

Timescape 141

Chapter 141: Opening Apertures on an Uninhabited Island

In Seven Blood Eyes, each peak used daoist robes of a different color. The Second Peak was orange, the Sixth Peak was blue, and of course violet was for the Seventh Peak. As for the First Peak, they had robes as red as blood.

When it came to Seven Blood Eyes, the most famous peaks in South Phoenix and the Forbidden Sea were the First Peak and the Seventh Peak. The First Peak warrior cultivators were known for being grim slaughterers. They rarely went out to sea, and preferred to do their training in Forbidden by the Phoenix. Only First Peak cultivators who had complete confidence in their own cultivation base and battle prowess would go out to the unfamiliar Forbidden Sea for training. Because of that, whether it was in the sect or out at sea, this was the first time Xu Qing had ever seen one of the First Peak warrior cultivators.

It was impossible to misidentify another disciple. That was because their daoist robes contained invisible designs that were connected to the identity medallion and aura of the disciple. When they got close to another daoist robe with such designs, they would shimmer in response. The reason for this was that the sect was too big for all disciples to recognize each other, and thus, there was a need for a method to prevent outsiders from impersonating disciples.

However, it didn't matter that this was a fellow disciple. Xu Qing didn't let his guard down in the slightest. What was more, he had no idea what this disciple meant with his cryptic poetry. His guess was that, perhaps, this disciple was warning him not to steal his prey.

After all, he did mention a "bag" and "hide and seek" while simultaneously chasing a giantfang shark.

Xu Qing watched him coldly, his iron skewer glittering at his side, his shadow beneath him looking like nothing special, but ready to leap out under Xu Qing's control. His dharmaskiff was ready as well, and his snakeneck dragon was in his dharma aperture, the row of spikes running down its long neck bristling.

As the giantfang shark fled in Xu Qing's direction, he could sense its extraordinary aura. Roaring, it spun in place and then lunged toward the incoming First Peak disciple, its mouth opened wide. Suddenly, a blood mist erupted from the shark's mouth, which transformed into a host of fish and shrimp that shot toward the First Peak disciple.

"The puny heavenly maiden's silver river; it's waiting for me to drink in one gulp." His right hand flashed in an incantation gesture, and his bronze sword thrummed, causing row upon row of sword projections to appear.

In the blink of an eye, over fifty smaller versions of his bronze sword could be seen, radiating an aura of slaughter. The First Peak disciple waved his finger, and all the swords except for the one he stood on shot toward the giantfang shark.

Shocking rumbling echoed out, and waves surged out across the water as the giantfang shark howled. Seven or eight of the swords stabbed into its massive frame, causing blood to splash into the water around it as it fled off into the distance. That blood contained a Foundation Establishment

aura, so it would scare away many sea beasts. On the other hand, it was also possible it could attract even stronger sea beasts into the area.

Xu Qing simply looked on.

Hovering in midair, the First Peak disciple snorted coldly.

“The snow-white rabbit slips through the sky; the night-black toad swims on by.”

As the words left his mouth, his huge sword thrummed again, growing larger and larger until it was roughly 300 meters long. Then, he shot over the water in pursuit of the shark.

Xu Qing hadn't spoken a word the entire time, nor had he done a single thing. He had listened to the disciple's ridiculous poetry, then watched him race off, staying on guard the entire time. Now that he was gone, Xu Qing simply piloted his dharmaskiff off in a different direction. Based on what he had sensed, the First Peak disciple was stronger than he was, but not by much. He wasn't at the level of being able to enter the profound radiance state, and probably had something around 20 dharma apertures opened. If it came to an all-out battle to the death, Xu Qing had the feeling he could come out on top. But a Foundation Establishment sea beast wouldn't be worth getting in a fight like that.

A few days later, Xu Qing reached his next target destination. He was about halfway between South Phoenix and the Westcoral Archipelago, roughly where he had encountered the creeping vines. There was also an island nearby.

It wasn't very large, but the island itself was shaped like the character 凹, with a natural bay.

There were a lot of uninhabited islands on the Forbidden Sea. Some of them were always there, others came and went. The former were real islands, while the latter were often some type of huge sea beast.

As for this particular island, Xu Qing checked the water underneath to confirm that it was a real island. His sea chart also indicated it was, but it was always good to double check things like that. The island itself was barren and had no resources, which was why it was uninhabited.

After scouring the surface of the island to make sure it was safe, he moored his dharmaskiff in the bay and took out a small bottle.

Within that bottle was a blue liquid, which was ghostlonging horseshoe crab blood. By refining that blood according to the principles of yin-yang polarity, and by combining it with other medicinal plants, it was possible to create a substance that would attract ferocious beasts. It was similar to the substance the young merman had used on Xu Qing. [1]

This was the method Xu Qing was going to attempt in the hopes of opening his dharma apertures. He would attract a large number of sea beasts, then kill them and take their souls. However, it was going to be difficult to control, and it was entirely likely he could attract a beast he couldn't deal with.

In the hopes of fine-tuning the process, he would use chrysanthemum mollusks, which could function as a harmonizing agent. With their aura as an added layer, Xu Qing's idea would still be risky, but he was willing to try it. [2]

Once I start it, it's not going to stop....

As he sat on the deck, he started refining the ghostlonging horseshoe crab blood. It took about an hour, and it was nightfall by the time he finished. He watched as the shell of the chrysanthemum mollusk turned blue; at this point, all that was required was a drop of his blood to start the process. Seeing that it was already dark, he decided there was no rush, and closed his eyes to meditate.

The night passed without incident. The next morning at dawn, he opened his eyes and scattered poison around the area.

Because he was in a harbor, the poison powder mixed with the seawater and began to spread about. Being very determined about how the event should play out, he put even more poison into the water. However, that wasn't enough. He needed something else to enhance the poison effect.

Therefore, he took out a stick of incense and put it off to the side. It was a kind of incense designed to stimulate the poison. Once it entered the water, and he added more poison, it would become hyper-poisonous.

Everything's ready to go. Eyes flickering with anticipation, he bit the tip of his finger and spilled a drop of blood onto the blue chrysanthemum mollusk. The moment it fell onto the shell, the mollusk turned a darker shade of blue. At the same time, a very faint smell pulsed off of the shell, so faint, in fact, that it was easy to miss. As the smell wafted out, Xu Qing looked at the entrance of the bay, his eyes narrowed, the poison-stimulating incense gripped in his hand.

Time passed.

An hour later, his eyes flickered with cold light as he saw a huge plume of water in the distance. A 300-meter-long whale breached the surface, let loose a piercing cry, then splashed back down into the water. That, in turn, revealed that within the water around it was a school of fish that resembled crocodiles. They were black-scaled crocfish, which were similar to black-scaled wolves. They usually congregated in schools of over a hundred individuals, and usually reached the eighth or ninth level of Qi Condensation.

As for the whale, it was in the great circle of Qi Condensation. Seeing this, Xu Qing's eyes lit up. As he waited, the black-scaled crocfish caused waves to surge as they rushed toward the bay. The whale was close behind. Shortly thereafter, rumbling sounds filled the bay as the black-scaled crocfish entered, swimming straight toward Xu Qing and slamming into his dharmaskiff defenses. Booms rang out, but his dharmaskiff defenses were strong, and they didn't even crack under the assault.

Just as in the forbidden region jungle, sea beasts were primarily body cultivators, and few had magical techniques. For the most part, their tough physical form was their greatest asset.

Only about a hundred. That's not much.... Not hesitating at all, he put more spirit stones into the formation to power the defenses. Before long, he saw more waves off in the distance.

This time, it was a school of huge swordfish, larger than any he'd seen before. There appeared to be hundreds of them. Most were between the third and fifth levels of Qi Condensation, but there were forty or fifty that were in the eighth or ninth level. Their eyes were bright red as they rushed into the bay. That was when Xu Qing tossed the poison-stimulating incense stick into the water.

Instantly, the more than one hundred types of poison in the water erupted, and the black water turned an even deeper black color, so that it looked like a thick ink. As the effect spread, the black-scaled crocfish trembled and went still. The whale was also rendered motionless. The same thing happened to the swordfish. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, the entire bay, which had just been spraying with water, was completely still and silent.

Eyes filling with anticipation, Xu Qing waved his hand and made a grasping motion. As a result, a huge hand formed from water grabbed all the sea beasts and dragged them toward him.

Then, Xu Qing's dharma apertures erupted with flames that shot out to burn them. Of course, they weren't dead. His poison was powerful, but he hadn't designed it to kill them, just render them incapable of fighting him. As the black flames burned, one soul after another flew into Xu Qing. There in his dantian region, they became soul shadows that served as kindling as he battered at his 3rd dharma aperture. Only a moment later, a tremor passed through him, and his eyes glittered as his 3rd dharma aperture completely opened. When that happened, spirit power rushed into it, and then dharma force spread out into his body.

He didn't stop there. With the black flames still absorbing souls, he was able to send the power toward his 4th dharma aperture. It opened!

The bay had become a place of death. Though there was nothing on the surface, below the surface were numerous beast corpses.

With 4 dharma apertures opened within him, dharma force surged through him, and his aura became stronger than before. As the black flames raged, and the fire within his 4 dharma apertures burned, it made Xu Qing seem like he was engulfed in flames as he sat on the deck. Though this was a far cry from the profound radiance state, it was clear that his dharma force was far more majestic than when he had first stepped into Foundation Establishment.

This is the kind of speed I'm looking for! Sometime later, Xu Qing opened his eyes, looked around, and then started creating more of the ghostlonging horseshoe crab substance.

Chapter 142: Massive Killing Intent

Time was like water, flowing by day by day. The beast corpses were like dead leaves, drifting down. In the blink of an eye, more than twenty days passed. Xu Qing was no longer in the same bay as before. He had changed islands five times. This was his sixth uninhabited island, and on this one, he had dug out a simple bay to use. During those twenty days, he had done only one thing other than change islands: focus on breaking open dharma apertures. He just opened his 10th.

Within the black iron skewer, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior had spent the last half month in a state of absolute trepidation. By now, he was in somewhat of a daze, and was convinced he was in one of the ancient records he'd read in the past. With each dharma aperture that a cultivator opened, more soul power was needed, and the process became more difficult. Because of that, it had taken the patriarch eight years to open 10 dharma apertures. But Xu Qing had done the same thing in twenty days.

It was a rate of progress that left the patriarch gobsmacked. Based on what he knew, even in Seven Blood Eyes, it was common for disciples to take two years or so to open that many dharma apertures. The only exception would be in the case of a huge war, in which a cultivator could kill large numbers of enemies.

But there had been no major war for Seven Blood Eyes in many years. There were only occasional small battles. As for the use of sea beasts, the Forbidden Sea was vast, but although the sea beasts weren't very intelligent, it was hard to kill them in large numbers.

It was only by using poison and spell formations that Xu Qing was able to achieve such rapid progress. There weren't many people who could do that. It not only required special resources, it necessitated an exceptional level of strength to begin with. And it also required the ability to make sure truly dangerous sea beasts didn't show up.

Xu Qing knew that he couldn't keep this up for a long time. First of all, ghostlonging horseshoe crabs were rare, and he had already refined the two he had, and only had a bit of their blood left. At the same time, he didn't have a large number of chrysanthemum mollusks. What was more, Xu Qing was starting to feel nervous. He was creating a lot of beast corpses in the bays he visited, and if he kept it up, he was worried it might attract the attention of something truly terrifying. Because of that, he was already thinking of going back to the sect. Right now, he was extracting the soul of a snakeneck dragon, which he used to batter at his 11th dharma aperture.

Even as a crack appeared on the 11th dharma aperture, Xu Qing's pupils constricted, and he looked off at the distant sea, his eyes gleaming.

That aura....

Off in the distance, the surface of the water exploded as a roughly 300-meter long sea beast shot up into the air. It was covered with what appeared to be a metallic suit of armor, and it had a huge, vicious mouth. While it hung in the air over the water, it looked over at Xu Qing in the bay.

That's a Foundation Establishment armored mackerel!

This wasn't the first Foundation Establishment sea beast he had encountered in the past twenty days. Just seven days before, he'd run into a spiraltooth horseshoe crab. Its terrifying appearance, astonishing aura, and the furnace-like heat it had in it gave Xu Qing the impression it could enter the profound radiance state. He had immediately retreated to the land, maintaining full vigilance, and keeping his dharmaskiff's godliness ready to use. However, the creature hadn't seemed very interested in him. It simply examined him for a moment then left. Ever since then, he had been even more on guard against such dangerous beasts.

As he looked at the armored mackerel, he came to the conclusion that it was very powerful. It seemed intelligent, as it didn't get too close to him, but rather circled the island as if taking stock of him. Its armor made a distinctive clinking sound as it swam through the water. Then, after enough time had passed for an incense stick to burn, it suddenly shot toward the bay Xu Qing was in.

Halfway toward him, it leaped into the air and howled in his direction, releasing a shockwave that created a wave on the surface of the water that rumbled toward the island with mountain-toppling, sea-draining force.

Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly, and his dharmaskiff thrummed as godliness converged within it. Xu Qing reached out with a grasping motion, and his snakeneck dragon appeared in midair. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the snakeneck dragon flew toward the armored mackerel. In response, the armored mackerel stopped and backed up to flee. Apparently, it realized Xu Qing was someone who shouldn't be trifled with, as it dove into the water to flee.

It can't enter the profound radiance state!

Xu Qing's eyes lit up. He had been hoping to find a Foundation Establishment sea beast that couldn't enter the profound radiance state. Now that he had found one, there was no way he could let it get away.

Bursting into motion, he became a streak of light that shot forward, while at the same time, he raised his hand over his head. The image of a heavenly saber appeared above him, which he slashed down toward the surface of the water.

Water crashed as a 300-meter-long furrow opened up in it, revealing the armored mackerel. However, its armor was truly spectacular, as the heavenly saber didn't damage it at all. Instead, the fish turned to look at Xu Qing with a ruthless expression.

However, that was when the iron skewer flew forth, a bluish light glittering on it that revealed it was covered with poison. Xu Qing had done that at the fervent request of Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. It seemed like the iron skewer was intending to hit the fish's armor, but at the last minute, it spun bizarrely in the air, then stabbed into the armored mackerel's eye.

The armored mackerel let loose a howl, then shivered. Instantly, the area around it became filled with countless projections of fish scales. All of them thrummed with dharma force; if they struck a Qi Condensation cultivator, that person would definitely die.

Yet they didn't stop Xu Qing. The black flames within him spread, emerging from his right hand to form something that looked like a dagger.

This was a magical technique from the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture that came after opening 10 dharma apertures. It was called Baleblade, and it changed its appearance depending on the needs of the cultivator. Right now, the dagger of black fire pierced right into the armored mackerel, destroying its armor and sending fire out to cover it. Xu Qing wasn't done. Next, he sent his shadow out toward the fish. Looking very alarmed, the armored mackerel twitched, causing its armor to vanish and take the flame with it, then transform into a metallic tempest that raged toward Xu Qing.

Having accomplished that, it swished its tail, which caused a huge wall of water to rise up between it and Xu Qing. Glaring at Xu Qing, the fish then opened its mouth and spat out a huge black pearl.

The pearl was filled with rotting corpses, some of them beasts, some of them humanoid. The corpses all opened their eyes and howled as if they wanted to escape from the pearl. In fact, their arms began to emerge from within the pearl, making it look like it was covered with spikes as it flew toward Xu Qing. His eyes were cold as the fire billowed higher around him. The spectral drought demon appeared behind him, howling, while at the same time, his snakeskin dragon shot out from the water and toward the black pearl.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as the snakeskin dragon swallowed the pearl. The dragon's belly suddenly swelled as if the pearl were fighting violently to escape, but the dragon kept it contained. After all, the dragon was the manifestation of a magical technique. That said, it seemed like it wouldn't last for much longer.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing burst through the metallic tempest sent at him by the armored mackerel. His personal defenses were activated as he closed in on the fish with his dagger of flame aimed at its eye.

The fish howled, and seemed to want to dive back down to the bottom of the sea. But Xu Qing's shadow had split into two parts, one stretching toward the island, and the other wrapping around the

armored mackerel. As the fish struggled against the bonds, Xu Qing's dagger stabbed into its eye. Then he lifted his left hand, and his 10 dharma apertures raged with fire, covering that hand. Pushing down on the armored mackerel, he began to immolate it.

As it burned, and soul power streamed into Xu Qing, he suddenly felt a sensation of profound danger.

Looking up, he saw dozens of ancient bronze swords flying through the air toward the armored mackerel.

They were arrayed in such a way that the attacker obviously didn't care about hitting Xu Qing. Worse, a huge vortex appeared directly below, giving Xu Qing no other option than to back up and use his black flames to create a shield to defend himself.

Rumbling sounds rang out as the dozens of swords fell, stabbing into the armored mackerel. Of course, it had lost its armor, so it was immediately sliced to bits. At the same time, Xu Qing backed away at top speed. After making sure he was clear of the falling swords, Xu Qing's face turned extremely grim as he looked at the fish corpse floating on the water. Then he looked up to see a young man flying atop a huge ancient bronze sword.

His crimson daoist robe made him very eye-catching. As the First Peak disciple stood with his hands clasped behind his back on his sword, streams of energy and blood rose from the corpse of the armored mackerel, which he then absorbed.

Looking down coldly at Xu Qing, he said, "It is no waste to wait from dusk 'til dawn; as you wish, produce a new treasure to add on."

Then he turned and left.

Xu Qing didn't say anything. Looking at his snakeneck dragon, he saw that the pearl inside it had stopped struggling now that the fish was dead. It was completely suppressed by his snakeneck dragon, who was now consuming it. He hadn't been able to extract all the soul power from the armored mackerel, but he had managed to take about forty percent of it. So he sent it toward his 11th dharma aperture.

A moment later, the 11th aperture opened, and his dharma force rose to new heights. Then he looked in the direction the First Peak disciple had disappeared to. Knowing that the disciple didn't have a life flame, Xu Qing's killing intent began to burn. Waving his hand toward his dharmaskiff in the bay, he sent the terrifying godliness within it out in an attack. A golden beam of light shot off into the distance toward the First Peak disciple.

When the First Peak disciple saw that, his face fell, and he scrambled to pull off an incantation gesture. As he did, the huge bronze sword he stood on tilted up to block the incoming godly attack. Then the sword shattered, and blood oozed out of the corners of the First Peak disciple's mouth as he was shoved backward 300 meters. There, his eyes shone with killing intent as he looked at Xu Qing.

"Easy it is for youths to discard an escort; the fifth watch sounds, taking the escort's life." [1]

Xu Qing had no idea what that meant, so all it did was make his killing intent stronger. Bursting into motion, he closed in on the First Peak disciple, his dagger slashing toward the young man's throat.

Chapter 143: Set to Kill

Xu Qing had his own set of principles. Previously, this person chased a giantfang shark right past him. It wasn't that he hadn't been tempted by that shark. He had been. But he hadn't made a move because he felt that the shark wasn't his.

It was just like that time, so long ago, when Sergeant Thunder gave him some steamed buns to eat. He had been deeply grateful from the bottom of his heart. That said, he wouldn't have felt it inappropriate for Sergeant Thunder to not give him those buns. Later, he treated Sergeant Thunder to some snake, and had felt fully justified in joining whole-heartedly. He had no problem wolfing down what belonged to him.

It was the same today. He had worked hard to capture that armored mackerel, had nearly killed it, and was just about to fully extract its soul. Then this person rudely jumped in and attacked the fish. It was behavior that, to Xu Qing, crossed the line. The last person who had acted this way toward Xu Qing was that young merman. If someone far stronger than him treated him in this way, he would patiently wait for the right opportunity to destroy them. But this person wasn't that strong. And Xu Qing wasn't feeling patient.

Bursting into motion, his black dagger rippled with dark flames as he aimed it toward the young man's throat.

The First Peak disciple's sword had collapsed, but an illusory sword appeared in front of him which blurred to intercept the dagger.

A boom rang out, and Xu Qing didn't hesitate to follow up with a punch mirrored by the howling spectral drought demon. His Sea and Mountain Incantation coupled with his dharma body unleashed such force that a vortex sprang into being in the air in front of his fist, rumbling toward the First Peak disciple like it could rip apart anything it touched.

The First Peak disciple's expression flickered as he backed up. His hands met each other to perform an incantation gesture, but then Xu Qing's shadow closed in, wrapped around his wrist, and interrupted. That distraction had profound effects.

Xu Qing's fist slammed into the illusory sword in front of the disciple. His fist crushed through the sword like a boulder crushing a drinking glass, and as the sword exploded, the blow landed on the young man. The First Peak disciple's pupils constricted, and blood sprayed out of his mouth as he tumbled backward like a kite with its string cut. And before he could stabilize the terrifying force threatening to rip him apart from the inside, the water below him exploded as a snake-neck dragon lunged up with its gaping maw. At the same time, a huge heavenly saber appeared, bursting with shocking momentum as it slashed toward him.

In that moment of deadly crisis, the First Peak disciple's eyes were bloodshot and he howled at the top of his lungs. Instantly, something like a furnace raged into life within him, something almost like the profound radiance state. Brilliant light spread out everywhere, shredding the snake-neck dragon into pieces that dropped down to the water below. They quickly reformed, but it was obvious the dragon had sustained serious damage. Meanwhile, the heavenly saber struck true, but

let loose a thrumming boom as it did. Though the saber hit the disciple, it didn't slash him in half. Instead, it caused blood to ooze out of his mouth as he borrowed the force from the blow to retreat 300 meters.

Xu Qing had noticed that the young man had something that resembled the profound radiance state, yet was different. His best guess was that it was a secret magic that released a fraction of the power of the profound radiance state. However, this young man didn't have a life flame, and therefore, using this secret magic would harm him.

Xu Qing's assessment was correct. As the First Peak disciple fell back, he coughed up a huge mouthful of blood, and the raging furnace within him winked out. His face was now very pale, yet his eyes were still locked on Xu Qing and burning with the desire to do battle. He didn't know Xu Qing, and didn't believe that Xu Qing was worth knowing. This disciple was the most recent, and also final, apprentice to be taken in by the peaklord of the First Peak. In other words, he was the First Peak's ninth highness, and it had been a very long time since he encountered a fellow disciple from the sect who could make him cough up blood.

Now, his eyes filled with killing intent as he glared at Xu Qing. Stabilizing his energy and blood, he wiped his mouth clean of blood and waved his trembling right hand. Instantly, a host of over thirty bronze swords appeared behind him, arranged in a complex spell formation pattern. As they radiated intense sword energy, he pointed at Xu Qing, and the swords shot forward. Then the First Peak disciple sprang into motion, looking almost like a sword himself as he headed right toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing looked completely calm as he also charged forward, waving his hand to cause the black fire in his 11 dharma apertures to spring to life. The fire then erupted out of him, wreathing him completely in flame. At the same time, numerous illusory flame daggers appeared around him.

When they slammed into each other, a heaven-shaking, earth-shattering boom rumbled out. Xu Qing's daggers collapsed, and the flames surrounding him faded a bit. However, the First Peak disciple's swords all shattered, and he coughed up three successive mouthfuls of blood.

Xu Qing also sustained injuries, but because of his body cultivation and dharma body, he didn't even pay attention to them.

But the First Peak disciple was an extraordinary individual. More sword projections appeared around him and shot toward Xu Qing as he approached, filling the sky and causing rumbling sounds to echo out over the surface of the water.

Xu Qing waved his right hand, and a huge wave rolled up, transforming into an enormous hand that grabbed toward his opponent. Meanwhile, the First Peak disciple performed an incantation gesture and touched his forehead. Instantly, the mark of a sun appeared on his forehead, then sent out dazzling light that destroyed the hand of water. Xu Qing frowned, but kept pressing the attack. This time, as they closed in on each other, he decided to resort to a simple head-butt. A boom rang out, and blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth.

At the same time, the First Peak disciple howled in grief, tumbling back, his forehead bleeding and seemingly about to collapse.

Xu Qing was about to chase after him again, but suddenly realized something and backed up. The instant he did, all of the broken pieces of the sword from earlier suddenly shot out of the water,

creating a tornado of blades that swept right over the spot where he would have been passing through if he gave chase.

The First Peak disciple suddenly ceased howling. After backing up a few more meters, he stopped in place to catch his breath. Inside, he was shaken by Xu Qing's performance. The First Peak disciple felt confident in his own status as a very strong cultivator. His own Master had outright said he was. In fact, his Master said he was the strongest new Foundation Establishment cultivator with no profound radiance state in the entire history of the First Peak.

This fight was a big blow to his faith in himself. However, he wasn't ready to give in yet.

"When I go strolling in the sky; the sun and moon both say good-bye!"

The only response he got from Xu Qing was a second godly attack from his dharmaskiff. The dazzling beam of light caused everything around it to ripple and distort as it shot toward the First Peak disciple. The First Peak disciple's expression yet again flickered, and he immediately threw out a jade talisman in front of him. The talisman exploded, and a host of soul shadows appeared from within it.

These soul shadows were all the beasts the First Peak disciple had slain. By using a special sealing method, he captured them and transformed them into a magical technique he could unleash. Most were beasts from forbidden region jungles. As they appeared in the open, they merged together to form one huge, pitch-black monster that faced the incoming attack of godliness. Everything rumbled loudly.

The First Peak disciple's eyes burned with killing intent as he bit the tip of his tongue and spat out a mouthful of blood. Then he lifted his right hand again and jabbed it onto his forehead. A tremor passed through him, and his energy and blood surged. His skin became crimson, to the point where he looked like he was covered in blood. And there was something sharp and incisive that glittered within him as well. Just barely, it was possible to see the image of a huge, blood-colored sword surrounding him as he pierced through the air toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing felt a sensation of danger, but he didn't back down. Throwing both hands out in front of him, he tapped into all 11 of his dharma apertures, causing each of them to emit a 1,500-meter sea of fire.

Combined together, that was a total of 16,500 meters that raged in all directions. As that sea of fire was reflected in the water below, the Forbidden Sea energy for 16,500 meters in all directions combined with it, creating a crushing pressure. And the First Peak disciple in his blood sword form slammed right into it.

A boom rang out. Xu Qing's 16,500-meter sea trembled and began to fade away. But at the same time, the First Peak disciple in his sword form shook violently, and began to collapse starting from the tip of the sword. It didn't take long. After ten breaths of time, the blood sword collapsed, and the First Peak disciple was sent tumbling away. As he did, Xu Qing's 16,500-meter spirit sea became a massive fist which shot toward him.

Mouthful after mouthful of blood sprayed out of the First Peak disciple's mouth, and his eyes went wide. In that critical and potentially deadly moment, he didn't hesitate to pull out a pearl that he then crushed. A haze of water vapor instantly surrounded him, blocking Xu Qing's terrifying attack,

and simultaneously allowing the First Peak disciple to turn and flee. His expression seemed very unsightly, and he had given up any aspirations of continuing the fight.

For one thing, he got the feeling he couldn't beat this opponent. In addition to that, he was terrified of this Seventh Peak disciple's spirit sea. He couldn't assess Xu Qing's cultivation base, but he had the feeling it was close to being able to produce a life flame.

However, just as he thought he was about to escape, a black shadow shot out of the water and wrapped around his leg. Then, the First Peak disciple's face fell as he realized an iron skewer was shooting toward his throat. He was nearly losing his mind with the intense sense of imminent crisis. Before he could do anything, a pop could be heard as the iron skewer hit him.

However, it didn't pierce into the skin of his throat. What was more, it seemed the shadow had finally met its match, as the First Peak disciple slipped out of its grip as if he were coated in oil.

The First Peak disciple didn't escape without paying a price, though, as a jade pendant he had hanging around his neck shattered.

It was a life-saving item his Master had given him, which would substitute itself for him in death. Now that it was destroyed, true terror appeared in the First Peak disciple's eyes. Without any hesitation, he started fleeing at the highest speed he could muster. However, behind him, Xu Qing waved his hand, causing his dharmaskiff to fly out of the nearby bay. As its wings unfurled, Xu Qing jumped onto it, recalled his shadow and skewer, and then started chasing after the First Peak disciple.

This opponent was strong. In fact, he was the strongest Foundation Establishment cultivator Xu Qing had encountered outside of the Captain in his profound radiance state.

If the old Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior faced an opponent like this, he would die within three breaths of time. But he had stolen something that belonged to Xu Qing, and therefore, Xu Qing was dead set on killing him.

Chapter 144: Unprecedented Brutality

The First Peak disciple could move fast. But out on the water, he had only himself to rely on. That was especially true considering that Xu Qing had destroyed his huge bronze sword.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing had his dharmaskiff. Not only did he not need to expend any effort to move at top speed, but also, he could simply sit on the deck and recover while doing so. It was easy to imagine how a chase between the two would ultimately play out. This was one reason why the 'boat cultivators' from the Seventh Peak were so mighty. Once in Foundation Establishment, they were strong on shore, but at the same time, could stay out on the water for long periods of time.

As a result, after about two hours passed, the First Peak disciple was starting to feel extremely anxious at having Xu Qing chase him with his dharmaskiff.

Xu Qing wanted to kill his target, and therefore, he had no qualms about using the godliness in his boat. At a certain point, he unleashed another godly attack. The First Peak disciple let loose an agonized shriek, and quickly performed an incantation gesture and threw out a talisman treasure to defend himself. Blood sprayed from his mouth, but he survived and kept fleeing.

Snorting coldly, Xu Qing kept up the chase. Before long, it was getting dark. As the sun set, slowly turning sea and sky the same color, Xu Qing accelerated on his dharmaskiff. This time, instead of using the godliness in an attack, he just tried to close the distance.

Then he waved his hand, and the sea erupted loudly as a snakeneck dragon suddenly popped up in front of the First Peak disciple, blocking his path. Then, as Xu Qing closed in from behind, he sent his black iron skewer shooting out. As it circled around, looking for an opening, the excited voice of Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior could be heard from inside.

“Milord, milord, you have to destroy this guy! Over the years, your humble servant has read many ancient records, and I’ve seen a lot of accounts of people like this. Based on his clothing, he’s obviously from the Seven Blood Eyes’ First Peak. He’s in Foundation Establishment, but hasn’t ignited his first life flame, yet is obviously very strong. In books, people like that are usually the main character. He’s obviously not an ordinary person. He might even have the title ‘highness.’

“Also, milord, did you notice that he talks very strangely? In most books, people with so many special qualities are usually very hard to kill!

“However, compared to you, milord, he’s like a knockoff protagonist while you’re the real thing. In the ancient records your humble servant has read, people like this usually have incredible destiny. However, after you kill them, you can take their destiny! So you really, really, really don’t want to miss out on this opportunity!

“Another thing. Considering how this guy loves to indulge in histrionics, and how he loves spewing loads of meaningless crap, we have a duty to beat him until he talks like a normal person. It’s satisfying just thinking about it!”

As the patriarch jabbered excitedly, he flew the iron skewer closer and closer to his target. At the same time, he was thinking, You’re dead! There’s only one person who can survive being chased by the Fiendish Xu. And that’s me! There won’t be a second!

As the patriarch pushed the iron skewer to higher speeds, Xu Qing got closer, lifted his hand overhead, and summoned the illusory heavenly saber.

Wailing inwardly, the First Peak disciple threw out a dozen or so talisman treasures, and as they exploded, they repelled the snakeneck dragon and the heavenly saber. Then he continued to flee.

However, that was when Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior saw his opening, and shot forward to stab the First Peak disciple through the arm.

Breathing heavily, and his eyes filled with a vicious gleam, the First Peak disciple shouted, “Burn!”

Instantly, the blood covering the iron skewer burst into flame.

The patriarch shouted in alarm and quickly worked to put out the fire. Feeling like he had lost a lot of face, he howled angrily, causing a huge sealing mark to appear outside the skewer and shoot toward the First Peak disciple.

The First Peak disciple was about to fight back, but then Xu Qing arrived. The moment he did, black fire erupted from him and surrounded the First Peak disciple. It seemed like Xu Qing was about to start extracting his soul.

This level of brutality was shocking to the First Peak disciple, and he fell back at top speed while simultaneously trying to point out to Xu Qing that they were both from the same sect, and didn't need to be fighting like this.

"A home amongst immortals puts the heart at ease; we two are neighbors within the mountains and seas!"

Xu Qing had no idea what that meant, so he tuned out the First Peak disciple's voice and sent black flames raging out with full force. As the moment grew more critical, the First Peak disciple shouted loudly and pulled out a small black statue of a human. When he threw it out, dazzling light exploded from it, and a projected image appeared. It was a middle-aged cultivator in a black daoist robe, his face expressionless. Looking at Xu Qing, he flicked his sleeve, and a wild wind sprang up, blocking Xu Qing's black flames.

Xu Qing was also sent spinning away, blood oozing out of the corners of his mouth. When he finally stopped his backward motion, the First Peak disciple was fleeing in the opposite direction.

"Milord," Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior shouted urgently as he flew back in the iron skewer. "This little punk has too many tricks up his sleeve. Let's just poison him!" The patriarch was really trying to make it sound like he and Xu Qing were working together as a team.

"I already did," Xu Qing said coldly, looking at the First Peak disciple's retreating form.

All of a sudden, the First Peak disciple coughed up a mouthful of black blood. Terror grew in his eyes, as he sensed his energy and blood growing very unstable. At the same time, intense pain struck his internal organs, as if they were melting. Realizing that these were symptoms of poisoning, he immediately pulled out some antidote pills. However, consuming them didn't do anything. In fact, they made the symptoms worse. Xu Qing had designed his poisons specifically to counter the effects of common antidote pills.

Looking more alarmed than ever, the First Peak disciple unleashed a secret magic to suppress the poison. He was really confused by everything that was happening. They were both from the same sect, and all he'd done was snatch a Foundation Establishment sea beast. Was that really worth this sort of life-and-death battle?

"Modern morals have fallen far; bullies make me wonder who I am."

Xu Qing ignored him and sent his dharmaskiff forward in a battering attack.

The First Peak disciple howled in grief, wondering why this Seventh Peak brat was so difficult to communicate with. He had already explained who he was and where he came from, yet his opponent wouldn't give up the fight. At this point, he was coming to the realization that he actually might die. As anxiety built in his heart, he bit his tongue and spat out some more blood. Yet again, he entered his blood sword form, then shot away.

Time passed.

Xu Qing pursued with relentless brutality, chasing the First Peak disciple for two days and three nights!

They clashed numerous times, and Xu Qing always fought at full force. He took advantage of every opportunity to utilize poison, but the First Peak disciple skillfully used some sort of bloodletting magic to neutralize it. What was more, he repeatedly tapped into his secret magic to assume his blood sword form and escape. Xu Qing had landed grievous blows on him numerous times, yet couldn't kill him.

However, he wasn't ready to give up. Meanwhile, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior sighed inwardly. Watching the First Peak disciple flee kept making him think of himself.

You little brat. I don't care if you really are an MC. That alone isn't enough now that you've run into the Fiendish Xu. The only way you could survive is if you do the same thing I did. But there are only a few open spots left for that kind of thing. At this point, only the dharmaskiff is available!

Though the patriarch sighed, he also felt quite proud of himself.

By now, the First Peak disciple's hair was disheveled, his robe was in tatters, and he looked very weak. The paleness of his face made it obvious how much blood he had lost. He had bitten his tongue so many times that he was worried that if he kept it up, he might not have a tongue left. By now, his cold demeanor had long since vanished. He had never met anyone as stubborn as this. During this two-day and three-night chase, neither of them had slept. It really seemed like this person was not going to give up until the First Peak disciple was dead.

"The heart falls numb when winter comes and autumn goes; when leaves fall and blood pools, homesickness grows!"

The First Peak disciple suddenly threw a medicinal pill out behind him, which exploded, revealing a host of souls. However, they didn't launch an attack. It seemed more like the First Peak disciple was giving them to Xu Qing. The First Peak disciple had been collecting them, some for cultivation use, and some to sell to Seventh Peak Foundation Establishment cultivators. After all, he knew that though these types of souls weren't as useful as freshly extracted ones, they could still be helpful.

"Where water meets land, reach the moon in the sky; all living beings know that you rule on high!"

He forced the words from his mouth hoping they would save his life, then bit his tongue and transformed into a blood sword.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing couldn't make heads nor tails of his babbling poetry. However, after seeing all those souls, he sent out his black flames to absorb them. The souls didn't resist, and immediately became kindling that he sent smashing into his 12th dharma aperture. As a result, he managed to half-open it. Eyes lighting up, he accelerated in his pursuit.

Seeing that, the First Peak disciple's expression became one of grief and indignation. He really didn't understand why Xu Qing was being so unreasonable. The First Peak disciple had begged for forgiveness, and even offered compensation. He had even pointed out that they were on the same side! But despite all that, including flattery, this was the result?? It was just a sea beast, right?

"Sun, moon, and stars are seen every day; to we immortals they are friends to stay."

Xu Qing didn't say anything in response, and instead, kept up the chase. Another day and night passed. The First Peak disciple had run out of souls, and Xu Qing had opened two dharma apertures, putting him at a total of 13. Despite that, he wasn't giving up the chase, and had even launched some mortal blows, only to have his quarry evade them. The First Peak disciple was so bedraggled his robe almost didn't look like clothing. He had dark circles under his eyes, and his face was extremely pale.

On a few occasions he was hit so badly he saw stars, and was worried he might pass out from exhaustion. And thanks to the poison, he was even weaker, pushing him closer and closer to the point of despair. He was glad he had prepared so well for this trip out to sea. All the boosts to his battle prowess allowed him to evade numerous mortal attacks from the Seventh Peak disciple.

Unfortunately, he had gone too far out to sea. Despite the days that the chase had stretched out, they still weren't close to the sect. And if his calculations were correct, they were still about five days away from it. Realizing that, his heart filled with despair. He had tried sending some voice messages to ask for help, but was so far away from shore that the messages didn't go through. As his pursuer accelerated, the First Peak disciple moaned inwardly. But then, he noticed rumbling sounds in the sky ahead. Craning his neck, he saw figures flying through the sky, causing thunderous rumbling sounds, and kicking the seawater into a storm-like frenzy.

Dozens of figures up ahead were engaged in fierce fighting, and there appeared to be two groups. Their cultivation bases were difficult to assess, and the shockwaves that rolled out from their blows filled the area with wild winds. The sky above them was dark.

Despite being a great distance away from them, the First Peak disciple felt such immense pressure from their aura that he coughed up some blood. Behind him, Xu Qing saw the same thing, and as his mind spun, he also coughed up blood.

The figures ahead seemed almost like gods, and they definitely surpassed Third Elder. Just looking at him caused Xu Qing to feel like his body might collapse. Then he saw that beneath one of the figures was a dreadnaught, which was when he realized who they were.

At the same time, the First Peak disciple's eyes lit up as he realized that one of those figures was his Master. Whooping with joy, he cried, "The setting sun casts out a divine ray of light; a new thread of hope rises up deep in the sea."

Chapter 145: One Talisman, Two Lives

When the First Peak disciple called out in excitement, he projected his voice with dharma force, ensuring that he could be heard from quite a distance. His voice pierced shrilly high into the dome of heaven. In fact, all of the dozens of fighting cultivators from both sides of the conflict heard him.

Xu Qing's expression flickered and he backed up. It wasn't just the unfathomable poetry that caused him to do so, but also... the dozens of gazes that turned in their direction. Every single one of those gazes had eyes like gods, and all of them had auras that, despite the great distance involved, had caused Xu Qing to tremble and cough up blood. Therefore, when they looked over... Xu Qing backed up without any hesitation. He fully activated his dharmaskiff's defenses, took out some defensive talisman treasures, and waved his hand to call over his snakeneck dragon as well.

However, the indescribable terrifying pressure was so intense that, as Xu Qing's mind spun, his snakeneck dragon collapsed, and his talisman treasures shattered. Thankfully, his dharmaskiff was

extraordinary, and had been built with godliness. Therefore, though the defenses were destroyed, the boat itself remained intact. Shaking, he coughed up two more mouthfuls of blood. However, as the dharmaskiff's defenses reactivated, and he backed up at high speed, he managed to finally stand up to the pressure.

Meanwhile, the First Peak disciple coughed up eight successive mouthfuls of blood as three of his life-saving items collapsed and his blood sword form was destroyed. He even pulled out an amazing shield, but it shattered. By that point, he was far enough away that he could resist the pressure. Xu Qing's heart pounded with fear as he continued to back up, while simultaneously taking in the scene.

High in the dome of heaven, the two parties involved in the conflict exchanged blows that caused wild colors to flash in heaven and earth, massive rumbling to echo out, and a tempest to rage on the surface of the water. Among the figures involved in the fight, Xu Qing spotted the peaklord of the Seventh Peak. There were six other individuals with him, wearing different colored robes, and all of them pulsing with auras similar to his.

Xu Qing didn't need to guess who they were. They were obviously the peaklords of the other mountain peaks in Seven Blood Eyes.

Fighting them on even terms were Seazombies. Xu Qing had encountered Seazombies in the Merfolk Isles. As for these, his eyes stung as he looked at them, but he could tell that they looked like humans. Each one wore a black suit of armor, and their eyes burned with black flames. At the same time, they seemed to exude a towering zombie poison.

There were other cultivators present as well, with weaker cultivation bases. However, they were still mighty. Xu Qing saw Third Elder, as well as Seazombie cultivators who were roughly on the same level as him.

Eventually, Xu Qing's eyes hurt so bad that he looked away. If he kept looking, he knew that his eyes would eventually collapse. That was how much more powerful this group was than him.

Suddenly, a howl echoed across the dome of heaven, and a crimson-robed old man from the Seven Blood Eyes group waved his hand. Instantly, an awe-inspiring golden sword appeared around him as he shot away from the Seazombies and toward Xu Qing and the First Peak disciple. The old man's face was as red as his crimson robe, making it seem like he was a burning sun. At the same time, he emanated a hair-raising heat. This was the peaklord of the First Peak.

Seeing him approach, the First Peak disciple excitedly shouted, "A new thread of hope rises up deep in the ocean; the setting sun casts out a divine ray of light!!!"

"Even in a moment like this you refuse to talk like a normal person, my apprentice?" shouted First Peaklord. "Get the hell out of here! Stick around and you'll end up dead!" He waved the sword in his hand, blocking an attack from one of the Seazombies that had broken away from the main battle to chase him.

In the blink of an eye, their fighting had taken them off into the distance. Hearing what the old man said, Xu Qing's pupils constricted and he sent his dharmaskiff underwater and shooting away at top speed.

Not too far off, the First Peak disciple also seemed anxious to get away. He knew that time was limited, and if his Master left him, he would be dead for sure. Looking like he was hardly able to spit the words out, he shouted, “Master, help me! This Seventh Peak punk has been trying to kill me for ten days and ten nights! He won’t rest until I’m dead! Don’t leave me, Master! Heeeelp!!”

Meanwhile, Xu Qing didn’t hesitate to push his dharmaskiff in the opposite direction with as much speed as possible.

Some distance away, the old man from the First Peak looked back in shock. He had known from the beginning that his last apprentice liked to babble meaningless poetry. And that was because the young man had learned that Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity had often hidden profound truths within poetry. Ever since then, he’d gone crazy trying to do the same thing. In fact, the last time the peaklord heard his apprentice speak like a normal person was three years ago. The old man’s gaze shifted like lightning to Xu Qing’s fleeing form.

Despite how far away he was, and the fact that Xu Qing was now under water, the pressure of his gaze still caused Xu Qing to tremble. And then he simply couldn’t move at all, as though he were restrained in place, his life hanging on a thread.

Opening his mouth, First Peaklord said, “You—”

“It’s a kid’s scrap,” a voice said coolly from higher up. The person who spoke the words stood atop a dreadnaught, and was casually fighting three Seazombies. He was none other than Master Seventh.

The First Peak disciple was visibly taken aback. However, First Peaklord didn’t react at all, and continued speaking, making it impossible to determine if Master Seventh’s words had made him change his mind about what he had been about to say.

“—You two are really getting into a scuffle considering the circumstances?” He waved his hand, and a golden paper talisman flew out. It appeared to be a talisman treasure, but at the same time, seemed a hundred times more powerful than any talisman treasure Xu Qing had ever seen. It splashed into the water and headed toward him. As it closed in, it suddenly ripped in half, with one part heading toward the shocked First Peak disciple and landing on his face. The other part pierced right through Xu Qing’s dharmaskiff defenses and landed on his arm.

The moment it happened, Xu Qing and the First Peak disciple trembled, and the talisman disappeared, leaving behind a golden mark on both of them.

“This lifelink talisman won’t harm you in any way. However, if one of you dies, the other will also die. If you want to kill each other, then go ahead. But if you don’t, then get the hell back to the sect. Once you’re there, the grand formation will dispel the talisman.”

Next, the peaklord sent a massive wave of force down, picked up Xu Qing and the First Peak disciple, and threw them off into the distance. Finally he shot back into the battle, waving his sword to chop the leg off of one of the Seazombie cultivators. Before the Seazombie could react, sword

energy shot through him, and he exploded. Then another Seazombie engaged with him, and they started fighting, rapidly moving off into the distance.

Waves rolled across the surface of the sea, and a very unsightly expression appeared on Xu Qing's face as he looked down at the mark on his arm. The mark wasn't actually limited to his arm; it covered his entire body.

Not too far away, the First Peak disciple was also looking at the mark. However, in contrast to Xu Qing, he was breathing a sigh of relief. In fact, he even took out a half-broken sword, sat on it, and looked at Xu Qing on his dharmaskiff.

Xu Qing looked back at him coldly. "What's your name?"

"I've lived free, as if drunk or dreaming; with a masked face, I've traveled the world."

Struggling to keep his killing intent under control, Xu Qing summoned an illusory dagger of black flame and rushed toward the First Peak disciple.

The First Peak disciple's heart leapt into his throat, but he trusted his Master, so he forced himself to just sit in place. The knife closed in on his throat, and just when it seemed like it was about to plunge into the flesh...

Xu Qing suddenly felt an intense sensation of deadly crisis. He hated to admit it, but it seemed this lifelink talisman really was astonishing. With the talisman in place, he couldn't kill his opponent. Nor did it seem possible to beat him to a pulp, or cripple his cultivation base.

Besides, given how tenacious he was, it was always possible Xu Qing might accidentally kill him, and thus, kill himself. That wasn't even to mention that the fellow had formidable battle prowess, ensuring that it would take a lot of effort to completely defeat him. After weighing the options, Xu Qing quashed his killing intent, glared coldly at the young man, then put his dagger away and got back onto his dharmaskiff.

Seeing that, the First Peak disciple finally started to recover from the terror which had been building up in him.

As for Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior in the iron skewer, he looked at the distant peaklords and sighed deeply.

Why didn't I think of that? It's a freaking good idea!!!

Meanwhile, Xu Qing sat cross-legged on his dharmaskiff, using his shadow to overload himself with mutagen, hoping that it might get rid of the lifelink talisman mark. Actually, the lifelink talisman mark did flicker a bit, but Xu Qing could tell that the process was going very slowly.

Ignoring the First Peak disciple, Xu Qing kept up the process of chipping away at the mark, then took out his bamboo slip and used the iron skewer to carve something on it.

Upon seeing the bamboo slip and all the names on it, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior's eyes went wide. That was especially true considering his name was at the top of the list. That got his heart pounding, and he was suddenly struck with how vengeful of a person Xu Qing was. But what caused him to tremble even more was the realization that, though his own name was crossed out, it looked different from other names that had been crossed out. The other names were crossed out with three lines, but his was only crossed out with one. And it was very faint.

Don't tell me he's still thinking about killing me? Terror gripped the patriarch, and he suddenly decided that he had to work much harder at being useful. The patriarch then watched as Xu Qing wrote a new name on the list.

'Idiot.'

Peering surreptitiously at the First Peak disciple, the patriarch mused that he fully approved of putting this name on the list.

As for the First Peak disciple, he was breathing a sigh of relief, and thinking that if he hadn't run into his Master, he would probably have lost his life already.

Then he started thinking about the implications of Master Seventh's words, and that caused him to look over at Xu Qing.

Unfortunately, he didn't actually know a lot of poetry. Most of the things he said were just random words thrown together. Though he wanted to ask Xu Qing some questions, he wasn't really sure of how to word them.

After thinking for a moment, he forced out the following lines.

"On a sleepless night, I listen to the rain; is the immortal in the sky your father?"

Completely ignoring the psychotic ramblings, Xu Qing finished writing 'Idiot,' and then put the bamboo slip away. After that, he activated his dharmaskiff's defenses and prepared to put some distance between himself and this young man.

Just as he was about to perform an incantation gesture... a rumbling could be heard off in the distance. Looking over toward where the Seven Blood Eyes cultivators were fighting the Seazombies, he saw the mangled torso of a Seazombie Gold Core cultivator splash into the water, sending out a huge wave before sinking down.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted.

Chapter 146: Xu Qing's Dao Protector

Xu Qing recognized that Seazombie as the same one First Peaklord had slashed with his sword. This was apparently the second grievous injury he had sustained. Though it wasn't possible to tell if he was alive or dead, if he wasn't dead, he would be soon. Looking at the spot where he had fallen, Xu Qing's eyes lit up in the same way the Captain's eyes had lit up upon seeing Joine's flesh.

The First Peak disciple was also looking at the same thing, although he seemed hesitant.

Xu Qing thought about it for a moment, and then a look of determination appeared on his face. Beneath his dharmaskiff, his snakeneck dragon suddenly shot down toward the sinking remains of the Seazombie cultivator.

The body was in bad shape. Its lower half was gone, as was its head, leaving behind only the torso. Vast quantities of black blood spewed out of it into the surrounding water. The Seazombie's chest was still; it really seemed as if he was dead.

As his snakeneck dragon reached the torso and prepared to bite it, the torso suddenly twitched and its arm lifted. Its hand touched the snakeneck dragon, whose entire body collapsed. The only thing

left behind was the armored mackerel's core. However, the dragon quickly reformed back around that.

Meanwhile, the Seazombie cultivator seemed to have drained the last of his strength. His hand dropped, and his aura seemed incredibly weak. In fact, the mere act of moving his arm had made many of his chest wounds worse.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing performed a double-handed incantation gesture, sending his snakeneck dragon back in for another bite. This time, the Seazombie twitched again, severely damaging the dragon, but at the same time, the dragon managed to bite off some flesh. In this case, it was a finger.

Xu Qing wasn't going to go down himself, and instead reformed the snakeneck dragon. He wasn't hiding what he was doing, so off to the side, the First Peak disciple saw everything.

At first he seemed suspicious, but when he realized what Xu Qing was doing, his eyes lit up. Looking at Xu Qing, then looking down into the water, he watched as the snakeneck dragon made a second attempt.

Rumbling sounds echoed out as the Seazombie's arm exploded, causing the snakeneck dragon to collapse. Seeing that, Xu Qing shot to his feet.

However, that was when the First Peak disciple laughed heartily, and before Xu Qing could do anything else, dove into the water and went down toward the sinking Seazombie.

Xu Qing dove into the water right behind him, and pretended to try to catch up, though he intentionally hung back a bit. He had never planned to be the first into the water. Despite the tests with his snakeneck dragon, he was still leery. After all, this was a cultivator on the same level as one of the sect elders. Even in the dilapidated state he was in, it was still possible he had lifesaving items on him. That wasn't even to mention the bizarre recovery capabilities of the Seazombies, which Xu Qing himself had personally witnessed. Therefore, he would rather have someone else go ahead of him to check out the situation.

As for whether this disciple from the First Peak would end up dead... Xu Qing doubted it. The disciple obviously had more lifesaving items hidden away on him. And if he really got into a deadly situation, Xu Qing was fairly confident he could save him using his shadow. Having reached the conclusion that this was definitely the best idea, Xu Qing kept his distance and watched as the First Peak disciple got close to the Seazombie cultivator.

As the First Peak disciple neared, he performed a double-handed incantation gesture, summoning a host of swords that he sent flying down. He wasn't stupid. Although he had beat Xu Qing into the water, he was worried the whole thing might be a trick. However, the temptation was too great for him to resist, so he had gone ahead. That said, he was still going to do some of his own testing.

Just as his swords were about to reach their target, the Seazombie cultivator's chest suddenly opened up, and a glob of black blood appeared, which transformed into a vicious ghost. Roaring, it flew toward the First Peak disciple.

That roar contained shockingly violent power, which smashed all of the incoming swords and caused blood to ooze out of the First Peak disciple's eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Pulling out a jade pendant, he crushed it, causing a defensive barrier to appear while he fell back, terror written on his face.

However, at the same time, Xu Qing rushed past him, heading at top speed toward the Seazombie cultivator.

Again, the ghost on the Seazombie's chest roared. As it did, Xu Qing's eyes glittered coldly, and a black umbrella appeared, opening up and bearing the brunt of the attack as the sound once again rumbled out. Xu Qing trembled violently, and blood oozed out of him. But at the same time, a dagger of black flame appeared in his right hand, and he thrust it out viciously toward the ghost.

The ghost writhed as black flames swept out over it. Then, a second ghost appeared on the Seazombie's chest, and it also unleashed a roar.

Xu Qing was shoved backward by about thirty meters. Meanwhile, the Seazombie cultivator took advantage of the moment to accelerate downward into the water. He was trying to flee.

Xu Qing's eyes flickered coldly. In the brief contact he had made with the Seazombie, he could sense a scrap of its discarnate soul. That alone was tempting, but more than that, he had noticed a bag of holding on the Seazombie. [1]

There was no way he would let this opportunity slip through his fingers. It wasn't often that you would run into a dying cultivator on the level of a sect elder. And even if you did, it wouldn't necessarily be possible to take their belongings.

His mind made up, Xu Qing shot toward the rapidly sinking Seazombie corpse. His snakeneck dragon swirled down to surround him, helping him pick up speed. And his dharmaskiff also sank under the surface of the water, glittering as it prepared an attack of godliness.

Meanwhile, the First Peak disciple watched with wide eyes as Xu Qing shot down. Although he was tempted by the possibilities of this situation, he didn't feel like it was worth risking his life over. After all, he was the ninth highness of the First Peak. He didn't mind taking some risks, but putting his life on the line blithely wasn't an option. He had a bright future ahead of him. But... Xu Qing was going for it. And he was connected to Xu Qing with a lifelink talisman. If Xu Qing died, he would die as well, and vice versa. While only moments ago, he had felt very pleased because of that, now he was feeling very nervous. He was also starting to think that his Master might not be the amazing genius he'd thought.... After vacillating for a moment, he gritted his teeth, uttered a curse in his heart, and followed after Xu Qing.

In order to pick up speed, he bit his tongue, spitting out some blood to use his secret magic and turn into a blood sword. After all, he was worried this Seventh Peak lunatic would get himself killed if he didn't hurry up. As he neared, he took out a lifesaving jade amulet and, despite how much it pained him, tossed it to Xu Qing. Xu Qing grabbed it.

When the First Peak disciple saw that, he sighed deeply, and mused that he really shouldn't have tried to steal this person's sea beast. Instead of feeling free from worry thanks to the lifelink talisman, he felt more like he'd become a dao protector.

Feeling very frustrated, he watched as Xu Qing head-butted the Seazombie corpse. Picking up some speed, he hurried to help, keeping an eye out for his own safety, but simultaneously making sure Xu Qing was safe as well.

And thus, the two of them engaged in a bitter fight with a Seazombie under the surface of the water. The Seazombie only had a discarnate soul left in him, but the ghost projections he could create were still formidable. Both Xu Qing and the First Peak disciple took significant damage.

The way Xu Qing seemed to disregard his own life made the First Peak disciple very frustrated. So, he kept giving him lifesaving items, while also using his own trump cards in the hope of ending the battle sooner.

Eventually, Xu Qing completely stopped defending himself. His hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, black flames erupted and he started extracting the soul power while the First Peak disciple protected him. Anyone who saw how this was playing out would be deeply stunned. Finally, the First Peak disciple gritted his teeth and backed away, convinced that Xu Qing wasn't actually suicidal, and that he would take over defending himself.

Xu Qing just looked at him coldly, then ignored him and kept up the assault on the Seazombie. The First Peak disciple watched in shock. When he saw Xu Qing nearly die a few times, he howled inwardly and threw out some more defensive jade talismans. A bitter look on his face, he also joined in on the attack.

He put all of his frustration into his attacks. The battle lasted all day. Eventually, Xu Qing had extracted all of the Seazombie's discarnate soul, and had also taken his bag of holding. At that point, both he and the First Peak disciple were completely exhausted.

Back on the dharmaskiff, the First Peak disciple whipped out a sword and held it up to his own throat. Gasping for breath, and his eyes filled with incomparable determination, he gritted his teeth and said, "During Tomb-Sweeping, two incense sticks are burning; heartbreak is avoided when splitting the earnings!"

"I don't understand," Xu Qing replied coolly, putting the bag of holding away.

The First Peak disciple's eyes were completely bloodshot as he stared at Xu Qing. After some struggling, he forced himself to speak like a normal person for the second time.

"We split the loot! If you don't, I'll kill myself right in front of you!!"

Xu Qing looked at him and saw the determination in his eyes. And as he thought about it, he realized the young man had been a big help. He had worked hard keeping Xu Qing safe, to the point where he actually seemed superior to an ordinary dao protector.

Opening the bag of holding, he dumped it out between the two of them. A mass of items fell out into a huge pile, including a stack of spirit notes, a vast assortment of spirit notes and jade slips, some medicinal pill bottles, various crafting ingredients, and the like.

There were two particular jade slips that emanated powerful fluctuations. Xu Qing had seen jade slips like this before. They were like the lifesaving items the First Peak disciple had used. Given the fluctuations, they were obviously very impressive. Xu Qing had also seen things like them in shops in the Port District, and knew that they hadn't been created by Foundation Establishment cultivators. Instead, they had been made by Gold Core cultivators. Of course, mere jade couldn't contain the full might of a Gold Core cultivator, so such jade slips usually contained only a bit of Gold Core power.

These two slips seemed recently crafted, and weren't something this Seazombie would have needed. In all likelihood, they had been intended as gifts for someone else. There was also a piece of jade carved into the shape of a feather. When Xu Qing and the First Peak disciple saw it, both of their eyes glittered.

A magical device! Xu Qing thought. The Spirit Breath Lamp was a magical device, and his iron skewer was, in some ways at least, similar to a magical device.

Magical devices existed between talisman treasures and magical treasures, and were items that had been created by a cultivator. However, they were not as powerful as the legendary magical treasures. And they were categorized into the tiers of lesser, greater, and superior.

Few cultivators would ever have the opportunity to get a magical treasure, and magical devices were similarly rare. Xu Qing didn't hesitate for a moment to reach out and grab the jade feather. The First Peak disciple also reached out at the same time, but he didn't reach for the feather. Instead, he picked up something that didn't look very impressive at all.

It was an iron box.

Chapter 147: Wish Box

When Xu Qing noticed the box, his pupils constricted. He had seen two other boxes like this.

The first had been in the possession of Horsefour back in the scavenger basecamp. The second had been with the young merman. To this day, Xu Qing still had no idea what they were. And in all of the shops he had visited in the capital city, he never saw anything like them. [1]

Today, he saw a third one. However, exactly as he laid eyes on it, the First Peak disciple snatched it and put it into his robe. Looking vigilantly at Xu Qing, he, "A hundred mouthfuls of blood were coughed up today; splitting the earnings is what true heroes do."

"Talk like a normal person," Xu Qing said coldly, then he waved his hand, activating the dharmaskiff's defenses and making it impossible for the First Peak disciple to leave.

Seeing this, the First Peak disciple sighed. Then he punched himself in the gut, causing himself to cough up a mouthful of black blood. After confirming that he had been poisoned, he used his secret magic to suppress it, then looked helplessly at Xu Qing. All the while, he mused that people from the Seventh Peak really lacked good character. This guy put poison on his own dharmaskiff? Was he trying to kill himself?

A long moment passed in which Xu Qing just stared.

Finally, the First Peak disciple sighed and said, "We said we'd split the loot, right? I just want this. You can have everything else."

Without a word, Xu Qing collected all the other items together. As he did, he happened to notice a seven-colored medallion. It had been crafted of wood, and appeared to be an identity medallion. It looked quite well-worn. From the patina on the surface of the wood, it seemed like it had been handled frequently by someone. Xu Qing studied at it, then looked up at the First Peak disciple.

"In the vast wilds, people flock to the—" Before he could finish with his poem, he noticed Xu Qing frowning, and stopped talking. Worried that if he didn't make himself clear, Xu Qing might not cooperate, he again forced himself to talk like a normal person. "It's an identity medallion from the Seven Sect Coalition. Since we got it from a Seazombie, it probably means that, in life, he was a Seven Sect Coalition cultivator."

“What’s that other thing you picked up?” Xu Qing asked.

The First Peak disciple hesitated. Obviously, this Seventh Peak disciple didn’t know what a wish box was. Originally, he’d intended to not explain. But then he decided that might not be a good idea. If the Seventh Peak disciple thought he was trying to keep some astounding treasure, it could lead to a very dangerous situation.

Shaking his head helplessly, he said, “It’s a wish box. Wish boxes contain gifts from cultivators from a previous epoch, placed inside specifically to be received by other cultivators in subsequent epochs.

“After the broken face of the god arrived, this tradition began as a way to mark the ending of epochs in the Revered Ancient mainland. In the last days of an epoch, wish boxes will be created using special materials. A lot of them have been created over the years.” At first, the First Peak disciple had found it difficult to speak without poetry, but the more he talked, the easier it became. In fact, it actually felt somewhat comfortable.

“Wish boxes are specially made to be able to survive the ending of an epoch. I’ve heard that some people have found wish boxes that look like coffins, and contain dead cultivators. Other people find wish boxes that are empty. There’s no way to know what’s inside before you open it.

“Each box contains items sealed inside by a different powerful expert. In other words, that person is the only one who could know what the box contains.

“I’ve heard of people finding magical treasures. Techniques. Things like that. Sometimes a wish box will contain nothing more than some leaves or other random things. In some cases, it can be completely worthless. In the final analysis, it all comes down to how lucky you are.

“I’ve already opened three wish boxes, and none of them had anything spectacular in them. But I have the feeling this is the time I’m going to get lucky. They’re easy to open. You just concentrate your dharma force on the box and it’ll open, though it’s usually a slow process. The reason I want this one is that you can tell the dharma force concentration has already reached the point where it will open soon.”

Apparently, once the First Peak disciple started talking, he would keep going without giving any opportunities for interruption. After he finished speaking, he backed up a few steps and looked vigilantly at Xu Qing.

“If you don’t agree, then I’ll give you the wish box in exchange for that magical device and those two jade talisman treasures.”

After mulling the matter over, Xu Qing opened his dharmaskiff’s defenses. From that, the First Peak disciple realized that Xu Qing was allowing him to leave. He quickly flew off the boat and landed on his sword.

Xu Qing looked away from him, sat down cross-legged, and sent his dharmaskiff back in the direction of Seven Blood Eyes. He wanted to get rid of the lifelink talisman as quickly as possible. Although his shadow was eating away at the mark, the process was too slow, and felt like a waste of time.

As he sat there, he started going through the items he'd acquired. The bag of holding had belonged to a Gold Core cultivator, and it contained some astonishing things. The spirit notes alone were worth more than 200,000 spirit stones. Granted, they weren't Seven Blood Eyes spirit notes, but he could exchange them in the sect for a small fee.

Xu Qing estimated that he could sell the random items in the bag for a few hundred thousand spirit stones. As for the two jade talismans, they were probably worth a few tens of thousands of spirit stones.

What was worth the most was the magical device shaped like a feather. It was a shocking haul.

However, Xu Qing had the feeling that a Gold Core cultivator should have a lot more belongings. This was probably only a small portion of his true savings. After all, most people didn't just have one bag of holding.

What a pity. I guess whoever injured him must have taken his other things. Either that, or he kept them somewhere else. Sighing, he focused inwardly on the discarnate soul that was just now beginning to burn as kindling. Let's see what an elder-level discarnate soul can do. And the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture supposedly works great on Seazombies. I wonder how many dharma apertures I can open!

He checked his dharmaskiff defenses, then looked at the First Peak disciple, who seemed very much on guard. Then he closed his eyes and focused on the black flames within him. All 13 of his dharma apertures raged with balefire, burning the Seazombie discarnate soul. Then he sent the resulting soul force toward his 14th dharma aperture. The dharma aperture trembled and then opened. But the process didn't stop there. Under Xu Qing's control, the power of the burning discarnate soul continued to his 15th dharma aperture, which also opened! Then his 16th and 17th. It was only after the 20th opened that the discarnate soul finally faded away.

I opened 7 dharma apertures!

Although he had anticipated something like this might happen, it was still surprising, and his eyes shone brightly as a result. The more dharma apertures you opened, the harder it became to open new ones. And once he had gone past 10, he had increasingly sensed that the soul power he needed was reaching ridiculous levels. Despite that, this discarnate soul had allowed him to open seven in a row, which suddenly made him wish he could find more such souls.

Sadly, it's too hard.

Xu Qing knew full well that he had only succeeded with the help of the young man from the First Peak. Without all the lifesaving items he'd given, it would never have worked.

I made out quite well. Now I just need to get back to the sect, remove the lifelink talisman, then come out to sea again. Before long, I should be able to form my life flame!

At this point, Xu Qing focused on gathering dharma force in his dharma apertures. At the same time, he took out the feather-shaped magical device. After inspecting it closely, he sent some dharma force into it.

Gradually, three days passed.

While Xu Qing focused on his dharma apertures and the magical device, the First Peak disciple worked on the wish box. When it finally reached the point where he knew he could open it, he looked over to confirm that Xu Qing was working on his cultivation. Then he slowed down a bit to put some distance between himself and the dharmaskiff. Finally, he waved his hand to summon a defensive barrier that would give him some privacy.

As he held the iron box in his hands, his eyes shone with excitement. He had not been lying to Xu Qing. He really had opened three wish boxes in the past. However, what he hadn't revealed was that the first one he opened contained an ancient jade slip. Although the slip itself wasn't valuable, it had contained information about the Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns. Information like that was worth a lot.

Specifically, that ancient jade slip told the life story of three specific Ancient Emperors. The First Peak disciple had become fascinated with those stories, especially the detail about how Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity loved hiding profound truths in poetry. That had been very inspiring.

Taking a deep, excited breath, the First Peak disciple again made sure that Xu Qing wasn't looking at him. Rubbing his hands in anticipation, he hit himself on the forehead, and then landed a blow on the pit of his stomach. Then he went into a ritualistic prayer with his eyes closed.

After enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, his eyes opened, and he reached down and put his hands on the box. A cracking sound rang out. There had been no visible cracks on the box before. It had seemed like a pure lump of metal.

But now, it opened exactly like a box to reveal a finger-sized jade bottle. It already had dark spots on it, making it look very old. And it seemed to contain a medicinal liquid of some sort. Next to it was an ancient jade slip. The First Peak disciple's heart started pounding.

The first wish box he had opened had contained something interesting, but the other two had been completely worthless. Therefore, seeing that this box not only had an ancient jade slip, but also a bottle with medicinal liquid in it, he couldn't help but be excited.

"I struck pay dirt!" he murmured. Suddenly realizing that he was getting too used to speaking normally, he cleared his throat. "All the misery at sea was not in vain; prosperity surges to amazing heights."

Feeling a bit better, he picked up the bottle, studied it for a bit, and then opened it. Almost immediately, a very unusual odor wafted out. The First Peak disciple had no idea what was in the bottle, but the odor stimulated his psyche, giving him the feeling that the liquid was still effective.

Chuckling, he murmured, "Jade dragons and heavenly spirits give good fortune; yet only I shall benefit from it."

That said, he didn't dare to consume the liquid. After taking another whiff, he closed the bottle and looked at the ancient jade slip.

The moment he inspected it, a message from inside rang into his mind.

“Greetings and best wishes, oh ye destined one.

“I wast born in the Dark Serenity epoch, and blessed with the dao by an Ancient Emperor. I knoweth not whether the god Ru Cang existeth in thy time. This wish didst containeth the treasure of a foolish friend, but in mine disdain, I didst discard it as refuse and replace it with mine precious gift.

“That gift beeth mine bloodline. If thou beeth of the fairer sex, then bear thee mine descendants.

“Thank me not, oh ye destined one. Fare thee well.”

Chapter 148: What Did You Get?

The First Peak disciple stared in shock. He believed himself to be very skilled in literary and academic arts. After all, he normally spoke in poetry. But the contents of this jade slip were bewildering, to the point where he needed to analyze everything bit by bit. Even after that, he still didn't feel that he understood completely, and could only stare blankly at the jade slip.

Mine descendents? Wait... 'mine descendents.' What descendents? And what does he mean by 'fairer sex.' Isn't the term 'fairer sex' used to describe women?

Then he looked at the bottle, and his eyes went wide.

There's no way.... Then he thought back to how he'd smelled the contents of the bottle, and suddenly felt a bit queasy.

“This is ridiculous!!” He almost threw everything into the water, but couldn't quite bear to. After all, he basically had half of the bloodline of an Ancient Emperor. But why did it have to be the male side?

Around this time, Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked over from his dharmaskiff. Guessing that the First Peak disciple had opened the box, and curious about the results, he said, “What did you get?”

The defensive barrier around the sword faded away, and the First Peak disciple sat there, an unsightly expression on his face as he breathed heavily through his nose. It almost seemed like he was trying to purge it of something. He even brought dharma force through his nose until, eventually, his expression returned to normal. Looking up at the sky, he put the wish box away without saying a word.

Xu Qing felt even more curious now, but he looked away.

Time passed as the two of them got closer and closer to Seven Blood Eyes. Along the way, Xu Qing got more familiar with the feather-shaped magical device, which he came to realize augmented speed. When activated, it gave one explosive quickness that surpassed one's ordinary limit by many times over. However, it drew deeply on the fleshly body.

Because he wasn't alone, he didn't want to test it out. But he could imagine what shocking levels of speed he could achieve if he did.

I need to find a place to test it out and get familiar with how to actually use it. Around that time, he spotted a Seventh Peak dharmaboat off in the distance.

The First Peak disciple had seemed overwhelmed with boredom ever since opening the wish box. When he spotted the distant dharmaboat, he took out a new daoist robe and put it on. He seemed so familiar with the process that it was a habit for him. Then his expression turned as cold as ice. Sword energy swirled out to surround him, making him look extremely vigilant. And as the sword energy swirled, it lifted his hair around him, such that any casual observer would think he was a very extraordinary person.

However, it was apparently all an act. After the Seventh Peak dharmaboat passed by them, he slumped back down dejectedly. That, coupled with the rapid manner in which he changed clothes, was very strange to Xu Qing.

As time passed, they encountered more and more disciples from Seven Blood Eyes. The same thing happened each time. Xu Qing got used to it. Eventually, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior took advantage of the situation to quietly say, "Milord, this brat obviously cares a lot about outward appearances. Given he's that kind of person, maybe we don't need to kill him after all. People like that can sometimes be useful.

"When the moment is right, say a few flattering words to him. Based on the ancient records your humble servant has read, this is the kind of person who will shed blood for the sake of face.

"Furthermore, because your humble servant realized that he cares so much about face, I used a special technique to record images of this brat in his bedraggled state. I also recorded him speaking like a normal person. I'm not sure it will come in handy later, but at the very least, we have some things we can use against him.

"If you find the right opportunities, Milord, you should create some situations in which he'll lose a lot of face. For example, make him beg you for help, make him fall into some filth, that sort of thing. I'll make sure to get a recording of it, and then we'll have even more ammunition for when the time comes." The patriarch spoke at a very rapid rate, and though he didn't emphasize his own role, it was obvious he was trying to prove his worth.

"Also, Milord, I beg you to punish me for not thinking of this sooner. It took a lot of thought on the part of your humble servant, and I know I spent too much time coming up with the idea. Please, punish me, Milord. Please. I'm such a fool! Milord, your talents and mine are poles apart.

"If you just give me a chance, Milord, I'll work very hard. Please, in the future, let me handle small tasks like this. The grunt work. The dirty work. Just entrust those things to me. Master Freespirit will work himself to the bone to do everything you ask me to do." [1]

Looking at the iron skewer, Xu Qing quietly said, “You have three more months, but for your sake I’ll add an extra month. The shadow gets the same advantage.”

The patriarch was very excited, and pretended to glance casually at the shadow. As for the shadow, it trembled, then stretched down into the sea water and started absorbing mutagen.

Xu Qing ignored them, closed his eyes, and started cultivating the Life Nurturing Incantation.

As time passed, they got closer to the Seven Blood Eyes port. As ships and boats became more prevalent, the First Peak disciple eventually put aside whatever was bothering him, and stood in place looking determined and extraordinary.

As Xu Qing coldly sized him up, he noticed that he didn’t seem as depressed as before.

In fact, after glancing at Xu Qing a few times, the First Peak disciple calmly said, “In front of Chenghuang Temple grew a flower; cultivators who passed it died more quickly.”

Hearing this, Xu Qing reached down and rubbed his iron skewer. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior discreetly released a ferocious aura that settled on the First Peak disciple.

The First Peak disciple cleared his throat. He could obviously tell that Xu Qing didn’t understand his poetry, but also wasn’t inclined to explain what he meant out loud. Taking out a jade slip, he imprinted it with some information and tossed it to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing frowned and caught it. Looking inside, he saw the message.

“Brother, I think the two of us are connected by destiny. I’m the ninth highness of the First Peak, Wu Jianwu. You know the old saying: from an exchange of blows, friendship grows. You have a strong baleful aura, but we’re members of the same sect, and there’s no need for us to be mortal enemies.

“Be careful about showing too much of a baleful aura outside the sect. I heard that, years ago, the conclave disciple Elder Brother Chen from the Third Peak had a strong baleful aura, and ended up going missing. Even years later, his killer has never been found.

“Furthermore, the only son of the Sixth Peaklord also had a strong baleful aura, and he went missing too.

“Anyway, I urge you to handle matters judiciously.” [2]

As Wu Jianwu stood atop his sword, he looked at Xu Qing examining the jade slip. Then, he shot up into the sky in a blood-red streak, where he transformed into a huge sword. He looked extremely impressive.

In the blink of an eye, he was a huge distance away from Xu Qing and his dharmaskiff. Just before he screamed through the sky toward the First Peak, he uttered one final poem.

“Surpass mortal life and be refined; I’ll become an immortal and surpass mankind.”

As his words echoed out in all directions, quite a few people looked over in amazement. To them, this chosen disciple from the First Peak in his crimson robe, his hair swirling around him, really did seem like an immortal.

Xu Qing watched coldly as he left. He wasn't bothered by Wu Jianwu's little act. And the closer they got to the sect, the less likely Xu Qing was to react violently to his annoying behavior.

Looking away, Xu Qing piloted his dharmaskiff into port. Once he was inside, the lifelink talisman mark glittered with soft light, then faded into nothing. Only then did he breathe a sigh of relief.

Glancing at Wu Jianwu, who was still flying toward the First Peak, Xu Qing put away his dharmaskiff, then ascended into the air and flew toward his mansion grotto on the Seventh Peak. Landing outside, he checked the area to make sure all of the poison he'd placed in the area was still in place. Then he opened the door, entered, and sealed himself inside.

Now that I'm back, I need to go see how many spirit stones it will take to develop my own harbor. Living here on the peak is just too inconvenient. I'd rather just stay in my dharmaskiff.

After some thought, he looked at his violet daoist robe, and then thought back to how the Captain and Zhang San both wore their gray robes. A gray robe did seem like the best decision.

Next, he looked at the jade disc in the middle of the grotto, which pulsed softly with glowing light. That jade disc was the heart of the mansion grotto's spell formation, and made the formation function without needing to add spirit stones into it. It also served as a recording device, and would keep track of the details of everyone who had sent messages to see if he was able to accept visitors. He saw one request from Huang Yan, one from Zhou Qingpeng, three from Ding Xue, and two from Gu Muqing. There were two people who had made far more requests than the others. One was from the director of the Violent Crimes Division, who had sent twenty-three requests.

And the other was from a Unit Six constable. The Mute. He had sent forty-one requests. In fact, it seemed that he had sent such requests on a daily basis. Xu Qing thought back to the day when he found the Mute on death's door, and had spent a few moments to save him. Clearly, the Mute was strong, and had survived the incident.

Even as Xu Qing was examining the jade disc, it shimmered with light as another request from the Mute came in. Outsiders needed permission to visit Onpeak cultivators, and that applied to Offpeak disciples as well. After thinking about it for a moment, Xu Qing approved the request. Before long, an emaciated figure appeared cautiously outside of Xu Qing's mansion grotto.

Opening the door, Xu Qing stepped out. "What do you want?"

The Mute stood about nine meters away, and obviously didn't want to get any closer. He was dressed the same as before, and all his wounds were healed. However, he seemed grimmer than before. Having returned from death's door, he seemed to have grown a lot.

Xu Qing's gaze caused the Mute to shiver slightly. Taking out a medallion, he respectfully placed it off to the side, then backed up a few paces. Looking at Xu Qing, he then dropped to his knees and kowtowed, banging his head onto the ground so hard his forehead started bleeding. Then he stood and raced down the peak.

Xu Qing watched him go. Then he made a grasping gesture with his right hand, and the medallion flew over to him. Examining it, he realized it wasn't an identity medallion, but rather, an authentication device linked to a warehouse.

Being familiar with the port district, Xu Qing knew exactly what it was. The port district was generally divided into two halves. One was used by Seventh Peak disciples, and the other was for public use. All sorts of ships and boats would come in and out of it, sometimes even pirate vessels.

Non-sect watercraft couldn't be put into bottles like Seven Blood Eyes dharmaboats and dharmaskiffs, so they needed to either lay anchor or be stored in dry dock. And to access such watercraft, one would need to use an authentication device.

In Seven Blood Eyes, the only way to lay claim to a watercraft was to have an authentication device.

Xu Qing realized what was going on. After his gift of a dead criminal was rejected, the Mute came to believe that Xu Qing didn't like criminals. So he was offering an authentication device instead. This time, Xu Qing accepted the gift.

Chapter 149: Emerging with a Gray Robe

The next day, Xu Qing went to the location linked to the authentication device. He found an average-sized trading vessel packed with ordinary cargo. It wasn't anything unusually valuable. What was noteworthy was that the cargo contained a lot of medicinal ingredients. The disciples in charge of the area cautiously explained that no one had come to claim the ship for two months.

Xu Qing collected the medicinal ingredients, then called his informant over to deal with the trading vessel. While she was there, he asked her about the matter of developing a new harbor.

Lowering her voice, she said, "Milord, I learned everything there is to know about developing new harbors. I can explain everything, sir. You can either open a sect harbor or a public harbor. Both have different advantages. Sect harbors aren't very profitable. But they're helpful in establishing information and power networks with Offpeak disciples. Public harbors can be very profitable. However, they require the presence of a lot of sect departments to operate. For example, Pilot Assistance, Dispatch, Transportation, and so-on. But even the simplest of harbors will bring in a lot of trading vessels, and thus, astounding profit. Businesses will also want spots on the docks, and you get a share of their profits as well."

His informant had held nothing back in her efforts to learn about this subject over the past two months. She had even spent a significant amount of spirit coins to get good information.

"However," she continued, "the construction costs are high. Even the most barebones harbor will require an investment of 3,000,000 spirit stones for all the initial construction. And if you want buildings for businesses to rent, that investment cost will rise to at least 10,000,000. Of course, the cost can go even higher depending on your requirements."

Upon hearing this, Xu Qing's facial expression didn't change, but inside, he felt deeply shocked. He had considered himself somewhat wealthy, especially considering that the seazombie bag of holding he'd looted had contained several hundred thousand spirit stones worth of loot. But his informant's explanation left him a bit speechless.

“That said, the profits you’ll earn are astounding. There’s limited space in the Seven Blood Eyes port, and after spending some time observing the water traffic, I can tell you that every day about thirty percent of the vessels are forced to wait outside.

“If you open a public harbor, there won’t be any lack of trading vessels who want to use it. Milord, after studying some of the other harbors, and also doing some calculations, I think that if we invest 3,000,000 to start, we can easily use subsequent profits to expand the initial construction. If things go smoothly, it will only take about two years to reach an equilibrium point. Then, it will take an additional three years to earn back your investment. After that, you should be able to make an annual profit of 3,000,000 spirit stones.

“Furthermore, I asked around about other Senior Foundation Establishment cultivators who have opened harbors. Most of them don’t make an investment solely with their own funds. Usually, they pool funds with others. Milord, if you have any friends you trust, it might be worth trying that. The only prerequisite is that they would also need to be Foundation Establishment cultivators. Also, I heard that there are private investment firms that will lend money for harbor development, although there are a lot of restrictions in place by the sect, so it’s not very common.”

Xu Qing mulled the matter over. He had previously felt that he didn’t want to waste the opportunity to open a harbor. After all, once he did, he would be able to rake in a significant annual profit without doing anything. That was why he’d asked his informant to gather all of this information.

But now, though he still thought it would be an amazing opportunity, he also knew it was simply too expensive. And there was also a lot of complicated work involved. Furthermore, investing so many spirit stones in that manner would tie him deeply to the sect. All of these aspects made him hesitate. Now it made sense why so few Foundation Establishment cultivators chose to open harbors.

After more thought, he decided to abandon the idea. Dismissing his informant, he changed into a gray daoist robe, then got ready to go shopping.

There were a lot of things he needed to buy, including medicinal plants and talisman treasures. And he also wanted to check what magical devices were available. Magical devices were extremely expensive, so in the past, he hadn’t even considered buying any. But he had some money to work with now, so he figured he’d at least look around. He was also very interested in the soul pills Wu Jianwu had used, and wanted to see if he could find a place that sold them. After all, they weren’t that amazing, but did make it easy to absorb souls. And then there was the Spirit Breath Lamp.

As he walked along in his gray robe, he kept his cultivation base hidden, and thus looked like an ordinary disciple. However, he would occasionally sense people looking at him from within the crowd.

Now, he realized that they were other Foundation Establishment cultivators who, like him, were disguised in gray robes. When he spotted them in the crowd, they would lock gazes briefly, then part ways without causing any trouble for each other.

Xu Qing went to his usual spot for breakfast and sat down. The vendor called out a friendly greeting and brought some food. This time, Xu Qing ate four eggs. Upon reaching Foundation Establishment, it wasn't necessary for a cultivator to eat food. They could survive on dharma force alone. But Xu Qing enjoyed his usual routine, and enjoyed the sensation of eating.

As he ate, he took out his identity medallion and sent a voice message to Huang Yan asking about whether he still wanted to buy the Spirit Breath Lamp.

Huang Yan didn't reply immediately. It was only after Xu Qing was finished eating and getting ready to leave that the reply came in.

"I'm in, Xu Qing! Are you back? Where are you? I'll come find you."

Hearing the reply, Xu Qing's eyes gleamed with anticipation. He was really looking forward to having an additional 500,000 spirit stones. After telling Huang Yan where he was, he only had to wait a short time before the pudgy cultivator was rushing toward him.

As it turned out, Huang Yan looked even pudgier than before, and his robe hardly seemed able to contain his girth. Upon catching sight of Xu Qing, he laughed heartily and pulled out a thick stack of spirit notes.

"These are 1,000-spirit-stone notes directly from the Sixth Peak. Two hundred of them. I didn't have enough time to gather more than this. Can I make up the difference with a magical device?"

With that, Huang Yan produced a black hauberk that he offered to Xu Qing.

"Magical device?" Xu Qing said, taking it. Sending some dharma force into the armor, he saw countless magical symbols arranged in a special design. At first glance, he estimated that there must be a hundred thousand of them. Obviously, this was a very extraordinary hauberk.

"It's a Myriad Talismans Hauberk," Huang Yan explained. "I'd planned to give it to my Elder Sister, but I think she'd like the Spirit Breath Lamp more. If you sell it, you can easily get 300,000 spirit stones. It's a lesser-tier magical device, but it has good defensive qualities. With that on, you could hold your own for several rounds of combat against a Foundation Establishment cultivator in the profound radiance state, as long as they don't have two life flames."

Huang Yan seemed to know a lot about Foundation Establishment. Obviously, his Elder Sister had helped him a lot in that regard. In fact, it seemed he was just on the verge of a breakthrough.

Xu Qing nodded and accepted the Myriad Talismans Hauberk, then handed the Spirit Breath Lamp over.

"Do you need me to escort you back to the Seventh Peak?" Xu Qing asked quietly.

"Nah," Huang Yan replied, patting his belly. "Who would dare to steal a gift intended for my Elder Sister?"

Putting the Spirit Breath Lamp away, he took out his identity medallion to send a voice message to his Elder Sister. However, that was when he seemed to suddenly remember something, and looked back at Xu Qing. “Hey, Xu Qing. Remember I told you about the possibility of war? Well, it’s definitely going to happen. You should think about whether or not you want to participate.”

With that, he waved goodbye and rushed off toward the Seventh Peak.

Watching him go, Xu Qing sighed. Huang Yan really did have a lot of money. He just handed over hundreds of thousands of spirit stones, plus a magical device, all without hardly thinking about it. Up to this point, Xu Qing had not looked into Huang Yan’s background. There were some things that were taboo in Seven Blood Eyes, and he had no intention of violating those taboos.

After Huang Yan was gone, Xu Qing thought about his parting words.

“War...” he murmured. That was enough to make him completely forget about his idea of opening a harbor. Instead, he would invest in a street in the city. Although the profits wouldn’t be as amazing, it would be better than nothing. Having made his decision, he went to find a shop that sold jade talismans.

Most of the shops that catered to Foundation Establishment cultivators were run by Sixth Peak disciples in the Rocbright District as opposed to the Port District. Because prices were so high in such shops, they usually weren’t very busy. Most of them had private viewing rooms and disciples trained in sales.

After arriving in the Rocbright District, Xu Qing looked around and settled on a shop called the Brightness Pavilion. It was one of the largest shops there, being fully five stories tall, with each story covering about 600 meters. It was extravagantly decorated inside, and the clerks, whether they were male or female, were all extremely good-looking. And there seemed to be more clerks than customers. Upon entering, Xu Qing attracted a bit of attention. Though he only wore a gray robe, he was extremely good-looking, and thus, quite a few female clerks eyed him. He seemed to bring a bit of brightness to the shop. What was more, it was obvious that anyone who dared to enter a shop like this had to be extraordinary in some way. At the very least, he was a conclave disciple. Furthermore, since these clerks had dealt with lots of Foundation Establishment cultivators, they knew it was common for such people to wear gray robes.

Several of the clerks made to walk over to Xu Qing. However, the fastest of them was a pretty young woman with pigtails. Flushing a bit, she softly said, “Hello, Elder Brother. You can call me Little Hui. I’m happy to help you with whatever you need. I’m completely at your service. Here at the Brightness Pavilion, we specialize in tools, weapons, items, and the like. The first floor is devoted to magical treasures, the second floor to jade talismans, and the third floor to magical devices. Whatever you’re looking for, Elder Brother, I can help you find it.”

Xu Qing looked around and noticed that he was the only customer on the first floor. Furthermore, the walls were covered with all sorts of talisman treasures. Though they were all sealed, they still released extraordinary fluctuations. There were also a few crystal pillars upon which rested brightly glittered talisman treasures.

The fact that they were being displayed as individual items indicated that they were very high quality.

“I want to see your magical devices,” Xu Qing said, looking back at the clerk.

When the blushing girl heard that, her eyes glittered.

Chapter 150: War Brings Opportunity

“The magical devices are on the third floor. Allow me to lead the way, Senior!” Upon hearing that Xu Qing wanted to shop for magical devices, this young woman, who had dealt with many Foundation Establishment customers, immediately knew that Xu Qing was also in Foundation Establishment. It was for that reason that she switched from calling him Elder Brother to Senior. Eyes shining, she led the way instead of waiting for Xu Qing to go ahead of her.

There was nothing rude about the way she led the way. In fact, as she climbed the stairs, her garment clung more snugly to her hips, making her curves even more obvious. She was very seductive, but at the same time, her pigtailed made her seem charming and innocent.

Sadly for her, Xu Qing didn’t notice those things. When they reached the third floor, it was to the young woman’s disappointment that she didn’t get any sense Xu Qing was attracted to her. However, she quickly dismissed her disappointment and led Xu Qing to a private viewing room. There, she asked him for more details about what kind of magical devices he wanted to see.

“Weapons,” he replied. “Under 300,000 spirit stones.”

Nodding, she left the room. A short time later she returned with a tray, upon which were arrayed three items.

One of them was a blue shortsword, attached to which was a paper talisman that reduced its fluctuations by about ninety-nine percent. The second item was a necklace, inlaid with five finger-nail sized black pearls. It was also sealed with a talisman. The final item was a small red bell.

“The Frigid Mountain Sword contains the aura of the Forbidden Sea. Part of the forging process involves burying the sword for three years at the bottom of the sea, which imbues it with a shocking level of frigid coldness. With dharma force, you can control that frigid energy. It’s a very fast sword, and is incomparably sharp.

“This is the Fivebales Pearl Necklace. Each pearl contains a golden baleful aura that, upon being released, transforms into a golden lightning bolt of punishment that can kill anything it hits. Once hit, the victim must dispel the energy, or they will die. To operate the necklace, fill it with dharma force and inscribe the name of your opponent onto one of the pearls.

“Last is the Living Spirit Bell. By ringing this bell, you can shake your opponent’s soul into immobility. It is ineffective against grues, as it only works on opponents with fleshly bodies. This weapon has a weakness, as the wielder suffers the effects of the bell as much as the target. However, because it’s a very rare magical device related to souls, it’s more expensive than average magical devices.

“The Frigid Mountain Sword costs 270,000 spirit stones. The Fivebales Pearl Necklace costs 300,000 spirit stones. And the Living Spirit Bell costs 330,000 spirit stones.”

Xu Qing’s expression remained neutral as he looked over the three items. Inside, he was bemoaning the fact that magical devices were so expensive. But at the same time, he knew that, considering he couldn’t enter the profound radiance state, he really needed the added benefit of having a magical device. That was especially true considering that... war was coming. It made sense to start preparing now; once the official announcement was made, prices would start climbing.

Truth be told, he liked all three of these items. But he couldn’t afford them all. He still had jade talismans to buy, as well as all sorts of poisonous plants. After further inspection, he finally gritted his teeth and chose the Living Spirit Bell. Though the weapon had a weakness, he had a way of negating that weakness. He planned to attach the bell to his iron skewer, and have Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior use it. After all, the patriarch didn’t have a fleshly body. As a spirit automaton, he wouldn’t suffer the adverse effects.

“That one,” he said, pointing at the bell.

The clerk looked excited. Obviously, selling this magical device would come with a big commission for her. Being very respectful, she helped him take care of all the formalities of the purchase. Then, upon his request, she took him down to the second floor to browse the jade talismans. There, he purchased three defensive jade talismans and one talisman used for offense. In total, he spent 120,000 spirit stones on them.

After leaving the shop, he rubbed his bag of holding and sighed. Back in Qi Condensation, he had believed cultivation resources to be expensive. Now that he thought back, he realized that the things he had believed to be too expensive actually weren’t so bad. The jade talismans and magical devices required in Foundation Establishment were really expensive.

Upgrading my dharmaskiff is also going to require a lot of spirit stones....

Shaking his head, he tried not to think about how much money he had spent and headed toward the Second Peak’s Clearspirit District to shop for medicinal plants. After all, the medicinal plants available in the Clearspirit District were on a different level than those available in the Port District.

He also wanted to see if he could find some ghostlonging horseshoe crabs and chrysanthemum mollusks to buy. Both were critical in attracting sea beasts to open his dharma apertures.

However, as he was on his way to the Clearspirit District, his identity medallion vibrated, and he took it out to find that Zhang San had just sent him a voice message.

“Xu Qing, are you back?”

“I got back yesterday,” Xu Qing replied.

“Where are you? Can you come meet me? Or I can go to you. I have a business proposition I want to talk to you about.”

“I’m heading to the Clearspirit District to shop for medicinal plants.”

Xu Qing was curious what it was about, and wondered if it had anything to do with the Captain’s visitor requests back in his mansion grotto.

“Okay. Do you know the Hundred Plants Workshop in the Clearspirit District? Why don’t we meet there?”

Xu Qing thought the matter over as he headed to the Clearspirit District. Eventually, he found the Hundred Plants Workshop, which was a very large establishment. In fact, it was one of the most famous Second Peak shops there was.

Even before he got close, he spotted Zhang San waiting outside.

Zhang San sat on one of the stone steps smoking a pipe, looking very unremarkable in his gray daoist robe. When he saw Xu Qing, he grinned, stood, wiped the dust off his rear end and hurried over.

Pulling Xu Qing off to the side, he lowered his voice and said, “Junior Brother Xu Qing, did you happen to talk to the Captain since you got back?”

“I haven’t seen him,” Xu Qing replied, looking curiously at Zhang San.

“Okay, good. The crazy loon has been going around borrowing money like there’s no tomorrow. He even tried to get me to put my port development rights as collateral for a loan. Said something about buying a technique to disguise yourself as another species. He keeps saying if he can get that technique, he can get a one thousand percent return on his investment. I have the feeling he’ll hit you up for money eventually. Anyway, Junior Brother Xu Qing, do you still have your port development rights?”

“Yeah,” Xu Qing nodded.

“Awesome!” Zhang San said, laughing heartily. “Xu Qing, would you be willing to transfer your port development rights to me? It took some convincing, but I already got the Captain to give me his. If I add yours into the mix, we can make a really big investment.

“I got some very reliable information indicating that the sect is going to war with the Seazombies soon. Of course, many people have speculated this will happen. But information like this means different things to different people. Everything is about context.

“When war comes, some people worry about personal safety. Some people think about earning merit points. Some people are just downright scared. Some people realize war can make you rich, but just don’t know how to actually make it happen. Many of those people think that hoarding important resources to sell later is the way to go. But I’m different.” Having reached this point in his explanation, a look of pride appeared on Zhang San’s face.

“I’m telling you, Xu Qing, when war breaks out, it’s the perfect opportunity to get really rich. If I were you, I wouldn’t even think about some sort of hoarding scheme.

It's useless, and also, most people hate that behavior. No, we're not going to make money off of fellow disciples. We're going to make money off the sect!

"The sect is definitely going to make a very big deal about this war with the Seazombies. And when the time comes, they're going to make full use of the harbors. Whether it comes to storing magical devices, prepping battleships, or providing transportation for disciples from the various mountain peaks, everything is going to focus around the harbors.

"Furthermore, there are limited harbors available. Therefore, if I take three harbors and develop them together into one larger harbor, the sect will definitely put that one on the top of their list to use.

"And of course, we'll charge for that. Therefore, we need to get this thing up and running before the war starts, with at least a few buildings and some extra berths. Based on my calculations, if the war lasts for three months, we'll make our entire investment back in that time. If it lasts for a year, we'll make quadruple profit! And if the war lasts even longer, then we could be sitting on the kind of opportunity that only comes around once every hundred years. We have to do this!"

Hearing this explanation from Zhang San, Xu Qing's eyes went wide, and he felt deep admiration for him. Zhang San obviously had great instincts when it came to making money, far beyond that of ordinary people.

Seeing the look on Xu Qing's face, Zhang San threw his head back and laughed.

"You look just like the Captain did, Xu Qing. By the way, I don't need a single spirit stone from you. Just transfer your port development rights to me, and I'll handle the initial investment. After we break even, then we'll split the profit between you, the Captain, and me. 25/25/50.

"Of course, we can keep the harbor running after the war, and we'll still keep making money."

Zhang San looked expectantly at Xu Qing, awaiting his answer. Xu Qing considered the matter, then took out his port development authentication device and gave it to Zhang San.

Zhang San's face lit up with enthusiasm. "I guarantee that within a year, I'll be handing you at least a few million spirit stones of profit!"

Laughing again, he took out his identity medallion and started contacting people in his network to start the project. Then he waved goodbye and left.

Xu Qing watched him go. He couldn't help but think that Zhang San really was a genius. Not only was he amazing with equipment forging, he also seemed to make good progress in cultivation, and also was amazing at making money.

I hope that in a year I really do get a good split of profit. The thought of making millions of spirit stones as Zhang San had mentioned caused Xu Qing's heart rate to increase a bit. To someone with a nearly empty bag of holding like Xu Qing, talk of that much profit was just too much of a temptation.

Finally, Xu Qing took a deep breath and entered the Hundred Plants Workshop.

After enough time passed for two incense sticks to burn, he walked out with all the poisonous plants he needed. Although he had spent a lot of spirit stones, he was satisfied with his purchase. This shop actually had more poisonous plants than it did vital yang plants. As far as Xu Qing was concerned, this was what a shop was supposed to be like that claimed to specialize in plants and vegetation. After all, in the final analysis, the vast majority of medicinal plants were actually poisonous if used correctly.

He even managed to buy a lot of plants that, to date, he had only read about in the medicinal codex Grandmaster Bai had given him. He was now very eager to work with them. Sadly, he hadn't found any ghostlonging horseshoe crabs. However, the shopkeeper had placed an order for him, and told him he should be able to pick it up in about a month.

I need to concoct some poisons that will quickly kill someone in Foundation Establishment. And also something that works on Seazombies!

With that, he rose into the air and hurried back to his mansion grotto on the Seventh Peak.

Time passed.

As Xu Qing worked on poison concocting in his mansion grotto, half a month went by. Then, a bit of news started spreading that caused the atmosphere in Seven Blood Eyes to grow very tense.

“Seven Blood Eyes is going to wage full-scale war on the Seazombies!”