

Unfathomable 591

Chapter 591

"This is a nice ship, it's nice that the Patriarch let me borrow it, although he didn't look so good... are you sure he wasn't sick or something?"

"No honorable Golden Dragon, he was just slightly tired. He'll be fine in a few days..."

"If you say so."

Zhang Dong nodded while turning away from Sun Shi and looking out into the distance. He and a couple of other cultivators were zooming through the clouds in a crystal ship. Thanks to the strange material it was made from, it was able to hide them from any peering eyes. It could block out their Qi and even bend light in such a way that it would be almost fully invisible. When going through the air no one would be really able to see them until it was too late.

"While we are here, how about you tell me about the place we are going to and what you know of the Emerald Phoenix Empire."

"As you wish."

"My Sun Lily Faction scouts are more informed, why don't I take this over while Elder Shi rests for now?"

"What nonsense... our scouts are not inferior to yours!"

"Uh, how about you both tell me what you know instead?"

The two elders glared at each other while following Zhang Dong into the captain's cabin. There they could see the scenery passing by at an alarming rate through a small window. There was no shaking or turbulence which made it a smooth ride and allowed for ample conversations.

"We will be arriving at the City of Panhua in a day, close to it is our closest outpost that some of our sect elders are guarding."

"City of Panhua?"

"Yes, have you heard of it?"

"No... I just expected a different-sounding name... could it be because its closer to the Eastern Empire? Ah, sorry I'm just thinking out loud."

Zhang Dong was confused at the start that the city that they were going to didn't have the usual sounding name. It was more in line with the cities in the Emerald Phoenix Empire than what he was used to here. Kang Yunru nodded and continued with the briefing but there wasn't really that much information to go around.

First of all, at least half of the eastern regions had already fallen into the hands of the Emerald Phoenix Empire. This constituted all of the lower regions and part of the middle ones. Kang Yunru didn't mention it but from Zhang Dong's perspective, this was still an amount that the Heavenly Crane Sect could stomach. They didn't really care or need anything from the lower regions as the sects in the middle

region were the ones sending them taxes in various forms. Unless they lost the bulk of the middle districts they wouldn't really care or feel a loss.

"So they have been stopped at this outpost close to the City of Panhua?"

"Not exactly."

Sun Shi chimed in while Kang Yunru became silent during his explanation.

"In all honestly they should have been able to continue forward and take the outpost and the city over, for some reason they stopped with their forceful push and retreated into the territories that they had already conquered."

"They did? Hmm... they might not have had enough resources for a prolonged siege perhaps? But they could have been other reasons, like searching for something in the lands that they already occupied or waiting for reinforcements..."

Zhang Dong spoke out to the two elders that probably knew more about tactics than he did. They just nodded without speaking, it seemed that they were mostly of the same mind.

"Some of our elders are of the mind that they didn't have the manpower for a further push, Leader Shen wished to launch a counter-offensive due to this reason but the Leaders couldn't reach an agreement."

"Leader Zhong didn't see a purpose in attacking now, we didn't have enough information about the situation."

"Hmph."

The two elders continued to scoff at each other. One side wanted to quickly push back at a seemingly weakened enemy while the other didn't see a problem in waiting. Both of them could have been equally wrong or right. From Zhang Dong's perspective, taking back some lands would have probably been the better idea, that is if they actually had the army for it.

As it stood now he didn't believe that the Heavenly Crane Sect would win a large-scale counter-offensive without going all out from the start. This they would of course not do as it went against most of their core beliefs and their way of life that allowed them to exist to this day.

'They probably could have pushed in further if they wanted, they must have been another reason for it.'

He had already asked around the Heavenly Crane Sect about all the information that they had. The Emerald Phoenix Emperor had apparently not appeared yet, at least he did not make a move. The people from that empire were different from the demi-humans, they weren't here to play around. To them, this was probably more akin to a huge secret ground zone that was opened every hundred thousand years.

Considering that they were almost identical to the cultivating nuts in this empire this was probably the case. They had certainly been preparing for hundreds of years for this event, perhaps even thousands. In their mind probably a way to immortality existed here and even the Emperor wanted it. It wouldn't be strange if all their strongest sects ventured here to compete for that elusive power-up.

The only problem was the bridge connecting to this world. It wouldn't be strange if the strongest sect or in this case the royal family tried to block access to these lands. While they probably wanted some help in taking over the lands this meant more competition for them. It wouldn't be strange that they would start infighting when discovering that treasure they were hoping for.

'Well... not like it exists, it's probably some lie thought out by the Overseer or the one above them. I bet they sprinkled some rumors about the location of this immortal treasure. In time they will get to the Azure Emperor's palace if they aren't stopped...'

This was only his speculation, to confirm this he needed to capture someone that was in a higher position than a junior sect member. It wouldn't be strange to anyone below the nascent soul level to be uninformed about the true purpose of this war. They had to listen to their elders that could snuff them out with a poke of their finger.

"We will see when we get there, do you perhaps have any idea of the numbers of Saint Emperor-level cultivators that they have?"

"Saint Emperor? So the honorable Golden Dragon does know about their strange cultivation realism."

"I've heard a bit, they an early level Saint Emperor should be above a regular nascent soul master."

"That is right, some of our elders had fallen when combating those ferocious masters."

"Hah, I bet they just got lazy and forgot how to fight after all these years of latency."

Kang Yunru grumbled while commenting about the deaths of his sect brothers. It seemed that mostly elders of the early and middle nascent soul realms were stationed there. They were also all old and too busy sitting in their cultivation chambers to do anything in real combat. It wasn't strange for masters to become complacent at an advanced age, their only thought was to prolong their life and nothing else. When coming in contact with hungry battle-ready masters they were sure to fail.

"They might have to fight again soon, it would be better that we get there sooner rather than later."

"Do you think that they will attack once more after retreating?"

"It's possible that they just decided to rendezvous with some reinforcement, it would be better to stay vigilant, they could appear at any moment but I could also be wrong."

The two elders nodded and after some chatting, the two left the cabin and returned to their own. This ship wasn't that large but there was room to spare for the entire crew. With the two nascent soul masters came around five core formation experts and a few lesser servants to tend to their needs.

Thus while traveling through the lands he took a look over his system screen. There he investigated the state of his own sect. There wasn't much to see there besides the ever-increasing number of spirit points. Ever since he took over the west side of the empire it was designated as his territory from which he was allowed to get his spirit points from.

These he received from having a good approval rating from the people living there. Perhaps it wasn't the best of times for the people living there but it was for his spirit point farm. The citizens there just wanted to get back to their homes so their approval was particularly high whenever they were just able

to return. As long as the war lasted and they felt that they needed the protection of the United Element Sect, it would probably not change.

It felt bad to use this war to get more powerful but not like he wouldn't take care of those people after it was all over. The only problem would remain in the form of the old Emperor which he didn't really want to face. However with the overseer huddled up there, the confrontation could have been predetermined already.

Thus time continued to pass as he examined the map and the mass of red fog in the eastern corner. Just as he expected, the biggest concentration of Qi was right outside of the cross empire bridge. Which wasn't anything alarming but the concentration there was quite staggering. His assumption that his new enemies were treating this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reach immortality was probably true.

"One side wanted to hunt people for fun, one to gain immortality, one to find a long lost treasure to help them survive... that just leaves the ones in the north that I don't really know the motives for... but they probably just want something like world domination..."

Soon he shot off the mapping device to just glance outside the window. Without ever being in these lands he couldn't just teleport to the city he desired. Instead, he needed to establish a safe point where he could summon his people if he needed them. That wasn't really the plan as his forces were busy in the north, instead he needed to somehow utilize the Heavenly Crane Sect and their vassal sects to fight for him instead.

"Well, it doesn't seem like I will need to wait for long, a red blob is getting close to that outpost... I just hope that we can reach it in time..."

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"Is this really it? Is this all that a branch sect amounts to?"

"M-my apologies senior but we must retreat, our warriors aren't strong enough to hold the formation, they are going to break through soon, we need to evacuate!"

"You want to evacuate? Me an elder from the main sect!?"

"I..."

An angry-looking old man dressed in a white robe with the Heavenly Crane Sect insignia was shouting at another elder. Before them stood a large wall that they were protecting, large amounts of cultivators were flying on their swords and frantically trying to reinforce the protective formation with their Qi.

"It has only been a day! How can you dimwits not be able to empower this formation our ancestors left behind even for one day! We must not retreat, we will defend for as long as we have to and the main sect sends us reinforcements!"

The man's nascent soul aura flew through the area stopping any replies of protests from the other people here, in his eyes, it would be dishonorable to retreat. The people under him wanted to cry out in indignation and run away. They knew that this man was strong enough to flee after the barrier was gone but they on the other hand had no such power. There were various elders just as strong as this man

there and they would make quick work of their defensive structures and weapons, the battle was already lost.

“B-but, they won’t make it in time, we lack a teleportation gate at this outpost, and the closest city is two days away, we won’t last.”

“You still dare speak up? Be quiet!”

One of the older core formation experts cried out through his bloodied teeth as he was being suppressed by the much stronger elder. No one could go against him, if they dared to retreat they would be killed by his sword but if they stayed here the monsters on the other side would break through and do the same.

There was still hope though, if they were really able to hold out then perhaps a few elders that remained at the main city would arrive. They didn’t believe that the main sect would do anything about this as they had let many other outposts like this fall. Even if they fled now they would be branded as deserters and their close relatives would suffer the same fate. This was the price for yearning for immortality, only the resourceful would remain at the end and everyone here knew it.

“They are truly weak, we should have not waited this long and just continued to their capital.”

On the other side of the barrier, a different scene was playing out. Members of the Emerald Phoenix Empire were having quite a jolly good time. Grins were plastered over all their faces as they were ready to massacre their opponents the moment the barrier was blasted open by their large-scale ships. These along with their own battle formations were pouring their own version of spiritual energy onto the shields and quickly getting through.

“You are right Senior, if that order wasn’t given we would have been able to gather more merits than the other battalions.”

“That is true, I don’t expect these lesser warriors to have anything of worth but perhaps we’ll get lucky.”

“You are right senior, the further we get to the middle of this backwater Empire the higher the concentration of this magnificent energy.”

“Yes it is truly a blessed land, I feel that I’m already close to breaking through after spending just a month’s time here.”

A Saint Emperor-level cultivator and his Supreme Saint follower were laughing while watching the siege taking place. To them, this was a land of secrets that opened up every hundred thousand years. Only the best elders and most diligent prospects could enter it and the rewards were truly magnificent. First of all the Qi here gave everyone a big boost, the concentration was at least twice as high as in their Emerald Phoenix Empire.

However, while this Qi was bountiful the residents of this region weren’t able to use it. They had captured various elders and some were on the level of Supreme Saints but paled in comparison to their grandmasters. They were using a faulty cultivation method that didn’t allow them to prosper in this place. The people from the Emerald Phoenix Empire, on the other hand, could prosper here, it was to the point of some of them instantly breaking through after entering this spirit-energy-rich environment.

In comparison, the pills, elixirs, and weapons that these lesser cultivators could offer them weren't all that great. There was nothing besides the raw resources in their lands that were worth claiming and the spirit stone mines were one of the better catches. With the ever-increasing quality when pushing forward they were convinced to find something great in these vast lands that were even larger than their own Empire.

"That's it, I can't wait any longer, all Generals and Commanders follow me, we will push through this flimsy formation in one go and then slaughter the enemy!"

"As you command, Senior General!"

All of them were waiting for this order, even though they would need to use up a lot of their power it would come back to them almost instantly. This was the true might of their forces, even though they were outnumbered by the native people here they could fight almost without resting. Even their biggest attacks that would normally put them out of commission for multiple days would only need an hour or two before they recovered.

With all this newly gained power they were drunk on it. Every part of their body was bursting with new spiritual energy and it made them feel invincible. What normally would have been a suicide attack would turn to assured victory as they were not afraid of tackling the enemies in a direct fight. Thus they all combined their power to form an enormous bird that looked like a phoenix.

It was made up of green flames and symbolized the whole Empire. The technique was a war formation developed by the emperor themselves and took this form for a reason. It was supposed to signal his coming and the green flames were intended to be burned into the people that didn't perish in this noble creature's wake.

"We... we can't hold it!"

The large monstrosity collided with the translucent barrier that began to buckle under pressure. Everyone on the side of the Heavenly Crane Sect was giving their all to just hold out long enough for some reinforcements to arrive, it was to no avail as with one strong attack the enemies managed to blast a large hole in the middle. Even when they tried mending it back together it couldn't.

"Haha, look at those inferior cultivators, it's impossible to reestablish a protective formation after it was broken by the emerald flames!"

Just as the Saint Emperor proclaimed the green flames started burrowing themselves into this formation and expanding the hole that was created. Within a few moments, this opening was large enough for a person to pass through and soon enough it would be large enough for one of the large flying ships to get through.

"I Wung Tong of the Enlightened Victory Hall will pave the way for everyone, follow after me soldiers!"

Someone at the level of a nascent soul master charged through he created an opening and unleashed his large glaive arts on the people on the other side. The core formation experts that were hovering on their swords were unable to defend themselves, retreat was the only option but this only hastened the expansion of the fissure and soon enough more enemies arrived.

"You fools, who told you that you could retreat, fight to the last man!"

“S-senior, they are too strong, we need your aid!”

The man responsible for all of this started sweating. Even though he was loud and boisterous he also realized that the masters they were facing were a notch above them. The person that came in first was his match and from what he could tell he was not even the commanding officer. Even if he tossed himself into the fight there would not be much that he could do.

“Useless bastards.”

His pride didn’t allow him to back away though and soon he performed a quick palm stroke on the enemy elder. It produced a violet burst of energy that flew like a spiral towards the man that made it through the opening.

“Hah, weak!”

The man moved both of his palms toward this large attack and started swirling them around. His hands started moving in a circle as he performed a well-known energy-dispersing technique that worked wonders on this attack. Instead of getting hit by the violent palm Qi it was fully dispersed and couldn’t even harm the weaker Supreme Saint and Martial Saints that followed soon after.

“Is this all that all you people amount to? The Azure Dragon Empire? You are no dragons but just small snakes trapped in a tiny well, the phoenix will rise in these lands and rule over them, kneel before us and we might spare you!”

“You damn savages want us to surrender? We know well what you do to people that surrender, you have no honor!”

“Haha, so you know but you would have at least had a chance of becoming a slave or given a quick death, now we will just play with you until there is nothing left!”

“S-senior!”

“I...”

The old elder that kept everyone from retreating was biting his lower lip and drawing blood. He had made a mistake and now everyone here would die for it. The line was broken and the stronghold they were guarding would fall into enemy hands. Throughout his long life, he had never tasted a defeat like this. However, if he was going to die, then at least he needed to take some of them with him to the afterlife.

“We are of the Heavenly Crane Sect, we shall not surrender and we shall not plead for mercy!”

He could see that the people that were with him didn’t want to listen to his last order. They were weak and their fear was showing. It was another fault that fell on him as their leader, instead of training them more he spent most of his days raising his personal power. In battles like this however numbers did matter as with help of battle formations the tides could be turned even by lesser cultivators.

“Hm, good words but you will not die today, old man.”

“Huh?”

Before the carnage could start a voice resounded from above the clouds which made everyone look up. It was clear that it belonged to some kind of powerful master as it carried his Qi with it. When looking to the sky everyone saw him and it would be a silhouette that they would not forget for the rest of their lives...

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‘Hm, these appearances out of the heavens are becoming a bit cliché but they do work on a new crowd.’

Zhang Dong arrived at the City of Panhua fort which was in the middle of a siege. The barrier protecting them had been broken down and enemies were starting to trickle in. Before any serious injuries or deaths could happen he decided to jump in.

In actuality, they had arrived a full minute before the barrier was broken but a problem arose. The Moon Lily and Sun Lily faction elders started arguing about the plan. Kang Yunru wanted to wait it out to see how it goes, it seemed that he didn’t want to go into battle that wasn’t in his favor.

Sun Shi on the other hand wanted to instantly dive in to save his people. To quiet the two down he finally pronounced that he would go into battle while the two could do whatever they wished. He didn’t really care as after a quick scan of the surroundings he didn’t spot anyone that could be his match. The two late stage nascent soul elders would probably have a hard time competing against the multiple Saint Emperors down there, but not him.

‘Saint Emperors... Supreme Saints and Martial Saints... They seem stronger here than when I was in their empire, this is something that was probably intended by the system maker.’

He could quickly tell that these cultivators had been boosted by the Qi from this empire. Zhang Dong had traveled through the Emerald Phoenix Empire after coming back from the previous world but didn’t take that much time to examine everything. It would probably be better to catch some of these experts to examine their cultivation, perhaps he could implement these enhancing methods somehow to boost himself or his people further.

Maybe there was a way to isolate the effect but perhaps there wasn’t. It could have been some kind of racial trait that these people had and it would not be possible without their bloodline. Nevertheless before taking any action regarding their unique cultivation methods he needed to clean this place up. He could see at least two Saint Emperors having broken through the array and multiple Supreme Saints at the late stage.

‘If I recall correctly they only have three small realms in their cultivation, so those Supreme saints are close to half step nascent soul masters.’

The number of Supreme Saint experts on the other side was comparable to the core formation experts on this. However, they were much stronger than their Azure Empire counterparts. Adding the spirit energy boost on top of the half-step nascent soul power level made these quite an army, even nascent soul masters would have trouble with these numbers.

‘So this is probably the main problem, while they don’t have more masters at the very top, their main army base is a lot stronger with all these Supreme Saints around. However... that is if they don’t have a person like me leading them...’

Zhang Dong was slowly coming down from the sky while producing a magnificent radiant glow to blind the people down on the ground. It looked like the sun was rising behind him to illuminate this place that was surrounded by darkness. Only torches from the fort and the colorful techniques had previously given light to this place, now as he was descending it looked as if a new dawn had risen.

“Hah, do you think that I Wung Tong, the Hall master of the Enlightened Victory Hall, would be scared? You mean nothing and will go down as an unknown stepping stone in my path to glory.”

“Uh...”

Zhang Dong didn't have any time to perform the usual seniorly pose. Who seemed to be the leader of this group of Saint cultivators quickly burst into a monologue instead and stole his limelight. Then just as quickly he flew forward like an arrow drawn from an exquisite bow.

‘Hm, could he have identified me as a threat and means to finish it in one go, or... is he just an idiot?’

He wasn't sure but it was more probably that the latter was true. If the man knew what he was up against he would have just retreated first and then tried to charge at him with the help of the other Saint Emperors that were still on their way. Shooting at him with the large cannons from those bulky ships that were floating in the background would have also been a better order.

“HA! Die to my blade!”

“Hm, sword intent? It's not bad but ...”

The man surrounded himself with massive amounts of sword energy. It circled around his body and would shred anything that came in contact with it. It was clear that he wanted to bounce any potential attacks away from his body while also performing a quick and vicious attack.

“Huh?”

Perhaps if he was up against Shun Shi it would have worked but this was Zhang Dong, the Golden Dragon and liberator of the west. With two fingers the sharp weapon was grabbed before it could poke through the heart as it was intended. The stop was immediate and the sudden stop caused a backlash against the weapon. The sword tip showed a few cracks as the massive amounts of Qi that it was infused with were too much for it to handle. Before the man could let of his blade this energy also injected itself into his sword hand to cause an explosion of flesh.

“ARGHh...”

Just a second ago the man was flying through the air while looking like a gallant warrior, now on the other hand he was falling down like a deflated balloon. The rebound was tremendous and Zhang Dong made sure to inject his opponent with a large quantity of his lightning Qi. It was now wrecking his body that he was not able to protect.

“H-hall Master!”

“How could this be, how could the General fall this easily, it must have been some sort of trick, don't let this affect you and charge!”

While Wung Tong was falling down from the sky the voice of another Supreme Saint echoed through the area. When taking another look all the people here were color coded. The Leaders that consisted of Supreme Saints were wearing robes that were purple. Then the next in line that were the Supreme Saints were red and the ones below yellow.

'I guess they have some kind of color-coded ranking system, considering their Emperor has something to do with emeralds, green will be the most prestigious of them all?'

Zhang Dong wasn't sure but thanks to the bright colors he knew exactly who to target. The enemies were all wearing the same types of clothes and were clearly part of one army. He wasn't sure if this was just part of this Enlightened Victory Hall but when listening to some of the shouts it didn't seem that they all knew each other. It was possible that the army was conscripted by the Emperor's forces before setting out to the Azure Empire.

While Sun Shi and Kang Yunru were arguing he was listening to his enemies. Even now the man that he one-shot was called a general. On his side on the other hand people still segregated themselves into sect juniors and seniors. This division was a bit less orderly and additions from other sects or clans wouldn't be easily welcomed. However, if the opponents had a strict army regiment then it would be a lot easier for them to react to orders.

'I guess that's another reason why they have been winning so much, the Heavenly Crane Sect's allies are nothing more than slaves. It wouldn't be strange for any subservient clan or sect to abandon the fight the moment they had a chance...'

It looked like going forward wouldn't be as easy as he had assumed. If the enemies had a regiment of trained soldiers that were also cultivators then it would be difficult to progress. It was one thing to fight against people that had no idea how to co-operate than ones that were used to fighting with each other. This was also one of the reasons why his troops were so ferocious, their teamwork was impeccable.

'These guys seem like they might have been the last hurdle to pass.'

Within a few moments he made his decision, the Saint Emperor that was injured wasn't let go of the hook as he quickly appeared behind him. A hit to his dantian quickly ended the general's military career. At first, he wanted to play it up for the Heavenly Crane Sect forces and raise their morale. However, these enemies weren't a joke and could probably produce some nasty war formations to prolong this battle and cause more carnage. He needed to end it and do it swiftly before his enemies could regain their bearings.

Thus instead of using flashy attacks that would cement him as the famous golden dragon, he went with speed. His body became clad in golden lightning as he flashed next to the second Supreme Saint opponent. This man was slightly weaker than the previous one and after delivering a palm strike to his chest he flew right back toward the hole in the array that all of them came from.

Everyone was shocked at what was happening, two powerful experts had been rendered useless within a few seconds of Zhang Dong's appearance. However, this wasn't the end as the golden bolt of lightning shot right after the man that was just struck. While using the Supreme Saint as a human shield he burst to the other side where the bulk of the enemy army was waiting for him.

"No one will disturb us here."

He made it to the other side and after performing a pinching motion with his thumb and index finger the hole he came from began to close. A little something in the form of a chaotic orb of lightning was left in the middle of the opening. From the core multiple electrical lines shot out to grab the opening defensive shield. It created a net of charged lightning that was slowly closing itself. When touched by anyone it would electrocute them and turn them into a charred corpse almost instantly.

“Yunru, Shi, I’ll leave the small fries to you that got to the other side, leave the ones on this end to me.”

“... Y-yes honorable Golden Dragon.”

Sun Shi replied after finally getting out of the hidden ship together with Kang Yunru. The enemies that got through were not on their level. The two elders instantly knew what Zhang Dong had planned and had no reason to refuse. This was a stronghold of their sect and enemies that could kill their juniors were here, the two were more than capable of suppressing them all by themselves.

“Well then, show me what you are capable of.”

Zhang Dong on the other side shot forth toward another Supreme Saint. First, he needed to clear out all the commanding officers, and then perhaps he would be able to take their equipment without damaging it too much.

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“ARGH... he’s going through our ships... stop him!”

“The ships... they can’t take it...”

“U-use the war formation, entrap him!”

“H-how could someone be this fast, the formations are crumbling!”

Shouts of soldiers being knocked out or blown away echoed through the battlefield as a blue of golden lightning energy went through it. No one was fast enough to react and each defensive trap they tried to muster was shattered instantly the golden being of light went through it.

Within a few minutes, the army of thousands of Martial Saints and Supreme Saints was no more. Their large flying battleships that proudly flew an emerald flag with their emperor’s insignia went up in flames. The giant war formations that looked like giants made from energy popped into nothingness the moment the radiant golden glow plunged itself into them. It was a one-sided slaughter and nothing but retreat was on anyone’s mind now.

“R-retreat, inform the other battalions!”

“Hm...”

Zhang Dong looked at the flaming ships that were falling down to the ground. They were exploding and burning up before him and the crews that were inside of them were fleeing. Perhaps it was a naive gesture but he didn’t feel like chasing after people that had already lost their will to fight was just.

‘I’ve also burned through a lot of Qi, chasing after them now could expose me to a surprise attack from more Saint Emperors.’

He glanced towards his right hand, there he saw a passed-out man with a bloody nose. It was one of the last remaining generals from the Emerald Phoenix Empire. The man was close to a late stage nascent soul master which at this point was nothing. This battle was won but it was not the end of the war, not in the long shot.

‘Not like I can capture them all or kill them for that matter.’

At first, Zhang Dong was deliberating on performing a large-scale attack and going all out. However, it was better to not show how strong he really was. The technology on the ships that these people had was unknown to him. Perhaps the Emerald Phoenix Emperor would see him fight and find some of his weak points. It was better not to give his enemies too much information about the limits of his spiritual energy or the techniques he uses.

“Well then, Sun Shi, Kang Yunru. I’ll leave the apprehension of the survivors to you, I propose capturing them first and interrogating them.”

While talking he held out the struggling man before him. His whole arm was around the Saint Emperor’s neck. The man was struggling but his body was disabled by Zhang Dong’s superior Qi. At this moment he was not stronger than a Qi condensation practitioner and putting some restraints on him wasn’t hard.

“T-the High-Generals will not stand for this, unhand me you...”

“Hoh? High-Generals? Are they your elite team of elders? Good, I like that you are willing to share information without the need for me to ask but I’ll leave you in the hands of specialists.”

“Huh?”

The man was stunned by the reaction and even more, as strange shackles of light started suppressing his body. They were wrapped around his limbs and also neck to cancel out most of his Qi. In this state, it was easy to throw him into the replica medallion that had now mostly become a prison for anyone he deemed worthy to question.

“We won?”

The hole he blocked didn’t even have time to be restored by the stunned members of the Heavenly Crane Sect. The battle was over before it even started by one man that was now slowly hovering back towards them. Some of them were stunned, others afraid while another group was giddy with anticipation. Almost everyone had heard about the Golden Dragon by this point but seeing the real thing before them couldn’t have prepared them for such a feat.

‘I guess most of them thought that the rumors were overblown, this should gain me some fame and make things easier in the future.’

His image in the west was already cemented in everyone’s mind but here on the eastern front, he was still a new rising star. His sticks were now shooting through the roof after he had managed to single-handedly take out a large battalion of soldiers. Battle formations crumbled under his foot and almost all of the Saint Emperors had been taken out within a few hits. Thanks to this the low morale that everyone was radiating started shifting.

“L... Long Dong!”

“...Long live the Golden Dragon!”

“Golden Dragon!”

Soon after he made his way back behind the protective barrier he was greeted with cheers. The tired soldiers that had accepted their deaths were ecstatic. In their minds, he was now a symbol, a hero that couldn't be stopped by normal means. Finally, there was now a chance at victory as this was actually the first stronghold that had managed to push back the assailants from the Emerald Phoenix Empire.

“Well, I'm glad that you are all in high spirits but this is only the start of this long journey.”

He spoke out in a gentle tone, his voice wasn't loud and with the help of his cultivation, it was heard by everyone. The cheering stopped and all eyes were on him, there was no time for a grand speech but he needed to say a few words to these soldiers.

“This battle might have been won but the war is far from over. Don't worry, you will have my full cooperation and I will protect all the other cities that are going through the same struggles.”

Things were handled here with no problem, the Saint Emperors that had invaded this side had been dealt with and were in shackles as well. With Sun Shi and Kang Yunru here this outpost would have enough manpower to even last through another siege. He could not stay here though, there were other forts that were being attacked just like this one. This was only the start but also a chance to deal a large blow to the enemy offensive.

“While I will depart to the other locations, elders Shi and Yunru will aid you in reinforcing the defensive formation.”

“Honored Golden Dragon?”

Sun Shi wanted to comment but Zhang Dong didn't have time to look over everything. His gaze was on the system map and the next location that was being attacked was already a waypoint. He needed to be swift and the ship that they came with wouldn't be fast enough.

“Don't worry about me, I can take care of myself but you should probably try getting some reinforcements from the main sect, tell them about the enemy's strengths and use one of those guys for information.”

He pointed towards one of the passed-out Saint Emperors that he took care of. There were five generals on a similar level and two were on this side. Another two were defeated by him on the other side with the third one fleeing when he saw that there was no chance of winning. When looking at the map he knew that the other forts would have to deal with similar amounts of enemies.

“Of course honored Golden Dragon but we shouldn't be hasty. What if enemies that you can't handle alone appear, it would be better if we waited a day and set off together to the next location.”

“Normally that would probably be the better option but I don't think that your allies have that much time. This attack wasn't the only one, the other ones might be slightly delayed but they will certainly go for the other strongholds that offer a good strategic foothold. I'll see you later then!”

“Honored Golden Dragon!”

Sun Shi stretched out his hand but as he was calling out Zhang Dong's body turned into a golden beam of light and shot up into the sky. After a large burst of energy, everyone there could see a golden lightning bolt traveling through those clouds in a direction one of the other strongholds was.

The people that were gathered here stood still without saying anything. They looked at the widespread destruction, corpses, and passed-out people. One man had just arrived and taken care of one of their problems in a matter of moments. Some of them were glad that it was over, others were angered that an outsider was needed for something like this and others saw this as a chance to further their ambitions. Nevertheless, they needed to get to work, and finally after Zhang Dong was gone Sun Shi shouted out to get a hold of this situation.

"Everyone, attend to the injured, the ones that are able shall reform the grand protective formation!"

Kang Yunru didn't want to be shown up so he also started barking out his own orders as everyone got their butts moving.

"We must transport the defeated enemy generals to our prison, I will tend to their grandmasters that the Golden Dragon disabled for us!"

Zhang Dong wasn't there to oversee things like this as he didn't have time and didn't want to babysit anyone. The people he was helping needed to pull their weight in one way or another, he couldn't be everywhere and at this moment he was more concerned about gaining back his spiritual energy.

His exit was flashy as he needed to use his lightning form to travel faster through the electrical currents in the sky. This way of flying was a lot faster than using the Heavenly Crane Sect's ship the Patriarch lent him. This of course eat into his reserves that had been lowered due to the quick pace of the fight against the Saint Emperors.

For a brief moment, he returned to his physical form to take out a large pouch filled with marble-sized pills. All of them made their way into his mouth before turning back to the previous energy form. Each one of these pills when consumed by a foundation establishment practitioner could push them through several small realms or even make them explode if they weren't careful. For him on the other hand they didn't even amount to one percent of his total Qi.

His ever-growing cultivation base was too much ahead of his pill-making skills. This he could only offset by volume as preparing these pills wasn't that difficult through the factory mode in his crafting abode. Thus he rocketed back through the clouds to his next destination, with some luck he would get there before their protective formation fell apart.

'This should give me some time, if they know that there are capable combatants on this side, even the Emerald Phoenix Emperor will think twice before launching another attack!'

Chapter 595

"Our new ally has been working hard, I knew he was strong but I wasn't expecting him to be so proficient in battle tactics and warfare. Was this the last one?"

"Yes Patriarch, all of the invading armies have been forced to retreat and we managed to capture a large number of enemy combatants, they are being tight-lipped but with time we expect to reveal their true origin and what they are planning."

"Mmm... good, what about our 'friend' the Golden Dragon?"

"After he defended the cities from the initial invasions he was seen going past our defensive land, it seems that he was either trying to scout out the areas that were claimed by the Phoenix Empire or..."

"Is he trying to single-handedly win this war? Perhaps his youthful appearance wasn't just a trick... he might be inexperienced, how many elders can we spare to aid him?"

"Not that many, our people are having trouble mending the defensive formations that had been damaged during the enemy offensive, it will take us several weeks to mend them. Only then we can start assembling a punitive force to strike back!"

"But Patriarch, would that be wise? Our elders and juniors are tired. We wouldn't have been able to defend ourselves without the Golden Dragon's help, what if we suffer a defeat instead? Wouldn't all the work go to waste?"

"Leader Zhong you bastard, even at this point you would curl up your tail and shiver in fear?"

"Leader Shen, this has nothing to do with fear, I am being logical, how could we offer our people on a platter to that Emerald Phoenix Empire? This is not the time to move yet, we need to interrogate the prisoners, find out about their strategic formations and what they want."

"Leader Zhong isn't wrong... we don't have enough information, we should send in the spies first before making our move."

"You..."

Sun Shen the Moon Lily faction leader along with the rest were in a meeting. All of them were discussing the situation at their borders and how Zhang Dong was affecting them. Ever since his first appearance, most of the enemy forces had been driven back. They had managed to capture some of their masters and weapons. These were in the process of being analyzed which complicated things.

Just like the last time the council was divided. One side wanted to use this opportunity and push into the regions that they had to give up to the Emerald Phoenix Empire. The other group on the other hand wanted to take this chance to wait. This had given them precious time and they would rather analyze the situation before going in further.

"If the Golden Dragon didn't aid us and acted, then all of our border cities would have been overrun by now! This is not the time to wait but the time to act! Our enemies are scattered and will need time to evaluate the situation, if we strike they won't be able to defend themselves!"

"Leader Shen brings up a good point but what if these forces were just a scouting party, what if we get decimated instead? Our cities are well fortified but we don't have a strong attacking force!"

"But there is no time, we have to..."

The whole area erupted as the old masters continued to argue. It didn't seem that they would be making any type of decision anytime soon. There was one person disappointed in this turn of events.

'I guess I won't be getting any more backup.'

Zhang Dong sat on a large tree branch while listening to the old men and women bickering with each other. It was another equal split between the ten factions as if his influence never mattered. Even when that fortune-telling faction was not neutral anymore, another one became opposite to it when the time to make another decision came. It was as if without him being there, it was impossible for them to make an important decision.

‘Could this be the world setting or an overseer at work? Could it only be possible for them to be moved whenever the Main Character was there?’

Zhang Dong couldn’t help himself from seeing game characteristics in the behavior of the people. He wasn’t sure but it was impossible to not become paranoid due to his knowledge of the people working in the background. There was a possibility of interference and when it came to games backup usually arrived when all was said and done. The same was true now as he wasn’t expecting to get any help unless he somehow made it true by his own power.

‘Hm, I’ve come this far, turning around now would make all that work go to waste, wished they listened to Sun Shen and trusted me more.’

Thanks to his system he could hear what the group were discussing. Sun Shen’s approval rating had been over sixty percent which allowed the use of spirit points. With them, he could hear the council discussing things even when being hundreds of thousands of kilometers away from their location. He was hoping for some backup but they were stalling their decision with continued bickering.

“But now that I’m here it would be bad to leave...”

He had come to the Heavenly Crane Sect not only to help out people but also to enhance his army. The area he was in once belonged to the Sun Lily faction which was known for its spirit metal mines. After making sure that the borders were safe he could with a clear conscience take his reward. If he liberated these lands then the Heavenly Crane Sect would probably try to lower the metal haul but with this place still being under the Emerald Phoenix Empire’s clutches, he had some wiggle room to take his cut.

“Hah... look at me becoming this greedy but I guess I can use these metals more than these people that can’t even make a decision to help their citizens, they clearly know that these people are ruthless.”

Zhang Dong gave out a sigh while looking out into the distance. There he saw a smaller settlement that contained around thirty thousand people. What made them unique was that all of them were very weak. No martial artists above the Qi condensation level of three existed and he knew the reason for it.

‘The rumors were a bit overblown but they weren’t that far off...’

This was a true war, something a person from his previous world could mostly only read up in books or see on television. With his superior senses, he could sense it, a large gathering of corpses had been buried near his location, a mass grave.

‘They must have buried all the cultivators that lived here and then covered it up with soil...’

The job was sloppy and after some rain parts of the soil uncovered partially decomposing bodies. Some beasts that lived outside were already scavenging the remains and eating up whatever they could. The only good news here was that they didn’t outright murder the entire population. The non-combatants were spared and in the city, anyone that was weak was given some type of chance to survive.

There was nothing he could do about the situation here anymore. The people here had died a while back and there was no way of bringing them back. Now he had to focus on the problem at hand and the people that were still alive. They were left alone in the city with a few hundred cultivators from the Emerald Phoenix Empire. There weren't that many but they were at least at the Martial Master level which was more than enough to handle these untrained Qi condensation commoners.

'They killed anyone that could resist them and enslaved the population, they don't see these people as human...'

Secret grounds and different pocket dimensions existed in this world. Many times they were rumored to be created by long-dead immortals and acted as trial grounds for the worthy. After capturing some of the people from the opposition at least this fact he did confirm.

'Perhaps they think that this whole Azure Empire is just an elaborate test made by some powerful immortal millions of years ago, a special place to gain power every thousand of years ago.'

Immortals were like gods in the cultivation world. It wouldn't be strange for the people living here to assume that they were capable of creating life or something very similar. Perhaps to them, this was nothing more than a facade, a battleground created for their people to gain power and show that they were worthy of claiming some kind of old relic.

'If that is what they think then it will be hard to reason with them, they might take it as some kind of trial... do they believe that we are some automatons or something?'

Zhang Dong looked at the dead bodies in the badly covered grave but couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. At least the people that were here weren't tempered with and their bodies had regular injuries. Demonic cultivators liked using people's bodies as resources but these cultivators were more aligned with orthodox sects like his. They would probably not budge on the moral side either which left overwhelming them with superior might.

"Well then, I should probably make my move..."

If it was the old him he would probably charge into the city and rescue everyone. It wouldn't be that hard, the strongest person here was only a Martial Saint. All the other powerful masters had retreated to evaluate the situation that he had caused at the border. There was a problem, even if he killed every cultivator there the people wouldn't really have anything to go to. He would need to somehow transport them out of here or create something that could do it instead of him.

"You'll have to wait a bit, but don't worry, I'll set you all free and you'll be able to bury your people in peace."

While the people were captured they were in no immediate danger. The enemies probably needed some slaves to keep the city running and to use it as some type of outpost. Instead of giving away that he was roaming these lands, he had a better idea.

'If the people from the Heavenly Crane Sect won't help me and if my own people are busy fighting with those fish people... I just need to make another force, I can't be everywhere but if I have some backup...'

Further inside at the outskirts of the city there was one location that he was after. It was where a large mine that contained various spirit metals was located. There were many things that he could make with those materials and instead of creating weapons or armor for his troops he had another idea.

“If I don’t have soldiers, I’ll just make them...”

Chapter 596

‘They aren’t really defending it too well, I guess they don’t hold these metals in high regard, I think it has something to do with their cultivation...’

Zhang Dong had quickly moved towards a mining area previously owned by one of the sects in the Heavenly Crane Sect’s region. It looked like a giant gorge with a river running for hundreds of kilometers to the north. The cliffs were steep and looked like swiss cheese with all the holes that were mined out. Simple planks were infused to the sides and used as walkways but no paths led up.

‘Hm, I think they usually use slaves below the core formation level. They won’t be able to fly away and escape and those sharp rocks below are probably a death sentence...’

From what he could tell, the people working here were trapped. He could feel with his spirit sense that the tunnels were long but never led out anywhere. The only way of escaping would be on the side of the gorge where probably a core formation expert was guarding everyone.

This wasn’t anything out of the ordinary. Even his own sect utilized prisoners to work for them but the conditions on his side were a lot better. Sunlight was a very important part of a human’s life and even slaves needed to see the light of day from time to time.

‘Hm... the slaves have been moved and stopped mining? They are holding them at one location.’

After taking out a few guards that were almost asleep he made his way into one of the tunnels. When traveling a bit further he came out at what looked to be an old living quarter. There were beds made of straw there that looked more like they belonged to a tomb. They were carved out in walls like bunk beds and had very little room, sitting wouldn’t be an option and they were all stacked over each other.

‘Damn, people really lived here...’

Zhang Dong wasn’t sure what he should feel about this. On one hand, these mining slaves usually consisted of killers and thieves. On the other hand, it wasn’t strange for some young master to just sentence someone to this fate for looking at them funny. It wouldn’t be strange if a large chunk of the people being forced to do this were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This reminded him of some of his earlier adventurers when he was up against the Dark Palm Sect. He had done a similar dive into a spirit stone mine and rescued the people held up there. Some of the people he rescued even made it into his sect while others scattered through the world.

“But why wouldn’t they want these, they aren’t the greatest but...”

He could see a few small pebbles made from spirit metal on the ground. These were almost everywhere and probably just minor samples that weren’t worth all that much. The one in his hand would probably at most be Mortal-grade items that a master craftsman could perfect. Further in the mine, he expected

to find Earth-grade and even Heaven-grade materials. A craftsman like him would be able to boost them past what they could originally become and the same should be said for the enemy blacksmiths.

“Hm, wait a second, what if their Qi isn’t compatible with our metals?”

When thinking back to the fights that he had with these people he did notice that they were using weapons from a different kind of metal. To test out his theory he brought out one of the swords he took while fighting the invaders and compared it to one made from one of the metals from the Azure Empire side.

“It’s resonating differently to the usual Qi...”

The people from the Emerald Phoenix Empire did have their own spatial rings but he didn’t really go through them due to lack of time. Now when going over them he could feel that there was a difference, their swords could take in a lot more Qi than the ones he was used to.

“Hm... so this means that they get a boost from our Qi... but when it comes to the weapons they are harder to use because they require more Qi.”

It seemed that the metals that were in this empire didn’t go well with the variation of spirit energy from the other empire. It was as if they were operating at 50% of the usual output. Even when he counted on the boost the people from the Emerald Phoenix Empire received it was still worse. It wasn’t strange that they decided to abandon the mines as the metals were highly inefficient compared to their own resources.

“I wonder if it’s similar for the pills and the herbs? But if they can absorb the spiritual energy at a rapid pace it might be detrimental to swallow too many at once...”

Consuming pills was a staple of the cultivation world. However there was always a limit of how much a body could take. If too much spiritual energy was consumed it could even mean death to the person using them. It wouldn’t be strange for the bodies of their bodies to not be able to take the concentration but they could also be able to work with less for more. Perhaps low-quality pills would work quite well which would make this a treasure trove when spiritual herbs were considered.

‘I guess more isn’t always better, at least they don’t care about the metal mines, this will be a lot easier and there is a lot of stuff here... I can start out here and create my own force while they are concentrating on other locations.’

He brought up the map of the eastern region. When he was at the Heavenly Crane Sect he had asked about locations of strategic points and ones of interest. The areas with all the mines the Sun Lily faction owned were really far away from places that cultivated spirit herbs. When taking the new information into account he realized that his plan could work before anyone realizes what he was up to.

‘I guess I should start, there aren’t that many guards here and neither at the city, they all should fit into the medallion but I might have to drop them off somewhere else later.’

After nodding to himself he vanished from the spot he was in. Luckily his senses and system allowed him to find every living being that was stuck in these tunnels. It had been created as a prison and would work against the people that had conquered it. They would not have any place to escape nor would anyone be able to hear their shouts.

Canceling out sounds wasn't that difficult for someone like him so the guards he came across fell like flies. Within a couple of hours, almost every part of the mine had been cleared out with the exception of one area. His one had a high concentration of people in it and was heavily guarded compared to others. Yet, the strongest person here was a early stage Martial Saint.

"Hey..."

"Stop, hold your voice, did you forget what they did to the last person that spoke out?"

"I know... but did you notice?"

"Huh?"

A large group of people was sitting down in a circle. They had been forced into the middle by the invaders that for some reason just left them there. To them, it didn't really matter who their new master was; the only thing they cared about was survival. They had been stuck in this place for weeks now and some had even died of starvation. Others that tried to go against their new captors were slain almost instantly which forced the rest to wait.

"Why is it so quiet?"

"Right? I don't see any of the guards either. They usually leave at least one person in that corridor but I can't see anyone..."

One of the malnourished slaves pointed towards one of the many corridors leading out of this place. They were kept here for a while with not many people guarding them but in their state, any one of the guards could have killed them all by themselves.

"It's strange, they at least made some noise..."

The mining slaves were started to whisper to each other. Usually, they would hear some sounds, grunts, and other noises from the guards. Sometimes they would pass by this room that connected to many other corridors but now it had been half an hour and no one had come. It was as if they had disappeared but most of them were too afraid to confirm anything.

"Could someone have come to save us?"

"Why would anyone save us? We are just slaves."

"Maybe this is a chance?"

"Chance my ass, they will kill us instantly if we move."

"We are already as good as dead, they won't even feed us."

The slaves were already malnourished and the only thing keeping them alive was a shallow stream of water that allowed them to at least drink some water. Being cultivators they could last more than regular humans but in a week or two, all of them would be dead. It was a gamble, some hoped that their captors would require the mine to work and have a reason to keep them alive. Others on the other hand only saw survival if they managed to get out of this predicament and perhaps this would be the chance.

"W-wait... did you see that?"

Suddenly people saw a bright flash of light in one of the corridors. They could not hear any sounds but a strange silhouette appeared. It looked to belong to a person but no one was sure and their vision had already become affected by the darkness so they were practically blind.

"It..It's coming here... be quiet..."

All of them started panicking, they had raised their voices and were probably heard by the person that was coming. The last time something like this happened one of them had been killed, their dead body that was missing a head was in the corner of this chamber and already decomposing.

It was dead silent but they could see the light getting closer. Usually they were used to hearing footprints but this time around it was only a bright light. Was it perhaps a master capable of flight that was coming to dispose of them in one fell swoop?

"Is this really it?"

"No, I don't want to die..."

Some of them started sobbing and cursing about the fate that brought them here. They were sure that this strange phenomenon couldn't be anything good. Soon a bright light that looked like a person had revealed itself. It was actually warm and filled out this damp room that they had been stuck in for almost a whole month. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad, if death felt like this then perhaps it was better to accept it. The pain was suddenly fading away, could they be dying at this moment while being struck by the master's powerful attack?

"Hm, I don't think I have enough room in the medallion, I'll have to create a temporary portal to move you guys to a different location, give me a few minutes to set things up..."

Chapter 597

"Huh?"

"They look malnourished, quickly bring over the nutrient pills, and after they are done bring them to the cafeteria for some real food."

"Yes sir!"

"Also dim the light, their eyes aren't used to it, remember to follow the Patriarch's instructions!"

A group of people that looked like walking skeletons were slowly walking into a grass-filled field. In the middle, there was a large gate filled with blue luminescent energy through which these malnourished individuals were stepping through. On the other end, they were greeted by people dressed in white robes with some golden dragon embroilments.

Just half an hour ago they had been dying of starvation in a cold mine. Then a strange person appeared, they couldn't really tell who he was due their sensitivity to light but the warm glow he gave out seemed to melt all the problems away. Within a matter of minutes everyone started feeling better and were then ordered to walk through the shiny blue light.

They were all cultivators once while their dantians had been damaged they could recover faster than a regular human. Their eyes were quickly adjusting to the blue sky above and the people around them.

Some of them were sure that they were being moved to another location to get killed or used for something else. However the people here looked kind and orderly, they didn't harm them nor did they bully them like their previous captors.

"What is the Patriarch thinking, could these people be of use to us? They look like common mining slaves."

"Junior, you are out of line."

"Ack."

A young member of the physician unit of the United Element sect got smacked in the back of the head. It was a girl that didn't look older than fifteen in a gray robe that differed from the bright white ones the other seniors were wearing.

"S-senior Ai, please forgive this junior."

"I better not catch you calling to question our Patriarch's will, you'll be peeling potatoes for the rest of the year!"

"N-no nothing but that."

"Very well, now take the other juniors and prepare the accommodations for these refugees."

The woman moved her hands behind her back and quickly flew away on her sword toward the people that were gathering in the middle. The young trainee grumbled but quickly moved to the part where the other helpers were gathering. They were just outer sect disciples and were tasked to tend to the slaves from the mine.

"Haha, you should keep quiet around senior sister Ai about the Patriarch, she has a long history with him and is also part of the original Zhang Clan, you must have a death wish."

When arriving at the group the other juniors started chuckling among themselves. The young junior girl that got reprimanded started pouting and turning red out of embarrassment. She felt slightly wronged as she only asked a simple question. It was known that the Patriarch was wise but for a new sect member like her, helping people that were punished to work in a mine was strange. These miners were usually criminals and in her mind didn't deserve the help that they were getting.

"But they are criminals, why should our great sect aid such people?"

"Are they criminals? You are naive."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure where you came from but it's normal for the poor to be thrown to those mines for small crimes like stealing rice."

The juniors continued to whisper while moving towards a large rectangular building. From the outside, it didn't look like much but it had all the important facilities. It was a similar dorm building that had been used by the Zhang Clan to test their warriors. The design was simple and thanks to it, the buildings could be quickly made and were perfect for large numbers of refugees.

"I didn't know... the Patriarch must have seen them and shown mercy, he is truly a generous master!"

"Yes but this is probably not the only reason, these people have interacted with the enemies of our sect, I'm sure they will be grateful for our aid and give us all the information they can!"

"Ah, it's like giving them a carrot while their lives were only ever filled with the stick?"

"Now you get it."

"Hey you two, stop talking and get to work, I don't want to be punished again for being slower than group C."

The gray-robed junior helpers quickly started going through the rooms and making the beds. The rooms weren't that big but they were able to fit three beds and some walking and sitting space. Compared to the cramped beds in the mines this was paradise.

"It's the Patriarch!"

While everyone was busy doing their job a loud shout was heard from the area of the teleportation gate. Everyone that was in the building quickly clamored for the windows or to go outside. To them, the person called the Patriarch was a living legend, the strongest cultivator that was even rumored to eclipse the current Azure Emperor. They chose to believe the rumors as the number of victories under his belt was immeasurable and he never seemed to have lost a battle.

"Q-quickly we must go back, this is a chance!"

"But senior sister told us to prepare the rooms for the injured."

"Who cares? It's the Patriarch, we might not get another chance like this in our lifetime!"

The girls that made out the entirety of this small squadron of nurses didn't know what to do. They had orders but their elusive leader was known for not showing his face out in the public often. Now he was at the teleportation gate they were near and it was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see him from close up.

Even getting a whiff of that superior radiant Qi could help them push through a small cultivation realm, it was also a chance to have their role model see them in the open. Sometimes masters like him with a glance could tell someone's aptitude for things. There was a one in a trillion chance that they could become his disciple by just making their presence known and some would be willing to die for a chance like this.

"I... I'm going..."

"W-wait for me!"

Suddenly all the young juniors rushed out of the building and were followed by almost everyone that had gathered there. All of them rushed to the hill where the teleportation gate was to see their leader. Even the senior sect members were doing the same and when the juniors noticed this, all bets were off.

When the gray-robed juniors crossed over the hill they could see a mass of other people already kneeling down. They were in a large circle with their heads touching the gentle grass on the ground.

They were momentarily stunned at the gallant appearance of their leader. Everyone had seen paintings, pictures, and even holograms of him but the aura he radiated could not be imitated by anything. It was as if a true immortal being descended from the heavens to grace them with his presence.

Instantly everyone that came dropped down to their knees to give him a proper welcome. They felt unworthy to look him in the eyes and felt like they did something bad by coming here. Only one person moved forward, her graceful form glided through the air before arriving before the man in question.

“Disciple pays respect to her master.”

Everyone wanted to rise their heads but no one below the level of the nascent soul had the gall to do it. Without the Patriarch giving them a clear order to raise up they weren’t allowed to. Anyone that was caught taking a sneak peek would be punished, perhaps even banished from the sect. No one was willing to go back to their old lives outside of this Spirit Spring City which was a paradise.

“Oh hey, good that you are here Xue, I need to unload a few prisoners, make sure that they go through the process just try not to break them. They are from the Emerald Phoenix Empire, I placed the cultivation-suppressing shackles on all of them, so even the elders that are on the nascent soul level shouldn’t give you a problem.”

The man’s voice sounded powerful but gentle and everyone held their breath in. To them, it was better to pass out instead of not being able to hear their leader’s words reach their ears in their full splendor. His quick speech was followed by a strange sound of something dropping on the ground. A strange energy was being produced that was akin to spatial techniques.

“Of course, Master.”

“Oh... and don’t tell her that I was here...”

“I will keep my lips sealed.”

In a matter of moments, the radiant presence that was there vanished, and the teleportation gate was closed. He was gone and finally, people started to raise their heads. They saw a large number of passed-out people wearing strange robes. Instantly they knew that they belonged to the new enemy in the east.

“So it was true, the Patriarch is working with the Heavenly Crane Sect?”

“But it hasn’t been long since, how could he apprehend so many?”

Not everyone was informed about the meeting in the east. They couldn’t let their enemies know what their leader was up to but now it was out. Some of the passed-out masters there seemed at the level of some of theirs. However, the chains around their bodies were hindering their Qi flow and rendering them as weak as Foundation Establishment practitioners.

“Hey, didn’t I tell you to prepare the rooms?”

“Forgive us senior sister but we had to greet the Patriarch...”

“... Fine, now get back to work!”

The group of juniors bowed and quickly returned to their work. Luckily their senior sister understood the glee in their eyes. They were finally in the presence of their glorious leader. The strong radiant aura that he was exuding was warm yet powerful. They wanted nothing more to go and cultivate while remembering that golden glow but first they needed to finish the order that was given to them.

...

"How did they get so many people there, that scared me..."

Zhang Dong removed the temporary teleportation gate and placed it back into his spatial ring. He had decided to return to his sect via it to dump off the prisoners he took captive during his travels. To his surprise, there were hundreds of his sect members there bowing their heads at him. Luckily he could quickly dump the prisoners onto his disciple before getting out of there.

"I guess time moves on and more people will be joining my sect, I can't let them down..."

With newfound resolve, he delved back into the mine. There his plan of making a secondary force would finally begin...

Chapter 598

"Hm... does this look a bit too... creepy?"

Zhang Dong looked at a piece of paper on which he was drawing a face on. He was aiming for something calming yet powerful but the design that he came up with was giving him the creeps.

"I guess unless it looks fully human it's going to have that uncanny part to it, maybe I should ditch the realistic idea. What if I just give it a face of a skeleton..."

When thinking about the next design he drew up a humanoid shape made of pure metallic bones. It was quite similar to an old movie series that kind of went downhill after the second movie. A group of automatons that looked like this would probably send a message but perhaps make his side seem like some demonic cult trying to take over the lands.

"Better not... I need something soothing to the eye, that won't tarnish my good name."

He pondered this topic, his image could be useful if he used it right. For the time being, people around the world viewed him as the brother of the Azure Emperor. The Golden Dragon was his title and his fame was made by saving others and acting like a hero. This view wasn't fully cemented in the people's hearts quite yet but it was possible to push it further.

"Quite the nefarious scheme I'm thinking about here but not like I actually have any underhanded motives besides setting the people free and stopping more deaths."

His only wish was to get this bloody war over and then get ready to take on the Overseer and whoever was behind the creation of this world. There were some titles he had gained beside his golden dragon one. Some called him a spirit of light or the radiant one. This made him think about angels which could become the design for his new robotic army.

“An angelic army that helps people... sounds a little bit campy but it would work, even people in this world have prejudices. They will be more inclined to trust something that looks like an angel than a demon.”

There were no angels in this culture per se, they were replaced by bald men called buddhas and saints. They were seen as people with good karma that did good deeds. However, not every one of them was good. There were ways to interpret good deeds for everyone and most of the time a person didn't perceive themselves as evil. There were always ways of justifying acts of violence so this area was muddled.

“Would a more feminine or masculine one be better? They don't need to all be the same, I could relegate them to a few roles.”

Zhang Dong felt inspired and took some of it from some old games he used to play. First would be the warrior angels. They would possess bulkier armor and carry various armaments. A shield and a sword combo would probably be the best combination but he was also planning to give some of them spears or gloves.

Then the thinner variants would wear hoods to cover their faces and be relegated to the background support. He was making puppet automatons made out of metal so healing wouldn't work but this didn't mean that they wouldn't be able to use these energies to heal humans. Instead, they would pelt everyone with a myriad of radiant long-range spells as he was not limited to only cultivation techniques.

One type was the melee brawlers that fought at close range, the other long-range glass cannons for support. Then there would be the last type, the leaders. These he gave a combination of both, bulkier armor with hoods over their heads, and instead of angel wings made of feathers they would be made out of energy.

These were more for show and to signal that his army was coming. The wings would be able to take the form of the traditional bird ones, they would just be made out of golden energy. But they could also look like a large cape or squiggly energy beams that fluttered while the leader angel moved. It would look like a mass of golden lightning was wiggling around their backs and even a way of attacking people.

“Hm... I might have gotten a bit carried away with these...”

It didn't take long but he made a lot of designs, too many to actually create. There wasn't much time for his creations to prosper and there were many more mines to get to like the one that he took over. Thus for the time being he decided to go with some of the slicker designs, the warrior would look like a fantasy hero with a centurion-like helmet that was on fire. There would be no face under the helmet as it was part of the automaton puppet.

The mage type would have its face covered by a white hood made of softer spirit metal. The flames of gold would be coming out of the shoulders instead of the head. Then the leader type would be a combination with wings of light shooting out of the back. Later he was planning to give the other leader types a more intricate design but for the alpha version, this would do.

‘Luckily this crafting abode makes things very easy, I just need to alter some of the old designs that I've already used and it will do most of it for me.’

While his crafting abode had been reset to its bare bones settings, thanks to the spirit point farm it was back in full swing. He just used some old designs and the knowledge he had from making power armor for himself and his friends. Within a day of scribbling around, he had the two common base models that were quickly shifted into production.

‘This holographic testing rig is really helpful, I don’t even need to make prototypes and can just let the factory build them in bulk.’

His system was inferior to Wang Long’s in a sense of gathering points and getting new techniques, yet when his faction system and making treasures were involved it was actually superior. A system was in place to produce various tests on the automatons. After making the first design and running the test through the Ai he could see all the weak points. It was easy to correct the joints and armor plates to fit his wants and needs.

‘Good, this will do... making variants that are better at taking hits or more speedy with these prototypes is quite easy.’

The warriors that were supposed to be bulk models could be customized. Ones with shields could be made more robust while the ones that used spears faster on their feet. The mages were less resistant to stress but they could hold bigger batteries to fuel their magic techniques. Now he only needed to throw in the mined minerals and spirit stones to create his army.

‘Well then, off to the next mine.’

Thus his quest continued, before his army was built he needed materials. His crafting abode continued to produce soldiers while he sneaked up to the next mine. The slaves that had not been killed were freed and their captors dealt with them. With the influx in materials, he could let his factory do all the work while he concentrated on things outside.

‘I guess, it’s time to test them before my location becomes known to everyone.’

“What should I call you? The Heavenly Revolutionary Army?”

Behind him stood a swarm of floating puppets. They combined the knowledge that he attained in this world and in the magical one. There he worked on large robots and smaller ones which made this task a lot easier. The biggest problem was supplying energy to these flying weapons.

For this, he decided to create support structures that looked like flying triangles. They would send out waves of energy that when absorbed by the machines would power them. It was similar to modern-day charging and allowed to reduce the risks of the metallic puppets exploding from their batteries being overcharged. The only problem was that this was a weak point of his entire army, if the flying pyramid was disabled then a whole battalion of soldiers would not have any energy.

“I’ll have to live with this, as long as I’m here then the structure is well protected, I just need to get the ball rolling the more resources I get the more of these power pyramids I can make...”

Starting out things was always the hardest. At the moment he was aiming for locations with spirit stone mines and metals that were less defended than the ones with spirit herbs. In reality, the large forces were mostly meant as a distraction to focus the attention away from the leader, which was him. If he

scattered the enemies, even if his armies continued to lose as long as he took out the Saint Emperors and stole their weapons to act as a base for his leader puppets, everything would be fine.

‘There they go... let’s see if that Leader Angel can take out those Supreme Saints.’

This time around he would be helping out his newly made army of automatons. He was wearing similar armor to the leader angel but hanging out in the back on top of a floating pyramid made of precious metals. It looked as if it was made from gold and inside it had a large scrape generator that was feeding a large quantity of spiritual energy into his puppets.

“Fear not, the Heavenly Revolutionary Army has arrived, we will drive out the invaders and bring divine wrath upon them!”

‘That is a bit embarrassing...’

The leading angel was holding a long spear which was a heavenly-grade weapon made by Zhang Dong. The mechanical warriors had a few pre-recorded messages but were mostly controlled by this AI helper Bob. Each puppet had a compact version of the Ai integrated into its control module. It allowed them to fight and make judgments faster than most cultivators in this world.

This army was divided into smaller battalions of around 300 units. Each of them had a mini-leader that could coordinate with them and order them to perform battle formations and tasks. Above them were the true leaders that controlled these battalions and made the real decisions. If a mini-leader was destroyed the battalion wouldn’t falter as its program could be uploaded to one of the existing units. It was like a hydra, even when a head was cut off another one grew in its place.

Finally, the clash between the invaders and the mechanical bearings commenced. This would be the final test and decide if he could actually push further into the defensive line of the Emerald Phoenix empire or if retreat was a better option.

‘After I’m done with this, I should see about that backup plan, I should make them work a lot harder for this one.’

Chapter 599

“Master General, there is a situation!”

“What is it now? Can’t you fools handle a few weak cultivators without the main force getting involved?”

A group of men was sitting inside a large tent and looking over a large map. On the map there were pieces representing various locations, structures, and even armies. It was a war map created to document their progress and also for making strategies. Not that long ago their first failure had transpired as they weren’t able to push into the middle of the enemy defensive line as they had planned.

“What is it this time? A mysterious master on the level of the Emperor Appeared again? You already know what happened to the last group who spouted those lies.”

The man that entered was a high-ranking officer that was close to a general. There were five other people at around his level inside this tent all capable of dislodging his head if they wanted to. The

leaders that retreated with their tails between their legs had been punished by getting their cultivation destroyed. They were then tossed out to wander through the wilderness and probably eaten up by the many beasts that roamed these lands. Retreat and failure was not allowed in this army and everyone was quickly becoming aware of it.

“This better be good.”

“Y-yes Master General, I’m here to make a report, our first defensive line has been attacked and we have lost some of the previously captured cities and strongholds...”

“We have lost our strongholds? Which ones?”

The man doing the report started to sweat but he had to continue. Even though he was scared of the people gathered here, if he didn’t do his job it was the same as signing a death sentence. Even these Saint Emperors that were at the pinnacle of power would be crushed under the Emperor’s foot if they failed.

Everyone had the incentive to win and conquer these lands. Back at the Emerald Phoenix Empire, there were many other warriors waiting to replace these that couldn’t take this chance and advance. Even spending a few days in this spirit energy rich environment could allow a person to break through a small realm. Everyone wanted to step into this region but there was a limited amount of space on which the Emperor decided on.

“The attacks started slowly, an unimportant outpost had been wiped clean by an unknown army of strange beings. They called themselves The Heavenly Revolutionary Army and were led by a strange powerful being calling themselves, Archangel Michael.”

“Archangel Michael?”

“Yes Master General, not much is known about this person just that they are capable of overwhelming even our Saint Emperor generals. Their forces started out small but with each passing day the number had been increasing, they have been targeting the metal mines that we had control of and we are sure that they will continue doing so.”

“They are after the mines? What of the spirit herbs?”

“They didn’t seem to be interested in them yet, however, we don’t know what they will do after securing all the mines.”

“Hm... Is that all?”

“No Master General, another force from the south has started pushing. It’s the people wearing golden armor, who had suddenly become active again we believe that they have something in common with this Archangel Michael as both sides use divine arts.”

“Hmm... first the Golden Dragon, now some Archangel... Do they take us for weak fools? I have made my decision, the High Generals will act, we can’t allow these people to embarrass us any longer, we will take care of them and make way for our Emperor.”

“For the Emperor!”

The man stood up from his throne-like seat and grabbed a large glove from the side. His physique was comparable to the demi-human emperor with muscles upon muscles. The other Saint Emperor generals followed after him while taking out their own weapon of choice. There was no way that they would let this stand, if their army failed then they would be the ones to pay the price. To take care of things without issue the decision was made, they would take on the unidentified force themselves and nip it at the bud before it became a real problem.

...

"Hm, It seems to be going well, this is the last mine in the area and the others are just small ones. What do you think Michael, should we change our target for now or just continue?"

"Enemy forces are approaching, this unit proposes a defensive measure."

"Is that so? Well, at least we forced them to split them up, Lucius and Argus better work for that Aegis shield. The bulk of their forces is coming here though, they probably don't want me near those spirit herb gardens they had taken over."

Zhang Dong looked at his map and could see a blob of red moving toward the northern parts of the eastern region where he was. A smaller group that looked like a red fog was going to the southern parts where Argus and the magical knights were attacking. He was using the fact that he had found another object they wanted, the magical holy shield. For it they would do almost anything, even attack the Emerald Phoenix Empire to lure some potential threats away.

This allowed him to take some heat from his new army which continued to quickly grow in numbers. Once his factory inside of his crafting abode ramped up in production it was easy to create his automatons. The regular units were mostly at the core formation level but just like their human counterparts, they could combine their power into formations.

"The only limitation is the power required to run them, this is the limit for now but... there is a way to expand this limit but the time isn't right yet and I think we also have some guests."

The flying puppets that were exuding radiant light turned in the direction of the incoming armies. Zhang Dong retreated inside the largest floating pyramid to act as the main source of power for these automatons. The army had become so big that he wouldn't be able to control them otherwise. While inside he could monitor what they were doing and see if they were capable of defeating a large force made up of multiple Saint Emperors and quite a high number of Supreme Saints.

"Well, I'm not really controlling them, Bob is doing all of the heavy lifts, if I tried I think my brain would overheat."

It was possible for a cultivator to control battle puppets like these. The more intricate the design of these automatons was, the more varied orders they could react to. Usually, they were only meant for battle and reacted to things like 'attack' or 'protect'. However, with the help of his Ai, this could be taken to another level as a large number of them could coordinate with each other. In a sense, they could move like a trained army and carry out all sorts of battle tactics.

Then there was one of the greatest strengths of this robotic army. It knew no fear and didn't question any of the creator's choices. Even if the plan required some to get destroyed they wouldn't care. Their

destroyed bodies could even be recycled or restored if it was possible. If half of them were destroyed in a victorious battle part of the puppets could be made whole again and their programming would continue to evolve. With each battle they would be able to read into the enemy formations more and react faster, this was the true power of this autonomous army.

“I might have created a monster if I use the Dolden Dong Palace as a source of energy and grab some other resources, this might become an easy victory...”

The battle had started and the swarm of puppets attacked the cultivators from the Emerald Phoenix Empire. Bob his Ai program had existed for a while and it was given a lot of battle dates through their travels. All of this data made it into the machines that he made and they were quite proficient at copying his fighting style. Even if they were a lot weaker then the original, the numbers made up for a lot. The bodies that would make body refiners jealous were also an added boon.

“What are these things?”

“T-there is nothing inside, these are battle puppets!”

Emerald Phoenix Warriors were being tossed around by the angelic army. However, some of them were also being destroyed and quickly it became apparent that they were some kind of automatons. After ripping out their heads the lack of flesh became apparent. The bodies looked bulkier on the outside but a lot of hollow areas existed inside. A slicked-jointed skeleton more similar to the usual wooden puppets was inside the armored suit that protected the automatons from harm.

“They must be being controlled by someone or something, find it!”

One of the generals shouted out while slicing up over ten of the warrior-type puppets with one swing of his large glove. Even when the swarm continued to come at him they were only turned to scrap metal. However to the man’s surprise, there was some suspicious movement, some of the automatons moved in to catch the destroyed bodies of their allies and flew off toward the large floating pyramids.

“What are they doing...”

He could see the large structures floating in the background. They were generating protective barriers that weren’t easily breached. Even their large ships and Saint Emperors that were trying to get through couldn’t. The damaged puppets were carried in through an entrance that opened and then from another one the man could see new metallic enemies emerging.

“Could they be...”

“Hm, did he figure it out with just one glance? Not bad, it would be better to get rid of someone like that...”

Zhang Dong witnessed everything while looking over this battle. He focused on who looked to be the commanding officer and with the help of the system could hear what he was talking about. In reality, the insides of these pyramids had been turned into puppet factories. The damaged bodies could be almost instantly melted down for resources and new models were assembled in their place. The loss of materials was high but thanks to this the army could maintain a high number of active units at all times.

‘They are already trying to break through the barricades, he is even willing to sacrifice his men to destroy the factories, I can’t let him do that... I guess it’s time.’

“Michael, you are up, go get rid of the enemy commander.”

The leader unit that he spent a lot of time designing released a radiant glow from its back. A golden aurora filled the whole area as a large set of golden wings appeared. In the middle, a warrior made of golden alloy appeared with a huge sword in its hand. The power it was exuding was at the level of a nascent soul master at the great circle realm and it was ready to chop its target up.

Chapter 600

“How can this puppet be so strong...”

“You shall be purified!”

“And why is it repeating the same five words constantly?”

“The light will bring everlasting peace to this world.”

‘Hm... didn’t have time to design the speech pattern too well, putting in those one-liners might have been a mistake...’

Zhang Dong watched as his ‘Archangel’ leader unit battled the enemy general. It was equipped with a pocket version of the Bob Ai and was capable of understanding almost everything but when the words that it was spewing had been pre-recorded. During battle, all speaking functions were limited and all resources shifted to the puppet’s battle mode. Conserving energy and processing power was paramount to victory and for that reason, it just continued to spew out a few one-liners, like a boss in a video game.

‘The leader is around the level of a tribe leader from the demi-human empire, I guess all these empires have a similar level of power, the only ones that were different were Argus’ group...’

The battle was in full swing and his puppets were battling it out with the large force from the Emerald Phoenix Empire. His allies were down in the south but this time around they were alone. They had a small elite force of fighters but there weren’t that many of them. Considering that all the other Empire’s had Emperor class leaders on their side, the people from the magical kingdom were a bit strange.

‘They kept their kingdom rather vague, would they only send help if this party failed?’

Argus and his knights would not be able to take on the Emerald Phoenix Empire by themselves. They were a bit stronger than the group that he was fighting here but with a couple more Saint Emperors, even the golden armors would start giving out. He could only attribute it to their forces not fully committing to this side. Probably after acquiring one item, they also didn’t see the need to ask for reinforcements.

‘It’s not strange to see this type of setting, only when the miniboss is destroyed will the real boss appear.’

Just like all the other Empires, the one Argus came from also had a leader. They had a king instead of an Emperor but he could be on the level of the demi-human leader as well. Other than that, they could have some other powerful warriors on the level of Lord Lucius. If there were ten at his level, even Zhang

Dong wouldn't be able to win. Before he was having trouble with one Lucius and his squadron of golden warriors, if they increased in number, they would be a formidable force to be reckoned with.

'I wonder if they will notice something, I did take inspiration from their armors.'

He had captured some of the silver knights and after working with Argus he had ample time to scan the golden armors. They wouldn't let him borrow any but he had captured the silver variants and could somewhat understand the principle they worked with. Now his new creation was in the process of getting pushed back by the enemy commander.

'I guess it needs some more juice or battle data...'

It was obvious that his Archangel Michael was a powerful creation but it could not fully contend with a Saint Emperor at the pinnacle of their power. The man was a general that had probably spent hundreds of years mastering his craft, a machine that was made within a week and had no hopes of beating him. At least not at this moment when it was still in the process of figuring out how to utilize its armaments. Even the best Ai needed time to process the information it was given and this was the first time it faced off against a Saint Emperor like this.

'I guess, I'll have to go in instead.'

Zhang Dong, who had been previously stuck in the main floating pyramid decide to make an appearance. A thick golden ray of golden light exploded upwards and pushed the clouds to the side. From within he appeared and was already dressed in his own power armor that he used to battle against Wang Long.

"Leave these lands!"

The enemy cultivators shuddered under the pressure, they instantly knew that the being in the golden armor was not something they could handle. However, retreating was not an option. Instead, all of the generals started moving toward each other, in their minds if all of them added their power, victory was possible.

"Everyone, we need to work together, for the Emperor!"

All of the generals shouted while gathering. They assumed an attacking formation that caused their spiritual energy to skyrocket. Together with who they called Master General, there were six Saint Emperors in total. Their eyes were flaming with passion and their muscles twitching with anticipation. They knew that the person floating in the sky was the real enemy and if they managed to kill him, then everything would be over.

"I see, you do not wish to leave nor do you wish to surrender, how do those guys always say it? Ah right... KNOW YOUR PLACE!"

He acted like a villain while his spiritual energy rose. His approach was faster than a bolt of lightning and only after the collision occurred did a thunderous roar echo through the battlefield. The formation that these six were so proud of couldn't last through a single hit and some of them even retreated while spitting out blood.

At this point in time, Zhang Dong had already advanced past what the normal denizens of this world should be capable of. After defeating Wang Long for a moment he had taken a glimpse at the realm beyond realms. And even if his foot was not in the door quite yet, he got to peek through the hole which allowed him to dominate this battle.

The six Saint Emperors didn't know what hit them as they got tossed around like rag dolls by this blur of golden light. Before they could muster enough spiritual energy for a counterattack, they were already flying through the air. There was no time to form a strategy or to examine the attack pattern Zhang Dong was going for, they couldn't only protect their vital points while turtling up.

"The generals can't do anything?"

"Watch out!"

"Argh!"

One of the Supreme Saints that was glancing at the battle taking place, screamed out in pain. While his attention was pulled away for a moment, the golden puppets resumed their attack. The pyramids in the background kept pushing out more models as the battle continued. Their greatest warriors were getting tossed around like little children and couldn't aid them anymore, this meant that the army composed of cold automatons could have free reign now, even the Archangel that was close in power to a general, was now keeping them busy.

After the golden one entered the fray, the battle quickly shifted. The Heavenly Revolution Army had clearly started winning and the forces from the Emerald Phoenix Empire were faltering. Soon enough, the morale wavered and some of them started backing off. Without the generals there to stop them, some of them prioritized their lives over the mission. Perhaps they would be seen as traitors but they had better chances of surviving if they ran.

"What are you doing, keep fighting!"

One of the Supreme Saints shouted while punching the hard skull of an automaton. The hit dislodged its head but didn't stop the puppet from moving as it grabbed the man's arm. While clinging to it, another three automatons approached with long spears to plunge them into the cultivator's back. His death only cemented the decisions made by the retreating warriors, the battle was over and they had to abandon it.

'I guess loyalty gained by might only amounts to this much, they still have around half of their forces left, they could make a stand and potentially turn it around.'

Zhang Dong was holding onto the head of the Master General. It was a bloody pulp that he had a hand in. The people on the other end didn't realize that they weren't doing that badly. The puppets he made wouldn't be able to keep up their numbers for too long. During the process of re-assembly, they were losing a lot of energy and it wouldn't last forever. As he saw it, there was a possibility to win this but a price would need to be paid for it.

For a moment he felt bad for these people. They were only here for shallow reasons like gaining power and prestige. Some of them were probably forced by their upbringing to believe that the biggest first

was always right. The fear of getting punished and greed was the only driving force in this expedition of theirs.

‘It crumbles this easily, huh?’

He looked at the grown men fleeing in panic and not even looking if they could save anyone. There were some people getting manhandled by the puppets but they were just ignored to aid the others to escape. It was clear that the Emerald Phoenix Empire was very similar to the one here. Most of the clans and sects would act in a similar fashion as the survival of their line was more important than people below them. The moment their powerbase crumbled these prideful cultivators crumbled instantly.

‘What would happen if my people saw me lose?’

Zhang Dong was curious, it was close during the Wang Long encounter where his allies aided him in his battle. However, would they continue to fight and even stay in the same sect if he was finally vanquished by someone? He did not know but he had to assume that it would be a mixed response. While part of his sect had a fanatical view of him, others were milder in their beliefs.

‘I guess it will be better to never lose and find out.’

The defeated Master General was tossed into the medallion with the other five that he knocked out. Some of them were missing limbs and had crushed bones but were all alive. He would use this group of officers to find out the truth behind the Emerald Phoenix Emperor and his true motive.

“Everyone stop pursuing, gather up the destroyed units and everything that could be useful.”

His army of automatons started chasing after the fleeing cultivators but instantly stopped when the order was given. The second weakness of this army was the range, without the slow-moving pyramids around them, they would quickly lose power and most of their fighting potential. Even if he wanted to capture all the capable fighters from the enemies, he couldn’t.

‘This will probably be the last time they underestimate me... I should probably get what I can and return to the Heavenly Crane Sect, now perhaps I’ll be able to make them move.’