

Seller 521

Chapter 521: Civil War at the Phoenix Empire (part-2)

The next day;

Imperial Palace, Phoenix Empire;

In the morning court session where all officials are present, the new Zhao Clan's Patriarch, Zhao Yenping was found kneeling before the Emperor alongside his Clan's Grand Elder, a reputed peak stage 6-circle realm expert.

"Do you have anything to say, Zhao Yenping?" Shang Jun, the Emperor looked so angry that he didn't even bother to address the other party with the formal title of the governor.

"We... we have no idea about it, Your Majesty. Please show mercy," Zhao Clan's Grand Elder kowtowed and apologized.

Shang Jun's anger only increased further, "An army of at least 500 in numbers entered your territory and did such an act, but you are telling me that your clan has no idea?" His voice echoed in the hall, startling the low-level officials.

Zhao Yenping, on the other hand, calmly cupped his fists while looking down, "Zhao Clan has nothing to do with this matter. His Majesty may launch an investigation against us. We will cooperate. If anything, it is the Southern/Eastern division's job to protect the region from such incidents."

Shang Jun narrowed his eyes as he got up and slowly walked down from the throne. "First, General Yu and now, you... It looked like you people at high-level positions are accustomed to not having any fear for the Emperor at all. Throwing responsibilities on each other," Letting out a chuckle, he added, "My uncle was really too forgiving on his subjects.

No wonder there is so much corruption in the Empire."

As the entire court was stunned by Shang Jun's remark, the latter reached the kneeling clan lord and raised his foot to place it on his shoulder with his arm placed on the thigh, shocking everyone even more, "Listen carefully, Zhao Yenping. The entire Phoenix Empire is my territory and you are given a job to govern a portion of that territory, which you failed to do it right.

So, it doesn't really matter whether Zhao Clan has a hand in it or not. You ought to be punished alongside the people who couldn't fulfill their duties too."

While the old emperor took away the ministries from six major noble clans, the new emperor took a historical decision among the others just within the first week of his ruling, abolishing the vassal system altogether that had been in the law for 1784 years.

It is how he crushed the arrogance of nobles and gained the respect of the masses. The Generals and the soldiers also followed his decrees because, in their eyes, their new emperor looked like a mighty lion, compared to a peace-loving lazy house cat like their former emperor, Shang Fu.

While the vassal system has been abolished by Shang Jun, to keep damage to the minimum, he appointed them as the provincial governors. The other six clans still looked after the provinces they ruled before, but they could no longer keep the 15% share of the taxes like before. Instead, all the taxes they collected with go to the imperial palace and it would then be allocated back to the provinces.

A number of benefits they enjoyed were cut off but at the very least, the governors have salaries and their enormous influence within their region will be enough to snatch a share from the allocated resources.

Hence, for the past few weeks, these six nobles often felt that they were in a higher hierarchy compared to the other six major nobles who lost everything.

Zhao Yenping was the same.

However, he never expected to be treated in such a way by this new emperor. Not only he was forced to kneel for an act he had no relation with, but he was also further humiliated by this young emperor who was just insignificant until a while ago.

He clenched his fists and released them, trying to control his anger, for he understood that Shang Jun would even go as far as massacring his clan to prove his ego.

Eventually, Shang Jun put down the foot from his shoulder and straightened his back as he addressed the rest of the court, "Here's my decree. For neglecting his duties as the Governor of the Zhao Province, Zhao Yenping will receive a hundred lashes in public this noon.

Each farmer will be compensated with two gold coins for their misfortune and the destroyed land will be purchased by the Imperial Palace as stated in that fake decree. And for a period of 14 days, military law will be applied in all the provinces apart from Imperial City. I order each General to take up their warriors and protect the lands from these traitors that use my name to do evil things.

Until then, I authorize the Censorate division under the Department of State Affairs to launch a full-scale investigation and catch those culprits. Under no circumstances, no official or the one who received an investigation stamp from the Censorate shall leave their respective provinces."

The new ministers and all the officials bowed to the Emperor's decree, and collectively echoed, "All Hail Your Majesty..."

After a while, in the imperial grounds where public trails are conducted, Zhao Yenping was tied to a metal pole by energy ropes. His cultivation is sealed for the moment and his upper body is bare.

One after another, his body was beaten by a whip with spikes. It isn't a normal whip. This is a special whip of semi-divine grade, used to punish high-level cultivators.

Even though his cultivation is sealed, Zhao Yenping, who cultivated in the path of Fighter, had a robust body, and hence, needed such a weapon to feel pain.

Amid thousands of gazes, the whip struck him again and again, increasing his pain with every lash.

However, Zhao Yenping didn't scream at all. He had his gaze on the ground and he was trying his best to bear the pain.

Meanwhile, in the adjacent tent of the royal tent, Supreme Commander Bai was conversing with the third prince as they were watching the scene.

"His Majesty's action is like a double-edged sword, Your Highness. I worry that this will only create more mess instead of giving a strong message to the enemies," commented the Supreme Commander, making sure to keep his voice low.

Shang Wei replied, "Based on our spies at Yuan Clan, Eldest Brother secured at least one million gold coins from his backer and was currently trying to poach all the noble clans. His Majesty was aware that Yuan Clan was hiding the Eldest Brother but he wasn't sure whether he was still the one behind that attack.

This punishment for clan leader Zhao will certainly serve as a warning to other noble clans. Even after this, if they join the Eldest Brother, it would mean our suspicions will be true. If they behave, it means that Eldest

Brother isn't a threat and His Majesty would fearlessly raid the Yuan Clan and arrest him, probably using this incident as an excuse."

Bai Xun was stunned for a moment, realizing how deep this matter was. "Is this your idea? Or Cao Wen's?" He asked.

Shang Wei could only sigh in response, "Obviously, not me. I won't suggest something barbaric like this. Violence always begets hatred, and hatred only brings violence."

Bai Xun meaningfully stares at the prince for a couple of seconds and asks, "Let's say your worries are true. What would you think the next course of action from your brother is going to be?"

"Civil war," Shang Wei replied without any hesitation, right away. He further added, "A kind of civil war that will destroy this empire in one way or another."

"What do you mean?" As Bai Xun's facial expression hardened, Shang Wei explained, "His Majesty isn't like my father. He won't make peace treaties. If not for that incident, he would have already proceeded on invading the Western Yan."

"A war with Western Yan?" Bai Xun furrowed his brows in displeasure, "Going to war with Feng Wu means inviting death. Why do you even think we ceded that land in the first place? As the supreme commander of the army, I won't throw my soldiers into the pit of fire even if it is a decree from the Emperor."

"There's a lot you don't understand, uncle," Shang Wei shook his head with a sigh, "When His Majesty was attacked, he passed the order to Cao Wen to bring his men to the Imperial City. It happened right in front of me. Who are these men, I'm not sure about it.

But, the fact that he was confident in dealing with a supreme being means that he had the support of a sect or an organization that could protect his throne from such an enemy. This is why I told you there will be a civil war that destroys the empire, earlier."

Bai Xun thought for a bit and nodded in agreement, "I guess that's true. When both forces that don't have pure domination over their opponent go against each other, the result of their clash will continuously generate waves that destroy their surroundings."

Just as Shang Wei expected, exactly 9 days later, the imperial palace received a letter from the Yuan Clan with the seal from their Patriarch. It is an announcement of the formation of Phoenix Rebel forces.

The head of the Phoenix Rebel forces is naturally the Crown Prince and their demand is the dethronement of Shang Jun.

Their excuse is his robust policies on nobles, preferring to give trade contracts to foreign merchants instead of favoring local merchants, military law to snatch freedom, and showing harsh treatment of his loyal subjects has put a taint on the name of the Shang Dynasty.

Thousands of soldiers that deployed in the south to control Northern and Southern Yuan provinces, and Shang Jun planned to use them to crush the Yuan Clan without giving any warning.

However, the General of the South didn't follow his orders. Through their spies, the imperial palace got the news that not only the southern division had joined the rebel forces under the Crown Prince, but even the Zhao clan had joined the other side.

The Eastern and Western divisions were still tightly controlling their deployed territories, i.e. Sui, Jin, and Qing provinces, but the Zhao and the remaining two provinces were now protected by the southern division alongside the major clans. As for the northern division, it was still protecting the imperial city and its outer districts.

All the soldiers who tried to defect from their division were either imprisoned or killed. Of course, some soldiers managed to escape successfully but they all went into hiding with their families, not intending to risk their lives.

However, Shang Jun didn't make any decision and calmly rested as if nothing was going wrong.

And then, three days later, on the day his arm finally returned with a miraculous pill, mysterious experts that been hiding in the imperial city for several days made their move at the same time.

In the span of one night, several leaders and important elders of the six major clans that reside in the imperial city were all assassinated.

The situation completely changed for even Bai Xun and Shang Wei.

Because both of them always showcased their loyalty to the throne, Shang Wei and Bai Xun were house-arrested at their respective homes, in the name of protection. The deaths of nobles naturally put on the head of the Phoenix Rebel force.

This ruthless action brought a profound response from Mark, forcing him to change his original plans slightly.

Chapter 522: Return of Fu Sheng

Genesis Enterprises, Lunaris City, Western Moon kingdom;

*Ding! Congratulations, you won the mysterious box from the Lottery reward.

*Ding! Opening the box in 3, 2, 1...

*Ding! You won a Random Skill evolution card.

*Ding! Random Skill evolution card was used. Choose the path: Multiple Lightning Clones /Elemental Clone

"Hmm?" Mark, for the first time, got a skill evolution card from the weekly lottery wheel, and his Lightning clone was randomly selected, probably because of his current 10 points of luck.

"System, descriptions please..."

**Multiple Lightning clones: Summon any number of lightning clones with stats equal to your maximum stats +1. Cost: 1% ether/second per each clone. CD: None

**Elemental Clone: Summon a clone of any element that the user possesses for 5 minutes. The summoned clone has the same stats as the user but could effectively have the same set of respective elemental skills that the user possesses. Cost: 50% ether energy. CD: None.

"Hmm, I could summon even an antimatter-type clone? That's freaking awesome, but I have no use for it..."

After taking a look at both details, Mark chose a simpler one and best for the present situation over their overall potential.

*Ding! Lightning Clone has evolved to Multiple Lightning Clone skill.

"Okay, the lottery is done. Next..."

"System, Open Statue of Velkazar"

*Ding! Prayed once. You received a Basic fireball card*3 as a reward.

"Ugh... not another basic fireball. I already got two of them from last time and now another two... This statue never gives me useful ones. What do I do with these fireballs that could only injure 3-circle realm Spirit warriors? And they can't even be given to others. Anyway, let's just stack it up in the inventory. Why waste throwing free stuff..."

After his luck points returned to normal, Mark left the store, although not before handing a 10 gold coin bonus to Chang Bo, who was constantly the source of his luck absorption.

Upon returning to the palace, he saw hundreds of servants were busy, cleaning the palace and the residences inside the compound, even the barracks were swept once again and the soldiers were also busy cleaning their armor to make them look all shiny, the kitchens were busy with royal chefs shouting at his assistants for their mistakes, and the soldiers were busy practicing their march on the palace grounds.

Mark had slightly given more attention to the firearms division that's basically comprised of only non-cultivators but are highly skilled in archery. While it is active, unlike at Phoenix Empire, there was still no permanent commander appointed for this division. They were currently employed in the patrolling division.

The reason why he paid special attention to it isn't just because they were using his weapons, but it is because of the teenage girl who was leading the march.

For several weeks, Xie Mei was training under Meng Tao. When she surpassed him, she began training the troops that were mostly depending on the guidelines from the first batch briefly trained under Mark.

When Mark was spotted by Xie Mei, she put more enthusiasm into the drills, but by the time she tried to glance at him again to see his reaction, he was gone. She could only sigh inwardly and continue the exercise.

Roughly two hours later, a huge troop entered the Lunar City. The citizens stopped their work and stood on the side, watching them out of curiosity.

The Spirit Warriors/cultivators couldn't help but shiver as they watched the soldiers dressed in scarlet and gold armor. The weakest of them is in the 6-circle realm and there are more than one 8-circle realm experts. As for the one leading them, no one could even gauge his strength. They could only feel awe by looking at him.

It took an hour for them to reach the palace. And there, the King was seen waiting with his officials, the ladies weren't present as they did when they welcomed Mark and his companions a while ago.

However, the King seemed more enthusiastic as he stared at the army. Wearing a long, flowing robe made from the finest silk dyed in imperial yellow; embroidered across the robe are golden rabbits with scarlet vertical eyes. These cute creatures are depicted amidst clouds, causing an illusion to a spectator that they are chasing white pearls across the skies.

His hat was also adorned with strings of pearls and jade.

Overall, his wear screams of this luxurious royal attire from even far away.

Who are these troops, one wonder?

Well, these are Elite troops of Fu Sheng that traveled all the way from Dragon Empire on their warship and just reached Western Moon's shores three days ago but waited until their Imperial Sovereign arrived from his trip.

As James parted his ways with Fu Sheng after entering Western Moon for some reason, he couldn't be seen with Fu Sheng at the royal banquet arranged for the demigod.

Fu Sheng sat along with the King, State Preceptor, and Mark on the Central platform, which was built a few feet higher than the rest of the floor with pillars; each one had a rabbit statue made of top-quality jade on the top that held a white pearl.

"Young master, this is one of the finest liquors I have ever tasted. Thank you for allowing me to taste it," Fu Sheng was all courteous with Mark as he drank the cup of vodka, which was only served to the Spirit warriors with at least 5-circle realm cultivation.

As King Shen Niu and the State Preceptor meaningfully glanced at each other, Mark waved his hand while taking a sip in calmness, "Please, you are overrating it."

"Young Master, as our cultivation level increases, the effect of the liquors will automatically decrease. Most of the wines will become akin to flavored water for us," Fu Sheng let out a smile as he explained. He continued to praise, "This drink is made of common ingredients we could find anywhere, and yet, it has this neutral flavor taste, clean and smooth.

The best thing is that a moment of instant burn you would feel when gulping." The former Imperial Sovereign of Dragon Empire really looked like he enjoyed the drink, for the onlookers. However, Mark only felt like he was flattering him. Hence, he tried to keep his conversation light without expressing too much of his thoughts on the ongoing civil war in the neighboring lands.

But, eventually, when the topic of mass assassinations came up, he had to speak up on the matter, although not in the way Shen Niu expected him to react.

"Regardless of whether it is Shang Jun's ploy or the rebel forces' action, it won't change the fact that the imperial city has become too dangerous for the nobles. Better to open the borders for them and give them shelter." Mark also told them that he was going to launch a secret operation to take out some acquaintances from that war zone.

Upon hearing his plan, King Shen Niu said, "I heard that the prospective heirs of those six clans were taken into tight protective custody and Miss Lin Xue is one of them. It is quite possible that Emperor Shang did it to keep the clans under control and to get their support against the rebel forces. In that case, getting Miss Lin out might unnecessarily spread a rumor that Mr.

Lu is supporting the rebels."

Before Mark replied to that, Fu Sheng spoke, "Actually, we don't need to resort to such methods. If the young master gives me the order, I, and my gold dragon knight division are ready to go there and bring whoever we want. Believe me when I say, there is no empire in the world that could dare deny our demands."

"Hmm..." Mark fell into thoughts for a second, considering his suggestion seriously for a second. After all, he did underestimate Shang Jun, not expecting him to decisively move against the six major noble clans before they even had the opportunity to join the civil war. There is also an issue of trust in this demigod, who can only be used as muscle for now.

After thinking thoroughly, he opened his mouth, replying to Fu Sheng, "Just one person would do, Mr. Fu. Just visit Shen Niue by yourself and bring her to Western Moon. There are three more you can bring along in return but only if they volunteer to tag along, although I don't think they would."

"Understood," Fu Sheng nodded but then asked after a brief pause, "By the way, who are those three?"

"The two imperial princes and the supreme commander," replied Mark in a calm manner, taking the others by surprise.

Chapter 523: Shang Wei proposes to Lin Xue

Imperial Palace, Phoenix Empire;

Shang Wei was waiting outside the inner quarters with a bunch of guards behind him, not for security but to keep an eye on him.

After waiting there for atleast half an hour, Lin Xue came out with a eunuch accompanying her.

That usual cold demeanor Shang Wei used to see in her was gone and replaced by a blank look on her. She completely seemed like someone devoid of emotions.

Even her greeting was like a simple, "hello" without any expression on her face. No one could understand whether she was annoyed, sad, or happy.

Shang Wei inwardly sighed and spoke, "Sister Xue, I want to talk to you about something."

"What is it?" She asked.

Shang Wei turned his head, "Can you give us privacy?"

One of the guards replied with a bit of hesitation, "But, his majesty ordered us not to leave our sight on you even for a second. Even the palace is not safe for His Highness."

It wasn't the first time Shang Wei heard this nonsense during the past few days. He could only come to a bit of compromise and ask, "Then, can you move away? Or does His Majesty also order you to not let me even talk to my friend?"

They could only follow his request and slightly increased their distance. As the eunuch also left them alone, Shang Wei then said to Lin Xue who looked like she wasn't interested at all, "Look, I know that this isn't how I want to ask you but it is the only way I can think to protect you. Of course, I also don't want to take advantage of the situation, and I also don't want you to think like..."

"Get to the point," Lin Xue interrupted him in a plain tone.

Shang Wei took a deep breath and grabbed her pale hands, "Will you marry me? I swear that I won't take any concubine or even show remote interest in another lady for all my life. I will protect you as long as..."

"Yes," Lin Xue once again interrupted him but this time with a positive reply, and surprisingly, she neither retracted her hands from his grip at all. Shang Wei was stunned for a moment and a big smile appeared on his face, "really?" He couldn't even believe his ears for a moment.

"Are you really agreeing to be my wife?" He asked once again in disbelief.

This time, Lin Xue gave a bit of a long reply, "Yes, but don't ever think I'm going to love you or I'm doing this for my survival. I have discarded my emotions, Your Highness. I'm nothing but a killing machine, right now. So, it doesn't matter who I marry. But, since I'm long aware of your feelings, I will give you a warning.

The moment I believe I gained enough strength, I'm going to leave everything behind and start hunting down the people that are directly or indirectly responsible for my parents death. Those who come in my way will die, even if it is you. Just keep it in your mind if you want to marry me."

Shang Wei felt pain in his heart and that pain reflected in his eyes as he softly spoke, "Lin Xue, I promise that I will be on your side no matter what you do."

Lin Xue didn't have much reaction to it and simply nodded, "Good. You can go and begin your preparations. Now, if you excuse me..." She turned around and walked away from there.

Meanwhile, the leader of those seven guards, who had been watching it from afar but could still hear it clearly due to his high cultivation level (high-6-circle) thought, "His Highness is getting married into Lin Clan? I need to inform Lord Cao."

By the end of the day, the news of their marriage not only reached Shang Jun but also the citizens living in the capital city.

The next day morning;

"Your Highness" "Your Highness, please wake up" "Your Highness, You are being summoned by His Majesty"

The servants woke up Shang Wei in a hurry.

The prime minister of the empire looked very haggard with his reddened eyes and tired-looking face as he was forcefully woke up and got readied.

Shang Wei didn't know why he was summoned but the civil war made him wonder whether there was an urgent situation that required his assistance. Despite being house-arrested, he is still the prime minister and loyal to the throne.

The prince reached the Emperor's study room in a hurry, only to see a dignified-looking stranger sitting opposite Shang Jun while they were having tea.

"Your Majesty." Shang Wei greeted his cousin with a deep bow and observed the stranger.

In the next instant, sweat beads formed on his forehead while his legs shivered a bit. "This fellow has a profound cultivation level, stronger than even Song Tai. My bloodline instincts are telling me to run away. He shouldn't be a supreme being. Don't tell me he is a demigod."

"Prime Minister Shang, this is Saint Fu, the Dragon Empire's former Imperial Sovereign. He is also the junior brother of Lan Gengxin, your grandfather," Shang Jun introduced the gentleman to a nervous Shang Wei, taking him by surprise.

"Shang Wei greets the elder," The prince cupped his fists as he greeted him with a bow. The fact that the emperor addressed with the title Saint only confirmed his suspicions. Still, he addressed him as an elder because this person is a junior brother of his grandfather, which makes him more or less the same as a real granduncle.

However, Fu Sheng had developed a frown on his face, "Hold your tongue, Emperor Shang. He awakened your family's Phoenix bloodline, just like yourself. I hope you don't link him to the Lan Clan or Lord Lan Gengxin for that matter."

Shang Wei doesn't know how to deal with the situation other than staying silent. In front of a demigod, he is nothing more than an insignificant existence.

As a result, Shang Jun could only apologize to Fu Sheng and go directly to the matter, "Anyway, Prime Minister Shang. Saint Fu is here to take away Miss Lin Xue with him. Since you are going to marry her, if you are willing to sacrifice your homeland and go with her, I won't stop you from leaving."

"Eh? Lin Xue?" Shang Wei was taken aback. This time, he couldn't stay silent and fearlessly spoke to the demigod, "I'm sorry but why do you want to take her way?"

"Shang Wei..." Shang Jun hissed at him in urgency, taking a glance at Fu Sheng's face. The demigod didn't seem like he was angry and it relieved the young emperor a little bit.

Shang Jun then took the initiative to give an explanation to Shang Wei, "Saint Fu is a friend of Lu Zhen, and Lady Song Yue is worried about her friend who lost her family. The rebel forces are powerful enough to carry out such assassinations in one night, toppling down the entire imperial city. So, their worries are not unfounded. Along with this, Lu Zhen has another message for three other people.

You, Prince Shang Bo, and Supreme Commander Bai Xun. The three of you are also invited to live at Western Moon until everything becomes normal here. Lu Zhen was supposedly doing this as a way of repaying Uncle Shang Fu and Queen Consort Lan."

Fu Sheng then further added, "However, you have a choice of not taking up this offer too. It doesn't matter. The only one that is of significance is Miss Lin Xue."

Shang Wei stayed silent for a while, seeming as if he was pondering on the offer. But, when he opened his mouth, he responded with a question, "If this matter is actually linked to Lu Zhen and Sister Yue, then, as long as they are convinced that she is safe here, then, you should have no problem with it. Am I correct?"

Fu Sheng briefly stared at him and firmly nodded, "Yes."

Shang Wei turned toward his cousin and knelt while cupping his fists, "Your Majesty, I request you to send me as an official envoy to Western Moon. The Western Moon is strong and even if we aren't allies, Lu Zhen is still a businessman who loves money. I can go there on your behalf to hire his services using funds as well as with an official letter of giving up our legitimacy over Western Yan.

We can end the civil war in a jiffy. Since we are paying him, there is no favor we have to fulfill later on, too. It will be like using a tool to beat up our enemies without injuring ourselves. If you give me an hour, I can draft a plan that you won't refuse."

Fu Sheng: "..."

Shang Jun: "..."

Chapter 524: Revealing the truth to Shang Wei

The next day evening;

"Yue Yue" "Xue Xue"

The two best friends, who lost their respective fathers very recently, reunited after months of separation, but only one was all emotional.

Forget about tears, there wasn't even a shred of emotion in Lin Xue even after she met Song Yue and long escaped house arrest.

Song Yue was quick to spot the change in her and she couldn't help but express her worry, "Xue Xue, what happened to you?" She grabbed her face and looked at her, after taking her to the side to talk privately.

Lin Xue answered truthfully this time, "I learned our clan's forbidden cultivation technique, 'The Heart of Frost', Yue Yue. It will increase my cultivation speed and increase the power of my lightning armor, but in exchange, as I increase my mastery over the technique, I will also lose my emotions one after another. I'm at the third level right now and I can no longer express my feelings.

By the time I reach the tenth level, I probably..."

Lin Xue didn't complete her explanation and stopped talking in the middle.

"What will happen?" As Song Yue asked her, Lin Xue took her hands into hers and patted the back of her hand, "forget about me. Tell me about your situation. When are you going to get married?"

Song Yue could only let out a sigh as she heard the word marriage, "Lu Zhen wants to marry after he settles some business. It is related to Shang Jun and Uncle Shang Fu. I can't tell you all the details, I'm sorry."

"That's alright with me." Lin Xue nodded in understanding. She added, "Unfortunately, I'm not in a situation to worry about other things at the moment. Of all my acquaintances currently alive, you are the closest thing to me. As long as you are fine, I won't have to worry about anything and focus on my goal. Since I'm already here, can I ask you to do a favor for me?"

I want to find out the identities of the ones that killed my parents."

Meanwhile, in the royal private study room, Mark was alone with Shang Wei.

After reading it entirely, Mark placed it calmly on the table and looked at his half-brother, "A mine in the Sui province that has at least 500 tons worth of ether ore in exchange for closing the borders of Western Yan and Western Moon from our side and formally aligning ourselves with the Imperial Palace on just paper.

The Phoenix Empire will not only officially relinquish its claims on Western Yan but even send a royal princess (a relative of the imperial family, not to be confused with the imperial princess) to the royal Feng family for the marriage, which could be used to convince them on the border closures and put an end to enmity.

The plan is impressive, I should say, but there is only one major problem here."

"What is it?" Shang Wei felt like his heart skipped a beat and became a bit nervous.

Mark's gaze changed to that of coldness as he asked, "What do you think it is?"

"Whatever bad blood you have with the imperial family, the source was my father. The current emperor shouldn't have any problems with you, right?" Shang Wei tried to make the other party understand that they weren't enemies.

Mark let out a cold chuckle, "Heh, I thought your intelligence was comparable to that of Princess Shen Ling's but it is a bit disappointing. Well, let me break it to you by stating two simple facts."

As Shang Wei's nervousness increased, Mark continued, "The one behind the death of Song Yun is Shang Jun. And I also know for sure that the behind Lin Xue's parents is also your dear emperor." He picked up the scroll and waved it while leaning to the edge of the seat, "Now, do you still want to give this proposal to me?"

Shang Wei's eyes widened and realization dawned upon him at once as if he solved a great puzzle that had been troubling him for a while, "It's you. You were the one behind my eldest brother, the one who sent that supreme being to assault our Emperor. It has been a while since Uncle Song Yun died and there is no way someone like you wouldn't leave your enemy alone.

Killing him is easy for you but you won't do that as it will be an easy punishment."

Clap Clap* Clap*

"Wonderful. Now, that is what I expect from you," Mark didn't bother denying Shang Wei's theory at all. He further added, "As you already figured out the truth, you will stay as a prisoner until I am done punishing your Shang Dynasty. After that, you are free to do whatever you want."

"You cannot imprison me." Shang Wei furrowed his brows and abruptly got up. "I'm the official envoy of Phoenix Empire and I'm entitled to immunity. Imprisoning me will not only declare the war on Phoenix Empire but also challenge the very system of monarchy. The other empires will surely take action on Western Moon."

"And which empire do you think will support you and go against a demigod?" Mark calmly asked him, leaning back to the chair once again. "I just have to send a letter to your emperor, stating that you tried taking Shen Ling hostage to release Lin Xue, and Shang Jun will gladly give his permission to take your head.

Or perhaps, I will even claim that ether mine you earlier offered as a part of compensation."

"You..." Shang Wei felt like he was seeing the real personality of this weapon seller sitting before him. "Yeah, that's right. Whatever you do, you still pursue material profits. This is who you are..." The prince of the foreign land commented with clear displeasure written on his face. "So, what is it that my eldest brother promised you?"

Mark's smile widened, "it doesn't matter. That worthless prince will never sit on that throne. With Shang Wen no longer here, I guess you will be left with no choice but to ascend the throne later on."

"Hmm. That's weird. You are imprisoning me first and then making me ascend the throne?" Wanting to get to the bottom of the matter, Shang Wei sat once again. "Why? Eldest brother will make a fine puppet for you. If it was me, I wouldn't stop looking for ways to deal with you."

"I wonder if you will think the same when you learn that your birth mother was killed by the imperial family, my dear half-brother..."

"Huh? What!"

Meanwhile, in the Undying lands of the immortal plane of existence;

Realm of Grima;

In the planet where the Grima Empire's ruling dynasty lives, The Saint realm human-looking mage arrived at the majestic golden palace, only to be stopped by the guards.

The mage got angered, "You dared to stop me?"

The guard with a humanoid naked upper body, animal legs, lion head, and a red mane replied, "Her Majesty currently went to closed-door cultivation and specifically ordered us to send away every visitor."

"Closed-door cultivation? Her?" The mage seemed surprised. "Was she trying to break through to the Elder God realm (15-circle) or something? In that case, she might have got her hands on some divine artifact. But, the task is still pending. Without her approval, I won't be able to get an immortal realm beast for my dungeon boss."

I should look for another way. Hmm... if she is not in a situation to make any move..." Suddenly, something clicked in his head and he spoke to the guards, "Okay, just go and inform His Highness, Prince Aurorafelis that I wish to meet him."

Chapter 525: Unveiling truths

A few minutes later;

Shang Wei stood there in silence with his head hung down as Mark got up and patted his shoulder, "It doesn't matter whether you believe it or not, but this is the truth. I'm going to send you to our Lan Sect's guardian where you will stay disconnected from the rest of the world and spend there until I'm done with tearing apart the Shang Dynasty that our dear forefathers painstakingly built it up."

Take this time to make up your thoughts."

"I..." Shang Wei wanted to say something but in the end, he cooperated, not because he blindly trusted Mark's words or because the truth is too much to take in. It is because he was worried about Lin Xue's safety.

"Steve..."

With a call from Mark, the 15-year-old entered and once again confirmed with his appearance that it was Mark who was behind Shang Jun's arm severing incident.

As Shang Wei's cultivation was sealed and taken away to Zheng, Mark sent a message to Song Yue to bring her friend to him upon reading her message through their communication scroll.

After a while, Lin Xue and Song Yue made their way to the royal gardens where Mark was seen sitting alongside Sylvandria with a kid in the middle as all of them were having tea. From far away, they seemed like one happy family.

Lin Xue was slightly taken aback as she saw the scene. She couldn't help but whisper to her friend, enquiring her about the situation.

As Song Yue cleared the misunderstanding, Lin Xue nodded in understanding and went on to take the seat.

Jingwei was quick to hug Mark's arm as soon as she saw Song Yue, "Papa, the scary lady is here..."

Her gaze didn't appear friendly and both the ladies were stunned for a moment. "Scary Lady?" Lin Xue looked at her once again while frowning inwardly. As for her outer expression, it remained blank.

Meanwhile, Mark quickly acted by giving a knock to her head using great force enough to kill a normal human usually, "I already told you not to address her like that."

"Ouch, it hurts..." Jingwei grabbed her head, "But, she is very scary."

"Ssss"

Letting out a sharp hiss of displeasure, Mark threatened her, "call her scary once again and I will throw you in the..."

"Lu Zhen," The elven beauty interrupted him and placed her hand on Jingwei's head. Divine energy started flowing through her hand and entering her head, "Let me handle it."

Jingwei's eyes widened as she hugged Sylvandria's arm this time, "Thank you, Pretty miss. You were the best mama I could ever have." She then turned her head to Mark, "Papa, can I call her mama please?"

"No." Mark's reply was instant and his tone was firm.

Lin Xue leaned her head to Song Yue's ear and whispered, "Are you sure this little girl is not his illegitimate daughter?"

"Don't spout nonsense," Song Yue gave a nudge with her elbow.

However, Sylvandria's ears perked up and the words entered her ears. She immediately looked at the blank-faced Lin Xue and spoke, "According to Jingwei, Lu Zhen is her birth father's reincarnation."

"What?" "Huh?"

As Song Yue and Lin Xue were surprised by Sylvandria's statement, Mark brushed her off, "That's just bullshit. I remember my past life very well. That world is located far away from here."

"What did she say?" Lin Xue was even more shocked now. She couldn't just believe what she heard and looked at her friend, who looked way calmer as if she knew about it.

However, Sylvandria argued, "It doesn't have to be your past life. It could be one of your past lives."

"Nope. It doesn't make sense," Mark didn't agree with her statement. "Are you telling me that I was born in this world, and then, somehow, reincarnated in a faraway world, and then reborn in this same world once again? How ridiculous it sounds?"

"Not if some god purposely reincarnated here," Sylvandria seemed adamant about believing Jingwei's words.

Mark stared at her while narrowing his eyes and she folded her hands to the chest and calmly stared back at him. Both of them participated in the staring contest for a few seconds before the guy admitted defeat and let out a sigh, "Fine, believe whatever you want to believe, Grandma."

"You should also believe my words, my dear grandson," Sylvandria let out a mischievous grin as she reached out to his head, patting him, "Now, be a good boy and..."

"Hey, don't go too far," Mark swatted her arm in displeasure.

Sylvandria's expression returned to calmness in an instant. "tch, you are too boring," She remarked before observing the two ladies who were staring at them. One looked very uncomfortable while the other was hard to read, although not for her. "Uhh, Lu Zhen, it looked like your friends have questions to ask."

Mark stopped talking to the elf and looked at Lin Xue, "Sorry, we drifted away. Let's speak of your situation."

Lin Xue sorted out her thoughts and asked in her plain tone, "Do you know anything about the recent mass murder incident, back at Imperial City?"

Mark responded with a question, "Who do you think is the mastermind?"

Lin Xue looked down for a few seconds and then looked at him, replying, "The most likely suspect is the Crown prince."

pfft

Mark suddenly broke out into laughter, startling the ladies for a moment. As he continued to laugh, Lin Xue's mood turned sour, and she grabbed the edge of the table so tight that she might break it at any second. The observant Sylvandria intervened to stop his laughter.

After his laughter subsided, Mark continued, "A civil war erupted in the empire with two powerful major noble clans allied with the crown prince in hiding, creating the rebel force.

Surprisingly, within just a few days, the clan leaders, key elders from those noble families, and various former officials were assassinated right in the imperial city, despite it being under the protection of the entire northern division army." His demeanor eventually shifted to that of seriousness as he leaned forward, resting his elbows on top of it and fixing his gaze on the woman, "Now, who do you think is the likely suspect?"

"His Majesty?" Realization dawned upon Lin Xue instantly.

Chapter 526: Mark's generosity

Mark nodded, "The same bastard who sent men here in my absence and killed Song Yue's father." His words showed clear hatred for the enemy he intends to destroy.

"What do you mean? Why?" Lin Xue grew confused. She couldn't help but cast a sidelong glance at her best friend, "What sort of enmity does he have with you? And why haven't you done anything so far? You have this powerful general behind you."

This time, Song Yue answered instead of Mark, "He believed that he could not take back Western Yan as long as we supported it. You know Western Yan has a large unexplored ether deposit in its mountains. He probably wants to abduct me and use me to distract Lu Zhen's attention while taking it by force.

My father, who was guarding me in the disguise of Black Knight for months, sacrificed his life to protect me in his absence. I... If not for me... sigh..." Song Yue couldn't continue anymore and became silent, knowing that her fiancé would scold her if she blamed herself.

Mark continued by answering the second part of Lin Xue's question, "Killing him is a piece of cake for me. But, I don't want instability in Phoenix Empire. So, I sent someone to sever his arm, which in return probably made Shang Zexi gather the support to rise against the throne. So, in a way, I'm indeed responsible for the death of your parents.

I'm really sorry but the chain of reactions that I started is no longer under my control." He paused for a moment and took a good look at the girl's expression.

Naturally, he couldn't read her face. Hence, his eyes wandered to other places to read her body language.

As her body shivered for a couple of seconds before becoming calm very quickly, Mark, "What can I do right now is help you raise your cultivation level, removing the side effects of the technique you were cultivating, and giving you the opportunity to take the revenge with your own hands. The rest is up to you to decide."

After several seconds of silence, Lin Xue opened her mouth, "Just help me to make a breakthrough to seven-circle as fast as possible. That's all I need."

"Hmm..." Mark made it look like he was thinking this time. But, when he opened his mouth, it threw everyone into shock, "I will ask Fu Sheng to take you in as his disciple. And when you reach the peak stage of the legendary realm, I will turn you into a Supreme Being with a permanent augmentation pill."

"Huh?" Lin Xue stared at him. She clearly doesn't believe him.

Song Yue reacted by blurting out, "but, that pill can be sold for 500 million gold coins."

"Eh?" Lin Xue couldn't help but turn her head to look at her friend.

It was then a burst of divine energy erupted from Sylvandria's palms and turned the table into dust, startling the others. "I thought you have only one?" There was a clear shock displayed on her face.

Mark then took out a bunch of various advanced-grade stat pills from inventory and showed them in his palm, "I have many of them actually."

Lin Xue: "..."

Song Yue: "..."

"Wah, so much power is hiding in them." Jingwei jumped in excitement, "Papa is the best."

"Just who in the hell are you?" Sylvandria's eyes widened.

Stat pills are originally created by the system to increase Mark's specific stat. however, the bodies of regular cultivators work differently.

Just after consuming such stat pill, they would absorb huge amounts of natural energy from the surroundings and refine it automatically into ether energy, thereby, increasing their cultivation.

However, the pill's full effect can only be enjoyed by someone with a compatible spirit path.

For example, a spirit warrior of the fighter path cannot increase his cultivation level by ingesting an intelligence stat pill.

For the strength pill, the compatible spirit path is a Melee-based path that uses physical strength or tools to take out their enemies in close combat. Those with incompatible paths only have their bone density get a slight increase.

For the intelligence pill, the compatible spirit path is Mage, Summoner, Archer, and their respective advanced paths that use ether energy/natural energy to unleash spells. The spirit warriors with incompatible paths only have their minds getting sharper.

For the Defense pill, the only compatible spirit path is Fighter, for some reason. As for incompatible paths, their skin becomes tougher.

For the Agility pill, the compatible spirit path is Assassin and its advanced paths. The incompatible paths only have their peak speed increased.

As for Vitality and Resistance pills, they work for every spirit path, but unfortunately, they don't increase cultivation levels. The vitality pill only increases one's lifespan and the Resistance pill only increases one's immunity against buffs and curses.

Since Mark never intended to sell them before, he doesn't care about them before. After witnessing how people could spend money more than the entire Shang Dynasty's wealth on the items he possessed, he decided to use them to his advantage.

However, Lin Xue is Song Yue's best friend and Allen's love interest. He intended to support her to the end. As for her marriage with Shang Wei, there's no way he would let it happen, at least until Allen returns.

Lin Xue was aware that what Mark asking her was next to impossible. For her own life, she learned that entering the 7-circle realm itself is something only incredibly talented can do. They get respect everywhere in the world.

But, Mark was asking her to reach the peak stage of the legendary realm to take that pill and become a supreme being.

Lin Xue was skeptical about whether Mark really intended to give that treasure to her. Still, she readily stood up on her feet and cupped her fists with a bow, expressing her thanks as becoming a disciple of a demigod is something she can only achieve in a dream.

On the other hand, Sylvandria couldn't avert her gaze from the stat pills in Mark's hand. She couldn't help but think of the method taught by the zheng, to reach the demigod realm and rewrite her own fate.

As for Song Yue, she wasn't a fighter anyways and didn't hold any greed for power. She was merely shocked by the fact that Mark intended to gift such a thing to Lin Xue. For a guy who loves money very much and always looks for profits even while fulfilling revenge, his generosity obviously made her feel like something was amiss.

Chapter 527: Several weeks later

Several passed away in the blink of an eye.

Lin Xue joined the Gold Dragon division and started training with the rest of the soldiers who were stuck in the same realm as her.

She was currently focused on polishing her existing techniques and Fu Sheng is happy to mentor her upon witnessing her lightning mode, which doesn't use her ether energy. Instead, her pure attribute energy is going to get consumed alongside her rapid depletion of stamina.

As a result, using such a technique is extremely taxing on one's body and she plans on improving her mastery to increase her limit.

Meanwhile, the situation at Phoenix Empire started getting worse day after day. Shang Jun's act of planned assassination of the noble clan leaders and elders while throwing the blame on the Rebel Forces enraged him. He hit back by destroying a couple of granaries in the imperial city, only to realize that the public sentiment on Rebel Forces turned worse.

However, Mark doesn't care about their feelings and neither does Shang Zexi. Hence, he continued to provide millions of gold coins as war funds to the former crown prince, who used it to increase his army's strength, hire adventurers, and eventually lure more experts from Shang Jun's side.

The situation has escalated to the extent that even some of the sects were pulled into this civil war. Assassination attempts were being made from Shang Jun, but for some reason, none succeeded in killing Shang Zexi or the leaders of the Yuan and Zhao clans as they moved to Northern Yuan province's headquarters. Every assassin who stepped into the Yuan Clan's territory mysteriously ended up dead.

Shang Jun was constantly on edge despite fame gaining among the commoners as he continued to compensate the people who lost their lives or fortune, which resulted in the rapid depletion of the treasury.

His governance gained stability amidst troubled times but his happiness was lost. Cashing on the opportunity, Mark instructed Shang Zexi to buy the farmers to cooperate in destroying their own fields for money and then later claim compensation from the district magistrates. This way, The Phoenix Rebels won, and the farmers also won, but Shang Jun ended up losing money.

Meanwhile, without Shang Zexi's knowledge, the Eastern Sun's King, on Mark's instructions, came forth to give a high-interest loan to Shang Jun in exchange for keeping the semi-divine weapons from the treasury as a mortgage.

For the past couple of months, Mark constantly pushed Shang Jun little by little to draw out his backing. After all, from an assassin successfully captured by one of Fu Sheng's two lieutenants with 8-circle realm cultivation, Mark found out his backing.

It is the Nine Hell Pavilion, a sect from the Fire and Ice plane of existence. According to Fu Sheng, they weren't powerful and at best considered a tier-3 sect, with tier-6 being considered the lowest and tier-1 considered the highest.

While they were no match for a tier-1 power, like the Ancient Lan sect, their leader is still a Saint Realm expert who could send an immortal or a demigod to help out Shang Jun, if he is an important figure in their sect.

In fact, Mark also had no idea whether Shang Jun himself belonged to any sect as he didn't have a chance to meet the young emperor and hence, couldn't get to scan him for the details.

Seeing that Shang Jun isn't making any big move, Mark pushed him further by sending an instruction to the Gold Dragon division's two lieutenants, one was dispatched to the Qian province and the other was dispatched to the Jin Province, killing the acting commanders as well as the elite soldiers and freeing up Qian and Jin families.

It's been a week since the war completely tipped in Shang Zexi's favor and apart from Sui province, the entire Empire fell into the hands of the Rebel Forces. The Western and Eastern divisions have lost their generals, acting commander, and lieutenants, forcing the army to either return to the capital city or scatter.

Yet, Shang Jun still focused on keeping the imperial city under control, with the help of the Northern division. Expert assassins were lurking in the shadows of the palace, constantly protecting him from the shadows

Intending to end the battle for good, Mark passed his final set of instructions to Shang Zexi and his subordinates.

On the 73rd day of the formation of the Phoenix Rebel Force, with two 8-circle realm experts leading an elite army of at least thousand in number, full of 5-circle and 6-circle experts hired from various sects, guilds, and freelancers, half of the northern division was deployed in the outskirts area where the enemy army is coming.

A direct war erupted between both forces, leading to hundreds of casualties from the Rebel Forces and thousands of casualties from the imperial forces.

As the final General of the Army fell, the Phoenix Rebel force made their way into the capital city.

The citizens were gripped in fear, not getting out of their houses as per the order from their Emperor.

The remaining soldiers deployed there were ordered not to engage in battle and hence, they gave way to 653 spirit warriors as they made their way to the imperial grounds, where Shang Jun was waiting for them, alongside Bai Xun who couldn't abandon his side due to his loyalty to the throne.

The acting commander of the Rebel forces, Lt. Zhou Ming addressed the Emperor, "You have lost, Emperor Shang. Destroy your cultivation with your own hands and surrender peacefully. You will still be granted a life but with limited freedom for as long as you live. Resist and you will die."

Pfft "Hahaha"

Shang Jun suddenly burst into laughter upon hearing those words from the enemy, startling the others. "Sorry, I always find it funny when I hear death threats. I can resurrect, you know."

In response, Lt. Zhou nodded as if he agreed with him, "I'm aware of the abilities of the Phoenix Bloodline. The very first bloodline skill itself is resurrection, which works one hundred percent every time as long as your death isn't of either natural cause or suicide.

However, you have a price to pay for it. Every time you resurrect, your cultivation drops according to your mastery. And it is also not an instant resurrection. You should have someone to protect your corpse for seven days before you resurrect. So, the users usually build a resurrection altar somewhere in secret and have a teleportation seal on their body.

The moment you die, the seal will activate and your corpse will be transported far away and only a barrier of demigod level can stop this spatial magic.

Since I know all of this, I know the way to stop it too. It is actually quite simple too."

"Oh, what do you plan on doing?" Shang Jun didn't show panic and acted calmly for some reason. He neither showed fear nor did he show any curiosity. He merely conversed with the enemy's acting commander.

With his long white hair fluttered with a blow of wind, Lt. Zhou brandished his spear like a whip as he answered, "I can't stop your body from teleporting away but I can seal away your soul with Soul Trapping Formation."

Chapter 528: Shang Jun's act of mass genocide

Shang Jun furrowed his brows for a moment before becoming calm once again. "Then, you can proceed with whatever formation you have. I won't be admitting defeat."

"Fine, it is your wish..."

Meanwhile, Steve, Fu Sheng, and even the zheng were watching the scene from the shadows, just in case an unexpected immortal or a demigod came to save Shang Jun and attack the soldiers. It was also the final trap laid by Mark.

If no one comes, the war will be over. If someone will come, then, these three would be enough to sort out the situation.

With them keeping an eye on the scene, Mark was enjoying royal delicacies with Song Yue and others in the Western Moon kingdom.

He had eaten those dishes quite often, but today, they tasted better than ever.

Almost 3 months of patience and careful planning without getting suspected as the mastermind is finally coming to an end at the Phoenix Empire. He could see himself finally moving on from the hatred that was deeply rooted in his heart because of an injustice to Lu Zhen.

While he is in the middle of eating, a scroll made of energy suddenly appears in front of his eyes, taking everyone by surprise.

"It's an emergency message," commented the King.

Mark, however, widened his mouth to give out a smile, "It is from Steve. Nothing to worry. I guess he must have a good piece of..."

The scroll opened and letters appeared on it. Mark's face froze in an instant. His hands shivered and his eyes fluttered for a moment.

Everyone turned tense as they saw his expression.

"What happened?" As Song Yue grabbed his shivered arm, Mark gritted his teeth, "that bastard... Shang Jun... He... He... I need to live right now."

Without giving any sort of explanation, Mark opened a portal right in front of everyone and walked into it, disappearing from their sight.

Half a minute ago, at the imperial city of Phoenix Empire;

As soon as Lt. Zhou made his move by clashing his spear with Bai Xun's fist, eight spiky pillars, each at least a hundred meters long, erupted from the ground before getting connected to each other by a wall of golden energy and encompassing the entire city of 324 sq. km of area.

Even his own allies were shocked by this move. Not even Bai Xun expected it. His battle with Lt. Zhou was momentarily stopped and they stared at the golden ceiling.

"What technique is this?" Lt. Wang, the other 8-circle realm warrior exclaimed. "It's a trap."

Shang Jun's words then echoed in the surroundings, "I can't commit suicide to escape but that doesn't mean I can't order my friends to kill me. Since I'm going to die anyways, I will leave nothing behind for that dear cousin of mine to rule. You have like 13 more seconds to live."

"Your Majesty..." Bai Xun's voice roared like a clap of thunder as the high-quality semi-divine grade bow appeared in his hands, almost making the warriors trapped shiver. It was probably the first time he had ever been enraged by the Emperor's actions. "You actually planned on committing such a crime against humanity. Release it right now."

Shang Jun cast a side-long glance at the Supreme Commander with a calm expression, "Sorry but the die has been cast. There is no stopping what's to come."

"You..." He conjured an energy arrow using all of his ether energy between his fingertips and aimed at the ceiling. However, just as he drew it back, strange energy was released from the pillars.

"This..." Steve, who was watching it, tried to make his move.

However, his hand was grabbed by the zheng before creating a barrier over the three of them. Fu Sheng wanted to go ahead and warn his subordinates but the attack from this ancient formation laid beforehand was faster than what Shang Jun even claimed earlier.

In just a matter of seconds, demigod-level energy was released by the pillars, turning everything into dust.

Apart from Steve, Fu Sheng, and the zheng, everything was disintegrated into dust.

As Mark walked out of the portal, he found himself on flat ground.

There are no buildings, no palace, no trees, no people, and not even the lakes. The entire imperial city transformed into a flat barren land.

"System, where am I?" He couldn't help but ask.

*Ding! Imperial City, Phoenix Empire.

"So, Steve was telling the truth? That darned motherfuc*er..." He could only curse out loud in frustration, and momentarily direct his intense hatred against the system. "You heartless parasite, you didn't even give me any notification or quest or anything when such a big thing happened here. Millions of people vanished out of thin air..."

*Ding! You have already been warned, Host. Don't blame the system for your incompetence.

"You warned me? When?" he roared in his head.

*Ding! 37 days ago

After sending the reply, the system further opened the Quest panel on its own to show the emergency quest that was modified, six weeks ago.

Emergency Quest: Stop the Undertaking

Description: The Church of Doom is planning to sacrifice 10 million lives and use their souls to resurrect their founder. Multiple formations were launched all over the Vermillion Bird continent. Stop the ritual by killing the current Supreme Pontiff before the resurrection happens.

Sacrifices so far: 9,495,677

Estimate time limit: 12 days

Reward: Battle Android (Rank-9)

"Hmm?" Mark instantly frowned as he looked at the details, which changed a lot from the original quest that supposedly targeted Western Moon, and the reward of Rank-7 Android was promised.

"I believe the reward has been changed from what I remember," Mark responded with a comment. He saw the modified quest a few weeks ago too but the reward wasn't changed. Hence, he didn't try to complete the quest and focused on the civil war.

The system gave its reasoning for that too.

*Ding! The Supreme Pontiff's strength has increased to the true demigod realm in the meantime (equivalent to 10.5 stats). Hence, the upgrade in reward.

"Then, why didn't you inform me?" As Mark blamed the system once again, the latter sent a stark reply.

*Ding! If not for the fact that the Host ignored the mission because of the reward that the host deemed not worth enough, millions of lives wouldn't have been lost. Emergency Quests are termed Emergency Quests because they need to be completed as soon as possible.

Mark couldn't help but stay silent as he was scolded by the system for being lazy and greedy for putting rewards above the lives of people.

Deep inside, he also knew that while he was angry that so many lives vanished in an instant due to his negligence, he was also deeply disappointed that his plans had gone awry. There's also the fact that his store was gone in the incident.

Now, unless he catches Shang Jun, he can never reveal his connection to this civil war.

In the end, he only let out a long sigh, "Fine, it's my mistake. Atleast, help me find that bastard."

The system obliged his request right away. For the first time, the system created a quest after Mark asked it.

*Ding! Emergency Quest has been triggered.

Quest: Capture Shang Jun

Description: Shang Jun has committed a crime against humanity, killing millions of innocents without any motive or reasoning. Capture Shang Jun and punish him for his sins with the Divine Throne.

Reward: Memory Erasure Card (One time use).

"Memory Erasure card?" Mark didn't expect there to be a reward for it too.

Chapter 529: Lin Xue kills Shang Jun

*Ding! The memory erasure card can remove any memory of your act from the entire world. No one below the Demigod realm will ever remember it.

"Well, unfortunately, this is of no use to me." As Mark let out a deep sigh, he spotted tiny figures in the sky that were approaching him.

At first, he was alerted about the presence of enemies but as they came closer, he realized that they were his people who were stationed in the Imperial City and the ones that sent him the message.

However, he didn't stay there to have a conversation with them.

With an excuse of leaving for an urgent task, Mark proceeded to accept the quest, as well as accepting the follow-up teleporting to the quest location.

He disappeared from their eyes and reappeared in what seemed like a temple. There's a giant statue of a warrior with a sword vertically pointing its blade to the floor.

Before him, there was a stone slab where Shang Jun was lying on his back. It was covered by an energy barrier.

*Ding! You entered the Tower of Doom.

*Ding! You are not a resident of the Tower of Doom. You are afflicted with the Doom curse.

*Ding! You are at the altar where the effect of the curse is at its highest. Your lifespan will reduce at a rate of 1 year per minute.

*Ding! You received a temporary reduction of stats (-5%).

*Ding! Please maximize your resistance stat for resisting the curses further.

As notifications continuously rang inside his head, Mark stopped wondering about his surroundings and focused on the stone slab.

"Multiple Lightning Clones, Activate."

*Ding! State the number

"2"

Two lightning clones mirroring his silhouette but have the appearance of energy beings appeared beside him.

Mark pointed his finger at the stone slab, "Alpha clone, go and bring him to me. Beta clone, stay here."

As one lightning clone stayed beside him in order to protect him from any unexpected danger, the other clone charged ahead and gave a punch to the energy barrier with its demigod-level strength.

A heavy crack formed on the barrier before the clone gave another punch. The barrier crumbled in an instant, letting the clone grab the corpse and return to its master.

Since it is still a corpse, Mark was able to place it in the inventory.

Once the target was secured, he didn't stay there to confront the Church of Doom and instead, opened up a portal to return to the Western Moon kingdom's Lunaris City.

After informing Fu Sheng and the others to return, Mark went to the palace and explained everything to the others in detail.

Lin Xue was devastated upon learning the news.

During the civil war, Mark tried his best to evacuate members of the Song clan from the Imperial City. Some settled down in Lunaris City, some settled down in towns and cities, while the prideful ones that don't want to leave their home stayed there.

However, the Lin Clan didn't get such a privilege. Unlike Song Yue, Lin Xue never asked Mark to help the rest of her family members and he turned a blind eye to their situation as he had nothing to do with them in the first place.

As Lin Xue's emotions had yet to return, no one could understand what she was feeling at that moment. Even Song Yue could only understand with a nod as Lin Xue went into closed-door cultivation in the name of seeking some time alone.

No one knows why she suddenly tried pushing her cultivation, but she went on absorbing ether crystals at a rapid pace while using her ancestral cultivation technique. With her inner emotions running wild when they were getting suppressed by the cultivation technique, her cultivation speed increased multiple times.

Three days later, she consumed all of her ether crystals and successfully broke through the seven-circle realm but didn't stop there. She continued her cultivation by absorbing the natural energy and feeding it to her lightning element, refining it again and again.

Eight more days later, the sparks of lightning dancing on her body turned red and the transformation was so violent that her own element took over her body, forcing her to go into berserk mode, losing control of her power and mind.

Fortunately, she was stopped by Fu Sheng in time and woke up a day later.

When she woke up, she learned the news about Shang Jun and she immediately rushed to the City Center where the young man, looked all haggard and stripped off his powers, tied to a pole. His eyes looked lifeless as if he had given up on living. Meanwhile, a large crowd gathered around as usual.

Healers formed a formation around him, constantly healing his injuries as he was being tied to a pole and was being hit by a whip with sharp spikes. Mark was seen standing before him and silently watching the scene. His gaze was calm.

As she slowly made her way to him, Mark glanced to the side and spotted her. He raised his hand. The guards stopped hitting him.

He spoke, "As I have promised, your perpetrator is here. I have kept him alive for you without passing my judgment."

As Lin Xue's gaze shifted to the pathetic-looking figure, Mark let out a sigh, "Song Yue forgave him and asked me to give him a quick death for he had suffered long enough. But, you weren't awake. So, we had to keep this punishment going for the past six days. Now that you are here, he is yours."

Lin Xue raised her hand without waiting much longer. She didn't realize it before but her face no longer looked blank as before.

Her usual cold demeanor is back on her as she summoned something that resembles a lightning bolt in her hand. Seeing it, the lifeless face of Shang Jun suddenly developed a smirk on it.

Irrked by his ridicule, she went on piercing his chest, not only ending his life in an instant but also turning him into ashes.

She immediately collapsed onto her knees, letting out all of her frustrated feelings in the form of a loud roar to the sky and shedding a stream of tears for the first, in weeks.

*Ding! The target has died without facing judgment from the Divine throne. You failed the Quest.

"Absorb," Mark muttered under his breath, absorbing his soul into the Orb of Bael while closing down the notification window.

After he was done with the absorption, he looked down at his friend and patted her back a few times, "I destroyed his soul. He will neither resurrect nor ever reincarnate, ceasing to exist for eternity."

She raised her head to look into her eyes and responded in a hushed tone, "Thank you."

"Now, let's return home. You have a bit to catch up on what happened during the past week."

As the crowd dispersed and the ashes of Shang Jun dissipated by the wind, Lin Xue returned to the palace, only to encounter a surprising guest right at the entrance.

"Brother Lu, you have returned. Father ordered me to fetch you. I was just about to leave. Oh, Lady Lin, it's been a while." An acquaintance of the imperial family with whom she had almost negligible contact appeared in front of her. As the young prince greeted Lin Xue and Mark, the latter's facial expression turned stiff, "Prince Shang, I know what he wants to say. But, it is a done deal."

He cannot stop it. Since he retired voluntarily and went on for a long vacation, he shouldn't interfere in the affairs of the Empire."

"Well..." The fourth prince, Shang Bo, could only stay silent as he internally agreed with Mark's decision while couldn't voice his opinion aloud to his father. "Still, it won't look good for him if you don't meet him. Who knows, it could be for another matter."

"What else we can talk about?" Mark argued a bit before letting out a sigh, "Fine, he is a guest at my home. I can't show inhospitality. Where is he?"

"He is with King Shen"

"Okay, I'll go and meet him. Can you escort Ms. Lin to my place?"

"That's not a problem."

As Mark left them, Lin Xue displayed her curiosity. "Uhh, what happened? Is something wrong?" She asked him as they walked together.

Chapter 530: Mark and Shang Bo

Shang Bo explained, "After the destruction of the imperial city, a lot of changes in the Empire. The Shang Dynasty is going to be portioned into two empires, the Northern Phoenix Empire is going to be ruled by the Third Brother and the Southern Phoenix Empire is going to be ruled by the Eldest Brother.

Brother Lu thinks that this will ensure stability in the region while Father thinks that it could actually generate hatred within his own family for generations. But, he was helpless as Eldest Brother already promised Brother Lu to give a portion of his empire after he gets the throne. Not to mention, in this current situation, we need his help more than ever."

"Hmm, I see..." Li Xue nodded in understanding before something suddenly clicked in her head. "By the way, how did you escape alive? I thought everyone stuck in the imperial city died."

Shang Bo gave a meaningful smile, "Did you forget who I am? Our NET has a vast network enough to find out the formation lay upon the Imperial City. I restrained caution just in case and escaped with my mother." He then followed up with a sigh of disappointment, "If only we knew what it could do, we would have been able to save many more. That bastard is evil to the core.

Since you returned with Brother Lu, I guess you must have put an end to him."

Lin Xue nodded once again.

For a while, there was silence between them as they weren't acquainted enough to talk about other things, but eventually, Shang Bo took the initiative to prolong their conversation by bringing up his other brother.

"Ms. Lin, may I ask if you are really going to marry my third brother?"

"Hmm?" Lin Xue halted her footsteps at once and abruptly turned her head with a frown, "why?"

"Ah, don't get me wrong." Shang Bo averted his gaze, feeling a bit shy as he explained, "According to what I have learned from the rumors, you were in love with Brother Lu's servant from the foreign realm named Allen, who mysteriously disappeared months ago alongside his sister Alina.

But, now, you agreed to marry my brother, who was chasing you for years. Brother Lu who is known to treat his servants the same as his siblings, on the other hand, instead of treating you harshly, first brought you from the imperial city, helped you take your revenge, and even went as far as giving the third brother a portion of the empire that Eldest Brother gave it to him.

Something just doesn't fit in this scenario, unless..."

At once, memories of Allen appeared in Lin Xue's head and her heartbeat spiked up. To hide her embarrassment, she furrowed her brows in displeasure and confronted the fourth prince, who didn't even finish his sentence, "Please watch out what you were about to imply, Your Highness."

Shang Bo scratched his cheek and hesitatingly spoke, "Well... I only have like half of the information. So, I couldn't help but form a theory. Either he formed a deal with a third brother to release you from the promise or he intends to control the Northern Phoenix Empire through you. The south is going to be in his control anyway as Eldest Brother wouldn't leave his side.

With the entire phoenix empire, Western Moon, Western Yan, and Eastern Sun on his side, almost half of the continent will be his puppet. If that is the case, then, I truly admire him."

When Lin Xue saw his face, she thought that the prince really looked like the guy who idolized someone.

With various good as well as disturbing thoughts filled in her head, she couldn't speak on the matter and kept her silence.

Meanwhile, Mark went to the King's study room to meet his biological father and the future father-in-law.

After greeting them with a light bow, he took a seat before them.

As the servant came forward and served him the wine, Mark directly went to the matter, "Prince Shang Bo informed me that you want to talk to me. What is it, Emperor Shang?"

Shang Fu, who looked as vibrant as ever for some reason, spoke with a smile on his face, "Don't worry. I won't talk to you about the partition. I called you here to talk to you about your marriage."

"Marriage?" Mark was slightly taken aback. Since when was this fellow interested in his marriage? Did that troubling mother of his urge him? He wondered. "What is it?" he asked after calming his mind.

Shang Fu answered, "Well, I recently learned that Xiao Wei is going to marry Lin Wuying's daughter. King Shen here is also telling me that you were looking for a proper time and date. So, I'm wondering why not hold a joint wedding?"

"Eh? Joint wedding?" Mark was taken aback once again.

King Shen Niu voiced his opinion this time, "Xiao Zhen, right now, the Phoenix Empire is in a state of turmoil. Millions of people are living in fear and panic. This even spread to our kingdom. Adding on top of that, the empire is going to be partitioned. So, we thought it is best to ease up the worries with celebration.

Holding a joint wedding will not only elevate everyone's mood but also send a strong warning to the foreign powers to keep their gaze away from the southern region of the Vermillion bird continent."

"Hmm..." Mark made a face like he was thinking about it deeply, but in reality, he wasn't. After all, there is still time till the completion of Allen's metamorphosis. Until then, he won't let Lin Xue marry anyone, much less Shang Wei. Not to mention, he swore not to start a new life until his revenge was completed.

Due to Shang Jun's greater evil act, he couldn't take credit for ruining the Shang Dynasty. He wanted to hurt Shang Fu with his own acts and that is only how he could truly have his heart at peace.

Hence, this isn't the time for marriage. But, how should he convince King Shen Niu? That is a big question.

It has been a while since he moved to Lunaris City and he has yet to be engaged to Shen Ling. Naturally, Shen Niu would worry about his intentions.

Adding on top of that, he also has to ease up Song Yue's worries. His new plan hasn't been shared with her yet and she might convince him that Shang Dynasty has already suffered enough. Knowing himself, Mark was confident that he had like 80% chance of listening to Song Yue's request. He didn't want that.

After sorting out his thoughts in a minute of silence, Mark opened his mouth, "Sister Lin is at a crucial stage of her cultivation. I think marrying her to the third Prince isn't a good thing at the moment. Not to mention, the third prince is going to be the emperor of the northern Phoenix. His attention should be on bringing stability to the region.

If he were to marry, his attention would be split and people might think that they were in dire status and their emperor is happily enjoying his wedding."

After taking Shang Fu by surprise, Mark shifted his gaze to Shen Niu, "I understand that you are worried but this isn't really the right time for my marriage too. Shang Jun was working with the Church of Doom. Now that I went under their noses and abducted his corpse, their target will be set on me. Announcing marriage right now is like inviting trouble to us.

Do you wish to risk the future of the kingdom for the sake of easing up the unnecessary worries of our citizens?"