

Unfathomable 561

Chapter 561

Zhang Zhi went into battle with high hopes. He had a lot of things going for him, a giant boost in power and a new sword that was given to him by the leader in a mysterious way. This boosted his morale and made him make the mistake of engaging this monster on his own. He was now in a losing battle with his spiritual energy being drained.

His biggest mistake was not taking the enemy's huge turtle into consideration. It seemed to not be able to do much besides its massive head, this was however enough to keep him on his toes. The enemy did make mistakes and there were a few opportunities where a devastating blow could be delivered but he was unable to follow through.

Whenever he tried using this high-quality weapon of his to slice the merman in half, a wave of sound energy would knock him back. Then the opportunity would be gone and his enemy would be back to thrusting that strange trident his way. If not for his new weapon his death would have been assured, only with it could he hope to counter the water Qi that his enemy was employing.

He needed to find a weak point and do it fast, if he didn't then his life was at risk. This was not even the worst thing, what he was worried about the most was that if he fell that the tide of battle could turn in the merman's favor. How could he face the Patriarch or his sect brothers and sisters if he lost? Dying was better than letting the sect's name be dragged through the dirt.

Zhi was entrusted with this mission and retreating was not an option, thus he decided to give up his flesh so that he could cut bone. The next time the sound wave came he would take the hit and commit to the strike. His internal organs would take a beating but he would be able to slice through his enemy. If everything went right the other side would be injured far worse than he would. However, if he made a mistake then his life would probably be over and inside his chest, he would find the trident of his enemy.

'W-what is this?'

His mind was resolute and both his hands were on the elongated katana. Before he could go through with his suicide tactic a familiar aura washed over him. The Qi clearly belonged to the Patriarch but he was not here; it was as if it was coming from within his own soul.

'It's as if the Patriarch is guiding my hand with his own superior swordsmanship...'

The knowledge and skills that he needed to win this clash entered his mind. A burst of energy that was unfamiliar yet familiar filled his entire being. The thought of risking his life left his head as he knew what to do. It was as if the path became clear to him and he just needed to follow the Qi trail before him.

With all his might he charged forward, the merman that he was facing looked surprised by the boost in power and speed. The turtle produced another blast of sound energy but just at the right moment, he slashed with his sword to open up the way towards victory. The protective barrier was cleaved apart and he found himself before the enemy leader.

It all happened in a fraction of a second, before the trident could even reach his throat his sword went through. The speed was truly something he was not fully used to and so he found himself tumbling forward in an uncoordinated fashion. Yet he did not panic, the deed was already done, his sword had

gone through and his enemy was already dead. His body was slashed in two from his neck down to his waistline.

When looking back he could swear that he saw the illusory figure of the Patriarch fading away. It was as if he was there as a teacher guiding his hand and lending his power to him just for that one sword strike. Just as fast as the knowledge and Qi was given to him it faded away. It was not clear to him how this had happened but he knew that if he wanted this technique would be open to him.

‘My whole body is screaming in pain... my bones almost shattered...’

There was a big drawback though, his whole body had been almost critically injured after performing this attack. It was clear that his body refining needed a tuning if he ever hoped to master this strange technique. This was obviously something that the unfathomable Patriarch had left behind during the ceremony.

He could feel a massive surge in holy and lightning energies that he was not that familiar with. During his ascension to the middle stage, some of the Patriarch’s healing properties had been given to him but it was nowhere near that power that just exploded from his fingers. Now after it was all said and done he was feeling a bit dizzy but his strength was returning to him. Perhaps if he mastered this new art he would be able to touch Zhang Dong’s heels.

...

‘This skill does burn through a lot of Qi.’

Zhang Dong leaned back in his chair while giving out a relieved sigh. Everything seemed to have worked out just as planned and the commander of the underwater creatures had been killed. Zhang Zhi’s Qi had fallen to only ten percent after using the special prestige class ability but with its help, he would be able to combat people above his level.

‘I didn’t expect this added feature though, I actually gained some spirit points from Zhi killing that merman commander, is this only limited to the prestige units from my faction or can I increase the number?’

He had a limit of five prestige units and had decided on the first three. Perhaps giving the next one to Qiang would be better after making this discovery. His friend was a battle junky and probably had the second biggest kill count from the whole sect. He was only second to him that had been putting himself in a bit more danger than a Patriarch should.

‘It’s not even a small number, It’s not quite as much as the old system was giving me but not that far off either.’

The system went through some changes along with changing the spirit point gain in general. When trying to compare it to the old points he would receive for killing a nascent soul master this gave him a bit above thirty percent. This meant that if his five prestige units started going through enemy numbers he would be given quite a large chunk of change.

‘This means that if I can get four of them to kill four early stage, nascent soul masters, I should get more points than if I killed one myself...’

While at first, it didn't sound that great, he could probably go through nascent soul masters as a warm knife goes through butter at the moment. However, if he considered that the old system started to give fewer points to the weaker enemy he fought, this might be even more efficient. Then he also had the numerical advantage with the prestige units and perhaps other options would open up in the future.

'This must be the effect of Wang Long's system I came in contact with but can I really keep relying on this workaround...'

Zhang Dong was unsure if he should continue using the altered system too much. It all felt too easy but there weren't that many options left to him. The spirit points were nothing more than an intricate way of gathering cultivation resources. He could spend them on almost anything, even for forcefully pushing his cultivation level forward.

Bob never mentioned any problems and it seemed that all the effects of the old system were countered. In theory, it had become an integral part of his oversized soul and would not be affected by any external powers. However, he did not know how powerful this superior being actually was, perhaps even after reaching the immortal level he would not be able to contend with it.

'It might not even be malicious though but I'm not sure if something like the devouring seed protocol would have been developed by a good god.'

After going through some research and now after interacting with Wang Long's system he had become more knowledgeable about that thing. It had been removed during his pseudo-death and it was also almost activated when Wang Long was defeated.

In theory, Bob explained that this thing would send out the very being of the system user somewhere. This he was not sure about as Bob remained vague. It was as if every experience, technique, spiritual energy, and even memory would be forcefully transferred somewhere. What someone would want with the memories of a system holder was above him, was the god just bored and wanted to live life through these 'players'?

There was some hope at the end of the tunnel. It made the being that was at a different realm of existence more humane and with more flaws. In a way, it meant that it still needed something from the mortals that these worlds were created for. Perhaps it was not as omnipotent as things seemed, it could have just been a very powerful cultivator that was trying to delve into the mysteries of the universe.

'I'm getting ahead of myself, this system is probably the only way I have a fighting chance, it's the only thing that kept me from succumbing to that overseer.'

If the system was evil or trying to control him then he would have probably had his mind wiped after killing Wang Long. Without knowing that it was the Empress and without Wang Long's cube his only way of moving forward would have been the enemy emperors.

'Though that overseer doesn't seem to be doing her job properly, perhaps they don't get that much work and aren't that good at it?'

The job performed by the Empress was indeed quite sloppy. She should have been able to tell after examining him that there was something wrong. However, she didn't really go into detail or even try to

get him to talk about his experiences. This would only make his victory more probable as he knew that his opponents were underestimating him, or not even taking him seriously at all.

“Well then, Zhi should be able to wrap it up and that turtle doesn’t seem very dangerous after the leader is dead... time to move the plan ahead.”

While nodding to himself he brought up Huo Qiang’s faction window, now with the added points from the kill he would be able to create his next prestige unit a bit faster than he had planned.

Chapter 562

“So they were hiding a small city inside?”

“Yes Patriarch, our forces have gone through this Turtle beast, it’s a bizarre amalgamation of flesh and technology, the beast looked fully alive from the outside but we have found many artificial structures on the inside, one of them being this large chamber.”

“I see, good work I’ll be there soon, try not to touch anything that might look like it could be cursed.”

“Of course!”

Zhang Dong from the comfort of his secret office looked through Zhang Zhi’s eyes as he strolled through the inside of the turtle. The battle was over and after the five nascent soul masters from the sea-people were defeated, the rest followed suit quickly. Some of them perished while others even fled and were in disarray.

“Can you give me your thoughts on those sea dwellers compared to the demi-humans?”

“They seem to have a somewhat hierarchical structure just as the demi-humans did. The ones that are lowest are the sea beasts, even the strong ones that could devour a large ship seem to answer to the higher caste.”

Zhang Dong nodded on his side while looking at what was inside the turtle. It was actually possible to go into the creature that was partially hallowed out from the inside. The top part of its body where the head and brain was had remained mostly untouched. However when going lower a lot of things were missing.

First of all, it didn’t have a lower body at all. The organs were dispersed into strange sections. One for the lungs, another one for the heart, and then the digested system was somehow connected to a strange chamber. The sect members were combing through it as it was something akin to a meat grinder for garbage.

It seemed that the sea creatures threw away various types of biomatter that they didn’t need, even dead sea creatures and decomposing plant matter. All of it was minced into a fine paste and then shoved into this creature’s digestive system that would keep the head alive. The loss of limbs didn’t affect the travel speed as this was covered by spiritual devices that used the Dao of water.

“The next in line are the workers, they are the humanoid creatures that faintly resemble us but are covered in scales, they show intelligence and carry out the orders of the mermen that are their masters, those seem to be the ones in charge but their similarities are, peculiar.”

“Peculiar in what way?”

“They seem to be exact replicas of each other, all the workers and the mermen look the same from the outside as well as on the inside.”

“Are they clones?”

“That’s what our researchers concluded as well, the only one that was unique was their leader, all the rest must have been cloned by some strange technique.”

“That’s certainly peculiar.”

Zhang Dong answered while trying to remember how the nascent soul mermen looked. The ones that battled with the ships and formations did look similar to the ones he collected. The worker drones on the other hand were a dead giveaway. If this was true then these people were producing battle clones to do their battles for them. Even the leader of this turtle could have just been another clone.

“The researchers have also discovered several strange chambers.”

“Strange chambers?”

“Yes, they seem to be for beast-birthing purposes, this could be the source of their large army. Many of these chambers are spread through this turtle beast and even now more underwater beasts are being produced.”

‘So is that why they have so many minions to spare? They just grow them en masse in these turtle islands? I probably should go check it out myself, watching the screen through Zhi’s eyes will only give me secondhand information’

“Good work, keep monitoring the situation, I’ll be right to see everything with my own eyes.”

“Thank you Patriarch but you don’t have to...”

Zhi was hoping that Zhang Dong would leave everything to him. The mission was successful but he still didn’t want to bother the leader with every tiny detail. This was a good chance to show his leadership skills and the knowledge of their research department. Yet before he could even finish the sentence he felt a change in space and suddenly a white-haired Patriarch appeared out of thin air.

“Patriarch!”

“No need to bow, just give me a tour of the place I won’t take long!”

“As you wish.”

Zhang Dong knew how Zhi felt but he needed to be on top of everything. This was the first big find concerning the sea creatures and could be a focal point in their war. First of all, he noticed that the place was very damp and fully filled with water. Only thanks to specialized techniques could he remain here without drowning.

However, there were spaces without water that were probably only accessible by the ones in power. The merman and the ones that were caught this time around had two forms. One was similar to the

fairytale which left them as a person with a fishtail but they could also turn into something that looked like a human with fins instead of ears.

These people could breathe air and also walk on land without that much of a problem. Their spiritual energy would react negatively to places with high concentrations of fire Qi. Which was probably why they were slowly trying to increase the sea level. Perhaps creating all these sea monsters and the island turtles was part of this plan.

“That’s a lot of eggs.”

Zhang Dong made his way into one of the birthing chambers. There were a lot of tubes in this one that was pumping out strange-looking eggs. It reminded him of one of the old movies that he once watched. Now if something similar to a crab popped out of one of these it wouldn’t even be surprising.

‘The eggs have living creatures in them, they are growing really fast...’

Instead of crabs, these eggs had monster fish that were part of the sea monster army. There were other rooms like this and each of them produced a different type of beast. They were clearly just clones of each other, probably the strongest version of their species that was possible to breed.

“So this is the secret of their numbers but is this only a matter of difference of warfare or is there a deeper meaning?”

“What do you mean Patriarch?”

“They chose to put so many resources into these replicated soldiers, there could be many reasons for it, one of them being fear of engaging in war themselves.”

The sect members around him started to wonder while he continued to tour the inside of the turtle. In another area, they even discovered a room that created the worker drones that were at core formation level at birth. Instead of eggs, they were in transparent tubes made of some kind of crystal. Everything looked like a biological science lab with the gruesome half-made clones everywhere.

‘Well, if we could produce mindless soldiers we would do it too, cloning technology on this level has not been seen within the empire, the few techniques that allow a person to make a clone of themselves are mostly just used as a precaution. When the user dies their soul gets transferred to their clone but no one really uses them at a scale like this.’

These monsters weren’t that strong but if this continued they would certainly have the number advantage. These moving turtle islands were slowly moving toward the shores on the entirety of the northern side of the empire. This was quite concerning as if they continued to multiply the entire northern sea would be quickly overrun. Then after they had a foothold they could start pushing in.

‘This depends on what their goal is and these mermen don’t seem to be able to speak, this explains a lot if they are just clones.’

At first, everyone thought that the fish people were just compelled to silence by some technique. However, with this information, it was clear that it was all due to being clones. They were manufactured by someone and this someone installed blocks into their minds. Whenever anyone was pushed from the outside their brains would be turned to mush and their souls destroyed.

‘Even these fish people have souls so this cloning technology is quite robust, perhaps their creator is using that as a controlling mechanism...’

After going through the entire facility he started inspecting the developed and underdeveloped clones. It was faint but there were parts of their souls that were similar to each other. It could have originated from some kind of technique and could be used for various reasons.

‘The big question here is... who is controlling all of them? At least the leader types seem to be able to function as regular people and give out orders, they do have a pyramid structure with the human-looking mermen at the top, who is above them though?’

The leader of this turtle island was not as strong as a horned demi-human tribe leader. Zhang Zhi even with the boost from the system wouldn’t be able to defeat a demi-human tribe leader. Perhaps Huo Qiang with an added boost and some armor would be closer to achieving this feat.

This could mean that there were more powerful foes hiding somewhere in this deep ocean. Now after one of their turtles had been claimed they might actually show their faces. It wasn’t strange for them to think that they should have been able to conquer at least the sea region. However, when he and his people arrived they were pushed back which went a bit against the scenario of this world.

‘This incident could force their leader to move faster or at least send some kind of mini-boss to clear things up.’

With this revelation, he knew that more fighting would be upon them. The next enemy should be around the demi-human tribe leader’s level of power as it was too soon for an emperor to move out.

“Good, bring this turtle to shore and keep it from dying, use the sea creature clones to keep it alive if you have, have the research department go through everything, and take everything that is useful.”

“Yes, Patriarch.”

‘I guess this is when the fun starts, what will they do now? Will this be enough to lure them out or do I have to grab a few more turtles before they react?’

Zhang Dong decided to go back to work, his people would take the bounty back to the shore and examine everything thoroughly. Perhaps he could use cloning technology to create his own beast unit. Not needing years of taming for the beasts to be useful in war times was a big bonus.

‘I guess it’s their move now, time to prepare.’

Chapter 563

A vast underwater utopia filled with families of fish, clear water, and colorful coral reefs started rumbling. In the distance, a grand emerald and golden palace of never before seen brilliance was lighting up the place. It radiated a bright emerald-like light that forced the darkness out of this deep sea location. Without it there the murky depths would have surely taken over.

Small fish that could be considered delicacies and materials for illustrious elixirs were everywhere. However fish wasn’t the predominant species here, people with the upper bodies of humans and the lower bodies of fish were seen everywhere. Half-women half-fish of bottomless beauty could be seen everywhere.

They seemed to be at peace, most of them were either resting and looking at the nice scenery or having fun. Their singing voices would make the greatest human songstress blush in shame and their dancing performance underwater was second to none. However their peaceful faces filled with joy quickly turned sour as they noticed the rumbling.

"T-the Empress is angry! What could have happened?"

One of the beauties called out while quickly swimming away along with the other mermaids. They were all clearly spooked by the trembling palace which caused them to hide in the nearby homes. Yet even when they were filled with fear their curiosity was even higher. With all their might they peeked out of their hiding places and listened. With a bit of effort, they could hear their leader shouting in displeasure and her target was one of the lesser ones.

"How could this be possible? How could one of our brood hatcheries have been captured? Who is responsible for this? Is it you?"

"T-the one responsible has been captured by the land-dwellers."

"Captured?"

A man quite similar to the one that had been defeated by Zhang Dong's sect was kneeling before a beautiful woman. Her long emerald-sapphire hair swayed along in the faint watery currents while she rested in a huge seashell. Her size was closer to a killer whale than that to a regular human, her gaze was cold and piercing. The shivering man on the ground dared not to look up as his life was on the line.

"Yes t-they..."

"Useless!"

Before he could give a proper answer his body began to shrivel up. His mouth was not used to speak words as the merpeople communicated by telepathy. His pleading thoughts didn't get through to the empress that could not be appeased. When looking to the people that were in this room they all turned away, everyone knew that if they spoke up they could be next.

"M-my Empr..."

The powerful warrior that could topple mountains was no more. His body shriveled up and turned into a tiny little fish that could fit onto a regular-sized pan. For a moment the little fish wiggled around but soon it regressed even further and turned into a pile of green goop. This stuck to the palace's floor and quickly dissipated as if the person that was there had never existed, to begin with.

"That one was faulty, it came from the same batch as the failure that lost the hatchery."

The beautiful Empress seemed bored but somehow knew exactly how this merman was connected to the rest. Her bored eyes sprung to life a bit after looking at the empty spot where her subject had been. A strange feeling gathered up in her chest that she didn't remember ever feeling.

"How long has it been since someone defied me? ... This might become more interesting but defiance will not be tolerated!"

For a moment a strange smile crept onto the woman's face and quickly another merman appeared before her. Replacing her forces was easy as breathing underwater for her, even if one hatchery was captured she could endlessly produce more of them. Even if her enemies were strong they would succumb to her forces, they always did and that's how she became the Empress.

"Bring one of the Generals over, I have work for them!"

"It will be done, Empress!"

The merman quickly removed himself from the chamber and headed for a section outside of the palace. While it was the focal point of the scenery and dwarfed anything else besides it there were four smaller ones behind it.

Even though each and every one of them was like a separate city on its own there weren't that many beings living here. A very small number of the mermen were allowed to be granted access into the main palace where the Empress resided and even the Generals were not allowed to enter without being called over first.

The man was instructed to call one of the generals but the Empress didn't specify which one. This was quite bothersome as all four of them were as menacing as her. Thus the easiest way to go about this was to make them decide among each other. He was just the messenger and could deliver the news to each one. The quartet was powerful but there also was a hierarchy, probably the weakest one would be forced to tend to this matter first...

...

"That's enough, stop!"

'When looking at it now, it really is a poor creature, who would do such a thing to a living being...'

The battle was over and the large turtle island was pulled closer to the shore. The beast that had its innards removed was making Zhang Dong feel bad. Without some of the strange contraptions inside this beast would be in constant pain. Normally he would put it out of its misery but they needed to go through what was on the inside to learn more about their enemies.

Besides them having no regard for life not much was known yet but before the next clash, they needed to discover their weakness. For this he had a tip already, in theory, there would be a way to tip the scales in his favor and do it almost instantly.

"Patriarch, here is the research data you requested on the subjects."

He was temporarily at the base where Zhang Zhi resided. While he didn't want to involve himself in the main battle too much there was no problem in deciding on the next strategy. Knowing how the enemy operated was paramount to winning this battle. One interesting piece of information that could turn the tide was already discovered he just needed to use it.

"So brainwashing is out and so is soul contracts, then the only one that remains is... bloodline techniques."

"That is correct Patriarch, all of these merpeople stem from the same bloodline and the control is probably still in place."

“Then does this mean that their ancestor is alive?”

“That’s possible Patriarch, if not then someone with an extremely pure bloodline to their ancestor must be controlling them.”

“I see, good work.”

The information was passed to him through a jade and flowed into his head. It was surprising how much information his noggin could hold now. All the books he absorbed through the system were compartmentalized inside of him. It was as if he was a bottomless pit of knowledge at this point able to pull from his ever-growing library to analyze everything. Then there was also Bob who had access to the same library and more, through both of their effort they could quickly go through this data to see what needed to be done.

‘So I could be up against some kind of ancestral being that these fish people are all related to, as long as that ancestor is alive they can’t go against their bloodline. It can be a blessing and a curse depending on the situation...’

Bloodline techniques were something that beasts were known for. The beast needed to have a certain amount of power to use something like bloodlines. After spreading its seed it could share its knowledge and strength with its descendants. Its family line would be a lot stronger as it would tap into the ancestor’s power but it was a double-edged sword. They could not go against the ancestral being and sometimes it could even affect their minds.

‘This explains why their brains melted when they were being interrogated, breaking a bloodline link isn’t easy and most of the time will just kill the host. Instead, the only way of breaking apart from such an ancestor is to achieve a similar level of power. I can’t be enhancing the enemy troops in hopes of getting more information though...’

This was troublesome, the demi-humans were already bad but these people could be even worse. They would probably do their utmost to defend their ancestor that was probably the Emperor of the sea creatures. The Demi-humans at least weren’t controlled and fled from battle on some occasions. Here on the other hand he needed to expect them to fight until death, taking prisoners was quite difficult if they didn’t care about their own well being.

There was however a light at the end of the tunnel. Even though it would be impossible to remove the brainwashing if he took care of the enemy Emperor then the battle would be over. The forces here were bred for battle and forcefully conscripted. They would probably revolt instantly and maybe go after each other when they were set free. He wouldn’t be surprised if they just abandoned everything and just ran.

‘There should also be some ways to at least momentarily disperse the bloodline curse, I might be even able to temporarily remove it without even killing their leader but for that, we will need better bloodline specimens.’

The warriors that were bred for battle weren’t worth that much, he needed some people from their group that were closer to their leader’s bloodline. These would either be their strongest masters or someone from the closest family. Considering that he was expecting a counter-attack soon the chance to capture one of these targets could present itself.

'Time to play the waiting game instead, luckily the Azure Empress hasn't noticed anything, or at least I hope.'

While the enemies scrambled in the background he would return to his workshop. Zhang Zhi received a new sword but Huo Qiang's new weapon remained unfinished. Soon he would have a battle maniac on his side that gave him free experience points and the underwater creatures would be the target.

At first, he intended to make a new set of gauntlets but soon the idea was dropped. Qiang used his entire body for battle and not just his fists. Instead of a single piece of weaponry, he would fashion him a new suit of armor that would offer the brute newfound strength.

'Of course, the color should be crimson and black.'

He chuckled to himself while teleporting to his workshop where the new piece of equipment was already partially made. With some finishing touches needed he hoped to be able to finish it before the next round with the fish people.

Chapter 564

"They really did follow through, this is becoming more and more predictable. I recon the other Emerald Phoenix Empire will be a stereotype as well."

Zhang Dong's hammer connected with a crimson piece of metal. The tool he was holding exuded a jolt of golden lightning that arced into the other item. The moment the electrical Qi seeped into the armor he was working on a few strange runes appeared that quickly faded away and left behind a shiny red outer shell.

While he was working on the new armament for Huo Qiang the system window to his faction was open. Through it and a few other monitors that were in his crafting abode, he could monitor everything.

During the last few weeks, they had continued attacking the turtle islands that were in range. All of them had identical numbers of defenders which they used to their advantage. The beasts that they were producing still needed some time to develop. It was the perfect time to take over more of these hatcheries with the exact same tactic and forces.

Through this second test, he saw one big flaw in these invaders, they were too similar to each other in every shape and form. They would constantly fight in the same fashion and use the exact same tactics. With so little variation in their troops, it was very easy to form a counterattack.

Even the leader that Zhang Zhi almost lost to turned into a predictable enemy that he could win against if following the correct tactic. So they continued to take over the turtles one by one and finally after the fifth one had fallen a new group appeared from the north.

'Considering that they took so much time to react there could be a couple of reasons...'

He thought to himself while hammering away. One of the causes could be a lack of information flow between their forces. Perhaps a word about them being attacked took a long time to travel to the one making the decision. Another possibility was that they just weren't prepared for this kind of resistance and just needed some time to form a proper army.

‘Another one could be distance, the ocean is vast it could be bigger than the whole empire, and no one has been able to chart it out even to this day... or the leader could be incompetent and just took their time.’

“Well, it doesn’t matter, they will fall one way or another... and this thing should be good to go.”

The armor was created and he looked at the shiny dark and crimson tint. He had been inspired by demon lords from works of fiction. Huo Qiang was in possession of a soul beast that looked like a devil so this was quite fitting. Instead of proper armor with angles, it looked more like a bodysuit with horns.

The metal it was made from had interesting properties. It was very resistant to attack and could channel fire energies quite well. However, its biggest strength was flexibility. When wearing it Huo Qiang should have no problem performing all his favorite moves, it would not constrict his movement at all while pushing him up another level.

“Hope this will be enough to take out the next opponent.”

Zhang Dong had decided to build up the people around him. Zhi was the first and now came Qiang. The biggest reason for doing this was that he had no other choice. The enemies that he was facing were large in number and the system he was using was focusing on the faction side of things.

His only real way of getting the system points was through his people and their approval rating. Zhi had gone through the leaders and also some other opponents since being given the new sword. Thanks to this he was sitting on a lot more spirit points than he expected.

He used those to upgrade this armor and also fully repair the Golden Palace which was now going to go into battle. Their opponents came in vast numbers that Zhi and his smaller army would never be able to contend with. They needed more firepower and the bastion that helped them against Wang Long and his forces would be what they needed.

‘Gramps has gotten used to calling the shots there, didn’t he start calling himself the Golden Elder or something now...’

Just as his forces continued to win more and more battles so did his name grow in fame. Not his original name Zhang Dong but more the Golden Dragon persona. Everyone wanted to be part of this popularity boost and his grandfather took this as a chance. Now he started wearing golden robes that were embroiled with golden dragons. It was as if he was the Golden Dragon and not Zhang Dong who continued to use the usual white robes that fit his hair color.

‘Well as long as he does his job right, he can call himself the Golden Dong for all I care.’

After shrugging to himself he grabbed the piece of armor and headed out. Now with the increase in spirit points, he didn’t feel as bad about teleporting all over the place. With more prestige units he could also use them as relay points as it did cost him less to get to them.

He had been using the feature a lot more lately as he needed to get to his bastion for work and monitoring purposes. Upgrading it to the next level wouldn’t take that much longer and perhaps the next iteration would allow him to combat these sea creatures. For the time being, it had one main flaw, it would lose a lot of its capabilities if it tried to go underwater.

The base of the new invaders would probably be somewhere underwater. There was a limit to how far the flying fortress' armaments could shoot. It was fine when going against flying creatures and masters but the torpedoes he mass-produced in his crafting abode were better than the spirit cannons the castle had.

'Need it to have some underwater feature and also increase the reactor size, it will need to hold its shields steady for the whole time if it bursts underwater people could die... have to consider the water pressure and how it will work on my people, not all of them had the body refining skills to last through it, quite troublesome.'

There were a lot of ways to improve his fortress, first of all, it needed to be waterproof. The problem was that the shields would react to stress by draining a lot of power. He needed to conserve power and only use the minimal amount that would keep the water away.

'Best to make the shields react to force from the outside on the part that is getting attacked and not on the entire surface area.'

This problem could be alleviated with spirit points but his engineering department was also gaining some ground. Through this war, many geniuses arose from the ashes and were working with no rest to get everything going. Slowly but surely the people from his faction were becoming self-sufficient.

Perhaps in a couple of years, he would be able to just hang back and enjoy the fruit of his labor but for that to come he needed to first take these invaders out. Then the last enemy he needed to face would be the overseer but perhaps that battle wouldn't need to be fought if he played his cards right.

She left him alive and didn't destroy the world either, there was still a chance of a peaceful resolution. However this also depended on the purpose of it all, if the being that created this world turned out to be malicious in nature then he would need to endanger his life again.

"Qiang is probably impatient, I'll head over to him first."

For the time being, he was in the golden palace that was making its way from the demonic continent down to the northern shores. There it would rendezvous with Zhang Zhi's forces and the rest of the elders that would be taking part in the coming battle. This time Huo Qiang needed to shine and for that, he needed to be promoted to a prestige unit.

"Senior brother, you came!"

"I did say I would, didn't I?"

"That is true."

"You do seem rather excited, Qiang."

"Why wouldn't I be excited? Words of what happened here reached the sect! You also mentioned a gift?"

Zhang Dong wanted to laugh when looking at Huo Qiang and how he was behaving. The man that was a head taller looked reminded him of his son whenever a new toy was promised. The new armor was mentioned in passing and everyone had seen Zhang Zhi ascend to a new level. New weapons and gaining a new realm were cultivators' biggest dreams and Qiang was still one at heart.

"You are really impatient... Hm, I was thinking of presenting it in front of the sect members, I'm sure it will give them something to strive for."

"In front of the sect? Um... like the time with Zhang Zhi?"

"Yes, it would be just like that, you did your homework."

Zhang Dong laughed to himself but Huo Qiang didn't seem as happy for some reason. This was a bit strange, the usual loudmouth of the sect that liked to show off would normally jump at the opportunity. He would be getting a new powerful treasure and getting his cultivation potential enhanced, there was nothing more a cultivator could ask for. Everyone would see his moment of glory just like they saw Zhang Zhi ascend to new heights.

"Um, senior brother could we perhaps do that part in private instead?"

"That part?"

"You know... the thing you do when you infuse your knowledge into people..."

"Infuse knowledge?"

He thought back to the time with Zhang Zhi, Huo Qiang probably meant the moment he turned Zhi into a prestige unit. That point seemed to make him a bit uncomfortable for some reason. His memory was quite good so he thought back to it. Most of the time he was paying attention to the system screen and somewhat to the rest.

"Oh... you mean that... Fine, we can do that in private."

"Thank you, senior brother, I knew you would understand!"

Huo Qiang quickly reverted to his cheerful self after knowing that he wouldn't need to go through the strange procedure. Even now the recordings of that day were circulated among the sect. Zhang Zhi's moaning face was plastered everywhere and strange stories started circulating among the younger female demographic. He did not wish to be part of them as that would have been truly a disgrace.

"Well, we are a bit short on time... there aren't really that many people here so let's do it now."

"Wait what....ohhhh...."

The screams of a particular fiery elder filled the corridors of the base. Not many people witnessed the spectacle but some rumors continued to spread even into the later years of the sect's existence...

Chapter 565

"Have you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"You know, the situation around the Patriarch and Grand Elder Qiang!"

"Shhh, do you want to get us in trouble!"

"But... their relationship... isn't it interesting?"

“Well it certainly is but...”

“Hey what are you two doing, get back to work, we will be given our next assignment soon and Lord Qiang will also be participating!”

“Y-yes Senior sister!”

A pair of chatting women were interrupted by a superior. A particular nosy Patriarch also overheard their conversation. The place they were staying was a flag ship that was even larger than the old Argonaut and a new model with some enhancements. Currently, all of them were heading toward the open sea to confront their next enemy.

‘Why did these strange rumors start spreading about me and Qiang? Do girls like stuff like this or something? I guess guys fantasize about two girls getting it on, so it would be normal for the reverse? But me and Qiang...’

His mind wandered into a certain place but he quickly stopped as he did not want to imagine himself and Qiang hugging each other while naked. Instead, he focused back on the problem at hand which was the new armament for his wife and the next battle that was before Qiang and Zhi.

It was somewhat unfortunate that he had to split his attention between the two tasks but at the level, he was at it wasn’t that hard. While multitasking in his old world was nothing more than a myth in this, a person was actually able to split their mind and compartmentalize tasks. Thus he was able to focus on tidying up the design for his wife’s weapon and armor.

Zhi received a new weapon and was granted the middle stage of the nascent soul level. Huo Qiang was given a new armor that made him look like a demon lord and had been boosted to the late stage. His wife on the other hand would get both, a new set of clothes that she could wear and also a set of twin fans to go with it. This of course required more materials and spirit points which he hoped to receive after the confrontation between his forces and the underwater creatures finished.

For the past few weeks, he had been cooped up working and watching the screens while his forces expanded through the empire. It was quite the change of pace as he usually was the one going out on adventures to solve every problem. Now that his sect had been built up this much there was no need for that. Perhaps it was even possible to wait the hundred years out instead of putting himself in danger.

‘I don’t think my guys can handle the Emperor-level threats, Qiang would have to get to the great circle stage before even having a chance.’

Huo Qiang was his strongest combatant but even he was at most powerful enough to fight off one demi-human tribe leader at this point. Perhaps with time, he could boost him up to that level but even at it the chance of victory wouldn’t be great. Perhaps if he brought a full squadron of nascent soul masters and taught them some better attacking formations it would be possible.

‘Hm, if 100% would be the power level limit that can be achieved in this world then these emperors occupy around 90-95% and the rest is probably the wiggle room for a system holder.’

This was only in a one-on-one scenario as the Qi numbers could always be boosted above a hundred percent. This happened with his fight against Wang Long who himself was probably above Emperor-Level. At this point in time, he could not see himself losing to someone from that class.

Wang Long was stronger than the Demi-human Emperor and Zhang Dong had gone even further. This didn't mean that he was invincible however if caught in a trap or against multiple strong opponents he would still lose. Only if he reached a new realm could he really become invincible.

'Would be nice if I could get into one of those in-between realms, but this world's setting erased them from existence.'

He got reminded of the Overseer that might have been in a stage between the immortal and nascent soul level. If he ever hoped to confront that being he would need to either bridge the gap or get some help. The current plan was to elevate his entire sect to such a level, as long as he could keep them from being frozen in time he might have a chance.

'Oh, think they are confronting the leader...'

While thinking about the future he was brought back to the present. Huo Qiang was floating up in the sky and looking down at his next opponent. This battlefield was not very in favor of his flame Dao which didn't contend with water as much. However with great enough knowledge and practice his flames could evaporate all liquids.

On one side his troops floated up in the sky on magnificent-looking mechanical ships. The materials used were all top notch and also acquired thanks to the current war. The demi-humans only cared about their hunt. While going through other sect territories they did raise the cities but they never cared about their treasures. After his forces swept through everything they uncovered a lot of raw resources that could be used.

While at first, he wasn't sure what to do with all of them he was convinced by Zhang Jin and the others to just use them for the current war. These lands were now the sects as they had been reclaimed by combat which was a valid means in this world. The previous owners were either dead or fled which by law relinquished their ownership over the materials. In short, might made right and his forces could do with the land how they pleased until a stronger force arrived to conquer it.

He did not quite see it like this but he also believed that the sects and the old farts ruling them wouldn't really use those resources well. With his people in power, he could at least put focus on rebuilding the cities and spreading wealth. The sects and old clans that ruled there would suffer but the general populace would see him in a favorable light.

With a high enough approval rating from each city he conquered, he would receive more and more system points which would further aid his conquest. He could not spend it on buying things from a system store but he could use them on improving the floating palace and for manufacturing purposes. Soon he would have an army outfitted with at least earth-grade treasures as a basis, no one from the old sects would ever be able to stand up to his faction.

'The big question here is... will my dear old 'brother' just sit back and wait for me to outgrow him?'

After the last time, he left he didn't hear a word from any Long Clan member. Long Qing who he remembered, felt like a person that didn't take things all that seriously. This was probably brought on through a life of leisure. He was the strongest master in the empire, no one could compare to him, it wouldn't be strange if he just accepted this as a fact. Perhaps he didn't believe that Zhang Dong could

ever overtake him but news of his conquests continued to flow into his ears. It wouldn't be strange if with time he took the threat more seriously.

'The big deciding factor is that wife of his, she can make him do whatever she wants, what if she decides to test me? She could probably whisper something in his ear and he would come running... and what should I do if he asks me to come to the Azure Palace, declining an invitation would be seen as disrespectful...'

While contemplating and working on Liena's battle dress he could see the sea actually opening up. From within a man holding a much more robust-looking trident emerged. He was around the same height as Qiang and just as muscular. It was the enemy commander but his behavior was a bit strange considering the enemy forces usually used their many beasts as cannon fodder.

"I am Tritton, General of the Deep sees, trusted soldier of the Cerulean Empress! I will give you land dwellers a chance to lay down your weapons or surrender! "

The man in golden armor that looked like it consisted of fish scales spoke up. His voice was aided by his cultivation level which was quite tremendous. Zhang Dong and his forces had no reason to surrender but this at least gave them some information about their enemies. The name of their leader was revealed and surprisingly it belonged to a woman.

'Cerulean Empress? I guess that's just another shade of blue...'

Zhang Dong didn't send any orders out as he watched. This was Huo Qiang's and Zhang Zhi's operation and the two had the power to make a decision. Naturally, the stronger of the two made his move first. A blazing ball of crimson flames started making the seawater evaporate. The hot steam turned the whole place into a sauna and forced a large chunk of the underwater beasts to scatter away in fright.

The massive spike in temperature was actually raising the temperature of the ocean to one that the enemy army wasn't used to. They had probably gone through millions of years of evolution while living down in the cold dark deep sea. Their skin and scales was certainly not prepared to take in all the hot water.

"I am Huo Qiang of the United Element Sect, I challenge you to a duel Tritton! How about we decide everything through it, winner takes it all!"

'Yeah, Qiang would do such a thing... but will the fish man agree? It wouldn't be such a bad idea considering that his opponent is presumably only a late-stage cultivator...'

Even though with his armor on Huo Qiang could go beyond the late stage his enemy didn't know that. His qi was at the late stage and so it would seem. People in this world weren't really able to ascertain the quality of the Qi that someone was using. What they could tell is the unique signature a cultivator at a given level produced. This was also why a lot of Zhang Dong's opponents thought he was much weaker than he actually was.

"You wish to challenge this Tritton? You must be a fool but I do not run from a challenge, first I will deal with you and then the rest of you will follow!"

'I guess I couldn't have asked for a better chance to see my product be tested...'

Both of the armies started inching away from each other while their leaders got ready for a brawl. Each side believed that their general would be victorious but no one quite knew at what cost.

Chapter 566

"When are you going to get home? You haven't been seeing the children much lately, your son misses his father, you should come back when you can."

"I know and you're right as always my beautiful wife but I have to finish a few things, I'm sure you won't be disappointed when I come back."

"Daddy come back soon, I learned a new technique!"

"Oh, did you now? I'll be sure to see it the next time."

"Me too, I learned the basic feather steps already!"

"Oho? The feather steps? You are becoming quite the martial artist, soon you'll be able to start learning the basics of the Thunder Movement Art."

"Mhm."

While Zhang Dong wasn't home he could see his kids on the screen. This wasn't the greatest way of speaking with his kids but it was better than nothing. Usually, he came back every few days to spend some time with them before returning to work. Making the advanced treasures took a while and required some precision. Some parts took days of concentration and Qi infusion and would actually require any lesser craftsmen months or years instead.

"Well, daddy needs to go, remember to listen to your mother and your senior sister and brother, I'll be sure to see what they taught you when I return."

Zhang Xiu and Jun were at the age that martial practice could be started. Xiu was already a qi condensation practitioner and would probably be able to reach the foundation establishment level in her early teens. Jun started a bit later but he was making quick progress that was even above his sister.

Previously he didn't show that much promise as he did have a meek personality. Yet after Zhang Dong returned and showed off his power before his son, Jun started finally aspiring to become a cultivator. It was a strange feeling to have a son that was looking up to him this much. To not disappoint him he needed to also strive for excellence and pave a path he could follow.

He wanted nothing more than to get back to his home and relax but for now, he needed to watch over his troops. The battle between Huo Qiang and the man called Tritton was about to start as they were speaking. After saying his goodbyes the image of his family vanished and was replaced by two burly men looking at each other with victory in their eyes. It seemed that these two were somewhat similar to each other as he did not expect this kind of resolution to be possible.

'Could it be possible to reason with them if people like this exist?'

Tritton the enemy general kind of went against what they had unearthed about their new opponents. They were supposed to be nothing but drones, some kind of mass-produced soldiers that needed to follow orders. However this person was different, he seemed to go against the grain.

‘Or was this an order from their leader? Maybe they want to test our strongest fighters before committing to a full assault?’

That was also a possibility and danger could be lurking around. Perhaps after this fight is over another general would peek their head out. Huo Qiang was strong but he was somewhere around the level of this Tritton. The fight could go either way at this point and they were fighting in an area with a lot of water qi.

Normally this would be an instant loss to Qiang as his fire techniques would lose a lot of their effects here. There was one ace in the hole though, Zhang Dong’s prestige unit system that Qiang was now part of. Just like he had shared his holy Dao with Zhi to add to his power the same was given to his new retainer.

“You think that this watery wall will help you to win? Think again!”

Huo Qiang roared out while his body was shrouded in a purple haze. After the battle started the opponent dived underwater to start pelting Qiang with watery serpents. To counter this the new Dao that he was capable of using, was utilized. Just as a moon could cause water to shift away, so could the gravitational Dao be used here. The water didn’t need to be evaporated away to make way, instead he could create a large sphere of energy that wouldn’t let any water close.

‘That’s it, get in close range and finish it.’

The plan was quite rudimentary, Huo Qiang’s biggest strength was his sturdy body and powerful fists. He needed to close the gap and take the fight to Tritton who was utilizing the vast quantity of water around him to douse Qiang’s flames. When close to the gravitational shield that pushed things away, those flames could not be put out.

This made the fight a bit hard to follow as both of the combatants dived underwater. Tritton probably reasoned that he would be given a simple victory. Fighting a fire user underwater usually meant that the water user would win. However, when Qiang dived under a large hundred-meter area around his body pushed all the water away. It looked as if he was in some kind of giant air bubble.

This of course took Tritton as a surprise as even the water serpents that he produced with the trident couldn’t pierce through this defensive measure. The would-be somewhat able to enter it but would then be dispersed by the immense heat inside along with gravity. It was as if the inside was a star, immensely hot and filled with powerful gravitational forces.

Huo Qiang was working against the clock though. Even though the technique he was using was powerful it had a large weakness. It burned through a lot of Qi and sooner or later would collapse. Before it did he needed to get in close range to deliver a critical strike. Tritton on the other hand seemed to know this and was keeping his distance. The way he moved through the water was astonishing, a speed that Qiang could hardly keep up.

“Fight me you coward!”

“I Tritton am no coward!”

“Then stop squiggling around.”

"I Tritton am also no idiot."

The quick exchange between the two masters could not really be heard by anyone else besides Zhang Dong that was listening in. He was ready to teleport there on the spot if anything happened to his friend but he wanted to keep his presence hidden for now. If there really was a trap then he would rather have the other side spring it first. If there were other generals waiting around then it would be better to capture them together. If they began escaping even Zhang Dong wouldn't be able to catch them underwater.

'Hm, I guess it's about time that he used it now...'

Just as he thought, Qiang firstly tried to achieve victory through his own power. The armor that was given to him was already equipped but he wasn't really utilizing it well. Only when he realized that his enemy wouldn't engage in close-range combat did he use his trump card.

His soul beast which had been right with him through the entire chase started glowing red. It turned into something that looked like a miniature sun and surrounded his entire body. When the armor was soaked in all of this pure fire energy it began reacting. Various glowing runes appeared on it and started sucking in all of this energy.

The boost in energy was clear and Qiang's power level shot up to a level never seen before. Everyone from the United Element Sect held their breaths as they saw a giant pillar of flames erupt from the murky depths. It spun around like a twister and caused a giant part of the sea to spread apart instantly.

"There you are, you will not escape!"

Tritton was quite surprised as the watery pathways that he used to evade his enemy were not there anymore. With so many fire Qi everywhere he was having trouble with controlling all the water Qi. This slowed him down quite a bit and allowed Qiang to finally close the distance. His trusted trident was used as protection from the giant dark crimson fist that connected with it.

The merman's entire body felt like it was evaporating before him. He had never felt something like this before, two energy types that opposed each other clashed within his body and he caught up blood. His mind was telling him to instantly flee but he wasn't sure if he could. The only thing left was pushing his opponent away with all the might he had left.

'They are going at it... didn't expect that General to be able to last through it... that trident must be of better quality than the rest...'

If Qiang was going against the merman that Zhang Zhi faced then it would have ended right there. The weapons that these fishermen held were very similar to each other but they certainly did vary in quality. Perhaps the trident Tritton was using was one of the original ones while the other ones were just lesser replicas.

It was quite interesting to see his own armaments going up against other treasured items. The battle couldn't last forever and just like Zhi had used a special prestige class skill to win the first encounter with a merman, so would Huo Qiang.

The illusory image of Zhang Dong appeared behind Qiang and augmented his fists striking power even further. There was no possible way for this general to last through it, the various protective measures

and treasures he activated to protect himself from death broke almost instantly. The massive fist connected with his chin and threw him right up into the air with half his face missing from the impact.

This victory didn't come easily, however almost instantly after the hit went through Qiang's body started spasming around. He had burned through far too much Qi in a short time frame. Even though he was in a world of pain his fist was raised high, he could not show weaknesses in front of his allies and enemies. The victory needed to be burned into both sides, they needed to know that the United Element Sect elders could not be messed with.

"Long live the Sect!"

He shouted and everyone that was watching on top of the ships repeated everything. The bout was won and the enemy general was flying through the air while half-dead. The moment of joy was short lived though as a strange sight unfolded before everyone.

The merman that was a powerful cultivator at the great circle instantly shriveled up and turned into a fish. His trident, on the other hand, stopped in mid-air, turned itself toward the sea, and shot off as if it was a rocket. The speed was quite tremendous and not something Qiang could catch up to after draining his energies this much.

'Was the trident the true source of power and not the merman?'

Zhang Dong pondered this possibility, the item was long gone before his troops could catch up but the victory was there. Now the only thing that he was thinking was if those fish people would honor the deal or not...

Chapter 567

The battle was over and the victorious Huo Qiang rose up from the watery depths. The gravitational area that reached up to a hundred meters shrunk down to a tiny air bubble that only encompassed his body. He was certainly drained and any further fighting would result in injury. Luckily he wasn't alone here and Zhang Zhi was quick to appear next to the victorious Qiang.

"Senior Qiang, leave the rest to me."

"Ha, I shall do that, I don't want to admit it but that took out more from me than I expected... nevertheless, senior brother Dong is truly unfathomable."

"That he is, without the Patriarch the sect truly would have been lost."

"That is true..."

The two warriors exchange meaningful glances while the man they were discussing was listening to their conversation. He wasn't sure how he should react and while it didn't affect him when people outside of his friend circle praised him, it was different when someone like Qiang did.

'Those two will make me blush if they continue and they should really find a better moment to praise me...'

While Huo Qiang had been victorious and the general had turned into a fish, this was not over. The army of mermen and their sea beasts was still there. Their leader agreed to surrender if he lost but it didn't seem that the rest agreed with him. The next in line wasn't having it and the battle was underway.

'Both the leaders are out but Qiang shouldn't take that long to recover and I can boost his recovery rate.'

With the help of the improved faction system and the prestige unit function, he could insert spirit points to recover Qiang's and Zhi's lost Qi. To not let this fight drag on too much and to minimize the loss of life, he decided to use some of those spirit points that were gained by Qiang to recover his lost stamina.

It was quite fun to see the grown man be surprised by the sudden alleviation of Qi depletion. With him back to full health and the vastness of his army the battle continued. His side had an advantage but not to the point of not suffering any damage. However, thanks to Qiang's returned vigor victory was assured and in a few hours, the entire area was filled with the corpses of sea creatures.

'I can really leave it up to my troops with this one...'

Zhang Dong's biggest issue in the past was the weak state of his clan and sect. Without him around to take out several of the top cultivators they never had a chance of winning anything. Now on the other hand his people had caught up and could finally count themselves among the truly powerful. Even the forces from the invading Empire couldn't count them out anymore.

'This system is truly a tremendous help, without the enhancement to the faction system this wouldn't have been possible...'

Everyone that was in his faction and around the Golden Palace was receiving a large buff to their power. Every time a battle took place his forces would be given it. The more his faction grew the more points he would receive and the more he could spend on improvements. It was like a snowball tumbling down a cliff, it had grown to a size that it could not be stopped anymore.

'I should have the two clear up any of the enemy armies in the sea to get more points, then distribute them accordingly...'

Two of his prestige units were now working almost full-time to get him more spirit points. With how many of the clones the Cerulean Empire produced this came easy. There were also a lot of those turtle islands left over that could be now reclaimed. His scientists were also working on adapting the cloning technology to their beasts. If they could produce battle tigers or dragons to aid them further then he could stop worrying about losing human lives as much.

'Maybe I should dump some points into the tamer side of things, I'm not sure if we can quite copy the way these sea people are controlling their armies.'

He believed that the armies of the Cerulean Empress were controlled either by her or some other powerful cultivator. They were like one unit and never bickered over anything, the only person he saw with a glimpse of self-thought was that one general. Perhaps the control she had over her people dwindled depending on their power level.

'Maybe those generals are like my prestige units and she can only control a set number of them at a time...'

This somewhat made sense as with the cloning technology that those people possessed there was no reason not to make more high-quality soldiers. That is if there weren't any drawbacks, one of them could be limited control and another lack of proper materials. Either the general-level mermen required rare treasures to produce or the more there were of them the harder it became to keep them in check. The one Qiang faced seemed to at least have his own ego.

Thus after the battle was won he continued to only monitor the situation while sending out orders here and there. Instead of being directly involved in the battles, his people were more than eager to show their worth. After seeing the increase in power that Zhang Zhi and Huo Qiang went through, everyone was motivated.

Words of the massive victories that his forces were achieving reached the furthest reaches of the Azure Empire. This coupled with the passive approach of the Azure Emperor and the Heavenly Crane Sect put more faith in the Golden Dragon. Would this however be let to continue or would someone try to break this rise to power?

...

'That about does it... but is it a bit, what's the word... risque?'

What he was looking at was a thin dress that was made for his wife. This thing took a lot more time to make than the sword for Zhi or the armor for Qiang. One reason was the various rare materials that it was made from and another was the design. He could not decide on one over the other but could also not ask his wife for input as it was supposed to be a present.

The end product was very flowy and would make Liena look like a dancing nymph if she flew around in the sky. At first, he wanted to add a window for her chest but decided that his wife's parts were meant for him and him alone. This dress could change forms as well, if Liena was forced into close-range combat she could quickly transform into a more fitting appearance.

Then there were the two emerald battle fans. The right one was jade green and had a phoenix image on the back. The other one was someone more golden and had a dragon to represent himself. Together they would combine his and her Daos to help her achieve a similar level of power as Huo Qiang.

'She had trailed a bit behind him but with these, they should be about equal. If I give it to her now, however... there might be a problem...'

While the treasures were ready and he just needed to spend the ever-increasing spirit points to make Liena part of his prestige units, he was a bit afraid. He feared that his wife would see the power increase as a chance to use it. His intention was to protect her and his children but in this case, she would endanger her own life.

"It's still better if she is stronger and a closer part of the system..."

There was a little theory he was working on. If it came out true then having Liena be one of his prestige units was a good move. This he would only figure out after the Overseer confronted him again. Thus after contemplating again he activated the teleportation function and appeared back at his home, New Spirit Spring City.

"Hah, haven't been here in a while..."

His original home where he spent his early marriage days had been destroyed by Wang Long. For a short time, he had to move his family to a separate villa but now his old home had been restored. The whole city was back to the way it was and it was as if the attack never happened.

In fact, the number of citizens had been steadily increasing. Even though just recently the whole place had been almost flattened everyone quickly returned to rebuild. Then after the consecutive victories against the demi-humans and merpeople, the fame of the city continued to increase.

Everyone wanted to be a part of the new world order that his sect was shaping up to be. Merchants crowded to be the first ones to trade in the new wares. Young martial artists were preparing for the coming sect trials for outer disciples, everyone wanted to be part of this new faction that was shaping up to overtake the old powers.

The teleportation spot was in the secret room he appeared while Wang Long was terrorizing the city. This structure that was used as a flying fortress had been buried under his home yet again but this time around his wife had access to it. Even now he remembered her chewing him out over the development. Luckily she let it slide due to the fact that he managed to actually survive and come back.

“Everything seems peaceful and everyone is moving on with their lives...”

When straining his senses just a bit he could hear the citizens going about their days. Everyone was busy living their life as best as they could. New relationships and goals were forming even as he walked through these spacious halls. His home was large but not many people were allowed to come in. He liked the silence, no one besides some personal maids and servants were allowed to be here.

Just like before his home was raised up into the sky. Perhaps after all of this was over he would replace his old home with the Golden Palace. At least for now he preferred this place as it did have more memories. The sound of his daughter’s voice entered his ear which made him stop and smile.

“When is daddy coming back home?”

‘I guess I shouldn’t keep them waiting, no telling when I will need to leave again.’

With a spring in his step, he moved toward the room where both his children and wife were staying. When opening the door the sight on their faces brought nothing but joy and reminded him why he was doing all of this in the first place. Those bright smiles were the reason he could move on and would surely be victorious in the end.

Chapter 568

Days turned into weeks and those into months. The fighting continued with the battles turning from large ones into more minor skirmishes. The western regions that the demi-human invaders previously attacked had been fully cleared out and all the stragglers apprehended. With the help of the treasure from the Long Clan, it was possible to track some of the stronger members with ease.

The demi-humans were used to being the hunters but not the hunted and lacked the skills for hiding. With time even the weaker members were apprehended. Some of them were of course killed while others were imprisoned. The cultivators were quite interested in the body-refining skills that the demi-humans were in possession of. While the Sect leader wasn’t so keen on having his people turn into monster-like beings it didn’t hurt to learn from that strength and adapt the refining skills to their own.

Thus the western front of the entire empire returned to normal and was now going from a rebuilding stage. Cities were being repopulated and the small and middle-sized sects that fled and were still alive returned. They were able to reclaim their old lands depending on how well they treated their populace. Sects that were similar to the old Dark Palm sect were removed from the chessboard.

This new land would be populated by the more righteous ones that needed to follow along with the new giant that was the United Element Sect. While the commoners and weaker cultivators were quite fond of the new leaders the rest weren't as ecstatic. Old clans and people that ruled these lands would remain to hold a grudge and look for a chance to reclaim their past glory.

To the east on the other side, the war continued to flood the lands with blood. The Emerald Phoenix Emperor had made their appearance and taken over a central city in that area. Everyone wanted to express their indignation towards the passive Azure Emperor and Heavenly Crane Sect that these lands mostly belonged to. The Golden Dragon showed everyone that it was possible to fight back which caused a silent uproar. The people didn't voice their complaints out of fright but everyone's belief in the emperor was at an all-time low.

Rumors of strange golden knights with queer techniques started circulating. Due to their appearance, they were groped up with the Golden Dragon of the West. They did clash with the Emerald Phoenix Empire and even drove back some of the forward forces in the southeast. Later on, they had been officially announced to be allies of the United Element Sect. With their help, some of the bloodshed was stopped and the battles in the lower eastern regions stagnated.

Then there was the north sea which was in constant turmoil. Word of strange sea creatures going up against the new United Element Army was the hottest topic in the empire. Some people see this as a chance to gain some scraps. The monsters that were being murdered weren't strong but for lesser sects and clans it was a treasure. Pills and tinctures made from their bodies could help foundation establishment cultivators take that one step further.

...

"That's what our spies have figured out."

"Is that all? What are we paying them for? These are just the same as rumors, nothing substantial."

A man was shouting in a disgruntled voice at a group of old men. Everyone had gathered in a large room that looked like an old auditorium. The man was wearing a long white robe with a black crane symbol over a red circle. Around him were various men and women of advanced ages nodding their heads while looking at the thin elder in the middle.

In front, there was a red light that took the form of a certain young-looking man. Due to the red shading the white hair that he was known for looked more pink than usual. Everyone here knew who he was as his deeds were known throughout the empire.

"Grand Elder, due to the state of affairs we aren't able to send out the best scouting units, this is as much as they could find and the Long Clan has remained silent."

"Those damn bastards, they will sooner let us burn than help out against the upstarts..."

The old man generated a burst of energy that sent a burst of wind through the whole auditorium. Some of the elders that were here were close to passing out but voicing their discomfort was not allowed.

This was a meeting between high-ranking Heavenly Crane Sect members. They had lost a big chunk of their eastern territories that were under the Emerald Phoenix Empire ownership now. Previously the Empire was mostly divided between them which had the east and the Soaring Dragon Sect which owned the west. The Azure Emperor had a small chunk of land right in the center that was exceptionally potent.

Their connection to the Long Clan was through the central spirit vein. Both they and the Soaring Dragon Sect received access to it but the distribution wasn't equal. The Azure Emperor received half of its concentration while the other two sects only had a quarter. After the other sect fell they were planning on a fifty-fifty split but then another problem arose.

This Emerald Phoenix Empire was making their life difficult. Their forces steamrolled through the lower eastern regions and quickly reached the middle ones that could only bunker up in their main cities behind their grand formations. They were quickly losing ground and people were forced to retreat to their main cities. Now they were constantly on the edge of disaster while fighting against the Saint Emperors.

These were the nascent soul counterparts but just slightly stronger. For the time being, they managed to protect their bottom line but the enemy forces continued to gain ground. Perhaps if the golden soldiers that appeared in the southeast regions didn't appear they would have had to even retreat further.

"Grand Elder please ease your anger..."

"... My apologies, I have let my emotions get the better of me. Our great sect has stood through the ages and we must not allow it to fall. The enemies are strong but they are not invincible... let me hear your opinions, Elders."

The old man gave out a sigh while looking at the holographic image of Zhang Dong. No one really knew what they should make of this man. Were the demi-humans and the merpeople he and his sect was going against on par with the Emerald Phoenix Empire? There was information about that sect defeating the demi-human Emperor but no one could really confirm his true strength.

For all they knew, Zhang Dong could have been a late-stage nascent stage cultivator. Only when Wang Long was destroyed did their interest increase. While they couldn't measure the power of the demi-humans the demonic cultivators were another thing entirely. The man leading them was able to destroy their rival but this could also be a red herring. What if the demons had depleted their power with constant infighting and Wang Long was too injured to do anything?

"I say we wait, even if those Emerald bastards reach our gates they will never be able to break through our grand formation."

"I concur, as long as our main sect survives and we don't lose access to the central spirit vein, we can rebuild!"

"That's only if we can last through the siege! What about Grand Elder Zimo? He couldn't even face one of their generals in single combat!"

"He must have been ill-prepared, if we just..."

“You just want to sit on your hands for years and let them build up an army? Are you crazy, we must counter-attack if not with our own forces then with the help of others!”

“We can’t bring outsiders into our territory! Do you really want to seek help from the Azure Emperor?”

“No the Azure Dragon won’t help us... that one will always remain neutral as history told us, the one that we need help from is his brother.”

The heated exchange between the elders stopped when the Azure Dragon and Golden Dragon were mentioned. This whole meeting was mostly due to how the western side had been able to contain the spread of war and they couldn’t. There were two options, one was to stem the tide and remain in their central city.

It was a fortress not much weaker than that of the Azure Capital. However, after the fall of their equals that were the Soaring Dragon Sect, they started getting cold feet. Their minds were filled with thoughts of failure and death. The only thing making them ignore that incident was that it happened from the inside. As long as they didn’t have someone from the inside deactivating their grand formation they felt secure.

“You all know what it will mean if we ask for help from the Golden Dragon and his forces, right?”

The grand elder raised his hand, and the moment he did all the other old people in the room quieted down. While it wasn’t treason to ask for help, getting it from someone able to contend for the Azure throne could spark a civil war. If Zhang Dong put his sights on the throne and helped them out then he could ask for their aid.

“We don’t know which of the brothers is stronger... this Zhang Dong could be an old monster or a frog in a well, if we get involved in their squabble we might sentence our sect to ruin...”

The grand elder asked while a old woman from the crowd stepped up to reply.

“Do we have a choice though? The Emperor will not help us, he would sooner retreat to his flying palace and wait just like his ancestor did. You know the forgotten records, as long as the Long Clan can run away they will...”

“Aye... if what the old records say is true, then we won’t be able to contend with this threat by ourselves... We shall give this thought and vote on this matter in a day, please consider all the outcomes my brothers and sisters as this decision will decide our faith. I will go inform the Patriarch while you all contemplate the issue.”

The old man retreated from the meeting room while some of the elders remained seated and started meditating over the problem. On one hand, they could try to remain vigilant in their beliefs, their sect was strong and they had a deep pool of secret old monsters still capable of fighting.

Their grand formation couldn’t be broken easily but the forces of the Emerald Phoenix Empire were vast and united. It was as if going against a combined big three sects with a strong Emperor leading them. Their side was unwilling to help, and their Emperor was more concerned with their own safety. Could the Empire require a switch, could switching to a Golden Emperor be the only way of survival...

“It’s been going well, a bit too well...”

Zhang Dong was looking at the big monitor screen in his office. There he could see the map of the entire empire and how his forces were able to push back the fish people. While he wanted to attribute this to his people performing well and improving this wasn’t the entire truth.

“Why do they keep throwing these generals at us constantly? Do they think that sooner or later our forces will tire and falter?”

After Huo Qiang defeated the first general of the Cerulean Empire he didn’t let up. They continued throwing the exact same army at them with a pallet-swapped general. Even though they had some grand titles like the four Cerulean Generals they looked exactly the same with a few changes in their armor and hairstyle.

“Their names almost sound the same, the first one was Tritton, then came Triggon and the third one was Tragron. The difference in power wasn’t even that great ...”

Tragron the third general was a bit more troublesome which required the involvement of Zhi but he didn’t amount to much either. The armies he was leading continued to feed his forces with all the leftover materials and the number of spirit points he was receiving was tremendous. With all those points he could ramp up his manufacturing plant, even if the opponent got stronger he could offset them by simply giving his forces more weapons or better versions of them.

This was exactly the strategy that let his forces be victorious over the fourth and last general of the bunch. With the combined might of Huo Qiang, Zhang Zhi, and a few nascent soul masters that were utilizing a grand attacking formation the man was taken down. With the addition of spirit points, his prestige ‘units’ were able to level up further. This they needed for the fifth appearance of a new general, this one with another name but the same appearance.

It was clear that the cloning technology of the Cerulean Empire was paramount. They just restored their entire army and tried attacking them with the first general again. His power was even identical but now after progressing this much Zhi was able to kill him even without the help of the additional skills given through the faction system.

“Could this actually be a grinding spot for system users? Normally the leader would be the one to appear after the generals get smoked. Instead, they restarted the scenario from the first part...”

This strategy only made sense in this kind of world. Considering that system holders were from the modern world and probably had a gaming background, they would certainly use this exploit to gain more power. It was possible that the being behind this wanted to give the more brain-dead system holder a chance of victory. With this amount of enemies to slay even the most untalented one would be able to get some power.

“Is this just a precaution or a necessity though?”

There could also be another possibility of this grinding break. There could actually be a potential threat out there that required this many spirit points. As it stood now he was looking at two or three people that could potentially threaten him. One was the current Cerulean Empress that hasn’t shown herself.

Then there was the Emerald Phoenix Emperor that was turning the eastern regions upside down. That guy in particular was somewhat worse than the demi-human emperor. He came from an orthodox cultivation world and performed warfare as a cultivator would. This meant that they would uproot everything, no one was safe, not even mortals or lesser cultivators.

In this world filled with strange scenarios, it wasn't that odd to find some secret immortal heritage. Even one person that was left alive could become an earth-shattering grandmaster that could potentially come seeking vengeance. To prevent this from ever happening all enemies had to be erased from the face of the world. Anyone with a semblance of talent that had been too long in the opposing faction was a potential threat.

The only way they would be willing to let someone like that live was by binding their souls to their side. At least the demi-humans didn't care about such things, they hunted for fun and weren't afraid to let some people go. They even craved the challenge of fighting someone that empowered themselves through the pursuit of vengeance.

"My forces are spread thin already but if I leave them be..."

Zhang Dong remained on the western side for a few reasons. One was just a lack of power and forces to defend his people. The second one was fear of losing his loved ones. Both of these problems were now somewhat resolved with how Zhi and Qiang were progressing. Even his wife started taking part in the grandest which gave him an ample supply of spirit points.

While they were getting stronger he was left with not much to do. He had tried meditating on his Dao but his seed wasn't really reacting and the progress was stalled. By his calculations, it would require many years of pondering and training to level up his Daos. The path was long and boring but it was still on the safer side.

In reality, he didn't really need to push as hard as in the past. The eastern regions might fall but the Azure Emperor was still in the middle to act as a buffer between him and the Emerald Phoenix Empire. The more sensible thing to do would be to wait, the Long Clan could at least halt one of the invaders while he contended with the other one.

"But if the Heavenly Crane Sect falls and they reach the Long Clan, my dear brother might ask for help..."

That was one of the problems that he didn't want to get involved with just yet. If he was called over he would need to contend with that Overseer. For the time being, he wanted to remain as far away from that woman as humanly possible. If she caught on that his system was different then his life and his family's life could be over.

"Nevertheless... this is kind of boring..."

Zhang Dong stood up and after taking a few steps he was teleported out of this room to his own house. There he saw a marvelous garden filled with trees, flowers, and even spiritual herbs. His wife had designed it as a spot to relax and have tea parties with others.

At the moment his children were outperforming their own daily routine. Zhang Xiu his daughter was being trained by his disciple Zhang Xue while her brother was performing the same with Zhang Jun. It

was a bit strange to have his disciples train his kids but they knew all the basics and foundation of his own technique. They would be capable enough and a bit stricter than he could be with them.

“Jun has gotten quite into it now, he spends most of the day training and Xue has gotten more serious too since he started showing promise...”

It seemed that his kids were in a competition now. The younger brother wanted to show that he was worthy of the title of Patriarch’s son. This of course made the older sibling try harder, she did not want her younger brother to catch up, even less after seeing that he was actually talented.

To Zhang Dong, it seemed that both of them were competing for his affection which could produce a problem down the line. He at least hoped that the two wouldn’t undermine each other’s progress. It was a scenario old as time, children of a clan head would try to one-up each other just to impress their father and gain more cultivation resources. It was quite a widespread phenomenon around young masters.

“It shouldn’t really be a problem though, it might have been if I had like three or more sons.”

In the cultivation world resources were everything. Even top experts couldn’t equally spread them between their children. It was normal to give more to the ones that showed more promise and were more serious about their training. Thus some naturally progressed faster than others and were rewarded for it and the gap kept increasing.

This approach didn’t really sit too well with Zhang Dong. Even when a child showed promise in the early stages of their life it didn’t mean that when they got older it would continue. The same came for the ones that were slower. Many times the ones that needed to work harder in the early days built up a strong work foundation. When they hit a wall they were more likely to work through it but the ones that had an easy life wouldn’t be capable of passing any type of roadblock as they didn’t gain the required skills.

“Think I’ve read this one in my past life, a talented child is a special needs child, if you’re not careful they can be left behind in the later stages of their life.”

Keeping that in mind he didn’t want to show favoritism between his two kids. Even if Jun had more lenient talent than his sister he wasn’t allowed to praise him too much. Both his kids needed to progress at their own pace and he needed to watch his words. Anything that he said could be blown out of proportion by the young minds and affect them for the rest of their life.

“Being an adult sure is hard... even now I don’t know how others do it...”

While going through this peaceful garden he focused on his kids that were quickly progressing. By the rate they were improving, reaching core formation in their early teens wasn’t a pipe dream. This rate of progress was incomprehensible to people that needed hundreds of years for the same result. This however wasn’t only their fault as the world stippled everyone’s progress.

“I bet reaching core formation in your thirties would be the norm when brought up near a spirit vein but then the problems start. With the world blocking the hidden realms and no clear path of progress out there...”

There was no clear path laid out toward the immortal stage. All records pointed to a handful of people being allowed to reach it. They had all been system holders however, without it there was no way the people could reach it as a hidden force was preventing them from opening their Dao.

‘I really hope that getting to that immortal stage is the right path, if that being is much stronger then...’

“Hm?”

While contemplating his choices again he noticed that there was some movement in the sect. A group of cultivators was approaching from afar and they were wearing robes that he had seen before.

“Heavenly Crane Sect? What do they want?”

Chapter 570

“Halt, identify yourselves!”

“You dare block our path? Who do you think that you are?”

“Elder, please calm down, we didn’t make the proper arrangements with the sect...”

“Stop, do not cross the gate if you do, you will be apprehended!”

‘What are those people doing...’

Zhang Dong had just been wondering what he should do about his slow progress. His cultivator army didn’t really need his help and he was left to cultivate alone. With time spirit points would come to him and if an Emperor level enemy appeared he could always use his system to teleport to either Zhi or Qiang. Thus when he saw an interesting group of cultivators approach his city it piqued his interest.

They came in a rather small group of ten members, quite a small delegation for the name they were carrying. The Heavenly Crane Sect was the faction they belonged to and they carried themselves as people that belonged to one of the big three. The leader was a nascent soul elder at the late stage, this was quite the achievement. A person like this would have been able to be the Patriarch of a middle-sized sect if they wanted. Instead they were arguing with some foundation establishment guards at the entrance to the city.

If this was any other city then these people would probably be wined and dined. Instead however, they were getting pushback by people that were ordered to treat everyone equally. There weren’t any forces in the empire left that his United Element Sect needed to bow their heads to.

The guards were just doing their job and it was normal for them to be confused. It was strange for someone from a large sect like that to just arrive at their doorstep without any plans. Normally someone would send some kind of letter or messenger to announce themselves. It was strange for them not to set up a meeting with some high-ranking elder in the main sect before coming here. They would be then guided through a VIP gate but instead, they were trying to make it through the one used by regular people.

“They won’t get mad and attack the guards right?”

Zhang Dong didn't really fear for the safety of his people. Even though the opponent was a late nascent soul stage master, he was still on sect grounds. The protective array would keep him from being able to penetrate inside. Even now it was keeping him from approaching the main gate without being given the right to enter by the guards. The shouting match started after the elder was bounced back by the invisible shield that wouldn't let outsiders in.

'He won't be able to blast his way in but my people can attack him from safety... but It probably wouldn't be too great if a person from that sect died...'

There had to be a reason for this unannounced meeting. In fact, he didn't believe that anyone from his sect had ever interacted with the Heavenly Crane Sect themselves. Perhaps they didn't send any letters or notices because they didn't know how. Thanks to the faction system his people started to communicate differently than the rest of the empire. Relay stations that worked like radio stations and satellites were implemented along the entire western side. People were switching to instant messaging over communication jades which could have led to the problem as well.

"Hm... will they handle this well... I don't really want to start my relations with that sect by having their elders get hurt..."

This was a strange sight to behold but there had to be a reason that they were here. Could the east have already been overrun by the Emerald Phoenix Empire and they were seeking refuge here? This was probably not true as he could just consult his world map to see that the enemy troops had not reached the central Empire or the core regions of the Heavenly Crane Sect.

"They could also just be people that believe that their side will lose, could they be attempting to stay here and wait the war out?"

His side had proven itself to be strong and after driving back the demi-human scourge refugees kept flooding. Some people that could see the bigger picture would abandon even the central and core eastern regions. If they believed that it was just a matter of time before their lands would be overrun then this was a good choice. While the Long Clan was probably their first option they wouldn't help anyone with this war until the enemy was on their doorstep.

"It wouldn't be good if I get involved, should I send someone out before those people get trashed?"

Zhang Kuo was out helping Zhang Zhi and Huo Qiang with the war effort up north. Zhang Ya, his second long-time retainer remained in the city and this was the perfect chance to use her radiant smile and people skills. He knew that cultivators that were part of the big three had a big ego but this was the first real interaction between the two camps, it was better to show some leniency.

"Zhang Ya, there are some guests from the Heavenly Crane Sect at the northern gate, look into it before things get out of hand."

The woman received a voice message through the faction system and was quick to get to work. She arrived within a minute at the scene with an assortment of beauties behind her. Her position in the sect as the Patriarch's secretary made everyone spread to the sides and also caused confusion within the Heavenly Crane Sect.

“Let me introduce myself, I am Zhang Ya of the United Element Sect. Could you explain why delegates from the Heavenly Crane Sect have come to our doorsteps?”

Zhang Dong watched with interest as Ya worked. She gave a lot of face to the other side and it would be interesting to see if the other side was cordial as well. Previously the elder at the front was shouting at the guards that continued to diffuse the situation. Probably if he didn't send the woman over a fight could have broken out. However, damaging his sect and threatening his citizens wasn't allowed even for people of high status.

“Finally someone with some sense! Young girl, open up the gates and let me speak with your elders. The words that I bring aren't meant for people of your status.”

Zhang Ya was just a core formation cultivator which normally would make her unworthy of exchanging words with a nascent soul master. That would be the case if she wasn't part of his inner circle, even a nascent soul master couldn't offend her as the Patriarch's presence followed her every step. She knew that outsiders wouldn't know this and was intelligent enough to not spoil the first encounter with a sect that on paper was on equal footing as theirs.

“Friends from the Heavenly Crane Sect, is it? Which elder do you have in mind?”

“Which one? The one with the most status of course?”

“Most status? Do you wish to meet with the sect Patriarch in person?”

“I see that you understand, now make way for this Sun Shi, I'm sure your Patriarch wouldn't want you to wait for this important meeting either.”

“An important meeting that had not been scheduled? Who do you think our Patriarch is!?”

Zhang Dong raised his eyebrow as Zhang Ya exploded with anger. All the sect members that were here started glaring at the small group of cultivators and even some of the defensive weapons were pointed at the group now. While the cultivators defending this location weren't strong by themselves the weapons that they were using would be troublesome for even a nascent soul master.

“You dare to threaten us, we are of the Heavenly Crane Sect!”

“What of it, we are of the United Element Sect! We are the law here and you best yield if you do not wish to offend!”

‘Well, this turned around quickly... why do those old farts always think that they are above others...’

He wanted to flick the old man's forehead for acting as if he owned the place. It was clear that this elder was still living in the past and thought that this place was unworthy of his presence. After all the guns and attacking formations gathered around their group in a matter of seconds he was quickly realizing that he made a mistake. Being a high level cultivator he obviously knew that the level of defense here was immense.

“Please uncle Shi, calm yourself. Friends of the United Element Sect appease your anger, we did not come here to fight, we came for debate with your leaders.”

Luckily before he needed to intervene a small girl that looked to be in her early teens jumped out in front of the angry old man. By the way, she referred to the old man. It was clear that she was part of his family and also the only one daring enough to cut him off.

‘I guess the young girl has more sense than the old man but Ya went a bit overboard too.’

He expected Zhang Ya to be able to handle the situation without a fight breaking out. Instead, she almost allowed the delegation to be attacked by their spirit bullet cannons. Perhaps she wanted to scare them into submission instead but he wouldn’t really know until the deed was done.

‘I guess I’ll need to think about procedures in situations like this, maybe send in a nascent soul elder with a silvery tongue.’

The conversation continued with the little lady speaking out and apologizing. Her uncle didn’t look amused but he just turned his head away as the two females talked.

“So you wish to offer a bargain to our leader and this you hoped to achieve without a proper audience?”

“We apologize immensely but there was no other way to do this...”

The girl kept bowing before Zhang Ya and her words started to intrigue him. What could these people want from him and his army? Could there perhaps be trouble brewing from within the Heavenly Crane Sect? If their forces faltered and the eastern regions fell then even he would need to get involved. With how the situation north was progressing he couldn’t really spare any troops.

‘Hm, will I have to get involved myself? That would save me from this boredom before that Empress made her move...’

Before the conversation between the two parties could continue a booming voice spread from all directions.

“Let them in, I’ll speak with them shortly.”

It was a very simple message but no one refused to comply. It was very surprising to the group of cultivators that came from outside to have the path opened within a few seconds of the voice speaking out.

‘Hope this is a worthwhile endeavor but at least they can inform me about what is happening in the east in detail...’

Thus he vanished towards the usual meeting room where he expected the delegation to be sent promptly.