

The Ages 651

Chapter 651 - Bunch of Cowards

“Xuanyuan Muxue is approaching Fang Xingque of her own will?” Jian Lingchen had also noticed it. Fang Xingque didn’t seem to be moving much, and it was Xuanyuan Muxue who was approaching him.

“That’s right. This way, everyone left will all be gathered at one spot,” said Tianming.

“That’ll save us trouble,” said Jian Lingchen.

“But it makes the situation even more chaotic,” the four ladies pondered. They were concerned with Jian Lingchen’s situation.

“Let’s go. Hurry up or we’ll miss the fun if we’re late,” said Tianming.

“Why are you in such a hurry? The mantis preys on the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind. We can wait for them to fight among themselves and show ourselves when they’re almost done,” said Jian Nichang. Her tone had gotten a lot softer.

“Problem is, are you the oriole? How can you do anything to the mantis if you’re an ant instead?” Tianming turned around and looked at her with a smile.

“Why are your words so insulting?” Jian Nichang said with a grimace.

“Big Sister Nichang, we just have to follow Tianming,” said Jian Lingchen.

At that moment, Jian Nichang felt the urge to pinch Jian Lingchen for helping an outsider instead of her. Tianming had already gone far ahead when they spoke.

“Catch up! Catch up!” Jian Lingchen called out.

“Lingchen, you’re the son of Tribulation Artifact Hall’s palace lord and a Quadrasword Talent of our Draconis House of Jian. So why are you following around him like a lackey?” Jian Nichang reprimanded.

“That’s because I have foresight, unlike you guys. He might be insignificant right now, but it’ll be different when he becomes Her Eminence’s disciple,” said Jian Lingchen.

“Talk again when he actually becomes one!” The five of them quickly followed Tianming.

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There was some logic to Jian Nichang’s idea. They would have an advantage if they made their move later, but that wasn’t Tianming’s style. Along the way, he saw many people gathering towards the two rays. They were those who wanted to try their luck.

“But that won’t be so easy....” Tianming headed directly toward Fang Xingque’s location. Everyone would gather there on the last day, and they had to be close to the mantis if they wanted to be the oriole. The spectators outside held their breath when everyone in the Deepstar Battlefield began gathering; they were waiting for the final battle.

“Fang Xingque is already prepared.”

“He found a place that’s easy to defend. This valley is very suitable for them to defend themselves after sealing it up.”

“The hundreds of Sterling House of Fang’s disciples even exceed the number of other disciples on the battlefield. In addition to the fear of Fang Xingque, his spot is practically guaranteed.”

“Did you guys see that? Many people are going after Xuanyuan Muxue.” Their gazes fell on Xuanyuan Muxue. She had frozen all her pursuers into ice sculptures.

“Why is Xuanyuan Muxue looking for Fang Xingque? There should be two battlefields, but it’s one now.”

“We’ll know eventually. Just continue watching.”

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The Deepstar Battlefield was massive, and Tianming spent half an hour traveling before he finally got close to Fang Xingque. Along the way, he got rid of everyone he encountered.

The ranking was constantly changing on the last day, especially Xuanyuan Muxue’s points. That meant she had been defeating those coming after her. On the contrary, there weren’t many changes to Fang Xingque’s points.

Tianming finally saw the valley up ahead. Hundreds of phoenixes flew in the sky above, constantly emitting cries to intimidate the disciples outside. The phoenixes were massive to begin with, so it was a spectacular scene having hundreds of them gathered together.

This placed those who came in a difficult position. There were many people gathered outside the valley, but none of them dared to enter the valley first.

The more people like them, the safer Fang Xingque will be because there will be fewer people with the courage to go against the Sterling House of Fang’s disciples. Tianming immediately noticed the problem and saw Fang Xingque standing in the crowd of Sterling House of Fang’s disciples.

He looked arrogant as he fearlessly spoke out, “Listen up, you people. I, Fang Xingque, will deal with anyone who dares to touch those from my Sterling House of Fang. You can be bold now, but you’ll realize how miserable life can be when you go out. I’m not joking here, and everyone knows what I’ve done to those people in the past. Do you people want to snatch the Deepstar Pool spot from me? Are you stupid?”

A wild burst of laughter echoed out from the valley, and even the phoenixes joined in. They were looking at those who surrounded the valley with contempt.

“Fight me? Do you believe that no one will utter a word if I cripple you, throw you out of the Archaion Sect, and kill you?” Fang Xingque smiled disdainfully. Even the Judgment Hall’s palace lord belonged to their Sterling House of Fang, so who could hand out judgment to them?

The entire valley fell into silence under his threat. Everyone remained where they were, and no one dared to raise their heads before the five hundred Sterling House of Fang disciples.

No one wanted to stand out. After all, if someone stood out and no one supported them, he or she would be targeted by Fang Xingque, and it would be troublesome.

“Why don’t we go after Xuanyuan Muxue? We still have hope if we go after her.”

“There’s no hope in taking out Fang Xingque, and no one dares to stand out. So who dares to go up without anyone taking the lead?”

“Xuanyuan Muxue is coming in this direction. We can just wait here. There’s no need to go looking for her.”

Everyone had their own thoughts, shrouding the entire battlefield in silence.

“Go!”

“Go and fight Fang Xingque. What the hell are those guys doing?”

“A bunch of cowards!”

The spectators were all growing anxious because they naturally wanted to enjoy an exciting battle. Everyone was waiting for the battle to break out. But it wasn’t, because no one dared to provoke the Sterling House of Fang, so those laid in ambush outside fought among themselves.

There were many Heaven Branch disciples there, and most of them had points ranging from tens to hundreds. So they still had a gleam of hope if they took all the points for themselves. That was also part of the reason why the situation started getting out of hand. There were lifebound beasts everywhere, recklessly launching their abilities.

“What a bunch of cowards,” Fang Xingque sneered.

Right at that moment, Tianming’s group appeared. “It’s him! And he’s really in the Emyrean Saint stage!”

“He’s together with the Draconis House of Jian’s Jian Lingchen, who’s in fourth place!”

“Their rankings have been rising violently over the past two days. Even Xuanyuan Yutuo, Jian Chenzhong, and Jian Mugu were eliminated by them. I calculated, and Li Tianming obtained Xuanyuan Yutuo and Jian Chenzhong’s points. That meant he’s the one who dealt the last blow to them.”

“What’s Jian Lingchen doing? He’s letting Li Tianming, an empyrean saint to take third?” They naturally didn’t believe that Tianming took out Xuanyuan Yutuo, since they hadn’t watched it.

“Wait, that doesn’t seem right. There’s no way Jian Lingchen and his wives could defeat Elder Dugu’s seven disciples!” As the only possible group to go against Fang Xingque, the appearance of Tianming’s group naturally attracted everyone’s attention.

Fang Xingque was also looking at Tianming, and the first thought that crossed his mind was to attack. But the Heaven Branch disciple, Fang Chenyun, stopped him, “Xingque, not now.”

“I’ve spent days looking for him. What are we waiting here for instead of killing his lifebound beasts?” Fang Xingque asked with a sinister face.

“Let’s take a look at the situation first. It’s easy to cause chaos if we attack,” said Fang Chenyun.

“I’m afraid that he’ll be expelled from the Astral Formation by others!” Fang Xingque said unhappily.

“He won’t. I find him rather cunning.”

“Alright, I’ll wait then.” Fang Xingque narrowed his eyes with a murderous aura when he looked at Tianming.

Right at that moment, Tianming looked over, and their gazes collided. Tianming smiled and raised his hand, drawing his thumb across his neck. His bold provocation instantly dropped a bomb in the Sterling House of Fang’s crowd.

But right at that moment, someone launched an attack at Tianming. Someone charged out from the corner and attacked without even speaking.

“Li Tianming has two thousand points! Defeat him and we might surpass Xuanyuan Muxue on the ranking!”

“Oh, yeah! Li Tianming and Xuanyuan Muxue only have a difference of five hundred points. I have four hundred points now, so I’ll be close to the second rank after defeating him.”

“Who’s attacking?”

“That’s the fifth on the current ranking, Yi Yuxuan. She has six hundred points, and she’ll be able to surpass Xuanyuan Muxue by defeating him!”

“Quick, don’t let her get it!”

The situation plunged into chaos. Tianming never expected that he would be treated as a pushover and get targeted by everyone when he had just arrived. But then again, it was understandable, since he was only an empyrean saint, and the disciples attacking him were all disciples from the Heaven Branch.

“I’d be under the impression that I’m in the top two, if the ranking wasn’t shown,” Tianming smiled. He was naturally unafraid and targeted the disciple who attacked him first. It was a woman with a voluptuous figure. She had a baby face that made her look innocent, but her voluptuous figure was eye-catching.

Her lifebound beast was a black cat. The cat was enormous and moved like a flashing illusion. It was probably a dark-type lifebound beast who could fuse into darkness. She was the fifth on the ranking, Yi Yuxuan.

“Quick! Don’t let Yu Yixuan take it!” But just as everyone was calling out, Yi Yuxuan appeared before Tianming. Jian Lingchen and the four ladies were nearby, but everyone realized they showed no signs of helping at all.

“I’ll be taking your points.” Yi Yuxuan smiled.

Chapter 652 - Tianming Taking the Lead

Right at that moment, a black cat appeared in Tianming's embrace. The cat was enveloped in lightning and had a pair of ocean blue eyes. It might have a cute appearance, but it was inwardly evil.

Under the accumulation of Myriad Electrode, Meow Meow unleashed its new ability, Myriad Thundernet. Tens of thousands of lightning bolts shot out, weaving into a huge net and going toward Yi Yuxuan and her lifebound beast.

As the lightning net rapidly tightened around them, a rope of lightning wrapped around Meow Meow, keeping a connection between them. Yi Yuxuan and her lifebound beast endured the constant lightning strikes on their bodies, leaving behind charred wounds with each touch. A beauty like Yi Yuxuan was instantly charred black, and her long hair stood up like an afro.

"Holy shit. Meow Meow, aren't you being a little too harsh on a babe?" Ying Huo said with heartache.

"It's a waste of my sleep time to date. So I have to eliminate every threat while it's still in the cradle," Meow Meow replied with disdain.

"What a waste!" Ying Huo looked at Yi Yuxuan struggling in the net with her lifebound beast yelling out in pain. The Myriad Thundernet was powerful, and it had a constant supply of lightning since it was linked to Meow Meow.

Just while they spoke, Tianming charged over. Yi Yuxuan asked, "C-can't you show tenderness to the fairer sex? Am I ugly?"

"Shut up." Tianming hacked down with the Grand-Orient Sword right at her head. The scene made everyone shut their eyes, because Tianming was being too ruthless. But the Astral Formation appeared and protected Yi Yuxuan. Even so, she still felt dizzy and was bleeding from her seven orifices.

"I'd even beat you up if you were a fairy, since you dared to come after my points," said Tianming.

Yi Yuxuan wanted to cry, but she had no tears. She wailed, "I've never seen such a heartless guy as you!"

"You have, now." Tianming turned around to face the other challengers.

Yi Yuxuan's body was trembling. But she was suddenly dumbfounded and she muttered, "Wait, why is he so strong? Isn't he just an empyrean saint?"

What happened next was even more shocking. Tianming's Astral Formation suddenly exploded with brilliant radiance that left even Tianming himself stunned. "Mhm? Oh yeah, I defeated Yi Yuxuan and surpassed Xuanyuan Muxue. I'm in second place now!"

He turned to look and saw that Xuanyuan Muxue's pillar of light had disappeared. Meow Meow looked at him and asked, "Are we going to run now?"

"Well, no one can catch up to us if we run. But it's not safe enough with two thousand seven hundred points. Everyone is fighting, and there might be those that end up with four or five thousand points," said Tianming. It was a bad idea to leave the battlefield now, but Tianming had also become the center of attention.

The surrounding Heaven Branch disciples also recovered from their shock at that moment. "So he defeated Xuanyuan Yutuo by himself!"

“Isn’t he a little too powerful?”

“T-t-this....” Everyone had initially wanted to try their luck with Tianming, but now they were scared of him instead. The battle instantly came to a stop, with everyone looking blankly at Tianming.

This is an opportunity! Tianming pointed in Fang Xingque’s direction and started cursing, “Fang Xingque, you’re a piece of trash who only knows how to hide. You’re just a cowardly tortoise. Why don’t you shrink your head back to your stomach? How can there be someone as cowardly as you? By the way, did you bring your dick?”

His words instantly left the entire valley in silence. Even Fang Xingque was briefly stunned with everyone looking at him.

“Why the hell are you stunned? I’m saying that you’re a cowardly tortoise who didn’t bring his dick with him. Do you have a different opinion about that?” Tianming laughed.

“Haha! He’s just admitting that he’s a coward. Otherwise, why does he need hundreds of bodyguards?” Jian Lingchen laughed and held his stomach.

“Fuck!” Fang Xingque finally recovered from his shock. He charged out of the crowd, looking at Tianming, and yelled, “Li Tianming, I’ll call you my father if I can’t skin you alive today!”

“My dearest grandson, please don’t do that. I’m your grandfather. We can’t mess up the seniority,” said Tianming. His words shocked everyone because that was simply too bold. On the other hand, Fang Xingque was on the verge of exploding.

“Go at him together!” Fang Chenyun got everyone to attack together to prevent any accidents. Everyone knew that Fang Xingque wanted to take down Tianming by himself, but the Deepstar Pool was too important. Everyone immediately left the valley and launched their attacks.

“Why are you Heaven Branch disciples, so cowardly? This is your opportunity to enter the Deepstar Pool. It doesn’t matter if you target Fang Xingque or me because either will work. Stop wasting time and attack! I’ll take the lead!” Tianming’s voice emanated a domineering aura that shocked everyone as he raised the Grand-Orient Sword and charged toward the Sterling House of Fang’s party.

“What the hell are you guys just standing there for? Attack!” Jian Lingchen also felt his blood boiling. He converged his four swordbeasts into his sword and followed behind Tianming.

“Protect Lingchen!” The four ladies followed after him.

The entire valley instantly plunged into chaos. But shortly after, a young lady in white appeared with two dragons. She was Xuanyuan Muxue, and there were dozens of pursuers following closely behind. They were all Heaven Branch’s disciples.

They had been chasing her for a long day now. Although she had lost her position in the ranking, she still had her points. With that, the entire battlefield converged into one. Xuanyuan Muxue turned to Fang Xingque and charged the rear of the Sterling House of Fang’s party.

Under her attacks, empyrean saint disciples from the Sterling House of Fang were leaving in batches. Even the Heaven Branch disciples pursuing Xuanyuan Muxue joined the battle. They were attacked by

the Sterling House of Fang's disciples before they could even react to it, so they had no choice but to retaliate.

"Go together!" Tianming, Jian Lingchen, and the others made a frontal attack on the Sterling House of Fang's party, while Xuanyuan Muxue came at them from the rear. Both parties sandwiched the Sterling House of Fang, and they instantly plunged the battlefield into chaos.

"What the hell are you guys waiting for? Attack!"

"Yeah, this was an unfair battle to begin with. Since Fang Xingque is cheating, why aren't you guys attacking since there's an opportunity now?!"

"Attack together! I refuse to believe that he can target so many of us when he gets out."

"That's right, screw him up!"

For a second, ninety percent of the people there joined the battlefield with their blood boiling, turning the final battle into a chaotic one. Due to all the unhappiness they felt, many of them targeted the Sterling House of Fang.

In the Sterling House of Fang, no one had many points aside from Fang Xingque. So it wasn't beneficial to defeat them. But there were many Heaven Branch disciples around. With that, the battle kept evolving to the point that you could attack anyone, and anyone was a potential enemy. The mountains were trembling as hundreds of people and lifebound beasts clashed.

"It's a mess!"

"Screw that. Just attack whoever you see!"

"Holy shit! Brother, why are you attacking me?"

"Because you're worth three hundred points!"

It was a headache to watch this chaotic battle, but this was where the Deepstar Battle's charm lay. When everyone saw the Sterling House of Fang being dragged into such a messy fight, many of them inwardly felt happy.

One after the other, Astral Formations appeared. The Sterling House of Fang's empyrean saint disciples were caught by surprise and beaten up. For now, all of the Astral Formations that were activated belonged to the Sterling House of Fang. They had many people on their side, so they naturally suffered the most losses in this chaotic fight.

As the first on the ranking, Fang Xingque's existence was brightly lit on the battlefield. But there were many Heaven Branch disciples around him to ensure his safety. When Fang Xingque saw disciples of the Sterling House of Fang being beaten up, his face turned purple and his lips trembled. "Li Tianming!"

"Don't hold me back. I'll kill him!" he said to the person beside him.

"Why don't we wait? Where's Xuanyuan Muxue right now?" Fang Chenyun asked.

"Over there! She's attacking us too!" Fang Xingque roared. It was all thanks to Xuanyuan Muxue's arrival that the entire situation had been thrown into chaos. But she wasn't dealing with the Heaven Branch disciples. Instead, she targeted the Sterling House of Fang's empyrean saints.

"Ignore her for now! Deal with Tianming first! This is an order!" Fang Xingque roared.

"Roger!" The eight Heaven Branch disciples summoned their lifebound beasts and went after Tianming.

Tianming was fighting with others. There were those from the Sterling House of Fang, and there were also other disciples who attacked him. He didn't have to look at all, since they were all his enemies.

"Go and die!" Fang Xingque came up to Tianming.

"What's the matter? Sieging?" Jian Lingchen charged over from the side along with his four ladies and plunged his sword into the ground.

Xuanyuan Muxue was calmly tearing through the Sterling House of Fang's defenses. She didn't attack Fang Xingque, but had begun targeting Heaven Branch disciples like Fang Chenyun.

The attacks from both sides instantly made Fang Xingque feel endangered. He felt that eight Heaven Branch disciples weren't enough. The Heaven Branch disciples went to deal with Xuanyuan Muxue and Jian Lingchen while he faced Tianming.

Chapter 653 - Eight Phoenix Blades, Sword Guiding Art

"Xingque, defeat Li Tianming and take his points then run away. You'll have more than five thousand points, so it would definitely be enough for you to win," Fang Chenyun said.

"Run away?" Fang Xingque fumed at hearing those words. It was as if everyone was trying to challenge his dignity, and it was all because of Tianming. He glanced at Tianming and roared as he summoned his lifebound beast, breaking through the crowd and charging at him with a punch. "Die!"

"Buzz off!" Tianming hurriedly turned around and used his black left arm to perform the Ninenether Fiendgod Claw, clashing against Fang Xingque's Samsara Stage power.

"Aaaagh!" Fang Xingque cried in pain as his fist bled.

"Fang Xingque, no matter how much of a spoiled rich kid you are, your petty little tactics haven't worked against me. As far as I'm concerned, you're nothing but a little brat!" Tianming finally had a chance to truly beat up Fang Xingque. He summoned Ying Huo, Meow Meow, and Lan Huang and began focusing on him.

The others around them didn't dare to come close and instead left quite a lot of space for Tianming. Perhaps they were trying to wait for an opportunity to get points for themselves after the fight, which ironically allowed Tianming to fight Fang Xingque on equal standing.

"Dammit, don't you know who the Archaion Sect belongs to?" In the past, Fang Xingque had never been so infuriated. Anyone that even came close to doing so would have long been killed.

"It's Her Eminence's territory, understood?" Tianming said with a smile.

"Her Eminence is.... Forget it, just die!"

As Fang Xingque spoke, four phoenix lifebound beasts flew around his head; he was a quad beastmaster! Coupled with his Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline, it made him among the most talented people in the entire sect, along with Jian Lingchen.

The four phoenixes had different types. The snow white one shone brightly and elegantly and was called a sacred sky phoenix. The lightning covered one sported brilliant purple plumage and was known as a sky blitz phoenix. Another was entirely blue and cold as icy water, it was a stillwater frost phoenix. The last one was covered in flames and had a draconic head, and was known as a helldragon flare phoenix. Each of them had more than three hundred and fifty stars.

Even though Fang Xingque was only a first level samsaran, his four lifebound beasts made him among the most powerful of his level. Even many more powerful seniors wouldn't be his match if they didn't have as many lifebound beasts, or theirs had lower star counts.

He was someone blessed with ultimate talent. Given that he was only sixteen, who knew how much further he could progress in the coming fourteen years he would spend in the Heaven Branch? At the very least, he was expected to achieve far more than any disciple ever had. After all, the Heaven Branch rankings, something that ranked the most powerful combatants in the Heaven Branch, only considered their fighting power and not their age.

"You should be honored that you'll get to have a taste of the sword guiding art my Sterling House of Fang is famous for!"

Sword guiding arts were special techniques that were rarely seen. As the name suggested, they allowed someone to control swords without even wielding them in their hands.

Eight swords appeared beside Fang Xingque, each one having a different color corresponding to different elements. The hilts of the swords resembled the wings of phoenixes and each sword had four tribulation patterns, making them not the least bit weaker than Xuanyuan Yutuo's Firestorm Sword. These swords made up the famous set of Eight Phoenix Blades.

Fang Xingque only held two of the eight swords in his hands while the other six flew around him, as if they were held by invisible hands. He could execute sword arts with each of them. He seemed especially imposing on the battlefield with four phoenixes circling him and his rainbow colored hair fluttering in the wind. Not to mention, the light coming from his Astral Formation was far more blinding than Tianming's, making him even more eye-catching. Almost all of the audience members were watching their battle.

Fang Xingque tried to throw even more shade. "Li Tianming, let me tell you—"

But before he could finish, Tianming said, "Just shut up and start fighting. Don't waste time talking."

He split the Grand-Orient Sword into two and activated the Imperealm Sword Formation. The moment the rampant sword ki exploded out into the surroundings, many empyrean saints of the Sterling House of Fang had their Astral Formations activated. The countless strands of gold and black sword ki formed a gigantic vortex around Tianming. As his white hair fluttered in the wind, he looked even more imposing than Fang Xingque.

"How handsome!"

"I only just realized the charisma he has on the battlefield! He looks so fierce, cool, and domineering!"

The cries of many female disciples resounded throughout the audience.

Tianming's lifebound beasts emerged and engaged Fang Xingque's four phoenixes. Almost immediately, the entire area shook from the abilities that were unleashed. The ground turned into the ocean when Lan Huang activated Azure Oceanic Purgatory. Lightning, fire, ice, and light shot out in all directions.

Lan Huang used its Primordial Wheel and knocked the phoenixes apart, stopping their abilities from piercing through the oceanic realm. Amidst the chaos, Ying Huo used Infernal Haze, causing many clones to manifest, then used Skyscorch Featherblast. As the only fourth order tribulation beast in the battle, Ying Huo's ability was really powerful. The other phoenixes that were struck by it immediately started bleeding from all orifices. Even Fang Xingque was struck by a few feathers on his thigh, causing him to wince in pain. The feathers even burned with Infernal Blaze. If it weren't for his body refining technique, he would be forced to kneel from the pain.

"Die!"

The moment he even managed to shout that, Meow Meow's Soulchasing Hellthunder burrowed into his head. Meow Meow's abilities had been powered up significantly since its evolution, this one in particular. There was no way to hide from it unless one had a really big and powerful shield. After Fang Xingque was struck, he bled and twitched from the shock. Even though it wasn't fatal, it severely hampered his ability to fight. There was no way the ability of a Primordial Chaos Beast would be so simple.

Most of the abilities of the phoenixes had been blocked by Lan Huang, leaving nobody to stop Ying Huo and Meow Meow's abilities. That was a huge advantage of having lifebound beasts with different body sizes. Even though Fang Xingque had four of them with different types, they were basically homogenous phoenixes and not one of them was big enough to act as a shield, like Lan Huang.

Fang Xingque was growing ever more infuriated now that three of four of his phoenixes were being targeted. Ying Huo appeared behind the helldragon flare phoenix and attacked it, Meow Meow kept the sky blitz phoenix busy, and Lan Huang fought the stillwater frost phoenix, leaving only the sacred sky phoenix beside him. But just as it was about to attack Tianming with its master, a gigantic white tower came out of nowhere and knocked it flying.

"Fang Xingque, now nobody can protect you," said Tianming in a cold voice.

Fang Xingque looked up and saw that Tianming was already in front of him. Insulted once again, he didn't know whether he was shaking from anger or the aftereffects of the Soulchasing Hellthunder. "I don't need to be protected!"

Even though the sacred sky phoenix was blocked off by the Prime Tower, it managed to shoot a white pillar of light toward Tianming.

"This is my chance!" Fang Xingque immediately struck. It was an advantage he had, having four lifebound beasts. As long as one of them was free, he would outnumber his opponent. He used a

tribulation ranked art, Sterling Arcane Sword, Serene Arrogance! Allegedly, it was a sure-kill strike. His Eight Phoenix Blades rapidly swirled around, unleashing torrents of sword ki.

Tianming used the Imperealm Sword Formation to mitigate the ability of the white phoenix then concentrated his hundred and fifty strands of tribulation sword ki into the gold sword and struck.

"It's over for you!" Fang Xingque said with a sinister smile. He used Sterling Arcane Sword, Exaltation. He had eight swords and Tianming only had two; there was no way Tianming would be able to keep up with the speed of his attacks.

"You think your swordsmanship can match mine?" Tianming said. At that moment, Meow Meow's Soulchasing Hellthunder's effect activated and drew a blast of Chaos Disaster to Fang Xingque's head like a lightning rod, frying him until he was charred and his flesh was raw and visible.

Tianming then executed the Hexapath Samsara Sword. Omnisentient Sword Intent swelled in both the swords, pairing up with tribulation sword ki and the Imperealm Sword Formation to unleash a devastating barrage of attacks on the Eight Phoenix Blades. The black Grand-Orient Sword struck out with such ferocity that Fang Xingque's numb body struggled to parry it. Then Tianming's sword curved, allowing him to thrust it into Fang Xingque's shoulder. It only took a simple swipe for Tianming to completely amputate Fang Xingque's arm.

"Aaaaaaaaaaagh!" The cry of pain was harrowing indeed. The worst part, for him, was that Meow Meow's Chaos Disaster followed and vaporized the severed arm.

"Apologies, looks like you only have one arm left," Tianming snickered.

Fang Xingque was forced to kneel from the pain as he bled out from the stump on his left shoulder. His expression contorted unnaturally from the burning pain he felt. He stumbled and rolled on the ground to avoid Tianming's attacks, covering the battlefield in his own blood.

Everyone else, both among the audience and the combatants in the battlefield, was completely shocked by what they saw. Fang Xingque had actually performed rather well in the battle, as he was far stronger than most others had expected, yet Tianming was able to cut his arm off.

Not only that, but his Astral Formation had not yet appeared, which meant that Fang Xingque hadn't been eliminated yet, so Tianming continued his onslaught. Fang Xingque ran and cried in pain just like he had before in an embarrassing display. He had completely broken down.

"Li Tianming, I swear I'll have you drawn and quartered! Otherwise I'm even lowlier than a beast!" he cried in desperation. His mind was now entirely blank apart from terror and rage.

"You and your boasts. Didn't you ask Fang Chenyu to cut my limbs off? I'm still waiting for you to fulfill that promise." Tianming's laughter sounded like a demon snickering.

As Fang Xingque continued escaping, he suddenly turned back and took out a tome whose use was forbidden in the Deepstar Battle. "You're still trying to force my hand! Do you think you're a big shot? Then I'll let you witness the death of your lifebound beasts!"

Chapter 654: Triple Kill

A heavenly pattern tome? Something like that was forbidden in the Deepstar Battle unless it was made by the user themselves. The moment this was discovered, they would immediately be disqualified from the battle and excommunicated from the sect. Apart from cases like Tianming, who had a back door that caused Yi Xingyin to not check his spatial ring, people wouldn't be able to bring illegal tomes in. Yet Fang Xingque managed to, so that meant someone in the Deepstar Battle had brought it to him.

"Is he so arrogant that he no longer even cares about the rules or his reputation?" Tianming immediately recalled the Prime Tower. He was furious at the fact that someone would cheat, and even threaten to kill his lifebound beasts after not being able to defeat him. If word of a Heaven Branch disciple doing something so shameless were to spread, it would definitely be a huge mark of shame and ridicule.

Having lost an arm, Fang Xingque seemed to have also lost his human reason along with it. If not for the Astral Formation on Tianming, he would use the thick tome on Tianming himself. As it stood now, the only tomes that could harm him were seven stars and above.

"This is the eight star starconvergence annihilation tome. Let's see how your lifebound beasts handle it!" Fang Xingque laughed maniacally and covered the tome with his blood to activate it. As Lan Huang was the largest of Tianming's lifebound beasts, thus the easiest to hit, Fang Xingque targeted it. An explosion of power came from the book and everyone nearby immediately ran away.

"Fang Xingque's gone mad! Run!"

Amidst the panic, the tome turned into a beam of starlight and soared into the skies before contacting the Deepstar Formation.

"It looks like the tome is something made by Palace Lord Yi Xingyin that absorbs the power of the stars from the Deepstar Formation! Li Tianming's lifebound beast is in danger!" Jian Lingchen cried.

However, it was too late. The starlight had already absorbed enough power from the formation to the point that it even distorted the leaderboard. The next moment, it rapidly fell toward Lan Huang.

"Quick!" Tianming could do nothing but ask Lan Huang to defend itself as best it could. Lan Huang used the Primordial Wheel to attract as much rock and dirt onto its body as possible, turning into a mountain. At the same time, it used Mountainsea World and gathered all the stars on his body onto his back.

Then the starlight descended, but it had to breach three lines of defense first. The first was Ying Huo's Infernal Armor, but it easily cracked and shattered. The second was Meow Meow's Ninefold Chaos Thunderscape, but that also seemed to be pierced through easily. The third was Tianming's Prime Tower. The soul servant increased the size of the tower and used its sharp point to block the incoming starlight.

The concentrated beam split into a few smaller beams when it impacted the Prime Tower, but it still pushed the tower heavily against Lan Huang's back, breaking the Mountainsea World, and eventually the Primordial Wheel. Then the full pressure of the Prime Tower pressed against Lan Huang's body. Under the incredible force, Lan Huang was pushed into the ground as it shrieked in pain. Thankfully, the Prime Tower had diffused most of the blast's power and Fang Xingque wasn't able to kill Lan Huang.

"Are you all right?" Tianming asked when he came to its side.

"It hurts!" Lan Huang groaned as it burrowed out of the ground.

Tianming saw a bloody impression on its back and it did seem rather painful. After taking the Prime Tower back into his lifebound space, he said, "Go back in to rest."

"Beat them up!" Lan Huang said, but it still obediently entered the lifebound space to heal up. It was truly tragic; its large size had made it the most convenient target.

"Don't worry." Tianming's eyes were now bloodshot. After Lan Huang returned, his killing intent soared.

"Not even an eight star tome was able to kill his lifebound beast...."

"He looks really angry!"

"Fang Xingque is definitely in trouble...."

The other disciples around them unconsciously backed away when they saw Tianming marching toward Fang Xingque like a god of death. Fang Xingque's face was now pale, and he was utterly shocked by how even his tome had failed. Tianming's fierce glare only terrorized him more.

"Fine, you win. You cut off my arm, I hurt your lifebound beast, so we're even," he said as he looked to the other disciples of the Sterling House of Fang for help. However, all eight Heaven Branch disciples were held up; four of them were needed to keep Xuanyuan Muxue alone at bay.

"We are even?" Tianming spat on Fang Xingque's face. Even his spit contained tribulation sword ki.

"Aagh!" Fang Xingque cried in pain as a bloody hole formed on his face. Seeing Tianming approach, he had tried to escape and intercept Tianming with his sword guiding art, controlling the Eight Phoenix Blades to attack him.

"Fang Xingque, you tried to cut off all my limbs, and you even wanted to kill my lifebound beasts, and now you say we're even? That is the most childish thing I have ever heard! It's like your brain never had time to develop!" Sword-shaped patterns manifested on the two Grand-Orient Swords, making them even more terrifying.

"Someone, defend me, anyone!" Fang Xingque cried in a panic. The unrestrained Tianming that didn't care about his status at all struck true terror into him. Tianming had made him understand that when he was all on his own without his parents' protection, or his minions, he was nothing but a sixteen-year-old kid. There were far too many people in this world that could crush him like a bug.

"White, protect me!" He ran as he ordered his sacred sky phoenix to intercept Tianming.

"Okay," it said as it returned, knowing full well that it would probably just die. Its white feathers let out a blinding light that formed into a pillar and shot toward Tianming.

"Everything is governed by cause and effect. Since you chose to do something, you shall suffer the consequences of your actions. Fang Xingque, let me teach you this life lesson!" As he did so, he would let the Archaion Sect and the Flameyellow Continent know who he was! The faction battles were far too small a stage for him, but the Deepstar Battle was just the right place.

Tianming pointed his sword at the phoenix, using the Impereal Sword Formation to block its ability. His next strike was infused with all his tribulation sword ki, piercing the white phoenix through and leaving a bloody hole behind.

"Die!" With his black sword, he executed the Hexapath Samsara Sword and thrust through the phoenix, killing it on the spot.

The audience and the other disciples in the battle cried in shock, their eyes glued to the gruesome sight.

"He just killed Fang Xingque's lifebound beast!"

"Fang Xingque is the son of the Heaven Branch's sect master and the precious grandson of the palace lord of Godservant Hall! The Sterling House of Fang is the top clan in the Archaion Divine Realm!"

"Has Li Tianming gone mad?"

They watched the white-haired youth with utter disbelief. Why would he dare to do such a thing? Soon after, the cries of two other birds echoed through the battlefield. Ying Huo and Meow Meow were going utterly wild.

"How dare you attack my Tortoise Bro without my permission?"

"It's my little brother! I won't let you get away with bullying it!"

Ying Huo was incredibly anxious when the starlight had come down on Lan Huang. Even though everything turned out okay in the end, it couldn't contain its rage. The helldragon flare phoenix that was the same type as it couldn't take the rampage at all. Everyone watched as Ying Huo tore into its abdomen and unleashed more than a hundred strands of tribulation sword ki, turning it into a pincushion.

The helldragon flare phoenix cried as it fell, spilling blood all over the place. The last thing it saw was Fang Xingque pathetically running away, and it was disappointed as it left this world. Almost at the same time, its fellow lightning phoenix also collapsed. It had used lightning as its main weapon for sixteen years, only to be struck down by a little black cat's own lightning bolts.

"Two more phoenixes died! Fang Xingque only has one left!"

Turning from a quad beastmaster into a normal one was a significant blow to his power and talent. It was so serious that it was even felt by those who watched from the sidelines. Defeating Fang Xingque wasn't a big deal; many others older than him could easily do it. But nobody would dare to kill his lifebound beasts.

"Now he only has his stillwater frost phoenix left. His Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline is as good as gone!"

Chapter 655 - I Will Take on a Hundred

The stillwater frost phoenix managed to avoid the fate of being killed, as it had been fighting Lan Huang. It immediately tried to escape; however, one of its wings had almost been torn off by Lan Huang before the blast from the starconvergence tome had struck. Now, it was Fang Xingque's only hope.

"He's still a beastmaster even though he has only one left!"

His three dead lifebound beasts could be converted into lifebound spirits, so he could still cultivate. However, he could no longer be compared to how he was before.

"He's three-fourths crippled. From now on, he'll only be average. There's no way he'll ever be able to match up to Xuanyuan Muxue again."

"He'll only have average talent in the Heaven Branch."

"He used to be so arrogant, but now he has fallen from grace."

Many others lamented his lost talent.

"As expected, one must be prepared to lose it all if one wanted to be able to do whatever they want. The only reason nobody could stop him back then was because he hadn't run into someone like Li Tianming, who doesn't fear losing it all."

"I wonder what goes on in the head of Li Tianming. Isn't he afraid of blowback from the Sterling House of Fang?"

Currently, Tianming was still chasing Fang Xingque down. "Hey, Fang Xingque, looks like you lost your rainbow feathers."

Tianming's voice was like a nightmare to him. The core of his Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline talent was his numerous lifebound beasts. Now that three of them were dead, three-fourths of the hair on Fang Xingque's head had lost its color. Now those parts of his hair were gray, like Fang Xingying's.

Fang Xingque spat out another mouthful of blood and stumbled, then collapsed to the ground face first. He struggled to get back up, his face all messed up. Grabbing his own hair, he looked at it in despair as his tears and snot flowed.

"Li Tianming, I swear you'll experience the worst kind of death possible!"

"You're still threatening me? You don't think I'll just kill you now?" Tianming said as he approached with a smile. The Grand-Orient Sword looked so terrifying that Fang Xingque couldn't help but shake in fear.

"Come if you dare! Don't you know who I am?!" Fang Xingque said, raising his face proudly like a cockerel.

"You're still trying to do that? Don't you ever get sick of that? Since you seem to like this line so much, let me ask you this. Who do you think I am?"

"Who are you? Jian Wuyi's illegitimate son? He's nothing compared to my father!"

"You're mistaken. I'm the disciple of Her Eminence. She was the one who brought me here to the sect. Are you satisfied?"

"Huh?" Fang Xingque widened his eyes in disbelief as if he was looking at a demon.

"Who do you think has a higher status in the Archaion Sect? Her Eminence or your father?"

Fang Xingque spat out blood again.

"Fang Xingque, many people know who I am. The core disciples of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan do, Jian Lingchen does, but you don't. It's obvious that your father didn't tell you about me! Let me guess the reason... Maybe your father wanted to use you to make me suffer a huge loss while you were ignorant of that fact so that he can avoid responsibility? I wonder why he wanted to do that.... To humiliate Her Eminence and the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, perhaps?"

That sounded too complex for Fang Xingque. "It doesn't matter. It's over for you."

"Stop exaggerating. You broke the rules of the Deepstar Battle and used an illegal item to try to kill my brother, so I returned the favor by killing your lifebound beasts. It's only fair. Fool, do you think you're the only one with a backing? I also have support too," Tianming said as he looked down coldly on him.

By now, Fang Xingque had completely broken down. All of a sudden, Tianming struck with his sword and pierced Fang Xingque's mouth, inducing a scream and causing the Astral Formation to appear. Despite that, his mouth was still filled with blood.

He continued crying in pain as he rolled within his Astral Formation.

"I can break your Astral Formation and kill you. Want to see me try?" Tianming said with a sinister smile.

"No, please! I yield! Don't!"

"Then kneel."

"That won't do...."

"Say that again?"

"You... you!" Fang Xingque hastily kneeled.

"Look at your body," Tianming said.

"What's this?" He looked down and saw complicated gold and black sword shapes had appeared on his body. The heavenly patterns looked like a cage that imprisoned him. When it finished forming, he was shocked to realize that he couldn't use a bit of his power. He was now as weak as a commoner.

"Something interesting," Tianming said after using the Imperial Sword Prison. He felt much better, seeing Fang Xingque in such a pitiful state. "To be honest, I would've already killed you if you weren't the son of the Heaven Branch's sect master."

While it was reasonable for Tianming to fight back after his lifebound beast was almost killed, he wouldn't be able to get away with killing Fang Xingque outright. In fact, even just killing three of his lifebound beasts was going a little far. Even so, Tianming was confident that he was still in the right and wouldn't have to worry about it, given his backing. At the very least, sparing someone from the Sterling House of Fang would be better for placating them.

At that moment, a rod entered Fang Xingque's Astral Formation and he was taken away by a senior. He was now properly eliminated. It was possible that those in Deepstar Hall were afraid that Tianming would kill him outright.

"Li Tianming, I'll never let you get away with this!" Fang Xingque said after he was out of danger.

Haha, he really managed to escape. But don't worry, he'll suffer so much from my Imperial Sword Prison and come to beg me to undo it! Tianming thought.

After Fang Xingque left the battlefield, everything fell silent. Almost everyone was looking at Tianming and wondering how he could be so brave. Now, his Astral Formation shone brightly. Everyone looked up at the ranking and saw that he was in first place with 7110 points. The runner up was Xuanyuan Muxue, with 3008 points. In third place was Jian Lingchen with 2500 points. Fang Xingque's name was no longer there, symbolic of his fall from genius to average. The huge blow to his reputation no doubt felt much worse to him than actually being attacked.

"He deserved it. Who knows how many disciples of the sect he's killed?"

"He's been throwing his weight around since he was seven with a bunch of minions. His punishment is long overdue."

"Evil people will be judged by other evil people. Li Tianming really is cruel."

"Let's hope that nothing bad befalls him after the Deepstar Battle."

"Still, his rate of improvement is too fast, probably even faster than someone with the Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline. Do you think someone powerful will take him in as a disciple, like Dugu Jin?"

"Let's hope that's the case."

At that moment, someone said, "What are you all waiting for? The Deepstar Battle is still ongoing!"

"That's right, it hasn't ended yet!"

"Li Tianming only has two lifebound beasts that are able to fight. Even if he's more powerful than Fang Xingque, that doesn't mean he can take on tens of others at the same time."

"He has more than 7000 points. Go for it!"

Tianming was just about to catch his breath when he saw the other Heaven Branch disciples and those of the Sterling House of Fang charge toward him and Xuanyuan Muxue. It was no longer the battle royale it was before. Everyone was working together to target the two of them; there was little chance they could defeat them otherwise. As for those from the Sterling House of Fang, it was a little more personal—they wanted to kill him.

In an instant, Tianming had become public enemy number one. Not even Fang Xingque had had to deal with something like that. Only Jian Lingchen and his four godsisters were still helping him hold some Heaven Branch disciples at bay.

"Come get me, all of you! I'll take on a hundred of you!" Tianming said as he turned tail and ran. There was no way he would be idiotic enough to face them head on. Instead, he would pick them off one by one. He immediately began by getting on Meow Meow's back.

"Since Jian Lingchen helped me a lot, I should help him get some points!" Tianming wasn't intending to run far away, only controlling the crowd and looking for chances to take down other Heaven Branch disciples. "Let's deal with the annoying ones first and help Jian Lingchen defeat Xuanyuan Muxue after."

Tianming turned and looked at her, seeing her ganged up upon just as he was. However, she seemed really calm as she rode away on one of her dragons.

"As expected of a first level samsaran." Tianming felt the terrifying power of her death tribulation energy. While the amount was lower than life tribulation energy, it possessed even more destructive power and was far more fatal. That was why a first level death samsaran was much more powerful than a first level life samsaran.

"Why does it feel like she hasn't really exerted herself from the beginning? Not to mention, she even helped me earlier. What was she thinking?" Tianming's heart was filled with doubts.

.....

The viewing room in the Sterling House of Fang had been quiet for quite some time. Nobody dared to speak or leave as they looked at Starlord Formation and turned to Fang Taiqing from time to time, immediately looking away when they saw that he had no reaction.

"Sect Master, the palace lord of Deepstar Hall, Yi Xingyin, requested to meet you. He's brought Xingque back," someone reported, kneeling with his head lowered.

"Let him in," Fang Taiqing said. He seemed really calm, without the slightest outburst of emotion. In contrast, Fang Yuewei had tightly clenched fists and a pale look on her face. Her eyes twitched even though she was looking down.

The door opened and a handsome middle-aged man dressed in a starry robe entered with a solemn look, bringing the sword pattern covered Fang Xingque in with him. Having lost an arm, Fang Xingque had fallen into despair.

"Dad, avenge me!" he said pitifully.

Chapter 656 - Hehe

In the dead silence, Fang Taiqing waved his hand. Before Fang Xingque could utter another word, he was taken away.

"Father, I'll go make the arrangements," Fang Yuewei said anxiously.

"Alright." Fang Taiqing nodded.

Fang Yuewei quickly went to deal with her younger brother's injuries and transform his lifebound beasts into lifebound spirits.

Fang Xingque sank into despair. His first thought was to beg his father for revenge, but the atmosphere in the secret room was gloomy and terrifying. Making a scene now would only be embarrassing, and Fang Taiqing wouldn't give him the chance to do so.

In the secret room, Yi Xingyin quickly strode towards Fang Taiqing. Kneeling down and kowtowing, he said, "Sect Master, it's all my fault."

"What have you done?" Fang Taiqing asked.

There was a mistake during the Deepstar Battle that I supervised. Someone secretly handed Fang Xingque an eight star heavenly pattern tome, which is against the rules, causing this entire farce and resulting in his heavy injuries. This is all my fault, a breach of responsibility. Please punish me."

Yi Xingyin was extremely nervous.

"It's but a trivial matter, palace lord. Why make such a fuss?" Fang Taiqing said gently as he touched the armrest.

"I can't escape the crime of negligence. I'll find the person who gave the heavenly pattern tome, punish him severely, and straighten things out," said Yi Xingyin.

"It's up to you. You may return." Fang Taiqing waved his hand.

"Sect Master, do you want to punish Li Tianming? Although he faced peril from the heavenly pattern tome and only fought back in anger, the severity of his attack was uncalled for. He was too cruel to Xingque," Yi Xingyin angrily accused.

"No, he's the victim. What a joke it would be if he's punished," said Fang Taiqing.

"Alright. I'll take my leave." Nodding, Yi Xingyin left decisively.

Fang Taiqing curled his lips, a cold glint flashing in his eyes.

"He's quite interesting. He makes the first move, takes the blame, and forces you into playing the saint," Judgment Hall's palace lord, Fang Shenyu, sneered.

"Since Xingque wasn't strong enough, he has to endure failure. I was careless to have done such a stupid thing," said Fang Taiqing.

"Are we going to just forget it?"

"Lack of forbearance in small matters will upset great plans. It's just a son. Everyone's the same, regardless of background or talent. Failure means starting from zero. There's no point and no need for regret," said Fang Taiqing.

"Then what's next?"

"Patience. We'll calmly watch for change. Anyway, we aren't the anxious ones," said Fang Taiqing.

"Yes, the Archaic House of Xuanyuan is bound to Her Eminence, sharing life and death together. We don't have to be like this. We don't have to worry if there's any movement from the other eight divine realms." Pausing, Fang Shenyu added, "But then again, your mother must be worried now that something happened to Xingque."

"It doesn't matter, she's considered half Xuanyuan." Fang Taiqing smiled.

"Alright." Fang Shenyu nodded, his eyes filled with admiration.

"Li Tianming...."

Narrowing his eyes, Fang Taiqing stared thoughtfully at the young man in the Starlord Formation.

...

Sterling House of Fang, Sterling Hall.

"Xingque, I sent the stillwater frost phoenix to Doctor Qin for treatment. Its wings are fine," said Fang Yuewei.

"Sister, will father avenge me? Just because he's a disciple of Her Eminence, he's allowed to kill my lifebound beasts?! How can we hold our heads high if the Sterling House of Fang is bullied like this?" Fang Xingque lay in bed, bellowing his grievances.

"Stop talking, you'll affect the formation of your lifebound spirits." Fang Yuewei frowned.

"I don't care! I've been beaten into this state and three of my lifebound beasts are dead! I'm crippled! Li Tianming must suffer a miserable death! Both Her Eminence and he should die together!" shouted Fang Xingque.

"Shut up!" Fang Yuewei slapped him across the face.

The slap sent his head spinning as he stood there stupefied.

"You dare hit me?! You bitch!" Fang Xingque's eyes widened incredulously.

"Fang Xingque, from now on you're just a mediocre, useless man. Why can't I hit you? Before this, I didn't have the right to teach you how to act like a proper human being. But now, you'd better behave and recognize reality," Fang Yuewei said angrily.

"Reality?!" Feeling like he had been stabbed in the heart, Fang Xingque wailed miserably from the pain.

"What's this on your body?" Fang Yuewei asked, touching the sword-shaped heavenly patterns.

"How the hell should I know?" Li Tianming did this to me. It actually blocks my powers, making it difficult for me to even move! I was going to ask Father to help me remove it, but you dragged me home!" cried Fang Xingque.

"Stop making such a fuss. When your lifebound spirits are ready, I'll get the elders to look at it," said Fang Yuewei.

"Get Grandma! Grandma is one of Her Eminence's people. She's definitely more important than Li Tianming. I want Grandma to help me kill him!" Fang Xingque shouted miserably.

"Shut up! She's there to protect Her Eminence."

"Well her beloved grandson is about to die. Fuck protecting Her Eminence!"

"What did you say?!"

"Humph!"

...

Outside the palace, a gray-haired Fang Xingying stood in the courtyard, listening to the screams in a daze.

"Have the Heavens opened their eyes?"

...

Deepstar Battlefield.

In the second half of the last day, the exciting battle continued. However, none of this had anything to do with Fang Xingque, who was once the most impressive. The hottest man right now was Tianming!

"Come on!"

A black thunder beast beneath him, a little phoenix on his shoulder, and the Grand-Orient Sword in his hand, Tianming swept through the crowd at a terrifying speed, striking them one by one.

If they didn't look for him, he would go to them! He wandered among the crowd, one against a hundred, at least twenty of which were disciples from the Heaven Branch. Tianming picked on the disciples of the Sterling House of Fang, who were mostly empyrean saints. Wherever the Grand-Orient Sword aimed, a hundred and fifty strands of tribulation sword ki violently exploded, sparking an Astral Formation. Tianming's score soared.

"Ahh!"

Before the disciples of the Sterling House of Fang could catch up to Tianming, they were defeated. It was a walk in the park for him. Meow Meow alone dispersed the crowd. They darted east, then moved west, without so much as touching a hair on Tianming's head.

"Don't bother chasing him. Attack Xuanyuan Muxue."

"I give up. Li Tianming is a beast!"

So what if he dazzled? None of them could catch him!

As time went by, there were fewer and fewer people on the Deepstar Battlefield.

"Trying to run? You're all my points. None of you can escape!"

While they went to deal with Xuanyuan Muxue, Tianming picked up a bargain in the outer circle.

"Don't go too far!"

"Off with you!" Tianming's dark arm hit a disciple on the face.

The Astral Formation had taken shape. The current battlefield was simply a stage for Tianming and Xuanyuan Muxue. One relied on speed, while the other relied on strength. Soon, there were fewer people who hoped to obtain their points.

"Li Tianming and Xuanyuan Muxue are both qualified for the Deepstar Pool quota."

"To be honest, Fang Xingque really didn't deserve it. He has poor character, threatens others with his status and identity, and even violates the rules. What a joke he is!"

"I'm certainly convinced that these two deserve the quota."

Only by relying on strength to win would one be respected.

"But why does it look as if Li Tianming wants to help Jian Lingchen get a spot in the Deepstar Pool?"

"You're right. He already has nine thousand points. At his pace, he can leave."

Many among the audience assumed the two would come to a battle.

"I hope not. Xuanyuan Muxue is more talented. She's fought alone from the very start and has a tough personality. I think she deserves the Deepstar Pool spot more than Jian Lingchen."

"That's right, Jian Lingchen actually needs women to protect him. He's clearly a weakling."

"Let's see what Tianming thinks. After all, Jian Lingchen bet on the right man."

"Anyway, I'm convinced by Xuanyuan Muxue. She's truly open and candid. She helped Li Tianming stop Fang Chenyun and the others as well."

Time passed as a heated discussion broke out amongst the audience, the end of the Deepstar Battle drawing closer and closer. In the blink of an eye, there was only half an hour left.

Amidst the roar of thunder, Astral Formations were present wherever Tianming went. The decrease in opponents only made it more convenient for him. Closer to the end, the others ran, no longer hoping for easy points.

Tianming looked around. As far as he could see, there were only a dozen people left. He looked up at the leaderboard.

First place: Li Tianming, 11,800 points. Second place: Xuanyuan Muxue, 4500 points. Third place: Jian Lingchen, 3001 points. Fourth place: Jian Nishang, 180 points.

There were only twenty people left on the leaderboard. The only uncertainty remaining was who would acquire the spot for the Deepstar Pool, Xuanyuan Muxue or Jian Lingchen?

In that instant, the audience turned their attention to them. Tianming, Jian Lingchen, Jian Nishang and Jian Yini stood before Xuanyuan Muxue. Two of Jian Lingchen's godsisters were already out.

"Li Tianming is clearly courting death. There's a fair chance he'll lose his points!"

"Yes. Although he defeated Fang Xingque, Xuanyuan Muxue is really strong. No one can stop the inevitability of death."

"Let's keep watching!"

"I think Li Tianming should stop. Jian Lingchen can't compete with Xuanyuan Muxue."

"That's right!"

As the audience was discussing amongst themselves, Tianming pointed his sword at Xuanyuan Muxue.

"One on one?" Xuanyuan Muxue smiled faintly, like an avalanche of ice and snow.

"No, a team battle," laughed Tianming.

...

Sterling House of Fang, Sterling Hall.

"Your lifebound spirits are ready. Stay here, I'll look for grandma," said Fang Yuewei.

"Go! Hurry up!" Fang Xingque said impatiently. "By the way, get grandma to check what sort of heavenly patterns these are. They actually managed to seal my strength!"

"Alright." Fang Yuewei stared helplessly at her younger brother.

"For the time being, don't use life tribulation energy to attack the seal. I think it's very violent. If you mess around with it, you might lose your life!" warned Fang Yuewei.

"Hurry up! You're so longwinded!" Rolling his eyes, Fang Xingque added, "Remember to ask Grandma to find me a tribulation pattern spirit herb that can regrow my arm. I think she has one."

"Alright."

With that, Fang Yuewei left. The hall was silent once more.

Suddenly, footsteps sounded outside.

"You're back? So fast?" Fang Xingque struggled to stand up.

Someone appeared at the door. It was a man with messy, gray hair that looked like it hadn't been washed for a long time.

"Fang Xingying, what are you doing here? Are you here to laugh at me? Fuck off! Get out of here, you mournful dog!" Fang Xingque was extremely sensitive and irritable today.

"Xingque," shouted Fang Xingying. Legs trembling, he walked up to Fang Xingque and burst into tears.

"What are you doing, you lowly bastard!" Eyes narrowed, Fang Xingque suddenly felt a chill creep up his spine.

"Your strength is currently sealed, isn't it?" Fang Xingying sounded hoarse, his eyes bloodshot.

"That's none of your business! Fuck off! Somebody? Anybody!?" Fang Xingque shouted, his expression changing drastically.

"I... I...."

Pulling out his sword, Fang Xingying placed it against his lips and licked it. When the blade sliced his tongue, he resembled a bloodthirsty demon.

"I'd like to chop you into a meat patty," he laughed.

Chapter 657 - The Oceansoul Fatedragon And Frosotsoul Dragon

On the Deepstar Battlefield, the battle had reached its peak. Despite being only seventeen years old, Xuanyuan Muxue was the only first death phase disciple on this battlefield. Now that Fang Xingque was crippled, no one else their age could compete with her. The fact that Xuanyuan Muxue's elder brother had perished at the hands of Tianming was enough indication of a grudge between the two of them.

However, Xuanyuan Yufeng's status in the family was very low. In fact, he could be considered as the family's good-for-nothing waste. Judging from her expression, Xuanyuan Muxue didn't seem to hold bitter hatred.

"In her eyes, Li Tianming looks like any other ordinary opponent."

"Let's keep watching!"

As the audience watched on, Tianming's lifebound beasts and Xuanyuan Muxue's dragons were staring at each other. Both of Xuanyuan Muxue's lifebound beasts possessed more than three hundred and sixty stars, which was considered rather high even in the Heaven Branch. Without Lan Huang's presence, the dragons were the largest beasts on the battlefield. One of them was white, like cold frost, with icicles all over its body. Wherever it went, everything froze over. It was a frostsoul dragon. The other was called an oceansoul fatedragon.

As large as the sea, it was covered in blue scales and its head somewhat resembled Lan Huang's. At this moment, it swallowed the clouds and exhaled, dancing in the clouds and mist, calling the wind and summoning the rain. The torrential rain it created complemented the frostsoul dragon, so it was even more dangerous.

Under the Deepstar Formation, the torrential rain swept across the battlefield, which was soon completely frozen and transformed into a snowy landscape. It wasn't supposed to snow in the Deepstar Battlefield, but now there was only white as far as the eye could see. Bathed in frost and snow, the girl in the blue cape resembled a goddess.

Before Tianming could take his shot, she began forming dragon scales all over her body, with the third blue eye in the center of her eyebrows as the core of her transformation. In an instant, a light blue armor made of scale had completely enveloped her flesh, protecting her. This was the Frostsnow Draconian Physique.

The Frostsnow Draconian Physique didn't make her burly or aggressive, but graceful and agile, with enchanting curves. She resembled a blizzard goddess. Not only did she possess the terrifying power of death tribulation energy, but her draconian physique also toughened her flesh.

The Trioptic True Dragon Branch of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan had extremely powerful body-refining arts. The weapon in her hand was an ice-blue metal rod, both hard and brutal. At both ends were dragon head sculptures. Severe injuries were inevitable if one were to be hit by the heads. Such a rough weapon was completely inconsistent with her elegant temperament. This tribulation artifact was a Twindragon Frostrod, and it had four tribulation patterns. Although it didn't have as many as the Eight Phoenix Blades, each tribulation pattern consisted of at least six hundred saintly heavenly patterns.

Rotating the rod in her hand, Xuanyuan Muxue triggered a storm of ice and snow that swept toward Tianming and the others.

"Let's go!" She said coldly.

After a brief discussion with Jian Lingchen, Tianming decided on a battle plan. Tianming had personally witnessed the tyrannical power of Xuanyuan Muxue's death tribulation energy. In the absence of Lan Huang and the Prime Tower, he was uncertain if he could defeat his opponent alone. But Jian Lingchen's

strength wasn't too far behind Xingque's. Together with his four swordbeasts, he should be able to deal with one of Xuanyuan Muxue's lifebound beasts. Jian Nishang and Jian Yini didn't have the ability to fight alone either, so they could help Jian Lingchen.

The opponent had three fighters. Thus, they were divided into three groups! Jian Lingchen and his group would target the oceansoul fatedragon. Ying Huo and Meow Meow would deal with the frostsoul dragon, while Tianming battled Xuanyuan Muxue one on one.

"Split the battlefield!"

Beastmasters usually engaged in team battles. Unsurprisingly, there were few people on the other team. Thus, the frostsoul dragon and oceansoul fatedragon both wanted to stay by Xuanyuan Muxue's side to support each other. Unfortunately, that was beyond their control.

Jian Lingchen and the swordbeasts were considered extremely powerful among first-level samsarans at life phase. The four tribulation beasts merged into a terrifying sword and slashed away. The oceansoul fatedragon was forced to dodge to the right as a huge crack appeared on the battleground.

Ying Huo and Meow Meow were more direct. The crafty chick and furtively sly cat made use of their small physiques. Ying Huo unleashed unpredictable attacks with Infernal Haze, while Meow Meow moved so fast the frostsoul dragon could only see the flashing of electric snakes, but not where its opponent was.

Furious, the dragon expelled a frosty breath that spread across the battlefield, freezing the air. Unexpectedly, Ying Huo combined the Sixpath Infernal Lotus and Skyscorch Featherblast, unleashing a hundred threads of tribulation sword ki along with the two techniques.

At the same time, Meow Meow invisibly used Myriad Thundernet, entangling the dragon's head. The Myriad Thundernet tightened, trapping the dragon's head. Chaos Disaster constantly rained down from Meow Meow's body and crashed into the dragon.

For a while, thunder and fire raged. The formation of an empyrean gold body, as well as their evolutions, had resulted in a monumental rise in strength. Together, they fought against a lifebound beast at the first-level death phase, yet they weren't at a disadvantage.

However, the dragon's death tribulation energy was truly powerful. Its abilities carried the power of death. Every time its ice and snow infiltrated its target's body, even Meow Meow's Ninefold Chaos Thunderscape weakened, gradually dying out. Once it touched the cat's flesh, it could certainly be frozen to death.

They had to be careful as they continued fighting. The task of defeating Xuanyuan Muxue fell on Tianming. Jian Lingchen was completely moved; he had never imagined that Tianming would take such risks for him. Jian Nishang and the others were also ashamed.

In the storm, Tianming's Imperealm Sword Formation exploded onto the battlefield, turning the surrounding area into his territory. The terrifying realm sword ki and imperial sword ki continuously raged, piercing through the crowd and not only threatening Xuanyuan Muxue, but also both of her dragons. Similarly, the dragons' abilities shot toward Tianming, who was completely unable to stop them.

In the raging ice and snow, Tianming felt cold all over. His movements slowed and the hands holding the sword were covered with frost.

On the other hand, Xuanyuan Muxue was still as calm as before. She drifted through the wind and snow with the Twindragon Frostrod in her hand. With each attack, a huge shadow of a dragon followed. Soon, more and more such shadows appeared, as if there were tens of thousands of frostsoul dragons dancing across the weapon.

A dragon's roar sounded with each strike. This was the Frostfiend Dragon Art, a top death phase battle art. Fueled by death tribulation energy, the power of each strike was almost too difficult for Tianming to deal with.

Aside from a huge advantage in terms of battle arts, Tianming also possessed tribulation sword ki and the Imperealm Sword Formation. For a while, they were deadlocked.

"Is the power of a death phase samsaran so strong?" Tianming frowned.

"Of course. Ninety percent of a person's lifespan is gone, so they gain power in exchange for that," Xuanyuan Muxue said flatly.

"You're very powerful, but I don't sense any killing intent from you. I heard Xuanyuan Yufeng was your brother," said Tianming.

"Killing intent? Kill you?" Xuanyuan Muxue smiled faintly, "I'm not that fearless. You're the one Her Eminence brought back. She values you, and you have indeed lived up to her expectations. In just two months, you have risen from the Human Branch to here. And now, many disciples of the Heaven Branch can't contend with you. The day you dominate the Heaven Branch is just around the corner. I'm no fool. Going against you and affecting my future isn't worthwhile."

"You do make sense. But what about the hatred involving your brother?" said Tianming.

"The loser is always wrong. Besides, I have several elder brothers, and Yufeng was the worst one. Without him, it makes no difference to me," said Xuanyuan Muxue as she continued attacking Tianming. Although she was speaking, her moves were still brutal. With every strike, Tianming's bones grew more and more sore from the cold.

Death tribulation energy frantically invaded his body like a wildfire.

"From what you're saying, I feel as if you're trying to please me," said Tianming.

"I am. I'm hoping to leave a good impression." Against the falling snow, Xuanyuan Muxue's smile was breathtaking.

If Tianming didn't already have someone in his heart, he would probably be attracted to her.

"What have I done to win your favor?" Tianming grinned.

"It's very simple. You defeated Fang Xingque and crippled him, which indirectly solved the dilemma of our marriage agreement. Additionally, the Archaic House of Xuanyuan believes that you have a bright future," said Xuanyuan Muxue.

"Is that so?"

When Tianming had first arrived at the Archaion Sect, there was a conflict between him and Xuanyuan Yuheng. In the Human Branch, he had yet another conflict with Xuanyuan Yufeng, thus his hatred for the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. But now that the situation had changed, the Archaic House of Xuanyuan was actually optimistic about him?

"Since that's the case, would you give your place to Jian Lingchen if I asked?" Tianming asked tentatively.

"That won't work. The Deepstar Pool is too important to me. I want to be your friend, not serve you. You can't behave so shamefully. If you really want to win a spot for your friend, you have to defeat me to convince me," said Xuanyuan Muxue.

"Fine then. Don't forget to show me around and introduce me to your brothers from the Archaic House of Xuanyuan," said Tianming.

"Sure. The day you become Her Eminence's disciple, you'll also become a member of the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. You can consider Xuanyuan Lake your home," said Xuanyuan Muxue.

"What an honor that is," said Tianming.

Could he believe her words? Perhaps not completely, but he could get a glimpse into what the major forces of Archaion Sect thought.

Because Feiling was connected to Xuanyuan Xi, she should have a stable relationship with the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, regardless of Xuanyuan Yuheng. Additionally, Tianming and the Draconis House of Jian should be on agreeable terms, since he was friends with Jian Lingchen. If he could establish a friendship with two of the three great clans, offending the Sterling House of Fang didn't seem like a big issue.

Chapter 658 - Number One

"Who can resist seeking out the strong? When you're in decline, don't be vindictive, arrogant, or allow your emotions to cloud your judgment. When facing the strong, some people naturally bend over and scrape to curry favor. The smart ones must make good use of their talents and survive between the cracks, waiting for a chance to rise!"

Now that he had entered the game, he would become a competent player. Tianming was very clear about this in his heart.

"My outstanding performance in the Deepstar Battle completely changed my position in the Archaion Sect and narrowed the distance between me and Her Eminence. We're no longer so far apart that she's in heaven while I'm on earth. This way, my resources and capacity to protect myself have increased. After defeating Fang Xingque, my relationship with Her Eminence will soon spread to the entire sect and they'll know the real me."

This was simple logic. If Tianming were a loser from the Human Branch, a sky saint disciple, Feiling wouldn't be able to give him anything or even show concern for him. Even if he was killed, Feiling couldn't show any emotion.

But now he was number one in the Deepstar Battle and showed sensational progress, as well as the momentum of an unparalleled genius. From now on, no one would dare complain if Feiling approached him, handed him treasures, or even personally trained him.

From Tianming's participation in the Deepstar Battle, he had gained a spot in the Deepstar Pool, and more importantly, a partial upgrade. By defeating Fang Xingque, he established a firm foothold in the sect. At the very least, the Archaic House of Xuanyuan seemed to have a steady view of him, judging from Xuanyuan Muxue's performance.

With such a starting point, I should completely devote myself to the Archaic House of Xuanyuan and form a close friendship with the Draconis House of Jian as well as the tribulation elders of Tribulation Peak. As for the Sterling House of Fang, I should avoid them.

Although he was currently engaged in battle, he was also contemplating. And in that instant, he made up his mind.

However, he still wanted to defeat Xuanyuan Muxue.

Xuanyuan Muxue alone wouldn't be enough to influence the Archaic House of Xuanyuan, but if Jian Lingchen managed to obtain a spot in the Deepstar Pool, perhaps the Draconis House of Jian could fight for more.

"I'm going to give it my all," said Tianming.

"Come on then. I won't complain if I lose. After all, this is a fair fight." Xuanyuan Muxue smiled gently.

"You're certainly unpretentious! Let's begin!"

Tianming wasted no time on thinking any longer. Holding the two Grand-Orient Swords in his hands, he fiercely fought Xuanyuan Muxue amidst the exclamations of the crowd.

One man and one woman soared into the sky, their fight causing cracks in the ground. Tribulation sword ki and death tribulation energy swept the battleground. The strength of the two young disciples excited the watchers in the audience.

"With their strength, they could make it halfway up the Heaven Ranking."

"That's right."

"They're amazing! Muxue's strength is evident; she's only seventeen. By the time she's twenty-five, she'll probably be at the top of the Heaven Ranking."

"She might never be able to achieve that."

"What do you mean?"

"I heard that in just two or three months, Li Tianming advanced from a new empyrean saint to being able to fight samсарans. He possesses an incredible ability to kill those above his level. Although he's older than Muxue, he'll be undefeatable in the Heaven Branch if he continues progressing at this speed."

"What's his origins?"

"Previously, they were saying he's Jian Wuyi's illegitimate son, but I think they're very different. He has rather mysterious origins. But since he's not afraid to fight Fang Xingque, he obviously has a backer. Perhaps Xuanyuan Dao, Dugu Jin, or other powerful people."

"I'm guessing information about his backer will spread after the Deepstar Battle ends."

The sect disciples, and even Divine Mentors were discussing his identity. In fact, his identity as the disciple Her Eminence brought back had already begun spreading among the tribulation elders. The reason such news was previously concealed was because those who knew of it couldn't be bothered to spread the word.

"This kid is crazy! A mere empyrean saint fighting one on one against Xuanyuan Muxue, and he hasn't been defeated!"

"Is his sword art so mysterious?"

"I don't know, his sword and sword art are both amazing. I can't seem to comprehend it."

"That's right, who gave him the tribulation manna for his fourth-order tribulation beasts?"

The fierce battle before them had reached a fever pitch.

"Even without defeating Xuanyuan Muxue, Li Tianming has already shaken the Archaion Sect and made his name known to everyone."

"I hope his rapid growth isn't a short-term thing, but lasting talent that can be maintained in the future!"

"That would make him a god!" In the audience, the pandemonium never ceased.

"Xueyi, I'm going to be upset if you don't introduce this little brother to me. Why, I don't think I can continue being friends with you!"

"Yes!"

In the crowd, Jian Xueyi seemed like she was dreaming as she was surrounded by dozens of female disciples. The girls kept asking her about Tianming. Cursing him inside, she covered her head, shivering among the crowd of crazy girls.

At that moment—

"It's over!" Many shouted.

"Jian Lingchen is too weak! Even with Li Tianming helping him resist Xuanyuan Muxue, he was still beaten out of the Astral Formation by the oceansoul fatedragon!"

"If he could hold on, they might have a chance of winning."

"I wouldn't say he's weak. After all, the oceansoul fatedragon is a whole level above him. Xuanyuan Muxue is stronger than Jian Lingchen to begin with."

"Everyone's happy with this ending. They all tried their best. To be honest, it was a good show!"

...

On the Deepstar Battlefield, Tianming paused and turned around in a daze. Jian Lingchen's Astral Formation had appeared, trapping him within.

"Damn it. This is so embarrassing!" said Jian Lingchen as he covered his face.

Despite expending a fair bit of effort, Tianming had yet to defeat Xuanyuan Muxue.

In fact, he believed she wasn't even fighting with all her strength.

"Tianming, I failed to live up to expectations. But it's okay, I can admit to this loss. Anyway, I had a good time." After a moment of embarrassment, Jian Lingchen raised his head in a smile.

Now that he had lost to the oceansoul fatedragon, there wasn't much Tianming could do. Because of that, Jian Lingchen's points were given to Xuanyuan Muxue. However, with more than ten thousand points, Tianming was still first on the scoreboard.

"Sure, we'll get together after this, buddy." Tianming waved his hand.

"Alright! Since you're new here, I'll show you the great rivers and mountains of the sect," said Jian Lingchen.

Despite having failed, he didn't seem to be in a bad mood. Tianming was relieved to see that. When he looked around, he found only a dozen people left. They didn't have the strength to challenge him or Xuanyuan Muxue and had already given up. Thus, they walked up to him to convey their congratulations.

"You both deserve the spots for the Deepstar Pool. It's only fair," said a Heaven Branch disciple.

"Thank you, brother," Tianming replied.

"Brother Tianming, you're good, but I'd like to remind you that the Fangs are a great clan. I recommend that you immediately seek an exceptional master to shelter you as soon as you leave," said the man.

"That won't be necessary. Our entire Archaic House of Xuanyuan will protect him." Xuanyuan Muxue said while deactivating her Frostsnow Draconian state.

"Huh? Weren't you just aggressively fighting?" The man was stunned.

Laughing cryptically, Tianming glanced at Xuanyuan Muxue.

Yes, the Deepstar Battle was over.

"Li Tianming, I'll see you in the Deepstar Pool," said Xuanyuan Muxue.

"Alright, see you then." Tianming waved.

...

Outside the Deepstar Formation, the Deepstar Hall palace lord Yi Xingyin announced, "The Deepstar Battle has come to an end and the spots for the Deepstar Pool are awarded to Li Tianming and Xuanyuan Muxue. Congratulations to these two outstanding disciples!"

His voice passed through the Deepstar Formation to the Starlord Formation.

The dust settled. In the conflict between Li Tianming and Fang Xingque, the latter had gone against the rules. Thus, Tianming's act of killing his opponent's lifebound beasts wasn't in violation of the rules.

However, Fang Xingque had also paid the price. Hence, Palace Lord Yi Xingyin wouldn't announce his punishment here. After all, he was the Heaven Branch sect master's son. Unfortunately, the matter would be forgotten as if it had never happened.

What the masses were curious about was how the elders and disciples of the Sterling House of Fang would retaliate against Tianming if he had a humble status.

"Can he survive?"

"Someone should take him as their disciple at once!"

"Who would have the courage except for the top few powerhouses?"

Tianming wasn't concerned about this.

What he cared about was being able to go to the Deepstar Pool and cultivate the Ancient Deepstar Godbody.

Then he would challenge the tribulation spirit hazards in the Heaven Cauldron so his fourth lifebound beast could be born!

Chapter 659 - Bury My Son

Fang Qingli rode her green phoenix across Xuanyuan Lake towards Sterling Hall, and Fang Yuewei obediently tagged along without daring to say anything.

"Were the three lifebound beasts converted into lifebound spirits?" Fang Qingli asked, her eyes a little puffy and her fists tightly balled up.

"Yes, Grandmother," Fang Yuewei answered.

"And one of his arms was completely vaporized, is that it?"

"Yes."

"Then even if his arm gets restored in a few years, it wouldn't be able to match the same refinement of the body that's been using a body refining technique, as it won't be able to sustain a lot of force. This is a huge side effect. That means our precious boy is now half crippled," she said, almost stuttering from her shaking tongue. Memories of a kid learning his first words surfaced in her mind.

"Yes."

"Your mother left the two of you at an early age, so I was the one who brought you up. Sigh! With how spoiled he is, his days ahead will no doubt be difficult." She couldn't stop the tears from flowing.

"Grandmother...."

"Wei'er, why did he have to fight the one who has Her Eminence's favor, of all people? Thankfully, he's still alive. If he wises up, he can still get by in the future." Fang Qingli felt that this matter was just unfortunate no matter how they looked at it.

"Grandmother, even if Li Tianming has that kind of status, can't you do anything for your own grandson as the palace lord of Godservant Hall? Shouldn't you be the most important person to Her Eminence?"

Shaking her head, Fang Qingli said, "Her Eminence is a god, while I'm just a lowly servant. She doesn't care about my grandson. Her Eminence said that she intended to forge Li Tianming into one of the strongest people in the whole Archaion Divine Realm within the next ten years, so there's not much I can do about it."

"What about dad?"

"Your father? He's nothing before Her Eminence. Yuewei, that's enough talk about this. It's already fortunate that Xingque managed to survive. Even if he only has one lifebound beast left, he's still a beastmaster. As long as he puts in the effort, he'll still be able to amount to something as long as I'm here. As long as he doesn't offend Li Tianming, nobody else can bother him."

"I understand."

"Living is always better than dying. It is about time Xingque grows up." The thought that her grandson might be suffering in despair caused her to want to go back to Sterling Hall as soon as possible.

"Grandmother, you haven't been back to Sterling Hall since the assassination attempt on Her Eminence."

"That's right."

Soon, they landed in the courtyard.

"By the way, Li Tianming left a kind of powerful seal on Xingque. It's really chaotic, so take a look at it," Fang Yuewei said.

"Okay." Fang Qingli immediately entered with Fang Yuewei following behind.

"Are you asleep, my dear?"

There was no reply.

"Over here," Fang Yuewei said and pointed to a room.

They entered and saw Xingque on the bed, then the color drained from the faces and they struggled to find their voices. They saw his head on a bloodied pillow; it was a gruesome sight, especially with his eyes wide open in fear and hopelessness. Blood came gushing out of Fang Qingli's orifices as she collapsed unconscious.

.....

By then, most people had left the Dimensional Battlefield. Fang Yuewei rushed over to the viewing room of the Fangs. "Dad! Dad!"

She looked around, seeing many important figures of the house leaving the room with Fang Taiqing at the very front.

"What are you making a commotion for?" he asked.

"Dad—" She knelt on the ground, still pale with shock.

"Speak."

"Xingque... is gone."

The whole place fell silent when that was uttered as everyone stopped chanting and turned to her.

"How did he die?" Fang Taiqing asked, his voice now much colder than before, but his reaction was still far too calm as a father.

"Li Tianming left a kind of seal on his body. I thought it'd be fine and went looking for Grandmother after converting his dead lifebound beasts to lifebound spirits. However, the seal took effect and jumbled up his body.... Xingque suffered too much. Even now, the seal is still on his body!" She broke down in tears.

"So that means Li Tianming killed him, right?" Fang Taiqing asked.

"Yes! It's all my fault, Dad, for not taking the seal into account...."

"Where's your grandmother?"

"She... she feels horrible about it, but didn't say anything else and returned to Godservant Hall."

"How did she react?"

"She was grieving so hard that she vomited blood, but what's worse is that there's nothing we can do for Xingque. All he did was hurt one of Li Tianming's lifebound beasts, yet he went straight to killing him! Since when has our house allowed others to treat us like this?" Even though she didn't really like this little brother of hers, his death was a sting to her dignity as the sect master's daughter. "Dad..."

Everyone was looking at Fang Taiqing, angry at what had transpired.

"Come, let us bury my son," Fang Taiqing said as he left first.

.....

Fang Qingli stepped into Soulburn Hall with a smile on her face.

"Your Eminence," she greeted.

Feiling nodded and returned the greeting.

"There is something you must know, Your Eminence."

"What is it?"

"Li Tianming has obtained a spot at the Deepstar Pool and ranked first in the Deepstar Battle. He has improved too much," she said with her head lowered.

"Is that so? Good," Feiling praised.

"Your Eminence's foresight is truly amazing. Not even I could tell that he was special when he first came to the sect. To think that he rose to prominence in only two months...."

"Li Tianming is indeed amazing. He will no doubt be a magnificent dragon of the Archaion Sect," said Xuanyuan Dao. It was high praise coming from him, considering that the Archaic House of Xuanyuan's signature lifebound beasts were dragons.

"If you give him more time to grow, he will definitely be a force to be reckoned with in the sect." Even though she sounded calm, Feiling was actually elated about the news.

"Rest assured, Your Eminence, I will make sure to pay attention to him and help him grow," Xuanyuan Dao said.

"Very well."

Fang Qingli merely stood there respectfully without saying a word.

.....

During the night outside Xuanyuan Lake, Fang Qingli flew over like a spirit. "What is the matter?"

A lone figure stood on the hill ahead of her. He turned and revealed himself to be Fang Taiqing. "Mother!"

His hands shook and his face was pale as he knelt there crying. "My only son... gone just like that without even a complete corpse!"

He grabbed her hand and looked up at her, despair filling his eyes as he respectfully put down an urn before her. "These are Xingque's ashes."

"What are you doing?!" she snapped in a hoarse voice.

"Mother, talk to him for a bit. You're the one who was closest to him."

Fang Qingli picked up the urn with shaky hands and said, "Let's lay the child to rest in the earth."

"His death was horrifying. He shall get no rest until it's answered for...."

"What would you have me do, Fang Taiqing? Deal with Her Eminence to avenge Xingque? Do you know what Li Tianming means to her Eminence?"

"Avenge him? Mother, you're overthinking this. All I hope is for you to not stand in my way when misfortune befalls our house."

Fang Qingli silently looked at him for a long while.

"You're someone who stands by Her Eminence's side. If the Sterling House of Fang perishes for good, at least you'll survive," he said as he kowtowed.

"You're going too far!"

"Please understand. Our ancestors have knelt and shed blood to achieve what we have today. I can't bear to see more of us suffer the fate of Xingque, innocently sacrificed to the vain goddess of the

Xuanyuan house. If I'm mistaken, may our ancestors strike me down. It would only mean that the Sterling House of Fang's fate is to perish in obscurity!" He kept on kowtowing and crying.

Fang Qingli held the urn in her hands and felt blades cutting through her heart. "Leave now! I serve the Godservant Hall both in life and in death!"

"But we are your real family, I and Xingque both!" He kowtowed one last time before disappearing in the blizzard, leaving Fang Qingli rooted to the ground.

.....

Right after that, Fang Taiqing met up with Fang Shenyu. His expression was neutral and refreshed, unlike before.

"How'd it go?" Fang Shenyu asked.

"It'll do. I planted a seed in the form of her precious grandson's ashes. I doubt she'll continue being a loyal hound."

"That's just how the Godservant Hall is. Her benefactor was far too important to her, and she's been the bearer of the blood of the goddess all her life. It's only to be expected that she's insanely loyal."

"Let's go. All we need is for the seed to sprout at the right time. Xingque really did have a good future. It's such a shame, but no matter. If we can change our fate at the crucial moment, his death won't have been in vain."

.....

In Draconis Sword Hall, Jian Wuyi stood at the balcony and watched the snowstorm.

"Big Brother," greeted a one armed man with messy hair.

"What're you doing here away from your bodyguard post?" Jian Wuyi asked.

"Someone from the Tai'e House of Jian wants to meet you."

"Oh...." Jian Wuyi smiled.

"Will you meet them?"

"Of course. Why wouldn't I?"

Chapter 660 - Her Eminence's Summons

When Tianming returned from the Abyssal Battlefield, he headed to Number One Pavilion. Before he traveled far, however, Yi Xingyin called out to him from behind.

"What's the matter, Palace Lord?"

"Fang Xingque is dead. What's going on?"

"Dead? Who did it?"

"You did."

"Me? Please don't joke around, Palace Lord. He was disqualified and the Deepstar Battle had just ended. I wouldn't even have had the time to go to kill him. Not to mention, I've already given him a lesson, so there's no need for that."

"That can't be right.... When I brought him out, there was a kind of sword-shaped pattern on his body that looked like a seal caused by your sword, isn't it?"

"That is the case."

"Those from the Sterling House of Fang claimed that the sword ki seal activated and killed Fang Xingque."

"It can't be. Were there any direct eyewitnesses?" Something like that was completely out of Tianming's expectations.

"That's... I don't know. The point is, he's now dead, but you have Her Eminence protecting you, so you don't have to worry about revenge. It also seems that they don't plan to do anything against you. Just make sure to tread carefully from now on."

Tianming furrowed his brow. Did the Imperial Sword Prison really kill someone without his say-so? Given how new it was to him, that happening was certainly within the realm of possibility.

"Thank you for the reminder, Palace Lord."

"No need for thanks. You are Her Eminence's favored disciple, and you're magnificently talented. The seniors of the Archaion Sect should be helping your growth. After all, the Archaion Sect doesn't just belong to any single house or clan." There seemed to be a deeper meaning in his words.

"I see. That makes sense."

"All right, just go take a rest. I'll bring you to Deepstar Pool in two days."

"Have a good day, Palace Lord."

"I recommend you keep a low profile from now on and observe the Sterling House of Fang's stance. It's best you don't get into any more conflicts with them."

"Understood."

Tianming remained there for quite some time after Yi Xingyin left. "Seniors like Yi Xingyin and Ouyang Jianwang treat me rather well. They represent a faction that isn't affiliated with the three houses in the Archaion Sect. Could the reason they want to look after and nurture me is for the sake of the Archaion Divine Realm? Is that why they're siding with the goddess faction?"

That seemed to make sense to Tianming. He could sense that the other eight divine realms were going to act, and that some would put Feiling in danger. If it were up to him, he would make sure that all the factions in the Archaion Sect stood united.

"Had Fang Xingque not died, I wouldn't be in such an awkward position with the Sterling House of Fang. After all, Fang Taiqing is the Heaven Branch's sect master. What in the world happened? Was it really the Imperial Sword Prison's fault?"

Tianming couldn't figure it out at all. Fang Xingque's death was definitely not something he wanted to happen. It was one thing for juniors like them to fight and compete, but killing the son of a sect master could be construed as an act of provocation. It was beyond what could be considered reasonable payback for using an illegal tome in the Deepstar Battle.

"I guess we'll have to wait and see to know whether this storm will pass." Tianming pondered for a long while as he looked at the Grand-Orient Sword, still in doubt that the ability could actually kill. So he went back into the Abyssal Battlefield and captured a wildbeast called a greenscale direwolf and used the Imperial Sword Prison on it before bringing it back to Number One Pavilion. He wanted to test if the technique could go out of control. Since Fang Xingque had died in less than a day, it should take about the same time for the wildbeast to die—if it really did.

.....

Lin Xiaoxiao wasn't bathing when he returned, and welcomed him at the entrance instead. She stood in the blizzard in a black hood and mantle, wrapped tightly from head to toe and revealing only her eyes.

"Now that's more like it. Come, maidservant, serve your master," Tianming said.

"Idiot. Did you get the spot?"

"No, it was too difficult. I was ganged up on really badly inside and almost couldn't return alive."

"You deserved it," she said with a gleeful look, though she quickly reasoned that Tianming had definitely succeeded since he seemed so relaxed.

Tianming tossed the direwolf into the courtyard and said, "Look after it and make sure your lifebound beast doesn't eat it."

"Okay. Why'd you bring this wildbeast back?"

"Don't ask too many questions and do your part. Did you make sure to clean the place?"

"I did!" she said, facepalming.

Tianming entered the room and turned back to her. "You seem to have made progress. What level are you at now?"

"The eighth."

"That's more impressive than people with Quadrasword Talent or the Rainbow Phoenix Bloodline."

"I see."

"Keep working hard. One day, I'll dissect you to see where you got all that talent from," he joked.

"Did I ever need your permission to improve?"

"Yes."

"How ridiculous."

"Get used to it." Tianming felt that he could get along with her rather well after spending some time with her. He wondered if he should find a way to make her leave the Archaion Sect so she wouldn't pose any threat to him any longer, but gave up on the notion. It wasn't like she would be able to see Feiling if she didn't leave Xuanyuan Lake.

The next day, Lan Huang had recovered, thanks to the Prime Tower, and was playing the usual game of 'high toss' with his favorite 'Sister Youyou'. The gigantic black beast was exhausted and fuming with anger from all the play, but Lan Huang couldn't care less.

"I wonder what's so special about that lifebound beast...." Tianming pondered.

"Why don't you just kill it if you don't know?"

"That won't do. Xiaoxiao only has one lifebound beast left."

"You're getting soft. Are you going to start a harem?"

"Nonsense. I have Ling'er and she's the best."

"Stop pretending. We all know that wildflowers have a charm that can't be matched by even the most beautiful flower at home."

"Leave me alone, you thieving chicken."

"Hey, you're the thief with your black arm. You keep stealing the hearts of girls wherever you go."

Tianming had no words.

"I bet your gropey hands are starting to mold after not touching anything for so long. You'd better get started with Xiaoxiao!" Ying Huo said.

"Why don't I start with you first?" Tianming grabbed it by the neck with his left arm.

"Stop! Someone, Xiaoxiao, save me! Tianming is going to commit poultrycide!" Ying Huo cried as it struggled to breathe. Lin Xiaoxiao saw it from afar and ran away.

"Come, let's go to the Hexapath Sword Palace."

Before he left, Tianming took one last look at the direwolf. A full day had passed and nothing about it had changed.

"Let's give it a little longer," he said, then waved goodbye to Lin Xiaoxiao and headed to Xuanyuan Lake.

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When Tianming arrived, he immediately continued cultivating the Hexapath Samsara Sword. "I definitely improved a lot after all the combat experience. However, there's still much more I can do."

The Hexapath Samsara Sword, coupled with the Grand-Orient Sword, was one of the key reasons Tianming had been able to defeat opponents far higher than his level. He once more broke through the seven sword barriers of the Sword Insight Rock and met with the Hexapath Sword God.

"Greetings, Senior, I am back."

"Yeah, you can go now."

"I love you."

"Yeah, you can go now."

"You stupid, shameless old fart."

"Yeah, you can go now."

"Do you still have balls?"

"Yeah, you can go now."

Tianming scratched his head; it was just like before. He continued training.

Two hours later, a cold voice called out to him. "Li Tianming, Her Eminence has summoned you."

Tianming looked up and saw Fang Qingli. "Greetings, Palace Lord."

"Let's go," she said plainly and turned to leave.

Tianming noted that she didn't seem young but still had a really good figure. Based on her looks, she seemed to be in her thirties. It suddenly occurred to him that she was Fang Xingque's grandmother.

Picking up the pace, he caught up to her and asked, "Palace Lord, would you believe me if I said that I couldn't have been the one who killed Fang Xingque?"

"You don't need to say anything to me. I am a mere servant of Her Eminence. External affairs do not concern me," she coldly said.

"Understood." Tianming couldn't say too much either, since he couldn't confirm the effects of the Imperial Sword Prison yet.

They came to Soulburn Hall. The security there was really tight, and the whole place was filled with powerful seniors from the Archaic House of Xuanyuan. Like before, there were many heavenly pattern formations layered atop one another to protect Feiling. They had all been newly installed.

"Li Tianming, you did well."

"I heard you have made shocking progress in the past two months."

"Her Eminence really has amazing foresight!"

"Her Eminence has said that you will be a top expert in ten years. I look forward to that day."

The seniors of the Xuanyuan house had all changed their attitudes because of 'Xuanyuan Xi'. Now they saw him as one of their own younger generation members.

"I will do my best!" Tianming said earnestly as he respectfully saluted each of them.

Fang Qingli didn't turn back, but entered the hall straight away. Tianming followed behind as he listened to Meow Meow and Ying Huo discussing the figure of the old woman ahead of them. He looked up and saw Feiling sitting by the balcony, looking at the snowy landscape outside.