

Timescape 131

Chapter 131: Grues Blowing Out the Lamp

The breakthrough from Qi Condensation into Foundation Establishment involved three steps.

The first step was sending accumulated spirit power exploding into one's body to search for dharma apertures and memorize their location. The most important aspect during this time was the total number of dharma apertures found. The step could be repeated as many times as necessary, and Foundation Establishment Pills helped during it. Usually, this part took up about half of the total breakthrough time. The second step was to converge one's spirit sea, use it to batter the first dharma aperture, and ultimately open it. After enough spirit power was poured into the opened dharma aperture, then the cultivator's first batch of dharma force would result. When the dharma force was unleashed, it would fill the cultivator, transforming their flesh and blood, and increasing their life level. That was the third step in the process.

When all three steps were complete, the cultivator was officially in Foundation Establishment. It sounded simple, but the reality was that the only way to successfully complete all three steps was to be 100% prepared, and also have a bit of luck.

Xu Qing started with the first step by unleashing the full power of his 1,500-meter spirit sea. As the waves of power surged, he began the search for his dharma apertures.

Dharma apertures were not acupoints. Because no two physical bodies were exactly the same, the dharma apertures were never in the same location.

Xu Qing had a huge reserve of spirit power, so he could spend more time looking. What was more, there were various ways to attempt to sense the location of the dharma apertures. Among the jade slips Ding Xue had given him was a suggestion to use a method called Forceful Exploration. [1]

The reason it was called Forceful Exploration was that it involved using one's spirit power to force the dharma aperture to reveal themselves. Many Qi Condensation disciples considered it a trump card to use at the very end of the step.

But Xu Qing could use only a small portion of his spirit power to utilize the method much earlier.

He didn't expect one usage of Forceful Exploration to reveal all of the dharma apertures. So he planned to do some experiments first. He started by releasing only twenty percent of the power of his spirit sea, in other words, 300 meters of it.

Although it was only twenty percent to him, it would be going all out for most ordinary disciples.

He trembled from head to toe as 300 meters of spirit sea erupted from his dantian region, sweeping through his meridians, flesh, and bones like the tide. As it spread, his meridians became like rivers, and the spirit sea raged like sea dragons through them.

As for his flesh, bones, and organs, they were like parched fields that sucked up the spirit power greedily. As all of that happened, he began his search.

Almost immediately, he noticed places in his meridians that were like small vortexes. They were very small and difficult to spot, and would only be noticeable when the meridians were absolutely full to capacity.

The vortexes were like heavenly gates that, when filled with spirit power, released a very mysterious aura. Upon sensing that aura, Xu Qing came to realize that the vortexes were indeed the dharma apertures.

The apertures weren't just located in his meridians. They were also in his flesh, organs, and bones. 91 of them!

His eyes shone as he ended his first attempt to sense the dharma apertures.

According to the information he'd read about Foundation Establishment, mutagen would interfere with the attempt to sense the apertures. However, theoretically speaking, there should be 120 of them in total. Normally, finding only 80 would be considered a success, while someone who found 90 would stand head and shoulders above ordinary cultivators.

Because 30 dharma apertures was the requirement to form a single life flame, that meant that only three life flames were possible after the first.

If Xu Qing didn't care about the total number of apertures, then he could easily proceed to the second step of Foundation Establishment.

Wait, I don't have any mutagen in me. So why did I only sense 91 dharma apertures?

After some thought, he came to the conclusion that it must come down to aptitude. Before the broken face of the god came, there was no mutagen in the world. Back then, cultivators didn't have to worry about the purity levels within their bodies. Everything came down to aptitude.

But things were different now. Most sects and organizations didn't care much about aptitude. The only people who did were the important scions of massive organizations.

In other words, my lack of mutagen doesn't change the fact that if my dharma apertures are deeply hidden, my ability to sense them will come down to aptitude.

After thinking about it some more, his eyes shone. He wasn't worried that he hadn't found all the apertures. And if his aptitude was limited, that didn't matter either. As long as he had enough spirit power, then there were ways for him to find the hidden dharma apertures.

If he didn't find them in one shot, then he would try a second time. And if that didn't work, he would try five or six times.

Having reached the conclusion that this was definitely the best idea, he closed his eyes and released half of his remaining 1,200 meters of spirit sea.

600 meters of spirit sea exploded out as he began his second attempt to sense the dharma apertures.

What he was doing was absolutely incomparable, and would be considered astonishing to ordinary cultivators. As his spirit sea erupted, his meridians swelled, and his flesh, organs, and bones filled with spirit power, causing him to tremble inside and out. The force of his effort was so intense that, in the blink of an eye, five dharma apertures appeared.

He had already sensed a total of 96 dharma apertures!

There was still spirit power left for his second attempt, however, so he continued the search.

I have enough spirit power and enough Foundation Establishment Pills.

Before his second attempt was even over, he decided to unleash his remaining 600 meters of spirit sea. However, that was when something unexpected happened!

As he sat there cross-legged in his cave temple, the Spirit Breath Lamp, which was casting its light over him and separating him from the darkness, suddenly seemed to sway as if it had been hit by some wind. In fact, as the flame flickered, it looked like it might be extinguished.

As the flame swayed, shadows appeared on the walls of the cave, like people or creatures. However, they were incomplete, and so blurry that it was impossible to make them out clearly. It was like they existed in the cracks between time and space, and thus weren't completely visible.

Normally speaking, they didn't pay attention to what was happening around them. But the aura created by Xu Qing sensing his dharma apertures seeped into their world, attracting their attention. Their world was a huge place, and auras like this would often appear there. Because of the great distances involved, only grues who were in the immediate vicinity would usually notice. But the flame of the Spirit Breath Lamp could exert pressure on them, and thus, all they could do was congregate in the cave and look on greedily.

As that greed transformed into malicious intentions, Xu Qing sensed it, and his mind spun.

He didn't know exactly what these grues were. His jade slips with information about Foundation Establishment hadn't offered a clear explanation. But he could sense their maliciousness, and knew that if they attacked him, his breakthrough would fail. Thankfully, the Spirit Breath Lamp couldn't be extinguished so easily. Though its flame flickered, it still cast its protective light around Xu Qing.

Knowing he didn't have a lot of time to work with, he took a deep breath and used his spirit sea to continue looking for dharma apertures.

Rumbling filled him as he found an additional seven. He was now at a total of 103!

He only needed seventeen more to reach the theoretical limit of 120!

"Again!" he murmured through gritted teeth.

Sending his spirit sea sweeping through himself, he heard cracking sounds as he found four more dharma apertures.

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At the same time, the bizarre shadows around him grew clearer. Howling noiselessly, they circled, exhaling sinister winds to try to extinguish the lamp. The Spirit Breath Lamp's flame flickered even more wildly, as if it might be extinguished at any moment.

Xu Qing ignored all of that. Opening his eyes, he consumed another Foundation Establishment Pill, instantly causing his dried-up spirit sea to fill with spirit power. Without hesitation, he sent the power through his body, making him feel like he was swelling up dramatically.

As his third attempt began, and the spirit power flowed through him, he found three more as-yet undiscovered dharma apertures.

He was now at a total of 110!

Gasping for breath, he waved his hand, causing one entire box of Foundation Establishment Pills to fly over. Inside were three pills that he consumed all at once.

Rumbling filled him as the power of the pills became like raging sea dragons within him. He wondered if his body could even sustain the force, as it felt like he was swelling up even more than before. However, one dharma aperture after another appeared.

111. 113. 115.

All the way to 118!

He just needed two more dharma apertures to reach the limit. However, no matter how he searched, he found that the aura emitted by the dharma apertures he'd found so far was too intense. That itself was what had attracted the grues.

Most cultivators would sense 90 apertures, or perhaps a few more. Xu Qing really was very close to the limit.

The intense aura that resulted was like a bright torch on a dark night.

As for the Spirit Breath Lamp, it wasn't the highest-quality treasure possible, and it could only hold on for so long. After all, it had never been tasked with protecting a cultivator like Xu Qing.

As the flickering of the flame grew even more intense, a final blast of sinister wind suddenly extinguished it!

Chapter 132: Life as an Umbrella

In the instant the lamp went out, all of the light vanished, and the countless grues erupted into cackling laughter. Filled with unprecedented greed and longing, they lunged toward Xu Qing.

However, also in that instant, a light flared that surpassed the Spirit Breath Lamp by many times over. In fact, it wasn't even possible to compare them. One was like a firefly, the other was like the brightly shining moon. The light swept out to fill the entire cave with brightness like that of daytime!

The grues let loose bloodcurdling screams as they were instantly transformed into ash.

In front of Xu Qing appeared a burning lamp that looked like a black umbrella. Of course, it was none other than the precious treasure he had taken from the Merfolk, the life lamp. The lamp had not been lit; the brilliant light that shone out from it came from the lamp itself. It looked like it was burning, yet actually wasn't.

Even unlit, it was shocking to the extreme, and its light covered Xu Qing with such intensity that the grues in the area were like moths that flew into a flame. Though some survived at the outskirts, none of them dared to get close after that.

The brilliant light also gave Xu Qing some clues about the dharma apertures.

As spirit power rushed through him, his mind spun and his body shook violently. At the same time, he found the final two dharma apertures!

120 apertures!

Throughout the entire history of Seven Blood Eyes, no one had ever sensed 120 dharma apertures. And it was only possible to sense the apertures during the breakthrough process. Therefore, it was

generally accepted that, however many you sensed in that moment, that was your limit going forward.

It wasn't just rare for someone to sense 120 dharma apertures in Seven Blood Eyes. It was also the case in most great sects and organizations.

However, in the information in Xu Qing's jade slips, 120 was actually called the 'theoretical' limit for dharma apertures. Though there was no information indicating there was anything past that, after sensing the 120th dharma aperture, Xu Qing realized that 120 actually wasn't the limit. Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to detect beyond 120 at the moment. He would have to open all the apertures before he could explore what was beyond.

What was more, he got the feeling that if he broke past that point of 120, then finding more dharma apertures would result in heaven-shaking, earth-toppling transformations.

He took a deep breath, his heart filled with anticipation. However, he also knew that now wasn't the time to contemplate those matters. He could worry about them later.

In that case, I'll start the second step. It's time to open my first dharma aperture of Foundation Establishment!

He reached out, took his final Foundation Establishment Pill, and consumed it. His spirit sea exploded like the raging tide, rushing directly toward his first dharma aperture. Xu Qing felt like he was being pummeled, like an enormous beast was smashing into him at high speed. It almost seemed like his body might collapse. However, it was also to his surprise that his 1st dharma aperture immediately opened!

The opened dharma aperture became like a point of light, a burning flame that started sucking in spirit power until it became a vortex.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as dramatic transformations occurred to his energy. Burning like fire, it expanded rapidly. At the same time, a brightly burning thread of highly compressed fire appeared within the vortex. That thread was the dharma force of Foundation Establishment! It surpassed the great circle of Qi Condensation by a huge amount, to the point where they were on completely different levels.

As it rose up, glittering with dazzling light, it emitted shocking heat that seemed reflected in Xu Qing himself. The spirit sea in his dharma aperture vastly surpassed anything from an ordinary cultivator. Clearly, his work to push his spirit sea to 1,500 meters had been worth it. And given that his dharma aperture could fit a 1,500-meter spirit sea, it was little wonder that his dharma aperture surpassed anything that an ordinary cultivator could form.

As Xu Qing's aura transformed, the dharma force coursed through him, provoking extremely dramatic transformations. It started with his meridians, which became tougher. Furthermore, it was possible to see countless natural striations within him. Next was his flesh. As the dharma force flowed through it, it transformed on a substructural level. Then came his bones and organs, all of which became tougher. And all of them, along with this flesh, came to bear natural striations. This was a dharma body!

When cultivators stepped into Foundation Establishment, their life force leaped to a higher level. They turned what was mortal into something dharmic!

As his dharma body formed, and his dharma force proliferated, he began to emit fluctuations that surpassed Qi Condensation. As they rolled out explosively, he opened his eyes, which shone with violet light.

According to what he'd read in the jade slips, when a disciple who had a Forbidden Sea dragonwhale reached Foundation Establishment, they would be able to open their 2nd dharma aperture more quickly than average.

During the actual process of the breakthrough, opening a 2nd dharma aperture would result in a second opportunity to refine the body. And it could only happen then. After the breakthrough point, opening more dharma apertures wouldn't result in any changes.

It was a precious opportunity, and in some ways, that 2nd dharma aperture became like a second life.

Xu Qing threw both of his hands out, and his dragonwhale appeared, which had reformed after his previous grievous injuries. Forcing it down into the size of his fist, he put it in his mouth and swallowed it. A moment later, the snakeneck dragon emitted a cheerful cry as it rushed toward his 2nd dharma aperture.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as the 2nd dharma aperture opened!

The snakeneck dragon charged inside, transforming into a 1,500-meter spirit sea vortex. Flames raged, and a second thread of dharma force appeared! When it appeared, it swept through him and once again transformed and blessed his body.

The shadowy grues surrounding him looked more greedy than ever, but when they tried to approach, the life lamp kept them at bay.

But then, an unprecedented sinister wind erupted, like a tempest. It was as if some mighty fiend had risen up from within the grues, and was trying to extinguish the lamp. Although the grues could not blow out the fire, they did manage to weaken it. And as it weakened, that unseen fiend seemed to get very excited, and howled noiselessly. Then it unleashed a projection that, in the blink of an eye, shot toward Xu Qing's forehead.

However, as the life lamp glittered brightly, the projection was forced to abandon its assault and shrank back.

Then, Xu Qing's shadow, which he had suppressed earlier, seemed to catch a whiff of an appetizing aroma, and shot toward the projection. Before the projection could return to where it came from, the shadow arrived and gobbled it up.

As the fiend's howls faded, the shadow burped and then looked back maliciously at Xu Qing. In the end, though, it shivered a few times and seemed to reconsider taking action. It remembered being viciously suppressed, and as a result, didn't dare to make a move. Returning to Xu Qing, it once again assumed its bored and bedraggled countenance from before.

Meanwhile, the grues in the area all trembled like fish in the face of a shark. Then, all in the same moment, they vanished.

Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked down at his shadow.

The shadow shivered, and more cracks appeared on it. Whether it was real or an act, Xu Qing didn't know. Narrowing his eyes, he examined himself. His dharma body was still being blessed, and rumbling sounds filled him from the beating of his heart.

It sounded like war drums.

At the same time, the second thread of dharma force combined with the first.

That new unified thread of dharma force made Xu Qing burn even brighter as the two spirit seas in his two dharma apertures continued to produce more dharma force. After filling him completely, it seeped out into the open.

His aura was now far beyond what it had been in the past. In fact, it surpassed comparison. And in terms of level, if he encountered another Foundation Establishment cultivator right now, then that person's dharma apertures wouldn't be nearly as dazzling as Xu Qing's.

The point of opening dharma apertures is for life flames! 30 dharma apertures allow you to form your first life flame! One life flame is the true early Foundation Establishment. Two life flames is mid Foundation Establishment. Only by forming life flames can one truly unleash the signature power of Foundation Establishment cultivators, the profound radiance state!

As Xu Qing knew from his jade slips, Foundation Establishment cultivators didn't keep their life flames ignited for long periods of time. After all, being in the profound radiance state was extremely draining. That said, the profound radiance state provided incredible amounts of battle prowess. That was why most Foundation Establishment cultivators with life flames only used them in battle.

That was why I was able to beat Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. He hadn't opened his 30th dharma aperture. I need to get to that point as quickly as possible!

Xu Qing's eyes shone with both vigilance and anticipation. The vigilance was from the fact that he now knew Foundation Establishment cultivators were more complicated than he had realized. The anticipation was from knowing that after opening enough dharma apertures, he could enter the profound radiance state. And then there was his life lamp!

Even the great sects and organizations long for life lamps. One such lamp contains the power of an entire additional life flame. That said, in order to use the lamp I have, I first need a life flame. Only then can I ignite it within me.

In other words, once I form my first life flame, I can then put it onto the life lamp. With that foundation for my life flame, I'll actually have the power of two life flames, allowing me to crush anyone in early Foundation Establishment. And I bet that, given the profundity of my dharma apertures, I'll be able to stay in the profound radiance state for much longer than average. [1]

Eyes flashing like lightning, he picked up the life lamp. As its light reflected in his eyes, they seemed to burn even more brightly.

Next, I need to put the life lamp inside of me. That'll be the safest thing.

The dharma force within him erupted out of his 2 dharma apertures. Placing his hands over the life lamp caused it to become slightly transparent. Then he used the dharma force to merge it into himself. As his dharma force came back inside his body, he sensed the life lamp in his dantian region, like a black umbrella. It abounded with profound mystery, and as it slowly opened and closed, it pulsed with a baleful aura.

After the life lamp pulsed brightly, then darkened back and forth a few times, it settled down. It had become part of Xu Qing's body, and as it did, a feeling of ancient times settled into him.

Just barely visible above Xu Qing's head was the image of a black umbrella, like an imperial canopy, tapping into the fires of heaven to emanate a screen of protection around him. Beneath that umbrella, Xu Qing felt incomparably safe.

At the same time, his dharma apertures experienced a blessing. The spirit seas within them rotated faster, and the speed of production for his dharma force increased.

It was now possible to sense some of the aura of that black umbrella within his dharma force. It seemed wild and ancient, and burning hot. As it spread through Xu Qing, he felt like he was being scalded. In fact, at that moment, his clothes crumbled into ashes. The cave temple filled with intense heat, causing the walls to crack. And then the rainforest outside started steaming. Trees burst into flames then crumbled into ashes. Before long, the intense heat spread out to the entire rainforest.

As steam roiled up, the ground became parched. And soon, all the trees had been burned into ashes, for a range of over 9,000 meters!

Within that area, the shocking heat made the land look like it had been scorched by drought for a thousand years!

In the middle of that drought-scourged area, the soil around Xu Qing's cave had already been baked into black crystal. And he sat in the middle of it all, eyes closed peacefully as he meditated.

If someone else in Foundation Establishment was able to look inside of him in that moment, they would be flabbergasted to realize that their dharma apertures were small while his were enormous. Furthermore, he had a black umbrella inside of him protecting his soul. The glow of the black umbrella completely encompassed him, and within that glow it almost seemed possible that there existed heavenly palaces.

After a long time passed, Xu Qing opened his eyes.

Chapter 133: Leaving Mortality

When his eyes opened, the 9,000-meter area of flame grew more blistering, sending steam roiling up into the sky to form the indistinct image of a black umbrella, which in turn masked the fluctuations. As a result, no one saw what was happening. However, all of the wild beasts in the area trembled and prostrated on the ground, not daring to move. One reason was that Xu Qing's aura was already that of Foundation Establishment, the might of which would weigh down in stupefying fashion. The other reason was because of the life lamp in him!

It was impossible to know what that umbrella-shaped life lamp had gone through during its existence, but it had an intense, murderous aura.

According to the information from the Captain, this lamp had to come from the time before the broken face of the god arrived, and was linked to the bloodline of one of the Ancient Emperors or Imperial Sovereigns. And it must have been created using an imperial-class technique.

Even in that past era, people like that were as rare as phoenix feathers or qilin horns. Any such individual could dominate everything around them. And the only cultivators who could fight them were also from a bloodline of one of the Ancient Emperors or Imperial Sovereigns, and also possessed life lamps.

After the broken face of the god arrived, the Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns left. Because of that, life lamps were exceedingly rare in the world. Only the trusted scions of powerful sects and organizations would be lucky enough to get them.

I wonder which of the Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns this lamp comes from. Xu Qing took out an ordinary set of clothing and put it on. He looked at the black umbrella above, formed from steam and mist, then opened his mouth and inhaled. Instantly, all of the mist from the 9,000-meter area of flame rushed toward him.

Xu Qing became the center of a vortex as the intensely hot mist rushed into his nose and mouth. As the mist vanished, his eyes shone brightly, glittering as if they had stars in them, their light thrumming with the dharma force of Foundation Establishment, which could shake one down to the soul. Apparently, he was so full of dharma force that he was instinctively releasing it.

Xu Qing's expression was the same as ever as this happened. He knew that, because he had just stepped into Foundation Establishment, he simply wasn't accustomed to the terrifying nature of dharma force.

Ordinary Foundation Establishment cultivators form one life flame per 30 dharma apertures. As a result, they usually form three before stepping into a new cultivation realm. But my current dharma apertures already have the potential to eventually form a total of four life flames.

Looking down at the umbrella-shaped life lamp within him, his eyes shone with keen anticipation.

According to the Captain's speculations, even back in the era before the broken face of the god came, the scions of the Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns generally only formed one life lamp.

Back then, only those truly chosen by heaven and thought to have the potential to become Ancient Emperors or Imperial Sovereigns, would form multiple life lamps. And for them, the number of life lamps they could form was equal to the number of life flames they had.

I'm happy to just have one. Now I really need to open 30 dharma apertures!

Xu Qing took a moment to inspect himself thoroughly. Because of the black umbrella covering him, his cultivation base fluctuations weren't very obvious.

Looking down at his shadow, he sent his thoughts out to control it. In response, the shadow sent a sliver of itself inside Xu Qing to cover over the life lamp. As the shadow neared the lamp, it shivered as though it was being shoved away. However, Xu Qing calmly forced the shadow to continue, and it didn't dare to resist. Under Xu Qing's control, the shadow formed a cover that went completely over the lamp.

Xu Qing's entire person seemed to go dark at that moment. He still pulsed with Foundation Establishment fluctuations, but the life lamp wasn't visible.

It's too bad my Sea and Mountain Incantation is at such a low level. Or maybe it's because the technique really has reached its final limit. Either way, it doesn't seem like I can push it any higher than it is.

The Sea and Mountain Incantation had been immensely helpful to him, and he had pushed it far past its original limit. Now, it seemed impossible to improve it any further. But Xu Qing couldn't help feeling that he was missing something.

I need to try to figure out a way to push the Sea and Mountain Incantation to a higher level. And now that my cultivation base is stabilizing, I need to hurry back to Seven Blood Eyes, register my cultivation base on the Seventh Peak, and get a new Foundation Establishment technique.

Because he didn't have a Foundation Establishment technique, he couldn't open any new dharma apertures. Therefore, he took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and focused on recovery cultivation.

A month passed slowly but surely.

He had now been away from the sect for about three months. With his fluctuations held back, and his shadow covering the life lamp, he seemed like an ordinary Foundation Establishment cultivator in all respects.

During the month that had just passed, he significantly improved his understanding and control of the life lamp.

When he opened his eyes, something like lightning flickered in their depths. Calmly performing an incantation gesture, he pointed his finger toward the dome of heaven.

Igniting his 2 dharma apertures, he sent their shocking power through his finger and shooting high up into the sky.

Up above, a semitransparent entity became visible, spiraling in the air as it turned into a snake-neck dragon. Throwing its head back, it roared to heaven as its semitransparent form grew more and more visible.

A wild aura built up within it, stronger and stronger. Eventually, it looked like a real, living creature, with absolutely no differences from a real snake-neck dragon. What was more, it pulsed with the fluctuations of Foundation Establishment. It seemed savage and wild, pitch black in color, with a long neck and a crest of vicious spikes. And its burning eyes seemed completely lifelike. In fact, if you put it in the Forbidden Sea, then unless it actually started fighting, it would be difficult for anyone to tell that it was the result of a magical technique.

Its back was almost like a turtle shell, providing powerful defenses. Its mouth was full of sharp teeth that made it look even more ferocious. And its four draconic flippers were so impressive they would obviously make it capable of attaining incredible speed in the water. As the 900-meter snake-neck dragon hovered in the air, Xu Qing stood and walked toward it. Now, he didn't need a flight talisman to walk through the air.

Step by step he ascended, walking toward the dragon.

At first, the sensation was unsettling. But after seven or eight steps, he acclimated, and walked up into the air toward the snake-neck dragon.

The dragon lowered its head, and he stepped onto it. When he turned around to face forward, the dragon howled, flapped its four flippers, and shot up into the sky.

The speed it could attain was shocking.

Mortals wouldn't be able to see the snake-neck dragon. And even Qi Condensation cultivators would see little more than a vague blur, unless they focused their spirit power on their eyes. Otherwise, they would only see Xu Qing standing in midair, his hands clasped behind his back as he moved forward!

This was Foundation Establishment.

It was just like how, back when Xu Qing had fled from Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior through the slums into the depths of the forbidden region, the patriarch had moved along while perched on his golden vajra warrior projection. [1]

That said, the patriarch's golden vajra couldn't compare to Xu Qing's snakeneck dragon, whether it was in terms of its level of corporeality, or its aura.

The two were in the same cultivation realm, but they were still poles apart.

Xu Qing looked calmly down from the snakeneck dragon's head as he sent it toward the nearest city with a teleportation portal. As he flew along through the wilderness, he noticed how the rugged environment was filled with countless bones. Mortals in this world lived very difficult lives.

Although it seemed like cultivators had better opportunities than mortals, the truth was that because of the dangers of mutagen, and how expensive cultivation resources were, most cultivators had no hope of advancing far.

The only way to get stronger was to fight, and fighting could always lead to dying. In reality, cultivators had very few options to pick from.

It was for that reason that people like Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior, who had experienced some level of glory, eventually decided that, after struggling so hard, it was better to settle down and eke out a living as a local tyrant, and just enjoy life as best they could in the chaotic world they lived in. It was a decision that had benefits and drawbacks.

Xu Qing might have done that as well, except he had the feeling that you could only last for so long living in such a way. Eventually, someone would come along out of nowhere and crush you out of existence. Therefore, the only way to be truly safe, and the only way to stay alive, was to get stronger and stronger.

I just want to stay alive in this chaotic world, and maybe improve my quality of life.

Xu Qing's thoughts were focused inward as the snakeneck dragon picked up speed. Eventually, as the wind buffeted his face, he caught sight of a city in the distance. It was not the city he had come from. Despite being a Foundation Establishment cultivator now, Xu Qing was just as cautious as when he was in the Qi Condensation level.

As he neared, he dispelled the snakeneck dragon and dropped to the ground.

There, he adjusted his clothing and changed his physical appearance so that he looked like a sallow-faced, middle-aged man. Then he started walking. The city ahead was not run solely by Seven Blood Eyes.

It was a place similar to the city he'd passed through in the Crimson Wilds. Here, Seven Blood Eyes, the Violet Lands, and the Church of Departure cooperated to maintain a spot with a teleportation portal. Places like this were common throughout South Phoenix. There were many locations on the continent that were occupied by humans, but not considered to be the territory of any one specific organization. In some cases, shared cities were located on the borders. In other cases, they were in places with no resources, and were generally considered unimportant. However, in order to facilitate travel, multiple groups would create places that were relatively safe havens around the teleportation portals.

Xu Qing's arrival caused an alarmed buzz of activity among the city guards. Despite having hidden his life lamp, and dispelling his snakeneck dragon, he was still a Foundation Establishment cultivator. And his arrival in the city was noticed.

Unless a Foundation Establishment cultivator worked hard to conceal their fluctuations, then they would automatically release some of their aura, and that would cause alarm for any Qi Condensation cultivators who sensed it.

It was the same for Xu Qing when he was a Qi Condensation cultivator. He remembered the first time he saw Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. Even from a distance, it had left him feeling shaken.

And the patriarch didn't even have a life flame, and could not enter the profound radiance state.

The lower one's cultivation base, the stronger the effect would be. Only someone in the eighth level of Qi Condensation could stand up to a Foundation Establishment cultivator. And even then, it was only true because most Foundation Establishment cultivators from small sects couldn't even open 30 dharma apertures.

A Foundation Establishment cultivator from a big sect who had a life flame and could enter the profound radiance state would be someone that even the most amazing Qi Condensation cultivator couldn't deal with. They were just on completely different levels. Back in the incident outside the Pilot Assistance Division, Honor Guard Li had shown up and spoken a single sentence that left Xu Qing shaken to the core. The cultivators in this city reacted similarly to Xu Qing's arrival.

Chapter 134: Bells Arouse Notice in the Mountain

In the chaotic world that existed after the arrival of the god's broken face, the majority of cultivators were in the Qi Condensation level. Relatively few ever reached Foundation Establishment. Because of that, outside of cities, they were rare. And only big sects like Seven Blood Eyes would have Foundation Establishment in numbers. It was only natural that Xu Qing's arrival would cause something of a commotion. As the guards offered respectful greetings, and before Xu Qing could even make his way toward the teleportation portal, powerful fluctuations rolled out from the direction of the city magistrate's manor.

Frowning, Xu Qing looked in that direction, his eyes cold.

A beam of light appeared, shooting in his direction and coming to a stop about nine meters away from him in the form of an extravagantly dressed middle-aged man. He was handsome, and pulsed with Foundation Establishment dharma force as he sized up Xu Qing.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing glanced at his throat and simultaneously tried to judge how many dharma apertures he had opened.

"Can I help you, Fellow Daoist? I'm Zhou Hengli from the Zhou Clan in Violet Lands. I was appointed as city magistrate to run this city, which is jointly owned by Violet Lands, Seven Blood Eyes, and the Church of Departure."

"I'm just passing through for teleportation," Xu Qing said tranquilly. He could sense that this man didn't have many dharma apertures open, and thus didn't have a life flame.

Zhou Hengli hovered in the air, his expression nothing out of the ordinary. However, inside he was fully on guard, as he could sense a very strong baleful aura from this sallow-faced cultivator. Obviously, he had killed many people. However, it was hard to tell where he was from, and thus, Zhou Hengli didn't take the situation lightly. Especially noteworthy was how his hair stood on end when the young man looked at his throat. Most shocking of all was that he couldn't tell if this cultivator had a life flame.

"After you!" Zhou Hengli said, feeling shaken but trying not to show it. Turning, he gestured toward the teleportation portal and barked some orders.

Immediately, everyone on the street moved to the side to make room for Xu Qing, leaving a path that led straight to the portal.

Xu Qing's expression remained the same as ever. He could sense that the city magistrate wasn't very happy to have him in the city, and wanted him to leave as quickly as possible. What was more, Xu Qing could sense other powerful fluctuations in the city. They didn't come from a cultivator, but from a spell formation that was just being activated.

This was an ordinary reaction as far as Xu Qing was concerned. This was a city in the middle of the wilderness, so it made sense that they would be wary of a random Foundation Establishment cultivator who showed up out of nowhere.

Xu Qing nodded. Then, instead of walking, he flew through the city toward the teleportation portal, kicking up a strong wind as he did, which sent dust flying everywhere.

Pupils constricting, Zhou Hengli quickly followed.

When Xu Qing arrived at the teleportation portal, he saw that it had already been cleared for his use. There were no random people present, only the handful of guards that operated the portal, who trembled and bowed to him in greeting.

"Well met, Senior. The teleportation portal is ready. Sir, where would you like to go?"

Xu Qing looked at them, and then at the city magistrate, who was obviously trying to look casual but was fully on guard. It really gave Xu Qing a sense of what it meant to be a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

Walking up to the portal, he said, "The capital city of Seven Blood Eyes."

The guards voiced acknowledgement, made some adjustments to the formation, and then after triple checking to make sure everything was in order, backed away thirty or so meters.

Xu Qing looked at the teleportation portal. He wasn't intimately familiar with the workings of spell formations, but he had learned a bit. After examining it, he stepped onto the portal, whereupon the formation started shining with bright light.

After he vanished, Zhou Hengli breathed a sigh of relief. He was in Foundation Establishment, but he had no interest in provoking someone with such a powerful baleful aura.

Seven Blood Eyes doesn't permit outside Foundation Establishment cultivators to enter their capital city. But that's where he's going. I'd say it's unlikely he's a criminal. So does that mean he's a Seven Blood Eyes Foundation Establishment cultivator?

Scratching his neck, Zhou Hengli decided not to think about it. As far as he was concerned, all outside Foundation Establishment cultivators were dangerous. If such a person had a life flame and could enter the profound radiance state, they could take his life in an instant. Therefore, all he wanted to do with such people was escort them on their way as quickly as possible.

If conflict erupted with a person like that, given how far away he was in the wilderness, away from his clan, he would be dead long before his clan had any idea what was happening.

In the eastern part of the continent of South Phoenix, where the Mountains of Truth connected to the sea, there were seven huge blood-red eyes that looked down on a bustling city. In the city center there was a teleportation portal, where Xu Qing stepped out of the glittering light.

The moment he appeared, and before he could even look around, his expression flickered. He could sense powerful fluctuations filling the city, and in the blink of an eye, they were converging on him. They didn't do anything, but they remained around him, as if they were monitoring him. Xu Qing knew what was happening. This was the Seven Blood Eyes Grand Formation at work.

It had never behaved like this in the past when he returned to the sect. But things were different now that he was in Foundation Establishment. Now he had a better understanding of why outside Foundation Establishment cultivators wouldn't blithely enter Seven Blood Eyes.

From the perspective of the spell formation, the fact that he was in Foundation Establishment was more important than him being a disciple. So though it recognized him as a disciple, until he went to the Seventh Peak to register his cultivation base, the spell formation would continue to monitor him closely.

Taking a deep breath, he calmly walked off the teleportation portal. The fact that he was being monitored by the spell formation was not something other cultivators or ordinary citizens would notice. After leaving, he changed into the standard gray daoist robe. He had learned his lesson after Sealizard Island, and upon returning, had bought several gray robes as spares. As he walked down the street, he tested out whether hiding his cultivation base would prevent the spell formation from locking onto him. It didn't, which gave him an even deeper understanding of the spell formation.

I wonder if it would work if I used my shadow.

After some thought, he decided not to do any experiments. For the time being, it wasn't necessary, and besides, could theoretically be dangerous.

I guess it's time to go up the Seventh Peak.

Looking at the distant Seventh Peak, he started walking.

As he passed the various shops, the cold and detached pedestrians, and the occasional gray-robed disciples, he thought back to everything that he'd done in Seven Blood Eyes. It caused him to sigh inwardly. At the same time, he was full of anticipation at the idea of getting his share of the sect's profits in the form of 5,000 spirit stones a month.

Just as he was about to start walking faster toward the Seventh Peak, he noticed a familiar face.

This person immediately attracted the attention of the common citizens, who looked at him in awe. Some of the nearby Offpeak disciples stared at him with open envy. He was a young man in a pale

violet daoist robe. Of course, the color of his robe indicated how important he was. Coupled with his handsome features and his powerful cultivation base fluctuations, he seemed like the child of a god descended into the mortal world. He was none other than Zhao Zhongheng.

Xu Qing saw him.

He saw Xu Qing.

Before, Zhao Zhongheng would have ducked his head and walked in the other direction without saying a word to Xu Qing. But today, he snorted coldly, waved his hand, and pointed toward the dome of heaven. All of a sudden, a Forbidden Sea dragonwhale appeared above him, roaring briefly before vanishing.

The scene caused a commotion in the area, with many of the Offpeak disciples cheering loudly.

Looking extremely pleased with himself, Zhao Zhongheng faced the expressionless Xu Qing.

“I also cultivated a Forbidden Sea dragonwhale!” he said proudly.

Xu Qing showed no reaction whatsoever. Not wanting to waste time on Zhao Zhongheng, he just kept walking toward the Seventh Peak.

Zhao Zhongheng frowned. He was a bit irritated that Xu Qing didn’t react with shock to his dragonwhale. However, he hadn’t forgotten everything that happened when they met out on the open sea. And therefore, he just bit his tongue, stowed any thoughts of showing off, and headed toward the Seventh Peak. He had come off the peak today to pick up a phoenix hairpin he’d had custom made for Elder Sister Ding, and now he planned to give it to her. As he went further south in the city, he eventually neared the gate that led to the seven peaks. Because that was the only thing in this part of the city, there weren’t a lot of pedestrians. And that was when a look of surprise appeared on his face as he realized Xu Qing was still ahead of him.

At this point, he realized that Xu Qing must be planning to go to the peaks. Of course, Zhao Zhongheng was curious about this, but being as proud as he was, he didn’t ask for details. Sometime later, they were getting close to the stairs that led up the Seventh Peak. When they were about 300 meters away, he finally couldn’t hold back any longer.

Hurrying to catch up, he asked, “Where are you going, Xu Qing?”

“Up the peak,” Xu Qing replied with a slight frown.

Zhao Zhongheng looked Xu Qing up and down, and didn’t notice any unusual fluctuations coming from him to indicate he was stronger than before. What was more, he didn’t see anyone waiting to receive Xu Qing. Snorting coldly, he said, “Up the peak? Gray-robed disciples can’t go up the peak unless they’ve been invited. And even if they have been invited, they have to wait to be escorted up! Only conclave disciples can go up without an escort!”

Xu Qing ignored Zhao Zhongheng and kept walking toward the stairs.

Seeing this, Zhao Zhongheng laughed coldly. “Offpeak disciples are prohibited from going up the peak, Xu Qing. If you step onto that staircase, the spell formation will activate. Xu Qing, if you keep walking you—”

Before he could finish speaking, Xu Qing calmly placed his foot onto the first step on the staircase. The moment his foot touched the step, it suddenly blurred, as though some invisible force were

gathering there to confirm something about him. Xu Qing looked up toward the top of the peak and simultaneously released the power of his cultivation base. A Foundation Establishment aura erupted out, causing the tolling of bells to echo out from the top of the Seventh Peak.

As the melodious sound filled the air, Xu Qing started walking up the stairs. Behind him, Zhao Zhongheng staggered backward under the force of the Foundation Establishment aura, trembling, his face pale and his eyes nearly popping out of his skull.

“F-F... Found... Foundation Establishment!”

Chapter 135: Onpeak Rules

The moment Xu Qing’s Foundation Establishment aura erupted out, and the sound of bells filled the Seventh Peak, three figures shot down from the top of the mountain.

If an outside Foundation Establishment cultivator tried to step onto the peak, the spell formation would block their path, not cause bells to ring. Then the formation would ask why that cultivator was visiting. If they had come to pay a visit to someone on the peak, that person would be notified. If that person agreed to see the visitor, then the spell formation would let them in. That was what happened when Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior came to visit Daoist Idlecloud. [1]

But for bells to ring like this meant only one thing: a sect disciple had arrived who hadn’t yet registered as reaching Foundation Establishment. Of course, enemy attacks were another matter entirely.

Not every disciple in Seven Blood Eyes would use the sect’s facilities set aside for Foundation Establishment breakthroughs. For one thing, such places were expensive. Also, most disciples who managed to claw their way up through Qi Condensation in such a chaotic world would have some ‘destined opportunity’ that would set them apart from the masses. Such situations weren’t uncommon. In a sect that focused solely on profit, trust was a rare commodity, therefore, about thirty percent of disciples would leave the sect for their Foundation Establishment breakthrough.

Such matters of ‘destined opportunities’ often involved going to distant ruins. In such cases, other disciples would usually notice if someone close to a breakthrough left, and could theoretically follow them to take advantage of the situation. However, that was heavily frowned upon. After all, if word got out, it could harm the reputation of Seven Blood Eyes.

Therefore, the sect was very strict about prohibiting internal fighting when it came to Foundation Establishment breakthroughs. Granted, it still happened, and in those cases, the Onpeak cultivators didn’t pay much attention, as whoever carried out such operations would plan them carefully. Few people would be foolish enough to try without doing so.

Of course, Xu Qing had carefully considered all of those factors before making his decision to leave the sect for his breakthrough.

A sharp whistling sound could be heard as the three figures from further up the mountain flew toward him. In the lead position was an average-looking man in a violet robe, with a round face. He was the very same cultivator who had led Xu Qing up to get his daoist robe when he first joined the sect. He was also the one who had given Xu Qing advice about his habit of holding his hand in a certain way, and had told him it was better to be a needle concealed in silk. Xu Qing felt a bit nostalgic seeing him. Back then, he hadn’t truly understood what it meant to be a needle concealed in silk. But after his experiences in Seven Blood Eyes, he knew firsthand how important it was. [2]

Xu Qing had learned a lot in Seven Blood Eyes. Clasp hands, he bowed deeply to the three cultivators. He was met with hearty laughter.

The round-faced cultivator landed in front of him and smiled warmly. "Xu Qing! I knew when we first met that there was something special about you. That's why I gave you that advice. Now, look! You're already someone I can consider a peer!"

"Many thanks for that advice, Senior," Xu Qing said, clasp hands again.

"You don't need to call me Senior. You're a Foundation Establishment cultivator now, so we can call each other Elder and Junior Brother. Junior Brother Xu Qing, my name is Zhang Yunshi. From now on, just call me Elder Brother Zhang." [3]

Looking down, Zhang Yunshi noticed the astonished Zhao Zhongheng. Being a shrewd individual, he could guess what was going on between Zhao Zhongheng and Xu Qing, but didn't ask any questions.

"Junior Brother Xu Qing, shall we go up the peak?"

"If it's no bother, Elder Brother Zhang," Xu Qing replied, politely bowing his head. At the same time, he respectfully clasped hands to the other two cultivators flanking Zhang Yunshi.

Apparently, all Onpeak Foundation Establishment cultivators concealed their fluctuations, as he had no idea how strong any of them were. That included Zhang Yunshi. That realization made him more aware of keeping his guard.

These two obviously ranked lower than Zhang Yunshi; when they realized that Xu Qing and Zhang Yunshi knew each other, they smiled faintly and took their leave.

And thus, Zhang Yunshi took Xu Qing with him up the peak.

The trees on either side of the mountain path connected overhead like a canopy, and as the sea breeze drifted through the leaves, birds sang.

It sounded lovely, and also stirred Xu Qing's memories, making him think back to the first time he'd walked this path.

"Junior Brother Xu," Zhang Yunshi said, "I was the one who introduced you to Offpeak life in Seven Blood Eyes. Today, I'll explain about Onpeak life. There are thirteen elders on the Seventh Peak, and all of them are Gold Core cultivators. Underneath them are the Foundation Establishment cultivators like us. There are currently more than 140 of us in total. After you register today, there will be exactly 149 Seventh Peak Foundation Establishment disciples.

"That seems like a lot, but it really isn't. In total, Seven Blood Eyes has close to a thousand. That's it. And remember that our sect is one of the four largest on the continent of South Phoenix. The point is that Foundation Establishment cultivators

have a very high status. It's the same everywhere in South Phoenix, including Seven Blood Eyes.

“After you register, you'll start earning about 5,700 spirit stones per month. The exact amount changes every month depending on sect income and expenditures.

“As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, you have the right to live on the peak. But you'll have to spend your own money to get a mansion grotto. It's the same with Foundation Establishment techniques. In Qi Condensation, you got them for free, but not now. That said, you do qualify to purchase any Foundation Establishment technique from the Hall of Scriptures and Magic.

“As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, you have four privileges.

“The first privilege comes with two options. The first option is to develop your own harbor in the port! It can be a sect harbor or a public harbor. As the owner, you'll split the profit from that harbor with the sect. That said, you'll have to run the business, and you'll need to provide the initial investment funds for the development. If you don't want to have your own harbor, your second option is to lay claim to one of the streets in the capital city. All of the shops on that street will pay their rent to you. That option is easier than the first. All Foundation Establishment cultivators get to pick between one of these two options. Take your time to think about which one fits you best.

“The second privilege is that if any Offpeak disciple offends you, you can kill them on sight. However, you have to pay a fee of 10,000 spirit stones for the first person you kill. If you kill a second, you have to pay double, and so on. You can never kill someone without paying that fee, and the debt can never be wiped out.”

Although Zhang Yunshi explained this with a smile, it caused Xu Qing's pupils to constrict.

“This rule is something that all Seven Blood Eyes Foundation Establishment cultivators have to bear in mind. It doesn't matter if you're outside the sect, or in it. You always have to consider whether or not it's worth it to kill someone weaker than you. By the way, if it's an Offpeak disciple from one of the other peaks, the fee is double.

“The third privilege is that you can pick two Offpeak disciples, or anyone else that you approve of, to be your attendants. They earn the right to live for free in the capital city, or they can practice their cultivation on the peak, registered under your name. Coupled with the third privilege is the right to teleport to any Seven Blood Eyes city for free. In addition, every year, you can distribute one hundred living permits for any Seven Blood Eyes city. Remember, in scavenger basecamps and other small towns,

such permits are very expensive. And they are only available to people with a recommendation from a Seven Blood Eyes disciple.

“The final privilege is that you get protection from Seven Blood Eyes. Because of that, no Gold Core cultivator from the outside would dare try to kill you. In fact, assuming you pay enough spirit stones, not even a Nascent Soul cultivator would dare cut you down. Actually, if you offer enough spirit stones as a reward, the sect will even help you go out and kill people like that.

“Something you must remember is that, while Offpeak disciples are like wolf pups, Onpeak cultivators are a pack of lone wolves!

“You don’t need to worry about Gold Core cultivators harming you in the sect. Outside the sect, you’re on your own. But here in the sect, a Gold Core sect member who kills a Foundation Establishment disciple has to pay an initial fine of 1,000,000 spirit stones. It’s the same for a Foundation Establishment cultivator who kills another Foundation Establishment cultivator. And the fines double for every subsequent kill. Just like the fines I mentioned before, such debts can never be wiped out. Also like I mentioned before, it’s a situation of determining whether killing that person is really worth it.”

Zhang Yunshi was still smiling, but his words made it clear what the Foundation Establishment position and Onpeak brutality were all about.

“What are my responsibilities?” Xu Qing asked.

“Responsibilities?” Zhang Yunshi chuckled. “All of us here worked hard to fight and kill our way up from among the Offpeak disciples. It was all our own effort. Therefore, we owe no responsibilities to the sect. If you want to stick around, you can make money. If you want to leave, no one will try to get you to stay. That said, the missions posted by the sect offer handsome rewards, so people usually scramble to finish them. If you want to save up a lot of spirit stones, earning some extra on the side always helps.

“Now, if enemies harm our interests and interfere with our long-term profit, we will step in. After all, as long as Foundation Establishment cultivators are careful, we can live a very long time. So maintaining our monthly income is important.

“Of course, it’s always possible that enemies will try to buy you off. And you’re free to accept such offers if you want. But consider: do you really think our enemies are stupid? For one thing, they know that buying off one or two of our cultivators wouldn’t be worth it. If they wanted to make any such operation work, they would need to buy off a lot of us. In fact, it would cost so much money that, in the end, it wouldn’t even be worth it.

“Full-scale wars with our enemies can actually be quite profitable, as you learned in the Grand Competition, so our cultivators generally flock to join in the fighting.

“The Onpeak elders know that disciples are wolf pups, so they don’t worry much about overseeing us. Everything comes down to profit. The ones the leadership really care about are the conclave disciples, who enjoy the best aspects of the sect. They really try to give them a unifying force and sense of belonging.”

Thanks to Zhang Yunshi’s explanation, Xu Qing understood a lot more about Onpeak life in Seven Blood Eyes. At this point, they were about halfway up the peak.

“You came at a bad time. Normally, new Foundation Establishment cultivators get to offer greetings to the peaklord. But all seven peaklords went out to sea recently. I guess something big is going on.

“Grand Elder and Second Elder are gone as well, which means Third Elder is in charge right now. After you offer greetings to him, I’ll take you to get your mansion grotto and show you the Hall of Scriptures and Magic.”

Just then, Xu Qing spotted Third Elder’s grand hall, which he had been to before. In fact, there was a familiar figure sitting cross-legged outside: it was none other than Honor Guard Li, who worked closely with Third Elder. [4]

Upon opening his eyes and seeing Xu Qing and Zhang Yunshi, Honor Guard Li smiled faintly. “I had a hunch the bells were ringing because you reached Foundation Establishment.”

Xu Qing clasped hands politely. Honor Guard Li was also masking his fluctuations. However, from what Xu Qing remembered of being around him, he was likely in Foundation Establishment, and strong within that level.

He’s probably got a life flame, Xu Qing thought, though he remained calm and collected.

“Go on in. The elder’s waiting for you.” Honor Guard Li looked from Xu Qing to Zhang Yunshi. Zhang Yunshi shrugged his shoulders and backed up a few steps to wait.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and walked into the hall for the second time. He sensed the same thing he had last time. As soon as he stepped in, he felt mountain-toppling, sea-draining force coming from the person seated cross-legged on the other side of the hall.

But this time, he was able to see the old man clearly. Third Elder had age spots on his face, and wore a violet daoist robe embroidered with gold. His face was completely expressionless as he looked at Xu Qing. When their gazes met, Xu Qing’s mind spun. The elder’s eyes seemed to pierce through him like lightning, allowing the elder to see everything about him. Thankfully, the life lamp was hidden by his shadow, and the elder didn’t detect it.

“Greetings, Third Elder.” Xu Qing said, inclining his head, clasping his hands, and bowing deeply.

“You’re so young, but you’ve already opened two dharma apertures. Impressive.” Then Third Elder said something that struck Xu Qing to the core. “So, you’re the one who took the Spirit Breath Lamp from the Merfolk?”

Chapter 136: Donning the Violet Robe

Third Elder’s question was like a thunderclap ringing in Xu Qing’s ears. However, he managed to keep his face mostly expressionless. And he didn’t take much time thinking before responding.

“Yes, sir,” he said respectfully. There was no point in hiding the truth. The Merfolk’s Spirit Breath Lamp was valuable, but it wasn’t something considered impossible to acquire. Although Xu Qing had tried to hide any evidence that he was involved, if someone thoroughly investigated the matter, they would probably find clues leading to him. Lying wouldn’t benefit him at all, and would actually make him seem more suspicious.

“What do you plan to do with it?” Third Elder asked calmly.

“Sell it,” Xu Qing answered immediately. He looked up at Third Elder. The old man radiated endless ripples and distortions, and caused immense pressure to weigh down on the entire hall. And when he had spoken just now, that pressure grew even more intense. The piercing nature of his gaze was similar to last time, except now, Xu Qing found it easier to endure. On his previous visit, it had taken immense effort just to lift his head, and his eyes had burned.

Upon hearing Xu Qing’s answer, Third Elder smiled. Apparently, the answer satisfied him. “Xu Qing, I’m not going to beat around the bush. I like you. You took the Spirit Breath Lamp fair and square, and I’m not going to try to take it away from you. I don’t care about the lamp, but you’d do well to sell it quickly. Eventually, people are going to start wondering where it ended up. If I could figure out that you took it, so can someone else. Now, give me your identity medallion.”

Shifting his gaze away from the elder, Xu Qing took out his identity medallion. Third Elder waved his hand, and the identity medallion flew over and landed on his palm. Almost instantly, it started shining with bright light. The elder inspected it, and then a moment later, fluctuations rolled out as he imprinted it with new information. It shone more brightly, and then the light faded. Finally, the Elder sent it flying back to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing caught it, expecting it to slam into him with immense force, as had happened when he offered greetings to the director when he checked in to the Violent Crimes Division.

However, that didn’t happen. When he caught the medallion, it was as if all the force dissipated the moment he touched it. That caused Xu Qing’s pupils to constrict as he realized how different Third Elder was from the director. It was easy to unleash force externally, but controlling it with such finesse was difficult.

“You can leave now,” Third Elder said, closing his eyes.

Xu Qing again clasped hands respectfully, then turned to leave. Just as he was about to step out of the hall, Third Elder’s voice reached him.

“Zhongheng... has a good heart.”

“I understand,” Xu Qing said, turning and bowing again. Then he left the hall. Last time, Third Elder hadn’t said these words to him personally, but rather delivered them through Honor Guard Li. The reason was that, back then, Xu Qing’s status was too low. But things were different now. [1]

Upon leaving the hall, Honor Guard Li gave him a nod, then closed his eyes. Xu Qing walked over to Zhang Yunshi.

Smiling, Zhang Yunshi took him to get his daoist robe and pick out a mansion grotto. Unfortunately, most of the mansion grottoes were already occupied, so the one he picked was in a somewhat remote location. Even still, he liked it. And it wasn’t as expensive as he’d imagined it would be.

Finally, Zhang Yunshi took him to the Hall of Scriptures and Magic, where he could get some Foundation Establishment techniques. He also acquired a new body refinement method.

By the time everything was taken care of, it was dusk. Zhang Yunshi took Xu Qing back to his mansion grotto, then clasped his hands in farewell. Before leaving, he smiled and said, “Junior Brother Xu, there are two reasons why I’m the one who helped you out today. The first is that I think we’re connected by destiny. The second is that I’m receiving a nice reward from the sect for accepting the task of receiving all new Onpeak disciples this month.

“So you don’t need to be overly suspicious of why I’m working so hard to help you out. That said, I really do feel like there’s some destiny at work in our encounters. If we ever meet each other while out at sea, I hope we can have each other’s backs.

“Finally, Junior Brother Xu Qing, I’d like to offer you a friendly tip. When we cultivators enter Foundation Establishment, the most important thing is to open 30 dharma apertures. As quickly as possible. When you form your life flame, you can enter the profound radiance state.

“Cultivators without a profound radiance state are on a completely lower level than those who have it. Since you worked so hard to get into Foundation Establishment, you must form your life flame as quickly as possible. Until then, you’re at a huge disadvantage. Many dead Foundation Establishment cultivators lost their lives before they formed their life flame. Foundation Establishment cultivators without the profound radiance state can do little more than bully Qi Condensation cultivators.”

Having finished speaking, he glanced at Xu Qing’s right hand. Detecting no signs of the previous bad habit, he smiled and strolled away.

Thanks to Zhang Yunshi’s reminder, and Xu Qing’s own understanding, he now realized more than ever how important life flames were in Foundation Establishment. Clasp hands, he bowed toward Zhang Yunshi as he disappeared. At the same time, he relaxed the guard he had been keeping against the man.

Turning, he looked at his new mansion grotto, which was located next to a cliff. Right now, the pitch black stone door was closed, and there were weeds growing everywhere. There was even moss creeping up the door. A humid wind constantly blew through the area.

After inspecting the area, Xu Qing stepped up to the stone door and took out the jade slip that acted as the key. When he sent some spirit power into the jade slip, magical symbols glowed on the door. Then Xu Qing used the method described in the jade slip to touch the magical symbols.

After imprinting his mark onto the door, the magical symbols glowed brightly as the mansion grotto became linked to him. Then the door opened, revealing the interior. It wasn't very large inside. It had two rooms, and was lit by luminescent pearls set into the ceiling. It obviously hadn't been used in a long time, as everything was covered in dust.

Xu Qing waved his hand, sending a wind through both rooms to clean them out. Then he closely inspected the entire place to make sure it was safe. After, he went back out and sprinkled poison powder everywhere. He applied the poison very liberally, making sure every area was thoroughly covered. Then he went back inside and spread even more poison. After, he took out his defensive spell formations and activated them.

With the door closed and the formations activated, he breathed a relaxed sigh.

Sitting down, he thought back to everything he had seen and heard. It reminded him of his first day in Seven Blood Eyes, except back then he was in Qi Condensation, and now he was in Foundation Establishment.

I'm finally in Foundation Establishment.

Thinking about all the perks to being a Foundation Establishment cultivator in Seven Blood Eyes, he changed into his new violet robe. Looking down at the daoist robe, his eyes shone. The robe itself had a defensive spell formation in it. It was the type of garment that people outside the sect, or even Offpeak disciples, would fight over, assuming the color was different.

After donning the robe, he sat down cross-legged and pulled out a jade slip. This was one of the Foundation Establishment techniques he had acquired at the Hall of Scriptures and Magic.

Pouring some spirit power into it, he examined the contents. He knew that it was important to start cultivating a Foundation Establishment technique as quickly as possible after a breakthrough. Otherwise, he would be wasting time. After all, he could further the cultivation of his new and old techniques at the same time.

Time passed as he examined the contents of the jade slip. Soon, moonlight touched the door of his mansion grotto, and eventually, the bright moon rose high in the sky. In the light of the moon, the stone door seemed simple and unsophisticated, yet also filled with the sensation of ancient time and profound changes.

Inside the mansion grotto, Xu Qing looked up from the jade slip, his eyes glittering sharply.

Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture!

One of the Seventh Peak's signature Foundation Establishment techniques was the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture. From the name alone, it was obviously something meant for killing. It was easy to imagine that this technique would be categorized as a nefarious art. That said, Xu Qing felt that it was befitting of a sect named Seven Blood Eyes.

The Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture wasn't divided up into different levels. Instead, the cultivation method was focused on opening dharma apertures as quickly as possible. In addition to that, it allowed for the creation of a type of flame inside the dharma apertures, a flame called balefire.

When that flame was mixed with the aura of the Forbidden Sea, it created a bizarre reaction. The more one cultivated it, the hotter the balefire became.

On the one hand, balefire could be used to attack. Also, it was a key component in the scripture's 'soulswallowing' aspect. After extracting the soul of an enemy, it was used like kindling for the flame. The resulting explosive force was used to burst open dharma apertures. It was a brutal method, but at the same time, simple and direct. According to the technique description, a disciple cultivating the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture could use the soul of a Foundation Establishment cultivator with no life flame to open one dharma aperture. If using the souls of Qi Condensation cultivators, they would need over a hundred to achieve the same result. Of course, the requirements only increased as one rose in cultivation level.

Both sea beasts and nonhumans can be used as kindling for the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture. Between the two, nonhumans are better, especially Seazombies. Because of their physical nature and their soul, they lead to spectacular results.

The words in the jade slip almost seemed to drip with blood.

The technique was indeed simple. There was nothing complicated or flashy about it. It was just about pure brutality.

After he finished reading the description, Xu Qing took a deep breath. Upon cultivating the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture to completion, the balefire would reach its ultimate state, and would exist in all of one's dharma apertures. At that point, one wouldn't need souls to open dharma apertures, and you could extract enemy souls and imprison them inside the dharma apertures. By burning them day and night, it was possible to make one's dharma force even stronger.

In a word, disciples who cultivated the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture became living gods of death.

However, not all disciples cultivated the technique. There were a total of three signature Foundation Establishment techniques in the Seventh Peak.

The second technique was called the Sea King Register.

It was a less brutal technique that focused on assimilating sea beasts, then using a special method to keep them in one's dharma apertures and absorb nutrients from them. It was divided into ten levels, and each level involved opening about seven or eight dharma apertures. The key to cultivating it lay in constantly capturing and absorbing sea beasts. When fighting with this technique, the results were astounding. When all the dharma apertures were opened, all of the numerous sea beasts inside the disciple would make their dharma apertures very impressive.

The first technique was brutal. It led to rapid cultivation advancement, but required a lot of killing. As a result, the slightest mistake could also lead to the cultivator dying. The second technique revolved around sea beasts, and made one's dharma force more and more powerful. It made it easier to defend oneself, but at the same time, didn't help improve battle prowess very much.

The third technique was called the Life Nurturing Incantation.

This technique was even milder, and didn't involve the use of any external force. Disciples who cultivated this technique spent most of their time in seclusion. It took time to succeed, but came with some big advantages as one didn't need to go out fighting and killing. Because disciples who cultivated this technique didn't need to fight a lot, it was usually suitable for those who preferred support positions in a group. Each technique seemed good for different personalities, and each disciple would pick one based on their preferences.

After thinking about it, Xu Qing wasn't sure which one was best for him. The first one he ruled out was the Sea King Register, as it seemed mediocre at best. As for the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture and the Life Nurturing Incantation, they seemed like polar opposites.

As Xu Qing wrestled with his decision, far away from Seven Blood Eyes out on the Sea of Endlessness, a dreadnaught roared through the heavens. This dreadnaught was almost like a godly entity. Everywhere it went, waves crashed beneath it. In one of the buildings on the dreadnaught's back, Master Seventh was looking back in the direction of Seven Blood Eyes.

Standing next to him was the same middle-aged servant who had given the identity medallion to Xu Qing. He had a jade slip in his hand. After examining it, he turned to Master Seventh and quietly said, "Master Seventh, the Kid reached Foundation Establishment. After we return, shall I arrange for him to meet you?"

Master Seventh shook his head. "There's no need. War is coming. We'll worry about it after that. I passed out a hundred identity medallions. He was the first to report in, but there are others out there. We need to see how they measure up to each other. Besides, he has a long way to go before he's ready to become my fourth apprentice."

Chapter 137: Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture

The Life Nurturing Incantation is too passive!

Xu Qing's eyes gleamed with determination as he sat in his mansion grotto.

On the one hand, the Life Nurturing Incantation would work well with his life lamp, as he wouldn't need to leave his mansion grotto. Once he reached the point of being able to use the life lamp, his battle prowess would be astonishing.

However, it would take too long to reach that point. Cultivation required spirit stones, and he also needed to upgrade his dharmaboat. Most important of all, Xu Qing knew that it was possible his situation could change overnight.

Therefore, it didn't make sense for him to focus on the quiet and peaceful Life Nurturing Incantation. It seemed entirely possible that, before he even reached the point of being able to use the life flame, catastrophe could befall him. He did not like the idea of being so passive.

Therefore, he decided to cultivate the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture.

With the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture, he could imprison the souls of enemies in his dharma apertures. Not only would it make his dharma force more powerful, but according to the technique description in the jade slip, he could use a special method to link the imprisoned souls to a

dharmaskiff. By doing so, his dharmaskiff would essentially have its own spirit. In other words, his dharmaskiff would have some of the characteristics of a magical treasure!

Xu Qing had actually never laid eyes on any magical treasures. But he knew that they were extremely rare, could not be used indefinitely, and had heaven-shaking, earth-shattering power.

Is my life lamp actually a special kind of magical treasure?

He wasn't completely sure.

After some more thought, he confirmed that this was the right decision. Taking the jade slip, he sat there cross-legged, closed his eyes, tapped into his dharma apertures, burned his spirit seas, and began following the description of the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture to cultivate the technique!

The first step in the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture was forming the actual balefire.

All Foundation Establishment cultivators had flames in their dharma apertures. Those flames could ignite the spirit sea and turn into dharma force. It was also the same flame that was critical to lighting one's life flame.

Because of fusing with the black umbrella that was the life lamp, the flames in Xu Qing's dharma apertures had changed, and were now pitch black.

As it happened, the fire cultivated in the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture was also the same color. The two types of flame seemed very similar. However, after only four hours of cultivation, Xu Qing succeeded in creating balefire in his dharma apertures, which was when he realized they were actually very different.

The flame from the black umbrella existed on a higher level than the balefire, and it was also much hotter. The only thing it lacked was the ability to absorb souls.

However, it was an easy issue to resolve. Xu Qing simply combined the balefire with the black fire that already existed within him. Soon the black fire in him also developed the ability to absorb souls, just like the balefire.

Feeling very pleased, Xu Qing proceeded with cultivation.

Three days passed.

Eventually, when the black fire in both of his dharma apertures was fully capable of absorbing souls, he stopped the session of cultivation. Going forward, the most important thing for him would be souls. He needed souls as kindling to open his third dharma aperture.

I wonder if Elder Brother Zhang San is back. Once he finishes fixing my dharmaboat, I can go out to sea.

Looking down at his shadow, he thought for a minute, then took out his black iron skewer and undid the seals on Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior.

The patriarch's aura appeared, but he didn't say a word. He was obviously afraid that if he said the wrong thing, it would provoke killing intent in Xu Qing. After studying the iron skewer briefly, Xu Qing tapped into the power of the violet crystal and crushed his shadow with suppressive force. This was all while the patriarch was hiding in the skewer watching.

Xu Qing did this on a daily basis. During the entire process, his facial expression didn't change. His shadow was also used to it, and didn't fight back. It just allowed itself to be viciously crushed.

However, inside the iron skewer, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior trembled in fear at the sight of it. It was a case of killing a chicken to frighten the monkey, and in this case, the patriarch was the monkey.

"You aren't as useful to me now as you used to be," Xu Qing said calmly to his shadow.

Now that Xu Qing was in Foundation Establishment, he viewed his shadow differently. It had its own sense of will, but he could suppress it. At this point he actually wanted his shadow to be stronger. Otherwise, his shadow wouldn't be able to keep up with him, and he couldn't use it as a trump card in a fight. He also felt the same about Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior in his iron skewer.

The patriarch had nothing to do or worry about, and that didn't suit Xu Qing's path. The words he had just spoken caused both his shadow and the iron skewer to tremble.

A moment later, his shadow rippled and distorted. As the fluctuations rolled off of it, a tiny scrap of will appeared and spoke in Xu Qing's mind.

"Mutagen... upgrade... godliness...."

A thoughtful expression appeared on Xu Qing's face. Then he looked from the shadow to the iron skewer, and his eyes burned with killing intent. That gaze caused the skewer to tremble even more intensely.

"What good are you?" he asked slowly. He raised his right hand, and within it appeared a scrap of the patriarch's life essence spirit. It looked like Xu Qing was ready to crush it. However, that was when the patriarch flew out of the iron skewer to appear in front of him.

"Milord, Milord, don't kill me!" he moaned. "I can practice cultivation! I have a spirit automaton technique. But lately I've either been too weak or just asleep, so I haven't been able to cultivate it. Give me a chance, Milord. I'll definitely, definitely, definitely cultivate it! I'll work really hard!"

He looked absolutely terrified.

"In six months I'm going to assess both of you," Xu Qing said. "The loser gets eliminated!"

In response to his words, his shadow seemed to pulse with ferocity. However, it wasn't targeting Xu Qing, but rather, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. The patriarch felt a similar ferocity in himself, but he didn't let it show on his face. Instead, he made himself seem calm and placid. That seemed suspicious to the shadow, who reined in some of its ferocity.

Xu Qing knew how the patriarch operated, so he didn't bother paying attention to the scheming that was already underway between him and the shadow. Putting away the iron skewer, he opened the door of his mansion grotto.

It was currently noontime. The sky was blue and dotted with white clouds. Sunlight streamed down, and carried on the humid wind were the sounds of the Offpeak world. However, the city was distant, so the clamor seemed like it came from another world. It almost didn't seem real.

Xu Qing walked over to the cliff and looked down at the city, noticing the bustling harbors and the ships coming in and out of the port. The other districts in the city were just as busy. The streets were packed with people. The Seven Blood Eyes capital city really was a flourishing place. On Xu Qing's first time up the peak, he'd had a chance to look down at the Offpeak world like this. But now he was an Onpeak cultivator, and the feeling was very different.

Things are the same. And they're different.

What was different was his level. What was the same was that the broken face of the god still loomed over everyone.

Eventually, Xu Qing headed down to the Port District. As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, he now had the right to develop his own harbor. However, he hadn't yet decided if he wanted to do that. In fact, he was thinking about that very topic as he walked through the air down toward the city.

His plan was to visit some of the shops in the Port District and buy some powerful jade talismans that were suitable for Foundation Establishment. After all, given the level of his cultivation base, ordinary talisman treasures wouldn't be of much use. Foundation Establishment cultivators primarily used jade talismans.

Another thing he planned to do was find his informant. As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, he was allowed to have attendants, and he wanted his informant to be the first, though he didn't plan to take her up the peak. Another objective was to see if Zhang San was back.

Given his breakthrough, his standing in the Violent Crimes Division had changed. He still had a position there, but his position was different. Instead of being the deputy captain of Unit Six, he was now a deputy director, and he was in charge of the Celestial Bureau. Being a deputy director meant that he didn't have to go to the Violent Crimes Division very often. In fact, he only needed to show up for important operations. His salary had increased, and was now 100 spirit stones per month.

As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, he could resign from the division if he wanted. His spirit stone salary wasn't much compared to what he would earn from the sect's profits. But for now, he wanted to stay. After all, when he first arrived in Seven Blood Eyes, 100 spirit stones was a huge sum.

Upon coming down from the peak, he became the subject of numerous envious gazes in the port district. When he landed and started walking the streets, everyone got out of his way, and no one spoke to him. When he entered one of the shops, the shopkeeper rushed to meet him, bowing and offering respectful greetings.

The Offpeak disciples present, regardless of which peak they were assigned to, bowed at the waist and called out respectful greetings.

To Offpeak disciples, Foundation Establishment cultivators were no different from gods. After all, both gods and Foundation Establishment cultivators could kill them. And the latter were a lot more likely to do so.

As the sun shone onto Xu Qing's violet robe, it seemed to radiate a boundless majesty.

To Xu Qing, who preferred keeping a low profile, being the focus of so much attention was unusual. Therefore, he quickly left the shop.

The next place he appeared was his set meeting location with his informant. After he summoned her, she came running. When she saw his dark violet daoist robe, she skidded to a stop, seemingly at a loss for what to do. The reverence in her eyes increased, and she started breathing heavily. She looked completely stunned. Then she saw Xu Qing's cold gaze, and she shivered and fell to the ground to kowtow.

"Milord!"

Xu Qing took out a jade medallion and waved his hand, sending it streaking toward her. It stopped right in front of her, hovering in the air until she put out her trembling hands to take it.

"That's an attendant medallion. I'm sure you know how much it's worth. For now, you won't live on the Seventh Peak. For the next three months, your task is to determine what's necessary for me to develop a harbor."

A moment later, Xu Qing was gone. The sea breeze stirred his informant's long hair, revealing a look of complete incredulity on her pretty face. Looking up at the departing Xu Qing, she tried to steady her breathing. Never could she have imagined that he would reach the lofty Foundation Establishment level in such a short time.

Chapter 138: This is the Profound Radiance State!

On the way to the Transportation Division, Xu Qing happened to pass the Sixth Peak shop in which the shopkeeper had tried to scam him. Upon noticing the place, he stopped outside the door. As everyone in the area greeted him reverently, the shocked shopkeeper and clerks noticed what was happening and rushed out to kowtow. "Well met, Senior!"

Xu Qing looked coldly at the shopkeeper but didn't say anything.

Sweat poured off the shopkeeper's face onto the ground, and his back was already soaked. He was terrified, and had the feeling his life was on the line. Never in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that Xu Qing would reach Foundation Establishment. Back during that incident, he had mostly been frightened of Second Highness. Xu Qing had hardly been worth giving thought to.

The shopkeeper was an attendant of Honor Guard Idlecloud from the Sixth Peak, so no Offpeak disciples would dare to mess with him. But Xu Qing was now a Foundation Establishment cultivator, and the shopkeeper had no idea if Honor Guard Idlecloud would risk hostilities with a fellow Foundation Establishment cultivator just to help an attendant.

As the shopkeeper trembled, Xu Qing looked away from him and moved on.

Even after Xu Qing was gone, the shopkeeper felt paralyzed, like he had just toed the line between life and death.

The reason Xu Qing hadn't killed him was because it was too expensive. What was more, he didn't want to beat the grass to startle the snake. He had learned from Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior that the shopkeeper was connected to Idlecloud, who was currently listed on his bamboo slip. He just hadn't found a good opportunity to take action.

For now, he put the matter out of mind. On this, his first trip down the peak after his breakthrough, he was finally coming to realize why he had hardly seen any Foundation Establishment cultivators in the city. They just attracted too much attention. Wherever he went, everyone was watching him.

Only people who loved attention would feel comfortable in such a situation. And it was worse considering Xu Qing preferred sticking to the shadows. It was simply impossible to do that with so many people paying attention to him.

Considering that the Foundation Establishment cultivators on the Seventh Peak were all grim individuals who had slaughtered their way out of the Offpeak world, it was only natural that none of them were like that.

What does everyone else do? He could only speculate.

Thinking about these matters, he hurried through the streets even more quickly on his way to the Transportation Division. Along the way, he sent a voice message to Zhang San, and found that he was indeed back already. Upon arriving at the Transportation Division, Xu Qing spotted Zhang San in his gray daoist robe. Next to him, with his lower half back, was the Captain, also wearing a gray robe.

Perhaps the ordinary workers in the Transportation Division didn't realize it, but Xu Qing, as a Foundation Establishment cultivator, could sense that they were a lot stronger than before. In fact, just looking at them, he knew that they had both risen to the Foundation Establishment level. They were just masking their auras.

The two of them squatted on some sandbags, Zhang San smoking a pipe, the Captain munching an apple. As the sun shone down on them, their gray robes seemed particularly splendid. It didn't take long for them to notice him approaching. And when they saw his violet daoist robe, the Captain smiled proudly, while Zhang San sighed.

"You lose," the Captain said. Zhang San took out a spirit stone and handed it to the Captain.

Seeing all this, Xu Qing realized that his previous speculation that they were leaving the sect for Foundation Establishment breakthroughs had been correct.

Grinning, Zhang San said, "Xu Qing, why are you actually wearing your violet robe? Foundation Establishment cultivators in Seven Blood Eyes only wear their colored robes when something important is happening. Otherwise, you stick out too much."

Zhang San was now a Foundation Establishment cultivator, but he hadn't forgotten Xu Qing's ferocity in the Grand Competition. Thus, he kept things as friendly as possible, while also explaining to Xu Qing why he and the Captain weren't wearing violet robes.

"You should go back and change ASAP," Zhang San continued. "By the way, don't spend all your time on the peak. Nothing's more boring than Onpeak life. Didn't you notice that there are basically no Foundation Establishment cultivators up there? You listen to me. Every single one of them is completely treacherous. They all wear gray robes and hide down here in the Offpeak world. And who can blame them? Everything is much more exciting and much more convenient down here."

Xu Qing nodded seriously.

As for the Captain, he smiled enigmatically and said, "For all you know, Xu Qing, you might have already run into some gray-robed Foundation Establishment cultivators. You just didn't realize it. Hardly anyone on the Seventh Peak flies around everywhere like Honor Guard Li. Besides, he only started doing that after he took up working for Elder Zhao. And you only see Zhang Yunshi when he shows up for work. People say he actually enjoys helping out newbies. By the way—" he took a bite out of his apple, then cleared his throat and continued, "Deputy Director Xu, you owe your director 10,000 spirit stones. When do you plan to settle up, huh?"

Xu Qing looked at the Captain. Just like before he had reached Foundation Establishment, the Captain's cultivation base fluctuations were impossible to read.

"The director?" Xu Qing asked.

"Yeah, that's right. After I got back, I was appointed as the director of the Violent Crimes Division. So, Deputy Director Xu, I suggest you get those spirit stones together as quickly as possible. The director is running a bit low on cash right now." Seeming very pleased with himself, the Captain looked at Xu Qing expecting him to be envious.

Recognizing this look from the Captain, Xu Qing didn't need any prompting. "Congratulations, Captain."

"Hahaha! It's great to be chatting like this again with you, Deputy Director Xu. Although, you need to update your form of address and call me Director."

Xu Qing nodded. "Okay, Captain."

"Director!" the Captain corrected, then viciously took a bite of his apple.

"Sure," Xu Qing replied with another nod. Taking out three large apples, he gave one to Zhang San and one to the Captain.

Grinning, Zhang San said, "Would the two of you calm down already? I finished fixing your dharmaboat, Xu Qing. In a minute I'll take you over there to see it. Ai. It's hard to believe the three of us all reached Foundation Establishment so smoothly. It feels like it's been a lifetime since the last time we were together.

"I honestly never thought I'd see Foundation Establishment. I heard that a lot of people broke through after the Grand Competition. And Ding Xiaohai was one of the first. He made the breakthrough here in the sect." Zhang San sighed.

"What an idiot, right?" the Captain said, taking a bite out of the apple Xu Qing had just given him. "Everyone else went to the Grand Competition to get rich. He went to become a conclave disciple. Then the first thing he does afterward is reach Foundation Establishment. What was the point of the whole conclave thing?"

“I hope neither of you are ever like that. Deputy Director Xu, I think you’re doing fine. You don’t care about anything but getting rich, so you’re not in danger of becoming an idiot. But Zhang San, you need to watch yourself.”

At this point, the Captain lowered his voice. Looking both mysterious and very excited, he said, “Alright, listen up, both of you. I’ve been working on a big plan. I still need to get a bit more information, but once I do, the plan will be ready to carry out. I’m going to take the two of you with me, and we’re going to make out like bandits. The rewards are going to be far more spectacular than Joine’s flesh.”

Zhang San suddenly looked like he was on guard, as did Xu Qing.

“What are you looking at me like that for?” the Captain said, glaring at them. “Fine, I won’t explain any further. Besides, I have to gather some more information first. Regardless, the two of you are far too weak. You need to form life flames as quickly as possible, so that you can unleash the power of the profound radiance state. Otherwise, I won’t let you take part in my plan.”

The Captain rose to his feet.

“What exactly is the profound radiance state?” Xu Qing asked. He had heard about and read a bit regarding the profound radiance state, but that was all theoretical. He had never actually seen it.

Zhang San also looked curiously at the Captain. Apparently, he was in a similar situation as Xu Qing, having not had many dealings with Foundation Establishment cultivators when he was in Qi Condensation.

“You want to know?” the Captain asked, smiling at Xu Qing and Zhang San. “Ah, whatever. Considering we’ll be working together in the future, I guess I might as well explain. Do you know why I wanted to get some of Joine’s flesh? It’s because after you eat the flesh of a godly entity, you can open multiple dharma apertures in rapid succession. And that makes it possible to form your first life flame. So, what is the profound radiance state? Instead of using words to explain, I’ll just show you.”

Suddenly, a shocking rumbling sound erupted from within the Captain, like heavenly thunder. As everything around them shook, a terrifying shockwave rolled out from him.

Xu Qing’s eyes went wide with shock as he backed up rapidly.

It was like there was a furnace inside the Captain that had been ignited, sending intense heat rippling out in all directions. At the same time, the fluctuations coming off of him instantly became stronger than before by many times over.

The Captain looked like he was made of fire now. There was a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering image projected behind him, but even looking at it was painful to the eyes. And everything around him rippled and distorted. Then he moved.

Xu Qing saw nothing but a series of afterimages, and then his mind reeled with an intense sensation of deadly crisis. He wanted to fall back, but wasn't fast enough.

The Captain was right in front of him, holding his right hand out.

Clasped in his fingers was a single one of Xu Qing's hairs. Because of the intense heat, it rolled up and dissolved into ashes.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted as the furnace within the Captain suddenly went out, and he returned to his normal state. Smiling at Xu Qing, he said, "Deputy Director Xu, if I had wanted to kill you just now, you'd be dead already."

Xu Qing didn't say anything in response, but his heart was pounding and his mind spun in shock. Most of what he had known about the profound radiance state came from what he'd read in jade slips. But seeing it in real life was totally different.

Just now, the Captain had seemed completely invincible.

"Of course, I am a genius," the Captain said proudly, "so when other people enter the profound radiance state, it's not as impressive. But you wouldn't stand a chance against them either. Entering the profound radiance state involves unleashing power from all of your dharma apertures. When you do that, both your magical techniques and your fleshly body reach their peak state. It doesn't last for long, but it's enough to either kill your enemy or escape with your life.

"The only way to fight the profound radiance state is to also be in the profound radiance state yourself. And Foundation Establishment cultivators without the profound radiance state are as weak as wild chickens. Therefore, little Ah Qing, don't let the wild chickens you've seen in the past fool you about what Foundation Establishment cultivators are like. You need to work hard! And remember to hurry up and pay back the 20,000 spirit stones you owe me."

Smiling, the Captain took a bite out of his apple and then walked a few paces away. There, he shot into the air in a beam of light, heading, not toward the Seventh Peak, but toward the Violent Crimes Division.

Xu Qing watched him go. The sense of danger he had experienced just now was like nothing he had ever experienced before. And it left him feeling very anxious. He needed to open more dharma apertures, and get to 30 as soon as possible. With a life flame, he could then enter the profound radiance state. That was obviously a big priority.

Zhang San was also standing there silently. A moment later, he chuckled bitterly and shook his head. "The Captain is such a freak. Come on, I'll take you to your dharmaskiff."

Xu Qing didn't respond. Keeping his eye on the disappearing Captain, he followed Zhang San.

Once I form a life flame, then with the blessing of the life lamp, I'll actually have the power of two life flames!

Eventually Zhang San reached his warehouse. As Xu Qing followed him inside, he caught sight of a watercraft that was both familiar and unfamiliar. It was a huge dharmaskiff, 150 meters long, with a

hull covered with a Foundation Establishment sealizard skin. It also had a different overall shape. Before it had looked like a crocodile, but now it looked like a sealizard!

And fluctuations of godliness rolled off of it. Instead of the feathered wings that had been on his dharmaboat, this sealizard had two leathery wings on either side of it. The entire thing seemed completely fierce and violent.

“Okay, Xu Qing. The Captain gave both me and you a very small portion of Joine’s flesh. I added it in as the power source. With that upgrade, your dharmaboat became a true dharmaskiff! Of course, if you want to uninstall Joine’s flesh, that’s fine. But I think having a dharmaskiff is better for you. With it, you’ll have a much better chance of surviving out on the Forbidden Sea!”

Chapter 139: His Own Fortune

Xu Qing felt battered by waves of shock as he looked at the sealizard-shaped dharmaskiff.

He had seen Foundation Establishment sealizards before. And because he had seen one in real life, he could spot the differences between a real sealizard and this sealizard-shaped dharmaskiff that Zhang San had crafted. However, in terms of the aura, it was almost exactly the same.

The hull was 150 meters long, and it had four limbs with razor-sharp claws at the end. Its head was extremely lifelike, and its tail even swished back and forth. It really looked just like a sealizard.

The main thing that didn’t resemble real sealizard anatomy was the pair of leathery wings. They were huge, and just looking at them, Xu Qing guessed that when they unfurled, each wing would be as long as the lizard’s entire body. He could only imagine what wild winds would spring up when they flapped.

The cabin was on the lizard’s back, a three-story structure that looked beautiful while simultaneously coming across as being very sturdy.

Zhang San looked extremely proud of himself, and his jaw even jutted out a bit as he gazed at his masterpiece. “Seventh Peak dharmaboats are classified as boats, skiffs, ships, and cruisers. Yours is one hundred percent in the dharmaskiff category, and class-3 at that. However, because of the godly lizard skin and Joine’s flesh, it actually surpasses that level in some ways.

“The points of weakness are the keel, some of the miscellaneous building materials, and the core power source. Joine’s flesh is precious, but the Captain didn’t part with much of it. And the godliness within it is limited. If you can get your hands on the full heart of a godly entity, then your dharmaskiff will be worth far more.

“Unfortunately, Foundation Establishment dharmaskiff materials are vastly more expensive than the Qi Condensation type. Also, dharmaskiff parts are a lot more complicated. Basically, to upgrade even the lowest level Foundation Establishment materials, you’re going to have to spend 30-50,000 spirit stones.

“If you want to upgrade something higher-level, such as your sealizard skins, it’s going to be even more expensive. Probably 150,000 or more. Not even I could afford

that. And there are more expensive items that go for astronomical prices. In other words, Xu Qing, if you want to upgrade your dharmaskiff, you really need to make some money.

“One reason why dharmaskiffs are so amazing is that, once they reach class-8, they have a special function related to the profound radiance state. Simply put, it lets you suppress an enemy’s profound radiance state! The better materials you have, the longer it works!”

Upon hearing that, Xu Qing was shocked. Seeing the Captain’s profound radiance state had left him feeling very anxious. Now that he knew the dharmaskiff could do something like this, it caused his eyes to glitter.

Zhang San grinned. “Surprised? Well, now you know why Seventh Peak Foundation Establishment cultivators are so focused on upgrading their dharmaskiffs. And you also know why people from the Seventh Peak are often called ‘boat cultivators.’

“Considering your previous dharmaboat got half-destroyed, I decided to shore up its toughness and defenses. Significantly. Your dharmaskiff is definitely much more impressive than your old dharmaboat. Whether it’s moving on the surface of the water, flying in the air, or moving under the surface, it’s capable of shocking power.

“Finally, I added an exterior shell to the boat, taking inspiration from the way sealizards shed. If your dharmaskiff sustains an overwhelming attack, the exterior shell will explode like heavenly maids scattering blossoms. It will look like your dharmaskiff is badly damaged, and hopefully it will make your enemy hesitate to waste dharma force on a second attack.

“However, with a mere thought on your part, the shattered pieces of the exterior shell can form back together. That said, I’m not very familiar with the method of constructing the exterior shell, so don’t use it too many times. I’d say no more than twice. In any case, when you use that ability, whether you fake death or counterattack, it will catch your enemy off guard.”

Xu Qing looked at Zhang San, and then back at the dharmaskiff. He could sense how much effort Zhang San had put into helping him upgrade his boat. It was a precious thing considering how things worked in Seven Blood Eyes.

Clasping hands, Xu Qing bowed deeply. “Many thanks, Elder Brother Zhang San!”

“Don’t be so polite,” Zhang Said. “I’ve invested in you, and seeing how you and the Captain are turning out, it seems I invested wisely. I just hope that I can improve your chances of staying alive. After all... I think both of you are absolutely crazy. Although, the Captain will probably end up dead sooner than you.” He sighed.

Xu Qing hesitated for a moment, then asked, “Does my dharmaskiff still have the materials in it you originally bought for the Captain’s coffin?”

Zhang San cleared his throat and smiled. "Of course! Those were some good materials. Half of them got destroyed when your boat was damaged, but there's no need to waste the rest!"

Xu Qing didn't say anything. Clasp hands, he thought for a moment, then took out 20,000 spirit stones and handed them over.

Zhang San accepted them. After all, he had used quite a few materials in his work. Waving goodbye, he left.

Xu Qing took his dharmaskiff and looked out at the open sea, his eyes shining with anticipation.

Tomorrow morning, first thing, I'm going out to sea!

Having made his decision, he left the Transportation Division, all the while calculating how many spirit stones he had on hand.

I spent way too much on Foundation Establishment. I barely have 50,000 spirit stones left now. I really need to sell that Spirit Breath Lamp. That'll replenish my coffers.

By the time he was heading back toward the Seventh Peak, it was getting late, and there were few people on the streets of the capital city. Night time was when Offpeak disciples would prowl the streets with malicious intentions. None of that had anything to do with Xu Qing. Criminals from the bounty list weren't worth it anymore. However, as he moved along through midair, he suddenly stopped and looked down.

Lying there in the middle of one of the streets was a person he recognized. It was a young man in a gray robe, underneath which was a dog skin jerkin. Both the jerkin and the robe were soaked with blood. It looked like he had a mortal wound on his abdomen. There were other cuts and wounds visible on him, and he had also been poisoned. His fingernails had been plucked out, as had all of the teeth that he had filed into points.

It was the Mute.

He was badly wounded and gasping for breath. As for the identity medallion laying on his chest, it had no merit points in it. Based on the time, when the sun rose in the morning, he would be wiped out of existence by the Seven Blood Eyes Formation. Xu Qing looked down at the Mute. Then he dropped to the street and stood above him.

The Mute was unconscious. In fact, he looked so badly wounded that he might not make it to dawn. He had no sack and no dharmaboa.

Xu Qing knew that beating someone to the point of death, then taking all of their belongings, was a common way for Offpeak disciples to get revenge on someone.

The Mute had earned a vicious reputation in the Violent Crimes Division, and someone had finally retaliated.

As he looked down at the Mute, Xu Qing recalled how the young man had offered him a dead criminal from the bounty list. And he remembered how the Mute had followed him on the day of the Grand Competition, and also the advice he had given about his shadow. After some consideration, Xu Qing picked up the Mute's identity medallion and transferred one spirit stone's worth of merit points into it. Then he forced some medicinal pills into the Mute's mangled mouth.

After that, he grabbed him by his clothing and dragged him away. Upon arriving at the Mute's small shack, which seemed like little more than a doghouse, Xu Qing tossed him inside. Turning, he left.

In the chaotic world they lived in, these actions alone could be considered extreme humanity and utmost virtue. As for whether the Mute pulled through and managed to stay alive, it was up to his own fortune.

The truth was that the Mute had actually regained consciousness on the way to his shack. Xu Qing knew that, but didn't care. After he was gone, the Mute opened his eyes and shivered. Looking weakly at Xu Qing's retreating figure, he closed his eyes and curled up into a ball.

Back at the Seventh Peak, Xu Qing was heading toward his mansion grotto when he saw a familiar figure sitting on the edge of the cliff. It was Huang Yan.

His legs dangled over the edge of the cliff, and he was currently sipping from an egg. Upon seeing Xu Qing flying toward him, his eyes widened and he waved.

"Hahaha! You're finally back. I've been waiting forever!" Huang Yan reached into his robe and pulled out an egg which he tossed to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing caught it and sat down next to Huang Yan. Xu Qing was in Foundation Establishment now, but things didn't seem any different than before. Poking a hole in the egg, he took a sip. It was just as delicious as he remembered.

Sounding very pleased with himself, Huang Yan said, "I heard yesterday that you were back, so I came to see you. Well? Am I awesome or what? I can come and go as I please now on the Seventh Peak. The spell formation doesn't do anything to stop me."

"Second Highness treats you well," Xu Qing replied with a grin. He really liked Huang Yan. In fact, of all the people he had met from the Seventh Peak, Huang Yan was the one he truly felt was a friend.

As soon as Xu Qing mentioned Second Highness, Huang Yan proudly thumped his chest. "Well that's a given. I'm telling you, Xu Qing, she really does treat me well. She gave me an identity medallion so that I could come visit her whenever I want."

Xu Qing smiled and continued enjoying his egg. As they sat beneath the moonlight, it was just like the old days in Harbor 79. Xu Qing mostly listened while Huang Yan talked and talked about how well his Elder Sister treated him. About an hour later, Huang Yan stood up, wiped the dust off his rear end, and grinned.

"By the way, Xu Qing, there's another reason I came. I heard you're the one who got the Spirit Breath Lamp from the Merfolk. Want to sell it to me? I'd like to give it to my Elder Sister. We're bros, so I'm not even going to think of taking advantage of you. I'll buy it for 500,000, except I don't have that much saved up. It'll take me a month to get it together. But if you're fine with it, then let's seal the deal right now."

Xu Qing thought about it, then nodded in agreement.

Hearing that, Huang Yan was very excited. Shortly after, as he was preparing to leave, he suddenly thought of something, and his expression turned serious. Lowering his voice, he said, "Xu Qing, my

Elder Sister told me that something big is going on in the sect. During the battle with the Merfolk, our Seven Blood Eyes patriarch experienced a cultivation base breakthrough, and then invaded Seazombie territory. But there's more to come. After all... his cultivation base is different now. It looks like the sea territories need to be redistributed.

"If things don't go smoothly, war will break out. Actually, it's a good thing for us. War is like the Grand Competition. There's always a big opportunity for profit. Of course, the more dangerous the situation, the more profit there is to be had." With that Huang Yan took his leave.

Xu Qing watched him go, then looked out at the open sea.

"War, huh?" he murmured.

Chapter 140: Fishing for Dragons

Xu Qing had never experienced war personally, but he had witnessed something similar. That said, it was a far cry from real war. The small city in whose slums he had lived had battled with another city. The fighting had gone on for about seven or eight days.

If Seven Blood Eyes goes to war with some other force, will it last for that long?

Xu Qing thought back to the Grand Competition and the fight with the Merfolk. Then he remembered what the Captain had said. Such weighty matters were beyond their control, and would be handled by the leadership of the sect.

If there's not enough profit to be had, I won't join in the fighting. Going back into his mansion grotto, he sat down cross-legged and took out the Life Nurturing Incantation jade slip.

The Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture was a martial technique, but the way it used slaughter made it something like a magical technique. After cultivating it, the way you opened dharma apertures revolved around magical martial arts stances.

The Life Nurturing Incantation was different. It revolved solely around a cultivator's breathing exercises. In that regard, it was similar to the Seaforming Scripture. By slowly strengthening oneself, the cultivator would open dharma apertures one after another.

After more thought, Xu Qing had come to the conclusion that his previous assessment was incorrect, and that the best thing would be to cultivate both techniques at the same time. It didn't matter which one he focused on more, as the Foundation Establishment level was all about opening dharma apertures and forming life flames, and both could do that.

And thus, he began cultivating the Life Nurturing Incantation.

The night passed.

The next morning, as sunlight slowly filled the sky, Xu Qing opened his eyes. He organized his weapons and poisons, as well as the talisman treasures he'd purchased. Then after his usual routine of suppressing his shadow, he opened the door of his mansion grotto and looked out at the rosy sky.

I need to go out to sea, kill some sea beasts, and use their souls to open more dharma apertures. Striding away from his mansion grotto, he stepped out into midair. His snakeneck dragon then

appeared beneath him, roaring to heaven. Flapping its four draconic flippers as if the sky were the sea, it shot with shocking speed toward the horizon.

The Sea of Endlessness was covered with black waves.

Compared to the bright sky, the darkness of the water was bizarre. It seemed almost like ink. Its mysterious depths imparted a sense of awe.

Though this was not Xu Qing's first time out at sea, he didn't feel very much different than the previous time. He remained cautious and careful. In the sect, there were rules that everyone had to follow, but outside the sect, anything could happen.

Instead of showing off by flying, he traveled on his dharmaskiff. And he used the disguising function to make it seem like an ordinary dharmaboat. After sitting down cross-legged, he activated the defenses and set a course.

It feels better to be on my boat than in my mansion grotto.

His first destination was a location he had been to before, specifically, the area where he, Zhao Zhongheng, and Ding Xue had encountered that snakeneck dragon. [1]

And that was because his first chosen type of prey was snakeneck dragon.

He needed souls to open his dharma apertures, and he'd decided that sea beast souls would be the perfect kindling for now. Of course, he knew it was unlikely he would encounter the exact same snakeneck dragon. But he figured it would be a good place to start looking.

Not wanting to waste time, he cultivated the Life Nurturing Incantation while he traveled, and simultaneously worked on putting his personal snakeneck dragon into one of his dharma apertures. His snakeneck dragon had a Foundation Establishment aura now, and he was worried that if it was out in the open, wild snakeneck dragons would fear it and stay away.

As he traveled, he saw other Seven Blood Eyes dharmaboats. He was always very leery of them. It didn't matter that he was in Foundation Establishment now, he was still as cautious as ever. Generally speaking, other watercraft treated him the same. Everyone was careful when on the open sea, and hesitated to get too close to each other.

Time passed. Three days later, Xu Qing's Foundation Establishment level of speed allowed him to reach that same spot he was looking for. It was high noon, and puffy clouds danced in the blue sky above.

As Xu Qing sat on the deck, he looked at the black waters of the Forbidden Sea, then focused his senses on what was happening beneath the surface. After quite some time passed, he didn't see any snakeneck dragons. Xu Qing stilled his dharmaskiff so that it didn't send out any fluctuations. Then he looked to the skies, peering about until he spotted a pseudotooth albatross circling in the distance.

Waving his hand, he sent his iron skewer shooting out. The pseudotooth albatross reacted with alarm, but it wasn't fast enough to completely avoid the attack. The skewer pierced the bird's wing, causing the bird to let out a piercing shriek. Then Xu Qing controlled the skewer in a manner to pull the bird out of the sky and onto the surface of the water, preventing it from flying away.

Then Xu Qing waited.

Time passed. The pseudotooth albatross' struggling didn't do any good. Eventually, Xu Qing's pupils constricted as he noticed something deep beneath the surface. Water flowed, and eventually, he saw a majestic snakeneck dragon more than 900 meters long.

It had an astounding aura, apparently somewhere between Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment. But most amazing was its physical form. There was no way a Qi Condensation cultivator could fight it. As it neared, it noticed Xu Qing's dharmaskiff. However, Xu Qing had the dharmaskiff's fluctuations masked, and was doing the same for himself. The snakeneck dragon circled around him, then suddenly shot right in his direction, completely ignoring the pseudotooth albatross.

From the look of it, the dragon thought that Xu Qing would taste more delicious than the bird.

As the dragon neared, Xu Qing sat unmoving on the deck. When it was almost upon him, his eyes turned cold and he reached out toward it with a grasping motion.

The water around the snakeneck dragon erupted, rising high in the shape of a hand that pulsed with the dharma force of Foundation Establishment.

As the hand grabbed the dragon, the iron skewer shot down from above. Inside the skewer, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was going all out to prove his worth, and didn't hold back as the skewer stabbed toward the dragon.

The dragon howled, creating a sound wave that blocked the iron skewer. At the same time, its draconic flippers swept through the water, creating a wave to fight back against the huge hand. From the look in its eyes it was clearly alarmed and wanted to flee. But it reacted too slowly. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the massive hand crushed around the dragon. As it did, the iron skewer glittered, stabbing into the snakeneck dragon and piercing through its flesh toward its heart.

"I need it alive!" Xu Qing said coolly. The iron skewer trembled as it stabbed into the heart, then came to a stop before going all the way through. Although the iron skewer was like a tiny needle compared to the dragon, the creature still howled in pain. It writhed, trying to free itself, but the huge hand lifted it out of the water and into the air.

Seawater poured off of it like a waterfall. The dragon was so huge that it blocked the sun, casting Xu Qing's dharmaskiff completely into shadow.

Xu Qing looked up at the snakeneck dragon, his expression placid as he extended both hands and began an incantation gesture. Black balefire shot from his dharma apertures out into the open.

From a distance, it looked like Xu Qing was wreathed in black fire. As the fire rose into the air, the snakeneck dragon's eyes filled with terror, and it howled and struggled even more ferociously.

Its efforts did nothing. Xu Qing's incantation gesture caused more and more black fire to erupt forth, eventually transforming into what looked like the head of a devil, cackling as it approached the dragon. When they collided, the devil head spread out to cover the dragon and then immolate it. Of course, what was being immolated wasn't the dragon's body, but its soul. After enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, the dragon's struggling grew weaker and weaker. Eventually, the

fire swept away from the dragon and back into Xu Qing. Its body was limp now. Having lost its soul, there was no life left in its physical form, making it useless.

The giant hand released the dragon, and it splashed down into the water and sank down.

As the iron skewer flew back and circled around Xu Qing, he looked at the results of his first usage of the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture. Inside of him there was a white soul shadow with a few traces of green on it that looked like a snakeneck dragon.

“So, it’s white,” Xu Qing murmured. According to the description in the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture, Qi Condensation souls were white, Foundation Establishment souls were green. Green souls were ideal for opening dharma apertures, whereas the white variety were inferior.

Might as well give it a shot. With a thought, he caused the snakeneck dragon soul shadow to ignite like kindling. As the fire burned, he sent it racing toward the spot where his third dharma aperture existed.

A tremor passed through him as the third dharma aperture trembled, and a crack appeared on it. However, it didn’t open. And then the snakeneck dragon’s soul power faded away.

It’s working, but not fast enough. After some thought, he wondered if it was because he wasn’t familiar enough with the process. Piloting his dharmaskiff to another location, he used the same method to try to catch another dragon.

The pseudotooth albatross had only been the starting point. This time, he used himself as bait, but releasing some Qi Condensation fluctuations into the water. At the same time, he prepared to fly up into the air in case things went wrong. After all... it was possible that his attempt to catch snakeneck dragons could actually result in something more terrifying coming up from the depths.

Of course, it didn’t seem extremely likely, as the truly terrifying entities wouldn’t be enticed by a mere Qi Condensation aura.

Three days later, Xu Qing’s attempts bore fruit as a second snakeneck dragon approached. Following the same pattern, he used its soul power to batter at his third dharma aperture. After that, he went to another location. And thus, for the greater part of a month, he hunted for snakeneck dragons. It was only after taking a dragon in the great circle of Qi Condensation that he finally broke his third dharma aperture open, although not all the way.

The process was going far too slow. Frowning, he did some quick math, and came to the conclusion that at this rate, even if he worked nonstop and without rest, it would take three years to open thirty of his dharma apertures. And that was probably being too optimistic with his estimate, as dharma apertures weren’t all the same. The more you opened, the more soul power you needed. Considering that, he would probably need twice as much time. That wasn’t to mention that he would eventually have to go back to the city. And who knew what other things could cause delays. All in all, using this method to open dharma apertures would probably end up taking him dozens of years.

I need to think of a way to kill sea beasts faster!

Eyes glittering coldly, he looked off into the distance.

There, he saw a giantfang shark racing through the water, hundreds of meters long, pulsing with the fluctuations of Foundation Establishment. Flying in the sky behind it in pursuit was a person standing on a huge, ancient bronze sword. It was a young man wearing a First Peak crimson daoist robe. His long hair whipped behind him in the wind, and he looked grave and stern, with cold eyes.

When he noticed Xu Qing, he looked at him coldly and said, “Calling the wind and summoning the rain is not unique; put the stars in a bag to play hide and seek.”

Xu Qing frowned.