

Chapter 691: The Dark Demonic Eye!

Wang Baole had first read about the Demonic Eye Art in his Dark Dream. It was a strange and bizarre mystic art that had originated from an ancient civilization that was now extinct. Its records stopped at its Nascent Soul realm techniques. The Dark Sect wouldn't have paid it much mind because of that, but its incredibly destructive power had resulted in it being listed as one of the three most powerful Nascent Soul realm mystic arts that the Dark Sect had ever come across. In fact, when practiced alongside the Dark Art, it would display a power that would make it the most powerful mystic art the sect had ever seen at the Nascent Soul realm. It had only been abandoned as a practical mystic art because it was incomplete.

The mystic art focused on killing. There were five levels to it. Each new level brought a transformation to the cultivator's cultivation, as well as his physical strength and speed. The latter two would be doubled at every level.

Theoretically speaking, a cultivator who reached the third level would be eight times as strong and fast as when they had first started on the mystic art. That would increase to thirty-two times when they reached the fifth level of the mystic art!

The first level was meant for one at the early-stage Nascent Soul realm, the second, the mid-stage Nascent Soul realm. The third level was for one at the late-stage Nascent Soul realm and the fourth, the perfected Nascent Soul realm. One's cultivation would be incredible at this stage. Then, there was the final stage of the mystic art—the fifth level!

There was the conventional way of rising through the levels—through normal training—and a shortcut. The latter involved killing. The more one killed, the more powerful one got, and the crazier one became!

In fact, killing was the true way of practicing this mystic art!

The records stated that at the early stages of practicing this mystic art, the cultivator would be able to summon a white eye outside his body. That was for ordinary cultivators, though. If one practiced the Dark Art before practicing this mystic art, the eye that was summoned would be a black-colored Dark Demonic Eye!

Like the cold, eerie-looking eye that had materialized behind Wang Baole!

There was only one now. But with every person he killed, he would be able to draw their God Spirit out from their corpse, which would then transform into the next demonic eye. Each demonic eye could dispel spells. Its destruction would unleash an incredible force. It would be equivalent to blowing up the person whose God Spirit had been drained to create the demonic eye in the first place.

It seems like a perfect match for the Dark Art... In fact, it seems to also work well with the Flame Snatch! Wang Baole sat deep in meditation, his eyes shut as he practiced the Demonic Eye Art. Thoughts flooded his mind. He thought of his Flame Snatch.

Flame Snatch was another mystic art that focused on killing others. The key to practicing it was absorbing the blood and flesh of living creatures. Through such a process, one's physical body would grow stronger, and his cultivation would increase. Wang Baole had adapted it so that his Thearch Armor became the main vessel—the receptacle for whatever the Flame Snatch absorbed. That had resulted in the fusion between the Flame Snatch and his Thearch Armor and the creation of an external artifact that was separate from his body. It had its limits.

“There are limits to the Flame Snatch, but not to the demonic eye,” Wang Baole muttered to himself. His mind seemed to have settled on something, and a calm fell over his mind as he removed his Thearch Armor.

The mountain of flesh that was his body was instantly exposed to the mist. He looked like an enormous, ancient beast, emanating waves of power that would strike terror into one's heart.

Waves of mid-stage Nascent Soul realm cultivation emanated from his body. He was nearly at the peak of the mid-stage Nascent Soul realm. Vast stores of spirit energy rested in the spirit fat in his body. It would form the foundation for Wang Baole's venture into the Demonic Eye Art.

As his cultivation progressed, the black eye hovering behind him grew more distinct. It exuded a coldness that grew increasingly chilly. Simultaneously, his body began to shrink in size!

Vast amounts of spirit fat transformed instantly into Spirit Qi, surging into the demonic eye behind him. This wasn't a simple, straightforward absorption. In the past, Wang Baole had only cultivation but had no cultivation technique. Now though... he had decided on the cultivation technique that was going to determine his path of cultivation. The Demonic Eye Art was activated. His body seemed to break down into its basic particles, which restructured and refined themselves as he pushed himself on the path of the Demonic Eye Art!

Wang Baole's size shrunk by half in an instant. He had reached the first level of the Demonic Eye Art. His cultivation had finally, truly reached the early-stage Nascent Soul realm!

He wasn't done yet. The Demonic Eye Art continued its work on him. His body continued to shrink in size. Soon, he had shrunk to the size of an ordinary person again, and he had also reached the second level of the Demonic Eye Art!

Explosions erupted in his mind, rumbling like thunder. The demonic eye standing behind him had grown more distinct, appearing real. It would strike terror into the hearts of those who saw it.

Wang Baole's progress with the Demonic Eye Art didn't stop there. He had accumulated an immense store of Spirit Qi in the final great palace. The spirit fat stored in his body might have been depleted, but there was still a wealth of Spirit Qi in his meridians fueling his hike towards the third level of the Demonic Eye Art.

It only took him ten counts. The cultivation inside Wang Baole's body finally stopped churning. It had fully melded with the Demonic Eye Art, sending the Demonic Eye Art from the second level to the third!

The late-stage Nascent Soul realm!

Wang Baole shuddered violently. A powerful aura, stronger and more concentrated than anything he had ever possessed before, erupted from his body. It was a power that threatened to overwhelm everything in sight!

The ghoulish faces that continued to appear in the red mist around him began to respond to the eruptions. Their expressions shifted. There was respect, fear, and awe on their faces, and they started to retreat.

They could feel the icy chill surging from Wang Baole and the creepy black eye guarding his back. It drove fear into them like a stake. The wisps of spirit energy that were colored by the Dark Art, which continued to emanate from Wang Baole as he continued his cultivation, made them afraid as well. They dared not draw near.

If given the choice, most of the souls would keep their distance from Wang Baole. Regardless, the red mist was their prison, trapping them within as their numbers grew, preventing their escape. The only way out seemed to be through Wang Baole. They could either consume him or be consumed by him.

The souls became increasingly torn. The will of the Soul Infusion Destruction continued to coerce, compel, and draw them. The souls that gathered within the red mist began to struggle and grow mad. Their frustration and anger grew. The entire red mist began to rumble and boil with emotions.

Daoist You Ran hadn't anticipated this series of events. Chi Lin and the other Never-Ending Clan Soul Conduit realm cultivators, as well as the Dao Palace cultivators currently deep in meditation aboard their battleships—whose souls were continuously being drained by the array formation—were all unaware of the monster they were breeding.

However, the tumultuous state of the mist that Wang Baole was trapped within was obvious when compared with the mist holding Feng Qiuran prisoner. It wasn't something that could escape the eyes of Chi Lin and the others. The red mist that Feng Qiuran was trapped within was too calm when compared to Wang Baole's. No one could tell what was going on inside. Even so, they could still sense waves of strange spirit energy escaping from the red mist.

The stark difference in the red mists' appearances drew their attention, but without the ability to investigate what was truly going on inside, Chi Lin and the others could only frown and watch. The red mist not only imprisoned their captives, it also kept the captors out and unable to discern what was happening inside.

"Maybe it's because of Wang Baole's special circumstances..." Chi Lin and his fellow clan members eyed one another. They continued to feel uneasy after a series of voice transmissions. Finally, they decided to seek Daoist You Ran's views on the matter.

They were about to do just that. It was then that inside the red mist, Wang Baole, who had sat in meditation and had just recovered fully, suddenly opened his eyes!

The faces surrounding him in the mist suddenly shuddered violently. They seemed on the verge of screaming, but they had held back their screams out of fear. They trembled, their expressions filled with awe. It was as if a single word from Wang Baole could dictate their death.

Wang Baole's cold eyes swept across the souls around him. He raised his right hand slowly, an icy glint flashing across his eyes. Then, his hand lowered, and his finger pointed forward. He didn't speak. Regardless, his will was transmitted into every soul inside the mist through his gestures alone. They trembled and turned around abruptly. They were like soldiers who had just received their orders, suddenly making a mad charge outwards!

The red mist spasmed and rumbled violently. It expanded outwards without stop, seeming as if it might explode at any moment. Countless faces could be seen howling and struggling inside the mist, madness distorting their expressions.

Alarm flashed across Chi Lin's and the others' faces when they saw that. They felt danger instinctively rumbling in their gut. Before they could take a closer look, an unimaginable force erupted. It was a tsunami, threatening to pull everything under its waves, and, like a volcanic eruption, threatening to split the lands apart. The red mist could no longer contain the crazed souls. Its outer layers began to disintegrate, surging outwards like furious waves and sweeping into everything!

The four Soul Conduit realm cultivators bore the brunt of the attack. They couldn't escape, and they found the backlash hitting them straight in their faces as they shuddered violently and retreated repeatedly. The battleships around them were like children's toys, swept along and flung into distant space. Chaos reigned momentarily. Alarm colored Chi Lin's and the other cultivators' faces. The souls that had escaped from the red mist and charged out turned back towards the red mist then. They stared straight into the mist, lowered their heads, and fell on their knees!

It was a mind-boggling sight. A tall, slim person emerged from the depths of the mist, and a head full of long hair flowed down his back as he walked out slowly!

It was Wang Baole!

"Thanks to you, I've decided on the path of cultivation I'm going to embark on!" A chilly voice, one laced with ice, erupted in everyone's minds. It seemed capable of freezing everything in sight. The distinct shape of a pitch-black eye materialized behind Wang Baole.

It was a terrifying sight!

Chapter 692: Slaying a Soul Conduit Realm Cultivator!

"Wang Baole?"

A strange black eye and Wang Baole's strange, terrifying figure sent alarm flashing across the Soul Conduit realm cultivators' faces. Incredulity lit their eyes. They hadn't expected Wang Baole to free himself from the red mist. The sight of countless souls falling to their knees and prostrating themselves before Wang Baole, as if they were in the presence of a king, was both shocking and unbelievable.

Regardless, they were experienced, battle-worn Never-Ending Clan cultivators. Their initial shock didn't stop them from eyeing one another immediately, then unleashing a sudden burst of speed, transforming into four blurs that charged towards Wang Baole.

They didn't hesitate. They immediately unleashed their most powerful attacks!

With a wave of his hand, Chi Lin summoned a gray Daoist robe. It hovered above his head, seemingly filled out by an invisible person, exuding an aura of death as it lunged at Wang Baole.

The other three cultivators had their own trump cards. One of them formed a series of hand seals, and his body blurred into dual images. One transformed into a huge black lizard that then fused with the other. The fused body opened its huge gaping mouth. Wafts of bad breath drifted out. He exuded incredible power that surged upwards and threatened to tear everything apart.

Another waved both his hands and then ripped his body apart, revealing three heads and six arms. He clearly wasn't bothered about exposing his true identity. He was going to overpower Wang Baole with his strong physical body.

The trump card of the final cultivator was the strangest and most bizarre. With a single step, he split himself into multiple replicas. They came from all directions, each glowing with a bright blue light that was clearly poisonous!

Wang Baole watched dispassionately as his four opponents charged at him with murderous intent. He lifted his right hand and waved suddenly. The souls that had prostrated themselves before him suddenly lifted their heads. Their mouths opened, and screams that were soundless yet pierced one's senses were unleashed from their gaping mouths. The souls rushed towards the four Soul Conduit realm cultivators fearlessly!

They were swift and many. They surged towards the four cultivators like an ocean of souls. They might be much weaker than the cultivators, to the extent that their vast numbers couldn't turn the tides in their favor, but they were still useful in gaining more time for Wang Baole.

Waves of spirit energy rippled across space momentarily. An emotionless Wang Baole spared not a single glance for the four Soul Conduit realm cultivators, who were momentarily trapped by the ocean of souls. Instead, he approached the mist holding Feng Qiuran prisoner, appearing next to the mist instantly and pressing his right palm on its outer layer.

In an instant, the souls that remained inside the mist or had wormed their way into Feng Qiuran shuddered violently. They felt a fearsome will casting a terrifying shadow over them. It was cold and harsh, and it spoke only one word.

"Scram!"

The single word almost blasted the souls into pieces. They fled instantly, charging outwards. The red mist couldn't withstand the vast hordes of souls struggling to rush out simultaneously. It exploded instantly. Masses of souls spilled out, revealing a barely breathing Feng Qiuran.

Feng Qiuran was a powerful Soul Conduit realm cultivator. Even though she had been trapped for an extended period of time and had suffered a long period of refinement, her mind was still clear. Her pupils contracted when she saw who had rescued her. She recognized Wang Baole, albeit vaguely. Her eyes were uncontrollably drawn towards the black, shut eye hovering behind him.

The sight seemed to send her into a daze. It was like staring into a black hole that was spinning continuously. She felt as if her soul was being pulled out from her body. Startled, she bit the tip of her tongue. The pain cleared her mind. She was quietly shocked. She had no idea what the black eye was,

but she could tell that Wang Baole hadn't activated whatever powers the black eye contained. Regardless, it had managed to cause her momentary loss of focus. The terrifying power the black eye held must be unimaginable.

"Wang Baole, you..."

"Grand Mistress Qiuran, the souls can only hold back the four Soul Conduit realm cultivators for a short moment. That's not enough time for us to escape. Are you able to take on one Soul Conduit realm cultivator?" With a wave of his right hand, Wang Baole threw out multiple pill bottles.

His voice was calm. It was different from the chill emanating from his person, as well as the terrifying aura the black eye hovering behind him was giving off. Even his voice in her head was cold.

"Yes!" She took the bottles and drank them in a single gulp. Then, she nodded fiercely and swept her gaze sideways. In the next moment, she was on her way to one of the trapped Soul Conduit realm cultivators. She immediately started attacking as the souls continued to trap the Soul Conduit realm cultivator within their midst.

Alarm flashed across the Soul Conduit realm cultivator's face when he saw Feng Qiuran unleashing her attack. They immediately engaged in fierce battle. Incredible waves of spirit energy surged from their clashes.

There were three other Soul Conduit realm cultivators left. Wang Baole's eyes flickered as they swept past the three trapped cultivators, finally pausing on Chi Lin.

"We have to make this quick..." Wang Baole muttered to himself. He turned towards Chi Lin with a single step. With the fall of his foot, red meridians emerged from his body and wove themselves around him, materializing into the Thearch Armor!

His form might have slimmed down, which meant that the armor no longer looked as enormous as it had before, but the violent aura that it exuded didn't lessen. The black eye behind Wang Baole added to the armor's fearsome appearance. He had transformed into a demonic god. He took a second step and appeared next to Chi Lin, raising his left hand and punching!

Behind the punch was the power of the Supernova, the Thearch Armor, his Stellar Nascent Soul, and the Demonic Eye Art!

The accumulated power momentarily surpassed the limits of what an ordinary Nascent Soul realm cultivator should possess. In fact, it wasn't power that a Nascent Soul realm cultivator could contain. However, Wang Baole had an incredibly resilient physical body and his Thearch Armor serving as a vessel for his power. That allowed him to unleash power that was beyond what a Nascent Soul realm cultivator was allowed to possess!

It was a punch that could rival one unleashed by a Soul Conduit realm cultivator, one that not only matched a punch by a Soul Conduit realm cultivator at the early-stage but surpassed it entirely. It was like receiving a punch given by a true mid-stage Soul Conduit realm cultivator!

Alarm colored Chi Lin's face. He howled, raised both arms, and with a sudden wave, summoned the gray Daoist robe that had been hovering above his head before him. The gray Daoist robe flew down and stood before him, prepared to stop Wang Baole's attack.

He prepared to make a hasty retreat as well, smacking his forehead with a force that exposed his intention to tear his host body apart and reveal his true Never-Ending Clan form. It was the right move. He acted swiftly, but it was still too late!

Just as the gray Daoist robe flew ahead of Chi Lin and the latter threw himself back, a white light flickered in Wang Baole's eyes. The demonic eye behind him, which had been shut all along, suddenly... blinked open!

The cosmos shuddered. Silence descended. Space and time and all living things came to a standstill!

Chi Lin was one of them. He froze, as if the thread connecting his body and spirit had just been snipped, and as if all thoughts had suddenly fled his mind. He stood immobile as Wang Baole stepped around the gray Daoist robe and passed Chi Lin in a single swift moment. The right arm of the Thearch Armor flared with the light of the Divine Armament.

It was too late to retaliate or dodge the attack, too late for his Never-Ending Clan form to escape from his host body. The Divine Armament arm slashed forward in a sweep, ending the battle... Blood splattered as Chi Lin's head flew into the air. As his head parted from his body, the latter instantly shriveled up, its blood and flesh drained immediately by the Thearch Armor. Chi Lin's soul was devoured by the black eye in the same instant. Behind Wang Baole, next to the first black eye, appeared another... a second shut eye the size of a fist!

So, it's that simple, killing a Soul Conduit realm cultivator. Wang Baole shut his eyes. He could sense another separate cultivation inside his body. His Demonic Eye Art was growing more powerful, inching slowly and steadily towards the fourth level of the cultivation technique.

The expression on his face was calm. There was no joy nor sorrow. This was the price one paid for practicing the Demonic Eye Art. He no longer felt anything when killing others. In fact, a faint and indescribable hunger began to unfurl inside him. It was urging him to continue killing.

Interesting. Does the Demonic Eye Art possess its own will? Is it trying to control me... Wang Baole assessed the waves of hunger inside him, then turned towards the second Soul Conduit realm cultivator who was currently trapped. An icy glint flashed across his eyes as he made his way towards the Soul Conduit realm cultivator!

Chapter 693: The Demonic Eyes Explode

Having reached the Nascent Soul realm on a physical level, Wang Baole was better able to unleash the potential speed a late-stage Nascent Soul realm cultivator was capable of. The speed he had originally been capable of had already surpassed that of his peers. With the additional boost from his Thearch Armor, he was now as fast as a Soul Conduit realm cultivator. This augmented speed received an extra boost from the power unleashed by his Stellar Nascent Soul, allowing him to be even faster than an early-stage Soul Conduit realm cultivator. With the final push from the strange Demonic Eye Art, his speed was utterly shocking!

If one were merely hurrying from one place to another, such speed might not be as useful as teleportation. However, it possessed an advantage that teleportation lacked. The process of

acceleration allowed one to accumulate power. The principle for such accumulation had long been established and proven by the Federation thousands of years ago. Power was the result of strength multiplied by speed!

Wang Baole's physical strength and the boost provided by his Thearch Armor, when combined with his extraordinary speed, resulted in an incredible power that now rushed towards the second trapped Never-Ending Clan Soul Conduit realm cultivator like a meteor. It rumbled and thundered in its charge, passing through the vast hordes of souls in an instant. The second Never-Ending Clan cultivator stood shocked, his pupils contracted, as Wang Baole smashed into him with the overwhelming power of a meteor!

The Never-Ending Clan cultivator let loose a loud howl. As the overpowering threat of death loomed over him, alarm bells rang loudly in his head. He raised both of his arms abruptly, and four additional arms burst out from his sides. Six arms—two tightened their hands into fists, another two had their palms open, and the last two came together to form a series of hand seals—shifted to defend as he tried his best to stop Wang Baole.

Thunder crashed, and the skies rumbled. Energy shock waves surged and flooded the area, spirit energy rippled through space like vast waves, and masses of souls shrieked and retreated. The Never-Ending Clan cultivator spat blood out of his mouth as he too was forced back. Shock filled his face and incredulity colored his eyes as he attempted to escape.

It was too late. Wang Baole approached with the speed of a shooting star, and the demonic eyes hovering at his back opened once again. Power that rendered all living things immobile was unleashed once more. Wang Baole could hear a distinct roar inside him, urging him to kill.

The Never-Ending Clan cultivator who had been madly retreating stumbled to a standstill as soon as the demonic eye fluttered open. A dazed cloud fell over his eyes. The black eye behind Wang Baole stared. Its gaze seemed to have transformed into a physical prison that trapped the Never-Ending Clan cultivator, holding him still in the middle of space!

He could have struggled. In fact, given sufficient time, the Never-Ending Clan cultivator might have been able to free himself with ease, but he was now trapped in a fierce battle for his life. Every second was precious!

The price he paid for that moment of immobility was heavy. Wang Baole approached instantly. Without even activating his Divine Armament, he lifted his right hand and pressed his open palm on the Never-Ending Clan cultivator's head!

He unleashed Flame Snatch!

The Never-Ending Clan cultivator's body shriveled up amidst thunderous booms. It shrank and collapsed into itself, like a ball suddenly squeezed of all air!

He wasn't done yet, he also unleashed the Demonic Eye Art!

The Never-Ending Clan cultivator's soul was ripped out of his body instantly. It transformed into a sliver of white light that shot straight into the demonic eye. A third eye materialized next to Wang Baole. The

Never-Ending Clan cultivator, drained of his flesh and blood and rid of his soul, turned to dust instantly, becoming gray specks that drifted into space.

The third Never-Ending Clan cultivator, surrounded and trapped by souls, and the fourth, engaged in fierce battle with Feng Qiuran, saw the entire thing. Alarm and shock flooded them. They were beset by an incredible, indescribable feeling. The emotions that Wang Baole inspired in them at that moment were simply beyond description. The power he was displaying was simply overwhelming!

He had slain two Soul Conduit realm cultivators within a short period of time. The feat itself would have struck fear into the heart of any Soul Conduit realm cultivator. What made Wang Baole more terrifying was his appearance and the mystic techniques he was wielding.

Hovering behind Wang Baole at the moment were one huge and two smaller black eyes. They shifted and wriggled in a strange manner, as if they were ingesting something. The sight of these eyeballs made one's hair stand on end. The sensation was akin to coming upon an immense, horrible monster.

What cultivation technique is that?

Such a spell seems to have an effect on the laws of Dao themselves. He's playing with Dharmic Dao. That's something only one who's at least at the Planet realm is capable of. How is he able to wield such power?

Overwhelmed with shock and terror, the surviving Never-Ending Clan cultivators had lost all appetite for battle. Their only thought was to escape. Unfortunately, one of them was currently trapped in a fight with Feng Qiuran, while the other was surrounded by souls commanded by Wang Baole. There was no way they could escape within a short period of time. Anxiety filled their hearts.

As the two cultivators lost themselves in terror, Feng Qiuran was also trying to rein in her shock. There was no doubt that she had been continuously surprised every time Wang Baole revealed something new and extraordinary. The latest reveal had inspired true awe.

The awe she felt was not towards Wang Baole, it was towards the black eyes guarding his back. They exuded absolute evil—a malice that made everything around them pale in comparison!

Having devoured the second Never-Ending Clan cultivator, Wang Baole seemed to exhibit no distinct changes. He seemed as he always was. However, he could feel distinctly inside himself a consciousness that seemed to have formed from the Demonic Eye Art. It was growing swiftly as he killed. It seemed that the more he killed, the stronger and more powerful it became.

That's quite strange. No one mentioned this in the books that I've read in the Dark Dream, about the Demonic Eye Art developing a mind of its own. Wang Baole shook his head. He had no time to think about that now. The Demonic Eye Art developing a mind of its own posed a danger, but the Never-Ending Clan cultivators before him now were an immediate threat.

What's the point of worrying about the future if you can't even survive the present? Wang Baole narrowed his eyes, an icy flint flashing within. He took a step forward and raced straight towards the third Never-Ending Clan Soul Conduit realm cultivator, who was currently surrounded and trapped by souls.

Only mere moments had passed since Wang Baole had devoured the first Never-Ending Clan cultivator, with a brief interruption when Wang Baole thought about the potential threat presented by the Demonic Eye Art—one that no one else was privy to. He was approaching his third Never-Ending Clan cultivator now. The latter howled furiously, the terror flooding his mind threatening to cause his complete mental breakdown.

He knew that he wasn't Wang Baole's match. He watched as the black eyes that appeared to embody the power of the Dharmic Dao itself approach. He knew that he was going to end up like his fellow dead comrades—not merely destroyed in body and spirit but consumed entirely!

Compared to the latter, the former seemed infinitely comparable, especially when death was inevitable. The third Never-Ending Clan cultivator laughed madly, a crazed look bright in his eyes. Just as Wang Baole came near, he blew up. His Dao Palace host body was torn apart, revealing the true three-headed, six-armed form of an Never-Ending Clan member.

"I'm the only one who gets to decide my own death!" A self-destructive power filled his newly revealed form and activated instantly.

Just as the self-destructive force expanded outwards and began to rip his body apart... the three black eyes behind Wang Baole opened. Wang Baole's will echoed in the air and in the mind of the Soul Conduit realm cultivator, whose soul was already in the midst of disintegration.

"You're wrong."

Those were the last words the Never-Ending Clan cultivator heard. The waves of self-destructive energy came to a standstill in the next moment, as if frozen immobile by a seemingly tangible gaze. Wang Baole stepped past the Never-Ending Clan cultivator, pulling along with him the mutilated flesh and blood body as well as a partially destroyed soul.

The three black eyes behind Wang Baole fluttered shut. Quiet momentarily descended. It was then that a fourth eye appeared behind him!

A furious roar erupted in the heavens instantly.

"Wang Baole!" It was a familiar voice. It was Daoist You Ran. Wang Baole had acted swiftly, but his extermination of the three Soul Conduit realm cultivators had still been discovered by Daoist You Ran. Furious but unable to leave the battleship, Daoist You Ran nevertheless chose to attack!

His attack didn't come from himself but through... the fearsome Never-Ending Clan battleship!

His furious roar thundered in space, followed by a red beam of light, ten thousand feet wide, blasted from Mercury. It shot through space, blasting numerous black holes in its wake, and appeared next to Wang Baole and Feng Qiuran in an instant!

It was swift and powerful, its speed and power as pure as light itself and equally blinding. It exuded destruction and power that almost rivaled one at the perfected Soul Conduit realm, threatening to overpower them instantly!

The sudden arrival of the immense threat didn't cause Wang Baole to lose his calm. Without hesitation, he turned, his eyes bright with madness, and pressed his hands together in a series of hand seals. Then,

he turned his hands outwards, towards the approaching beam of light and its waves of spirit energy, which were rippling outward and burning his hair.

“Demonic eyes, explode!”

Chapter 694: Nowhere to Run!

Four eyes, one large and three smaller, hovered behind Wang Baole. Except for his original demonic eye, the other three black eyes raced away from Wang Baole and appeared before him, between him and the approaching beam of light, and opened simultaneously!

There was something different this time when the eyes opened. Besides the immobilizing effect of their gaze, an aura that exuded destruction surged from the black eyes. Before the beam of light could flood them, these black eyes blew themselves up!

Waves of spirit energy surged outwards violently, creating an immense shock wave that might not rival the singular attack from the great Never-Ending Clan battleship but still managed to scatter the concentrated beam. The beam of light diffused into a fainter, glowing blanket of light instead, its original force weakened.

The weakened attack still managed to drive Wang Baole back thousands of feet, causing his organs to churn under his Thearch Armor. However, no blood was spilled. Feng Qiuran, on the other hand, seemed worse for wear. She hadn't yet fully recovered from her earlier injuries. She recently had her soul devoured and mind taken over. Under the cast of light, blood dripped from her lips as she tried her best to retreat. The Never-Ending Clan cultivator, whom she had been engaging in battle, seized the opportunity and unleashed a spell. He melted into the light and escaped!

That wasn't the end of it. Daoist You Ran was clearly furious over his oversight. He found the casualty count unacceptable. The hate he felt towards Wang Baole intensified and had reached a point where he had to kill Wang Baole.

After all... this time, he was the one who had initiated the attack. He was the one who had picked up a boulder and dropped it on his own foot. If he hadn't decided to use Wang Baole and Feng Qiuran as bait to lure the Federation fleet to him, he wouldn't have initiated the Soul Infusion Destruction, and Wang Baole wouldn't have had the chance to exploit the Soul Infusion Destruction, causing him such great casualties and such a humiliating defeat.

“Wang Baole, I must kill you!” Daoist You Ran sat inside the great Never-Ending Clan battleship resting on Mercury, his hair loose and disheveled, and a red glow lighting his eyes. Before him was a pool of water, and within the pool, a body!

It was lined with cracks, as if pieced together from numerous parts. This was what Wang Baole had blown up earlier, the core of the great Never-Ending Clan battleship, the battle robes!

Daoist You Ran was trying to fuse with the battle robes as he repaired the battleship. There was no way he could leave. Regardless, his desire to kill Wang Baole was overwhelming. He might not be able to leave the battleship, but that didn't stop him from making other arrangements. The light beam earlier was one of them.

As Wang Baole fought against the beam of light, Daoist You Ran sent out new orders. They were received by the Dao Palace cultivators hidden in space, who were ready to ambush the Federation.

They were all waiting for their orders. They had hidden themselves and were isolated from the battlefield. They had no idea what was going on outside. Upon receiving the latest orders, alarm flashed across the faces of the leading Never-Ending Clan cultivators inside the battleships. They immediately sent their orders. The battleships revealed themselves instantly, turning towards the battlefield a short distance away from them, where Wang Baole was currently located. They spread themselves out into a fan-shaped formation and charged towards the battlefield!

In order to guarantee Wang Baole's death, after making a series of orders, Daoist You Ran gritted his teeth and pressed his right palm on the torn and tattered battle robes before him. No one knew what spell he cast, but the battle robes' shut eyes suddenly opened!

Its eyes shone with hate for Wang Baole. The glow within mirrored Daoist You Ran's eyes. It was as if it were an exact copy of Daoist You Ran!

"Wang Baole!" The battle robes spoke. It lifted the index finger of its right hand with great difficulty, then pointed it at the surface of the pool. The finger dipped in the water lightly. The battleship, which had been formed from shards of Heavenly Dao, suddenly shuddered. Black ripples of energy traveled across the entire battleship, gathering at the central, primary altar. Black light continued to gather as waves of spirit energy spread into space. The speed at which Mercury was being mined of its stellar source seemed to quicken. The battleship seemed to be gathering its strength. At the same time, a wisp of spirit energy drifted into space and locked onto Wang Baole's location!

Something shifted in Wang Baole's expression. His demonic eye and his Thearch Armor seemed not to sense anything amiss. His Stellar Nascent Soul, however, opened its eyes at that instant. A strong sense of dread and danger erupted from the Nascent Soul, flooding Wang Baole's senses.

"Something's wrong!" The heart-racing sensation that beset Wang Baole compelled him to unleash a sudden burst of speed without hesitation. He raced into the distance. Feng Qiuran hadn't sensed danger at all, but she had seen the serious look in Wang Baole's eyes. She didn't speak. Instead, she set all her doubts aside and chased after Wang Baole.

The entire region had fallen under Daoist You Ran's grasp, however. There was almost nowhere they could escape to. The battleships that had hidden themselves for ambush revealed their forms under Daoist You Ran's orders. Their fan-shaped formation allowed the battleships to be spread across a vast area. No matter where Wang Baole tried to escape, he would still run into a few battleships.

A dozen battleships soon discovered his tracks. The battleships set up array formations swiftly. This was followed by hordes of Dao Palace cultivators, as well as Never-Ending Clan members hiding in the host bodies of Dao Palace cultivators, surging out from the battleships and charging towards Wang Baole.

The Never-Ending Clan members amongst them hadn't witnessed Wang Baole's terrifying battle prowess first hand. Regardless, they had been able to figure something out on their own, based on the orders given by Daoist You Ran. The Dao Palace cultivators were blinded by their greed for battle credits. All of them wanted to kill Wang Baole in exchange for rich rewards. They weren't fools, though. Quite a

few of them had realized that something wasn't right. The enormous black eye hovering at Wang Baole's back was terrifying enough to give anyone the creeps.

That was why... they appeared to approach steadily, but in reality, no one wanted to be the first to die on the battlefield. What they planned to do was to hold Wang Baole back and keep him under control. It seemed like a relatively safe method that would earn them battle credits. It was, indeed, a good strategy. Unfortunately, it wasn't going to work on Wang Baole.

Wang Baole was beset with anxiety. A sense of danger crept steadily inward, eating at his soul. The murderous look in his eyes intensified. His gut was screaming at him. If he were to be slowed down here and now, he was going to die. His fate would be sealed!

Maybe the only way out isn't to escape, but to... kill them all! Wang Baole was a decisive character. Once the thought entered his head, he immediately narrowed his eyes and shifted his feet. In the face of the approaching battleships, their brightly flaring array formations, and armies of flying cultivators, Wang Baole didn't run away. Instead, he picked up his pace and charged towards them!

Thearch Armor!

Wang Baole roared inwardly. The armor on his body shifted. Numerous red meridians burst out and danced around his body, transforming Wang Baole into a fearsome-looking beast!

He ignored the beams of light emitted by the battleships' array formations, allowing them to race towards him and land around him. They stirred violent ripples of spirit energy around him, but the shock waves were all stopped by his red meridians. The beams of light cut down his meridians but couldn't touch him, and where the meridians were destroyed, more meridians emerged to take their place!

Wang Baole looked like a war chariot—invincible, infallible, and powerful beyond measure!

Demonic eye!

Red meridians continued to be blasted into bits, to turn to dust, to reform and resurrect. Behind Wang Baole, the black demonic eye fluttered but didn't open. The mind behind the eyelid seemed to shiver with excitement. It sent thoughts of murder and carnage into Wang Baole's mind. Its urge to kill was so powerful that it seemed to distort the fabric of space around the black eye.

Feng Qiuran trembled. Wang Baole seemed like a complete stranger at that moment. More terrified were the Dao Palace and Never-Ending Clan cultivators, who had flown out from the battleships and been intent on stopping her and Wang Baole from escaping.

"What is that?"

"He's Wang Baole? That's impossible!"

"There's something not right with him!" Shocked and alarmed, the Dao Palace cultivators attempted to retreat but were a step too late. As Wang Baole rushed at them, the demonic eye behind him opened without warning!

A pitch-black eye and its pitch-black pupil. It gave one a bizarre feeling. It was as if... they were staring into an actual eye!

One that exuded malice, madness, and a lust for blood. One whose gaze seemed almost tangible, that caught and rendered all living things immobile!

A shiver rippled through the starlit space. The cultivators stood dazed as Wang Baole charged into their midst!

Concealed underneath the Thearch Armor, Wang Baole's lips dripped with blood. He had overreached and tried to cast his control over too many cultivators. It had resulted in a backlash from the demonic eye.

Let the backlash come. I need more demonic eyes to counter the approaching threat! Murder flashed across Wang Baole's eyes as he attacked!

Chapter 695: Spirit Immortal Hand!

Since he had started his journey of cultivation, Wang Baole had survived numerous encounters with death. He had crossed paths with the giant tree, escaped with his life during the lunar incident, survived a short stay inside the dark artifact on Mars, and, of course, there was his time on the ancient sword. Those incidents might have seemed like smooth sailing, but in reality, a single misstep would have left him dead. He would be bones and ashes now.

The massacre had begun from the time of the first cruiser's attack. At present, he could no longer remember how many cultivators, who were dying to meet their end, he had cut down.

Other cultivators doing the same might gradually grow cold, emotionally speaking. Wang Baole wasn't like others. Deep in his bones was a vicious, harsh streak that made him merciless towards himself. Such mercilessness allowed him to show no mercy towards the enemy as well. However, whether intentionally or unintentionally, his chubby appearance and the habits he had cultivated since he was a child had given him the appearance of someone who was cheerful and happy-go-lucky.

This was the wolf's skin that Wang Baole had learned to wear since he was a child!

This facade had been thinned considerably under the Demonic Eye Art's influence. Having flung aside his happy-go-lucky and earnest appearance, Wang Baole's true character was now fully exposed.

A massacre was unleashed instantly. With cultivation at the late-stage Nascent Soul realm, the resilience of the Flame Snatch Thearch Armor, the augmented power from the Stellar Nascent Soul, and the added strange power of the Demonic Eye Art, the result was a demonic, god-like entity that was... Wang Baole!

Thunderous booms transformed into waves of spirit energy that rippled across the battlefield. The cultivators who were trapped by the demonic eye's gaze suffered a moment of immobility and paid for that with their lives!

The countless crimson meridians that emerged from Wang Baole's Thearch Armor danced like red snakes in the air, skewering the living around him as he charged forward. His speed ensured that a brief bump from him would result in the other party being smashed into a pulp and mowed down instantly.

The Flame Snatch continued its mad absorption. Under its frenzied draining, the Thearch Armor grew more fearsome by the moment. White strands of bone increased in startling numbers and thickened

into bones that protruded from the armor and turned into spikes. As the massacre continued, excitement, delight, and a lust for more seemed to emerge from the consciousness resting within the Demonic Eye Art.

It devoured one soul after another greedily, transforming each devoured soul into another black eye hovering at Wang Baole's back. Even when the immobilizing effect of the demonic eye passed and the surrounding cultivators regained control of themselves, there was still no escape. What awaited them was an inevitable death!

Truly... Wang Baole had now become the source of all terror, shock, and despair, amongst other equally horrid emotions. Such devastating feelings spread across the battlefield like wildfire, casting a looming shadow over everyone. They lost all ability to organize themselves into some semblance of an effective force and mount a joint attack. This was, in fact, one of the reasons Wang Baole had chosen to initiate an attack!

He needed the shock and the deaths. He knew how the Dao Palace cultivators he faced thought and acted. He knew that any hesitation on his part would flame their lust for battle. What awaited him then would be the joint attack of a ten-thousand strong force. He might have the ability to kill a Soul Conduit realm cultivator with ease, but he knew his own limits. On his own, he wouldn't be a match for such a combined, organized attack!

Ants might be small, but with enough of them, they could terrorize the king of all beasts!

Instilling fear and shock was of utmost importance at this moment. The black eyes conjured by the Demonic Eye Art might be able to exert an influence over the masses every time they opened and shut, but there was still a limit to that influence. As the backlash on him increased, the effect on the enemy decreased.

That gave the Dao Palace cultivators around him temporary respite. As the Never-Ending Clan cultivators continued to bark out orders and incite the Dao Palace cultivators with battle credits, the masses began to organize themselves amidst their battle frenzy and lust.

Before some semblance of an organized force could emerge, Wang Baole greeted them with a silently chanted... scripture!

The power of the scripture took the Demonic Eye Art's place, descending from above and striking terror into the Dao Palace cultivators' hearts. Another round of massacre unfolded!

Wang Baole had spiraled into a kind of madness. Being locked in by the troops from Mercury had sent chills deep into his bones. The sense of danger that he was in now made him feel cold. He felt as if his life was not his own.

Luckily, as he continued to cut down his enemies, and as the demonic eyes hovering at his back grew in numbers, this chilly sense of death lightened, fading slightly with every additional demonic eye.

Not enough, it's still not enough! Wang Baole's eyes were red. He seemed to have forgotten where he was. The strong, looming sense of danger forced him to seek warmth instinctively, one that would drive the cold away indefinitely. In his mind, everyone standing before him were targets!

Kill!

Wang Baole took a step forward, appearing next to a Never-Ending Clan cultivator. The latter, shocked, tried to withdraw and shift away. Wang Baole didn't even spare him a glance. He rushed into the Never-Ending Clan cultivator. With a loud slam, the Never-Ending Clan cultivator was flung into the distance. Like an ordinary human colliding with an airplane, his bones were crushed instantly and his spirit destroyed!

Kill!

Wang Baole didn't stop. He leaped and gritted his teeth as the force of hundreds of Dharmic treasures pummeled into him from all directions. The Thearch Armor trembled, then the Divine Armament on his right arm unleashed a blinding light as it slashed forward. A huge, glowing sphere of lightning appeared then exploded, transforming into a net that cast itself across ten thousand feet and burned everything trapped under it!

The deaths reaped from such methods were many, but the energy it consumed was equally significant. Even with the Flame Snatch rapidly absorbing new energy, it was hardly sustainable in the long run. There were simply too many Dao Palace cultivators!

The difficulty was intensified by the Never-Ending Clan members in the Dao Palace cultivators' midst. Their pointed attacks aimed at overpowering him, as well as Daoist You Ran's orders, ensured that the Dao Palace cultivators continued to hold their ground firmly on the battlefield. They were waiting for Wang Baole to show a moment of weakness!

They were like a coiled spring pressed into itself under growing pressure. As soon as Wang Baole showed a moment of weakness, they would unleash the pent-up energy within them. Of course, coils had their limits as well. If the stress became too great, there wouldn't be a window of opportunity for them to unleash their power. In fact, they might even be crushed instantly!

Fifteen minutes passed in the roar of violence. The coil finally... shattered!

The battlefield was in utter chaos. The cultivators could no longer take it. There were signs of them caving. No one knew who the first one to retreat with horror on his face was, but others followed. The battlefield resembled a retreating tide as cultivators withdrew and the army showed signs of internal collapse.

"I don't want the battle credits anymore. This guy's not human!"

"I still have the Great Dao ahead of me and many other things I want to accomplish. I'm not going to be the pebble destined to be crushed under some other person's boot!"

The breakdown of the army was a blow to the troops that followed after, and chaos descended on the battlefield. The sight sent shivers down Feng Qiuran's spine. She stared at Wang Baole, then at the Dao Palace cultivators who surrounded them. Her heart brimmed with indescribable emotions. In the end, she could only sigh.

As the cultivators scattered, Wang Baole emerged from the center of the battlefield, which was a sea of corpses and rivers of blood. The crimson Thearch Armor remained a terrifying sight to behold. More terrifying was what lay behind him. Adrift in space were tens of thousands of black eyes!

They were all closed, shifting and spasming while distorting the surrounding fabric of space. They hovered behind Wang Baole as he stood atop and was surrounded by countless corpses. It was as if a demon god had descended upon them all!

That's barely enough. It's still not enough! Wang Baole was heaving, mentally exhausted and physically weakened, hardly able to stand on his own two feet. The continuous energy flowing from his Thearch Armor and the will of the Demonic Eye Art, however, forced him to straddle the space between utter exhaustion and heightened excitement. His eyes reddened, and he shifted his feet, ready to kill again.

It was then that, suddenly, a strange sound emitted from Mercury and resonated in space. The great Never-Ending Clan battleship on Mercury, and the black lightning bolts that had gathered, suddenly unleashed their power!

The countless black lightning bolts were no longer beams of light ten thousand feet wide. They expanded to a hundred thousand feet in width. What had been beams of light gathered and materialized into a gigantic black hand formed from lightning!

The gigantic hand swept across the cosmos, bringing along with it power that surpassed that of a Soul Conduit realm cultivator. It was a terrifying power that seemed to rival that of a Spirit Immortal realm cultivator. It appeared on the battlefield suddenly and surged towards Wang Baole in a sudden grab!

The gigantic hand might seem insignificant when compared to the vastness of space. However, it was as vast as the heavens when placed on the battlefield. It appeared ready to gather Wang Baole and the surrounding stars, crush them in its fist, and bury them alive!

Chapter 696: Escape from Danger!

Wang Baole might be able to hold his own against a Soul Conduit realm cultivator at the early- and mid-stages after a series of boosts from his artifacts and mystic arts, but when it came to a Soul Conduit realm cultivator with a mastery over late-stage Soul Conduit realm level mystic techniques, the challenges he would face in battle would be tremendous. A single misstep would result in grievous injury, much like his past fight against Daoist You Ran.

With his late-stage Nascent Soul realm cultivation, even after multiple augmentations from his various artifacts and techniques, the power he could display would only reach the late-stage Soul Conduit realm. Besides, there were limits to what his Thearch Armor was capable of. His Stellar Nascent Soul was bound by even more rules, and his Demonic Eye Art had its own set of dangers. The price he had to pay for such boosts were considerable.

There were ways for him to become even more powerful with his current level of cultivation. He could either unleash the power of his scabbard, or he could rely on the unique feature of his Stellar Nascent Soul and find a planet that could provide him an endless and increasing source of power.

The former was an impossible feat for him currently. As for the latter, there was no planet in sight.

The current attack from the Never-Ending Clan battleship was of a power that surpassed that of a late-stage Soul Conduit realm cultivator. Instead, it was the power of a perfected Soul Conduit realm

cultivator and matched the power of a cultivator at the true Spirit Immortal realm. The extent of that power made Wang Baole tremble.

Every muscle and nerve in his body was screaming. They were telling Wang Baole that he had to escape, that he had to run immediately. All of his senses were screaming danger at him. The alarm was like waves of danger rushing at him, a tsunami that threatened to pull him under.

I would lose psychologically if I retreat. That would be the end of me! Madness colored Wang Baole's eyes. He stared unblinkingly at the approaching gigantic black hand, a massive form that blocked a great part of space, and sent a quick voice transmission to Feng Qiuran, who was on her way to help him. Feng Qiuran paused in her tracks when she heard what he had to say. It was then that the gigantic black hand swooped at him with its overpowering aura and made a grab for him.

Its aura rushed at him before the physical hand arrived. It seemed to contain the power to erode and burn everything away. Wang Baole's robes withered away, and the Thearch Armor showed signs of dissolution.

Wang Baole stood his ground against the waves of spirit energy rushing at him. His eyes reddened as his hands came together in a flurry of hand seals then flung outwards at the approaching gigantic hand.

"Demonic eyes, explode!"

The howl that emerged from Wang Baole was tinged with grim determination, madness, as well as brutality. Tens of thousands of black eyes filling the heavens behind him, alongside his own demonic eye, went from shut to open in an instant!

The concrete gaze that shone from these thousands of eyes rippled across the cosmos, holding the approaching gigantic black hand in a momentary grip!

Unfortunately, the levels of cultivation separating Wang Baole and Daoist You Ran were too many. The gigantic black hand wrestled itself free from the Medusa-like gaze instantly and continued its approach!

The collective attack was not without its effects. By the time that the gigantic hand had freed itself, the tens of thousands of black eyes behind Wang Baole had disappeared and reappeared before him. They blew up simultaneously, the destruction transforming into a black hurricane that was the embodiment of destruction and evil. It howled and collided into the gigantic black hand.

The thunderous howl that resonated in space seemed to overwhelm the cosmic laws themselves as its echoes traveled outward, farther into space. The demonic eyes smashed into the gigantic hand, exploded, and created shock waves that collided with the gigantic hand repeatedly. The gigantic black hand was flooded with repeated waves of spirit energy. It shuddered under the endless attacks, growing more indistinct with each blow.

The waves of spirit energy that resulted from their collision smashed into the Dao Palace cultivators in the vicinity. Many had barely enjoyed a moment of delight at the black hand's appearance before they were swept away from the residual shock waves in the next instant, their bodies torn apart and their spirits crushed.

Wang Baole cared nothing for their deaths, however. His hands flew into a series of hand seals as he wielded the power of his Thearch Armor and allowed it to fuel the Flame Snatch without stopping. He

had observed the extraordinary power displayed by his demonic eyes. Regardless, there weren't enough of them. They continued to explode and flood the gigantic hand with the destructive force of their explosions. The gigantic hand's form gradually grew indistinct. Its size had shrunk. Regardless, its core remained.

When the last of the demonic eyes finally disappeared, the gigantic black hand—now half its original size—continued its charge towards Wang Baole, its palm outstretched!

It was swift and exuded the murderous intent of Daoist You Ran. It approached and was about to make a grab for Wang Baole. It was then that the madness in Wang Baole's eyes brightened. His hair whipped in the stillness of space as Wang Baole howled like a demonic god and unleashed the full power of the Thearch Armor!

An incredible, overwhelming force erupted from Wang Baole's person, from his mass of meridians and his Thearch Armor, and from his Divine Armament arm, which was raised and sweeping towards the gigantic black hand in a violent slash.

As the blade fell, the Stellar Nascent Soul inside Wang Baole's body opened its eyes. Starlight glittered within, and a star appeared to also be spinning inside the Stellar Nascent Soul. It unleashed its full power, becoming a relentless engine that was giving its all to fuel Wang Baole in this battle!

The gigantic black hand and Wang Baole clashed in a cacophony of thunderous booms. The black hand stilled, momentarily held back by Wang Baole. Its five fingers continued to close in though, trapping Wang Baole within its palm that abruptly tightened into a fist...

It was an incomplete fist. Wang Baole stood in the center like a stubborn rock. No matter how much force the gigantic hand exerted, it couldn't crush him.

The slash from Wang Baole's Divine Armament had landed true, the damage it created further weakening the gigantic hand. The latter's form gradually blurred, growing increasingly indistinct. Regardless, it would take some time before the Divine Armament could fully pierce through the palm.

It seemed like a stalemate had been reached. Wang Baole's red face said otherwise. The sensation of being grabbed by the gigantic hand had been akin to being slammed into by a speeding cruiser. His organs were spasming, and there was a loud buzzing in his ears that was drowning out everything else.

The power that the gigantic hand was exerting on him seemed capable of crushing everything. His life wasn't going to be snuffed out like a flame. He was going to be crushed to bits and then buried alive!

His Thearch Armor was creaking under the gigantic hand's pressure. It seemed on the verge of giving out. The stores of blood and flesh that had been accumulated by the Flame Snatch were being channeled to the armor's continuous repair. Regardless, cracks continued to appear, lining the armor. His Stellar Nascent Soul was trembling, as if forced to its limits.

The fight wasn't going to boil down to strength or power, it was going to boil down to resilience. The person to outlast the other would emerge the winner!

As the two continued their fight to the death, Feng Qiuran stood a distance away. Her face was pale, and anxiety shone brightly in her eyes. She didn't join the battle immediately but was instead biding her time and awaiting the right opportunity. She knew that if she were to join the fight now, whatever aid she

could provide Wang Baole against the gigantic black hand would be minimal. She knew what she had to do. If Wang Baole won the fight, she would protect him as both of them escaped the battlefield. If he lost, she was to rescue him in the nick of time!

That was the contingency plan that Wang Baole had shared during his voice transmission!

Moments trickled by. The gigantic black hand continued to tighten itself into a fist. It seemed to be gradually gaining the upper hand. Wang Baole appeared to be losing the fight against the increasing pressure. The Thearch Armor began to creak loudly. The surrounding Dao Palace cultivators grew alert and tense, whereas Feng Qiuran was wrecked by anxiety. She could no longer wait by the sidelines. She was prepared to rush forward and help Wang Baole. To hell with the consequences.

Then, something that resembled the sound of the universe ripping itself apart came screaming from distant space. It materialized into countless waves of energy that rippled outward. In an instant, a vast fleet of Federation battleships appeared in the wake of the energy ripples. They had made use of the Solar System Array Formation, teleporting through the abyss, leaping through space, and arriving at the battlefield!

Layers of array formations flared up and gathered upon their landing. The light of spells swept outwards like a furious flood and rained down on the battlefield like a relentless storm. Alarm flashed across the Dao Palace cultivators' faces as they hurriedly evaded the attacks and mounted a hasty defense. A voice, augmented spiritually, boomed from within the Federation battleships and thundered across space.

"Do not fear, Qiuran. I'm here to save you!"

More than a hundred large spheres of light flared up inside the Federation battleships as soon as Li Xingwen's voice rang out. Inside each sphere of light was a strange crystalline stone that emanated incredible power!

Another ten spheres of red light flared into being, capturing the attention of everyone on the battlefield!

These stones... were the Federation's trump card—the Anti-Spirit Bomb. The blue-colored bombs rivaled a Nascent Soul realm cultivator's power, while the red-colored bombs were a recent upgrade. Due to certain restrictions, the latter couldn't be manufactured on a large scale. Regardless, any of the second-generation Anti-Spirit Bombs was more powerful than a Nascent Soul realm cultivator. Its power could match a Soul Conduit realm cultivator!

There were fewer of these second-generation Anti-Spirit Bombs. Only those with the highest access rights could deploy them. Li Xingwen had brought nearly half of all existing second-generation bombs with him. He had seen the danger Wang Baole had been in and deployed all of them without hesitation.

The hundred spheres of light rushed towards the gigantic black hand instantly, approaching and blasting the latter with relentless force!

The gigantic black hand was a force to be reckoned with. Regardless, it had been weakened earlier by Wang Baole's demonic eyes and his subsequent attacks at full force. It was to the point where its materialized form was blurring and growing indistinct. Trapped in a corner, it was unable to avoid the Anti-Spirit Bombs. It suffered a frontal assault from the hundred bombs. The blue-colored bombs were

still manageable, but the combined explosion of the red-colored bombs managed to reach the hand's core!

Feng Qiuran's eyes flashed as she spotted an opportunity to attack. She unleashed her artifacts and her mystic techniques relentlessly. The attacks from the outside helped ease the pressure on Wang Baole. The tide gradually turned to his favor.

"Now!" An exhausted Wang Baole roared. The near-withered Stellar Nascent Soul inside him suddenly opened its eyes. It released the last of its energy, which darted into Wang Baole's Divine Armament. Wang Baole was transformed into a shooting star, the Divine Armament the tip of his blade as he surged forward in a sudden charge!

He rushed forward with the force of floodwater bursting a dam open. The gigantic black hand could no longer hold its form. It shuddered, then began to break apart. Wang Baole's Divine Armament pierced clean through the back of the hand, resulting in the hand's explosion!

Violent shock waves surged outwards with the force of a tsunami. Wang Baole darted out from the disintegrating black hand, freed at last!

Chapter 697: Drawing the Snake out from Its Hole!

Wang Baole could no longer hold back the full extent of his injuries. As soon as he broke free from the gigantic black hand, his injuries became fully exposed. He spat out a mouthful of blood. More blood began to trickle out from the gaps in his Thearch Armor, which drifted into space and formed streams of blood. The Thearch Armor could no longer maintain its form as well. It shattered and transformed into mutilated strands of meridians that retreated into Wang Baole's body.

He hadn't initiated the Thearch Collapse, which meant that even though the armor was severely damaged, he could still restore it to full functionality by nourishing it with sufficient Spirit Qi. However, the terrible state it was in was a testament to the difficult battle Wang Baole had just survived.

Wang Baole had just lost the protection of his Thearch Armor. His vision began to blur after he had broken free. He was at the end of his rope and had expended all his energy. However... the threat hadn't been completely eliminated despite him having wrestled himself free.

As soon as he had broken free of the collapsing gigantic black hand, a cloud of mist had materialized into a seal inside the disintegrating hand and flown out. It charged towards Wang Baole, ready to imprint itself on the latter.

It exuded the aura of all things dead and dying, the power to end all living creatures and erode away life itself!

Should it reach Wang Baole, with his current weakened state, there was no way he was going to survive the seal!

Wang Baole was in no position to evade the attack. His Thearch Armor had vanished, and his demonic eye's form had grown blurry with weakness. It eventually transformed into a mark inked into Wang Baole's forehead, like a third eye. The only hope Wang Baole had against the approaching seal was his

final words to Feng Qiuran over his voice transmission. If any accident had befallen Feng Qiuran over the course of his battle, he could only rely on his scabbard to unleash its power and save him from death.

Feng Qiuran didn't disappoint Wang Baole. She had been watching the battle closely. As soon as Wang Baole had dashed out, she rushed towards him. She appeared next to him in an instant, grabbed him, and spun around. Then, her left hand formed a series of hand seals and raised into the air. Her Soul Conduit realm cultivation erupted. She risked backlash and injuring herself again as she pressed her left palm into the air, towards the approaching seal.

Her face paled instantly. A white bottle materialized before her palm and collided with the seal.

The bottle shattered amidst a thunderous boom. The black seal's approach was halted by its explosion. It finally lost the power to pursue Wang Baole, giving Feng Qiuran sufficient time to escape. She turned and took Wang Baole with her, transforming into an arc of rainbow that rushed away from the battlefield. With the coordinated aid provided by Li Xingwen and the Federation fleet, she finally approached and landed on one of the Federation battleships.

Li Xingwen rushed over, anxiety clear on his face, as soon as they landed. He hadn't had time to take a look at Feng Qiuran, who was staggering and still suffering a backlash from her injuries. Instead, he took Wang Baole from Feng Qiuran's arms. Staring at the pale-faced Wang Baole, who was weakened to the point where he couldn't even open his eyes, and sensing the drained state he was in—like a candle on its last inch of wax—Li Xingwen's heart stuttered painfully.

"You little rascal..."

"Grandmaster..." A dazed Wang Baole seemed to have heard Li Xingwen's voice, so he struggled to open his eyes. He saw Li Xingwen, then noticed Feng Qiuran, who was standing beside Li Xingwen. His eyes seemed to clear slightly, and a grin appeared on his face.

"Your disciple did as he was told. I brought the grandmatron back safely..." He didn't finish speaking the words he wanted to say. Wang Baole couldn't stay awake any longer. After seeing familiar faces from the Federation, his heart finally eased into long-awaited relief. His head tilted to one side as he passed out.

Li Xingwen sighed secretly at the thought of Wang Baole still trying to gain Feng Qiuran's favor when he was in such a terrible state. He lifted his head and looked at Feng Qiuran. Her face was pale. She seemed to feel the same sudden sense of relief. She spat out a mouthful of blood that she had been holding in, then sat down immediately. Unable to move any further, she began her healing process.

Li Xingwen stared at Feng Qiuran and Wang Baole, then lifted his head and looked at the stars beyond. He gazed at the Dao Palace fleet and the Dao Palace cultivators, clearly thrown off course and into chaos after the Anti-Spirit Bombs had blown the gigantic black hand apart. He took a deep breath. They were too near Mercury. The mission objective was to rescue Wang Baole and Feng Qiuran, and the objective had been achieved. There was no need to start another incident. He gritted his teeth and stopped himself from acting on impulse, which was crying for him to turn the battleship around and pursue the enemy. Instead, he barked out an order to retreat.

As the fleet retreated, Li Xingwen sent orders for the deployment of another hundred Anti-Spirit Bombs. They hovered in space, threatening to blow up at any second. The Dao Palace cultivators stared at those glowing spheres, their pupils contracting in alarm. Their hesitation intensified.

Somewhere on Mercury, Daoist You Ran had fallen silent. Sending out the gigantic hand had consumed a great portion of his energy. Replicating the attack would affect the overall recovery of the Death Dao Battleship. The Anti-Spirit Bombs had left an impact as well. He narrowed his eyes. After assessing the situation, he clamped down on his murderous thoughts and didn't pursue the fleeing Federation fleet.

The Federation fleet retreated slowly, making use of the vortexes conjured by the Solar System Array Formation to leap through space. The battlefield descended into a deathly silence with their departure. A long while passed. Then, the Dao Palace fleet and their cultivators finally dispersed soundlessly.

Having made a safe retreat, Li Xingwen immediately sent down orders for a defense array formation to be temporarily set up around Feng Qiuran as she continued her healing. He also made arrangements for a trustworthy cultivator to guard her. He personally brought Wang Baole to the secret chamber, where he made full use of the Solar System Array Formation and the Federation's vast resources to set up a conducive environment that would optimize Wang Baole's recovery.

Li Xingwen finally released a sigh of relief when he was assured that Wang Baole had only passed out and wasn't in critical condition. He extended his spiritual senses and stood guard over the two injured cultivators.

Time passed steadily. The Federation fleet traversed vast regions of space as it headed for Venus. Several hours into the journey, Wang Baole's eyes finally fluttered open.

A bone-deep exhaustion and multiple sharp pains all over his body made Wang Baole grind his teeth. He struggled to sit, then panted heavily as he surveyed his surroundings. He was in a secret chamber and could sense rich Spirit Qi flooding the room. His memories of the recent battle returned to him. His spiritual senses extended outwards as he scanned the area without anyone's discovery. He saw everything that was going on in the battleship, including Feng Qiuran, who was deep in healing, and Li Xingwen, who was outside watching over them.

Wang Baole was finally able to release a true sigh of relief.

It seems like I didn't die. I even managed to get back to the Federation safely. Wang Baole rubbed his tummy, which had lost all former softness. As his heart eased into a sense of relief, he pulled out a bag of snacks from his storage bracelet without thinking and began munching loudly. He began to inspect his injuries.

Seems quite serious. The damage to the Thearch Armor's quite significant too. Nothing to be worried about though. Ten bottles of spirit liquid... hmm, maybe twenty bottles. That should be enough for me to recover fully.

Wang Baole continued snacking. He didn't begin healing immediately. Instead, he did some calculations, then pulled out a bottle of Ice Spirit Water and finished the entire bottle. After that, he narrowed his eyes and lifted his hand to touch the image of the black eye inked on to his forehead. Memories of the earlier battle, which had nearly got him killed, flashed across his mind.

The power of the Demonic Eye Art seems more terrifying than I imagined it to be. The combined force of ten thousand demonic eyes is enough to destroy half a gigantic black hand and halve its power. Wang Baole didn't immediately extend his senses towards the imprint on his forehead. An imperceptible light flickered in his eyes. He placed his snacks to one side, then pulled out a bottle filled with spirit liquid from his storage bracelet. He placed it under his nose and took a deep sniff.

The bottle shuddered. The spirit liquid inside the bottle transformed into a thick spirit mist instantly, entering Wang Baole through his nose, mouth, eyes, and ears. The mist shook inside Wang Baole's body, then expanded and filled his entire body. It began healing his injuries.

The bottle was soon depleted. Wang Baole pulled out a second, then a third bottle. Thirty minutes later, more than thirty emptied bottles had accumulated next to Wang Baole. It was then that he opened his eyes. They still showed signs of exhaustion, but the injuries that had lined his body had recovered fully.

His Thearch Armor had also been restored to its full functionality after being nourished by the spirit liquid, its damaged parts repaired completely. The store of energy accumulated by the Flame Snatch had to be replenished by draining more blood and flesh though, as Wang Baole didn't waste his spirit liquid on the Flame Snatch.

Having accomplished the series of restorative actions, Wang Baole took a deep breath and prepared to rest his eyes and mind. His tired spirit required rest. Based on his calculations, when he next woke up, the battleship should be just about to land on Venus.

He hadn't seen Zhao Yameng or any other familiar faces on the battleship. However, when he had last scanned the battleship, he had caught snippets of information from casually chatting cultivators. That had given him a greater understanding of the current situation. He had also found out that Zhao Yameng and the others had returned to the Federation safely. They hadn't joined the current mission because they had been assigned other missions.

They're going to find out that I've suddenly become so powerful. That's going to inspire some strong feelings of adoration. I have to think about how I'm going to present my humble, modest self.

Brimming with anticipation, Wang Baole's eyes slowly fluttered shut. Tension seemed to ease from his body. However, an icy light continued to dwell somewhere deep inside him... As soon as his eyes shut, the imprint of the demonic eye inked on his forehead suddenly shifted. It seemed to have suddenly come alive. The black, shut eye seemed to possess its own mind. It... opened!

The consciousness dwelling within erupted instantly. Wang Baole's current state appeared to be its best chance to seize control!

Chapter 698: Who's the Devil!

Hmm? It seems like another idiot to me. One that got hooked so easily. Wang Baole's eyelids twitched. He opened his eyes, revealing an icy glimmer deep within. His lips twitched upwards into a cold smile.

Wang Baole had multiple ways to soothe his exhausted mind. He was, after all, a master of Dharmic Armaments. Refining Dharmic Armaments required great mental strength and focus. He might not be able to fully utilize the fruit he had obtained from the Hyacinthus Tree on the ancient sword or his many

other mystic techniques in battle, but using them to speed up the recovery of his mind and spirit outside battle was still something within his means.

He hadn't done so earlier and had concentrated purely on healing his physical body because he had wanted to test the consciousness that he had discovered hidden within the Demonic Eye Art!

He hadn't had time to examine it earlier during the chaos of battle and their escape. That didn't mean that he didn't care. He had been keeping a close eye on it all along.

That was why he had left the healing of his exhausted mind to last and why he had pretended to relax. He wanted to know if this consciousness would show any signs of movement or change. Upon sensing its sudden eruption, Wang Baole pulled out the dried Hyacinthus Tree fruit with a wave of his hand, as well as a few pills that he swallowed immediately. With his other hand, he formed a series of hand seals and initiated a few tricks he remembered. They helped soothe his mental exhaustion and stabilize his mind, transforming it into a mental stronghold.

Then, with bright, curious eyes, he extended his senses deep into himself, towards the frenzied consciousness of the Demonic Eye Art that was unleashing mad spikes of power!

The mode of its appearance seems to indicate that it's a spiritual companion of sorts. It didn't surface during my fight with the gigantic black hand. That means this consciousness possesses a certain degree of intelligence. It knew that if I were endangered due to its sudden interference, it would also face the risk of destruction.

"But a simple bait managed to lure it out. It seems like it's not that smart, after all. Maybe it relies on pure instinct?" Wang Baole muttered to himself. The look in his eyes sharpened, and a black, mist-like entity began to cloud the sharpness in his eyes, threatening to color his eyes fully black.

Or maybe it only has one trick up its sleeve, which is to cloud my mind with blood lust and a hunger for death during battle? Wang Baole was slightly disappointed. He dissected the agitation that was rising within him currently, and the thoughts of murder that had started to surface in his mind. The sensation was akin to a drug addict suffering a relapse. If he didn't obey those instincts to kill, those impulses would consume him.

Is that all it's got? What a waste of my efforts. Wang Baole shook his head. Black mist clouded his eyes, giving him an almost supernatural appearance. But he was extremely clear-headed. His mind seemed separated from his body, his observations neutral and devoid of emotion.

He observed for a while longer, realized that this consciousness that had risen from the Demonic Eye Art had no other tricks up its sleeve, and then lost interest completely. He was about to silence it when this companion consciousness appeared to be dissatisfied with only spreading murderous thoughts in Wang Baole's head. It began to reach for his Nascent Soul.

That was a pleasant surprise for Wang Baole. He paused in the middle of his hand seals and continued his observation.

The companion consciousness was like thin black strands that gathered inside Wang Baole's body, unaware that he was awake and watching. It crept further inward, like a serpent, as it headed for his Nascent Soul.

So its target is the Nascent Soul? Or maybe after it extends to the Nascent Soul, it's going to infect or devour my spirit, which is housed inside the Nascent Soul? The look on Wang Baole's face turned serious when he realized where the consciousness was headed. When a cultivator achieved the Nascent Soul realm, his spirit would transform into a Divine Soul that would then be housed within his Nascent Soul. Once he reached the Soul Conduit realm, the Divine Soul would transform into a God Soul!

The Divine Soul held incredible importance to a Nascent Soul realm cultivator and required the latter's careful protection. Wang Baole's eyes flashed as he studied his Nascent Soul. Within hid his scabbard as well as the Dark Fire. The latter had formed when he had become a Dark Child and was proof that he was from the Dark Sect. Within the Dark Fire was his Divine Soul.

Just to be safe... Wang Baole quietly activated the Dark Art and released a sliver of dark energy through the Dark Fire housed inside his Nascent Soul. He intended to direct the dark energy towards the consciousness and test the latter's strength.

It was but a mere wisp of dark energy. As soon as it appeared, the black strands of consciousness that had been trying to approach Wang Baole's Nascent Soul shuddered violently. It was as if it had suddenly discovered the presence of a terrifying entity. It shook and cowered, appearing on the verge of disintegration.

"Hmm?" Wang Baole received a fright. He hurriedly weakened the wisp of dark energy to a tenth of its original power. That saved the Demonic Eye Art's consciousness from annihilation and gave it a fighting chance as it clashed with the dark energy.

Wang Baole released a breath of relief at the sight of the fight. He continued observing, at first curiously, then with an increasingly odd expression on his face. The fight between the two entities had grown intense. The consciousness seemed to have used its full force in order to hold its own against Wang Baole's dark energy. Then, having realized the tenacity of its current host, it slowed down its encroachment of Wang Baole's Nascent Soul, retreating rapidly and hiding. It even silenced its murderous desires.

"That's amazing!" Wang Baole coughed. There was no way he was going to admit that he was blowing things out of proportion.

He started consoling himself as he muttered with a serious look on his face, "It seems to harbor some form of strong will, a kind of madness. It's as if it were emperor of this heaven and earth. It possesses a degree of intelligence and resembles a virus, or at least, a kind of possession that's been recorded in the Dao Palace archives!"

Wang Baole thought long and hard about what he had just seen. It was the embodiment of the devil. Wang Baole found the term extremely appropriate.

What a terrifying devil. To think that it's able to stand its ground against a tiny sliver of my dark energy, one that's been weakened ten times, and hold its own. Not a simple feat at all! Wang Baole rubbed his chin. He gazed inward, at his Nascent Soul, and tried to put himself in the shoes of this terrifying devil. He considered how difficult it must be to infect his soul.

Hmm, if I were that devil, I'd have to first defend myself against the power of the Dark Art. I'd start from one-thousandth of its full power, then gradually advance to being able to hold my own against the full

power of the Dark Art. Then, I'd be able to approach the Nascent Soul... I'd be able to see a Stellar Nascent Soul, which is unique and completely different from all other Nascent Souls. At that point, I'd have to work very hard to become more powerful, trying again and again to infiltrate the Stellar Nascent Soul. If I was unlucky, I might cross paths with a strange scabbard. Then, that would likely be the end of me...

Of course, maybe luck would be on my side. I'd manage to avoid the scabbard and enter the Nascent Soul. I could relax then and ready myself for a sumptuous meal. When I'm just about to possess and infect the soul, I would see a ball of fire. The Dark Fire. The spirit energy that it exudes is the exact same as the creature that I'd first encountered while outside the Nascent Soul!

Then... I'd have to work very, very hard, grit my teeth, and fight the Dark Fire. When I finally see the host's soul, I would realize that it possesses the unique traits of a Dark Child and power many times stronger than that of a Dark Fire...

So, I'd have to work like mad. If luck was on my side, I'd overcome the Dark Child. Finally, just as I think I could finally possess and infect the host's soul... I would discover, my god, a devouring seed lurking in a corner, watching and waiting greedily for its turn. Wang Baole coughed again at that thought. He decided he should stop trying to pretend to be the devil. He turned his thoughts towards the origin of this entity.

There's something very strange about this. I don't doubt the power of the Demonic Eye Art. It's an extremely evil mystic art. So why isn't this devil as strong? Wang Baole fell into a contemplative silence. After a long while, he finally arrived at two possible conclusions. The first possibility was that the cultivation technique and the consciousness might seem to be one and the same, but they were, in fact, completely separate entities. The second possibility was that his very presence was many times more evil and more perverse than the Demonic Eye Art...

The second possibility is out of the question! Wang Baole tapped his nose lightly. He extended his senses and felt for the devil hidden inside the Demonic Eye Art. He thought for a bit and decided not to destroy it immediately. Instead, a wild idea popped into his head.

Should I... rear another devil for kicks? Wang Baole itched with temptation at that thought. It was then that he realized that he seemed to have forgotten something.

"What did I forget?" Wang Baole muttered to himself and wondered. His eyes widened suddenly.

"The donkey!" Wang Baole smacked his forehead. He hurriedly pulled open his storage bracelet and rummaged inside. He finally found the donkey he had forgotten. It was skin and bones and barely breathing.

The donkey kicked its four feeble legs subconsciously after being pulled out of storage. It had been starved to the point where even breathing was becoming a chore. It remained in a daze for some time. Then, tears started to stream from its half-opened eyes, which glimmered with an intense, almost unbearable resentment...

"Son..."

Chapter 699: We Will Get Even!

The Solar System Array Formation was activated once the battleship carrying Wang Baole and Feng Qiuran entered the Venusian outer atmosphere. A series of checks confirmed that neither of them hid Never-Ending Clan parasites. Li Xingwen conducted his own special inspection as well, verifying that they were indeed not under an external force's control. Their battleship was finally allowed entrance and landed at the Venusian aerial port.

The entire aerial port was placed under martial law.

The interior of the port was placed under lockdown, and the defenses around the port were ironclad. Masses of cultivators stood guard, alert and curious. They were commandeered by Duan Muque himself. Countless eyes stared as the battleship slowly landed.

The doors of the battleship swung open. All eyes turned towards the opened doors, and a low voice thundered in the air.

"Salute!"

Every cultivator and staff member on the ground, including the various leaders of the respective political entities, raised their right hand and performed the Federation military salute. Duan Muque was one of them.

The salute was directed at Wang Baole!

They had all heard the reports from Zhao Yameng and Sect Lord Xu. Wang Baole himself had personally escorted Feng Qiuran back to the Federation. The contributions he had made to the Federation were beyond parallel!

The reports had revealed how Wang Baole had risked his life to send Zhao Yameng and the others to safety. That had been how the Federation was alerted to the incoming danger. Wang Baole's subsequent return with Feng Qiuran had been a boost of confidence to the currently disadvantaged Federation.

When the Federation's Hundred Seedling Plan had first been initiated, Duan Muque had advertised Wang Baole's name as well. Wang Baole's reputation and his contributions to the Federation had been made known to the entire Federation. Even Duan Muque had no idea what position he was to award Wang Baole now...

Regardless, this was a salute that Wang Baole clearly deserved!

However... just as everyone stood at attention and extended their salute, ready to receive the new arrivals, an excited bray pierced the air and echoed in the port. The sight that greeted everyone when the battleship doors opened made their eyes widen. The expression on their faces was that of surprise, and Duan Muque was clearly startled.

The first people to step out of the battleship were Li Xingwen and the giant tree. Their appearances were ordinary and hardly noteworthy. However, there was a slightly embarrassed look on both their faces. Wang Baole followed behind. He also seemed normal. He was no longer exhausted, was dressed

in proper attire, and was no longer chubby looking but had become slim. Even his aura had changed. It was drastically different from when he had left the Federation.

It was all due to the advancement of his cultivation, his attainment of the Stellar Nascent Soul, and his years of hardship. He had shed all residue of immaturity. The changed and matured him should have been an opportunity to leave a good impression on everyone. His new self should have inspired respect and admiration. It would have... if not for the donkey sitting on his shoulders!

It was a small black donkey. Its hind legs were hanging over both sides of Wang Baole's neck, while its front legs were pressed onto Wang Baole's head. It was skin and bones. However, the braying it let out was filled with life and clear as day...

Humans riding donkeys was a common sight, but a donkey riding a human... was certainly out of the ordinary. The bizarreness of the situation was compounded by the bag of snacks in Wang Baole's hand and how he kept raising his arm up to feed the donkey...

The expression on everyone's faces turned odd at the sight.

Wang Baole wasn't immune to embarrassment, but there was nothing he could do. The donkey hadn't been willing to return inside the storage space after being let out. It had cried tragically, shivered like a leaf, and even stuck its tongue out to make a show of its willingness to just kill itself right there and then. The sight had sent guilt spiking through Wang Baole. A moment's weakness had led to their current situation.

The snacks had been something Wang Baole had started feeding the donkey after seeing its starved state. The donkey had started exploiting his guilt-driven generosity then. It would threaten to bite its tongue and kill itself if Wang Baole stopped feeding it.

That was how they had ended up walking out like that. An embarrassed Wang Baole swept his eyes across the crowd outside the battleship, as well as the strange looks on their faces. He sighed secretly, then stopped in his tracks. With a solemn look on his face, he shouted, "My fellow Daoists, you must be wondering why I have a donkey on my back as I appear before you!"

"That is because, in my eyes, this is not any mere animal. This is my comrade, my ally. He saved me repeatedly in times of danger. He even chose to forsake food and water in order to search for food and medicine for me while I was unconscious, to the point where he almost starved himself to death!"

"I, Wang Baole, value friendship and loyalty above all else. Carrying him on my back is nothing. In fact, I won't hesitate to cut my own flesh to feed him. It's because when I first began my journey of cultivation, my grandmaster at the Ethereal Dao College taught me—us cultivators of the Federation will always return a favor!" Wang Baole's voice grew increasingly louder. The crowd was clearly moved as he came to the end of his speech.

The skin-and-bones state the donkey was in was the strongest proof. There must be a reason why any animal or human would choose to starve itself to such an extent!

In such a day and age, trying to starve to die was a considerable feat. The reason it had tried to do so... must be because of what Wang Baole had just said. It had chosen to sacrifice itself in order to save its master!

Not everyone believed Wang Baole, but a great many accepted his words for truth. When they looked at the donkey, it was with great respect. The donkey, naturally intelligent, sensed the sudden shift in their attitude and the look in their eyes. It froze at first, then blinked. It was about to grin when Wang Baole suddenly coughed softly. It was so soft only the donkey heard him.

The expression on the donkey's face immediately turned solemn. It looked as if it had just sworn to die by its master's side.

Wang Baole was pleased at how quickly the donkey reacted. His speech not only resolved the embarrassing moment he had been caught in, but it also seemed to have left a positive effect as well. He brimmed with self-satisfaction. His tact and awareness seemed to have improved considerably once again. Then, he spoke again with great solemnity.

"Then, when I graduated from the Ethereal Dao College, our president, Duan Muque, taught me another thing, and that is... we must always get even! The Never-Ending Clan has invaded the Federation's turf. This wrong must be avenged. The Dao Palace cultivators have willingly chosen to follow the orders of the Never-Ending Clan. As Elders of the Dao Palace, Senior Qiuran and I will cleanse the sect of its evildoers. But everything boils down to what President Duan Muque has taught me. We, the cultivators of the Federation, must never forget. We will get even!"

Wang Baole used all of his strength to shout out the last words. With his cultivation, his final roar gained the force of a hurricane, sweeping through the aerial port. His words were like lightning bolts, striking deep into the hearts of the crowd, stirring emotions to life. Many of them began to shout as well.

"We will get even!"

The Federation cultivators' morale surged as Wang Baole worked the crowd. They gathered closer to one another, a united force that emanated an intense fighting spirit that made one tremble with excitement. The upper echelons of the Federation, from the respective political entities, were equally stirred. They began to cheer loudly as well. Duan Muque, Li Xingwen, and others more familiar with Wang Baole knew his habit of spewing nonsense. Regardless, their eyes were bright with an intense light. Duan Muque, especially, was seized by a sudden thought... If Wang Baole were to become the Federation President, despite not knowing how he would perform in other areas, it was clear that at least when it came to motivating the people, he was doing much, much better than Duan Muque was. He was clearly suited for this role.

Feng Qiuran, who had followed Wang Baole out of the battleship, was equally moved. Her injuries hadn't fully recovered, and her face was still slightly pale. However, upon hearing the roars rising all around her and feeling the Federation's fighting spirit, she took a deep breath and shut her eyes. The faces of Dao Palace cultivators—cultivators she had to fight her way through—flashed across her eyes. When her eyes opened again, they were clear of mixed emotions and divided loyalties. Instead, a bright, resolute light shone in them. At the end of Wang Baole's speech, she stepped forward and stood next to him. Then, she turned towards the crowd, cupped her fists, and bowed deeply.

"Grand Elder Baole is right. The Dao Palace... is in need of cleansing! The Dao Palace's betrayal has caused great injury to fellow Daoists in the Federation. I can extend ten thousand apologies, but it wouldn't be enough. I can only offer my full aid and my life, to fight the war with my fellow Federation Daoists!"

Wang Baole's and Feng Qiuran's words resonated with the crowd, inspiring and exciting them. Their bold declarations gave the people a greater determination to fight.

"Let us salute Wang Baole and Senior Qiuran!" Duan Muque shouted, his bright voice steady and resolute. Everyone bowed once again. Their fighting spirit, united, flooded the port once again.

The welcome party reached an emotional climax at that point. Wang Baole and Feng Qiuran descended from the battleship, then followed Li Xingwen, Duan Muque, and the other upper echelons of the Federation into the military base.

Duan Muque represented the Federation as he and the other upper echelons of the Federation spoke to Feng Qiuran in detail and gathered more information regarding the current situation. Feng Qiuran was then placed in a secret chamber in the base where she could continue healing. The donkey was led away as well. Wang Baole was left standing in the main pavilion. Only he, Duan Muque, and Li Xingwen remained after everyone else left. Duan Muque had a serious expression on his face. After some thought, he suddenly spoke.

"Wang Baole, if the Federation wins this war, you will be made the next Federation President!"

Chapter 700: The Federation's Top Secret!

Upon hearing Duan Muque's declaration, Wang Baole, who had just reached into his storage bracelet for another bag of snacks and started munching again, shook. He almost choked on his chips. His eyes widened, and he could hear buzzing in his ears. Fortunately, his throat was thicker than most. He took a huge gulp and forced the chips down, then swiftly set his bag of snacks aside. His breathing quickened as he stared at Duan Muque. He blurted out a question hastily.

"You mean it?"

In principle, Wang Baole's current strength and cultivation had made his becoming the Federation President a moot point, but this was his goal in life, a dream that he had pursued since childhood. It was his personal mission. He had entered the Ethereal Dao College largely because of his dream to become the Federation President. Besides, he had sent back so many sets of cultivation techniques when he had been on the ancient sword. Based on his calculations, that should have been enough for his promotion to Federation President.

However, since he had returned and gained a greater understanding of the current dilemma the Federation was in, he had realized the gravity of changing a president during wartime. He knew that something was amiss. He also knew Duan Muque's character. He would face great challenges if he were to force the man to retire and give up his presidency. It would be difficult even if he were the strongest cultivator in the Federation.

There were too many complications involved in taking over the office. This was his home. Besides, Duan Muque and the rest had always treated him well. There was no way he was going to force his way into office.

That was why he hadn't asked about the rewards he would be receiving. He had observed the discussion Feng Qiuran had with Duan Muque and the others and realized the situation with the Dao Palace. He

planned to ask Li Xingwen in a roundabout way instead. He wanted to know if he could maybe get a promotion to the next Noble's rank. It would be best if he could be declared the next candidate in waiting for the presidency. However, if that were impossible, he would be satisfied with a promotion to Secondary Rank One Noble.

He hadn't expected Duan Muque to initiate the succession himself. His excitement peaked at that moment, especially when he saw Duan Muque nod after he asked him to repeat himself. Excitement and glee flooded his brain, causing him to feel slightly faint. His breathing quickened, and he smacked his chest hard, his eyes red.

"The Federation is going to win this war. The Never-Ending Clan and the Dao Palace are going to lose. I'll kill whoever stops me from becoming the Federation President!"

Duan Muque watched the intense emotions playing on Wang Baole's face. He had no idea whether he should laugh or weep. Li Xingwen smiled. He wasn't surprised by Duan Muque's declaration. If not for Wang Baole's young age, he could have become the president right away.

He knew Duan Muque's character. His successor had a strategist's mind. He had ambition and vision. He also had his own pride. Their failure at Mercury had dealt a heavy blow to Duan Muque. Others might not have realized it, but Li Xingwen knew how serious an impact it had on him!

On the other hand, Duan Muque knew his responsibilities as well. He wasn't going to let Wang Baole be the president who would witness the civilization's end. He was going to be the one to shoulder the burden of their loss. If they won, however... he was going to be there, fighting with all that he had to prove his worth with their victory. He wanted the future generations to know his contributions to the Federation. He wanted Wang Baole to begin his presidency with a fresh new era!

"Baole, your mission will no longer be to fight. You're going to have to... ensure that you and many others with equally important missions stay safe and survive!" Li Xingwen took a deep breath, then gave Wang Baole a meaningful look.

Wang Baole shuddered when he heard that. He shoved down the rising excitement and cleared his mind. It took him less than a second to understand Duan Muque's choice, as well as the meaning hidden behind Li Xingwen's words.

If they won, Wang Baole would be the future president. If they lost, he would have to shoulder the burdens of protecting their civilization and ensuring its survival!

"How much longer can the Venusian line of defense last?" An unfathomable light appeared in Wang Baole's eyes after a long bout of silence. He stopped worrying about his future presidency and finally asked solemnly.

"If nothing unexpected happens, it will collapse completely the next time the Never-Ending Clan launches a full-frontal attack," Duan Muque replied hoarsely. He finally admitted to the inevitable end that he hadn't wished to accept but couldn't deny.

"The Federation made preparations many years ago for war with the Dao Palace. The plan had been to make use of the Solar System Array Formation and the three lines of defenses on Mercury, Venus, and Mars. Unfortunately... there wasn't enough time. With the additional Never-Ending Clan forces and their

terrifying battleship, we aren't their match, even after we include you and Feng Qiuran." Li Xingwen sighed. He smiled wryly as he spoke.

"The fall of Mercury was my fault!" Duan Muque said solemnly.

"Duanmu, you don't have to blame yourself for that. Even if we were to blow up Mercury, the war would still continue. It would only have given us more time, time that still wouldn't be enough for us to prepare for a complete war. We would still have ended up here." Li Xingwen shook his head, then turned towards Wang Baole.

"Baole, Earth is the origin and the core of our civilization. The objective of this battle is to ensure that the Solar System Array Formation, which was set up to protect Earth, does not get destroyed."

"As long as the array formation survives, the Federation will have the power to defend itself. Our civilization will have hope of survival. Mars and Venus are the two key points supporting the Solar System Array Formation. As long as either of these planets remains, the array formation will stand indefinitely. Destroying just one of them will not affect the array formation," Li Xingwen said. At that juncture, Wang Baole frowned and interrupted him.

"Grandmaster, President Duanmu, I have two questions!

"First question. The two key planets are located on either side of Earth, and their coordinates are completely different. Why did the Never-Ending Clan decide to destroy Venus first, then make their way around Earth to destroy Mars? Are they unable to break through the array formation and head for Earth instead?

"Second question. Is the Solar System Array Formation really that powerful? Is it truly capable of protecting our civilization?"

Wang Baole looked at Li Xingwen and Duan Muque after having asked his questions. The two exchanged looks under Wang Baole's gaze. Then, after a bout of silence, Duan Muque suddenly formed a series of hand seals with his right hand. A defensive barrier rose around them, shielding them from eavesdroppers. Li Xingwen pulled out a wooden figurine, placed it on one side, and activated it. The defensive barrier strengthened visibly.

Wang Baole's eyes flashed brightly as he observed them. He formed a series of hand seals as well, even drawing on the power of the Thearch Armor and his Stellar Nascent Soul. The latter pulled on the power of Venus, further reinforcing the defensive barrier around them.

Layers of protection ensured that no eavesdropper would be able to listen in on their conversation. A serious look fell on both Li Xingwen and Duan Muque's faces. They stared at each other again.

Finally, Li Xingwen sighed and whispered, "Baole, what I'm about to tell you next is something that only I, Duan Muque, and Master Zhao Pinfang know. You'll be the fourth person in the Federation to know this secret!"

"This is the most confidential secret in the Federation. In principle, only the president should have access to this information. Zhao Pinfang is exceptionally gifted in the study of Spirit Science, which was why Duan Muque and I agreed to share this information with him!

“That is why... you must not share this secret with anyone else! Unless... the Federation loses this war. If that happens, the confidentiality of this secret will be made void. You can decide then if you wish to tell anyone else.”

The expression on Wang Baole’s face turned solemn when he heard that. His heart began to race slightly. He could sense the solemnity in both Li Xingwen and Duan Muque. He knew that the secret that Li Xingwen was about to share was likely going to be something very important. It was likely going to be world-shattering.

“Yes, Master!” Wang Baole cupped his fists and swore.

Li Xingwen stared at Wang Baole for a long time in silence. He seemed to be lost in memories, or perhaps he was trying to find the words to express himself. Some time passed before he spoke again, softly.

“The spirit energy that is supporting the Solar System Array Formation comes from the Federation citizens practicing... the Qi Fostering Art. We have ten billion citizens, and almost all of them practice the Qi Fostering Art. The Spirit Qi that they produce during their cultivation fuels the Solar System Array Formation. This is supposed to be a secret, but there are many who know of it. However, there are only three of us who know the core foundation that the Solar System Array Formation is built on!”

“Its foundation... is a talisman of mysterious origin!” Wang Baole’s eyes widened when he heard what Li Xingwen said.

“A talisman?”

“More than a thousand years ago, before the arrival of the Spirit Inception Era, a talisman was discovered in an ancient ruin in the southeastern region of Earth. It had been an object of worship. No one knew what it was, and the conditions were unsuitable for excavation. Despite numerous guesses and a great deal of research, no conclusive findings were reached. The talisman was eventually categorized as an ordinary historical artifact and archived.

“Then came the Spirit Inception Era. Spirit Qi, brought forth by shards from the ancient sword, transformed civilization on Earth. I was the first person to reach the Foundation Establishment realm in the Federation. That very day, the talisman suddenly appeared before me. I did extensive research before I could conclude that it had been unearthed more than a thousand years ago.

“The talisman possesses incredible power. What is most extraordinary about it... is that it appears to be invisible to those who are not from Earth. They can’t see it or sense it. It is almost imperceptible to them. I tested it with a Divine Armament and witnessed the Divine Armament shudder in the presence of the talisman, as if in extreme awe!

“After a great deal of research, I believed there was a sixty percent chance of this talisman being a map of an array formation. I called for the Federation to build the Solar System Array Formation. However, nobody knew that the core of the entire Solar System Array Formation... was built on this talisman. It acted like an amplifier. However, without sufficient resources, it couldn’t expand its reach. We have to use Venus and Mars as keystones to increase the reach of the talisman’s power. Extraterrestrial species that are alien to Earth will face increasing difficulty as they try to approach Earth. The closer they get, the harder their advance will be!

“When I retired from office, I shared this secret with Duan Muque. A rule was set up. Only Federation Presidents are privy to this information, while the public will believe that the Divine Armament is what is keeping the Federation safe. In reality, what is protecting us is this talisman!

“The world believes that Master Zhao Pinfang conjured the Anti-Spirit Bomb out of nothing. The truth is... he gained enlightenment after studying the talisman and its changing contents. That was how he came to invent the Anti-Spirit Bomb.

“I wasn’t worried about you and Feng Qiuran arriving on Venus. The reason being, because I could borrow the mysterious powers of the talisman through the Solar System Array Formation and verify if you had parasites hidden inside your body, or detect if any extraterrestrial beings had seized control of your mind!”

“That is the truth behind the Solar System Array Formation. That is why I am certain that the Never-Ending Clan will head for Mars after they’ve destroyed Venus. There is no other way for them to land on Earth!” The words spilling from Li Xingwen’s lips were like bolts of lightning that were striking at Wang Baole’s senses. His eyes widened as he listened to Li Xingwen, and his breathing quickened. This was beyond his wildest imagination. There was no way he could have guessed this—that such a secret existed on Earth!