

Unfathomable 551

Chapter 551

“What is troubling you?”

“Troubling me? It’s nothing, just worried about the direction the sect is heading, that’s all”

“Is that it? The sect is just growing but the people revere you, maybe a little bit too much. If they only knew that their leader worried this much~”

Liena smiled while giving her husband a peck on the cheek. It was time for her to head out as the two were quite busy. Now that the danger of Wang Long had ended and their power was shown to the world, they needed to continue to improve.

The lands that they reclaimed during the demi-human invasion were now practically theirs. Other clans and sects that once fled back to the middle reaches continued to swarm back to their homes. What was supposed to be an army for the Azure Emperor was quickly becoming his own faction.

In quite a short amount of time, the United Element Sect had become one of the big powerhouses of the Empire. They were now considered to be part of the big three and a replacement for the Soaring Dragon Sect. Zhang Dong was viewed as a rising star that was perhaps only second to the Azure Emperor. Some even believed that he was stronger as he achieved this much in not even a year.

Zhang Dong and his sect had achieved something that even the previous powerhouses couldn’t. They had successfully infiltrated the demonic island and dealt a lasting blow to the evil cultivators. Their city was in ruins and the demons had fled, while they weren’t fully eradicated it would take them millennia to get back to their previous glory.

It was already enough for Zhang Dong to defeat Wang Long who had destroyed the age-long Soaring Dragon Sect by himself. Not everyone believed that it was done in single combat between the leaders but it was enough to make everyone speculate. Could there be a new world order coming and which side should they join before it was too late?

On one side there was the tried and true Azure Emperor and the Long Clan that had existed for many millennia. However even they didn’t engage in a fight with the demi-humans or the demonic cultivators as if they were afraid of them. One side proved their might while the other one was showing weakness.

Even now in the east, a new battle was taking place and flags of the Emerald Phoenix Empire were being placed everywhere. Where was their great leader the Azure Emperor? He remained back at his castle without sending any kind of aid. The only thing that he did was allow anyone to retreat to his lands. Then when people arrived there they were forced into temporary militia forces and treated unfairly.

On the other side to the west of the Empire, it was different. The Golden Dragon had managed to clear up the bloodthirsty demi-humans and even fixed the issues with the demonic cultivators in the north. People could return to their homes and be free to do anything, there were no forced conscriptions and the sect even allowed them to withhold paying any taxes until they got back on their feet. The sticks of the Golden Dragon were on the rise while the Azure Emperor was beginning to be seen as a tyrant.

"I have to go, there is still much work to do, the barricades at the western regions have been almost fully assembled but the scouts have spotted movement."

"The remnants of the demi-humans trying to return home?"

"It might be."

"Maybe I should go instead what if..."

"I can handle myself, I am not a child and if something happens that idiot will also be there, now stop worrying."

After a little back and forth Liena left him to his own devices. The world moved on but he was stuck on what happened several weeks ago. There he interacted with this world's Overseer and who was the wife of the Azure Emperor. She was under the impression that his memories were wiped clean.

This didn't give him any solace as the worst-case scenario could happen at any moment. What if she contacted the grand being that was apparently the one responsible for it all? What if she decided that this world was lost and needed to be restarted again? But would she do this now after so much time had already passed?

Zhang Dong thought back to that day when he defeated Wang Long. The cube that he could use to reach the new stage was taken away and he was left with more questions than answers. Nothing really happened after the encounter, she nor the Azure Emperor contacted him in any way. It was as if the event never happened to begin with and that the scenario could play itself out.

'Bob, are you sure that she won't do anything with that nucleus?'

'Affirmative, world overseers are designed to supervise the world, they will only act if they discover an anomaly that can threaten the balance of the world.'

'Yeah...'

His handy Ai that had all the knowledge of his predecessor kept reassuring him. The administrator of this world would not act unless there was a big enough issue. Even when the whole world was destroyed they wouldn't act out and instead just wait. Only when something that shouldn't happen occurred would they act. Thus only after he was about to reach a new stage of being that was alien to this world did she come forward.

'I guess this confirms my previous suspicion, they will probably let the world play itself out and summon another system holder after the war is over and many thousands of years pass... should I just accept this...'

This was the big question he needed to ask himself. Did he really want to continue on this path that could break the cycle but would also endanger everyone he loved? The first time he prodded the beehive he wasn't stung but if he did it again then perhaps everything would end.

There was no guarantee that things would remain like this. Perhaps the next time the Empress saw him she would realize that the memory-altering attack didn't work. She would probably not be as sloppy the other time around. The only reason he got away with it the first time around was that she didn't take him seriously. If he was deemed to be a bug in the system that couldn't be fixed then he was done for.

'Bob, is there really no way of getting rid of that time-stopping technique?'

'Insufficient data.'

This was one of the biggest problems, during the encounter she was able to fully disable his entire cultivation base. Perhaps with enough system points, it would be possible to counter it but his Ai wasn't sure. The time he spent under the effect was too short for Bob to make an assessment. He would need to put himself under that effect again to know the answer.

'At least I found another one of these...'

He looked at another cube that he discovered in the demonic lands. It had been around the volcanic region where Wang Long's castle was. Luckily his enemy wasn't smart enough to look at his own map to see the strange dark space. It was an entry point for other orders like them and probably for ones that decided to start with demonic arts as a base.

The cube he was holding still had some juice left in it and could be used for an injection of spirit points. For some reason, he felt like it would be better to hold on to it instead of absorbing it outright. Having a trump card like it wouldn't be a bad idea and he could always get more points in a different fashion.

One of these ways was the corrupt spirit vein that still resided in the demonic region. After taking over the place he decided to slowly siphon it for more points to prepare for the future. While the issue with the overseer was the largest problem there were some others. There were still two hostile empires that needed to be driven back and perhaps a third enemy.

'Will Long Qing and the Long Clan just remain passive like this? He could also just be a puppet of that administrator, there is no way of knowing what they will do now...'

This uncertainty had already brought him many sleepless nights. Perhaps it would be fine to just dial it down and let this story play out. After a thousand years, he would just die but his life would have been quite eventful. He had a wife and kids, something that he never thought was possible.

But as a father, he could not stop worrying. What if the great overlord above the sky decided it was time to erase it all? What if he reached the immortal stage or whatever the seed let him sprout into? What if perhaps he could challenge that god with that newly gained power? There had to be a reason why it was keeping the power level low and didn't allow the cultivators to reach heights beyond the nascent soul level. It must have been afraid of potential enemies that could interfere with its plan, what this plan was, he did not know.

'That administrator let me live for a reason, at least it can't read my thoughts or could detect Bob that can imitate the true system, to it I might as well have been Wang Long and everything is going according to plan.'

Zhang Dong looked out of the window of the rebuilt mansion. There he saw his two kids playing with the toys that he made. Their smiles were the current driving force behind his actions and probably the only reason that he didn't go crazy.

For the time being, he would need to play along with the forces that governed t

“Where are they taking us?”

“Where do you think? Probably right into a pill cauldron...”

“No, I don’t want to die! Let me go!”

“Hey, be quiet!”

A large group of prisoners was being transported before a large teleportation gate. All of them had one thing in common which was that they had been the residents of the demon city ruled by the Chaos Sect. Now that that faction didn’t exist anymore they were at the mercy of this United Element Sect that they knew nothing about.

It was a mix of actual demonic cultivators and people with no power that had mostly given up on their life. There were some indignant to call it quits just yet, they pushed and tried to run but the chains they were wearing didn’t allow them to gather any spiritual energy inside of their bodies. They were quickly pushed back in line and forced to go through that gate that probably led to their doom.

“So this is how it ends...”

A middle-aged man gave out a sigh while his group was the next one to step through. He had been forced to participate in the war and managed to survive. His power wasn’t small but it was not large enough to matter. His previous master had died during the battle but now he would either get a new one or be turned to cultivation resources. This was something that he had already made peace with but what lay on the other side of the gate was not something he expected.

“Hurry up, we don’t have all day, you’re part of group G.”

“What is this...”

The man called out in shock as the hell he imagined wasn’t waiting on the other side, instead, it looked like paradise. The air was filled with spiritual energy, the grass was green and full of life. In the distance, he could hear the chirping of birds and the people that were there seemed different. They were actually smiling, something rarely seen in the demonic regions.

“Group G, follow me you’ll be taken to your new home.”

“Our new home?”

People from the demon faction looked at each other with puzzled expressions. All around them there were similar groups. They were taken onto floating barges and flown out somewhere. The entire place looked like some kind of strange airfield through which they would be flown to different parts of wherever they were.

“Hurry up and be grateful to our great leader’s magnanimity, if it was up to me you all would be turned to fertilizer!”

A rather scary-looking core formation cultivator was responsible for this group. There was no compassion in his eyes and this old man could feel it. There had been an order from someone over them and it seemed to be the sect leader. This man had shown himself during the large-scale battle and his tremendous power could not be denied. Even someone like the demon king was not able to stop him.

Everyone wanted to ask more questions but they were all suppressed by the guards. Time was apparently not something that these people wanted to waste. Soon around two thousand people made it onto this barge and were forced to stand shoulder to shoulder while it took off. The view wasn't that bad and a spirit shield protected them from the wind so they had enough time to take everything in.

There didn't seem to be anything worthwhile besides nice-looking vegetation. The beasts that were below them were of the Qi condensation variety which made this old man think that it was the empire's outer region. Even though the ship was fast it took half a day for them to arrive.

"We are here, get ready to disembark, and not a word from anyone, you will get your instructions from your group leaders down on the ground."

No one dared to speak up or voice any complaints. They all came from the lands of demons where a person could die from looking at the wrong person. Life was cheap and everyone knew that if they actually wanted to live they needed to adhere to the ones in power. The old man could see barren fields everywhere and a lack of greenery. It didn't take much deliberation to figure out what they were here for.

The instructor took them to a strange blocky looking building. It lacked any characteristics known to them and was quite basic. This was their new living quarters but they weren't that bad on the inside. He expected it to just be an open space where they would be given blankets at most.

"Divide yourselves into groups of three, fighting is not allowed, the rules are written down on this board so learn to follow them or you will be punished."

At first glance, this looked to be some type of concentration camp. However, for being one the living conditions weren't bad. The old man got a room with two other people of a similar age. This room had a strange bed that was soft and blankets to keep him warm at night. They were given new clothes, food, and the only thing that they needed to do was work the fields.

"This isn't that bad... it's nothing compared to the work I needed to do at the old restaurant... they don't even hit you even if you make some mistakes..."

"Right? We even get some free time to chat like this!"

When overhearing conversations between the others at this encampment he wasn't sure what he felt. The working conditions were good, and even though they couldn't leave it was better here than it was back in the demonic city where a person's life was constantly threatened.

They treated the old well, if someone couldn't contend with the weather outside they would be given other tasks like helping around the cafeteria or cleaning. But thanks to the constant food supply even the elderly started recovering from being malnourished. Most of the time these people were discarded and deemed useless, here on the other hand they could be useful once more.

Who was this radiant Golden Dragon that made all of this possible? The man and the others kept asking themselves. At first, they believed that the orthodox sect just wanted to brainwash them over to their side but as the weeks passed nothing changed.

They continued to plant trees and grow food and apparently, if they worked for at least twenty years they would be able to leave. While their demonic cultivation would be sealed they could spend the rest

of their life free. There was also a way of retaining some form of their power but no one was sure what to think about it yet...

...

"This is an unorthodox method but it seems to be working."

"Yes, the Patriarch outdid himself again, who would have thought that we could just use these demons like this?"

"You should all stop doubting the Patriarch, his plans aren't something that we can fathom!"

"Indeed, it might be best for relics of the past like us to just make way for the new generation..."

A group of elders was sitting around a large meeting room. With new technology available they were just looking at some still slides on a large screen. There statistics of the current demonic cultivator redevelopment plan were shown.

At first, no one knew what they should think of it. Zhang Dong, their leader decided to spare almost everyone from that cult. Only the most heinous criminals that already went too far were given a swift death. The rest was guided out of those lands filled with miasma and death.

It was a mix of commoners and cultivators. They were all taken to undeveloped regions where spirit energy was lower. There they would work the lands as farmers and produce food and herbs. A plan for new villages and cities was also being worked on. After these criminals were done with their sentence they would be given small homes and some land that would be theirs.

"Truly a marvelous idea, by giving them their own land even these hoodlums have something to strive for, and it's all produced from their labor so we don't need to pay a single spirit stone!"

"That is true, we can use the herbs they produce for pill making and sell them for profit, even the surplus food they create can be used. Even if these people weren't loyal to us before they will now!"

"It's interesting, their view of our sect and Patriarch is becoming more favorable with each day. While there will be some bad apples, if we can change the minds of the majority then we can only profit."

In the end, all of those people were war criminals that would normally die or be worked down to the bone. That was a very shortsighted way of looking at it and the elders here now believed it too.

By taking these people under their wing they would produce loyal servants to their sect. They would probably be grateful for the freedom they were given and a new chance at life. There always existed a possibility of an uprising but with the current disparity of power that wouldn't be probable.

"Well then, I think we all agree that this has been a success but our Patriarch doesn't seem to want to take a break."

"Yes, he has taken an interest in the northern sea, now that we have forces in the demonic lands they can act as a base for our warships."

The slides changed to something else; it was a new type of ship that had recently begun production. It didn't look like much as it was shaped like a torpedo and had no sails. This was understandable as it had been created to contend with the underwater currents in the vast ocean.

"This one might be troublesome, our forces haven't recovered from the last battle..."

The old men and women here looked troubled. They didn't want to speak up but to them going from one battle to another wasn't the greatest idea. In their eyes, they needed to bunker up and spread their influence in the Empire. Now was the time for growth and the continuous war would only bring more death and perhaps even weaken their standing.

"We must trust in the Patriarch, he has always been able to see through the veil, perhaps this is a chance to enrich ourselves even further!"

Some people nodded while others continued to ponder the expansion of the current sect. While they had gotten stronger they also drew in the eyes of others. Would the other powers in this empire just allow them to grow without interfering...

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"..."

"Patriarch?"

"Woah... don't sneak up on me like that!"

"I apologize, Patriarch, please punish this Zhang Zhi accordingly!"

"No... it's fine... what is the problem?"

Zhang Dong was deep in thought while Zhi approached him from the back. So much that he was startled by even someone like his retainer. The last few weeks had been nerve-racking on his psyche. Even with the good old tranquil mind technique, he continued to worry and look over his shoulder.

To what extent the Overseer would act was unknown to him. Perhaps she was constantly watching him through some device he couldn't fathom. There were immortal grade items on the system store that perhaps the administrator could use. What if the brainwashing failure would be figured out sooner than he could gather the power necessary for his ascension?

Thoughts of an inevitable end clouded his mind and continued to drive him towards his next enemy. The faster he took care of the two remaining forces of the empires the better. Only after absorbing the Dao's they had would he be able to break through. Only with a newfound power could he ever hope to go against someone that broke this world's rules.

"I just wished to inform you about an unusual sighting at the shore line. A strange object that resembles an island had shown itself along with various sea creatures surrounding it. They are making it troublesome for our spies to approach."

"I see, they might be trying to establish a foothold to invade the lands."

“Our strategists are of the same mind Patriarch, they wish to observe further before sending out our forces that had been diminished but if you give the order, I will direct our brothers to battle myself!”

“No that won’t be necessary, just keep watching from afar and I’ll call for you when the need arises.”

“As you wish.”

Zhang Zhi clasped his hands but there was a look of disappointment in his eyes. Zhang Dong knew what the problem was as he was able to overhear some people talking his disciples included. Everyone was feeling that his position as Patriarch should be taken more seriously. The constant engagement with stealth missions was only one of the problems. They feared that one of these days he would put himself somewhere that he won’t be able to escape from.

‘They aren’t wrong... strictly speaking, there is no need for me to join these battles anymore.’

His forces were evolving and advancing at a rapid pace. All the lands that the demi-humans and demonic cultivators occupied were now under his jurisdiction. Not even the Azure Emperor or the Heavenly Crane Sect could demand it back from him. His side had proven that they are capable of competing with the big boys.

Wang Long’s death was a surprise to everyone. Naturally, the sects in power tried to spin it their own way. Either the person that they were fighting was injured or they themselves had become a demonic sect. The invasion of the city of demons and the subsequent absorption of the whole island was somewhat suspicious.

Without proper evidence, they could not pin anything substantial. This didn’t mean that they couldn’t find something to accuse them of. If they really wanted to start a war then claiming that he and his faction had become bloodthirsty demonic cultivators would probably be enough as a reason. It wouldn’t be that easy however, his reputation of a magnanimous being had already spread through the whole empire and could actually benefit him.

“Before you go, were we able to get our fishy friends to talk?”

“No Patriarch, they have proven somewhat resistant to the mind-bending skills, and the more we prod the more their minds deteriorate.”

It seemed that the fish people he had previously captured had some kind of mind-controlling spell cast on them. They were unable to speak whenever asked about their leaders, plans, and forces. The moment they tried to give out this information while under the usual techniques their minds would boil. Afterward, they would not be able to remember anything and their cultivation base was eradicated.

‘Whoever puts such mind blocks on their commanding officers can’t be the soft type, probably all of their forces will turn into berserkers to protect their leaders.’

It was a similar technique to what demonic cultivators used. No one would be able to go against the person performing the spell and if they tried their mind would be fried. Though it was disheartening to see that even the nascent soul-level masters were put under it. Whoever led these sea creatures must have been quite pedantic about them being loyal.

‘It could also be some kind of racial skill, perhaps they have some type of hive mind mentality, like ants or bees?’

The being that he took for questioning had died during the interview and they had examined their body. The nascent soul ones that looked more human didn’t actually have any human DNA in them. It was clear that they evolved from some other creatures entirely which made them different from the demi-humans that were changed through millennia of body refinement.

‘This could be more troublesome but I shall cross that bridge when I get there...’

Now he had to make a decision, would he use his sect for what it was created for or endanger himself alone like he always did? His forces had just gone through some rest and their healing arts were one of the best in the whole empire. The golden palace that was half destroyed was quickly being restored. This was all thanks to the corrupted spirit vein that was slowly being converted into spirit points and repairs.

It wouldn’t be totally out of the picture to continue with his attack. The biggest problem was the field the enemy appeared in. The sea creatures had the advantage over his flying ships and anyone that tried to fight underwater. Some of the battle formations needed some tuning and testing as well.

His forces were growing but it was clear to him that without the Golden Dragon around they wouldn’t be taken as seriously. Even though the number of nascent soul masters had increased thanks to his system and continued to grow, they were mostly only ones in name. It took many years of study to get to that level, battles between such masters would usually go to the one with more experience if the power difference wasn’t that drastic.

‘I might not always be here, they need to learn to take care of themselves without me around.’

He might have been looking at it in a pessimistic way but he had no idea of knowing what would happen in the future. The last time he vanished for five years his sect was almost destroyed by Wang Long. Even if they eradicated all the invaders the Azure Emperor or the Heavenly Crane Sect could begin to see them as an eye sore. It was important to secure the safety of his children and allies, for they needed to take some of the responsibility off his hands.

The recent attack proved that they were able to contend with powerful beings themselves. There were many masters under Wang Long’s influence that were world-class fighters. Perhaps if the army was more tightly knit they could have pushed for a stalemate. The moment their leader was down for the count they just fled the scene and were in hiding even now.

‘A slower approach might be in order, if I rush into it then that woman might come for me...’

A decision had been made and growing his forces came first. He would not totally abandon the rush for power but some concessions needed to be made. The people that showed the most promise needed to be gathered up and further groomed into proper warriors. This batch would include some of the nascent soul masters while also some core formation experts that did well, his disciples included.

‘I should give Kuo a call...’

Thankfully he didn’t really need to go through much to find people that were talented. His faction part of the system would do that for him. He could even order it depending on potential and loyalty towards

him and the sect. Only trustworthy people would be helped to reach a new height. It would take some time but even both of his disciples could soon reach the nascent soul level as long as he retained the system. While his dependency on it never went away it was a necessary evil.

‘It won’t help me that much with understanding the Dao though, without that cube I might have to get it myself.’

The world here was not made with the intention of giving the system holders that much insight. Just as Wang Long proved it just injected the base knowledge that the user most of the time didn’t fully grasp on their own. Perhaps if he went through this journey the correct way he could even skip battling the remaining two or three Emperors.

But such an endeavor required time and probably a lot of it. Luckily with Wang Long’s death came some peace. Locking himself in a cultivation chamber at this point in time could do him some good. He had been going through the motions of rushing towards the next big battle without really understanding what he was sitting on. Understanding the power that was slowly budding inside of him could be very beneficial.

The fighting within the Empire was also dying down. The sea people were trying to establish forward bases which he was planning to counter. To the east where the Emerald Phoenix Empire had invaded people had already either submitted or fled to the lands of the Long clan. Even without him interfering that area would probably be fine.

Lord Lucius and Argus didn’t come along for the demonic extermination but were still looking for the holy weapon parts. They weren’t true enemies and didn’t really push into the cultivator-owned cities. It wasn’t a given that they would remain neutral but for now, it was safe to assume that they would.

He had already allowed them access to the lands that were under his new jurisdiction. It wasn’t that hard, they just needed to imprint the characters of the United Element Sect onto their armor. This way they would not be attacked and everyone would be fine with cooperating with their relic searching efforts. If they wanted to delve into the other side of the empire then they would need to face off against the other invaders, which was all up to them.

‘I guess taking a backseat for once won’t be such a bad thing...’

After glancing at his faction window that could be used as a hub between his faction members he decided to head out towards the sea region. He would at least see what the ocean people were up to before fully deciding on his next action.

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“So that’s it... do we have any information on their movements?”

Zhang Dong floated high in the sky while looking into the distance. Even with his enhanced sight, he could only see a tiny speck of land. It was a lot smaller on the outside but its size expanded exponentially when going underwater. This was something similar to an island or at least something made to look like one. Anyone below the nascent soul level would be unable to tell it apart from any other tiny mass of land.

“Our scouts aren’t versed in underwater travel, the dummy ships we sent with the wooden puppets had been quickly destroyed by the sea creatures. We confirmed six nascent soul-level beasts in the vicinity; the core formation ones number around a hundred but there is also a swarm of weaker ones.”

“They sure have a lot of meat shields...”

He rubbed his chin while using his own spiritual sense and system screen for scanning. The number was around the same but he also spotted one stronger monster in the vicinity. It made the other ones look like sardines but it wasn’t clear if it was actually an enemy yet. The beast in question was actually the island itself. The mass of dirt and corals that was encasing it kept it from being seen as anything other than a small island.

To his knowledge, there were more of these monster islands floating along the shoreline. They were quickly spreading these strange creatures through the area. There were a few theories that he had about them but two were the most probable. Either they were there as a means of protecting the sea and their new lands or to act as some sort of springboard to infiltrate the lands.

‘Can those things be used to flood the mainland or something, or is it just supposed to be some kind of underwater fortress...’

There was a lack of information he was working with. Normally this would be the time for him to sneak over to the closest fake island to check it out. However, there was no need to rush, without Wang Long there or any other system users he could take his sweet time. The administrator was out there but at the moment he could not do anything about it.

It was more important to build up his faction to its fullest before the confrontation. His system was somewhat different to the old one but it had its strong points. At least when it came to his sect he could continue to upgrade anyone that met the criteria. If they had him in a favorable light they could directly affect their progress by spending points on them. It was probably a better system than the fear one Wang Long was using for his people.

He could not directly affect his own cultivation base anymore thus spending points on his closest family members and retainers was the next best thing. Even in the fight with Wang Long they had helped him close the gap at the last second. Perhaps when facing off against the other emperors and the Empress they were the key to victory.

Zhang Zhi

Nascent Soul [Early Stage 85%]

Main Dao:

Water [57 %]

Main Weapon:

Katana [S – Grade]

Favorability :

Revered [97]

When looking over Zhang Zhi's stats he looked at the favorability ranking which was one of the more important statistics. Thanks to it the conversion from points to cultivation base would be higher and impartation of techniques was also boosted. It wasn't fully maxed out but when it came to elders then Zhi was the one that saw him in the most favorable light. In contrast, both his disciples and his wife had this stat already maxed out. Huo Qiang on the other hand was a bit lower.

At the moment both Zhang Dong and Zhi were floating in the sky but soon they descended towards the temporary encampment in an abandoned city. It had been discarded during the demi-human wars and the people had not returned here yet. For the time being his sect was trying to prepare a stationary teleportation gate through which their forces could keep going through.

Large ships like the Argonaut had these types of gates built in but it was always better if one remained on the ground. The teleportation formations used up a truckload of spiritual energy which a flying vessel needed for its defensive shields. Most of the time it would be only used to transport smaller forces or masters of the nascent soul variety instead. It was always a more economical solution to establish a gate on the ground.

But he had not come here to just watch as the base was established. Zhang Zhi was close to reaching the middle stage of the nascent soul level. There was another reason why he ordered his number one retainer to be here. He wanted to make a spectacle of his ascension to a new realm. Through the tassel with Wang Long, he had actually gained something he couldn't do before.

The reason for this new upgrade was either due to his contact with that cube he dropped or the expansion of his current seed. Nevertheless, there was a function that he gained and only people with a favorability ranking of ninety and up could be given it. This function would give the person a special title along with sharing some of his own Dao with them. In short, it was an upgrade through the system that would enhance his most loyal retainers.

At first, he wanted to instantly apply it to his wife or Huo Qiang. However, using untested features on his loved ones was probably not the best idea. Zhang Zhi was the perfect test subject. While he did feel bad about trying to use an untested method on someone like this he was also in a somewhat panicked state. Before the attempt, he had consulted with Bob on multiple occasions and there didn't seem to be any drawbacks to the transition.

'The only one was the increase in favorability...'

It was the only reason that he was withholding from using it on everyone was the forced increase in favorability. Normally this stat would be increased in a more natural way. It was a reaction to people gaining help from him. Here on the other hand it would boost it up and perhaps forcefully change it.

'But in this world where power and cultivation is everything, it is a given that the favorability would skyrocket...'

The same thing happened after he removed the impurities from the core formation experts and then helped them achieve the nascent soul level. The favorability rating jumped up drastically, there was no one below a seventy favorability rating in his sect who was given direct help. In a way, it wasn't that hard to influence these people that believed that rare techniques and cultivation materials were more precious than life.

So would he actually be affecting their relationship in any way or was it just a normal reaction to be given power. At this point in time Zhi's fascination with him bordered on god worship. There was probably not something that would shatter the image of the perfect Patriarch. Perhaps only if he started acting like a demonic cultivator would this favorability rating go down.

Though this was mostly not due to what he was doing but the alignment of the person. People still kept their own characteristics and not many were fine with wanton slaughter. However, if he started eradicating sects under a 'righteous' pretext then probably Zhi would have nothing against it. With a good enough excuse, it was possible to wiggle around everything.

The time had come to give it a try. Part of their sect was already here and most of the base had been established. Now was the time to give everyone a small morale boost by increasing their command officers' prestige. He wanted to show what could happen to someone if they were deemed worthy by the Patriarch. The people here were hand-picked through the system and would be boosted the most by it if their favorability rating rose even more.

"We greet the Patriarch and the elders!"

"That's enough, raise your heads."

Zhang Dong called out to the people gathered here. Other nascent soul masters that he helped established were here but they were nowhere near Zhang Zhi in skill or favorability. They needed to see one of their peers be given even more power. This would give them the urge to show what they were made of in the coming battles.

"Today we have not gathered for me but for our sect brother, Elder Zhang Zhi. His accolades have not gone unnoticed to me and I wish to reward him, if you show me the same determination you might gain the same chance as him."

"Patriarch, your words are enough, I do not need any rewards!"

Zhang Zhi clasped his hands while lowering his head. It was clear that the man didn't really want anything and his loyalty was unshaken. He was not the type of person that required treasures or powerful techniques as a reward. If he was noticed and appreciated for his actions by his superior, then it was enough.

Most of the people in the sect weren't like this, without seeing something worthwhile they wouldn't give their all. For this reason, Zhang Zhi would act as a reminder to all of them. After reaching a new stage of power his victories would be a beacon. Everyone will see what they could become if only the Patriarch noticed them.

Perhaps this was just dangling a carrot in front of them but there was a need for them to improve. Without a proper army of high level masters, he was unsure of the longevity of his sect. Partially he was doing this to increase his own power base but also to leave behind trusted retainers that would protect his family if he ever vanished like before.

"Nonsense, you have done well and you will be rewarded. Just relax, this could feel strange like the last time..."

The grandmasters that were here all recalled the stench and weird feeling they were put through during the previous ascension. It was a rather pleasurable feeling but now with so many people gathered here, they started feeling pity for Zhi. He might have been getting power but if it was anything like the last time, then it would be something to remember.

“Like last time, Patriarch? P-perhaps we should do this in a more private place... I uh... I’m sure we could use some of the new gathering halls for this instead.”

“Nonsense, this won’t take long, just bear with it.”

“I uh.... ohh...WOooooaaHHH...”

A strange moan escaped from Zhang Zhi as Zhang Dong moved his finger towards his system screen, it was not something anyone would forget for a long time...

Chapter 555

“That glow... it’s entering elder’s Zhi’s dantian... his power is rising!”

“I can feel it too, he... he is reaching the middle stage before our eyes!”

The group of nascent soul masters that were all in the early stages of the nascent soul level gasped in awe. Before them a strange transformation was taking place, their sect brother Zhang Zhi had been chosen by the Patriarch and was moving past them in the spawn of a few moments. To people that took centuries to push their levels by a tiny fraction, this was a truly astonishing sight.

From their perspective, it looked like Zhang Dong gave a poke to Zhang Zhi’s forehead before utilizing a strange technique. His finger was tracing a strange path in the air that probably had some deeper meaning. Not soon after the aura of the cultivator exploded and started pushing towards the middle stage of the nascent soul level.

However this was no simple nascent soul level, its quality overshadowed anything that came before it. It was more similar to the radiance of the Patriarch himself or the great two other elders Huo Qiang and Zhang Liena. The three were a notch above the rest and it seemed that other people could actually reach this pinnacle realm.

Zhang Zhi’s body, which was filled with water energy, started releasing blue light. This light somehow started moving up into the sky to form the water dragon soul beast that he was known for. No one knew what this meant but soon enough they witnessed a slither of golden light jumping from Zhang Dong’s finger and being absorbed into the blue energy.

This is when it all actually started, the blue water dragon started changing. Its size increased twofold and the blue scales turned into a more radiant hue, not quite blue and also not quite golden but something in between. Some people here realized that what was happening was that the holy Dao that the Patriarch was famous for was somehow mixing with the soul beast and making it stronger.

It wasn’t only the soul beast that was getting stronger, Zhang Zhi’s whole presence changed. A cultivator usually possessed a unique spirit energy signature. The elders that were gathered here were already used to it. Thus when this pattern was switched to something entirely new they knew that Zhang Dong

made it so. It was as if the Dao of Holy light was being injected into Zhang Zhi and upgrading his whole being.

“How is this possible...”

“Can the Patriarch share his knowledge with others just like that?”

“Be quiet, the ceremony isn’t over yet!”

The people were abuzz with speculation but after one of the elders shouted they went silent. Zhang Dong on the other hand wasn’t even really paying attention to them. The strange finger movements that he was performing were just his scrolling through the system window. There were several options that he could click that would affect Zhang Zhi’s cultivation.

This was the main reason why the favorability rating had to be over ninety for this to work. The person was opening up their cultivation to his system and this could be only achieved with almost blind trust. The subject would have his core cultivation method altered by spending spirit points gained from the faction system or spirit stones.

Everything also depended on Zhang Dong’s own knowledge and power level. He could not boost anyone past his own level of cultivation. At most the skills could be at the same rank as his but even that would use up a boatload of points. Yet Zhi here was a trusted retainer who would even offer his life to protect the sect or Zhang Dong if the need arose.

Thus he would not skimp out on any upgrades that he could give to his number one elder. First of all, he needed to decide on what he could add to Zhang Zhi’s repertoire. His body refining skill wasn’t quite up to par so it was quickly upgraded to allow him to take a beating. This was also augmented by adding a smidge of the recovering abilities from his holy dao. With that combination, Zhi’s vitality and stamina would be comparable to great circle nascent soul masters.

Zhang Dong’s own knowledge of the Dao of water wasn’t that great but he added whatever he could to Zhi’s to boost it a bit further. Knowledge of his sword skills would be far more useful and with the increase in body refinement, Zhi would be a force to be reckoned with. Adding a third Dao like the lightning one and gravity one wasn’t really an option and would muddle the current balance between water and holy.

The biggest change that everyone was witnessing was the soul beast. With the combination of gold and blue, it looked quite shiny and green. The Emerald coloring was quite breathtaking and was also something he could customize on his side. There was an extensive beast modification screen on which he could input some changes. It even showed him a warning signal if he made the soul beast too strong. It would then weigh on the user’s nascent soul and diminish the fighting capability which needed to be avoided.

‘That should do it...’

“Calm down and let the power flow through you, I will help you circulate your spiritual energy, for now, you will need to get used to it as fast as you can.”

“Yes, Patriarch.”

Zhi went down to his knees and assumed the lotus position. The transformation had taken place but even now one mistake would cause cultivation deviation. Elders that were watching knew this and quickly surrounded the two masters to protect them. Luckily Zhang Dong was sure to scan the whole region for potential threats and even some defensive formations had been prepared. Soon the soul beast started fading away and returned into Zhang Zhi's body, the process was over.

"Congratulations on reaching the middle stage, how do you feel?"

"Is this really only the middle stage?"

Zhi was stunned by the amount of progress that he made. He knew that he wasn't that far from maxing out on his early stage but reaching a hundred percent in it didn't actually guarantee progress. It only opened up the possibility of reaching the next stage. That would always depend on the practitioner's luck and skill, it was never this easy but thanks to Zhang Dong it had happened without even one misstep. During the whole process, he could not feel even a single problem, it was as if something was guiding him through everything.

"I feel... sensational... it's as if I have become a young man again!"

"Well... you do look a bit younger."

Zhang Dong smiled as some wrinkles disappeared from Zhi's face after the middle stage had been reached. His hair had also started to turn blond after the transformation took place. This was a stark contrast to his disciples that had pure white hair. It seemed that the Dao of Heavenly Lightning that they had practiced beforehand was responsible. If the holy dao was inserted without the other one it would transform people's hair golden instead.

'Hm, would adding the gravitational Dao make someone's hair dark purple?'

That Dao's energies were of the dark purple coloring and sometimes close to black. He had not heard of people's hair color changing due to the Dao a person followed. Perhaps it had to be one of the greater ones and it needed to be understood to a high degree. His disciple's hair needed some time to reach the white coloring similar to his.

"I hope your wife doesn't mind the change in hair color but I'm sure she could find some tinctures to get your old one back."

"My hair color Patriarch?"

Zhang Dong just smiled and with a wave of his hand produced a mirror. Through it, Zhang Zhi could see the long golden locks that sprung free from his head during the transformation. It looked like the samurai was going through a rebellious phase and didn't really fit his kimono and katana look. Nevertheless, the transformation was done and while Zhang Zhi was panicking over the new looks he decided to take a peek at the status screen.

Zhang Zhi

Nascent Soul [Middle Stage 0%]

Main Dao:

Water [65 %] Holy [50%]

Main Weapon:

Katana [S – Grade]

Favorability:

Worship [100]

‘Worship huh?... the kids have adoration at a hundred points which is a bit different...’

He was not sure what to make of it but Zhang Zhi would probably be a lot less troubled in carrying any type of orders. If he worshiped him as a higher being or something like that then what came out of Zhang Dong’s mouth would be the truth. He would need to watch to not have his number one elder take his words literally.

It seemed that the favorability was different depending on the relation. His wife that was also at a hundred points instead of worship or adoration had devotion there. The words were all somewhat similar and described strong emotions. He had not yet seen the number drop after going over a hundred so he was not sure if it was possible. Some other favorability ratings did drop during the five-year break when he vanished and were only restored when he returned.

“This Zhang Zhi will be loyal to the Patriarch and the bloodline that it carries, this I swear on me and all the descendants that I bring to this world!”

“You don’t need to bring your kids into this, they can make their own decisions...”

“Nonsense, they will follow your line for all eternity!”

“Ah yes...”

Zhi recovered from getting his hair bleached quite fast and was back to his old self. He kind of promised that every offspring that he produced would be under Zhang Dong’s line. It wasn’t strange for this to happen so for now he just waved it off. Most of the time such a promise would be forgotten within a few generations but it did somewhat guarantee help to his children if he vanished yet again.

‘For them, it is an equal exchange but it still doesn’t make the whole thing any better.’

This was something that he was aiming for. The overseer that might be looking at him from the shadows was constantly on his mind. If something happened to him then his children and wife would be in danger. Perhaps not now but after many years when new experts arose, it could become beneficial to them to have allies. This was one of the reasons that he wanted to produce more people like Zhi that would feel grateful to him for giving them power.

Everyone was looking at him with pleading eyes already. They clearly wanted to be the next one to advance further and they would work tirelessly to show that they were trustworthy retainers worthy of praise. With this the seed had been planted, now what came next was the assessment of the enemy army and how his new improved general would handle it.

Chapter 556

‘Whew, it’s always strange to see old farts looking at me with those puppy dog eyes...’

Zhang Dong removed himself from the gathering area after enhancing Zhang Zhi’s cultivation. The other elders had sparkles in their eyes and if he allowed it they would probably start kissing his feet just to get some help. This was not that strange of behavior as after hundreds of years of failing in cultivating the old farts were desperate.

This procedure that Zhi had gone through was a limited bonus he was given after getting in contact with Wang Long’s system. Under his faction window, Zhi was the first one to make it over to his prestige units. There was a limited number of five people that could go through this changing process and he already had decided on the next two.

First of this was a little test to see what this function entailed for the one going through with it. While his favorability rating was enhanced it didn’t seem that Zhi had really changed much. Now he could move on to his family members like Zhang Liena that would be next in line. After her came Huo Qiang and then on the next two he had not fully decided on.

One of the possible candidates was Zhang Jin. His grandfather was loyal and a trusted member of his inner circle. The only problem was that he had only recently achieved the nascent soul level. His power wouldn’t get as much of the boost unless he really dumped all the spirit points he had to get him to the middle stage. With how he was planning to get Qiang and Liena into the late stage this would be quite costly.

Both of his disciples were also potential targets of the boost. While they were still core formation practitioners this could open up the future for them. Considering that he might have to play the long game it might not have been such a bad idea. The two would not become nascent soul masters instantly but would be closer to being half-step into the higher realm.

With time they would certainly develop into powerful figures, the only question was if they had enough time. If the Azure Emperor came knocking and his wife joined in then his disciples wouldn’t be that helpful. However, they would be a great choice if he needed his kids to retreat. Zhang Xue and Liu would be perfect bodyguards and caretakers. Perhaps it was the wrong kind of motivation to entrust more power to people in hopes they return the favor but there wasn’t much he could do here.

‘Besides Qiang and Liena there aren’t that many elders worth mentioning, I guess I’ll gather enough resources for them before making a decision.’

For the time being, he made the choice to wait. Zhang Zhi needed to be monitored as well before he truly decided to fiddle with his wife with the help of his system. It should not be able to fiddle with the thoughts of people but there was always a risk. There were already techniques in this world that could be used to control others, it wouldn’t be strange if whoever made this world had access to stronger ones.

These prestige ‘units’ that the one affected became came with a boon. They were supposed to become loyal to the faction leader. This meant they were reinforced against any mind-affecting spells and techniques. They also shared in the power of the faction leader which after the run-in with the overseer would come in handy. His wish was that the Empress would not be able to affect them as much just as he wasn’t affected by the time stop.

“Well then, I should try this new monitoring feature.”

After his speech, it was time to return to the Golden Dong Palace. With a quick teleport, he appeared in his private chamber. No one would be the wiser if he was or was not in his personality floating castle which also improved the workflow.

The room he was in had been slowly plastered all over with various monitors and another holographic map replica. Thanks to his cultivation it wasn't hard to look at multiple screens at the same time. There, on all of them, he could quickly check the state of his sect and the state of the empire.

‘Best if I color code everything first... Let me see... I guess my faction can go with white or yellow...’

It was turning into a strategy game. His golden cultivation and the whole Golden Dragon persona inclined him to choose yellow as the color for his side. The Azure Emperor would of course be blue and the Emerald Phoenix Empire was green. The Heavenly Crane Sect had become pink and that left Argus and his faction as a holy white. Then the fish people with brown color so as to not coincide with the other blue.

‘I guess it's muddy water? Their color patterns kind of clash with each other...’

After inputting everything into the mapping device he was given the state of the current war. The West border region was all yellow and it pushed into the north side where the demonic lands were. The center of the empire was blue with the coloring becoming fainter before being taken over by other colors.

‘That Emerald Phoenix Empire took quite a chunk from the east side, their territory is almost as big as mine...’

After a few glances, it was clear that the Long Clan still had the largest section of land. They were highly concentrated in the middle though with the rest just being faint blue with a questionable grasp. The pink coloring pushed into the east side which clashed with the green side. Then in the south, there was a small white encampment that belonged to Lucius.

The faction system even introduced a hostility rating that he could place on the interactive map that was now connected to his system. Only after being reassured by Bob that the administrator couldn't access the system he had was he willing to continue using it like this.

‘It's a bit strange but perhaps that great goldy figure above doesn't want the overseers to fiddle with the system? If that's true then perhaps this broken system is the greatest weapon I could have against it.’

There could be a few reasons that the administrators didn't have access to the system holders' system. One of them was to make it fair for the system holder but that didn't really make much sense as the administrator was there to steer the scenario in one way. Then if something went wrong they could even erase people's memories and probably even kill the system holder.

After going through his predecessor's files he was still unable to find anything to help him with the administrators. That man had to be aware of the whole structure of this world and that included the overseer. Was it also the Empress even two hundred thousand years ago or did these people die as the rest?

The world had a limit on power and even when that woman was a lot stronger she didn't feel like a fully-fledged immortal. In the previous world, the demon king also had a power level going above the heroes but he was still only within the confines of power that Zhang Dong was at.

Taking that into consideration it should be possible to take out the Empress if he only got a bit stronger. Something like a half step into the immortal realm should be more than enough. His main plan was to absorb the Dao's of the two other Emperor-level enemies, perhaps they would be enough to push him in the right direction. If that didn't work he would need to do it the hard way or utilize his faction system in some other way.

It was easy to bring his people closer to his own level but it wasn't possible to go beyond it. There was a possibility of gaining some insight from his own faction members but as it stood for now they were all behind him.

The only two that were slightly above were Qiang in the ways of fire Dao and Liena in the wind department. However, this was not something he couldn't cross by himself if he just delved into the study himself. All the base techniques they were given were created through the system and what they were doing was just perfecting them.

'I guess if we three lock ourselves in seclusion for a few hundreds of years then we might gain insight into several more Daos without needing to fight but can I trust the admin to not figure out that my system is busted at some point...'

The Azure Dragon was a big problem, he always brought his wife over for any type of occasion. It would be a slap to the face of the Long Clan if Zhang Dong refused any invitations or didn't invite his own brother to some more serious events. At some point in time, they would need to meet and when that happened he needed to be ready.

With the map before him, he could continue to monitor the fishy invaders in the north and the more traditional cultivators in the east. Regretfully this map didn't really tell him anything about the strengths or weaknesses of his enemies. At most, it could warn him of surprise attacks or secret hiding places if they had a powerful enough defensive force.

But this was not the reason for this setup, he was attempting to change it from an action game into a strategy for now. From this chamber with the screens, he could perfectly direct all of his forces to places he seemed fit. He had built up his faction to be part of the great three and it was time to use them as such.

'I need to get stronger and they need to get stronger if we want to survive this together, I can't cuddle them or play the hero forever, if they can't take care of themselves then after I'm gone it won't take much for the entire sect to implode...'

While giving out a sigh he looked towards the top part of the map. There he saw a small yellow dot where Zhang Zhi and the current forces were stationed. After the scouts came back it was time to prepare the offensive. This time around he would be taking a backseat and his sect members would have to fend for themselves to gain more experience.

'They should be fine...'

He hoped that he wasn't making a mistake and was also ready to jump in if things got too hairy for Zhi. But while the offensive was taking place he wouldn't be fully passive. There were other ways of supporting his troops than directly being there on the battlefield.

'I guess I should prepare some items worth for true grandmasters.'

Chapter 557

"Hear me out brothers and sisters of the sect, the Patriarch put his trust in us and we will make true on it. As you might know, the demonic menace is done with but another enemy on the level of the demi-humans remains. We will organize a task force to get to the bottom of that island, failure is not an option!"

Zhang Zhi was performing a speech at a gathering of commanding officers. The Sect had a similar ranking system to the army which was decided mainly by a person's cultivation and skill level. However, this didn't mean that the most potent fighter would always be giving the orders. Everything was run through a special brain unit that brought out the best strategies and the one in charge had to finally decide on one.

"Has the intelligence unit prepared the information?"

"We have, Commander Zhi."

"Very well, I'll leave it up to Elder Changpu, she will present us their findings."

"Thank you, Commander Zhi."

A woman that looked to be in her fifties took a step forward toward the stage. There a large screen flickered on to present the findings of their scout units. There were photos of the strange island from all sides that they could.

"As you can see the island is but a reproduction and its true size is hidden under the deep water. Without the proper equipment, we were unable to gather information about the true size of it. These beings are aquatic in nature and our people had to retreat."

"Elder Changpu, aren't the new underwater ships ready to set out? As I recall the armory unit called them submarines?"

"Ah yes, the new products from the main sect that the Patriarch helped to design, it's truly a blessing that he is with us."

The elders nodded in agreement. The underwater ships and weapons had been produced at the main sect and then transported through the teleportation gates. With them to aid them they hoped to be able to close the gap between the person and sea creature. They were equipped with various projectile weapons that should even be able to harm a nascent soul master and were designed to be especially deadly in underwater combat.

"Truly, it wouldn't be possible without the Patriarch's knowledge, it is a mystery why he is so wise!"

"It must be because he is the Golden Dragon!"

“Indeed, if it was up to me he would be sitting on the throne and not that Azure Emperor... what has he done for us or the people?”

“That isn’t wrong but... should we be saying these things...”

“Why not? We are the United Element Sect, we are not inferior to any of the other sect or the Long Clan!”

“That’s right, as long as we have the Patriarch we need to fear no one!”

The room burst into cheers after the conversation shifted toward the sect leader. Everyone here didn’t try to deny this fact, their leader was in their eyes at least on the same level as the Azure Emperor. With no point of reference, they assumed that he would be victorious in a fair fight and for now it seemed that Long Qing was remaining silent.

There could be many reasons why he wasn’t interfering with the United Element Sect. The most reasonable one being that they just had other things to worry about with the invaders everywhere. However the sect loved Zhang Dong, to them, it must have been another reason. Long Qing was just afraid of a direct confrontation and losing face against his brother, the Golden Dragon.

“Please calm down brothers and sisters, this is not the time we must discuss our plan, otherwise we will bring shame to the Patriarch if we are forced to seek his help again.”

Zhang Zhi brought everyone’s attention back to the screen. It was important to him that they are able to confront the enemy by themselves. Most if not all of the main battles were victorious thanks to Zhang Dong being involved. Zhi as well as the other elders knew that this couldn’t continue. They needed to show to their Patriarch and also to the world that they could win even without their strongest fighter getting involved.

“Aye, the Long Clan rarely involves the Azure Dragon in their dealings, we must do so as well, otherwise no one will take us seriously without the Patriarch’s direct involvement...”

Soon the conversation returned to tackling the strange island. On the screen, they placed the diagrams of the sea creatures guarding the whole place. The weak spots had been found and would be used to bring victory to their next war expedition. After all of the equipment and personnel were ready they would begin their mission.

...

‘They do that a lot, maybe it’s because my favorability rating is too high?’

Zhang Dong had left his people to their own devices but kept an ear out. Thanks to his faction system and Zhi that was now a prestige unit being at the gathering he could easily hear what they were talking about. It was embarrassing to hear them praise him every second that they could. Some of the praises were true but others were just trying to crawl up Zhang Zhi’s posterior by praising the man he adored.

The praises that he received were fine but some parts were problematic. Long Qing was brought up and disrespected by his own people. If the Long clan ever got wind of it then it could cause some friction. It wouldn’t be strange if people from his faction got into a dispute with the Long Clan over things like this.

His side was clearly disrespecting the current Emperor, it was as if they wanted Long Qing to be replaced.

‘This isn’t good but their faith in me borders on fanaticism already, after Wang Long died my name began to be spread even more...’

Zhang Dong knew that this was all problematic. The only reason there was no friction on the surface between the Long Clan and his side was due to the war. If they started killing each other then the invaders would only profit from it. For the time being an uneasy truce had been established but when all of this was over then it would explode.

‘The sooner we get rid of the Emerald Phoenix Empire and those underwater beings, the sooner I might have to clash with the Emperor...’

He was not afraid of battling Long Qing, his power was vast but it wasn’t above his. The biggest problem was the woman that would be there. What would the overseer do after his victory over the Long Clan? Would she not notice that the mind control didn’t work?

‘What is her plan... if Long Qing dies then so will she and her family if we consider the usual rules of this world. At best I would need to imprison them somewhere to ease the minds of the people, two Emperors can’t exist at once and their kids would have a right to the throne...’

The administrator had some kind of mind-affecting skills. There were also ways of producing clones and flesh puppets. Perhaps after Long Qing was killed or imprisoned she would exchange herself for another person.

‘Wait... would she do something like that?’

Zhang Dong, who was in the middle of crafting a new sword, almost dropped his hammer. The crafting abode was still in his possession and it was one of the places where no one could bother him. During his crafting session, he continued to overthink and a terrible thought entered his mind.

What if that Empress exchanged the Azure Dragon for the Gold Dragon after all was set and done. What better place to examine the system holder than being at his side constantly. If he thought about it more it did make sense. When all was said and done the system holder would become the new Emperor of this empire. To monitor everything she would need to remain close to the people in power and switching from Azure to Gold would be the easiest method.

Now, this was a true problem, his mind raced to rationalize this possibility. He had planned to take it slow, as long as he didn’t give himself away then perhaps the Overseer would remain passive through all of it. Even if it took him a thousand years he might finally be able to achieve the immortal stage himself and break this cycle. Could he sacrifice his dear wife for all of it though or anyone else? She could replace anyone and he would need to watch, even if it was not a close family member could he just let something like this happen?

‘Shit... I might have been overestimating how much time I have...’

While his plan was to get stronger he now needed to keep his family members away from the Azure Emperor. If a war broke out between them then perhaps it would be better to prolong it as much as he

could. This didn't change the fact that he needed to take care of the current problem which was the fish people in the north.

"I need to finish this thing first..."

In his hand, he had a long piece of metal that was slowly taking shape. His spiritual energy flowed into it while he continually delivered hammer strikes. Crafting in this world was a lot different, the hammer was only used to inject his Qi with more force but in general, this force was used to mold the item into shape.

With time a curved blade with one sharp edge started to appear. This would be the new weapon that Zhang Zhi would use in battle. The highest heaven grade weapon that he could produce would belong to his first prestige unit.

'Think they used to call these blades Odachi.'

It was infused with both water and holy energies. With the water elemental infusion that went above the norm, he hoped to bridge the gap. The battles that would be taking place would be fought near large bodies of water. This blade should be something that took his enemies off guard and boost Zhi's current power level to someone at the great circle.

"It's quite long but it shouldn't break that easily..."

After giving the sharpened edge a poke he could feel his flesh being injured. It was even able to injure him who had a powerful body refining skill. With this, the blade would be able to deliver damage to even an Emperor-level threat now it just needed a few finishing touches before the battle started.

"I still need to make those gauntlets for Qiang and that new fan for Liena, who should I start with first..."

Chapter 558

"The sword is finished."

In his hand, he held a razor-sharp blue blade elongated katana. It was on the longer side and reminded him of the weapon of choice of a certain white-haired villain. This blade that could boost water-based attacks and control would make it to the hands of Zhang Zhi.

"I better just send it over, if I personally deliver this thing to him he'll make a fuss about it..."

During the years spent in this world, he never got used to the way people treated him. To some extent, he saw himself as the thirty-something loser from his old life. Even after achieving all of this success it was still hard to see himself as someone above the rest.

His people saw him as some kind of deity able to bring them towards the promised land. If he bought into it all it would be a very slippery slope. He could see himself becoming something similar to Wang Long that lost it. The man actually thought that he was some kind of chosen being and everyone else was an NPC in his story.

From Zhang Dong's perspective on the other hand everyone wasn't that different. The amount of power and even their intelligence was highly dependent on their environment. If someone was lucky enough to

be born in the higher regions of the empire their life trajectory would be wholeheartedly different from that of someone that started in the lower region.

Perhaps after all this is over he could establish a new and fair regime where at least people had a chance to reach their true potential. It was of course impossible to make everyone happy and corruption would always exist. His aim would be to at least make the world around him a bit fairer and to guarantee baseline living conditions for people that were dealt a bad hand.

“Before that ever happens I need to finish all of these repairs and enhancements.”

While the sword was finished this wasn't the only piece of gear that needed to be created. On a large workbench that he was looking at, his own white armor was being reconstructed by a peculiar-looking machine. There were several mechanical arms on the sides injecting spiritual energy in short bursts which made it look as if it was being welded.

His crafting abode upgrades had been reset down to zero after he made his way back to this world. After taking care of Wang Long he was finally able to put some spirit points into enhancing it once more. However for some reason after getting in contact with Wang Long's system this place had also shifted.

Previously it had the feel of a medieval smithery. The old dancing system that was implemented in one of the earlier models was luckily gone. Through his faction window, this place could now produce items en masse. He just needed to throw the required resources into a large furnace that was ten meters high and twenty meters wide.

The scenery was more modern now, it looked like a giant car factory with various machines. He didn't quite understand it all but it did do the job for him and supplying his forces with powerful weapon replicas wasn't hard. What he needed to do was just design a model that would be then multiplied by the machines.

For the time being the assembly line was in full swing. They were creating battle armor for the soldiers that would boost their fighting power to an extreme level. With all this gear on his soldiers would be able to easily combine into grand battle formations that were on the level of nascent soul masters. Now even some of the weaker practitioners could be of use in battle.

“Even though I'm here it's still hard to comprehend that such a place exists and whoever I might be going up against next can just make things like this, what is this immortal realm?”

Zhang Dong had come a long way since his journey started. At that point, he didn't really think about the system he was equipped with. However now it was different, it was something that could affect the world to a high degree. Even at his current level, he would not be able to perform most of the acts this system could.

Creating small subspaces wasn't something that was above him anymore but materializing equipment just with spiritual energy was not something he could do. It would take quite some time for him to examine every machine in this factory and then recreate it with the correct materials. Some of the intricacies inside of them were somewhat a mystery.

His knowledge was still limited and he needed more of it. Perhaps there were other ways of building up his power than defeating the enemy emperors. His best bet was still his predecessor that managed to counter the old system programming.

'If only those records weren't so old, most of the information had been lost and Bob would need more computing power to scavenge through what was left.'

While this was true he wasn't left with anything. There were still bits and pieces here that he could reverse engineer back. Even the nuclei that were scattered through the empire along with treasures like the dimensional regalia could aid him in ascending to the next level. He just needed time to comprehend what it took to become a true immortal. If he wasn't able to retrieve the cube the Empress stole it would be the only way.

"It will be hard to go against something that made this system possible..."

He opened up the system screen where Zhang Zhi and his prestige unit section was. There he saw an equipment panel that reminded him of old MMORPG games. The sword that he created first was placed down on a special bench. When it was there an icon of the sword appeared on the inventory screen. Then by dragging this item towards Zhang Zhi's right hand he could drop it to equip it.

The moment the pixelated version of the sword made it to the right side weapon square, the real sword vanished from the bench. This was a first try at the new mode of equipping his closest warriors. Zhang Zhi would be quite surprised when the sword appeared on this side as if it belonged to him. To make the blow to his senses easier, Zhang Dong attached a little note to the sword hilts with the explanation.

Thanks to the faction's latest enhancements he could actually monitor Zhang Zhi. Just as the weapon was equipped he could see a rather confused Zhi almost falling over. He was just on his way to a military facility where the new soldiers had arrived as the weapon appeared strapped to his side. A few other people were walking behind him so the light of teleportation caused them to jump away in fright.

However the weapon carried something with it that Zhi could recognize. Zhang Dong's holy aura was all over it so the fright and confusion quickly changed to interest. The little letter that he attached to it was red with haste and was followed by bowing.

"Look at them go..."

It was a strange sight to behold. Without him being physically there, the people were starting to prostrate themselves to thin air. They must have thought that he was somewhere close by and trying to pinpoint his position. The sight of them bowing in all cardinal and intercardinal directions was truly interesting.

"This is a handy feature, I'll be able to supply him with new weapons and items even during battle..."

Zhang Dong could already imagine it. If Zhi found himself in danger he could quickly drag over an item to resolve the problem. There was a limit to what it could be as this only worked with specific items that the faction system approved off. He could only drag things like weapons, armor, and pills.

He could not for instance shove a flying treasure through it, there was no designated spot for flying mounts. At most he would need to create something that could perform both functions of a weapon

and a means of transportation. The only downside was that he would actually need to do it by hand. Monitoring what Zhi was up to 24/7 would be hard even for him and stall his current crafting.

‘I should be able to equip him in power armor though, I just need to finish it first...’

His own power suit had been mostly restored after the tussle with Wang Long but it also needed to be improved further. His own safety came before that of his men, at the moment he could only give them limited support. The long Odachi sword that was handed over would need to suffice for now.

“Well then, while they prepare for their own battle I need to get back to work.”

With his hand occupied with a large hammer, he descended into the improved crafting area. There more generalized furnaces and smelters were already heating up the crafting materials. Not everything could be done by the robots and the factory setup. He needed to actually create the blueprints and the item in question by himself.

The next one on his agenda was Liena’s battle fan. This item would need to be even better than the one that he gave to Zhi. He was clearly biased towards his wife and would even dive into his secret stash of rare materials to push this fan over the limit of nascent soul. His aim was to create something that could go beyond it.

While the world didn’t allow for the creation of immortal grade items they still existed. The flying golden bastion was one of those items that had been left behind and another was the dimensional regalia. Both of them were quite versatile in their function and had a similar feature of becoming stronger by absorbing spiritual energy.

The regalia was a small world in itself and the inside was comparable to a large continent from his old world. The golden palace continued to become larger and the arsenal it was equipped with could not be stopped by normal means. Even he himself would probably be unable to burst his way through the defenses easily.

Yet they were not directly weapons at the immortal level. Something like a proper sword or other type of weapon would make things easier. Instead, he would need to somehow study these two items and finally emulate the thing that made them go over the heavenly grade.

‘This might take a while but before Zhi and the others make their move it will be some weeks, let me get to it!’

Chapter 559

“Commander, we are ready to begin the operation, please give us the order to depart.”

“Very well, we shall commence with the operation, we will depart now and be victorious!”

“As you wish!”

Zhang Zhi pulled out his new sword and pointed it toward the artificial island in the distance. Some time had passed since they were given the order to take that place over. They had been preparing for weeks and finally, all was ready to take the fight to the fish people.

It was not a grand operation like the one during the demonic island incident. However to the people gathered here it had even more meaning. Many of them were put into leading positions while in the previous event they were just following the Patriarch.

In their eyes, they didn't feel like they did much during the last battle. The two grand elders and the Patriarch took out the strongest enemies. They were just along for the ride and even had trouble battling the regular demonic army that was now missing. This was their moment to show their true worth, they needed to prove themselves to the sect and pave a path toward immortality.

The commanding officer for this battle was Zhang Zhi. Currently, he was floating above ground while looking toward the sea. The underwater ships that were tailor-made for this attack started revving up their engines. Out on land large dragons made from water started to form. Each one of them had a core nascent soul member and multiple core formation experts inside of its body. These grand battle formations moved next to the large underwater ships.

No one really knew what to expect but they did believe in one thing, the sect, and their leader. If the Patriarch thought that they would be able to conquer this new enemy by themselves, then they would. There weren't any second thoughts, only victory and honor were on their mind.

Soon the large underwater armada was making its way towards the floating island near the shoreline. Their enemies were not surprised and met them head-on as under the sea a different spectacle was taking place. Many sea creatures of varying shapes and sizes tossed themselves at the invaders.

Zhi spread out his senses and could feel a swarm of living beings approaching. Their numbers were tremendous and a stark contrast to the demi-humans that came in a smaller number. Luckily they all weren't that powerful the many sea beasts were mostly at the Qi condensation but they also had a lot of foundation establishment troops mixed in.

This was not the time for him to act, he was the leader. While the Patriarch liked to delve into battle by himself he was not allowed the same leisure. There was a vast difference in their power levels and Zhi was aware of this. If he made a mistake his skills would probably not be high enough to help him out of trouble.

For the time being, he allowed his troops to pave a path forward. First came a tidal wave of small creatures, fish with sharp teeth and the size of sharks were very prevalent. Yet they would not come far as the underwater ships were quick to launch their armaments at the monsters.

It was the first time for him to see the ingenious weapon that the Patriarch created. Spiritual energy bullets weren't as effective underwater as above it. Instead, the ships launched specialized shells that had a propeller at the end. It would continue to spin and add speed to the projectile.

Zhi was quite captivated by the large quantity that was made by their sect in this short time. The scientists and blacksmiths informed him that the vast majority was procured by the Patriarch himself. The ways of manufacturing them at this scale were unknown to them but they were trying to keep up.

With this much ammunition on their side, the swarm of underwater creatures was defenseless. The large numbers were actually a detriment as they couldn't maneuver out of the way. The moment a torpedo collided with one of the beasts it produced a huge explosion. Blood and guts soon riddled the sea while continuous explosions produced gassers of bones.

The sect submarines were able to take out the vast majority of the initial beasts but some of them still made it through. This was just a testament to their ferocity and sheer numbers that even a huge amount of explosive rounds couldn't clear out.

Zhi wasn't worried though as the more modern ships had guards around them. The moment some of the monsters made it too close to the submarines they were attacked by sea serpents made from water energy. With the vast quantity of water here it was easy for the masters to keep these water serpents working.

Most of them had come from the Zhang Clan and were still using one of the core formations that were created and later improved by the Patriarch. Thus most of the swarm of fish ranging from Qi condensation to foundation establishment were dealt with by the underwater ships. However, this was not over yet, the real test of their might still remained.

Massive underwater monsters were still waiting for them. They surrounded the fake island that was a beast in itself. The closer the armada of ships belonging to the United Element sect got the harder it became. The defending army was quite relentless and without any fear for their life.

"It can't end with these mindless drones, the people in charge must come out eventually, otherwise we will surround them."

Zhi along with some other elders and support flying ships moved in tandem with the underwater submarine squadron. He did not believe that the underwater creatures were the only line of defense. Zhang Dong had informed all of them about the enemies and they had even examined the trident and their physiology beforehand.

Just as he thought as they got closer the nascent soul sea monsters started to move. Their size was truly tremendous and it didn't seem to slow them down at all. The top part was more humanoid in shape while the underside consisted either of tentacles or fish tails. They weren't unified in shape or size but all of them started moving.

At first, the monsters just waited there but suddenly a strange wail escaped from this island monster. The sound wave produced a massive tsunami which would cause a lot of damage to the seashore. Under the waves, the massive blast of sound waves collided with the formations and the ships to push them away.

Right on cue, the army activated various defensive measures to disperse this wide area attack and continued to push forward. They continued firing the torpedoes but from within the island structure blasts of sound energy continued to repel all of these projectiles.

Finally, the large monster revealed itself, the head sprung forward and it was quite tremendous. Even the huge sea monsters that were equal to nascent soul masters were like mere ants compared to this behemoth.

"Is that a turtle beast? But how can it have grown to this size..."

Only a tip of the giant monster's shell was sticking out and it already looked like a small island. The creature had to be several kilometers in diameter but was still able to keep itself afloat. It was clear that this was done with the help of some spiritual energy as nothing this big wouldn't sink.

This was their true target, the massive creature that was the size of a city. But it wasn't their only opponent as the nascent soul level creatures that were guarding it started to move forward the underwater ships that couldn't fire their torpedos anymore.

To add to the injury the giant turtle beast started revealing its head further as before it was hidden away in its shell. There was something off about this turtle though. Even though it had a giant head, the orifices where its legs should be remained empty. Instead of large limbs, strange humanoid-looking underwater beings started pouring out.

"Are those the underwater dwellers? They look like the sub-species type that takes orders from those mermen..."

The patriarch came up with the names of mermaids and mermen for these underwater creatures. However, they had not come across any female versions of them yet. There was a possibility of them not existing but the males of this species did have all the organs required to be considered male. One of the theories was that the women were not as violent and stuck tending to the children but perhaps soon that conclusion would prove faulty.

"None of the leaders are showing up though, considering that they are using their beasts like this..."

Zhi mumbled to himself while also unsheathing his long blade. The moment it left the sheath a humming sound was produced. While the monsters were pointing their fangs at the vast armada of ships and the sea serpents he used this chance to approach.

The flying ships in the sky remained stationary but also moved into a firing formation. The large cannons at the helm started charging up spiritual energy and aiming toward the part of the turtle's shell that was revealed. Soon a barrage of energy bolts rained down from the sky and uncovered the fake ground that occupied the turtle's back.

It didn't seem that this monster turtle had anything to counter this air attack. However, the shell that was covering it didn't budge at all. Even when it was pelted by a swarm of energy attacks they weren't producing any damage. Probably with such a defensive monster on their side the mermen didn't feel threatened.

Zhang Zhi didn't think that they would remain passive for too long. They were inclined to use their beasts first but after their troops were shaved off enough they had to show their hand. When the time came then he would be ready for it.

Playing the waiting game was a bit new to him. Usually, he just delved into battles as one of the soldiers. On this occasion, he had to hold himself back, if he fell then this whole operation could fail. The commanding officer needed to remain tall and be a beacon of hope to their troops. At least that's what he thought after seeing their leader in action so many times.

"Commander!"

"I know, get ready now the true battle starts..."

Finally, the turtle released another wave of sound that even caused him to recoil in pain. From the holes on the sides, something was coming out. The spiritual energy signature was similar to their previous

prisoner and aligned to the powerful trident weapon and there were multiple, it was the time for him to delve into battle and show what he was made of.

...

“They are doing alright for now... let’s see what he does next...”

Zhang Dong stopped working and looked at the large set of screens on the side. There he could see the entire force Zhang Zhi was leading and the moment the underwater beast leaders finally showed themselves.

Chapter 560

“So the giant turtle isn’t really meant for combat?”

Zhang Dong had decided to remove himself from the crafting chamber and moved to his secret room in the golden bastion. There he could monitor the movement of the current army that Zhang Zhi was leading. The diagram of the massive turtle could be thrown onto a holographic map along with the space surrounding it.

It really felt like he was looking at a strategy game. He could see his troops trying to surround the giant beast while the sea creatures pushed back. It was all going well until the larger sea monsters started moving. It was the same exact ones that he was able to easily dispatch while hiding his true identity.

If he wished he could have just teleported there and probably cleared out everything by himself. This was not the reason that he was letting Zhang Zhi be the leader though. Only when put into stressful situations could his people rise to the occasion. While he didn’t want anyone to get hurt, this world they lived in was not fair or lenient. Everyone needed to learn to take care of themselves and only when clashing against people on the same level could they improve.

“By the calculations, they should be able to win this battle...”

Bob analyzed the situation and came out with a winning percentage. He was of the same idea that this was a very winnable scenario. If his armies believed in their power and all of the commanding officers did their job then victory was assured. However, problems and unforeseen events could always transpire. He was ready to go into battle the moment something out of the norm happened.

‘Well then, how will those attacking formations prove against the nascent level monsters... each one of them has one to contend with.’

On the holographic map he could see the sprite that represented one of the sea serpent formations moving towards the nascent soul beast. If he looked from here he wouldn’t be able to tell what was happening. There were no stats on the units he was seeing or any health points as a reference. What he could do though was access his prestige unit that was Zhang Zhi.

The bulk of spirit points he spent to enhance his cultivation allowed him to see things through his eyes and his senses. What Zhang Zhi felt he could also somewhat feel and see through his eyes while spending a minor amount of spirit points. Thus he continued to monitor the fight as if he was watching a boxing match on TV.

When the two clashed at first it seemed that the nascent soul monster would win. It was at the level of a late-stage cultivator with a body fit for it. However, the attacking formation was fueled by many cultivators which gave it an advantage when it came to Qi and also lessened the weak points that this creature didn't seem to be aware of.

The monster attempted to claw at the body made from spiritual energy and water Dao. Yet the sharp teeth and talons that it was proud of didn't amount to much. The initial attack dug into the flesh made from energy but even when it was torn apart, the serpent made of energy quickly reformed itself back. Unless the creature killed the people that were fueling the formation it would continue to mend back into its main shape.

This might have sounded like a critical weak point that could be easily exploited. However, hitting the correct spot that was buried deep into the huge serpent wasn't that easily achieved. The people hidden in the spiritual flesh weren't visible to the naked eye and there was a vast range of similar spots set up as dummies.

The sea serpent formation's strength was in its random movement. The body could contort in many different ways to avoid the other creature's attack. Then when close enough it went for an entanglement attack. By wrapping its elongated body around the huge monster it went for the kill. Not by means of force but by electrocution as this attacking formation was not just versed in the ways of water but also lightning.

'Water does conduct electricity well.'

Zhang Dong nodded to himself as he was the one that came up with mixing his lightning Dao with the attacking formations. It was a change that required some support items where he injected some of his own power. The cultivators on the inside just needed to supply their own spiritual energy which would then turn the sea serpent into a heavenly lightning eel.

Electricity and lightning were not something underwater creatures were that resistant to. Even though massive storms pelted the sea with lightning bolts the power would be quickly dispersed on the giant surface area of the water. It would only deliver damage to the surface of the water but never reach underground where the stronger sea monsters resided.

He could not test out his theory last time but now he could see that it was working. The monsters were being entangled by the attacking formations and slowly getting the electric chair treatment. They weren't going down quietly though as some of the creatures even managed to slip out of the death hold.

'They are making a lot of mistakes but it's working in a general sense, the big question is if the enemy leaders will come up with a counter for the lightning attack.'

There was an actual way to counter the electric attack. Water didn't conduct electricity if it was pure and without any additives. Pure water was an excellent insulator and did not let electricity through. However, they were in the sea which had a lot of salt in it and this made the current tactic hard to counter. The master would need to cleanse all of this water and produce pure H₂O if they wanted to protect themselves with the help of the DAO of water.

The huge creatures here weren't the smartest and they were also being controlled by the mermen. Perhaps if they were free to think for themselves they would be able to counter this attack but as it stood now they were quickly succumbing to the jolty constriction.

'There they go... is that turtle hollow or something?'

Finally, as the heavy hitters were getting suppressed the denizens of the turtle started pouring out. They used the four holes that should have the huge turtle's limbs as an exit point. First came the humanoid fish people that were around the later stages of core formation. They were quite vast in numbers and were also carrying spears and some were even wearing armor.

In the back, the mermen with tridents arrived. This time there was more than one and each was riding on a chariot pulled by large fish that resembled large sharks. The display he was seeing through Zhang Zhi's eyes became quite detailed as the man finally decided to move into battle.

There were four mermen at the middle stages of the nascent soul and a fifth one that remained closer to the turtle's head. He really did look like some kind of king from an underwater city. His beard was quite long and he was wearing golden-green armor made from some type of scales. This was Zhang Zhi's next opponent, the other four merpeople would have to contend with some of the new elders that joined the war effort.

This time around Zhang Dong's side had the number advantage when it came to them but they were not comparable when it came to cultivation. There were four of them against eight early-stage masters with the addition of the attacking formations that were taking out the large creatures his side was able to make up for the lessened quality.

'How will this pan out...'

Zhang Dong was somewhat concerned about his people. Watching the bloody battle wasn't so good for his heart. Both sides were losing their fighters but his side was clearly pushing forward. Even when someone got critically injured there was a special unit to rescue them before they died. Cultivator bodies were quite resistant and with the help of body refinement, it was possible to last through a lot.

While other sects discarded people that fell in battle he had a different philosophy. It was a dog-eat-dog world but it didn't have to be. Having a person go through years of training just to fall in battle was in a sense a giant loss in resources. One was a moral problem but in saving people he would produce a vast quantity of veterans that were grateful.

Everyone would also risk a lot more if they were convinced that their sect members would do their utmost to rescue or help them in their time of need. Thus as the army on the other side discarded their vast number of creatures and soldiers, his side was constantly pulling their fallen away into the medical ships and defensive formations and evacuating them to a safe location. Later they could use the experience from this battle to better themselves and produce better results when the time to fight came again.

This was the same for Zhang Zhi, his battle with the enemy leader wasn't going all that well. Even though he had increased his cultivation level and received a new weapon he was having trouble using it against this new foe. The location of the battle was clearly disadvantageous for him and the giant turtle that continued to blast him with sound waves was very troublesome.

The man like the other mermen was using a trident, with it he was producing strange waves of water energy that continued to chase after Zhang Zhi. In return, Zhi had to burn through his spiritual energy and create quick slashes with his sword. These sword energies clashed with the watery currents and dissipated each other.

'It doesn't seem that he will win if it goes on for much longer...'

Zhang Dong rubbed his chin while watching over the fight. While the difference in skill wasn't that big, the other man just had more spiritual energy to delve into. Unless Zhi managed to deliver some kind of critical hit in one hit, the battle would be lost.

'I guess it's time to test out that new feature...'

He looked towards his system menu where Zhi's profile was. Currently, he was the only prestige unit that he had here. Besides the boost in cultivation and the possibility of teleportation items there was another technique that was usable.

'Manifestation of skill, is it?'

Before the battle was decided he pressed the button to activate this feature. The moment it was active Zhi noticed a strange phenomenon. He was given knowledge of DAOs and techniques that he never practiced and an illusory figure of a certain Patriarch appeared behind him...