaders would not go out of their way to eradicate everything in their wake as it would leave the conquered lands in a devastated state. No one wanted to rule over a destroyed desert with no subjects to control there. But if these invaders just wanted to kill people they would not shy away from using drastic solutions if they started losing.

‘And they had to pop out at my side of the empire, my dear brother won’t help me with this either...’

Without the Long Clan’s aid, he was in a bit of a predicament. His forces were still in the process of being built up. Without a steady supply of spirit stones, he would not be able to create more nascent soul soldiers. Thus it was time to go for the next important location, one that looked to have been taken over by the enemies.

“What was it? Heavenly Forge Alliance?”

While this sect had a grandiose name, it was just a coalition of small clans that were proficient in creating treasures. After many millennia they had managed to form into a middle sized sect that wasn’t much different from others. They lived in a mountain range that was devoid of much greenery.

Instead of living on the land, they lived inside of it. This sect somewhat reminded him of a fantasy race of dwarves. They buried deep into the mountains where they mined various minerals and turned them into weapons. What it seems like they were doing was substituting low cultivation with powerful weapons.

This place shared its borders with the Shadow Phantom Sect here. It was the next on his list of areas to check as there were many mines with valuable resources. Some metals retained spiritual energy within them which allowed them to be turned into high quality weapons fit for masters.

Besides these, there were rumors of spirit stone mines in this small region. The sect was somewhat secretive about what they were doing as they surrounded themselves by high mountains and kept their cities underground. Their main area was in an active volcano that they had somewhat been able to harness.

A large-scale attack on them would be quite hard as the troops needed to go inside the earth. Due to the high concentration of metals and minerals, the tunnels were quite resistant to spiritual energy. Even a nascent soul master would have a hard time maneuvering the lava-filled chambers there.

The Heavenly Forge Alliance was another example of a defensive geared sect. They didn't have the strength to attack others but they managed to entrench themselves inside the mountains. Where other cultivators abandoned these grounds they had survived while paving a path for themselves.

"Are there any survivors though?"

When going through the map Zhang Dong could see that the red vampires came from these lands. It made it look that they had finished clearing out the Heavenly Forge Alliance's lands and moved on to the Shadow Phantom sect. Yet the troops that they sent didn't seem like the main force which could mean that the people living in these lands could still be resisting.

"I guess I'll know when I get there."

With nothing else to do here, he activated his Qi and shot towards the mountains. The distances between these lands were quite large and even he would need a few days to arrive at the active volcano that was the capital city.

While going through the air Zhang Dong looked at his three cores. The soul core had increased in size but it was still smaller than the holy one. After his visit to the Long Clan, it had become quite bloated. This was bringing a slight imbalance to his cultivation as the two other cores were trailing behind.

The Dao seed that was in the middle of these cores had also increased in size but it could not extract more energy from the cores anymore. Only when all of the three had more to give would the seed activate and grow. He absorbed any lightning from storms that he passed through but this wasn't enough.

Yet even though the seed wasn't growing his power was still slowly going up. Even without being in the nascent soul stage, he was stronger than most great circle masters of that realm. He could not really consider himself a master at the core formation stage, this was something entirely different.

Following his visit to the secret ground, he had also become aware of the disappearance of cultivation realms. His predecessor stated that they were hidden for the sole purpose of hindering the regular people from attending the immortal realm. Now when his system was changed he might have to follow the old ways of cultivation.

"At least the system lets me change Qi into what I need for the cores but I'll have to push through this stage on my own..."

This was not like when he attained the nascent soul realm, there was no information of the Dao Seed realm that he gave the name to this phenomenon. The system could only help him reach the apex of it but he would need to germinate this seed by himself.

It seemed that the key would be to combine his three Dao's into this seed and then make it bloom. Would it create some kind of tree? Perhaps it would take the form of a lotus flower or something similar.

"Don't think it will sprout into my soul beast again..."

While it was interesting to ponder what his new transformation would entail it also made him a bit sad. He would be probably entering into a new form of existence which would mean that he would no longer be getting a nascent soul.

"Maybe I can recreate him from the soul core later?"

His journey continued while his thoughts were taken towards his next level of ascension. While the war was supposed to take a hundred years he was unsure if he had that much time to train. Wang Long was there and so were the enemy emperors. But he would not give up until his last breath, many people depended on him and they trusted that he could get them through this bump in the road.