

Starlit Path 421

Chapter 421: The Gluttonous Girl and the Black Pot That Shook the Heavens

The black pot slammed onto the bluestone plaza with a crisp, resounding clang.

Every head snapped toward the sound.

Among the forest of gleaming, rune-etched pill cauldrons that radiated ancient majesty, that plain black pot looked utterly ridiculous—like a goofy husky that had somehow strolled into a pack of wolves.

None of the alchemists here were pushovers. They were the elite who had fought through brutal preliminaries across countless high-martial worlds just to stand on this stage. Their skills were monstrous, their standards sky-high.

“Pfft... a cooking pot?”

“She’s seriously refining pills in a pot?”

“Is this little girl here to perform stand-up? The Five Phoenixes are the hosts, and this is the champion they send? Treating a sacred alchemy contest like a circus?”

“A freshly ascended Ninth-grade world... of course they don’t have any decent alchemists. But if they’ve got no one, why send a kid with a pot just to pad the numbers? They’re throwing away their origin source essence for nothing!”

Laughter erupted all around, loud and unrestrained.

To these masters, alchemy was a solemn, almost holy art. They chose only the finest cauldrons, the ones forged from heavenly metals and inscribed with ancient formations, all to ensure perfection and eliminate even the slightest chance of failure.

Using a pot? Unheard of.

Technically possible, sure—but the control required was insane, and one tiny slip meant disaster.

Ni Yu felt every mocking stare prick her skin like needles.

What's wrong with using a pot?

This pot was personally awakened and blessed by the Young Master himself. Compared to those fancy cauldrons, it was a hundred times better!

Like the old saying goes: the best tool is the one that fits you perfectly.

Who gave these people the right to laugh at her?

High above, on the ancient warship, one of the Upper Realm envoy's attendants narrowed his eyes slightly.

Refining pills in a pot? A first for him.

He wouldn't interfere, though. If the Five Phoenixes wanted to clown around, let them. The one who lost would be the one stripped of origin source essence—and that would be the Five Phoenixes' problem.

Dong!

The attendant clenched his fist and struck the massive bronze bell beside him.

A deep, solemn toll rolled across the plaza.

With a flick of his finger, streaks of light shot out—scrolls that floated gently into every alchemist's hands.

The moment they unrolled them, every pair of eyes grew grave.

Sixth-grade pill: Flower Gathering Pill.

A pill capable of helping Tribulation Transcendents condense their primordial spirit flower. Even many Eighth and Ninth-grade worlds had never seen one.

And this was only the first round.

Fail to produce it, and you were out—no second round for you.

Ni Yu unrolled her scroll and studied it carefully.

Flower Gathering Pill... ingredients: Prime Spirit Grass, Black Ginseng Root, Velvet Leaf...

Her brow furrowed. Looks tricky.

She memorized every step, every detail. Suddenly, flames burst from the scroll, reducing it to ash in an instant.

Every alchemist lowered their hands, closing their eyes to commit the formula to memory.

The attendant's cold, proud voice rang out from the warship:

"Beside each of you is a spatial orb containing the exact herbs you need. One attempt only. Form the pill or blow the furnace—either ends your chance. You may abort mid-process if you sense failure and restart without penalty, but time is limited. When the sands run out, those without a finished pill are disqualified."

He raised his hand. Array patterns wove across his palm and formed a gigantic hourglass.

Shaaaa...

Golden sand began to pour.

"Begin."

DONG!

The bell tolled again, ripples spreading through the air.

Tension skyrocketed.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

In an instant, the plaza exploded into a dazzling kaleidoscope of flames—violet, crimson, azure, gold—each more breathtaking than the last.

Herbs flew from spatial orbs, tossed into flames to extract their essence.

...

On the blood-colored battlefield, the new emperor of the Great Xuan Dynasty, Tantai He, sat rigidly, his face dark as reports flooded in.

Around the plaza, cultivators from countless worlds had gathered—some from the Five Phoenixes, most from beyond.

Their representative? A little girl.

A little girl who had just slammed a cooking pot onto the ground.

The competing alchemists at least tried to stay focused, biting back their laughter.

The spectators? They lost all restraint.

“A Ninth-grade world shouldn’t even have qualified for the preliminaries! If they weren’t the hosts, that kid would still be at home sucking on candy!”

“Pathetic. Even if they wanted to forfeit gracefully, did they have to send a child?”

“Does she even look like an alchemist? Refining pills in a pot—she’s playing house!”

Whispers turned to open jeers.

From the warships hovering in the sky, powerhouses from other worlds laughed without bothering to hide it.

The Five Phoenixes had always been despised here. Born from the Void Heaven, they were seen as upstarts at best, abominations at worst.

The cultivators of the Five Phoenixes clenched their jaws and endured the storm of mockery in silence.

Tantai He’s fists tightened until his knuckles went white.

Then he forced them open and stared at the plaza.

He believed in Ni Yu.

Not for any complicated reason.

Just one: she came from White Jade Capital.

That was enough.

...

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Lu Ping'an lounged on the Thousand-Blade Chair, one hand propping his chin, the other lazily swirling a bronze cup of liquor. Ripples danced across the surface.

The Spirit Pressure Chessboard floated before him, projecting the entire alchemy contest in perfect detail.

He watched with amused interest.

For Ni Yu, this was a rare chance to see the wider world.

...

Ni Yu's round face was flushed crimson. She took a deep breath, closed her eyes, and forced her heart to calm.

Focus.

No matter how loud the ridicule, she couldn't let it shake her.

She spat out a tongue of ghostly white flame—the Bone Spirit Fire, a heavenly profound flame personally bestowed by the Young Master. Perfect for alchemy.

One handful of herbs after another flew into the black pot.

Soon she sank completely into the flow state.

Sixth-grade pills were no joke.

Alchemy demanded absolute concentration—using divine sense or primordial spirit to control flame temperature, intensity, rhythm—every step precise to the extreme.

BOOM!

Terrifying primordial spirit fluctuations swept the plaza like a hurricane.

Nearly every contestant was at least a Unity Realm powerhouse; some were even Tribulation Transcendents. Their unrestrained auras clashed and formed a suffocating pressure storm.

Ni Yu felt her cheeks distort under the force.

She hadn't formed her primordial spirit yet, so she spread only her divine sense.

Many alchemists glanced at her struggling in their aura storm and smirked disdainfully before ignoring her again.

They began refining in earnest.

Herbs dropped into cauldrons. Flames danced under perfect control. Impurities burned away and sank; pure essence was sealed and protected.

Sixth-grade was hard.

Pffft!

Suddenly—a cauldron exploded.

Acrid smoke and the stench of charred herbs filled the air.

One alchemist's face turned livid. He punched his ruined cauldron with a furious roar.

In a flash, an attendant appeared beside him.

“One chance only.”

A palm struck downward.

Mysterious origin energy surged. Threads of source essence were forcibly ripped from the alchemist's body.

He stared in despair and regret—he'd actually failed before the girl with the pot!

"Failed contestants leave quietly... or be erased."

Ashen-faced, the man packed his cauldron and slunk away.

Passing the Five Phoenixes group, he sneered venomously.

"Keep staring. Your little pot girl won't last much longer."

Time ticked on.

More explosions. More successes—fragrant pill aroma wafted when cauldrons opened, though only a few pills formed per batch, the scent far from overwhelming.

Ni Yu's nose twitched.

Gurgle...

Her stomach let out a thunderous growl that echoed across half the plaza.

She was starving.

But this contest was too formal—she couldn't just pop pills into her mouth mid-refining like usual.

Her chubby cheeks twisted in agony.

Ever since comprehending the Dao Intent of Gluttony, her appetite had become bottomless. Going without food felt like torture—her stomach itself seemed ready to turn into a furnace.

She glanced into the black pot. Rich, mouth-watering medicinal fragrance rose up.

Drool slipped from the corner of her mouth.

“Can't take it...”

“One portion definitely won't be enough to fill me!”

She couldn't hold back anymore.

With a wave of her plump little hand, she yanked out all nine remaining portions of herbs from the spatial orb and dumped them straight into the pot.

Every alchemist nearby twitched.

This was alchemy?!

This was madness!

Who throws ten portions into the same pot at once?!

Precision was everything in pill refining—how could anyone just toss everything together like stir-fry?!

She was begging to blow the pot sky-high!

On the ancient warship, the attendant's gaze locked onto Ni Yu.

A faint, intrigued chuckle drifted from deeper within the ship.

“Interesting...”

The attendants felt a chill crawl up their spines.

Ni Yu was too hungry to care who was watching. She was about to die of starvation—who cared about peeping?

Her divine sense roared out like a tidal wave.

Normally the recipe was meant for a cauldron, but thanks to the secret black-pot techniques the Young Master had taught her, she effortlessly adapted every step.

Golden sand kept falling.

Everyone waited for her spectacular failure—greedier than the snake trying to swallow an elephant.

Ten portions in one go? What kind of idiot fatty does that?

Of the 13,872 alchemists, one-third had already succeeded.

Another third were still trying or had already failed.

The hourglass never paused for anyone.

The Five Phoenixes delegation grew nervous.

Qi Lijia's wrinkled old face kept twitching.

Ni Yu still hadn't finished...

Emperor Tantai He shot to his feet, palms sweaty, staring at the plaza.

Suddenly—

Ni Yu's eyes snapped open, bloodshot from hunger.

She grabbed the edge of the scorching pot—red-hot from the Bone Spirit Fire—and started slamming it against the ground.

BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM!

Inside, ten portions of molten essence churned violently, yet her divine sense perfectly separated each portion like oil and water.

Drizzling openly now, she began the real performance.

CRASH! CRASH! CRASH!

The black pot smashed into the bluestone again and again, cracks spider-webbing across the tiles.

Every alchemist still refining whipped around in fury.

Those who hadn't finished yet nearly coughed blood.

Damn it!

She can't refine properly so she's deliberately sabotaging everyone else?!

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

The attendant on the warship felt veins pop on his forehead.

He stormed inside to report, expecting the envoy to disqualify the lunatic girl for disturbing the contest.

Instead, laughter echoed from within the cabin.

When he came back out, he looked like he'd bitten into a lemon.

The envoy had allowed her to continue "causing chaos."

BOOM! BOOM!

Explosions rang out nonstop.

Alchemists screamed in rage.

“I’ll kill her!”

“You little monster—ruining my focus!”

Some clutched their chests and howled.

This was sacred alchemy—how could such a freak exist?!

Attendants flashed in, cold glares forcing the furious alchemists to stand down.

They could only watch their origin essence get stripped away and leave in humiliation.

Ni Yu was oblivious, completely lost in her zone.

Black Pot Alchemy Manual: First smash, second toss, third brew...

Smashing forced the essences to collide and fuse perfectly.

One tiny mistake and the pot would explode.

Of course, she'd done this a thousand times.

Smashing complete.

The ten portions had merged into one massive, fragrant blob.

She swallowed hard.

Then—tossing phase.

Like a master chef flipping vegetables, she jerked the pot rhythmically. The huge mass of liquid leapt and danced, flying out of the pot only to be caught again.

The bottom of the pot, wrapped in heavenly flame, struck the ground in perfect symphony.

If smashing was wild chaos metal, tossing was an elegant orchestral masterpiece.

The remaining alchemists lost their minds.

Their cauldrons started rattling ominously.

All they could hear was that cursed rhythmic CLANG-CLANG-CLANG!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Another wave of explosions rocked the plaza.

Ni Yu didn't notice.

Drooling, swaying like seaweed in a storm, she tossed the pot with increasing flair.

The scene was apocalyptic.

Below the stage:

Qi Lijia's old face twitched uncontrollably.

Nie Changqing covered his face with his palm.

The Five Phoenixes cultivators were stunned speechless—then started laughing through their nerves.

Oh, so we're not allowed to mess with your focus now?

On the plaza, the remaining alchemists paled.

Because...

As she kept tossing...

That massive blob of essence began condensing—miraculously forming perfect, round pills that rolled and clattered inside the pot like rain on a tin roof.

Huala... huala...

Soon the only sound in the entire plaza was the thunderous applause of hundreds of freshly formed pills bouncing happily in the black pot.

On the ancient warship, the attendant's pupils shrank to pinpricks.

She... actually succeeded?!

And the yield...

Terrifying!

A powerful primordial spirit fluctuation swept out from the depths of the ship.

A faint, shocked murmur drifted through the air:

“That girl is the alchemist from the newly born high-martial world in the Void Heaven...”

“This... could this be a lost ancient alchemy art?”

Chapter 422: This Attendant Didn't Die for Nothing

Ancient alchemy art?

If Lu Fan heard the Upper Realm envoy on that ancient warship thinking that, he'd probably burst out laughing.

The upgraded Alchemy Notes were indeed a high-level refining method, but mostly they recorded insights and mindset. The actual techniques still had to be hammered out through countless failures.

All because, back in the day, Lu had casually tossed a random pot to Ni Yu. Ever since, she'd gone farther and farther down the black-pot alchemy path with no way back.

She'd always used that pot—failed, exploded, failed again, exploded again—until, through sheer repetition, she'd forged her very own black-pot style.

Ancient art? Hardly. It was 100% Ni Yu original.

Lu scratched his ear and chuckled.

Over the years on Lakeheart Isle, that girl had caused no small amount of chaos. The constant clang-clang-clang of her pot smashing the ground used to drive him up the wall.

Eventually, though, he got used to it. The racket even added a bit of lively noise to the otherwise tranquil island.

Now she'd taken her show on the road to torment everyone else. Lu couldn't help feeling a tiny bit of schadenfreude.

He took a leisurely sip of plum wine from his bronze cup and kept watching the competition.

...

Smashing phase: done. Tossing phase: done.

Ni Yu moved on to the third and final step—brewing.

The black pot hovered before her. Inside, countless pills clinked against the walls like a rainstorm on a tin roof, crisp and endless.

The plaza finally quieted down. Many red-eyed alchemists forced themselves to calm.

Golden sand continued pouring from the hourglass—time slipping away, irretrievable.

The first round was nearing its end.

Of the thousands of elite alchemists who had qualified through preliminaries across countless high-martial worlds, more than half had already been eliminated.

Every remaining second drew every eye in the arena.

Only a few grains of sand remained. When the hourglass emptied, anyone without a finished pill would fail and have their origin dao essence stripped.

Sensing the deadline looming, the surviving alchemists sped up.

Speed meant mistakes.

Failures multiplied. Sixth-grade pills weren't easy—even masters who could reliably produce them needed multiple attempts and long hours under normal conditions.

A timed contest like this tested not just skill, but mental fortitude.

And thanks to a certain pot-wielding chubby girl wrecking everyone's focus earlier, the failure rate had skyrocketed.

Outside the plaza, countless gazes locked onto the remaining contestants—worried looks from the Five Phoenixes, mocking smirks from other worlds, and calm observation from those who had already succeeded.

Most eyes, however, were glued to the baby-faced girl standing with eyes closed, divine sense enveloping her black pot as she coaxed the pills to completion.

The sole alchemist representing the only high-martial world born from the Void Heaven.

No matter how flashy her performance had been, if she failed to finish in time, it was all for nothing.

A final few grains of sand slipped through...

Suddenly.

The chubby girl's eyes snapped open.

GURGLE!

A thunderous growl rolled from her stomach.

Her eyes flashed with hunger-fueled brilliance. Divine sense rippled outward.

She grabbed the pot with both hands and slammed it down one last time.

BOOM!

“Heyah!”

With a cute little shout, she clapped both palms against the pot.

WHOOSH!

Pills shot out like a reverse rainstorm—hundreds of them erupting from the pot in a dazzling spray, like a celestial maiden scattering flowers.

Gasps exploded both inside and outside the arena.

This wasn't just surprise. This was pure shock.

That pill yield was insane!

The higher the grade, the lower the yield. For a sixth-grade Flower Gathering Pill, ten pills from one set of materials was already considered excellent.

Yet here was a dense cloud of pills so thick you couldn't count them at a glance.

This wasn't alchemy. This was cooking for an army!

The Five Phoenixes crowd erupted into cheers, clutching their hearts in relief.

Talk about cutting it close!

The hourglass had literally one grain left when she finished.

Qi Liuja let out a long breath. On the high platform, the new emperor Tantai He couldn't help pumping his fist.

From the void beyond, disappointed sighs drifted down from the warships.

A figure flashed.

An Upper Realm attendant appeared beside Ni Yu, hands clasped behind his back, pristine robes untouched by dust.

He pinched a single pill between two fingers.

“Sixth-grade Flower Gathering Pill. Quality... lower-middle at best. Still, it counts as success.”

His words officially declared Ni Yu advanced to the second round.

He glanced at her, waiting for the expected squeal of joy.

Instead...

His pupils shrank.

Ni Yu had already grabbed a massive handful of pills and was stuffing them into her mouth, chewing frantically like a starving beggar who hadn't eaten in three days.

The surrounding alchemists stood frozen.

She refined an entire pot... just to eat her fill?

And—those were sixth-grade pills! One contained energy that could rupture an ordinary cultivator. She was shoving in handfuls like candy!

Wasn't she afraid of exploding?

The attendant frowned in distaste, then vanished with a flicker, moving on to strip essence from the failures.

He no longer paid any attention to the pill-munching girl. She'd finished—that was all that mattered.

The Five Phoenixes alchemist had advanced to the second round.

Nobody had seen that coming.

A little girl with a cooking pot had actually forced her way through.

Although the rules limited contestants to Unity Realm and below, plenty of actual Unity Realm alchemists had still failed in the first round.

“Just luck.”

“Didn’t you hear the Upper Realm lord? Her pills were barely passable. She scraped by.”

“Hmph. Utterly disgraceful. She’s a stain on all alchemists. She’ll be crushed in the second round.”

Cold snorts and furious glares came from eliminated contestants.

Ni Yu waddled back to Qi Liujia’s side.

Li Sansui gave her a gentle smile.

Alu scratched his head and grinned honestly. “Awesome!”

Ni Yu crunched thoughtfully. “Not bad. Could use more sugar.”

Everyone went speechless.

“Rest well,” Qi Liujia said gravely. “The second round will be much harder. If I’m not mistaken, it’ll be head-to-head duels. The winner strips the loser’s staked origin dao essence.”

He stared at the now-empty plaza, expression still tense.

“That’s why the second round is crucial for Ni Yu. Win once, and even if she loses later, the gains and losses can offset each other.”

Ni Yu nodded solemnly, plopped down cross-legged, pulled out an entire sack of pills, and started munching.

Qi Liujiu glanced at her, a helpless fondness in his eyes.

She had trained under the Young Master himself, yet compared to the monstrous geniuses of those ancient high-level worlds... making it past the first round was already a miracle.

He just hoped the second round wouldn’t be too brutal.

His gaze shifted to Li Sansui nearby.

The girl was wound tight as a bowstring, pressure radiating off her.

She knew that in the formation competition, she might face her former senior brothers.

She understood exactly why her master had fallen so low. Only by defeating those traitors could she restore his honor.

“Relax,” Qi Lijia’s gentle voice drifted over.

Li Sansui startled.

“Master...”

“Just show them your strength. Don’t obsess over winning or losing.”

He smiled.

“With your ability, the first round will be easy.”

DONG!

As if on cue, a deep bell tolled from the formation plaza.

The sound echoed across the entire Five Phoenixes.

Five Phoenixes cultivators perked up. From the warships and spirit boats in the void, figures shot forth with confident laughter.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

There were even more formation masters than alchemists.

“Master, I’m going.”

Li Sansui stood, robes fluttering, expression resolute.

Formation masters descended onto their plaza.

On the other side, the artifact-refining competition began as well. Alu headed toward his stage.

...

The formation contest was simpler than alchemy. The first round didn’t even require constructing arrays—just breaking them.

The attendants deployed illusion arrays prepared by Upper Realm formation masters. Anyone who broke free before time ran out advanced.

Simple rules, but no one felt relaxed. Who knew how terrifying those Upper Realm arrays might be?

Qi Liujiā exhaled in relief. This was exactly what he'd predicted. Li Sansui would breeze through.

Buzz...

The grand array activated.

In an instant, every formation master on the plaza was bound by chains of array patterns. Break the chains to escape the illusion—that was breaking the array.

Silence blanketed the plaza.

This time, the spectators from other worlds held their mockery.

Li Sansui and Alu looked perfectly normal, after all.

Unlike a certain pot-carrying chubby girl.

Qi Lijia stared intently at the formation plaza, still nervous despite his confidence.

He paid no attention to Alu's refining contest—Gongshu Yu was watching that one.

Just as he craned his neck, waiting...

A figure appeared silently behind him.

Qi Lijia's old body stiffened.

A face leaned in close.

Qi Lijia slowly turned his weathered, wrinkled face.

A spotless, gentle, jade-like countenance smiled back.

“Master, long time no see. You’re looking spirited.”

The voice was warm, like fingers rolling a heated jade bead.

A tall, handsome youth. Beside Qi Liujia’s hunched, aged frame, the contrast was stark.

Farther off, Ni Yu’s pill-munching slowed slightly.

She sensed killing intent.

BOOM!

Qi Liujia’s primordial spirit surged, blasting the youth backward.

The youth floated down lightly, loose robes fluttering, landing on the blood-colored ground.

“Fourth,” Qi Liujia said icily.

Of his ten disciples, if there was one he hated most—it was this fourth.

The inheritor of the “Zhe” character array word!

He looked refined and gentle, but inside he was a venomous viper.

The youth’s hair scattered softly. He smiled warmly at Qi Liujia.

“Master still has that temper.”

“Just you?” Qi Liujia narrowed his eyes.

“Yes. All the other senior and junior brothers were taken in by Upper Realm experts. Only I was left behind...”

His tone carried unwilling bitterness.

“Why... why did you give me the ‘Zhe’ word back then instead of a better one?”

“Now I have to participate in this boring little contest just to earn the Upper Realm’s recognition!”

Resentment flashed in his gentle eyes.

Qi Liujia laughed coldly.

“The Nine Character Array Words have no strong or weak—only you were too talentless.”

The youth’s snarl vanished, replaced by calm indifference.

He glanced at the formation plaza.

“I heard you took in a little junior sister? Perfect. Her presence makes this dull contest interesting.”

His soft laughter slithered into Qi Liujia’s ears like a demon’s whisper.

“I’ll take good care of little junior sister during the matches. Let her experience despair... peacefully.”

He grinned, fangs glinting like a serpent.

Then his figure flickered and vanished.

Ni Yu trotted over, still stuffing pills in her mouth.

“Who was that weirdo?”

Qi Liujia closed his eyes. When he opened them again, calm had returned.

“Si Tu Gui. My fourth disciple. Now serves a Sixth-grade sacred ground in the Blood Evil Heaven.”

“Si Tu Gui? What an ugly name...”

Ni Yu muttered, then lost interest.

Worry surfaced in Qi Liujia’s eyes.

On the plaza, Li Sansui was still trapped in the illusion chains, struggling to break free.

Yet Si Tu Gui had already escaped the array and even come to chat.

The gap in strength... was enormous.

...

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Lu Fan lost interest after watching Ni Yu's round.

Hmm?

He sensed many figures sneaking past the blood-colored battlefield into the Five Phoenixes continent.

He smiled faintly.

Sipping his wine, he flicked the armrest of his wheelchair.

Buzz...

Silver light exploded outward, streaking across the land in countless blades.

Pfft! Pfft!

Blood flowers bloomed silently across the Five Phoenixes.

The infiltrators—powerful cultivators—died without a sound, sliced apart before they could react. The blades carried a strange, irresistible force.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Bodies rained into the vast sea, into deep mountains, into snowfields...

Their primordial spirits tried to flee, only to be frozen mid-escape by the silver light, turned into statues just like those on the primordial spirit platforms in the ocean.

Their flesh dissolved into pure energy, absorbed by the Five Phoenixes' heavens and earth.

Outside an ancient tomb.

A figure wreathed in hazy smoke appeared—one of the Upper Realm envoy's attendants.

“An ancient tomb from the primordial era...”

He murmured.

Suddenly, he shifted.

BOOM!

A silver blade tore through the air, slicing space itself.

But the attendant was no weakling—he barely dodged.

The blade plunged into the sea, sending up a heaven-shaking wave.

He glanced calmly at the silver light.

“Somewhat powerful... The holy lord of this newborn world?”

“Such arrogance.”

His robes began to flutter, ready to retaliate.

Then—

The tomb doors opened.

BOOM!

A massive skeletal hand reached out.

Terrifying pressure crushed down, locking the attendant in place.

The sky above was left only with drifting crimson mist—the attendant's body had been smashed into paste.

His primordial spirit shot toward the heavens, racing for the blood-colored battlefield.

Yet from within the tomb drifted faint, ghostly guqin music.

The primordial spirit exploded into a violent storm, scattering into nothingness.

The tomb doors closed slowly with a long creak.

On Lakeheart Isle, Lu Fan waved lazily.

The silver blades flew back and vanished into his wheelchair.

None of the infiltrators had been particularly strong—even that attendant was only at the first stage of Primordial Spirit Unity.

They'd been cautious, afraid to alert him.

The only pity was that the attendant's primordial spirit had been shattered by the guqin sound. What a waste.

If it had been preserved as a statue, the Five Phoenixes could have gained another Unity Realm expert.

...

On the ancient warship.

The moment their comrade died inside the Five Phoenixes, every attendant trembled, eyes flashing with murderous fury.

From the cabin came an intrigued chuckle.

Below, the first rounds of both the formation and artifact-refining contests concluded.

Li Sansui and Alu both advanced.

An attendant received a sound transmission. He walked respectfully to the cabin door, hands folded over his abdomen, bowing slightly.

A lazy, amused voice drifted out.

“Hmm... give the Five Phoenixes contestants some special arrangements.”

“This attendant didn’t die for nothing.”

Chapter 423: The First Battle of the Five Phoenixes

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

A gentle breeze stirred the lake into soft ripples. Everything felt peaceful and pleasant.

Suddenly—

Waves surged across the water. A giant whale's roar boomed from the depths. Space itself tore open with a violent rip.

Lu Fan's hand paused mid-move over the chessboard.

"Oh? The little guy's finally out?"

From the torn void, a round, ball-like figure shot out like a cannonball, bouncing several times across the island before skidding to a halt.

Flesh wings unfurled. Sharp gusts swept outward. A terrifying primordial spirit pressure rolled across the island.

Little Yinglong—who had been tossed into Buzhou Peak for nearly a century of beatings—had returned!

He looked far more formidable now. Every dragon scale gleamed like forged steel, reflecting razor-sharp light. His dark-golden eyes churned with a thousand blades' worth of killing intent.

ROAR!

The moment he landed on the island, Little Yingdragon threw his head back and unleashed a sky-shaking dragon roar.

The Sky-Reaching Chrysanthemums and Green-Fall Peaches swayed violently in the shockwave.

He was announcing his return in the most dramatic way possible.

Lu glanced over and smiled.

A hundred years of getting pummeled by Zhulong clearly worked wonders. If Little Yinglong had trained on his own, he wouldn't have improved at all in a century.

All that little glutton did was eat and spray water...

"Back already? Go play somewhere. Stop yelling."

BOOM!

Lu picked up a chess piece and placed it calmly.

BANG!

Heaven and earth spiritual energy detonated.

PFFT!

Little Yinglong was instantly flattened against the ground by overwhelming spirit pressure, his proud roar turning into pathetic whimpers.

Lu released the pressure. The little dragon sprang up like a spring-loaded toy and zipped straight to Lu's shoulder, shrinking to palm-size as he landed.

Two big bumps swelled on his forehead, looking ready to pop.

"Not bad. You've grown quite a bit."

Lu could feel the powerful aura rolling off him.

With the dragon blood pool, ancestral dragon qi, and all the resources piled onto him—if Little Yinglong hadn't shown noticeable improvement, Lu would've rolled up his sleeves and beaten him personally.

Now, not only had he stepped into the Unity Realm, he was even close to condensing a true dragon soul.

For a Heavenly Dragon seed, condensing a dragon soul meant stepping onto the path of becoming a real dragon.

Little Yinglong puffed up proudly at his dad's praise.

Then opened his mouth and shot a water arrow at Lu...

And that was the end of that.

A few minutes later, a bruised and swollen little dragon waddled around the island, looking like he'd lost a fight with a brick wall.

To his disappointment, the chubby pill-making girl was nowhere to be seen.

During all those years getting beaten on Buzhou Peak, the thing he missed most was Ni Yu's pills.

Having pills to eat was heaven—especially since she produced them in bulk. He could eat one, throw one, eat one, throw one...

Now he was back, craving a proper feast, and... nothing.

Little Yinglong floated face-up in the Lake of Origin, golden dragon eyes filled with existential crisis.

No pills, and he still got beaten the moment he came home.

Why was his dragon life so hard?

Lu ignored the drama queen.

He looked toward the closing spatial rift.

Atop the distant peak stood a graceful young girl with closed eyes. Sensing Lu's gaze, she bowed slightly, a shy smile on her lips.

Lu nodded. The rift sealed smoothly.

Zhulong had grown stronger too.

As expected of the child he was most proud of.

...

Ni Yu, of course, had no idea Little Yinglong was back.

On the blood-colored battlefield, the professional tournaments were in full swing.

Though only a warm-up for the true Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament, they had drawn countless eyes—from Five Phoenixes cultivators, Void Heaven wanderers, and even experts from other realms.

Three grand plazas had been erected.

The first rounds of the formation and artifact-refining tournaments were also wrapping up.

Li Sansui broke free from the illusion array without suspense. Her comprehension of formations, bolstered by Qi Liujia's teachings and her time meditating on Lakeheart Isle, was exceptional.

Alu advanced as well. As Gongshu Yu's prized disciple, his master wouldn't have let him compete without confidence.

Both returned beaming—they had protected the Five Phoenixes' origin dao essence.

Qi Liujia was pleased, though he kept his encounter with Si Tu Gui hidden. He didn't want to burden the kids.

"The first round is over. Rest well," he said.

"The second round's timing depends on the Upper Realm envoy. And from what I can tell, it will likely be one-on-one duels. Stay sharp even while resting."

The three nodded solemnly.

The fact that all three Five Phoenixes contestants had passed the first round caused a massive uproar.

No one had expected the only high-martial world born from the Void Heaven to not lose a single drop of origin essence.

Warships in the void began casting strange glances downward.

The brighter the Five Phoenixes shone, the more attention—and hostility—they attracted.

BOOM!

From the ancient warship, an attendant stepped forward, powerful aura unfurling.

His face was shrouded in mist, but Qi Liuja could feel eyes fixed on the Five Phoenixes contingent.

“The first round of the professional tournaments has concluded. All participants have three days to cultivate. In three days, the preliminary matches of the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament will begin—along with the second round of the professional tournaments.”

His voice boomed across the blood-colored battlefield and the entire Void Heaven.

Shock rippled through the crowd.

Normally, only the finals of the professional tournaments were woven into the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament.

This time, they were starting the cross-over from the second round?

Excitement surged.

The professional contests were interesting, but compared to pure combat, they were niche.

Not everyone understood pills, formations, or artifacts.

But battle?

Everyone understood battle.

The attendant's words spread far and wide.

The entire Void Heaven trembled.

Many participants in the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament had already arrived, waiting aboard their respective warships and spirit vessels.

Now, the real show was about to begin.

Qi Liujia's expression grew heavy.

The second professional round being inserted into the grand tournament...

If the fights weren't thrilling enough, complaints would flood in.

That meant the second round would be far more brutal than expected.

He glanced at Ni Yu, Li Sansui, and Alu, worry settling in his heart.

"Let's return and prepare."

The three nodded.

Even the new emperor of the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty withdrew to the continent.

News of the upcoming intense battles sent the Five Phoenixes cultivators into a frenzy of excitement.

They would finally witness true experts from beyond their world.

How did the Five Phoenixes' cultivation level compare?

...

On the ancient warship, the attendants began clearing the deck.

Powerful auras swept outward.

Everyone except the Five Phoenixes group was forcibly ejected from the blood-colored battlefield and pushed back to their warships.

Many frowned.

Was the Upper Realm deliberately going easy on the Five Phoenixes?

The Five Phoenixes cultivators also retreated—the pressure from those attendants was suffocating.

The attendants began constructing the grand tournament plaza.

Cyan orbs shot into the sky.

Then slammed down like cannonballs.

Massive cyan brick plazas rapidly formed, each brick gleaming with brilliant light.

The Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament plaza dwarfed the three professional ones.

Its importance was clear.

...

Five Phoenixes Continent.

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Qi Liujia led Ni Yu, Li Sansui, and Alu back to the island.

Lu Fan descended slowly from the White Jade Capital pavilion, white robes fluttering.

“Young Master.”

“Mission accomplished. Ni Yu, Sansui, and Alu all passed the first round,” Qi Liujia reported, a hint of pride in his voice.

How many worlds could claim that?

Countless high-martial worlds from the three major heavens—Pingyang, Blood Evil, and Yuanci—competed, not to mention the Upper Realm powers that skipped straight to the finals.

For three kids from the Five Phoenixes to advance in such fierce competition was no small feat.

Lu Fan nodded slightly.

The moment Ni Yu returned, a certain salted-fish-like little dragon floating in the lake perked up.

He shot toward her with a whoosh, landing on her head, tail swishing happily.

“Waa! Little Yellow! You’re back from your beating?!”

Ni Yu squealed in delight.

She reached into her pouch, grabbed a handful of pills, hesitated, put one back... then another... until she finally tossed a single beautiful Flower Gathering Pill to the dragon.

Little Yinglong swallowed it whole.

Then his face changed.

His dark-golden eyes went blank.

...Why wasn’t it sweet?!

Qi Liujia sent Li Sansui and Alu off to cultivate, then walked slowly with Lu Fan around the island.

“In three days, the grand tournament begins...” Qi Liujia said gravely, hands behind his back.

“Young Master, have you sensed anything strange in the Five Phoenixes lately? Any outsiders trying to sneak in?”

Lu Fan smiled, twirling a peach blossom between his fingers.

“Just some flies. I turned them into something useful.”

Qi Liujia blinked.

Turned them... into something useful?

Lu Fan glanced at him, smiled, and offered no explanation.

“Anyway, the grand tournament is coming. Gather all the participants. Also...”

Qi Liujia bowed and withdrew.

Lu Fan watched him leave, leaning back in his Thousand-Blade Chair among the peach blossoms, fingers tapping the armrest.

“Old Qi really cares for the Five Phoenixes. But maybe because his previous world was destroyed, he’s overly cautious now.”

He chuckled. Some mindsets needed time to change.

His gaze swept over the system panel. Spiritual energy was still bottlenecked, but Lu Fan wasn’t worried.

When it was time to break through, it would happen.

Then he remembered the system’s [Glory Mission]—to make the entire Five Phoenixes feel pride and purpose through this tournament.

An idea formed.

“Ning Zhao.”

A white dress fluttered as Ning Zhao appeared gracefully.

“Young Master.”

Even after a century, her beauty remained untouched—now a Unity Realm expert with a vastly extended lifespan.

“Go to the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty,” Lu Fan said. “The Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament will be combat-focused. Have the new emperor bring the imperial army to the blood-colored battlefield to observe and learn.”

“Also spread word throughout the cultivation world—this kind of battle is rare. They may gain enlightenment just by watching.”

Ning Zhao blinked in surprise.

She hadn’t expected Young Master to open the event to everyone.

A gentle smile curved her lips. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

“Yes, Young Master.”

Then she vanished in a streak of light.

After she left, Lu Fan’s eyes gleamed faintly.

He looked up at the sky, fair face calm.

He could sense powerful, oppressive auras lurking beyond the Void Heaven, watching the Five Phoenixes.

“Why hold the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament in the Five Phoenixes?”

“To drain all our origin dao essence?”

The corner of Lu Fan’s mouth lifted—cold and sharp.

The Five Phoenixes’ dao essence was the foundation of its growth.

Anyone who tried to touch that foundation was touching his foundation.

Lu Ping’an made a mental note.

...

Qi Liujia went to gather the tournament participants.

Ning Zhao descended upon the imperial capital of the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty.

The new emperor personally led his officials to greet her—this was his first direct contact with someone from White Jade Capital.

White Jade Capital was legend. Its mysterious lord was revered as the number one cultivator of the Five Phoenixes.

No one knew how strong he truly was.

Treating him like a god was never wrong.

Ning Zhao relayed Lu Fan's message.

The emperor's face lit up. He immediately vowed to bring 100,000 troops to the blood-colored battlefield to observe.

Ning Zhao nodded and left, heading to Tianji Peak to have Lü Mudui send messages via Heavenly Secret Pigeons.

In just three days, the entire Five Phoenixes cultivation world erupted.

Few knew much about the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament.

But when Young Master Lu himself commanded them to come watch, saying they might gain enlightenment from the battles?

Every sect, every clan, every rogue cultivator prepared to go.

...

Western Liang, Dongyan River.

The river roared, spring approaching. Ice was melting.

Overlord stood with hands behind his back, robes fluttering, staring at the rushing waters, lost in thought.

“My lord.”

Luo Mingsang stepped out from the main tent, voice soft.

“This battle... please be careful. This Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament is no ordinary event.”

“Recently, strange phenomena have appeared across the Five Phoenixes—primordial spirit statues rising from the ground. That means many outsiders have tried to invade and were slain by Young Master Lu. So many experts spying on us... combined with this tournament...”

“No matter what, my lord, be careful.”

Overlord nodded slowly. An aura of devouring mountains and rivers erupted from him.

“This king is, after all, a cultivator of the Five Phoenixes. Emperor Tantai Xuan once said: Those who offend Great Xuan will be executed without mercy.”

“The same applies to the Five Phoenixes.”

“Whoever invades us—kill.”

His final word carried terrifying pressure.

BOOM!

The Dongyan River exploded into thousands of water columns.

He gently touched Luo Mingsang's face. In the distance, Qi Liujia and the others waited.

Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, Tang Yimo, Jiang Li, and more...

Overlord laughed and stepped forward. The earth trembled with each stride.

...

A small farmhouse courtyard.

"Big Sister Chi Lian, will Uncle Jiang be fighting in this Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament?"

Bai Qingniao scratched Little Phoenix Nine's fluffy belly. The little bird's eyes narrowed into happy slits.

In the yard, Little Phoenix One strutted proudly with his chicks, bullying the normal chickens.

Chi Lian swayed over, leaning against the railing.

“According to Tianji Pavilion, the Lord of the Martial Emperor City, Young Master Tianxu, Master Ye of the Absolute Blade Sect, and the Spring and Autumn Empress of the Qian Female Palace will join Lord Jiang Li in the team battle.”

Bai Qingniao’s pale-golden eyes flickered with firelight.

“Uncle Jiang excels at military formations. With him leading, the team battle will be perfect.”

“Sister Chi Lian, let’s go watch.”

Chi Lian, who had been listting, suddenly perked up, eyes shining.

...

Atop a snow-capped mountain.

Kong Nanfei stretched lazily.

Behind him, Meng Haoran, seated in meditation and absorbing righteous qi like a torrent, opened his eyes slightly.

“Teacher, are we going to watch the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament?”

“It’s the first real contact between the Five Phoenixes and the outside worlds. And... don’t you feel something off about this tournament?”

Kong Nanfei shook out his tattered scholar’s robe.

Beneath his scruffy beard, sharp eyes gleamed.

“When the Five Phoenixes became a high-martial world, we faced countless tribulations and invasions. Now they suddenly hold this so-called grand tournament?”

“Their intentions are obvious.”

“Plus, a few days ago, another primordial spirit statue appeared at the foot of the mountain—one of those fallen experts, bearing Young Master Lu’s sword intent. Without a doubt, a massive conspiracy hides beneath this event.”

“As scholars of the Five Phoenixes, how can we sit by and do nothing?”

With hearty laughter and the sound of reading aloud, Kong Nanfei and Meng Haoran soared into the sky toward the blood-colored battlefield.

...

Southern Prefecture, mountain path.

After fresh rain, the empty mountain air was crisp.

In a bamboo tower, Sima Qingshan finished a painting and hung his brush.

An Miaoyu, still wearing her red cloak, folded a patched cyan robe into a book box, added a few scrolls of paintings, then looked at the figure by the window.

“Master, I’m ready.”

Sima Qingshan turned and smiled.

“Then let’s go. Young Master Lu has called all cultivators to witness this battle. We mustn’t miss it.”

An Miaoyu nodded gently, took a bamboo umbrella, and stepped out with him.

...

North Luo Lake.

Nie Changqing stood in a straw raincoat and conical hat, Dragon Slayer at his waist, eyes closed.

Splash.

Nie Shuang walked across the water without causing a ripple.

“Father, the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament is about to begin. Aren’t you going to watch?”

“I can’t believe they didn’t invite you to compete.”

Nie Shuang frowned, now tall and imposing.

“I am a disciple of White Jade Capital. Without the Young Master’s word, how could I casually join?”

“Still... let’s go watch.”

“The Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament... Heh. Back when enemies surrounded the Five Phoenixes, now they hold some grand tournament? Their goal is clear.”

Nie Changqing opened his eyes. Blade intent surged, as if slicing the lake in half.

...

Three days passed in a flash.

One corner of the blood-colored battlefield.

At one end of the massive tournament plaza, 100,000 armored soldiers of the Great Xuan Divine Dynasty stood in perfect formation, radiating iron and blood.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Their synchronized march shook the earth.

From the void, countless gazes looked down with faint smirks.

To Unity Realm experts, mortal armies were nothing.

BOOM.

On command, the entire army sat in perfect unison, facing the plaza.

Five Phoenixes cultivators streaked through the sky, arriving one after another.

They weren't stupid. They all sensed something wrong.

Their auras merged, forming a silent storm.

In that moment, the entire Five Phoenixes seemed to become one.

From the ancient warship, a faint voice drifted out.

“Interesting...”

The attendant at the bow looked at the unified aura of the Five Phoenixes, lips curling beneath the mist in disdain.

“So many spectators... just to watch the Five Phoenixes fall?”

More and more warships gathered beyond the heavens.

Nearly every qualified high-martial world had arrived.

Even the Little Thunder Buddha World of Pingyang Heaven sent spirit boats carrying shadowy Buddhist figures.

Saint Master Tuoba and Saint Master Qingling also waited with their teams.

BOOM!

From the ancient warship, the attendant rose into the air, robes fluttering, hovering above the battlefield.

A powerful aura erupted from the ship.

An ancient mirror was tossed out by the mysterious Upper Realm envoy.

The mirror radiated ancient energy. Within it, origin dao essences from countless worlds coiled like divine dragons.

The attendant rolled up his sleeve, tapped the mirror lightly.

Two beams of light shot out.

Lake of Origin.

Lu Fan's brow arched.

He felt the Five Phoenixes' origin tremble slightly.

What was that mirror?

It could actually affect a world's origin dao essence?

The next moment, he saw—

One beam projected the phantom of the Five Phoenixes.

The other revealed a crescent-moon-shaped world.

Uproar exploded among the warships.

The very first match of the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament...

The Five Phoenixes had been drawn.

And there was no attempt to hide the targeting.

The attendant unleashed his full aura—Tribulation Transcendent pressure roared outward, shaking the very laws of the Void Heaven.

“The Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament—first battle.”

“Void Heaven, Ninth-grade Five Phoenixes Small World...”

“Versus...”

“Blood Evil Heaven, Seventh-grade Star-Moon Small World.”

Chapter 424: No Need to Endure—Fight When It’s Time to Fight!

“Ninth-grade versus Seventh-grade?”

“This is going to be a massacre.”

“A newborn high-martial world... what do they have to challenge a Seventh-grade world with? Do they even have a single Tribulation Transcendent?”

Laughter exploded from every warship hovering above the Five Phoenixes.

Some were gloating, some sneered in disdain, and plenty just openly mocked.

In the professional tournaments, all three Five Phoenixes contestants had unexpectedly reached the second round. The only explanation anyone could stomach was that the Five Phoenixes had poured everything into alchemy, formations, and artifact refining.

After all, some worlds specialized in those fields.

But the professional contests were just appetizers. The Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament was the real test of strength.

Saint Master Tuoba and Saint Master Qingling sat at the prows of their respective ships. Their eyes met, both filled with gravity.

“The outlook isn’t good for the Five Phoenixes.”

“The Star-Moon World from Blood Evil Heaven is no pushover.”

Tuoba spoke.

Qingling nodded slightly. “Victory is hard to predict. The Five Phoenixes are shrouded in mystery. Under that unfathomable Saint Lord Lu, they might just pull off a miracle.”

“And...”

She glanced at Tuoba. “Don’t forget—the Five Phoenixes are the only high-martial world born in the Void Heaven. All the Void’s fortune is gathered upon them.”

Tuoba froze.

Before he could reply, a figure approached, radiating Buddhist light.

Venerable Joyous.

He shook his head at Qingling. “You overestimate the Void Heaven. A land where emperors were buried—where would it find any fortune?”

“You think it’s coincidence that the Five Phoenixes were drawn first?”

“And against a Seventh-grade world? Star-Moon is solidly mid-to-upper tier among the lower-realm entrants.”

“The Five Phoenixes? Ninth-grade at best.”

“The Upper Realm bigshots intend to drain every last drop of their origin dao essence... maybe even knock them back to mid-martial in this tournament.”

Tuoba and Qingling’s pupils shrank.

...

The ancient mirror released a vast aura that blanketed the plaza.

The attendant stood with hands clasped behind his back, lips curling beneath the swirling mist.

He glanced at the neat rows of one hundred thousand Five Phoenixes spectators seated on one side and sneered.

So many came to watch their own world’s humiliation?

He saw Qi Liujia leading the group, face pale.

“Both sides, take the stage.”

His primordial spirit wrapped his voice into thunder that rolled across the entire blood-colored battlefield.

“Hahaha!”

From the heavens, a warship erupted with terrifying auras.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

One figure after another stepped out, unrestrained pressure sweeping outward.

Laughter rang from every hovering warship.

To them, the outcome was already decided.

Many even envied Star-Moon World.

What an opportunity to make a name!

First match against the only high-martial world born from the Void Heaven!

Defeating the Five Phoenixes meant defeating an entire heaven in one battle.

That was glory.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Eight figures from Star-Moon landed on the cyan brick plaza without raising a speck of dust.

Three for individual battles, five for the team battle.

The attendant floated in the air, hands behind his back.

All eight from Star-Moon were Unity Realm, and two carried the faint presence of Tribulation Transcendents.

No world would ever take the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament lightly.

“Five Phoenixes contestants, take the stage.”

The attendant turned toward the Five Phoenixes group and spoke flatly.

Below, Qi Liujia’s expression was grim.

“Rigged!”

He clenched his fists.

Seventh-grade in the very first match? Statistically possible, but this convenient?

He had expected an Eighth-grade opponent at worst.

Feeling the countless mocking gazes and unrestrained jeers from above, sorrow welled in his chest.

The Void Heaven had struggled so hard to birth a single high-martial world, and now it had become everyone’s punching bag.

But there was nothing he could do.

The weak get bullied—that was the law of the primordial era.

“Be careful, all of you.”

Qi Liujia looked at the contestants.

“Don’t worry, Elder Qi.”

Du Longyang, black robes fluttering, carried his reforged earth-tier Martial Emperor Spear on his back.

Ye Shoudao’s single arm flapped in the wind, eyes ice-cold.

They dared treat the Five Phoenixes as a joke?

They’d soon see if they had the qualifications.

“Let’s go.”

BOOM!

Explosive auras detonated beneath their feet.

Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, Ni Chunqiu, Young Master Tianxu, and Jiang Li shot forward—the team of five had trained together and built solid coordination.

Overlord strode unhurriedly, axe and shield on his back.

Tang Yimo slowly wrapped white cloth around his arms.

Lu Julian remained utterly calm, as if he barely existed.

Eight figures landed gracefully on the plaza.

The attendant's face remained shrouded in mist. He swept his gaze over them, a flicker of surprise in his eyes.

He hadn't expected the Five Phoenixes to field so many Unity Realm experts.

Finally, his gaze settled on Lu Jiulian.

Hmm?

For some reason, his heart skipped a beat.

“Begin.”

A cold voice drifted from the ancient warship.

The attendant immediately turned and bowed toward the ship.

“Yes.”

He looked at both sides.

“Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament—life and death are irrelevant.”

“Stake origin dao essence. The victor claims the loser’s stake.”

“Preliminary round: maximum ten strands, minimum one.”

“Place your bets.”

The surroundings instantly boiled over.

“Ten strands! Bet ten!”

“It’s a guaranteed win—why not go all in?”

“Seventh-grade crushing Ninth-grade? This is just bullying!”

Laughter poured down.

From Star-Moon, a young man with a crescent moon tattooed on his forehead stepped forward, swagger in every movement.

From the Five Phoenixes, Jiang Li represented them.

The youth smirked arrogantly, utterly confident.

“Trash from the Five Phoenixes...”

“Wanna go big? Your dao essence is getting taken anyway—might as well lose it to us and make it quick.”

Though he spoke softly, his words spread through some strange method and exploded across the battlefield.

The new emperor of Great Xuan slammed his palm on his armrest, face red with fury.

“Too far! What gives them the right to look down on us?!”

The hundred thousand armored soldiers all radiated anger.

“Oh? The trash are mad?”

The youth chuckled, glancing at the army with even greater contempt.

“Don’t rush. Soon... you’ll watch me personally crush your contestants. Then you can really get angry.”

His words were like a spark in dry grass.

Every world outside the Five Phoenixes roared with laughter.

Emperor Tantai He’s body trembled with rage.

Only now did he understand—outside the Five Phoenixes, no one wished them well.

He had once considered diplomacy.

Diplomacy my ass.

If given the chance, he’d beat them to death.

Not just him.

Every person from the Five Phoenixes felt their hearts turn ice-cold, fury rising.

Only now did they truly understand.

This was reality.

“So this is what ‘demons beyond the heavens’ means...”

“Any who seek to destroy the Five Phoenixes are demons!”

Mo Tianyu’s hair flew wildly, belly exposed to the wind as he muttered.

...

The youth ignored the Five Phoenixes crowd.

He looked down on a mere Ninth-grade world, but this was still the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament—losing would cost him dearly.

So first, break their spirit. Once their minds cracked, flaws would appear the moment battle began.

He narrowed his eyes at Jiang Li.

“Well? Wanna go big or not?”

The attendant also looked at Jiang Li.

Jiang Li frowned.

From the skeletal inheritance, he knew how vital origin dao essence was—the foundation of a world’s growth.

Betting it like this was cruel beyond belief.

But after accepting the War God inheritance, he knew the universe was far crueler.

Still, he remained rational.

A former god of war would not be easily provoked—perhaps why Qi Liuja chose him as representative.

He closed his eyes, then opened them again—clear and calm.

“One strand of dao essence.”

His words fell.

The youth’s face stiffened.

Countless jeers and boos exploded from the heavens.

“Trash!”

“As expected of Ninth-grade—betting one strand? Is this guy a coward?”

“Get off the stage—one strand isn’t worth fighting for!”

Jiang Li’s expression didn’t change.

Overlord, Du Longyang, and the others all radiated terrifying killing intent.

The hostility from these worlds toward the Five Phoenixes... was thick.

Qi Liujia hunched over, eyes murky and complicated.

Among the Nine Heavens, the Five Phoenixes truly had enemies everywhere.

The only high-martial world in the Void Heaven bore burdens it should never have had to bear.

Jiang Li remained expressionless, but his clenched jaw betrayed his inner turmoil.

“Match him.”

Suddenly, a calm voice rang in Jiang Li’s ear.

Young Master Lu.

Jiang Li’s heart shook.

“As cultivators of the Five Phoenixes, there is no need to endure. When it is time to fight—fight.”

The words ignited a flame in Jiang Li's eyes.

"Fine!"

The next moment—

On the plaza, a heart-stopping aura erupted from Jiang Li.

"Match it..."

"Ten strands of dao essence!"

"The Five Phoenixes... will fight you to the end!"

He roared the words through gritted teeth.

Hmm?

The youth blinked in surprise, then grinned—he was happy to oblige.

“Betting complete.”

“Winner takes ten strands from the loser.”

The attendant cut in instantly, preventing any reversal.

Jiang Li glanced at him and sneered.

“Can you guarantee fairness?”

The attendant clearly favored Star-Moon.

“Insolence!”

BOOM!

Terrifying pressure exploded from the attendant, forcing Jiang Li back several steps.

“I represent the Upper Realm. You dare question my impartiality?”

“Next time, you die.”

Pressure shot skyward like a pillar.

Then he vanished in a flash, returning to the warship.

“Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament, first match—begin.”

As his words fell, the ancient bell floated beside him, shimmering.

He punched it.

DONG!!!!

The heavy toll spread in all directions.

“Team battle first. Ten strands staked. Victory condition: surrender or inability to continue fighting.”

“Life and death do not matter.”

The deafening voice echoed across the blood-colored battlefield, chilling every soul.

The ancient mirror hovered.

Reflecting both the Five Phoenixes and Star-Moon worlds.

Ten strands of origin essence floated beneath each illusory world.

...

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Lu Fan sat in his Thousand-Blade Chair, expression icy.

The Spirit Pressure Chessboard showed the battlefield.

He needed to forge the Five Phoenixes' iron blood.

So—fight.

He could afford ten strands.

They couldn't lose momentum before the battle even began.

His fingers tapped the armrest.

In the jumping lines of his vision, the ancient mirror's reflection appeared.

Hmm?

“System, what is that mirror? Why can it manifest the Five Phoenixes' dao essence?”

For once, the system answered.

[Dao Derivation Mirror, Heaven-tier high-grade spirit tool. Forged from Great Dao laws. Contains one thousand ownerless strands of dao essence. Can convert the dao essence of myriad worlds.]

Lu Fan's eyes brightened.

So the thousand ownerless strands became the staked essence of the two worlds once the bet was set.

The loser's essence would be stripped and absorbed by the mirror.

Lu Fan's gaze burned.

"That mirror... is a treasure."

"System—if I seize and shatter the Dao Derivation Mirror, can the Five Phoenixes absorb those thousand ownerless strands?"

The system went silent.

Lu Fan felt a twinge of regret.

That attendant kept provoking him.

Perhaps it was time to test it.

...

Terrifying auras clashed.

Whoosh!

Overlord, Tang Yimo, and Lu Jiulian were forcibly ejected from the plaza by an overwhelming power— individual battles would come later.

Now, the stage belonged to the team battle.

Countless sharp gazes rained down from the warships.

Tuoba shook his head. “Sigh... provoked into betting ten strands.”

Qingling, for once, didn’t argue. “Indeed. Losing ten would be more than just a heavy blow.”

And could they even win?

Star-Moon had two Tribulation Transcendents in their team of five.

The Five Phoenixes? All five were only Unity Realm first stage.

When the starting bell tolled across the battlefield...

At the front of Great Xuan's hundred thousand troops, Xue Tao stood straight as an ancient pine.

He slammed his spear into the ground and roared.

"FIGHT!"

The next instant.

One hundred thousand soldiers roared as one.

The thunderous cry rolled like a tidal wave.

On the cyan brick plaza.

The crescent-moon youth glanced at the surging army and smirked, digging in his ear.

“Home-field advantage? A bit loud...”

“Don’t worry. Soon... they’ll all shut up.”

His lips curled.

Behind him, his four teammates’ auras surged—they were ready to charge.

But before they could move—

Jiang Li moved first.

A battle cry tore from his throat.

His silver spear swept out like a signal.

Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, Ni Chunqiu, and Young Master Tianxu had been waiting, killing intent and rage boiling over.

Their primordial spirits resonated.

Behind Jiang Li, a colossal blood-colored war god illusion slowly formed.

Silver armor blazed with divine light.

He thrust his spear straight at the youth's face—murderous intent like a tsunami!

BOOM!

Space itself seemed to scream. The cyan bricks trembled.

Jiang Li's eyes burned with battle lust and killing intent.

“I'll shut your mouth first!”

Chapter 425: Severed Arm of White Bone, Fighting to the Death

Jiang Li's icy words detonated the battlefield.

This was the opening match of the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament; every eye in the Nine Heavens was locked on it. Warships and spirit vessels formed an iron ring around the Five Phoenixes, some here to compete, others simply to watch the spectacle.

A gamble of origin dao essence, a gamble of a world's fortune—every clash was heart-stopping. Billions of lives across countless realms were watching.

BOOM!

Battle erupted in an instant.

Jiang Li's roar thundered across the arena:

"I'll shut your mouth first!"

Du Longyang, Ye Shoudao, Ni Chunqiu, and Young Master Tianxu moved the moment his words fell.

From the day Qi Liujia informed them of the tournament, they had trained relentlessly together. The four had known each other since the Tian Yuan era—rivals, friends, brothers-in-arms. After merging into the Five Phoenixes and surviving countless wars, their synergy was instinctive.

As for the fifth member—Qi Liujia had chosen Jiang Li.

The perfect choice.

Jiang Li was a born commander. After inheriting the War God legacy in the ancient tomb, his talent and presence had soared. Now a Unity Realm expert leading four others of the same level, this was the strongest team the Five Phoenixes could field.

Even Lu Fan had no objections.

(Though Qi Liujia suspected the Young Master simply couldn't be bothered to care.)

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

On the blood-colored battlefield, the vast cyan-brick plaza exploded into combat.

Terrifying Unity Realm auras flooded the air.

This would be a brutal fight.

From the moment the draw was revealed, every Five Phoenixes cultivator knew it.

Ninth-grade versus Seventh-grade.

Two entire grades apart—an insurmountable gap.

On the sidelines, the hundred thousand troops fell deathly silent. Xue Tao stood ramrod straight, spear in hand, staring unblinking at the plaza.

He admired Jiang Li. He would gladly die under Jiang Li's command.

But today, he had no place on that stage.

Not a single soldier dared cheer again, terrified their voices might disturb the five warriors.

Jiang Li's silver spear tore through the sky like a comet, ripping the air with a hollow shriek as it stabbed straight at the crescent-marked youth's face.

The youth's heart jolted.

But as the enemy commander, he refused to flinch.

Tribulation Transcendent aura exploded outward. Dazzling energy bloomed around him like a radiant flower.

The crescent on his forehead blazed. His eyes turned pure white, killing intent boiling within.

He would show no mercy, no carelessness.

Ten strands of dao essence were on the line—his world's foundation, its fortune. If he lost because of arrogance, the Saint Lord of Star-Moon would execute him personally.

CLANG!

The unstoppable spear met an invisible energy barrier and was halted inches from his face.

BOOM!

Shockwaves rolled like tidal waves.

The youth was sent flying.

Across the plaza, Star-Moon's four Unity Realm experts charged.

"It's a military formation!" the youth roared, clutching his chest. That single strike had nearly pierced his heart!

"Sever their connection!"

They had two Tribulation Transcendents—this should have been a stomp.

Yet Jiang Li's formation fused the four Unity experts' power into something rivaling a Transcendent!

"Even combined, it's only one Transcendent. The two of us can crush him!"

The youth landed, a starry scepter falling into his hand.

Buzz...

He raised it. Starlight flickered.

Above the battlefield, thick clouds gathered.

BOOM!

Beams of starlight rained down like a meteor shower, blanketing the entire plaza.

From the warships, confident laughter rang out.

“No suspense. Two Transcendents, one wielding a high-grade sacred-tier artifact—total slaughter.”

“The Five Phoenixes actually figured out military formations. Impressive.”

“But everyone here has comprehended Dao Intent. Their advantage isn’t that big.”

On the plaza—

Jiang Li’s team faced annihilation.

The star rain wasn't harmless; every drop carried horrifying corrosive and destructive power.

Jiang Li constantly directed the others to evade, straining their primordial spirit link.

Star-Moon's second Transcendent closed in.

"DIE!"

A cold, murderous voice.

"Ye Shoudao—block him!"

Jiang Li barked.

The blood-colored war god illusion contracted, wrapping tightly around Jiang Li like armor.

Ye Shoudao was ejected from the formation.

"Leave it to me."

His single sleeve flapped wildly.

He flung his great blade skyward in a strange arc.

Black light pulsed beneath his feet. His body swayed left and right, afterimages trailing as he danced through the corrosive rain unharmed.

He leapt above the war god illusion.

A low growl.

His blade spun.

Blade light exploded into a blooming lotus of death above his head—a shield against the stars.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Starlight crashed against blade light.

Ye Shoudao grunted.

This wasn't ordinary rain—it was a Transcendent's technique. Despite years of bitter training, he was still only Unity Realm.

Each drop felt like it could punch through his body.

But he held.

The rain was dispersed across thousands of drops; the Transcendent's power was diluted.

Ye Shoudao bought them time.

The formation stabilized.

Du Longyang, Ni Chunqiu, and Young Master Tianxu poured their strength into Jiang Li.

The second Transcendent arrived.

Jiang Li's eyes blazed.

Silver light flashed.

BOOM!

The Transcendent's expression changed.

Without distraction, Jiang Li's strike matched him blow for blow.

"Fifth-sequence Valor Spear Intent!"

A roar exploded in the Transcendent's ear.

He tried to retreat.

Too late.

Du Longyang's Dao Intent fused into the spear.

Power surged!

PFFT!

The spear punched clean through the Transcendent's shoulder, pinning him to the cyan bricks and shattering them.

Silence.

Then chaos from the warships.

"Impossible?!"

"Idiot! This is a deathmatch—how do you get careless?!"

"They sacrificed one Unity expert to block a Transcendent, then four combined to kill another. Ruthless and decisive!"

"Are the Star-Moon contestants brain-dead?! They had total advantage!"

Jiang Li flicked his spear.

Blood sprayed dozens of meters across the bricks.

The wounded Transcendent roared in fury, slamming star-clad palms together.

BOOM!

Jiang Li staggered back.

The Transcendent clutched his bleeding shoulder, howling.

“You court death!”

He had been gravely injured in one strike!

That burst of fifth-sequence Dao Intent had blindsided him.

Fifth-sequence...

The Five Phoenixes had hidden depth!

But that was all.

Star-Moon's three remaining Unity experts finally arrived, too late to stop the kill.

Now with three more Unity experts supporting, victory was assured!

"Jiang Li—finish him!"

Ni Chunqiu's red robes flared, her stunning face twisted with killing intent.

They had to kill one Transcendent before the others closed in!

It was difficult, but it was their only chance!

Jiang Li charged again, spear coiling like a dragon.

The plaza became a maelstrom of killing intent.

Ye Shoudao's voice rumbled.

"I'll handle it!"

His blade, already half-corroded by star rain, slashed downward.

One slash became two, two became four, four became ten thousand.

The technique Lu Fan had taught him when he first broke through.

Countless cyan bricks empowered by starlight were shattered.

A clear path opened for Jiang Li!

PFFT!

Ye Shoudao coughed blood. His back was a mangled ruin, flesh melted away.

Without blade light to shield him, the full force of the star rain had struck.

This wasn't just physical damage—it scorched the primordial spirit.

He was a realm below and had taken it with his body.

He spun, single arm swinging the corroded blade, weaving another lotus shield.

Droplets slipped through, but he danced untouched.

Jiang Li trusted him completely.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Shards of star-empowered bricks sliced Jiang Li's face open, but he didn't care.

Only killing intent filled his eyes as he locked onto the wounded Transcendent.

Both hands gripped the spear.

He leapt.

The blood war god condensed into a thin membrane of power over his armor.

Like a lion descending from the heavens, he stabbed downward!

Du Longyang's Dao Intent flared again.

But the same trick wouldn't work twice.

Starlight wrapped the Transcendent's arms.

He reached to catch the spear barehanded, prepared for the fifth-sequence explosion.

BOOM!

Smoke and shattered bricks filled the air.

Then—

A wet ripping sound.

The Transcendent stared in disbelief.

The spear had pierced his throat, shattering his spine and pinning him to the ground.

How?!

The youth in the distance paled.

The first kill was carelessness.

The second?

Only the dying Transcendent knew.

When he reached to grab the spear, the Dao Intent had shifted—from Du Longyang's rigid valor to Young Master Tianxu's soft, yin-flexible intent.

One rigid, one soft.

The sudden change left him grasping air.

The spear tore through his neck unimpeded.

Jiang Li's face was ice.

Du Longyang disengaged from the formation.

Killing intent boiled.

His Martial Emperor Spear swept out, locking down the three incoming Unity experts.

Same realm—he feared no one.

His fifth-sequence Dao Intent, honed over a century, had nearly condensed a primordial spirit flower.

In Lu Fan's system, Unity Realm experts needed to condense the primordial spirit flower before Tribulation.

That was Du Longyang's confidence.

He might not beat a Transcendent, but three Unity experts?

He would hold.

He had to buy Jiang Li time to kill!

CLANG! CLANG!

His spear split into three shadows.

The three Unity experts attacked furiously.

Sparks flew. Shockwaves carved cracks across the plaza.

Yet all three were forced back.

Du Longyang stood alone, black robes fluttering, spear in one hand, killing intent blazing.

One man against three—unyielding!

Jiang Li ignored that side.

His spear bent under his grip.

Then snapped straight.

The Transcendent's head exploded in a shower of red and white.

His primordial spirit shot skyward.

Jiang Li's eyes flashed.

A bloody battlefield vision unfolded—setting sun, corpses wrapped in horsehide, a general waving his hand as millions fell.

His Dao Intent.

Fourth-sequence...

Blood General!

BOOM!

Like a bloody sun, it slammed into the fleeing primordial spirit.

Without a body, even a Transcendent's spirit was merely Unity-level.

PFFT!

Spear intent wrapped in Blood General Dao shredded it instantly.

Gale-force winds swept the plaza.

"Damn it!"

The scepter-wielding youth roared, star rain intensifying.

BOOM!

Ye Shoudao crashed to the ground.

His remaining arm had been corroded to bare white bone.

He swung that white bone arm, still weaving blade light with sheer will.

“KILL!”

Jiang Li's eyes turned red.

Ni Chunqiu and Young Master Tianxu burned with rage.

Du Longyang's spear danced faster, dominating three enemies alone.

Ye Shoudao knelt, gasping.

His blade was gone, corroded away.

But he still had one arm...

That arm would carve a sky for his comrades!

Jiang Li charged the youth.

The Transcendent youth cursed, retreating.

He couldn't let Jiang Li close—his fighting style forbade it!

The blood-colored battlefield fell deathly silent.

Every warship, every spectator—silent.

The first match of the Grand Tournament was cruel beyond words.

No one had expected this.

A Tribulation Transcendent... dead!

The situation had spiraled beyond comprehension.

Disciples of the Absolute Blade Sect stared with bloodshot eyes at Ye Shoudao—kneeling, barely conscious, swinging a white bone arm against the star rain.

Their hearts shattered.

Across the Five Phoenixes, cultivators felt the same shock.

This was a fight to the death.

Not a performance.

Many were shaken to their core.

Emperor Tantai He stood, hands trembling.

Jiang Li's earlier roar echoed in his mind.

"The Five Phoenixes will fight to the end!"

With what?

With their lives.

...

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Lu Fan watched coldly.

Ye Shoudao's stubbornness surprised even him.

Ruthless Blade Intent—ruthless to others, ruthless to himself.

Lu Fan exhaled slowly.

On the empty Spirit Pressure Chessboard, he placed a black stone.

Like adding a name to a notebook.

...

On the ancient warship.

A gaze watched silently.

The mist-shrouded attendant's voice carried faint surprise.

"I didn't expect... the Five Phoenixes to do this well."

"But there's still one Transcendent left—with a high-grade sacred artifact. They cannot win."

The Upper Realm chose the Five Phoenixes as the venue for one reason: to bleed them dry.

The outcome was predetermined.

...

Du Longyang held three enemies.

Jiang Li, Ni Chunqiu, and Young Master Tianxu—three against one Transcendent with a sacred weapon.

The rain stopped.

The youth couldn't risk being enveloped.

Jiang Li knew exactly how to deal with ranged fighters.

Close the distance. Beat them at point-blank. Grind their face into the dirt.

That was their only chance.

The blood war god surged again.

Charging the youth.

The youth smiled coldly.

He had already won.

How could three kill him?

He swung the scepter. Starlight formed a storm.

A curtain of stars descended like closing drapes—his ultimate defense.

Once it sealed, no one could break through.

His body was fragile; if Jiang Li reached him, he'd die faster than his comrade.

BOOM!

The starlight storm blasted outward to halt Jiang Li.

But—

PFFT!

A figure stepped in front.

Young Master Tianxu.

Starlight slammed into him. His pristine robes shredded. He was hurled thousands of meters, leaving a long trail of blood.

The fastidious Young Master who once screamed over a paper cut...

Didn't make a sound.

The storm was blocked.

The youth didn't care.

His scepter blazed again, firing a terrifying beam.

Jiang Li's killing intent peaked.

Red robes flared. Black hair snapped.

Ni Chunqiu blocked next, red strings weaving a shield—shattered instantly.

Jiang Li passed her.

Closer.

Trading lives for a path!

The youth's pupils shrank—panic for the first time.

The star curtain fell.

It sealed.

But in that final instant—a silver flash slipped inside.

BOOM!!!!

Cyan bricks exploded.

The cold scepter pierced Jiang Li's shoulder, blood dripping from its tip.

And the youth—

Was grabbed by the throat with a rusted-gauntleted hand.

Slammed into the ground.

The plaza caved in.

His head burst like fireworks—splattered in every direction.

Chapter 426: All Attacks Returned with a Single Axe

Dead silence.

A deathly silence swept across the vast cyan-brick plaza, as if a freezing wind had blown through and stolen every sound.

Every gaze was fixed on the scene above. Hearts trembled in shock.

The overall situation... was decided?

A Seventh-grade high-martial world, Star-Moon, backed by two Tribulation Transcendents... had actually lost?!

In truth, Star-Moon hadn't fully lost yet.

The youth's head had been crushed, but his primordial spirit still lived and could fight. The three Unity experts Du Longyang had pinned down were still capable of battle.

On the Five Phoenixes' side, aside from Du Longyang, nearly everyone was gravely wounded—including Jiang Li.

But in momentum, the Five Phoenixes had already won decisively. There was no question.

No Tribulation Transcendents on their roster, yet they had forcibly slain two. They had overturned a situation that should have been utter defeat.

Every warship and spirit vessel floating beyond the Five Phoenixes fell silent.

The opening match of the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament had been far bloodier than anyone imagined.

No one here was stupid.

The instant the youth's skull exploded, Star-Moon's defeat was sealed.

Three remaining Unity experts couldn't change the outcome.

Jiang Li swayed, the rusted ancient armor on his arm slowly dissipating.

The skeleton in the ancient tomb had warned him never to use the War King's Armor lightly.

He had held back.

But when he saw Ni Chunqiu and Young Master Tianxu trade their lives to buy him time, when he saw Ye Shoudao still swinging a blade of nothing but white bone...

He could no longer hold back.

So he unleashed it.

And crushed the youth's head.

The star curtain shattered.

The youth's primordial spirit rose, eyes filled with nothing but terror—no will to fight left.

Jiang Li would not let it escape.

The setting sun bled once more. The battlefield general marshaled his troops.

With a wave of his hand—millions fell.

BOOM!

The blood-colored war god shot forward like a cannon shell, devouring everything in its path, slamming into the youth's primordial spirit.

Jiang Li's face was ashen. The high-grade sacred-tier scepter still pierced his shoulder, but he didn't care.

PFFT!

Just like the first Transcendent, the youth's primordial spirit was slowly ground to nothing.

As though trampled beneath the hooves of a million soldiers.

In the distance, Star-Moon's three remaining Unity experts felt their souls quake.

Both their Transcendents—dead in an instant.

Could they turn this around?

Du Longyang's eyes were bloodshot, spear lashing out relentlessly.

Jiang Li staggered forward, step by step.

Blood dyed the cyan bricks red. The cold corpses of Transcendents lay strewn across the plaza.

An aura of slaughter and ice enveloped the three surviving Star-Moon experts.

Flee!

They chose escape.

The moment they shot out of the plaza as streaks of light, the match was decided.

Ninth-grade versus Seventh-grade...

Ninth-grade victorious!

The Five Phoenixes... victorious!

Every warship fell deathly silent.

“Pfft... lucky.”

“They figured out military formations—that’s why they had the guts. Still, barely scraping by against a Seventh-grade. That’s their limit.”

“If Star-Moon’s two Transcendents hadn’t been careless, the Five Phoenixes would never have won.”

Murmurs rose from the warships—some sneering, some making excuses.

A Ninth-grade world defeating a Seventh-grade one was shocking.

Unity experts slaying Transcendents—second-stage experts—was equally shocking.

Saint Master Tuoba and Saint Master Qingling exchanged glances, speechless.

They were surprised, but not overly so.

They had long known the Five Phoenixes' tenacity. A newborn high-martial world with limitless potential.

Venerable Joyous stood awkwardly, honest face stiff.

He coughed lightly, then forced a dry laugh. "They actually won..."

That was all he could say. He was just as stunned.

Who would've thought they could win?

On the cyan-brick plaza.

From the ancient warship, the mist-shrouded attendant watched silently, faint surprise in his eyes.

A lazy voice drifted from within the ship.

"War King's Armor... interesting."

The attendant's body trembled slightly.

...

They won!

The Five Phoenixes won!

Like the moment before a volcano erupts—

The hundred thousand Great Xuan troops who had sat in silence could no longer contain themselves.

ROAR!

Every soldier roared in exultation.

Xue Tao stood like an ancient pine, staring at the plaza.

What a brutal, soul-shaking sight.

Ye Shoudao swinging nothing but white bone.

Ni Chunqiu and Young Master Tianxu trading their lives to open a path.

Xue Tao's heart was struck like a war drum.

He finally understood why they fought so desperately.

He glanced at the hovering Dao Derivation Mirror, at the staked origin dao essence, and understood.

All of it—for the Five Phoenixes' survival.

Star-Moon, a Seventh-grade world, had dao essence to spare. Losing ten strands hurt, but was acceptable.

For the newborn Five Phoenixes? Losing ten would shake the very foundation of their world.

Xue Tao clenched his fist, armor clanking.

He stared at the figures on the plaza.

Thumped his chest with a fist.

Across the Five Phoenixes, cultivators boiled with passion. Many eyes turned red.

They all understood what Jiang Li, Ye Shoudao, and the others had fought for.

A mortal fights for pride. A cultivator fights even harder for it.

Emperor Tantai He's eyes were bloodshot. Though not a cultivator, he was a man of passion.

In truth, he was much like the previous emperor—straightforward, explosive.

Those who offend the Five Phoenixes—kill!

This battle taught him the importance of cultivation.

He now understood how wise the previous emperor had been to found the Great Xuan Academy.

On the plaza.

The Upper Realm attendant descended from the ancient warship.

Jiang Li pulled the sacred-tier scepter from his shoulder and stored it—spoils of war, non-returnable.

Du Longyang walked over and helped Ye Shoudao stand.

Though Ni Chunqiu and Young Master Tianxu were battered and heavily injured, they could still walk.

The attendant gazed calmly at them from beneath the mist.

“First match—Five Phoenixes victory.”

His flat voice rang out.

He clenched a fist. The ancient bell appeared and was struck.

DONG!

The heavy toll declared the end of the first match.

BOOM!

The Dao Derivation Mirror hovering above the plaza radiated powerful light.

Ten strands of staked dao essence were forcibly torn from Star-Moon's phantom and transferred to the Five Phoenixes'.

But because the overall contest wasn't finished—individual battles remained—the essence had not yet fully belonged to the Five Phoenixes.

BOOM!

Beyond the Five Phoenixes' skies, aboard Star-Moon's warship, a furious palm slammed the railing.

A terrifying aura exploded.

The Saint Lord of Star-Moon was enraged.

The opening match—Seventh-grade versus Ninth-grade—lost!

Losing ten strands was secondary. The humiliation was primary.

They had been so certain of victory, yet were defeated by a Ninth-grade world. They would become the laughingstock of the Nine Heavens!

Fortunately, individual battles remained.

They could still win back the lost essence.

When the attendant declared the Five Phoenixes victorious, uproar swept through the watching worlds.

Jiang Li and the others descended from the plaza.

Qi Liuji, Overlord, and the rest shot forward.

Overlord, Tang Yimo, and Lu Jiulian exhaled at the sight of Ye Shoudao's condition.

Ni Chunqiu and Young Master Tianxu were in bad shape, but Ye Shoudao—who had borne the full star rain alone—was tragic. Even his primordial spirit was damaged.

“Good... good...”

Qi Liujiā’s wrinkled face trembled, eyes misty. He could only repeat the word.

It had been a brutal fight, but Jiang Li and the others had given him an enormous surprise.

They had actually won the first match.

“Next are the individual battles. Be careful.”

Jiang Li clutched his rotting, pierced shoulder and looked seriously at Overlord, Tang Yimo, and Lu Jiulian.

Overlord stood like a mountain, silent. His hair hung like steel needles.

His eyes twitched at Ye Shoudao’s bone arm.

Fury simmered within.

“Leave it to me.”

His voice was low, but resolute.

On the cyan-brick plaza.

The attendant stood with hands behind his back, expression indifferent.

“Team battle concluded. One incense stick’s time to rest. Individual battles will follow.”

With a flick of his sleeve, cyan orbs fell and repaired the shattered plaza.

His figure blurred and returned to the warship’s bow.

...

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Lu Fan leaned back in the Thousand-Blade Chair, eyes closed.

Only one piece had been played on the chessboard.

His fingers tapped the armrest.

In his vision, the [Glory Mission] bar began to glow.

Lu Fan remained calm.

This battle had moved him.

Ye Shoudao's stubbornness—even after his arm was corroded to bone, he never retreated, swinging only with will.

The pampered Young Master Tianxu and Empress Ni Chunqiu trading their lives to give Jiang Li that final opening.

Why?

For the Five Phoenixes' victory. For its glory.

Perhaps that was the mission's purpose.

A thought.

Lines of text popped up.

"Defend the Five Phoenixes' honor with victory. First match won. Reward: 50 strands of origin dao essence (claimable after the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament ends)."

Lu Fan read the system prompt.

Rarely, he felt no particular excitement.

He closed his eyes. When he opened them again, the text vanished.

A gentle breeze lifted his robes.

Fifty strands earned through blood and pain.

All rewards accumulated until the tournament's end?

Lu Fan's lips twitched.

He ignored it.

His gaze returned to the Spirit Pressure Chessboard.

The contest with Star-Moon wasn't over yet.

...

"That was the War King's Armor. He obtained the War King inheritance?"

Experts saw the truth in that fleeting moment of rusted armor.

“Since the War King inheritance has appeared, the Piano King, Sword King, and Shadow King inheritances should surface soon...”

“Heh, the Blood-Robed General...”

“The Five Phoenixes truly hide great secrets. But the more secrets a world holds, the faster it falls.”

Voices murmured across the void.

On the blood-colored battlefield.

Jiang Li sat cross-legged, regulating his breathing.

Corroded flesh and spirit slowly healed.

He heard the whispers around him but felt no regret.

The skeleton had warned him, but when his comrades traded their lives for that chance—how could he waste it?

A trump card kept hidden until the end was no trump card at all.

Suddenly—

Above Ye Shoudao, a vision of the Lake of Origin appeared.

Origin energy poured down like a waterfall.

Huala...

Under its cleansing, Ye Shoudao's bone-stump arm regrew flesh and blood.

His damaged primordial spirit recovered.

"It's Young Master Lu!"

Someone shouted in joy.

Jiang Li, Ni Chunqiu, and Young Master Tianxu were bathed in the same energy.

Qi Liuji's old face twitched. He exhaled in relief.

Overlord, Tang Yimo, and Lu Julian relaxed, beginning to prepare for their own battles.

Under Lu Fan's origin energy, the four healed rapidly.

"Brother Lu! Heal me more!"

Ni Chunqiu's cheeks flushed with excitement, arms spread wide.

Brother Lu cares about us!

So rare!

Ye Shoudao's severed arm regrew, but he chose not to restore the other.

He would remain one-armed.

"Thank you, Young Master Lu."

Ye Shoudao bowed.

Ni Chunqiu, Young Master Tianxu, and Jiang Li bowed as well.

...

On the ancient warship.

A faint primordial spirit fluctuation spread.

“This world’s Saint Lord... interesting. Can’t see through him at all.”

A lazy, intrigued laugh drifted from within.

The attendant rose and descended to the center of the plaza.

His robes fluttered.

“Individual battles...”

“Best of three. The losing team may stake more dao essence for a chance to compete. Victory reclaims the team battle stake. Defeat forfeits the new stake to the winner.”

His voice, carried by primordial spirit, boomed across the battlefield.

Silence fell.

Here it came.

The individual battles that would decide everything.

“Now—both sides, take the stage.”

BOOM!

The moment his words fell—

From Star-Moon’s warship, a figure shot sideways.

Terrifying pressure whipped the void as he crashed onto the plaza.

Tribulation Transcendent aura rolled out like a tsunami.

“Trash of the Five Phoenixes...”

His icy gaze swept across every person from the Five Phoenixes.

Their team battle was lost.

He had to win the individual battles.

From the Five Phoenixes side.

Overlord and Tang Yimo stood at the same time.

Their eyes clashed in mid-air.

“This fight is mine.”

Overlord said.

Tang Yimo glared stubbornly, then sat back down on the blood-colored sand.

“Thank you.”

Overlord nodded.

Then he began walking, step by step.

The Five Phoenixes contingent erupted in cheers at the sight of that familiar, towering figure.

Luo Mingsang’s cheeks tightened with worry.

The brutality of the team battle had shaken her.

Xu Chu, Zhao Zixu, and the other Western Liang generals’ eyes blazed.

Emperor Tantai He sat straight, staring at Overlord's broad back.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

Every grain of sand seemed to leap with his steps.

Overlord ascended the cyan-brick plaza.

The attendant glanced at him and raised a brow.

Another Unity expert?

The Five Phoenixes planned to fight a Transcendent with a Unity expert again?

Their team victory had relied on Jiang Li's military formation and the War King's Armor.

What did this man have?

"Star-Moon—state your stake."

The attendant looked at the white-haired Transcendent, whose crescent mark radiated sharpness.

“Another ten strands.”

His words fell.

The Dao Derivation Mirror surged again.

Ten more strands appeared beneath Star-Moon’s phantom.

The attendant vanished, reappearing at the warship’s bow.

“Individual battle—life and death do not matter.”

“Begin.”

BOOM!

The instant the word left his mouth—

A storm erupted on the plaza!

Tribulation Transcendent primordial spirit pressure exploded without restraint.

The white-haired Transcendent's crescent mark burned like fire.

Behind him, ring after ring of stars rose.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Massive, blinding stars were hurled like mountains toward Overlord standing in the center.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The earth quaked.

The plaza cracked and shattered in an instant!

Cyan bricks were pulverized into dust!

Like the collapse of heaven and earth, the bombardment detonated the entire arena!

Yet—

BOOM!

From within the apocalyptic explosions—

A towering figure carrying axe and shield strode out calmly.

Each footstep rang clear as a bell, impossible to drown out even amid the deafening blasts.

Step.

Step.

Step.

Shield raised, he walked unflinchingly through the crushing starfall.

The Star-Moon Transcendent's pupils shrank.

He refused to believe it!

Even experts of his own level wouldn't dare tank his attacks head-on!

A mere Unity expert dared to walk through them like it was nothing?!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The Transcendent rose into the air, aura surging.

Stars rose like moons over the sea, smashing down with apocalyptic force.

The plaza became ruins...

Dust choked the sky.

Yet a fierce wind cut through.

Overlord's towering figure emerged from the endless bombardment, shield raised, walking forward without pause.

Left hand shield, right hand axe.

Countless star explosions rained upon him.

Yet he advanced!

The Star-Moon Transcendent inhaled sharply.

Why was this man so unbreakable?!

Behind the ice-cold shield, Overlord's eyes blazed with battle intent.

"Third-sequence..."

“Unyielding!”

BOOM!

Demonic qi exploded outward.

His giant axe swept across the sky.

All the bombardment he had endured—all the destructive power—

Now gathered into one swing.

As if laughing at the heavens.

You hit me.

Now I return it all!

One axe—

Starfall!

Chapter 427: In My Dictionary, There's No Such Word as Surrender

The white-haired Tribulation Transcendent from Star-Moon felt a tidal wave of murderous intent crash toward him—an overwhelming, apocalyptic power that made even his Transcendent heart tremble.

A dark axe blade, wrapped in sky-blotting demonic qi, erupted with force so terrifying it defied comprehension.

Overlord's massive frame swayed.

The relentless barrage of stars hurled by the Star-Moon expert had been mountain-shattering, each one capable of pulverizing continents.

Yet Overlord had not dodged a single one.

He had taken them all.

At first, the spectators beyond the Five Phoenixes had only sneered, thinking this man a fool with a death wish.

But now...

Reversal.

This cultivator from the Five Phoenixes had absorbed every ounce of his opponent's onslaught... and returned it in one axe.

What kind of technique was this? What kind of power?!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The cyan-brick plaza exploded. Countless bricks were reduced to dust beneath the axe light.

A tsunami of axe intent surged forth—unstoppable, domineering, absolute.

Third-sequence Dao Intent!

PFFT!

The Star-Moon Transcendent's pupils dilated. For the first time, he felt the cold grip of death.

He was a Tribulation Transcendent! Second stage of the Unity Realm!

Yet before a mere Unity expert, he felt mortal peril?

A cultivator from a Ninth-grade world dared pressure him like an Upper Realm monster?!

The axe was unavoidable—too fast. Space itself seemed cleaved apart.

He felt only bitterness.

All that power had come from his own stars.

He had meant to kill Overlord with them.

Now they were turned against him.

Karma?

A wry smile twisted his lips.

But he would not wait to die.

Block!

BOOM!

The axe fell.

Dust was torn asunder.

A long, narrow chasm split the ground.

In the distance, a towering man carrying axe and shield strode forward.

Primordial spirit fluctuations rippled outward.

Above his head, a radiant primordial spirit flower quietly bloomed.

A primordial spirit flower?!

In the instant the axe descended...

All the Transcendent saw was that flower.

Why could a Unity expert condense a primordial spirit flower?!

BOOM!

The plaza shattered completely, the earth cracking into terrifying fissures.

The Star-Moon Transcendent dropped to his knees.

Doubt and obsession lingered in his eyes.

PFFT!

A jet of blood shot out.

Then his body exploded into bloody mist—obliterated by overwhelming force.

The chasm in the plaza was painted crimson.

His primordial spirit surged with terror.

It fled as a streak of shadow toward the edge of the arena.

What kind of monsters were these?!

A Unity expert with a primordial spirit flower—who could take every attack and return it all?!

And that Dao Intent...

Third-sequence!

Was this an Upper Realm prodigy?!

BOOM!

Overlord slammed his shield into the ground.

He raised his head, calmly watching the fleeing primordial spirit.

“This axe was for Sect Leader Ye.”

“Cultivators of the Five Phoenixes do not fear death. We do not fear battle.”

“If you want war—we fight. I, Xiang Shaoyun, will meet you all!”

His black hair whipped in the wind. His icy gaze swept the heavens like a declaration of war.

He had insisted on fighting the first individual match—for this moment.

He would win.

And win gloriously.

Ye Shoudao's tragic state had ignited a fire in him.

The Five Phoenixes were where he had risen.

Anyone who tried to destroy its foundation deserved one word:

Death.

As the former emperor Tantai Xuan had said—

Those who offend the Five Phoenixes will be executed without mercy!

Uproar exploded from every warship.

Fury. Sneers. Disdain. Ridicule.

"Arrogant!"

“Are all Five Phoenixes cultivators this insane?”

“Decent Dao Intent, but the Nine Heavens are full of geniuses. You’ll die soon enough!”

Voices thundered from warships and spirit vessels, shaking the void.

Overlord swept his gaze across them and laughed coldly.

He hurled his axe.

Demonic qi roared as it chased the fleeing primordial spirit.

He would not let even the soul escape.

He would kill it here and now.

Hummm...

Suddenly—

An enraged aura erupted.

Beyond the Five Phoenixes' skies, from Star-Moon's warship, a colossal palm formed of star-sand slapped downward.

Terrifying primordial spirit pressure crashed like mountains and tsunamis toward Overlord.

BOOM!

Overlord's axe flew back to his hand. He slammed it into the ground, carving a horrifying trench.

The Star-Moon primordial spirit seized the chance and fled.

Aboard the warship, the Star-Moon Saint Lord stood coldly, staring down at Overlord.

Overlord grinned, lips curling with utter contempt.

He turned to the mist-shrouded attendant on the ancient warship.

“Outsiders can interfere now? And you do nothing?”

“Is this your so-called fairness?”

The attendant’s face remained hidden in mist.

He offered no reply.

Only clenched a fist and struck the floating ancient bell.

DONG!

The resonant toll rang through heaven and earth.

“Individual match—one victory to the Five Phoenixes.”

His voice was ice.

Overlord felt cold eyes staring from beneath the mist.

He snorted, slung his axe and shield across his back, and strode down from the plaza.

Best of three.

Overlord had taken the first match in overwhelming fashion—beyond anyone’s expectations.

A Unity expert with a primordial spirit flower, capable of leapfrogging realms.

Terrifying.

Countless gazes—cold, puzzled, probing—locked onto him.

The attendant returned to the warship, aura subdued.

“You seem angry.”

A lazy voice drifted from within.

The attendant bowed hastily.

“This man’s cultivation method is strange. A Unity expert condensing a primordial spirit flower... could this be an ancient technique?”

The mysterious existence chuckled, as if guessing.

The attendant remained silent.

“Do not be angry. After the tournament ends... you may do as you wish.”

The attendant’s misty eyes brightened.

“Go. Continue hosting. The outcome is not yet decided.”

The voice carried lazy amusement.

The attendant withdrew and floated out.

...

Overlord descended the plaza step by step.

His gaze swept across the hundred thousand Great Xuan troops.

He raised a fist.

Xu Chu's beard and hair bristled as he roared to the heavens.

Xue Tao pounded his chest like a beast.

One by one, soldiers rose.

"FIGHT!"

BOOM!

A hundred thousand voices merged into a terrifying wave of sound—thunder that rolled without end.

They feared nothing.

They glared at the warships, spirit vessels, and ferocious beasts hovering above—at the arrogant experts looking down on them.

Their blood boiled.

Just as Overlord had declared:

“Cultivators of the Five Phoenixes do not fear death. We do not fear battle!”

“If you want war—we fight!”

Overlord turned. His towering frame was like a spark that ignited the Five Phoenixes’ raging blood.

Ye Shoudao opened his eyes, pale face breaking into a smile.

As expected—the most domineering was still Overlord.

Qi Liujia hunched over, face full of smiles. This exhilarating battle had lifted morale sky-high.

Across the Five Phoenixes, cultivators' blood burned.

Li Sansui's eyes gleamed beneath her black robe.

Nie Changqing gripped Dragon Slayer at his waist, itching to charge in himself.

Nie Shuang, bearer of the Saint King Body, trembled with excitement—only a slap from his father kept him seated.

“Well fought.”

Jiang Li, seated and healing, smiled at Overlord's return.

Overlord glanced at him and nodded. “Same to you.”

“Don't relax. We need two wins for true victory.”

Qi Liujia spoke up.

Overlord's win was inspiring, but no reason to let down their guard.

Star-Moon had lost one match. They would now send their true elites—no holds barred.

“Will you fight again?”

Qi Liujia looked at Overlord.

“You could sweep them all if you wanted.”

But Qi Liujia knew—though Overlord's victory had been spectacular, it had not been easy.

“No need.”

Overlord shook his head.

Not because he couldn't.

Because Tang Yimo had already stood and was walking toward the plaza.

Beside them, Lu Jiulian sat quietly, transcendent and unhurried.

Like a lotus untouched by dust, he watched everything with a faint, dragonfly-touching-water smile—even as Overlord's battle set hearts ablaze.

...

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Lu Fan's lips curved at Overlord's glorious victory.

Tanking endless bombardment from a Star-Moon Transcendent.

Stacking armor, eating damage!

Truly worthy of the title.

Then returning every attack in one axe—cleaving a Transcendent in half.

Even Lu Fan had to admit: beautiful.

His fingers tapped the armrest.

Through the Spirit Pressure Chessboard, his gaze fell on the Dao Derivation Mirror—no, on the cyan-brick plaza.

The contest was not over.

Next up: Tang Yimo.

Suddenly, Lu Fan frowned slightly and tapped the armrest again.

...

Ninth Prison Secret Realm.

Tenth Ghost City.

Ghostly qi formed a massive mirror projecting the blood-colored battlefield.

“Well done!”

“As expected of Overlord—the man who once fought this king to a standstill!”

“Those who offend the Five Phoenixes, who dare bully us—beat them! Beat them to death!”

Tantai Xuan pressed his flushed face against the ghost qi mirror.

Saint Lord Beigong sat leisurely nearby, shaking his head at Tantai Xuan’s fervor.

He didn’t quite understand the excitement.

But as a former Saint Lord, he understood the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament well.

“Beigong, look! That trash Star-Moon World got their guts broken!”

“This is what happens when you bully the Five Phoenixes!”

Tantai Xuan grabbed Beigong's arm.

Beigong's lips twitched. Of course he knew what happened to those who bullied the Five Phoenixes...

He frowned slightly and shook his head.

"The Five Phoenixes haven't fully won yet..."

"Best of three. They've only taken one."

Beigong considered, then spoke honestly.

"Beigong Sacred Ground was also Seventh-grade. If we were pushed this far—team battle lost, face shattered—we might throw away all pretense."

Tantai Xuan froze.

He knew Beigong's background well.

"Beigong, explain—what do you mean 'throw away all pretense'?"

Tantai Xuan took a deep breath, serious.

Beigong didn't mince words. He pointed at himself.

"If backed into a corner, to avoid losing twenty strands of origin dao essence..."

"I might take the stage myself."

"Same logic..."

Tantai Xuan's expression changed.

A Saint Lord entering the arena personally?

Beigong's meaning was clear: to secure the second match, the Star-Moon Saint Lord might fight himself!

Tantai Xuan's excitement faded.

A Saint Lord was not an ordinary Transcendent.

Anyone who reached that position stood at the absolute peak of their world in both strength and combat prowess.

This... was bad.

Beigong glanced at Tantai Xuan and spoke leisurely again.

“There is one piece of good news...”

“Star-Moon is only Seventh-grade, so their Saint Lord cannot exceed Tribulation Transcendent and reach Ascended Immortal.”

Tantai Xuan’s face darkened.

That was supposed to be good news?

Beigong shrugged. It genuinely was.

A Sixth-grade world's Saint Lord would be an Ascended Immortal.

If one appeared, unless the mysterious Young Master Lu intervened...

The Five Phoenixes had no chance.

Beigong didn't believe anyone besides Lu Fan could face an Ascended Immortal.

Tantai Xuan clenched his fists, worry etched across his face.

...

Blood-colored battlefield.

When Tang Yimo rose, old Tang Xiansheng's eyes lit up.

"It's big brother!"

Tang Guo beside him bounced with excitement.

Tang Xiansheng smiled, eyes gleaming. He wasn't surprised Tang Yimo represented the Five Phoenixes in individual battles.

Ever since Tang Guo's mysterious disappearance, when Tang Yimo had exploded with multiple veins at the Great Xuan Academy and fought Lu Jiulian to a standstill, he had awakened.

His cultivation had soared.

And unlike the traditional Five Phoenixes path, Tang Yimo had fused his own insights into the immortal techniques, optimizing them.

His combat power... was terrifying.

"Big brother will definitely win!"

Tang Guo clenched her fists. With the Divine King Body, she grew more ethereal by the day—like a spirit of the mortal world, every inch of skin glowing softly.

Tang Xiansheng looked at her with tender affection.

"Of course..."

“Your brother’s potential is immense...”

“He won’t lose easily.”

BOOM!

The hundred thousand Great Xuan troops roared again—support for Tang Yimo!

The entire battlefield seemed to ignite.

Five Phoenixes cultivators watched Tang Yimo with heated gazes.

Black robes, arms wrapped in white bandages—Tang Yimo’s expression remained calm.

He walked slowly toward the plaza.

He was not a man of many words.

He let his actions speak.

The attendant from the ancient warship had already descended to the center.

His misty face showed faint surprise as he looked at Tang Yimo.

Surprised that the Five Phoenixes hadn't sent Overlord again.

Overlord had just cleaved a Transcendent in half—his momentum was at its peak.

Yet they switched fighters.

In terms of presence alone, Tang Yimo was far weaker than Overlord.

After all, on the surface, Tang Yimo's realm was lower than Du Longyang or Ye Shoudao—those half-step primordial spirit flower experts.

A cold smile appeared beneath the attendant's mist.

The Five Phoenixes... had grown arrogant?

Looking down on a Seventh-grade world?

Or...

His gaze shifted to Overlord, eyes mocking.

Perhaps Overlord had exhausted himself with that one mighty strike and could no longer fight at full power?

Regardless, the attendant would not warn them.

“Star-Moon contestant—take the stage.”

He turned toward Star-Moon’s warship, robes fluttering.

All eyes converged on the warship.

BOOM!

Aboard the bronze vessel floating beyond the Five Phoenixes—

A figure stood at the prow, aura powerful—a peak Tribulation Transcendent.

But just as he prepared to leap—

A hand pressed his shoulder.

Hmm?

Every gaze turned—first curious, then shocked, then horrified!

BOOM!

Terrifying aura erupted across the battlefield.

Countless streams of starlight swirled.

A figure slowly floated out from the warship.

Uproar exploded.

“Star-Moon Saint Lord?!”

“He couldn’t sit still anymore—the Saint Lord himself?!”

“Everyone has an unspoken agreement that Saint Lords don’t fight in the Grand Tournament, but... there’s no actual rule against it.”

“They have to win one match. A Saint Lord has been forced out in the first round.”

Understanding dawned across the void.

Tang Yimo paused mid-wrap of his bandages.

He raised his head calmly and looked at the descending Star-Moon Saint Lord.

On the blood-colored battlefield—

Qi Lijia's breathing hitched.

"This is bad!"

"Why can a Sacred Ground Saint Lord compete as a contestant?!"

Qi Lijia staggered forward, shouting at the attendant.

The attendant glanced at him from beneath the mist.

"Is there a rule forbidding Sacred Ground Saint Lords from fighting?"

"If you wish, the Five Phoenixes' Saint Lord may also take the stage... but only in the next match."

His voice was flat.

Qi Lijia trembled, turning frantically to Tang Yimo.

"Child, don't be stubborn! If you can't win—forfeit!"

Wind swept the plaza.

Tang Yimo's black robes fluttered.

His eyes burned with resolve. He shook his head.

"In my dictionary, there's no such word as surrender."

He turned.

Looked up at the Saint Lord floating high above—untouched majesty radiating from him.

"You want to destroy the Five Phoenixes. That means harming my sister and my mother."

He bit down on the white bandage, tying it tight.

Battle intent thundered in his eyes like lightning.

“Even if you’re a Saint Lord...”

“I’ll still beat you all the same!”

Chapter 428: This Is My Dao

Tang Yimo’s words were not loud, yet they rang across the cyan-brick plaza like iron striking stone, resounding with unshakable resolve.

The Upper Realm attendant laughed. Beneath the swirling mist, his face seemed to mock Tang Yimo’s overconfidence.

If Overlord’s leapfrog victory had surprised him, where did this youth get his courage?

The previous Transcendent and this one were on completely different levels. Though both were Tribulation Transcendents, the gap between them was vast.

“Young man... quite the guts.”

The attendant smiled, hands clasped behind his back.

Since the stake had already been placed in the previous match, no new bet was needed.

His figure blurred and vanished from the plaza, robes fluttering as he reappeared atop the ancient warship.

“Second individual battle—begin.”

Silence fell.

On every warship hovering above the Five Phoenixes, eyes gleamed with amusement.

This match would be far more interesting.

No one had expected the Star-Moon Saint Lord himself to take the stage against a Ninth-grade world.

Embarrassing?

Of course.

But compared to losing twenty strands of origin dao essence, what was face worth?

For a Seventh-grade world, losing twenty strands would set development back centuries.

Face or centuries of progress—which mattered more?

The answer was obvious.

Beneath the radiant Buddhist light, Venerable Joyous couldn't help but sigh.

“Even the two of you might not have full confidence against the Star-Moon Saint Lord, right?”

He glanced at Saint Master Tuoba and Saint Master Qingling.

Both were also Seventh-grade Saint Lords.

“Against him, our chances would be slim... Star-Moon sits in Blood Evil Heaven, which is stronger overall than Pingyang Heaven. Every world there grew through conquest. The Star-Moon Saint Lord is powerful.”

Tuoba's gaze was grave.

Qingling inhaled deeply. “Most importantly... he possesses a special constitution.”

“If I remember correctly, the Star-Moon Saint Lord has the Star-Sand Constitution. Not top-tier, but the combat boost is terrifying.”

“At the very least, he ranks among the stronger Saint Lords.”

Venerable Joyous narrowed his eyes.

“This battle... will be hard to win.”

“If the previous matches still had surprises and a chance of victory, this one is a guaranteed loss. The Five Phoenixes will have to concede this round.”

He spoke.

No one argued. All eyes turned to the plaza.

The atmosphere grew heavier.

On the Five Phoenixes' side, faces paled.

Everyone sensed something wrong. Star-Moon's contestant was no ordinary expert.

Mo Tianyu scratched his sparse beard, belly exposed to the wind.

"Something feels off..."

He squinted. "Little Tang really needs this old man to divine for him right now."

Muttering, he formed a hand seal. Three bronze coins shot out, spinning around him in golden light.

He slapped them into his palm, fingers pressing down, calculating.

But the moment he finished—

Mo Tianyu's expression changed.

"Oh no... this hexagram..."

“Great fortune?!”

He snapped his head up, staring at the plaza, eyes filled with deep worry.

This time, he was truly anxious.

...

The battle did not begin immediately.

The Star-Moon Saint Lord floated in the air, a middle-aged man with an indifferent face. His wide robes fluttered. A crescent moon glowed at his brow. His eyebrows were so faint they seemed barely there.

His eyes were deep as the starry void.

He stared down at Tang Yimo with cold detachment.

“Young man... arrogance requires capital.”

He spoke from on high, looking down on Tang Yimo.

As the Saint Lord of Star-Moon, he was confident.

If other Transcendents could be leapfrogged, he—peak Tribulation Transcendent—could not.

Even the arrogant Overlord from before—he could suppress with absolute certainty.

Tang Yimo released the bandage from his teeth. A strand of hair fell across his forehead, then whipped back.

His figure blurred into afterimages.

BOOM!

The air exploded.

“Too slow.”

The Saint Lord floated calmly, watching as if an ant were showing off.

Slow?

Tang Yimo's eyes sharpened.

His speed surged.

Air rippled in circles. Afterimages trailed behind him.

In an instant, he appeared before the Saint Lord.

A devastating punch smashed forth.

Tang Yimo's bandaged fist carried mountain-splitting force.

BOOM!

The air itself seemed to shatter.

Yet...

The Saint Lord did not move.

A disdainful smirk curled his lips.

A single grain of star-sand fell.

Then his entire body dissolved into countless grains—like a fountain of clear water.

Tang Yimo's fist struck the sand, scattering it.

No damage.

Tang Yimo frowned.

Suddenly—

The sand swirled behind him, reforming into the Saint Lord.

Cold. Ruthless. Murderous.

“Your Five Phoenixes are quite arrogant...”

“Suppressing my Star-Moon cultivators—feeling proud?”

He stood with hands behind his back. Star-sand formed a massive palm.

It slammed down.

A muffled roar shook the air.

Tang Yimo’s heart jolted. He spun, unleashing a flurry of punches that collided with the palm in continuous explosions.

Star-sand scattered, but each grain became a blade, slicing across his cheeks.

BOOM!

Immense force struck.

Tang Yimo was smashed into the plaza. Cyan bricks shattered, forming a deep crater.

The Saint Lord flicked his wide sleeve as if swatting a fly.

Weak.

Far too weak.

He now wondered how Star-Moon had lost the previous matches.

“No more wasting time. Kill this one, then another from the Five Phoenixes. We reclaim the staked essence. Not a wasted trip.”

The Saint Lord raised his chin slightly, hair whipping in the wind, faint eyebrows cold and stern.

The gap between Unity and Tribulation was vast.

Tang Yimo had only just entered Unity Realm.

Even someone like Du Longyang, half a step from a primordial spirit flower, would struggle against a Transcendent.

What gave Tang Yimo the courage to fight?

From his wide sleeve, a palm emerged.

Countless grains of star-sand fell, forming a massive sandy hand.

It slammed down.

BOOM!

From stillness to explosive motion, the strike detonated with terrifying force!

Tang Yimo felt pressure like a mountain.

Suddenly—

A frenzied aura erupted from the shattered plaza.

Tang Yimo's hair whipped wildly. Power and blood qi surged within him.

"First vein—open!"

Veins bulged.

"Second vein—open!"

Two veins unleashed.

Tang Yimo threw a punch.

Demonic qi exploded around him!

BOOM!

The sandy palm shattered. Tang Yimo shot through like a black shadow, charging the Saint Lord.

With veins opened, his combat power skyrocketed—speed, aura, pressure—all surging.

Uproar rippled through the spectators.

No wonder a mere early Unity expert dared step onto the stage.

He was no ordinary Unity expert.

From the ancient warship, a soft “oh?” of surprise drifted out.

“This Five Phoenixes... is truly strange. This man’s technique is some kind of amplification secret art.”

The voice within the ship spoke leisurely.

The attendant bowed respectfully.

“Unfortunately, even such amplification cannot defy the heavens.”

...

The Star-Moon Saint Lord watched Tang Yimo grow frenzied.

“So this is your trump card.”

He spoke.

But that was all.

Tang Yimo’s robes flapped wildly. His body seemed to swell.

BOOM!

He was faster now, leaving sonic booms in his wake.

His knee struck out, sweeping toward the Saint Lord.

Early Unity against peak second-stage Unity—no fear!

Beyond the Five Phoenixes, spectators on the warships were briefly shocked.

But the surprise faded quickly.

They all knew Tang Yimo couldn't change the outcome.

The realm gap was not so easily crossed.

Overlord had third-sequence Dao Intent, Upper Realm prodigy-level talent, and a primordial spirit flower—that was how he leapfrogged.

Relying on a secret art to leapfrog? Delusional.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Tang Yimo unleashed hundreds of punches in an instant.

Each aimed at the Saint Lord.

But the Saint Lord didn't move. Star-sand formed shields, each grain blocking Tang Yimo's strikes effortlessly.

He was completely at ease.

Tang Yimo remained calm.

The Eight Veins Demonic Technique amplified strength, body, and speed to terrifying degrees.

The more veins opened, the stronger it became.

Tang Yimo glanced at the unruffled Saint Lord.

His eyes sharpened.

"Third vein—open!"

BOOM!

An invisible shockwave exploded from his body, scattering several grains of star-sand.

Hmm?

The Saint Lord blinked.

Tang Yimo's aura surged again!

"This secret art... can still grow?!"

Rip!

His skin turned blood-red as blood tide surged, boiling across his surface.

"Fight!"

Tang Yimo roared. His body became a black streak, power like shifting mountains.

He was blasted backward, crashing into the plaza.

Bricks exploded.

The rebound launched him forward like a meteor—pure, extreme black formed by sheer speed.

He slammed into the star-sand shields.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The shields trembled, shedding grains.

The Saint Lord's gaze finally turned serious.

"This secret art... is strange."

"But still not enough."

Tang Yimo's cold, demonic face glanced at him.

He said nothing. After opening the demonic veins, he became a machine that only knew battle.

“Enough. It ends now.”

The Saint Lord exhaled.

He no longer wished to waste time.

He raised a hand and pushed forward.

Primordial spirit trembled. Star-sand boiled.

His body dissolved inch by inch into countless grains glowing with starlight.

Star-Sand Constitution!

A special physique!

Even in his youth, the Star-Moon Saint Lord had been a genius!

Star-sand surged like tidal waves, crashing toward Tang Yimo.

No matter how he dodged, he was struck.

Finally, like a drowning man, he was slammed into the plaza.

Crack... crack...

Each grain carried mountain-like weight. The plaza groaned with cracks.

“Explode.”

The Saint Lord’s calm voice rang out.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Explosions erupted within the star-sand.

Some bricks were pulverized.

Under such force, Tang Yimo would be reduced to dust.

“It’s over.”

Sighs rose from the spectators.

As expected—a one-sided slaughter.

The star-sand reformed into the Saint Lord.

Cold. Arrogant. Disdainful.

He didn’t even glance at the plaza.

He raised his head, hair whipping, looking toward the Five Phoenixes.

As if saying: Next.

“Who are you pretending for?”

A low, hoarse voice—like a beast’s suppressed roar—rang out.

BOOM!

The Saint Lord, floating with hair flying, gazing at the Five Phoenixes—

Was suddenly smashed by a black shadow.

Terrifying force cracked his sandy cheek, grains falling.

The figure struck once, then fell freely onto the sand-covered plaza like a boulder into a lake, sending waves crashing.

Pure black demonic qi swirled around him like a tornado.

BOOM...

With Tang Yimo at the center, black demonic qi laced with blood erupted from the plaza like geysers!

Like thunder from a clear sky!

Ten zhang. Twenty zhang. Thirty zhang!

Demonic qi tornadoes shot skyward!

“Fourth vein—open!”

Tang Yimo’s robes whipped wildly.

His body swelled circle after circle.

The shockwaves from his skin alone seemed to shatter the air.

But...

Still not enough!

His skin turned purple. Black patterns crawled across his body, making him increasingly monstrous.

Fifth vein—Demonic Frenzy!

Star-sand fell from the Saint Lord's face.

For the first time, his expression grew grave as he stared at the demonic figure on the plaza.

“What kind of secret art is this... that an early Unity expert can erupt with such power?!”

Suddenly—

The figure at the center of the demonic storm looked up.

Crimson eyes burned with boundless killing intent.

“Those who offend the Five Phoenixes seek to harm my sister and my mother!”

Images flashed in Tang Yimo's mind—Ye Shoudao, Jiang Li, and the others fighting for their lives.

That desperation to win.

All eyes converged on him.

Many sighed.

But soon, those who understood shook their heads.

“This technique’s cost is too high... it turns him into a demon, burning away massive lifespan. The price outweighs the gain.”

But the Star-Moon Saint Lord no longer thought so.

He was serious now.

He refused to capsize in a ditch.

A Saint Lord fighting personally was already humiliating.

Losing to a mere Unity expert? Star-Moon would become the laughingstock of the Nine Heavens.

He had thought the first match would make Star-Moon famous—defeating the only high-martial world of the Void Heaven was like sweeping an entire heaven.

Now all that glory might vanish. He only wanted to remain undefeated.

BOOM!

The plaza caved into a massive crater. Sand and stone flew.

Tang Yimo became a shadow—like a god or demon streaking across.

The Saint Lord shifted in mid-air, forming star-sand shields.

But each shield was violently shattered by Tang Yimo.

Their battle reached a strange equilibrium.

At this moment, Tang Yimo possessed Tribulation Transcendent-level combat power!

No—

An ordinary Transcendent would be beaten to death by him!

“This technique pushes physical power to the extreme!”

From the ancient warship, the Upper Realm envoy spoke gravely again.

The attendant’s eyes were solemn.

But even so, defeating the Star-Moon Saint Lord was impossible.

The Saint Lord landed on the plaza.

Frenzied Tang Yimo crashed down. Every brick seemed to leap from the impact.

Star-sand fell from the Saint Lord’s face piece by piece.

His eyes turned white. The crescent on his forehead burned hotter.

Vast energy surged from his body.

His primordial spirit floated out, forming a flower!

Not only that.

His golden body blazed—he was half a step from condensing a golden body flower.

This power stood at the absolute peak of Tribulation Transcendents!

The Saint Lord's pale eyes locked onto Tang Yimo.

Frenzied Tang Yimo was burning lifespan.

He was too fast—even the Saint Lord's eyes couldn't track him.

But he didn't care.

He formed seals with both hands.

Countless star-sands glowed with stellar light, forming layer upon layer of tidal waves around him.

Each wave carried world-ending might.

The plaza's bricks were obliterated, ground flat.

This was the most destructive battle yet.

PFFT!

Even in frenzy, Tang Yimo bled from nose and mouth, hurled away by the star-sand waves.

Outside the arena.

Overlord's gaze sharpened.

"Not enough... still not enough."

Lu Jiulian's smile had vanished.

Back when Tang Yimo was not yet Unity, his frenzy state had pressured even him.

Now as a Unity expert, frenzied Tang Yimo was naturally far stronger.

But...

The Star-Moon Saint Lord had a primordial spirit flower and was half a step from a golden body flower!

This combat power was nearly unmatched below Ascended Immortal.

If Tang Yimo were a Transcendent opening frenzy, he could crush the Saint Lord.

But he was only Unity Realm.

Again and again, he was sent flying.

Tang Yimo bled profusely.

His body seemed ready to crack apart.

His eyes turned completely black.

“Not enough!”

Blood poured from his mouth and nose.

He crouched low, teeth gritted.

If frenzy wasn't enough...

Then go further!

“Sixth vein—open for me!”

BOOM!

A pillar of demonic qi shot from Tang Yimo into the heavens.

Flesh exploded. His skin seemed to burn with flames.

A heart-stopping pressure made even the Saint Lord's hair stand on end.

Damn it!

From calm confidence to growing horror—

What had the Star-Moon Saint Lord experienced?!

Were all Five Phoenixes cultivators monsters?!

“This man doesn't want to live?!”

The Saint Lord could feel Tang Yimo's lifespan draining away rapidly.

A little longer, and Tang Yimo would die from lifespan exhaustion.

BOOM!

The plaza cracked open.

A black lightning bolt streaked forth.

“Star-Sand Shields—rise!”

The Saint Lord roared.

Countless star-sands stacked, forming nine hundred and ninety-nine shields before him.

They blocked the black lightning’s path.

But explosions rang out endlessly.

Every shield shattered!

The Saint Lord coughed blood.

Ruthlessness filled his eyes.

CLAP!

His hands slammed together.

The shattered star-sands suddenly surged.

They formed two mountain walls before him, crashing together.

BOOM!

His arms exploded into star-sand.

“Rise!”

Even he seemed to lose control!

Countless gazes turned grave.

Star-sand gathered.

Tang Yimo's demonic figure was crushed between them.

A massive star formed of star-sand rose, hovering above the Five Phoenixes!

Just when everyone thought it was over—

BOOM!

Dust exploded from the star.

A head with flying hair and gushing blood burst out.

Arms followed, pushing against the star as if to break free!

Countless memories flashed through Tang Yimo's fading consciousness.

He remembered protecting his sister as a child, taking beatings again and again.

He remembered guarding Southern Prefecture.

His peaceful cultivation and life in the Five Phoenixes.

Once, he only wanted to protect Tang Guo and his mother.

Now...

He wanted to protect the entire Five Phoenixes!

“Those who offend the Five Phoenixes seek to harm my sister and my mother!”

“Even if you are a Saint Lord—I will still kill you!”

“Even if it makes no sense!”

“This is my Dao!”

BOOM!

Cracks spider-webbed across the star.

“Seventh...”

Before he could finish—

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

BOOM!

The star-sand star shattered completely.

A black lightning bolt shot out.

It streaked downward.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The plaza split into a massive chasm.

The Star-Moon Saint Lord was terrified!

What kind of secret art was this?!

A madman?!

He frantically stacked countless star-sand shields around himself.

All the sand that had suppressed Tang Yimo now piled onto him.

He encased himself in a star.

The black lightning arrived!

One punch—heavily struck the star.

Smoke and dust shot skyward!

The world fell silent.

Cold sweat slid down the Saint Lord's cracked, sandy face.

A bloodied, mangled fist...

Had shattered half the star and countless layers of shields.

It stopped inches from his face.

The world went deathly still.

Chapter 429: Lu Places a Piece, the Demon Lord Turns His Head

This was a battle of blinding brilliance.

Dazzling, heart-pounding. Tang Yimo, transformed into a frenzied demon, unleashed combat power that stunned every soul present.

Even the cultivators of the Five Phoenixes were shocked.

Not even Overlord had expected Tang Yimo to explode with such strength.

The Star-Moon Saint Lord—Saint Lord of a Seventh-grade high-martial world—was he strong?

To the experts aboard the warships of Seventh-, Sixth-, and even Fifth-grade worlds floating beyond the Five Phoenixes, he was merely average.

But to the Ninth-grade Five Phoenixes, he was an absolute titan.

Moreover, he possessed the Star-Sand Constitution—a special physique that granted immense combat amplification.

That was why every warship had been certain of Tang Yimo's defeat.

Yet the resilience and power of the Five Phoenixes cultivators exceeded all imagination.

Just Tang Yimo—an ordinary-looking Unity expert—had nearly punched a Saint Lord to death!

His resounding words still echoed in every ear, stirring awe:

“Even if it makes no sense—this is my Dao.”

That final punch seemed to prove it.

It had nearly pierced the Saint Lord’s star defenses, stopping a hair’s breadth from his face.

Intent to kill, but powerless to follow through.

Silence.

Utter silence.

Only the sound of shattered star-sand grains rolling across the ground.

“What a pity...”

Someone sighed.

Even the arrogant experts from higher-grade worlds felt moved by Tang Yimo's defiance.

"He was just a little short... He couldn't open that final pulse."

Some sharp-eyed observers noted.

Tang Yimo had failed to open the seventh vein.

His body—or perhaps his primordial spirit—could not support it.

An unseen force had blocked him.

If he had forced it, his body would have collapsed, his spirit burned to ash—certain death.

Crack... crack...

Atop the massive star formed of piled star-sand, cold sweat beaded on the Saint Lord's forehead as he stared at the terrifying fist inches away.

Even he felt fear.

A Saint Lord—terrified by an ordinary cultivator from a Ninth-grade world.

He waited.

But Tang Yimo's fist did not fall.

The Saint Lord's cracked defenses trembled.

Star-sand cascaded away like a waterfall.

On the ruined plaza, the scene was revealed to all.

Tang Yimo held his punching stance, head bowed—like a statue, unmoving.

The Saint Lord staggered back several steps, exhaling shakily.

“The Five Phoenixes...”

Suddenly, he threw his head back and laughed maniacally.

“No wonder you’re the only high-martial world in the Void Heaven. In that ancient war, how many Ancient Emperors and Saints died? Perhaps all their fortune has gathered upon the Five Phoenixes!”

His laughter bordered on madness.

He had nearly been killed by a Unity expert from the Five Phoenixes—like a blazing slap across his face.

Aboard the warships beyond the Five Phoenixes, his words drew sharp inhales.

“I want you dead!”

BOOM!

The Saint Lord’s laughter cut off.

He moved!

Countless grains of star-sand fell, forming a massive, razor-sharp blade that hovered above the unconscious, defenseless Tang Yimo.

Its cold tip radiated slaughter.

Madness and killing intent filled the Saint Lord's eyes.

Tang Yimo had to die!

This man was too terrifying!

Six consecutive amplifications—each stronger than the last!

At the seventh, the Saint Lord had felt helpless—like prey stared down by a demon god.

If that punch had landed, he would have been obliterated—body and spirit torn apart!

Tang Yimo could not be allowed to live.

The Saint Lord's heart would never be at peace.

And Tang Yimo was only Unity Realm!

BOOM!

Murderous aura erupted like thunder from a clear sky.

Aboard the warships, many experts smirked.

Mocking the Saint Lord.

But no one moved to stop him.

They had no reason to.

“Stop!”

“We surrender! We forfeit!”

Outside the ruined plaza—

On the blood-colored battlefield, the Five Phoenixes cultivators were already cracking with rage!

Qi Liuji's fingers trembled with fury.

Tang Yimo's defiance and resolve had left even him speechless and stunned.

Against a Saint Lord, he had thought Tang Yimo would fall quickly—or surrender.

But Tang Yimo had not.

He had burned everything, even his lifespan, to unleash his strongest power.

His potential was horrifying.

He had nearly killed the Saint Lord with one punch!

If only he had opened the seventh vein...

But it was fortunate he hadn't.

If he had, with his current realm—he would have died.

“The match is over! We lost! Why are you still attacking?!”

Qi Liujia roared, eyes bloodshot, veins bulging.

He screamed at the attendant standing on the ruined plaza.

The attendant glanced at him from beneath the mist.

Then leisurely floated down from the ancient warship.

So slowly it was obvious—he was deliberately allowing the Saint Lord to kill.

Blatant indulgence!

Qi Liujia's roar echoed across the battlefield.

Every Five Phoenixes cultivator turned pale with rage!

BOOM!

The star-sand greatsword was already descending.

If it struck, the unconscious Tang Yimo would be reduced to minced meat.

“No!”

“Brother!!”

From the crowd—

Tang Guo’s face was streaked with tears, filled with terror.

She had never imagined her invincible brother—the one who always shielded her—could die!

Her scream was piercing.

Divine light surged from her body.

Overlord rose, hair whipping, eyes filled with grief and fury!

Too far!

They had gone too far!

Tang Yimo had no strength left—why still strike to kill?!

Despicable!

Demonic qi surged from Overlord.

Lu Jiulian stood, hair flying, eyes sharp.

Whoosh!

His figure flickered, air compressing into a blooming lotus of force. He shot toward the plaza.

Overlord moved!

Qi Liujia moved!

Jiang Li, Du Longyang, and the others charged with icy killing intent.

On the plaza—

The white-robed attendant landed at the edge.

He did not stop the Saint Lord.

Instead, he blocked Qi Liujia, Overlord, and Lu Jiulian.

“Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament—life and death do not matter.”

“The match is not yet over.”

His calm voice drifted from beneath the mist.

“We forfeit for him!”

Qi Liuji’s wrinkled face twitched as he roared.

This attendant wasn’t stopping the Saint Lord—he was stopping them?!

“Get out of my way!”

Overlord was enraged!

This man was deliberately targeting them—he had no patience for words!

“He’s unconscious!”

Demonic qi roared. Overlord drew axe and shield, stomping the ground and leaping like a demon god.

“Insolence!”

The attendant shouted.

Terrifying aura exploded from him.

BOOM!

The laws of the Void Heaven seemed to stir.

Overwhelming pressure forced Overlord and Qi Liujia back.

Qi Liujia staggered several steps, face flushed red.

“Too far... too far!!”

He roared in fury.

The attendant stood high above, a cold smile seeming to form beneath the mist.

“Those are the rules of the Grand Tournament...”

But his expression suddenly changed.

Because...

A blooming lotus had evaded his sweeping force, streaking into the plaza as a flash of light.

What?!

The attendant was stunned.

Lu Jiulian’s hair flew. He ignored the attendant completely.

He flickered continuously, racing toward the Saint Lord and Tang Yimo.

The attendant’s face grew grave.

Among the Five Phoenixes’ individual contestants, there was an even stronger one hidden!

But soon, a smirk returned to his lips.

Too late.

The star-sand greatsword was already falling!

Lu Jiulian landed, force dissipating. He exhaled a breath.

He hadn't made it.

But his expression did not change.

Because... he didn't need to.

Wisps of demonic qi began to drift from Tang Yimo's body.

The descending star-sand sword seemed blocked by an invisible, mysterious force.

It froze above Tang Yimo's head.

Unable to descend a single inch!

The attendant had blocked Qi Liujia and Overlord.

The Saint Lord had been thrilled.

Now only terror remained...

Something was wrong!

What power was this?!

Black demonic qi billowed and rose.

A terrifying, oppressive aura spread.

The plaza seemed on the verge of collapse.

“What?”

“Why hasn’t the Star-Moon Saint Lord struck yet?”

“Hmm? Something’s off... It’s not that he won’t—it’s that he can’t.”

Shocked voices rose from the warships.

No one understood what was happening.

From the ancient warship—

A surprised aura spread.

“Who is it?!”

BOOM!

A voice rang out from within—questioning, furious, filled with undeniable pressure!

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

The attendants on the warship moved.

They shot out as streaks of light, landing on the plaza.

An anomaly had occurred!

Everyone was stunned.

An anomaly in the very first match of the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament.

In truth...

Everyone knew that holding the tournament in the Void Heaven guaranteed anomalies.

After all, the true purpose of this Grand Tournament was not the tournament itself.

The secrets of the Five Phoenixes.

The secrets of the Void Heaven.

That was what the various powers—and the Upper Realm—truly cared about.

BOOM!

The atmosphere turned cold and tense!

On the Five Phoenixes' side—

Tang Guo was already sobbing, tears streaming from fear and despair.

“Master! Save my brother!”

She screamed.

At that moment, Lu Jiulian was her only hope.

Beside her, Tang Xiansheng's old eyes brimmed with worry, fists clenched tight.

"Who are you?!"

"Who the hell are you?!"

The Star-Moon Saint Lord roared in terror.

Demonic qi flowed like spilled ink, like ink splashed across a scroll.

Soon, above Tang Yimo—who still held his punching stance, aura nearly spent—

Demonic qi billowed.

It blotted out the sky, forming a blurry silhouette.

The figure stood in the air, back turned to the world.

As if detached from all existence, aloof and untouchable.

Close enough to touch, yet distant as the horizon.

Formless, yet tangible!

Far away—

Overlord, forced back by the attendant's pressure, suddenly blazed with light in his eyes—brighter than the brightest star in the night!

His heart pounded.

His gaze fixed on that black silhouette.

“Demon... Demon Lord!”

...

Lake of Origin, Heart Island.

Lu Fan leaned back in the Thousand-Blade Chair, exhaling slowly.

Black lines danced in his vision.

Tang Yimo's stubbornness had surprised even him.

He had not expected Tang Yimo to reach this point.

Originally, Tang Yimo had only opened the fifth vein of the Eight Veins Demonic Technique.

The sixth had been comprehended mid-battle.

Yet Tang Yimo's ambition was too great.

As a new Unity expert, even the sixth vein couldn't kill the Star-Moon Saint Lord.

To decisively slay him required the seventh vein!

"Too ambitious."

“But... this is your persistence. Your Dao.”

Lu Fan spoke, as if to someone.

Tang Yimo could have opened the seventh vein.

But Lu Fan had stopped him.

A mere Seventh-grade Saint Lord was not worth Tang Yimo’s life!

More importantly...

When Tang Yimo had tried to open the seventh vein—his Dao Intent had evolved!

Lu Fan smiled faintly.

The first time he had witnessed a Dao Intent transformation.

But all that could wait.

“Bullying my Five Phoenixes...”

Lu Fan narrowed his eyes.

He raised a hand, picked up another piece from the box, and placed it slowly on the board.

Light flashed across the chessboard.

...

Demon Lord?!

Demonic qi surged. The Demon Lord stood with his back to all living beings.

The Star-Moon Saint Lord saw only his back.

In fact, everyone saw only the back of the demonic qi figure hovering above Tang Yimo.

Gasps of shock exploded from the warships.

“Who is this?!”

“Such terrifying aura... Could it be a third-stage Grand Ability Realm Ascended Immortal?!”

“How could the Five Phoenixes have an Ascended Immortal?! Did this man inherit an ancient expert’s legacy?!”

Guesses buzzed like flies.

But everyone was more interested in the situation on the plaza.

From the ancient warship representing the Upper Realm—

Fury erupted.

The attendants released powerful auras, shooting out as streaks of light onto the plaza.

The envoy was enraged—they would enforce his will and suppress everything!

“Stop him!”

“The rules of the Grand Tournament cannot be broken!”

The envoy’s stern voice rang from the warship.

The attendants’ auras linked, forming a towering immortal god-like figure.

Jiang Li’s eyes narrowed at the sight.

Their linked auras... were similar to military formations!

Suddenly—

A soft laugh rang out.

As if exploding from darkness and silence.

It instantly filled heaven and earth.

“Who gave you the right to bully the cultivators of my Five Phoenixes?”

A calm voice, like a gentle breeze.

Suddenly!

Above the linked immortal god figure formed by the attendants—

A crisscrossing chessboard appeared.

Hmm?

Beyond the Five Phoenixes, sharp eyes gleamed from the warships.

This aura...

The mysterious... Saint Lord of the Five Phoenixes?!

Plop.

A single chess piece fell from the sky.

The immortal god formed by the attendants' linked auras...

Collapsed like a broken dam under that one piece!

PFFT!

One after another, the white-robed attendants paled in horror.

The mist around their faces shattered, revealing their true appearances as they coughed blood.

Each attendant was crushed to the ground by the pressure of a single chess piece.

Yet...

While everyone was focused on this—

The Star-Moon Saint Lord's bloodcurdling scream echoed across the plaza.

The world seemed to rumble endlessly.

The demonic qi figure hovering above Tang Yimo...

Slowly turned its head.

The Star-Moon Saint Lord felt himself cut off from the world.

In his eyes, in his primordial spirit's perception—only that figure remained.

Slowly turning.

When the Demon Lord turned his head—

Heaven and earth collapsed, rivers ran dry!

In the Saint Lord's vision, the world shattered.

His primordial spirit began to disintegrate inch by inch!

Chapter 430: Thousandfold Spirit Pressure!

On the cyan-brick plaza, demonic qi surged and coalesced into a tall, mysterious figure.

Cloaked in black robes that billowed at the hem, it stood with its back to the world.

Utterly detached.

And when that figure turned its head, heaven and earth seemed to collapse.

PFFT!

The Star-Moon Saint Lord's mind went blank. Blood sprayed from his mouth as he let out a wretched, unwilling scream.

He had never imagined such a turn of events.

As the Demon Lord's silhouette turned, the star-sand greatsword inch by inch disintegrated, crumbling into fine grains that cascaded down like a broken river of stars, scattering starlight.

What kind of terrifying power was this?

The Saint Lord's mind was shattered with shock—and above all, fear. He felt the breath of death.

The aura radiating from this manifested figure alone filled him with utter terror.

Who was he?

An Ascended Immortal?

Or... a true Immortal beyond even that?!

PFFT!

The Saint Lord coughed blood in great spurts, unable to control his body.

His flesh cracked. The Star-Sand Constitution he had always been so proud of—now as fragile as porcelain skin, ready to shatter at a touch.

His gaze fixed on Tang Yimo, then shifted to the surging demonic figure above him.

A formless body, as if a single breeze could scatter it.

Not a true physical form.

The Saint Lord suddenly trembled.

He felt he had touched something unspeakable, something forbidden.

Could it be...

This was a remnant will from the survivors of the Void Heaven's ancient cataclysm?

The will of an Ancient Emperor?

Or a Primordial Saint?!

He wanted to probe further.

But he would have no chance.

BOOM!

The Demon Lord turned his head and glanced over.

The Saint Lord's body seemed to collapse outright, ready to dissolve into star-sand.

His primordial spirit cracked inch by inch.

The light in his eyes died completely. His body fell to the ground.

THUD!

On the ruined plaza, the broken body of the Star-Moon Saint Lord knelt before Tang Yimo.

His aura vanished utterly.

One glance across eternity had annihilated his soul.

The world fell into deathly silence.

Aboard every warship beyond the Five Phoenixes, breathing grew rapid.

Who was that demonic qi figure?

Was it truly an Ancient Emperor?

Everyone was horrified.

Yet after the horror came inexplicable excitement.

They seemed to see the first light of dawn breaking over the sea—a brilliant radiance that promised to illuminate everything.

This figure was absolutely connected to the Void Heaven's secrets.

Absolutely tied to the legacies left by the Ancient Emperors!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

One after another, overwhelming auras erupted, shaking heaven and earth like a storm.

Any one of these auras far surpassed the Star-Moon Saint Lord's!

On the Buddhist lotus of the Little Thunderclap Buddha World—

The Great Venerable Buddha, benevolent and serene, surveyed his surroundings as lotus flowers bloomed around him.

He felt the auras no weaker than his own.

He sighed softly.

Finally, the Great Venerable seated on the lotus pressed his palms together.

He chanted the Buddha's name.

"Amitabha."

BOOM!

A terrifying aura shot skyward like a rainbow piercing the heavens.

His presence joined the others—no less powerful than the experts on the warships, spirit vessels, and ferocious beasts!

Venerable Joyous, Saint Master Tuoba, and Saint Master Qingling paled.

The moment the Great Venerable released his aura, Venerable Joyous understood—he could never again set foot in the Five Phoenixes.

By revealing his power now, the Great Venerable was declaring to the Five Phoenixes:

The Little Thunderclap Buddha World had torn away all pretense.

They would pursue the Void Heaven's secrets.

From this moment, the ambiguous relationship between the Little Thunderclap Buddha World and the Five Phoenixes was severed.

From now on—they were enemies!

Tuoba and Qingling trembled.

“Sixth-grade... even Fifth-grade high-martial worlds...”

“To think the very first match would rip away all masks!”

Tuoba's heart pounded with fear.

These auras meant Ascended Immortals!

So many Ascended Immortals—who could stand against them? Who would dare?

Indeed, the Five Phoenixes' Young Master Lu was mysterious and peerless.

He might handle one Ascended Immortal.

But against so many, filled with greed?

What chance did he have?!

Aboard the ancient warship hovering over the plaza—

A faint laugh rang out.

Filled with interest, excitement, and the joy of discovering treasure.

His attendants had all been crushed to the ground by terrifying power.

This could not be tolerated.

A chessboard appeared in the sky, lines crisscrossing like a net of stars.

Only one piece rested upon it, yet like a sea-stabilizing divine needle, it pinned every attendant who tried to rise.

“Stand. Kill.”

A calm voice drifted from the ancient warship.

Light surged in the attendants’ eyes.

They pressed their palms to the ground, trying to rise.

BOOM!

As if shouldering mountains, as if holding up the heavens.

These attendants were like gods and demons!

Golden light bloomed across their bodies!

Golden body flowers!

Their auras linked, forming an even more terrifying presence.

Every single attendant was a Tribulation Transcendent who had condensed a golden body flower!

Many aboard the warships, while focused on the towering Demon Lord, also noticed this.

So many golden body flower Transcendents—mere attendants.

The Upper Realm's might was horrifying!

It made one feel utterly insignificant!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Earth-shaking auras rolled forth.

The attendants blooming with golden body flowers strained to rise from beneath the chess piece's suppression.

Crack... crack...

The sound of golden body flowers wilting rang out.

BOOM!

The section of the plaza where the attendants knelt collapsed inward.

A circular shockwave of dust exploded outward.

These attendants were like ants pinned to the ground by a single finger—crushed dead!

Spirit Pressure!

Young Master Lu's Spirit Pressure!

On the Five Phoenixes' side, cultivators' eyes lit up.

Forcing enemies to kneel, rendering them unable to move—this style belonged only to Young Master Lu!

Young Master Lu of White Jade Capital had acted!

Every Five Phoenixes cultivator boiled with excitement, hot blood coursing through their veins!

One glance had slain the Star-Moon Saint Lord.

The Demon Lord turned his back to the world once more.

Pillars of aura pierced the heavens, as if countless experts had surrounded the Demon Lord.

Demonic qi whipped around him.

The Star-Moon Saint Lord knelt before Tang Yimo—an utterly bizarre scene.

A faint laugh rang out.

As if the Demon Lord chuckled softly.

Wisps of demonic qi began to dissipate, seeming to retract into Tang Yimo's body.

But at that moment—

Furious roars exploded from the warships.

Buzz... buzz...

Ascended Immortals no longer hid their auras.

Countless law-blades formed by the Void Heaven's rules slashed down, trying to suppress these experts who dared reveal Ascended Immortal presence.

"You think you can leave after killing the Star-Moon Saint Lord?!"

"Did you take the Heaven and Earth Grand Tournament for a joke?!"

"Demon—stay! We demand justice for the Star-Moon Saint Lord!"

Roars thundered.

From warships and spirit vessels—

Towering figures of Ascended Immortals appeared, enduring the law-blades' suppression.

Their gazes burned like stars, illuminating the world.

They stepped forward, ready to cross the void.

The Demon Lord's qi dispersed.

With his back to all living beings, he seemed indifferent to their threats.

I am the Demon Lord.

I come when I wish. I leave when I wish.

He began to fade.

As if about to vanish from the world.

...

The mist-shrouded attendant faced Lu Jiulian.

“Move!”

His voice was emotionless, but undoubtedly furious.

He had never taken Lu Jiulian seriously.

His gaze shifted to the Demon Lord, whose qi was retracting into Tang Yimo.

His breathing tightened.

Then he shot forward.

His sleeve became a razor-sharp blade, sweeping forth thousands of radiant sword-lights—like a waterfall or a silver river.

Lu Jiulian gently raised his palm.

A cyan lotus bloomed before him.

He lightly pushed forward.

His palm met the attendant's blade-sleeve.

The scene was strange—as if Lu Jiulian were seeking death.

Yet his face remained calm.

He and Tang Yimo were not close.

But Tang Yimo was Tang Guo's brother—and Tang Guo was his only disciple... his only family.

He would not let her grieve.

Thus, he would stop this attendant.

BOOM!

Thousands of blade- and sword-lights shattered.

Then Lu Jiulian's palm strangely passed through it all and struck the attendant's chest.

The attendant's face still held shock and confusion.

How?!

BOOM!

Force exploded.

The attendant was sent flying.

He landed, the mist around his head scattering, revealing a middle-aged face.

The man's calm eyes stared at Lu Jiulian, filled with killing intent.

...

Lu Jiulian had stopped the attendant. Overlord and Qi Liujia seized the chance and shot forward.

They knew Lu Jiulian was buying them time.

"Go!"

Overlord roared.

Demonic qi surged around him. His charge shook the ruined plaza.

Qi Liujia followed, array patterns weaving around him.

The attendant was enraged but completely entangled by Lu Jiulian.

He was not just held—he was in danger of being killed if he slipped!

Overlord and Qi Liujia ignored him, closing in on Tang Yimo.

But the moment they neared—

Terrifying pressure crushed down, as if ready to compress their bodies to dust.

“You take Little Tang!”

Qi Liujia shouted.

Every wrinkle on his old face twitched.

The Demon Lord’s qi had fully returned to Tang Yimo’s body. Tang Yimo still held his punching stance, aura nearly spent, blood seeping from his skin.

Forcing the seventh vein had gravely wounded his life force—he was at death’s door.

“Got it.”

Overlord said nothing more.

He grabbed Tang Yimo and charged out of the pressure zone.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

One after another, terrifying auras descended like rainbows.

Though weakened by countless law-blades—

These were still Ascended Immortal pressures.

Qi Liujiā's hair and beard whipped wildly. He sat cross-legged, array patterns weaving into a formation.

BOOM!

Countless pressures smashed down.

Qi Liuji raised his array skyward, blocking them.

PFFT! Cracks appeared in the patterns, on the verge of collapse.

He dropped to one knee, hair flying.

Overlord carrying Tang Yimo escaped the zone.

“Stop!”

From warships and spirit vessels, furious roars thundered.

These were peak experts from Sixth-grade worlds.

In their eyes, the Demon Lord was tied to the Void Heaven’s secrets—and had emerged from Tang Yimo.

They had to keep Tang Yimo.

He might be the key to unlocking the Void Heaven’s mysteries!

Overlord charged toward the edge of the plaza with Tang Yimo.

The attendant entangled by Lu Jiulian was furious, but he could not break free.

No—he was barely holding on. One mistake and he would die!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

From the warships and spirit vessels, Ascended Immortals seemed ready to descend.

Their towering bodies prepared to step forth.

Qi Liuja gritted his teeth, his array holding up a sky.

Perhaps noticing the attendants' plight—

From the ancient warship, a voice laced with anger rang out.

“Useless!”

The word struck their souls.

The attendants trembled, then attacked even more ferociously.

PFFT!

PFFT! PFFT!

Yet the two chess pieces hovering in the sky remained unshaken.

The crushed attendants’ bodies began to explode.

“Insolence!”

From the ancient bronze warship—

The age-worn patterns seemed to come alive.

Creak... creak...

The ancient cabin door began to open.

As if a terrifying figure within was awakening, slowly rising from languid slumber.

BOOM!

The Upper Realm envoy within the ancient warship was about to emerge.

This sight made even many experts on the surrounding warships pause.

The Upper Realm envoy—feared by all.

Yet...

A faint laugh rang through the world.

Like thunder from a clear sky.

The chessboard spread, enveloping the ancient warship.

A chess piece fell like a blazing sun.

Onto the crisscrossing star-like lines.

BOOM!

Spirit pressure crashed down like a boulder into a lake, sending shockwaves rolling outward.

The figure that had just risen within the ancient warship...

Sat back down heavily.

As if forcibly shoved back by the falling piece's pressure...