

Seller 641

Chapter 641: Tournament finals: Lan Xia vs Mark (part-1)

The following day;

The entire sect gathered in the grand coliseum, and their excitement was obvious. This was the battle they had been waiting for.

On one side is Lan Xia, one with a princess title and one of the two heiresses of the Ancient Lan clan. She is also the pride of the sect. Whether it is her grace, her battle techniques, or her ice element, everyone just feels proud of her. She is like a goddess of the clan.

However, on the other hand, it is Mark/Lan Zhen, the rising star of the Clan, the great-grandson of the sect leader/clan head, Lan Yujin. His fame is completely the opposite of hers.

On the first day he arrived, he offended his own clan elders. And then in the first week, he charmed Lan Xia with some tricks, made her follow him like a puppy. Then, in the tournament, he either used simple fists and kicks or this weird artifact, the anti-matter gun, to make it to the finals. He offended the proctor, he offended an inner sect disciple like Lan Wenshua, and He offended the prince of the empire. Most importantly, he is cruel, torturing those two in front of many eyes. He is basically a devil.

So, for the majority of the spectators, this is a battle between the goddess and the devil.

The moment he entered the arena, the boos were already filled all over. He didn't know who started it but the boos aren't coming from any certain section of the audience. It was like the entire sect was standing against him. Of course, among them, there were a few supporters who liked his guts, rebellious attitude, and found his defiance cooler.

Anyways, the two finalists are here in the arena, covered by a clear barrier so that no attacks accidentally affect the spectators.

Mark stood on one side of the arena, maintaining a calm expression. Opposite him, Lan Xia exuded an icy confidence with her aura crackling with power. She seemed emotionless, but those with high-ranking cultivation and super eyesight could see that Lan Xia seemed a bit anxious.

The sunlight caught the edge of her blade as she drew it, her stance poised and lethal.

The sect master, Lan Yujin, sat in the highest seat, watching with an unreadable expression. Elders and disciples alike held their breath.

The Proctor was changed for the final battle. Elder Yuxuan, the other clan heiress and the god realm expert herself, also a grand elder of the sect, volunteered for this position.

Began

The battle began with her voice reverberating all over the arena.

Lan Xia struck first, vanishing in a blur.

She flew high into the sky while her fingers formed a seal. Dozens of ice lances materialized in the air, and she stopped around 150 meters high from the ground.

Meanwhile, Mark calmly raised his hand. With a flick of his wrist, he summoned his Anti-matter gun, his soul weapon.

With a motion of her hand, she shot the ice lances at him, raining them down all at once. Without looking at the result, once she fired, she proceeded with her next attack already, not intending to give him a chance to counterattack.

Looking at the ice lances, Mark smiled, "Well, that's a mistake. One or a hundred, it wouldn't matter, because all of that is made of matter."

Bang

He clicked on the trigger, shooting an anti-matter bullet.

The moment the bullet struck one of the lances, the anti-matter energy was released and came into contact with the matter. It exploded, releasing its energy widely. The chain reaction caused all of those ice lances to explode into energy.

However, when they were exploded, the mass of energy didn't dissipate. Shockingly, it transformed into a mist cloud.

"Go." Then a word was heard above the mist cloud.

The mist cloud was pushed to the ground and expanded all over the field, minimizing Mark's naked vision.

Mark heightened his vision, scanning his surroundings with his senses. He didn't take Ark's help to find her location. He wanted to do it on his own.

But he only found her when Lan Xia was already behind him with her sword aiming for his back.

Mark twisted at the last second, blocking her blade with his gun. Sparks flew as they clashed, their weapons locked for a breathless moment before they separated.

She smirked. "You are fast."

"No, you are too slow," Mark replied with a shrug. "I have a high opinion of you. Don't disappoint me and fight me at your full strength, Sister Xia."

Lan Xia's smirk deepened by his comment. "Alright, I will stop holding back. Get ready."

In an instant, a monstrous surge of energy erupted from her body. The ground beneath her shattered as her Immortal realm cultivation was fully unleashed.

She then shot forward, several times faster than sound, closing the gap between them in an instant. She momentarily freed her sword, which floated in the air, while she threw her fist at his face. Mark, taken aback by her movement, crossed his arms and barely blocked. "There are two ways to deal with you, Lan Zhen. One, from a far distance, and two, close combat."

She kept on throwing high-speed punches while Mark tried his best to only back up. However, for every exchange, Mark was being pushed back. His arms are getting bruised, and pain is spreading all across his body.

"Ark, what's happening? I shouldn't feel pain at this level of attack. I had a 99% Damage reduction spell on me." He became confused.

*Ding! Master, the passive skill is being restricted by the aura in the mist.

The AI replied to him. Mark realized now why. It is her bloodline's power. "Hmpf, no wonder you spread this mist all over the arena, Sister Xia. Its main reason is not for blinding my vision, after all." Mark commented, a smile creeping to his lips as he was impressed by her idea.

Continuing to press her assault with rapid punches, she replied with a smirk. "Well, you figured it out. My Frost Dragon bloodline has the power to restrict the bloodlines of others. But that also means I cannot use my bloodline powers either. So, we can only use the power of artifacts and sect cultivation techniques."

"Bloodline restriction?"

Chapter 642: Tournament Finals: Lan Xia vs Mark (part-2)

"Bloodline restriction?" Mark didn't recognize this one. He only thought about his passive skill not being triggered. Now, after hearing out words, he reached out to the AI. "Ark, display the skills that can be used right now."

*Ding! Affirmed Master.

A holographic window opened before his eyes, displaying his skills. To his surprise, all normal skills were grayed out, active, and both passive. "Shit, This means I cannot use gravity dome or a lightning clone or anything. With even my recovery rate passive skill also affected, I also need to worry about the Ether Energy Points I consume. Hmm... but at the same time, unlike what she claimed, none of my bloodline skills are

affected. Maybe it is because my bloodline is the Primeval, a higher one than even her Frost Dragon King? Well, alright, since she is ice, let's fight with fire instead."

At the same time, Lan Xia's eyes gleamed as she prepared the finishing blow, after giving a powerful punch that blasted him for a few meters. She leaped high, caught her sword while spinning midair. Her Qi overflowed the icy sword, and she unleashed one of the three ultimate techniques of the Lan Clan. "FrostFang Requiem."

She raised the sword and swung the sword. A beam of frozen ice launched from the sword, going straight to Mark, who was still there.

Just as it was about to strike him, something changed. She saw a ball of flames, burning brighter and brighter.

The ball of flames flew past the mist into the sky.

Screech

A powerful screech resonated all over the sky.

The elders got up from their seats as they watched the surroundings heat up in temperature. -12 to -15 degrees Celsius was the regular temperature in the Lan Sect. But right now, as if the surroundings were going

through a global warming, it rose by atleast twenty to three degrees Celsius as soon as the ball of flames was up there like a mini sun.

Soon, the ball of flames transformed. Wings were the first to erupt, then the claws, and then the rest of the body.

The coliseum was no longer filled with cheers or murmurs. Only stunned silence as a majestic phoenix bathing in flames, the enemy of the Lan Clan, was seen in the sky, looking down at them, at Lan Xia.

Lan Xia flew into the sky and floated before the Phoenix. A surprise was seen on her face.

Lan Yujin, the sect master, stood up from his seat. The elders were pale. Even the most powerful warriors present were in shock.

"A phoenix?" an elder whispered.

"So, it is true after all. Lan Zhen has the bloodline of the enemy..." another murmured.

"Wait a second. If he can transform, doesn't that mean he is the inheritor of the phoenix?" Said one.

"Yes, he is an enemy."

"He doesn't deserve to stay in the Lan Clan or the Lan Sect."

"Yes, he should be kicked out"

"Lady Xia, kill him"

"Kill him"

"Kill him"

"Kill him"

In just a matter of seconds, hundreds roared in the arena, asking Lan Xia to kill Mark, taking him as the enemy outrightly because of his transformation.

Flapping its wings, Mark, in his Immortal Phoenix form, with his strength rose to rank-11 temporarily, stared at Lan Xia. "You might be able to suppress bloodlines with your mist, Sister Xia. But, how did you forget that not even the Blizzard Pegasus is capable of suppressing the Immortal Phoenix? Why do you think your Frost Dragon King could?" Mark still maintained his human speech, despite being in beast form. He spoke, ignoring the crowd down below.

Lan Xia, for the first time, looked shaken. "An inheritor of the Immortal Phoenix?"

Her breath caught in her throat as she saw the beast form of Mark.

She hovered in the air, sword trembling in her grip.

"Oraaa..."

With a roar, Lan Xia dove forward, her blade glowing with condensed frost energy once again.

The temperature around her dropped sharply again, trying desperately to balance out the blazing heat above. Ice formed trails behind her, cracking and reforming, as she prepared to clash head-on with Mark.

But Mark didn't dodge or move aside. He spread his wings and flapped once.

The gust of flame released by his wings was like a tidal wave of molten gold. It surged forward swiftly, engulfing Lan Xia's strike mid-air.

Whatever the frost energy she was about to release from her sword was melted away like sugar under boiling water. As the flames of heat made her extremely uncomfortable, Mark took this opportunity to attack her. Moreover, he also knew that he could only keep this form for 100 seconds, and after that, even his own ether reserves would hit zero. Luckily, during this formation, he can use all bloodline skills of the specific beast without bearing any cost.

And he chose the fourth skill right away, intending to finish it with one shot.

"Celestial Flare."

A pillar of fire rained down from above, smashing into her position before she could recover. It didn't pierce her, but instead it wrapped her, forcing her to use all of her Qi to protect herself.

She gritted her teeth, her aura holding out for only a few seconds before cracking like brittle ice.

And then...

BOOM!

She was sent flying downward, smashing into the center of the coliseum arena, leaving a smoldering crater.

The fire receded slightly, just enough to let the spectators breathe again.

Everyone stared at the impact zone with their hearts pounding.

Mark dismissed his form, transforming back into human form, and he landed slowly before Lan Xia's unconscious form. The mist in the arena dispersed completely.

He walked to her to check on her condition, but before he took two steps forward, the Proctor, Lan Yuxuan, appeared, blocking his path. Her expression seemed ugly. "Lan Zhen, did you hide the fact that you are the inheritor of Immortal Phoenix?" She questioned aloud.

"Hmm?" Mark blinked.

"See, I told you that he is a fraud!" A voice was suddenly echoed throughout the arena at the same time.

All eyes turned to the source. It is Lei Fengyun, the 17th prince of the Empire.

Lei Fengyun stood in his place but continued to shout aloud, speaking venom against Mark. "I told you before. He has the bloodline of our enemy. He does not deserve to stand among us."

Murmurs spread through the audience.

The chants of either kick him out or kill him once again spread in the arena like a wildfire.

As the elders and the sect leader didn't say anything, Lan Yuxuan raised her hand, making everyone stop for a moment, and then spoke to Mark. "Lan Zhen, I have asked you a question earlier. Are you the inheritor of Immortal Phoenix?"

Mark looked at her and then at the audience, and finally at his reserves, which were slowly increasing after dropping down to zero earlier. He would need 60 seconds for another transformation.

So, after a quick thought, he replied. "Your question was a thing I needed to answer in private or when I was on trial. Can you ask it during the tournament? Shouldn't you first announce me as the winner?"

Chapter 643: Bloodline Storm (part-1)

Mark kept his gaze fixed on Lan Yuxuan, neither flinching nor stepping back.

The murmurs hadn't stopped; if anything, they grew louder. Dozens of eyes, hundreds of glares, accusations flying as swiftly as blades.

He calmly dusted off his robe, despite the lingering ash and frost. "Proctor Yuxuan," he said, tone even. "Your question was a thing I needed to answer in private or when I was on trial. Aren't you still standing on the tournament platform? Shouldn't your first action be to declare the victor?"

His voice wasn't loud, but it carried with the weight of authority she always had, piercing the noisy atmosphere.

Lan Yuxuan's brows twitched. "Don't change the subject, Lan Zhen."

"I'm not changing it," Mark replied. "But I do know protocol. And I also know this..." His eyes flicked briefly to the holographic screen. His reserves were filled by more than 40%.

Just a little more time... he needed.

"You all couldn't simply digest the fact that I defeated Lan Xia. First, there's a thing about using my own creations, demeaning me by stating I depend on artifacts to win matches when others can use swords and

spears, whatever. And then, you painted me as evil by bringing up my father's bloodline, and now that I won it fair and square, you guys are here once again, trying to void the competition results by doing this. Just accept the fact that you aren't willing to hand over the clan to someone who came from the mortal realm. You aren't willing to hand over the clan to the grand of Lan Gengxin, whom you lot brutally sacrificed to please your emperor and make it seem like he is a criminal whom you righteous fellas exiled as punishment. Why don't you just admit the truth instead of keeping painting others as villains?"

Perhaps, due to his high charm stat, as Mark amplified his voice, making sure the entire arena heard it, his words affected the listeners with cultivation lower than his. The noise was significantly lowered and lowered, only leaving whisperings and murmurings instead. However, those with high cultivation were more offended than felt guilty.

One of them was certainly Lan Yuxuan herself, one of the two grand elders of the sect.

Her Qi trembled around her, thin veins of crackling light forming in the air. Her patience, already brittle, snapped. "Insolent!"

With a flick of her wrist, she conjured a spear of translucent blue-white energy, pulsing with sharp intent, and she motioned it backward, intending to hurl it.

However, Mark instantly acted, activating the skill. "Gravity Dome, 1000x! Restrict the range to 300 meters."

The invisible dome spread out from him, covering the arena, but not affecting the spectators.

BOOM!

Lan Yuxuan's lance arced in midair, veering downward as the sudden spike in gravitational force bent its trajectory. It smashed into the marble floor, exploding harmlessly away from Mark.

Yuxuan's form lurched at once, and her knees buckled.

*Thud!

She crashed down hard, face twisting in pain as she fought against the suffocating weight.

Mark hovered calmly at the center, unaffected by it. "Interesting," he said, peering down at her. "You Lan Sect elders really need therapy. All of you have this ridiculous impulse to attack first at the slightest offense. To be honest, you have too much pride but no intelligence."

The arena grew silent again. All eyes now turned toward the elder on the grandstand, Lan Yujin, the Sect Master.

A few elders below him had already risen from their seats.

"This is getting out of hand," one muttered, stepping forward.

"That brat is going to die."

"Well, he asked for it."

"Arrogance clouds one's judgment."

"Should we intervene?" another asked.

But Lan Yujin only chuckled softly, stroking his long beard. "No, no. Let them play it out."

He leaned forward, eyes twinkling with interest. "Interfere only when it seemed like one of them was going to be killed."

The Elders couldn't help but gaze at their sect leader. They wonder whether he was on Lan Zhen's side or Lan Yuxuan's.

Back in the arena, Yuxuan's body shuddered. Veins bulged under her skin as her Qi surged once again.

"Not yet... you damn brat..." she hissed, her feet cracking the stone beneath.

A blinding aura burst out from her core.

A thick, glowing armor of Qi wrapped around her frame, reinforcing every limb, every tendon.

With a defiant roar, she stood up straight, inch by inch, forcing her way through immense gravitational force. The pressure strained her bones, but she rose and resisted it.

"You scrooge... disgrace... You must be eliminated at all costs!" she howled, glaring at him like a beast denied its prey.

Mark narrowed his eyes. So she's still got some juice in her. At this rate, I'll burn more energy than I can afford...

A flicker on his User Interface warned him, Ether Reserves at 43%. Recovery was slowing as 1% per second was being consumed to maintain the gravity dome, while 1.43% of his ether reserves were being recovered at the same time. So, it is like the recovery process is cut in half.

Since the other party is already resisting the gravity dome anyway, Mark found it useless. He raised a hand and, with a breath, dismissed the Gravity Dome.

The pressure lifted instantly. A few cracks on the arena floor snapped back into place with the release of tension. No one knows what Lan Xia's condition was.

Lan Yuxuan gasped sharply, the relief flooding her muscles. But her moment of triumph was short-lived.

She was about to charge forward to reduce their gap and hit him at close range, but Mark had already moved his hand again.

"Activate, Absolute Freezing."

BOOM.

The air howled as a sudden drop in temperature struck the arena.

Frost erupted outward like a blooming lotus of glaciers. It was quite an instantaneous technique

At -272C, a wave of crystalline frost surged across the entire coliseum stage, freezing the very moisture in the air. Even sound seemed to fade.

Lan Yuxuan's eyes widened, but only for a second. Her Qi lashed out instinctively in defense.

But it was too slow.

The frost clamped onto her like living chains, encasing her in solid, crystalline ice. Her armor cracked, then stopped completely, sealed in a blue-white prison.

She stood mid-step, frozen solid.

Chapter 644: Bloodline Storm (part-2)

The audience collectively gasped at the sight. It was something they had seen a day ago, when Shang Jiao did it.

If it could freeze an elder like Lan Yuxuan, it wasn't just some freezing technique. They knew what it was because every single cultivator around either read or heard of the abilities of the Blizzard Pegasus.

Back in the stands, the elders stood once again.

One elder squinted. "That... is Absolute Freezing? But that's impossible."

"Not even a 2nd-stage Transcendent like Elder Yuxuan could break out instantly... Yes, it is absolutely freezing indeed."

"So, that story of Lan Zhen freezing her with his gaze isn't a rumor, after all. He inherited Blizzard Pegasus' powers."

"Only an inheritor of the Blizzard Pegasus can perform true Absolute Freezing."

"But, how is it possible? Isn't Shang Jiao the inheritor of Blizzard Pegasus? We literally saw her transformation and saw her unleash the absolute freezing."

"Then... Lan Zhen... is he also...?"

"A second inheritor of the Blizzard Pegasus?" one whispered.

Another shook his head slowly. "No, this must be some kind of trick he was using. There's no way that's possible. He is the inheritor of Immortal Phoenix. Why would the Blizzard Pegasus bless his enemy?"

Mark stood in the center of the arena once again, his hand still extended, palm smoldering with the residue of energy. His breath was steady. "Another billion of ether points were wiped out, but it is alright. I will gain it in 7 seconds. But, I still need a bit of time to waste..."

He glanced around. At the frozen Elder. At the crowd, now eerily quiet. At the sect leader, who still hadn't spoken.

Then he raised his voice. "Well then... Proctor Yuxuan is indisposed. Will someone else officially announce the match result?"

After a long moment of silence, murmurs once again spread all over the arena like wildfire.

Those who were screaming for Mark's death moments ago now sat in stunned silence, uncertain, conflicted, unsure what to believe.

They saw him clearly transform into Phoenix, and then he also unleashed Blizzard Pegasus' Absolute Freezing. How to make of this? They didn't understand.

The silence broke as the Sect Leader, Lan Yujin, finally spoke from his seat. "Enough," his voice boomed across the arena, calm yet impossible to disobey.

Everyone turned.

Yujin turned to his side, speaking to an elder clad in deep green and gold robes, his long silver hair flowing like threads of starlight. The man stood with the composure of someone who'd lived centuries and seen worlds rise and fall.

"Elder Qianxu," said the Sect Master. "Release Elder Yuxuan. And... capture Lan Zhen." After a brief pause, he added. "Don't harm him. Just restrain him. We must speak calmly."

The Grand Elder, Wang Qianxu, the third-stage Transcendent, a 14-circle powerhouse, nodded once. "Understood, Sect Master."

He rose and floated silently down into the arena like a falling leaf. No flashy aura. No blinding power display. But the air itself seemed to bow to his presence.

Mark narrowed his eyes as the elder descended. "Eyes of God, activate."

"They are sending a 14-circle, eh? What was his motive? Kill or capture me?" Mark wondered.

"Lan Zhen," Elder Qianxu said, his voice like still water. "An order from the Sect Leader. You are to be restrained. Don't resist anymore."

He extended his hand.

The ice encasing Yuxuan cracked. Not with brute force, but with subtle, intricate strands of Qi that gently disassembled the freezing from within, unraveling it thread by thread.

Within seconds, Yuxuan slumped out of the crystal cocoon, barely conscious but intact. Her breathing was faint while her Qi was still too sluggish, needed time to reach top condition again.

"Okay, I still need more time." Mark narrowed his eyes, staring at the user interface.

Meanwhile, Lan Yuxuan forced herself to stand properly and bowed, "Grand Elder, I deeply appreciate your kindness." She then turned to Mark who stood there in defiance. Her eyes widened. "Wait... that skill just now. That wasn't mimicry. That was the real thing. Is he also the inheritor of the Blizzard Pegasus?"

Her voice dropped even lower.

"But there can't be two... not in one generation..."

"We don't know yet." Grand Elder Qianxu shook his head, his eyes were on Mark. And his eyes could also see how fast Mark's ether energy/Qi was recovering.

She turned toward the Grand Elder, and confusion in her eyes was evident. "What are the Sect Leader's orders?"

Qianxu's expression didn't change. "Restrain him, but no harm."

Then, turning to Mark, he spoke calmly. "Lan Zhen, surrender. I give you my word. No one will kill you, nor imprison you without trial. You'll be escorted, and only that."

Mark looked up, his eyes flickering with faint amusement. "Well, I had enough ether points now."

Letting out a smile, he replied. "I don't mind a trial. But if you intend to drag me off without announcing the victory, then I would like to show something."

Qianxu raised an eyebrow slightly. "What do you mean?"

Mark didn't answer. He tapped on the holographic interface only he could see.

Skill Activated, Transformation: Blizzard Pegasus

The air twisted at once. Qianxu's frown deepened as Mark was enveloped by concentrated thick mist, and he floated in the sky. Qianxu waited in patience.

And then beautiful icy wings popped up, followed by the body.

Crowned with a silver mane that shimmered like moonlit frost, wings of pure crystalline ice, and hooves that stepped on air itself, the Blizzard Pegasus erupted out of its own cocoon.

"What the..."

The crowd gasped, but no murmur escaped their lips this time.

Mark's voice then rang out from the beast's form, "So... let me ask," he began. "When I transformed into the Phoenix, you called me a scourge. A cursed being. An enemy."

He flapped his wings once, releasing beautiful snowflakes, and asked. "But now that I've transformed into the sacred beast your entire sect worships. Should I be holy, now? Should I be worshipped instead?"

He paused as the crowd stirred in confusion.

"This... is why people need education," he said with a cold snort. "If all you know is how to swing a sword or pour Qi into your fist, you'll spend your lives fighting shadows and calling everything you don't understand a demon."

The Sect Elders stood halfway between their seats. The Sect Leader's gaze narrowed, thoughtful but unreadable.

"Oh, and by the way..." Mark's voice darkened.

"I'm willing to go to trial, yes. Because I accepted myself as a member of the Lan Clan, and as an Inner Disciple of the Sect."

He stepped forward, hooves freezing the very space he walked on.

"But don't expect me to kneel... or let myself be shackled because you're all too stupid to think."

Then, without warning...

"Absolute Freezing."

There was no scream. No flash. Or any warning.

A storm of white burst forth, not gradually, not even in a wave. It struck instantly, like rays of light itself.

Time seemed to pause for the spectators.

One heartbeat. Two. Three.

And both Elder Yuxuan and Grand Elder Qianxu were encased in pure ice, although slightly short of absolute zero.

Alongside Yuxuan, even the grand elder of 14-circle-realm, Wang Qianxu was also frozen, not being able to free even after ten seconds of silence.

In Blizzard Pegasus form, Mark then shifted his gaze to his great-grandfather and said. "I didn't come here to make enemies. I fought within the rules of competition. But if being different makes you a threat in this place... then maybe the sect should indeed go under heavy reorganization. Now, with that said, as I have said, you can put me on trial later. First, would you announce the victory or not?"

*Neigh...

A powerful neigh escaped his mouth, an unintended one, but that released an invisible wave of energy and struck the souls of the people around. The common disciples of the clan couldn't help but leave their seats and kneel at the same spots.

Chapter 645: Mark becomes Prince Lan

Three days had passed since the coliseum froze under the breath of Absolute Zero and Mark's winning moment.

As the winner of the tournament, he received three Supreme Tier Spirit Pills, which, in theory, could give him a direct push to the next minor stage of the realm.

However, Mark, who didn't have any Qi, had no use for those pills. He passed all of them to Lan Xia privately, earning her appreciation.

On the dawn of the third day, the Ancient Lan Clan Grounds stirred with ceremonial resonance.

The Sky Chimes of the ancestral pagoda rang 13 times, which is an ancient signal of a great declaration. It was a sound heard only thrice in the last five centuries.

In the Sacred Courtyard of the Azure Cloud Pavilion, the elders of the clan were all dressed in embroidered ceremonial robes of pale blue and silver. A path was cleared down the center, a carpet of woven ice silk rolled out toward the Jade Dragon Steps, where the Clan Leader and the Grand Elders stood awaiting. Only the elders who bear the surname Lan were gathered in ceremonial robes. Some of these have positions in the Sect, but at the moment, the Sect has nothing to do with this.

From all parts of the world, and beyond the world, from other worlds, leaders of noble clans or their representatives gathered in the courtyard to witness the anointing of a prince.

The air shimmered with spiritual energy.

Floating above the courtyard was the Lan Clan Ancestral Totem, a spectral carving of the Blizzard Pegasus, its eyes glowing faintly as though bearing witness to the moment.

An enormous announcement scroll, glowing with divine ink, hovered in the sky, flanked by four Celestial Formation Masters who kept it suspended with sacred Qi scripts that danced like fireflies.

And then, the procession began.

From the west gate of the pavilion, Mark, now dressed in a formal ceremonial robe of sky white with frost-blue thread forming pegasus wings, walked forward with slow, deliberate steps.

Two elders flanked him, acting as witnesses of the bloodline and the Sect's acknowledgment of his dual inheritance.

Behind him walked Shang Jiao, adorned in a softer jade-embroidered robe, bearing the crest of the Lan Clan on her shoulder. Her steps were humble, but her spine unbending.

Lan Xia stood among the other elders, though she wasn't one.

Elder Yuxuan stood behind the Clan Leader, no longer aggressive, but silent in acceptance.

The crowd murmured as Mark approached the stairs, where a divine jade table stood holding three items:

A white jade tablet, carved with the Lan Clan ancestral seal.

A bloodstone chalice, half-filled with spiritual springwater.

A lantern of frostfire, burning silently and eternally.

Grand Elder Lan Ming stepped forward, his voice echoing through the entire sect:

"By decree of the Sect Leader, the elders, and the approval of the ancestral will, we hereby recognize Lan Zhen, son of Lan Jingyi, grandson of Lan Gengxin, as the rightful blood of the Lan Clan, who earned his qualifications to become the heir to the throne. As per ancient law, he shall be bestowed the title of Prince, equal to Lady Lan Xia and Elder Yuxuan in rank and honor."

He turned to Mark.

"Place your hand upon the jade."

Mark stepped forward and pressed his palm onto the tablet.

A pulse rang out.

Wuuummmm—!

The tablet glowed white, then silver, then flashed into a golden light. An imprint of a blizzard pegasus appeared on his palm before it disappeared.

*Ding! You received a passive skill, Blessings of the Lan.

Blessings of the Lan: All your stats are increased by 5%.

Then came the ritual of name binding.

Qianxu held out the chalice. "Drink of the Lan Spring and swear by your name."

Mark accepted, sipped once, and said clearly, following the rehearsed speech, "I, Lan Zhen, I vow to honor the legacy of my clan, protect its people, and preserve its name."

The fire in the lantern flared brightly, turning azure for a moment, acknowledging the vow.

Then, the Clan Leader Lan Yujin finally stepped forward, holding a scroll of ancestral silk and speaking with divine authority: "From this day onward, let it be written in the sacred scrolls of the Lan Clan:

Lan Zhen, titled as this generation's 3rd Prince of the Lan Clan, is of true blood and acknowledged as one of the future pillars of our lineage."

Applause rippled through the square.

Elders nodded with respectful smiles.

Even those who had doubted him now lowered their heads in deference, although not exactly in sincerity.

The ceremony had ended quite smoothly. Snow still drifted lightly in the courtyard, the frostfire lanterns flickered gently, and the ancestral jade tablet had been returned to its pedestal within the Hall of Heritage.

As everything is over, the Clan leader orders the dismissal of the crowd. He, of course, reminded everyone to attend the Grand Banquet for sure.

But, just as the crowd was about to disperse, as the celebratory drums were sounded, the skies suddenly trembled.

A sudden whirl of frost and sacred wind swept across the sect grounds.

The light snowfall reversed in direction, drifting upward into the air, as if time had bent for a moment.

Sudden chaos filled the courtyard. The Elders were instantly alerted by a possible ambush. Or perhaps an intrusion from a powerful cultivator?

But then...

From the distant horizon, a blinding beam of arctic light shot across the sky, parting the clouds and reaching the Lan Clan grounds.

The snow-glazed form of an enormous divine beast soared down from the skies.

Its mane was a flowing aurora of pale blue and white gold, eyes like twin moons, body sleek and ageless, a being of both grace and unimaginable power. Each flap of its wings sent pulses of glacial energy rippling through the spiritual realm.

"The Blizzard Pegasus?" The Clan leader whispered in shock. He instantly left his stage and flew to the grass, raising his head to look at the most beautiful creature in the entire universe.

The Grand Elders, the Elders, the guests, Lan Xia, Shang Jiao, every single person standing there couldn't help but look at the creature in a daze.

It descended slowly, without haste, its hooves never touching the earth, but frost bloomed under its shadow.

The clan members, servants, and the elders fell to their knees instinctively as it reached their eye level.

Even Grand Elders bowed.

Sect Leader Lan Yujin, for the first time in perhaps a century, lowered his head and folded his arms respectfully across his chest.

Only Mark was standing straight, staring directly at the creature as if he wasn't interested in bowing.

The Blizzard Pegasus then spoke, not with sound, but through divine consciousness that filled every mind present. "Five millennia of Heaven have passed since I last appeared. I watched in silence. I waited. And now, my inheritor... she has finally returned home."

The divine beast turned its gaze, not toward Mark, but to Shang Jiao.

Every spectator understood who the divine creature was talking about. After all, it used the pronoun, she.

The crowd's breath caught in their throats.

Shang Jiao, stunned, stepped back. Her body trembled from an overwhelming resonance within her blood.

Chapter 646: The Blizzard Pegasus

The Blizzard Pegasus continued, "She who carries my will, my soul mark, my divine frost. She who walks in the shadow of obscurity and yet burns with light. She... is my chosen."

The Pegasus then turned to Lan Yujin and the elders. "Your ancestors have lost their way in pride. You have hunted legacy like a beast hunts prey. But bloodlines do not bow to ambition. They are found... or they find."

After a heavy pause, it announced. "Yet I am merciful. You were my home once, after all."

It looked down upon the sacred grounds. "As the matron guardian of the Lan Clan, I shall bless it once again. Let my bloodline awaken within your halls."

"The Leader of the Clan, you shall choose three."

"Three among you, whose blood shall be carved with my frostbrand. Their descendants shall carry my mark... until time and dilution extinguish it once more."

The words echoed like a divine bell.

Gasps rang out. Some disciples wept. Others looked around in disbelief.

The Blizzard Pegasus left them about 35 generations ago, when the 982nd Head had committed a great sin and the clan lost its protection. Now, as the guardian returned to the clan, everyone around couldn't help but become emotional and then gazed at Shang Jiao in gratitude. Many of those eyes filled with gratitude were also toward Lan Jing, who brought her here.

Lan Yujin stepped forward and bowed once again, "Great Matron of the Frost Sky, this honor is beyond words. We shall make the choice with wisdom and reverence."

The Pegasus bowed its head once. "Then I shall remain until the frost moon rises. I will await your choice. Make it with heart, not the brain."

The Pegasus then shifted its gaze once again to Shang Jiao. "My child." This time, its voice was also heard in Shang Jiao's head. Suddenly, its eyes flashed.

A pulse of light surrounded Shang Jiao at once.

Her body trembled and moved of its own accord, flew toward the divine beast, eyes half-glazed, some mystic symbol glowing on her forehead.

Everyone just watched in silence, including the grand elders and even Mark.

The divine beast and the girl hovered together in some sort of bubble. The Blizzard Pegasus was speaking something, and Shang Jiao was also speaking back.

For nearly a minute, they remained like that. No one could hear what they were talking about.

And then...

The bubble broke, and Shang Jiao slowly descended, her face looked like she was clearly shaken.

She only bowed to the Pegasus and nodded.

The Pegasus nodded in return before shifting his gaze to Mark, at last.

Before Mark could react, a similar scene happened with him, too. He was dragged into this transparent bubble-like space where he and the Pegasus were facing each other.

The outside people could see them, but inside, Mark felt like he was stranded in some kind of endless white space.

He blinked.

The Blizzard Pegasus didn't speak right away. Instead, it studied him for a few seconds and then opened its mouth. "Three bloodlines and multiple elements... in one shell. Intriguing."

Mark's breath caught at that comment. He couldn't help but remember Hei Zhenyu, who also could see through him, just like that. Maybe, this is what a 15-circle is like? He couldn't help but wonder.

Meanwhile, the divine creature continued. "I sense my bloodline in you. You also carry the flame of the Immortal Phoenix, my bitter rival. And even the Leviathan..."

The Pegasus narrowed its eyes. "It is impossible for our bloodline essences to coexist with one another, and only one being has ever held such convergence. The Primeval."

Mark stiffened. At least Hei Zhenyu only found out that he had those powers. But Blizzard Pegasus even spelled out the bloodline he originally had.

However, the string of surprises hasn't ended yet for Mark.

The Pegasus' voice continued. "You carry the bloodline of Primeval and yet... You are no beast. You are human, with a soul that's been fractured and rebuilt more than once."

"Yandi... And Houyi... Both are of Phoenix descent... and through Lan Gengxin, my inheritor, you acquired my bloodline. So, these are your own powers since they started. However, Leviathan, I can sense that you acquired it recently."

Mark's eye twitched at the mention.

"And I seemed to have learned from Yuanlong not long ago that a human from the mortal realm had killed Leviathan in the demon world. I believe that is where you have acquired the bloodline. Unfortunately, that also means Leviathan would never be able to reach its peak state unless it kills you. If other progenitors learn of your existence, they will hunt you down."

Mark couldn't help but feel a cold sweat at that threat.

But then the Pegasus gave a bit of relief by adding. "Fortunately, you carry my sigil. As long as you carry it, apart from me, no one could sense any other bloodlines unless you display them."

Phew "That's good."

The Pegasus continued. "Anyway, I didn't call you here to pry into your secrets, but to give you a mission."

"Mission?" Mark wondered aloud.

The Pegasus nodded, its tone turned sharp as it said. "It's related to my youngest daughter. She went rogue, refusing to serve the Blizzard Palace. Evading my authority, she has escaped into the mortal plane of existence, where you can enter and leave freely. I want you to capture her. If capturing alive is not possible, you can eliminate her, too. Her soul signature is registered in the Blizzard Palace. She will be resurrected there, but I don't wish for death. So, I wish you to keep it as a final choice."

Mark blinked. "Okay. But..."

Before he said anything more, the Blizzard Pegasus lowered its head and brought it down to him. Its head touched his head, and Mark felt something he couldn't explain in words.

The divine beast then turned its head and said, "As I have mentioned earlier, I'm not allowed to step into the mortal realm. So, this blessing of mine will not work there."

Mark nodded. "I understand." He doesn't know what the blessing is, but the AI hasn't given him any notification or anything.

The Blizzard Pegasus said nothing else.

The frost dimension began to dissolve. Light returned. Space folded back. And in a flash, Mark was back in the courtyard.

Neigh

After its talk with Mark was over, it flapped its wings and flew into the sky. Snowflakes fell all over the place with a flap of its wings. Whoever the snowflake has touched, whether it is a guest or a member of the Lan Clan, they all found complete refreshment. It was like they finally found peace after life lifelong fight for ambition.

Chapter 647: Reaching the Threshold

After one became an heir of the Lan Clan, Mark had an easier life even inside the sect.

Doors opened before he knocked. Elders bowed slightly in greeting. Both outer and inner disciples, those who cheered for his death a month ago, no longer whispered in contempt but in awe, reverence, or a cautious mix of both.

Of course, his sister, too, underwent transformation.

Two weeks after his ceremony, Shang Jiao was anointed as the princess of the clan. The clan leader gave her a new identity: Lan Fei.

Though honored and celebrated, Lan Fei didn't get the same freedom as Mark. She remained in the inner clan grounds, secluded in the ancient jade pavilions of learning, undergoing brutal but prestigious training under the two Grand Elders and also the Clan leader. They were teaching them everything they could as if they were preparing her as the next head, and other heirs only have titles and nothing else.

Mark didn't know what the Blizzard Pegasus had told her, and neither would his sister tell him, but Shang Jiao was quite diligent in training, staying in that imprisonment. Mark visited her regularly, but she only kept a strict one-hour visitation every time and spent the rest of the time in training. Her goal is to attain immortality.

Meanwhile, he also got closer to Lan Xia and almost became best friends with her.

She was like a koala bear that wouldn't just stop clinging onto him. She was always by his side.

And whenever he visited, Lan Xia came with him.

They trained together often, both intending to polish their techniques. She was trying to make her clan techniques better while he tried to create his own fighting style centered around the gun, mixing the Lan Clan's martial arts footwork with his gun.

Sometimes, they spent more time arguing about form than fighting, though.

They ate together almost every day, shared roasted meat buns or fish hotpots from the sect kitchens. During long breaks, they stroll through the gardens or go on outings in the nearby towns, browse through old technical manuals in the library, or just wander the mountain trails.

And whenever he returned to the clan to see Lan Fei, Lan Xia would be by his side, blank-faced and animated as always.

Lan Xia even shifted her residence next to Mark's, just so that she could visit him whenever she wanted.

It didn't take long for the sect and clan to begin whispering.

"Prince Lan Zhen and Princess Xia... they're always together."

"He teaches her swordplay... she brings him food in the middle of his practice... I don't think you can call it simple friendship."

"Ahhh! I wish I could also find a girl who would do that..."

"But, don't you think she is a bit too obsessive?"

"Did you see them walking down Moonlit Steps last night?"

"She calls him by Gege! Isn't that... a bit intimate?"

"Hah! The beauty falls for the hero. He beat her squarely, and she was obviously attracted to him."

Whispers and murmurings like these were also a daily scenario, seen everywhere in the clan.

But Mark didn't think much of it. Whatever friendship they have is temporary anyways. Once his goal is accomplished, he would neither return to the clan nor meet her again.

*

At Present;

Just as every night, Mark and Lan Xia sneaked out of the sect, mainly Mark and Lan Xia just tagged along.

Snow crunched softly beneath Lan Xia's boots as she paced around a little hillock, arms folded, her breath misting in the crisp mountain air. A wind blew now and then, just enough to tug at the end of her braid, but she didn't flinch. Her gaze stayed locked on the lone figure seated cross-legged atop the snowy outcrop a few meters ahead.

Mark sat perfectly still.

His eyes were closed, and his hands were on his knees. The moonlight spilled onto his shoulders like silver silk, catching on the frost lining his coat.

Above them, the full moon loomed in the sky, large and luminously pale. This has been the routine for the past few months, ever since he stopped annoying the Demon Cat Empress, except that during these past ten weeks, Lan Xia was with him.

She tugged her sleeves tighter and sat down beside a half-buried boulder. From her pouch, she pulled out a roasted meat skewer, still warm. She chewed thoughtfully as if she were too bored to do anything and not interested in meditating either, eyes fixated on Mark.

Just like this, Mark trains here secretly, and Lan Xia keeps an eye on the surroundings like a bodyguard.

But what was Mark exactly doing? One might wonder.

Basically, what he was doing was training the cultivation technique of the Cosmic Essence Absorption skill, which allows him to absorb energy from celestial bodies like moons, planets, stars, black holes, etc... The energy was absorbed and then refined into his Ether Points.

The best way to amass a large number of Ether Points is simply to absorb them from a black hole, which could even simply kill gods if they aren't careful.

But, as someone who is extremely cautious when there is a risk of death, and extremely reckless when he had confidence, Mark wouldn't obviously approach that thing, not in the present and perhaps, not even in the future. Maybe, if he ever reaches the 14-circle realm.

And stars? Stars were giant death furnaces. Sure, the energy was dense, but they generate gamma rays, which will be like poison to his cultivation.

Planets? Too risky. He didn't want to accidentally nuke a civilization or suck out life from some random race of lizard-people or giant fungus or whatever. And he was too lazy to search for a perfect planet. Of course, he couldn't absorb the planet Lan Clan, and the sect's main branch was based on. It was his second home, after all.

So, that leaves the moons. But the problem is that there are no portals to travel there directly, and the closest one he can see right now is still like 200,000 kilometers away. So, he could only absorb every night, traveling to the location on the planet where the full moon is visible and absorb its essence, because the rate of absorption from a full moon is 40% higher than a crescent one.

As he greedily absorbs it as fast as he can, Ark, his AI, ever helpful, takes care of refining the raw power into clean, usable Ether points. The process wasn't fast. But it was safe. And subtle.

After weeks of grinding, Mark finally felt the threshold approaching.

99.9 billion Ether Points.

Just a sliver away from a full round number.

A quiet buzz echoed in his core, as if his body knew what was coming.

And then...

The final wave of moonlight energy surged gently into his body like a tide, and the internal system pinged.

*Ding! Master, you reached the threshold. You cannot absorb the energy anymore

The AI replied in his head.

Mark's breath misted as he exhaled slowly, opening his eyes with a smile on his face.

"Ark, Open Character Interface."

Name: Lu Zhen (Mark Spencer)

Rank: 10

Strength: 10.9

Intelligence: 10.9

Defense: 10.9

Agility: 10.9

Vitality: 10.9

Resistance: 10.9

Charisma: 9

Luck: 7

Bloodline: Primeval (Blizzard Pegasus, Immortal Phoenix, Gargantuan Leviathan)

Attribute: Lightning, Ice, Space, Gravity, Oil, Poison, Antimatter, Fire, Water

Spirit Path: Summoner, Mage

Ether Quality: Max.

Ether energy: 100,000,000,000

[Breakthrough]

Special skills: Ultimate Defense I, Ultimate Defense II, Thunderblast, Lightning clone, Seal breaker, Devil's hand, Taming, Enhanced Durability, Ether regeneration, No touch, Gravity Dome, Eyes of God, Metal Armor, Weapon Transmutation, Cosmic Essence Absorption.

Bloodline skills: Absolute freezing, Ice bolt, Blizzard Wings, Freezing gaze, Blizzard Pegasus Transformation, Instant Resurrection, Celestial Flare, Flame Burst, Eternal Flames, Phoenix Transformation, Abyssal Resilience, Maelstorm, Tsunami Charge, Ocean Sovereign, and Leviathan Transformation.

Titles: Master of Holy Beasts, Absolute Authority (Equipped)

Special items: Danya (the divine throne), Missile Defense system-VII, B-2 spirit bomber, Mark 14 nuclear bomb, Ring of luck, M134 Minigun, M999 Minigun, Battle Tank-VII, Space station-V, Unnamed, Helicarrier, Amulet of Bael, Scroll of Alloces, Elixir of Eternal Springs, Fan of Ephemeral Storms, Flag of Huangdi, JAS 39D (Fighter Aircraft), Amulet of Diyu, lamp of wishes, and Staff of Blessing.

Assistants: 1 (Alina Spencer)

Contracted beasts: 10

Contracted demons: 1

Store branches: 2

Headquarters: Lunaris City, Western Moon Kingdom, Vermillion Bird Continent.

Affiliations: Dominion of Genesis, Heavenly Ocean Empire.

Lifespan limit: 2085 years (2056 years left)

*

"Hmm? Breakthrough?"

He blinked.

Lan Xia tilted her head, wondering what that face was for.

Mark called out his AI. "Ark, why didn't I get a breakthrough automatically?"

*Ding! According to the creator's database, Master will face the tribulation from the heavens as he was trying to defy the natural laws of mortality.

"Oh, so tribulation isn't just for others. I, too, have to face, huh?" Mark muttered under his breath. "But, it's alright, I have enough skills to face this."

Taking a deep breath, Mark looked at Lan Xia. "Xiaojie, I'm going to break through, right now."

"Eh? Gege will break through? Seriously?" Lan Xia's eyes widened. She sprang up to her feet immediately.

Mark didn't clarify anymore and proceeded to click on the breakthrough option.

*Ding! Proceeding to a breakthrough to Rank-11.

"Let's see what you've got."

The moment Mark tapped the breakthrough button, the surroundings changed.

Above him, the clouds twisted unnaturally. Dark and violent, they spiraled out of the clear sky as if someone had ripped a hole in the heavens.

Chapter 648: The Heavenly Tribulation (part-1)

Thunder cracked.

The sound didn't echo; it boomed, directly into the bones of anyone within miles.

Lan Xia stumbled backward as the wind surged around them. "Gege! What the hell. Are you crazy? You can't just attempt to break through without necessary preparations."

Mark slowly stood up, eyes wide, staring at the sky. "It's alright. I'll survive this tribulation."

Back in the sect...

A massive bell tolled once, low and ancient.

In the Sect Leader's personal chamber, a man with graying temples opened his eyes from meditation. A thin flash of lightning reflected in his pupils.

He frowned. "A tribulation?" he muttered. "In the frozen range? Right now?"

Across the inner sanctum, Lan Yuxuan stood up from her sleep, sensing the shift in the air. "That's no ordinary heavenly tribulation... the cloud density is too high... Who could it be attempting this, right close to our sect?"

The next moment, all outer formation guards on the sect perimeter were alerted. Disciples looked up at the sky, their expressions morphing from curiosity to fear.

Some inner sect disciples who had once gone through their own tribulations felt their blood run cold.

"That can't be a normal breakthrough," someone whispered. "There are too many clouds."

A young girl near the medicinal garden trembled, tugging on her mother's sleeves. Her nice sleep was broken.

Back in the mountains...

Mark clenched his fists. The Ether particles in his body swirled around.

Lan Xia moved next to him, worry etched deep in her face. "Do you need me to inform the elders? Someone will be here to help you out."

He looked at her and smiled slightly, his voice unusually calm. "No need. If I can't survive this on my own... I'm not worthy of what comes next."

Then the storm above answered.

A bolt of lightning crashed down, not toward him, but near him, like a divine warning.

Ten seconds.

The clouds boiled darker. The snow on the mountain was already gone, melted into steam and flung into the sky. The air buzzed with divine pressure.

Five seconds.

He stepped forward and stood tall.

Three.

His Ether flared like a silver-white sun beneath his skin.

Two.

His feet left the ground slightly, lifted by the sheer force of power.

One.

Then, the heavens cried.

It didn't start with lightning or thunder, but with acid rain.

Heavy, thick droplets fell from the sky like molten jade. Wherever they landed, they hissed and sizzled, melting stone, searing snow, scarring the earth.

Shhhhhh...

He spoke aloud, "Lan Xia, you need to move back, far away from the range. Focus on protecting yourself."

Lan Xia hesitated. Her lips pressed into a thin line. After a long pause, she finally gave a small nod. "Fine. But I'm not going far."

She conjured a barrier around herself as she moved away, while the acid rain immediately began, but Mark didn't flinch.

Mark looked at the skies, his expression turning serious.

"So this is what it means to break through to Transcendence, to immortality... Hmpf, what a joke."

"No Touch – Toggle switch on." He muttered under his breath. The AI responded immediately, activating the passive skill.

The rain curved as it neared him, droplets veering away mid-air, splattering harmlessly against the frostbitten earth instead. It completely avoided him.

Mark glanced at the dark clouds above, lips curling into a half-smile, staring at the rain that was melting down the snow around. "Try better, buddy. Whoever is up there in the heavens is responsible for this tribulation."

And as if the heavens heard that exact line... the acid rain stopped pouring down and the clouds rumbled in thunder.

"Hmpf, now, that's what we are talking about," Mark smirked. "Ark, get ready... Bloodline skill: Blizzard..."

Thunder tore the sky apart, and a blinding arc of lightning exploded downward like a silver serpent, slamming toward him at breakneck speed.

Just before the bolt struck, Mark's body moved slightly.

He bent his body downwards as if he were to pick something that had fallen on the ground.

FWOOSH—!

But then a pair of glacial, ethereal wings unfurled from his back with a crisp snap, sending snowflakes scattering in every direction.

The moment the lightning struck, it didn't hit Mark.

Instead, it crashed onto the outstretched wings behind him that covered his back and head. The feathers absorbed the voltage with a crackling sound, dispersing the impact like a lightning rod grounded in winter.

The snow beneath his feet steamed, but Mark stood, utterly unscathed.

[Lightning Tribulation – Impact Force: 10.9 Stats]

His AI's voice echoed in his consciousness, calm and precise.

Mark snorted. "Only 10.9? Then, I wouldn't have even needed the wings to bear it." Anyways, I think it will get stronger. So, let's just sit down."

The clouds above growled again—angry, insulted.

A second bolt was built quickly. He could feel it, it's the same as before.

During the next couple of minutes, five such lightning strikes attempted to strike him but got neutralized by his wings.

Letting out a sigh, Mark calmly sat down, cross-legged, and let his head be covered by the wings like an umbrella. "It does look like it will take a while."

But this time, the rumble was quite louder than before.

He didn't need the AI's prediction for that. It was charging thicker, deeper—almost twice as dense. It was more whitish before, now it appears like white-bluish.

"Come on, then," he muttered, closing his eyes.

The wings continued to fold upward like a shield, forming an icy dome over him, each feather locking into place like armor.

Lan Xia, watching from a distance, let out a slow exhale. She didn't say anything this time. But a sense of worry was evident on her supposedly blank face. "Gege..."

Sssh

The white-bluish bolt of lightning struck Mark's blizzard wings and got neutralized again.

But the sky hadn't rested yet.

Every ten, sometimes twenty seconds, another lightning bolt carved through the heavens. Again. And again. And again.

From a distance, Lan Xia watched with narrowed eyes, arms folded over her chest, her long coat fluttering in the wind. Her barrier barely shielded her from the fallout now, snow melting around her boots as stray static crackled through the mountains.

Each bolt came harder than the last. The earlier ones turned blue, each carrying the strike of an immortal.

When it failed to hurt him even once, the lightning turned scarlet.

Scarlet lightning was no joke. It was something even saints feared. A single strike of that would incinerate an immortal and even destroy a Saint's cultivation if they didn't block it fast enough.

Yet every time it slammed down, those icy, divine wings would rise, fluttering, absorbing, redirecting the deadly power with impossible grace.

Lan Xia bit her lip, watching as the tenth scarlet bolt dissipated like it would hit the ocean instead of flesh and bone. "Please. Let it stop here. Let it stop here." Her heart was beating too fast.

The thirty-minute mark ticked by. The storm hadn't weakened. If anything... it was growing more ominous. The clouds twisted violently, sending down the yellow lightning bolts, each carrying the power of a God (13-circle).

Yet, they still couldn't do anything to the wings. The Wings are as sturdy and flexible as ever.

Another 10 minutes passed, and the twentieth yellow lightning bolt was neutralized.

And then, for a minute or so, the sky became silent.

Mark couldn't help but peek into the sky, mumbling. "Is it over?"

RRRRRRRRMMMMMMMMMBLLE—!!!

The loudest thunder was suddenly heard in the sky, causing his body to tremble for a second. "F**k..."

Chapter 649: The Heavenly Tribulation (part-2)

The sound wasn't just thunder. A crushing pressure dropped over the entire sect like a blanket of gravity.

Lan Xia's knees buckled slightly. "What the hell..?"

Back at the sect, a dozen elders were forced to come and witness with their eyes. One grand elder snapped to his feet, his face went pale as he watched the cloud. "This rumble! That's not a mortal tribulation!" he hissed.

Even the Sect Leader stood up with a sharp breath. "That's the Sky-Judgement Bolt. It hasn't appeared in the last five hundred thousand years anywhere in the plane of existence..."

"Let's go, Pavilion Master. We have to see this..." Grand Elder Qianxu said, turning into specks of light and disappearing from the sect grounds.

Back at the mountain, Lan Xia was on her knees, as if she had lost her will to resist.

Far above the snow-covered cliffs, the heavens growled with malicious intent. The clouds twisted and raged like a beast denied, building toward the final judgment.

The Sect Leader and the Grand Elder Qianxue appeared on Lan Xia's side at the same time.

Lan Xia looked at them. "Pavilion Master, you've got to save him." She hurriedly screamed, tugging his sleeves.

Both old men looked at her in surprise. It was a side of Lan Xia that they were completely unfamiliar with. In their eyes, she was someone who was emotionless and only had the ability to express either curiosity or anger. Worry or panic is something they expect from this girl,

Lan Yujin patted her head as he commented, his eyes turning to the clouds.

"It's not a tribulation, Lan Xia. It is the Sky Judgment Bolt. We don't have the authority to interfere."

He shifted his gaze toward Mark, still seated in silent meditation, still channeling ether calmly like none of this concerned him.

The Grand Elder, however, commented. "But if we don't do something, Lan Zhen might not survive this."

The Sect Leader clenched his fists behind his back. A thousand thoughts flooded his mind.

This boy... the one who upended the arena, the one the Grand Elder had to hold back for.. Brother of the inheritor of the Blizzard Pegasus. A phoenix reborn. Even Lord Hei spoke of him with guarded respect.

And now, he might die here.

The Sect Leader's aura flared briefly.

He could stop this.

But the moment he did, the backlash would be catastrophic. The heavens would curse the entire Lan Clan. Spiritual roots would wither. Children would be born crippled. No one would rise for generations.

He hovered there, caught between responsibility and fate.

His jaw tensed, and then he closed his eyes. "I'm sorry. But it is too late to interfere. Perhaps, this is his destiny."

"So, are you saying we abandon him, Pavilion Master?" Grand Elder Qinxue furrowed his brows in displeasure. "If you are not going to interfere, let me do it."

However, the Sect leader raised his hand. "No, you will not." Staring at the sky, he sighed. "Perhaps, it is best this way. Xiao Zhen has the bloodline of Immortal Phoenix. Even if he dies, he will resurrect, although there will be a dent in his cultivation. But it will be fine. He can attempt once again after recuperating and training further. The Sky Judgment bolt won't attack more than once, anyway."

"But..." As Lan Xia was about to say something, the vortex screamed.

Then, BOOM, the final bolt fell in the form of a purple bolt.

But it wasn't just a purple bolt of lightning. It was thick as a mountain. And one could see the silhouette of a dragon behind it as it descended from the clouds with a piercing scream that split the air in two.

Mark looked up just in time to raise his wings one last time.

BOOOOOM!!!

The impact shook the mountain range. Snow from peaks a hundred kilometers away was blasted off. Trees shattered in every direction.

His Blizzard Wings flared white, absorbing the brunt, but it became too much.

A fraction of the purple bolt pierced through. It struck his back directly, bypassing defense, drilling into his body.

"Argh..."

Mark screamed loudly in pain. His body flew backward, crashing to the frozen ground. Steam hissed from his charred limbs. The wings dissipated. His clothes were burned. His skin, blackened.

And then...

Silence. He lay there motionless.

The clouds slowly receded as if the heavens had delivered their judgment and were satisfied with the result.

Lan Xia, who had watched it all with clenched fists and trembling knees, finally couldn't hold herself back.

"LU ZHEN!" she screamed, dashing toward the crater.

She dropped beside him, knees in the snow, her hands hovering uselessly over his blackened form. Tears began to stream down her cheeks.

"Why... why weren't you more prepared..." she choked.

The Sect Leader and the Grand Elder remained watching from afar, his face calm but... not unmoved. By then, some of the elders had also arrived and saw the situation.

They saw Lan Xia bawling at what seemed like Mark's corpse.

Murmurs spread among them.

"He was dead?"

"I couldn't just believe Lan Zhen failed his tribulation."

"The heavens were too much. How could they send a Sky Judgment Bolt at such a young man?"

"He is so young... poor soul..."

"Look at Lan Xia... I know they were close, but didn't expect this close..."

"Were they perhaps, really lovers in the past, and he really came to the clan for her?"

"I wonder how Princess Lan Fei will take this news. Her only brother has died like this..."

While many elders expressed their condolences, feeling pity for the young man, a couple of them were feeling satisfied, though. They were happy to see his death as if they thought the heavens had really delivered justice.

But it was just then...

Mark's body suddenly glowed, throwing away all of their unnecessary thoughts in the trash.

A golden light burst from within him, blinding and pure.

His charred flesh peeled away, flaking into particles.

Lan Xia gasped and stumbled backward. "Wha..."

Mark's body rose into the air. Slowly and Weightlessly. A gentle pulse of wind flowed out with each beat of his heart.

His hair shimmered silver-white.

Chapter 650: Who am I?

Mark opened his eyes, but he wasn't in the snow anymore.

He stood barefoot on the edge of a crystal lake. The water stretched wide, still as glass, reflecting the silver peaks that towered around him. The moon above loomed massive, round, and pale, as if it were descending toward the earth. Its light cast a silvery shimmer on the lake, painting the world in frost and silence.

Mark took a step forward. His reflection on the water wavered and shifted.

It wasn't his face.

The man in the reflection had eyes like hollow stars, deep and weathered, but not cruel. His hair was longer, tied loosely at the back. A heavy black bow rested across his back, forged from what looked like bone, twisted, ancient, and in the shape of a dragon's spine.

He knew that face. Somehow, without understanding how, he knew. "Houyi." The name echoed in his head.

The scenery around him shifted all of a sudden.

Gone was the lake. Now he stood on a land cracked and bleeding. The ground was scorched and dry, blackened as if fire had kissed it for far too long. Above him, the sky blazed, not with one sun, but ten. Ten golden, burning spheres hovered overhead, pouring merciless heat onto the land. The air shimmered, thick and dry, filled with the scent of ash and death.

Mark—no, Houyi—looked around.

The rivers had long evaporated. Crops had turned to dust. Trees were nothing but cinders. Here and there, twisted bodies of deer, birds, and humans lay motionless, dried like leaves in a furnace.

The people who remained huddled inside a dome of frost magic, conjured by the great Frost Dragon King who hovered above, wings stretched wide like a celestial guardian.

Behind him, warriors knelt. Dirty, gaunt, eyes hollow with despair.

"Lord Houyi," one of them whispered, voice trembling, "may your aim be true."

He did not answer them. He stepped forward, drawing the black bow from his back.

He raised his hand and summoned the first arrow, using his life force. His fingers trembled as he drew the string back.

And then, he released the arrow.

Ding

Swoosh

The arrow tore through the sky like lightning and struck one of suns.

As soon as the arrow struck, suction force erupted from the arrow and engulfed it entirely.

But Houyi staggered as his breath caught. His chest tightened, and something inside him withered, like a flame snuffed out too soon.

Still, he raised the bow again.

Another arrow. Another sun. Another piece of him torn away.

Mark felt the draining of life. Each shot made his limbs heavier, his heartbeat slower. Yet, he didn't stop.

Eventually, the ninth sun fell, and at last, the sky dimmed to its natural glow.

Cool wind kissed his cheeks.

He dropped to his knees, unable to hold the bow anymore, losing his strength in his body. The warriors rushed forward, but someone else reached him first.

It's his wife, Chang'e—the moon goddess.

Her robes fluttered like white flame. Her eyes were pools of grief. She knelt beside him, cradling him against her chest.

"Dear," she whispered, stroking his cheek, "why did you do it? Why did you feed me a lie that you would live forever and make me drink that elixir of immortality instead, knowing your spell would bring you into this state? Why?"

He smiled weakly. His hand trembled as he reached to touch her face. "It's actually a very simple question, Chang'e. Why? It's because I love you, Chang'e, and I want a long life for you," he whispered. "That's all there is. Live for me... protect this world from above. Don't tell our children how I died. Tell them how I lived instead. Tell them their father once walked with fire in his veins and hope in his hands."

She shook her head, tears falling onto his brow. "I won't let you go. You still have time—we can fix this. We can... find some spell that lets me transfer my immortality to you."

"No," he interrupted softly. "I want peace during my last years of life, Dear. Let me grow wheat. Let me mend the shoes. Like my father did. Let me see the stars without carrying them."

He gripped her hand gently.

"However, promise me you won't visit. Don't chase ghosts. Promise me, Chang'e, that you will not abandon your duties over love for me. Promise me."

Her lip trembled. "I... I promise."

The vision faded.

Mark's soul trembled. He felt like he was the one saying those words, not Houyi. Mark felt genuine love for the woman.

And then he blacked out, and the scenery changed.

Mark blinked again and now sat on a jade throne.

He wore robes of scarlet and gold, adorned with a phoenix crest. Crowds stretched beyond the throne room, kneeling before him.

"Long live Yandi, the Flame Emperor!"

The voice was his, but older, wiser. His back was straight, yet his eyes carried exhaustion.

"Another border rebellion, my lord."

"Divert troops."

"Taxes rising in the west."

"Send grain."

Every day was a fire. Every hour, another burden. And yet... he bore it all.

A little girl ran through the chamber, dodging ministers.

"Father!"

Yandi chuckled. "Yes, yes. Come here, Nuwa."

She climbed onto his lap like it was her throne, too. "Will you teach me flame arts today?"

"After court."

She pouted. "You always say that."

"I always keep my word."

The scenery shifts to Yandi meditating at the seaside rock while little Nuwa is playing around. Suddenly, the wind blew harder, and the conch in her hand flew away.

She chased after it, only to fall into the sea, and got swept away by the currents.

By the time he realized it, his daughter was already drowned in the sea.

Yandi dived into the sea and brought out his daughter's body and lay on the land. He saw she was no longer breathing.

Yandi blamed himself, cried and filled with rage. He summons the most powerful fireball and swore to destroy the entire sea.

At this, Yujiang appears and calms him down. As Yandi demands him to give back or his daughter's life, Yujiang can also tell him that she can't return to life as it is against the law of nature, but he can transplant her soul into this...

He showed him a palm sized egg and say that this is an egg of a divine beast and it is blessed with immortality.

After planting her soul into the egg, Yujiang leaves.

The egg then hatches, revealing it to be a bird. Yandi names her Jingwei.

The scene cuts to his final days.

He sat in a garden, sipping tea with shaky hands. His grandchildren visited with their own children. He gave his eldest grandchild his imperial seal and said that he would entrust the world into his hands.

"I'm tired," he then said, watching the sunset.

His grandson held his hand.

Moments later, he died.

Mark felt the moment of Yandi's death not as pain, but as release from pain and burdens. A deep peace washed over him as if he lived a life without regrets.

The world once again changed, and Mark found himself in a white space dimension. This time, he had his own body, but he seemed to be filled with confusion. "Who am I? Am I Houyi? Or am I Shennong (Yandi)?"