

Timescape 171

Chapter 171: Suppress! Suppress!! Suppress!!!

The shadow was now an incomparably bizarre and gruish pitch black tree. It had over a hundred eyes, all of which radiated an astonishing crimson light that made the entire mine seem like a world of blood. The malicious ferocity it exuded seemed filled with madness. It was as if the shadow had been holding back for so long that, when it finally managed to reach a breakthrough, everything it had been suppressing in its heart finally erupted into the open. Strangely, though, much of that ferocious maliciousness wasn't directed at Xu Qing, but rather, at Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior.

Given how Xu Qing had suppressed the shadow on a daily basis for such a long time, it would have made sense for all its killing intent to be focused on him. But obviously, some of the things the patriarch had done aroused the shadow's hatred to this level.

The patriarch's expression was solemn as lightning crackled around him and he looked at the shadow. However, inside he was bursting with joy.

Ah, Little Shadow, you did perfectly. You couldn't have picked a better way to reveal your rebellious nature. This is only going to make my position more stable.

With those thoughts on his mind, the patriarch shouted, "You evil shadow! I can't believe you want to devour our lord and master!!"

As the words left his mouth, he flew in between Xu Qing and the shadow, looking very loyal and protective. At the same time, the lightning symbols on the skewer glittered brightly and exuded a terrifying aura.

Xu Qing's eyes shone brightly as, instead of worrying about the shadow's sudden maliciousness, his mind raced as he tried to recall why that crunching sound was so familiar. Then it hit him.

The giant with the dragon chariot! [1]

Suddenly, to his shock, he noticed a muffled rumbling sound coming from far off in the distance, beyond the mine and the island.

It was a faint noise, like something very heavy being dragged along the ground. Its vibrations caused waves to roll out on the surface of the water, and the entire island trembled. Under the water beyond the shore of the island, Xu Qing's snakeneck dragon appeared and looked off into the distance.

What Xu Qing saw through its eyes sent shock rolling through him. Off in the distant sea, he saw a dense mist covering the surface of the water. And besides the sound he had just detected, he also heard chains clanking. Shockingly, there was a massive giant on the seafloor, slowly walking toward him step by step. Its huge body was covered with numerous tentacles that looked almost like hair. Every step the giant took caused powerful currents of water on the seafloor, and kicked up massive clouds of silt.

As it walked along, a set of ghastly black chains appeared behind it. Those chains draped behind it, ending in an astonishing bronze dragon chariot. It oozed a sensation of ancient time, and was covered with rust and corrosion. It looked to be in very bad condition, and was tilted so badly it seemed like it might fall on its side. It left a huge furrow in the sea floor as it moved. Both the giant

and the chariot were enormous, to the point where Xu Qing would seem tiny compared to them. To him, both of them seemed like mountains.

What was more noteworthy were the carvings on the chariot itself. They seemed like something belonging to an emperor, as if only someone filled with a spirit of incomparable dignity could ride in this chariot.

As the giant got closer, the sea whipped into a frenzy. The waves became so huge they turned into a tsunami. This terrifying aura surpassed the level of Joine by so many times over that it was impossible to calculate. It was like the difference between a firefly and a torch. In fact, a moment later, Xu Qing's snakeneck dragon started to crumble to pieces.

Xu Qing's eyes began stinging, and then blood dripped out of them. Then the walls of the mine collapsed, with cracks spreading across them and sea water flowing into the mine. A moment later, the walls completely crumbled, such that Xu Qing didn't need the snakeneck dragon to see the giant; he could see it with his own eyes. The aura assailing him caused his mind to tremble.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing ignited his life flame and entered the profound radiance state. He erupted like a volcano to fight back against the aura. However, being this close to the dragon chariot, he was actually able to see one of the engravings on it!

It depicted a handsome young man wearing fine clothing and an emperor's crown. He sat on the dragon chariot, one hand rested on his chin, the other holding a bamboo slip from which he read. It was a beautiful image, and it was very lifelike. The young man's posture and expression were very clear. He seemed very interested in what he was reading, and the corners of his mouth were even tilting up in a smile. The dragon chariot was being pulled into the sky by a running giant, around whom curled five golden dragons. The giant was obviously extraordinarily mighty; despite it being a simple engraving, he seemed incredibly powerful.

The giant in the engraving was looking back at the young man as they ascended into the sky. His expression seemed one of loyalty and even fanaticism. It was as if, to him, that young man carried his fate in his hands. It was as if, to him, pulling that chariot was the greatest honor he could ever experience.

That wasn't the only engraving Xu Qing could see. In the next one, he saw the young man with the emperor's crown riding the chariot through the clouds all the way to the horizon, where he transformed... into the sun. There it hung, high in the dome of heaven! Its radiance shone on all the lands below!

In the final engraving, it was evening, and the sun had once again transformed back into a young man. As before, he sat on his chariot, and was being pulled by the giant across the sea. These series of images shook Xu Qing deeply, leaving him trembling to the core.

Meanwhile, the giant pulling the chariot issued forth another sound.

C-c-crunch. C-c-crunch.

Bizarrely, it seemed like that sound was a response to the shadow!

Although Xu Qing's shadow was already submerged in water now, making it impossible for anyone to see, Xu Qing knew that it was still in the shape of that bizarre tree, bursting with malice and madness. And it was still making that same noise!

C-c-crunch. C-c-crunch.

The giant trembled and continued to walk in Xu Qing's direction. As it got nearer, fear rose up in Xu Qing. He looked deeply at the giant for a moment, then chose to flee. Sending out the power of the crystal, he suppressed the shadow, took out his dharmaskiff, and started speeding across the surface of the sea.

It was currently dawn, and the sun shone brightly onto Xu Qing.

That, in turn, caused his shadow to appear clearly on the deck of the dharmaskiff. The shadow twisted and distorted as it tried to fight against his suppression. As it did, its appearance changed again. Tentacles spread out from the tree, making it look very similar to the giant pulling the dragon chariot.

Killing intent appeared in Xu Qing's eyes. Tapping into all 44 of his dharma apertures, he sent dharma force into the violet crystal. Rumbling sounds echoed out as the power of the crystal erupted from his chest and slammed into the writhing shadow. This time, Xu Qing suppressed the shadow 50 times in a row!

The shadow fought back fiercely, its eyes glowing bright red. Then, when it seemed like it was going to issue forth more sound from its mouth, Xu Qing snorted coldly and added the power of his life flame into the violet crystal. Then he waved his hand, and a huge black umbrella appeared.

Instantly, brightly colored light flashed in heaven and earth. Winds screamed as Xu Qing covered the shadow with the umbrella, blocking it from the sun, and thus its connection to the outside world. Beneath the umbrella, no one could see the shadow. But Xu Qing could sense its position, and knew its connection had been severed, causing it to look surprised, and to struggle even more.

"Fool," Xu Qing said. By imbuing the violet crystal with his life flame, it became even more impressive, and unleashed an unprecedented level of suppressive power. It was a violet halo that crushed down onto the shadow over and over again.

3 times. 7 times. 16 times.

With the added power of the life flame, the suppression was vastly beyond anything from before. The shadow trembled, and its fight against the suppression grew weaker and weaker. It couldn't emit any sound, and eventually began shaking.

At the same time, Xu Qing checked and found that, thanks to the black umbrella and his effort in suppressing the shadow, the giant and the chariot had stopped moving. Apparently, whatever had allowed the giant to sense them was now gone. Turning, the giant dragged the dragon chariot in a different direction, going deeper and deeper into the sea.

Even after the giant was gone, fear lingered in Xu Qing's heart. Turning coldly to look at his shadow trembling in trepidation.

"Your plan failed," he said coolly.

The shadow shivered as it reverted to its previous shape. The tentacles disappeared, and though its eyes were still red, they didn't radiate malice, but instead seemed fawning.

Out on the open sea, the morning sun was brighter than it seemed on land, its red light spreading out everywhere, making it seem like everything was on fire. Even the black Forbidden Sea couldn't contend with the glory of the sun at sunrise.

Xu Qing wasn't paying attention to that, though. Waving his hand, he dispelled the black umbrella. As the sunlight shone down on them again, the shadow became visible on the deck. After being suppressed so many times in a row, it was back to the same color it had been before its breakthrough. As Xu Qing glared at it coldly, it shook harder.

"My... bad...." the shadow conveyed.

Xu Qing tapped into the violet crystal and suppressed it violently again.

10 times. 30 times. 70 times. 120 times.

In the middle of it, he sat down and looked off into the sky, making it seem like he had no intention of stopping. Off to the side, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was excited, but as it went on, he started to feel more and more anxious. He watched as the shadow got weaker and weaker, trembling so badly that it looked like it might die.

Then the patriarch looked at the expressionless Xu Qing. Finally, the patriarch couldn't hold back, and said, "Milord, it's... it's about to die."

Xu Qing looked at him. "You feel sorry for it?"

"Absolutely not!" the patriarch blurted, terrified at Xu Qing's gaze. Slapping himself on the chest, he produced a mass of lightning that swirled around him. "Milord, we can put this traitorous shadow to death together!"

Worried that he wasn't reacting fast enough, he sent some lightning flying toward the shadow.

Chapter 172: The Final ????

Xu Qing wasn't paying attention to the patriarch's performance. He just continued suppressing the shadow while still looking off at the horizon.

He was thinking back to the time when he acquired the shadow. It was back in the jungle forbidden region when he and Squad Thunderbolt had fought a pack of black-scaled wolves. The shadow had come out of one of those wolves, almost as if it were a parasite. [1]

That was the first time the violet crystal within him had done anything different from before, as it had sealed the shadow. From that point on, his shadow had changed. More precisely, it seemed like his own shadow became the host for the black-scaled wolf's shadow. The two had become one.

From then on, his shadow could absorb mutagen, which made his practice of cultivation go much more smoothly. Of course, as the shadow absorbed mutagen, its battle prowess increased. Other than helping him, the shadow hadn't done much or changed. And after Xu Qing figured out how to control it, it became one of his trump cards.

It was when he killed that young merman that his shadow first showed some signs of intelligence. Later, the Mute warned him about the shadow. And then there was the time when the shadow seemed to wake up and extinguish the Spirit Breath Lamp in the Merfolk Isles. After that point, his shadow didn't just seem alive, it seemed intelligent. [2]

Xu Qing had long since predicted where it all was going. However, the entire time, he had been able to keep the shadow suppressed with his cultivation base and the violet crystal. Therefore, though the shadow had been of concern to him, since he never let it get too strong, there was no risk of it attacking him. The fact that it had done so just now wasn't surprising. What was surprising was that the shadow had somehow attracted the giant with the dragon chariot. That got him even more curious about what exactly the shadow was.

Looking down calmly at the shadow, he said, "Regardless, as far as I'm concerned, you're more of a risk than a benefit."

When Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior heard those words, he shivered.

At the same time, the shadow could sense that things were different this time around, and it emitted fluctuations of terror and pleading.

"Since that's the case," Xu Qing continued, "I don't need you around!"

Closing his eyes, he extended his right hand and pushed it down onto the shadow on the deck. Violet light surged out with suppressive force, causing the entire dharmaskiff to tremble. The shadow didn't seem like it could last much longer, and let loose an unprecedented shriek, along with emotions associated with pain and anger.

Xu Qing could sense them, but he ignored them and kept suppressing the shadow.

Hearing the howls of grief, the patriarch was so shaken he backed up a bit and looked nervously at Xu Qing.

The shadow howled as it grew fainter, until a sound rang out like something shattering, and the shadow reverted from a tree to its previous ordinary form. Another weak cry rang out, one of pleading.

Face completely expressionless, Xu Qing continued suppressing the shadow.

180 times. 240 times. 320 times.

Violet light erupted as he suppressed the shadow over and over again. It grew fainter, more transparent, and its cries grew weaker.

Xu Qing's eyes remained decisive. He really did intend to wipe the shadow out of existence. As for how he would deal with mutagen afterward, he wasn't sure, but it didn't concern him too much. To him, the violet crystal was his most important asset, and the shadow was secondary.

The shadow could absorb mutagen, but the violet crystal could keep it sealed. If that was the case, then it meant the crystal could seal other things similar to the shadow. Worst case scenario, after the shadow died, Xu Qing could start hunting forbidden regions and try to find something else similar to the shadow.

Therefore, no matter how weak and faint the shadow became, he continued suppressing it.

350 times. 460 times. 570 times. 680 times.

He continued relentlessly and without stopping.

Eventually, as the shadow grew fainter, it shrank into a ball, making it a bit less faint. At that point, it took the shape of a small person that began kowtowing over and over again.

Xu Qing looked at the shadowy person and once again suppressed it. With a single palm, he crushed it. A scream rang out.

Xu Qing remained calm as he sat beneath the sun, casting no shadow whatsoever. Ignoring the strangeness of that, he walked to the edge of the dharmaskiff and looked out at the black water. Given the angle of the sun, if he had a shadow, it should have been cast out onto the mutagen-filled sea.

Standing there, Xu Qing looked toward the prow of the boat and said, "Get the hell out into the open!"

Everything was quiet on the deck of the boat.

Xu Qing suddenly smiled, and his eyes turned cold. Violet light glittered on his chest as if it were about to erupt out.

At that point, the trembling shadow appeared on the deck in the spot where he had been suppressing it. It quickly converged into the shape of a tiny person, which began kowtowing over and over again pleadingly.

"You took too long," Xu Qing said, and he suppressed it a few more times. There was another bang, and the little person screamed, then exploded.

Xu Qing remained completely expressionless as he sat there meditating, his eyes closed.

As it turned out, killing the shadow was much more difficult than it seemed. It looked like he would need to do some more research into the violet crystal to see if he could come up with a more efficient method. Some time passed, and eventually it was noon. With the sun hot overhead, and Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior stewing in anxiety, Xu Qing finally opened his eyes and looked at that same spot on the deck.

"Get the hell out into the open!"

This time, the shadow appeared with astonishing speed, clearly terrified of being tormented further. It was still faint, but after recovering for a few hours, it had regained some strength, and now looked like a tree again. Trembling, it sent out emotions of pleading and terror that surpassed anything from before by ten times over.

"You've been with me long enough to know what I'm like," Xu Qing said, looking at it coldly. He really did want to kill it, but it would take time to figure out how to use the violet crystal to do so. Therefore, seeing how terrified it was, he said, "I'll give you three months to convince me not to kill you. If you fail..."

He trailed off and didn't say anything further.

The shadow trembled and kowtowed over and over again to voice its agreement.

Looking at it, Xu Qing said, "Listen well. It doesn't matter that you experienced a breakthrough just now. Nothing has changed."

"Gobble... control..." the shadow said.

However, whether because it was so weak, or because of its inherent nature, even after its breakthrough, it wasn't capable of ordinary speech, and had trouble expressing itself.

Xu Qing frowned. He needed more detailed information. Now that the shadow had risen to a higher level, he wanted to know what it was capable of. That information would be critical in fights later on.

"Milord, I'll handle this!" the patriarch said. Lighting crackled around him as he hurried over to the shadow's side, squatted down, and glanced at its one hundred eyes. Lowering his voice so Xu Qing couldn't hear, he said, "I'll ask you some questions. Blink for yes. Nod for no. Now, tell me what you meant just now when you said 'gobble.' Gobble what? Gobble mutagen? Gobble flesh? Gobble shadows?"

The shadow clearly didn't like the patriarch, but it had no choice but to follow his lead. Eventually, when it heard the patriarch say 'gobble shadows,' it blinked.

"Gobble yourself? Or gobble other peoples' shadows? Gobble a mouthful? Or the whole thing? Control the body? Or control the soul?"

After communicating in this manner, the patriarch finally reached a certain level of understanding, and turned to Xu Qing.

"Milord, I get it now. Little Shadow means to say that it can devour the shadows of others. Once it consumes the entire shadow, it gains control of that individual's body. However, milord, you possess something that it fears greatly, and thus, it didn't work on you!"

As the patriarch explained, the shadow sent out emotions of approval, and nodded repeatedly. But then, only a moment later, it started shaking its head vigorously. Then it stared helplessly at the patriarch.

Apparently, Xu Qing's unprecedented act of suppression had damaged its intellect to a certain degree, leaving it less intelligent than before.

"Remember, Little Shadow," the patriarch said kindly, showing no signs that he had any ulterior motives, "blink for yes, nod your head for no. That method should make it relatively easy for me to figure out what you're trying to say."

The shadow blinked.

Though the patriarch was smiling, inside, he was thinking, This obnoxious shadow still dares to look at me maliciously? Just wait and see how I punish you! Once you get used to me interpreting for you, then as long as you remember how to say yes and no, then I can think of numerous ways to make you suffer!

Xu Qing wasn't concerned with whatever the patriarch was scheming. But he was interested in the shadow's bizarre ability. He also found it intriguing that the shadow was terrified of the violet crystal.

"Anything else?" he asked.

“Eyes... observe....” the shadow replied quickly, and then it looked at the patriarch.

After another back-and-forth conversation, the patriarch explained what the shadow meant.

“It has another ability that lets it send out shadow eyes and hide them in someone else’s shadow. If you do that, milord, you can observe things through those eyes.”

“Domain...” the shadow said.

The patriarch thought, then asked some follow-up questions. After confirming the shadow’s meaning, he turned respectfully to Xu Qing.

“Milord, it can create something like a shadow domain. Once it’s formed, its powers become much stronger while inside the domain.”

The shadow seemed pleased with that explanation, and looked at the patriarch with much less revulsion than before.

Xu Qing thought about the situation. The patriarch’s changes were visible to the naked eye. Meanwhile, the shadow just grew more and more gruish. It was actually a good combination, and gave him a lot more options.

After some more thought, he looked back out at the sea, and recalled the giant pulling the dragon chariot. His eyes narrowed, and he thought back to what Elder Zhao had told him about the dragon chariot containing some sort of secret magic. An imperial-class secret magic. Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits! [3]

I wonder if I could get into that dragon chariot and learn that secret magic.

The thought excited him as he looked out at the sea. Then a thoughtful expression appeared on his face.

Still squatting off to the side, the patriarch said, “Little Shadow, I know you don’t like our lord and master very much, do you?”

The shadow seemed surprised, but quickly nodded.

“You shouldn’t be like that,” the patriarch continued. “I’ve read many ancient records, and I can tell you that rebels never meet a good end. I know you don’t like how this has turned out for you. You think that flying free is the only way to live. And thus, you’re still thinking of rebelling. In fact you want to come up with a way to kill our amazing lord and master, am I right?”

Hearing the question, Xu Qing looked over.

Seeing Xu Qing’s gaze shift, the shadow trembled and cautiously nodded.

Chapter 173: Destined Opportunity for Imperial-Class

Xu Qing knew full well that he had suppressed the shadow enough that its intelligence had dropped, and thus it had been tricked by Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. Despite that, he still felt the urge to suppress it for what it had just indicated. However, doing so wouldn’t be logical, so he dismissed the urge and then glared at the patriarch.

Appearing very obsequious, the patriarch ceased his attempts to make the shadow more irritating to Xu Qing.

Looking at the shadow, Xu Qing said, "Why are you able to attract the attention of that giant pulling the dragon chariot? What exactly are you? And how many other things like you are out there?"

Shivering, the shadow did its best to express itself.

"Through... shadow...." Having finished speaking, it looked urgently at the patriarch.

The patriarch, still squatting next to the shadow, started whispering. After a series of blinks and nods from the shadow, the patriarch turned to Xu Qing, clasped hands, and respectfully said, "Milord, Little Shadow is trying to say that it doesn't know what it is. From the moment it gained consciousness, it was just a shadow capable of living like a parasite in the shadows of host beings."

At this point, the patriarch blinked a few times. A moment ago when Xu Qing had asked if there were other things out there like the shadow, he had sensed some hidden killing intent in the question.

Lowering his voice, the patriarch said, "The shadow also said that it has never sensed the existence of another being like itself. That said... your humble servant is of the opinion that there are few things in the world that are truly one-of-a-kind.

"In terms of the giant pulling the dragon chariot, the shadow also doesn't know the details. It just knows that upon seeing the giant, it was possible to make the same sounds as it, and therefore summon it. Having thought about it myself, your humble servant thinks that the shadow might have something to do with the chariot."

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. He only partly believed the shadow's explanation. But given that it had already said so much, he didn't think it would help to threaten it with more suppression.

The fact that it can attract the attention of the giant and the chariot is enough. That alone can be a trump card.

Xu Qing sat cross-legged on his dharmaskiff, looking out at the sea and mulling things over. It was already afternoon, and though the sun was bright, it was already showing signs of nearing evening. He kept thinking about what Elder Zhao had told him about the giant and the chariot. And the more he thought about it, the greater his desire grew.

If he saw the thing once, and never again, then he wouldn't have thought much of it. But now he'd seen it twice. What was more, the shadow had the ability to bring it again. And that made Xu Qing wonder if he could devise a plan to get a destined opportunity for an imperial-class technique.

Of course, it would be incredibly difficult. Just looking at the giant and the chariot from a distance, he had felt like his soul almost couldn't take the pressure. If he got closer, his body would probably collapse. It was a pressure that came from a higher level of life, the same thing Xu Qing had experienced in the mural in the Merfolk Isles. Though his cultivation base was higher at this point, the giant and the chariot had godliness that surpassed the mural. He couldn't get close, much less step onto the chariot. And even if he somehow did manage to do so, if the giant looked back, then Xu Qing knew he couldn't withstand that level of might.

I wonder how the president of the Seven Sect Coalition managed to do it back then.

Xu Qing got the feeling that unless the giant was asleep, it would be simply impossible to get onto the chariot.

“Shadow, I’ll give you a chance to atone for some of your crimes. Summon the giant and the dragon chariot to me. Then you sneak inside and make a copy of the imperial-class technique.”

The shadow immediately released fluctuations of terror. “Very... scared....”

The patriarch didn’t need any urging from Xu Qing. Looking very excited, he started communicating with the shadow. Shortly after, he had an explanation.

“Milord, Little Shadow says the giant has strange fluctuations of godliness, which make it impossible to get close to. Furthermore, the giant doesn’t have a shadow of its own, which would make it even more difficult.

“Of course, this led me to ask why the shadow summoned the giant and chariot if that’s the case. The answer is that Little Shadow hoped the might of the chariot would kill you, milord. Little Shadow can’t sustain that level of pressure for very long, and it knew that if you died, it would mean freedom for it. Ai, Little Shadow, how could you be so muddle-headed?”

Hearing that, Xu Qing thought back to when the shadow had attacked him, and immediately suppressed the shadow. The shadow screamed, then sent out emotions of both terror and pleading.

Looking away from the shadow, Xu Qing stared out at the sky as it gradually crept toward dusk. Many thoughts ran through his head. Eventually, the sun set and the sky grew dark. That was when Xu Qing thought back to the first time he saw the dragon chariot, and also the time he saw countless ghosts haunting the night on his first time out at sea.

“There is a fantastic symphony in the endless sea; mortals are unable to hear it; it accompanies Crimson Yang the golden crow; countless movements become a song; it is called Natural Sounds Welcome the Moon.

“The god loved it; the god’s eyes gazed upon it; the endless sea became forbidden; countless movements became sinister.”

Those lines were from the sea annals, and they described ‘countless ghosts haunting the night.’

As Xu Qing recalled them, his heart started beating, and new thoughts occurred to him.

Elder Zhao said that the dragon chariot is actually the sun’s imperial carriage. In that case, the young man in the engraving must be the sun. And that engraving describes how he transforms into the sun.

That conforms to what was described in the sea annals. The sun was a golden crow that normally assumed the form of a young person, riding through the sky on a dragon chariot during the day as the embodiment of the sun. Then, at night, the dragon chariot would return, and in his palace, the golden crow would listen to countless harmonic movements that welcomed the moon with the sounds of nature.

If all that is true, then the giant must have accompanied the sun to listen to that symphony. And now, despite having perished, he still pulls that chariot across the Forbidden Sea. If some of the giant's instincts remain, then if he hears that symphony of natural sounds welcoming the moon, won't he lose himself in the music...?

Having reached this point in his train of thought, Xu Qing's eyes shone with anticipation.

If he wanted to make this plan a reality, then he would have to find countless ghosts haunting the night, and at the same time, have a way to collect their music. That last aspect was the most important, and it made Xu Qing look down at his bag of holding, within which was that recording bottle. Once he had captured the music, then he would have to find the giant and the chariot.

The Forbidden Sea was vast, and the giant and chariot were on the seafloor. Anyone who caught a glimpse of them would be considered lucky, and searching for them was basically impossible.

Assuming I'm correct, then I'm surely not the first person to have realized this. Perhaps the president of the Seven Sect Coalition got the technique in a similar way. Regardless, it doesn't matter if other people have thought of this idea, does it? Even if they did, they would have to search for the giant and chariot, whereas I can call them to me with my shadow. One method is active, one is passive, and the difference between the two in the chances of success is immense.

Even still, he felt like he needed to carry out his plan as soon as possible. For all he knew, there was someone out there already trying to do the same thing as him.

Xu Qing also remembered Elder Zhao saying that whenever the dragon chariot found someone to inherit its legacy, and that person gained enlightenment of the imperial-class technique, then the giant would go to sleep somewhere on the seafloor. Years later, after building up enough power to impart the legacy again, it would reappear.

This seems to indicate that the legacy of that high-level technique cannot be imparted onto a chosen successor, but rather, can only be acquired in this way. I suppose that can't be proven until later, though.

At this point, Xu Qing was determined to try out his idea.

"The first thing to do," he murmured, "is find countless ghosts haunting the night!"

He knew that the haunting would only occur at nighttime, and wouldn't last for very long. And thus, it was without the slightest hesitation that he sent his dharmaskiff flying out over the Forbidden Sea in search of the ghosts.

Days passed, and Xu Qing's search proved fruitless. After all, the Forbidden Sea was massive. Searching for ghosts haunting the night was like fishing a needle from the sea, and was fully dependent on luck. However, Xu Qing was patient.

During the month that passed, he got more familiar with the usage of the black iron skewer. With Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior having transformed into a lightning spirit, the skewer was now astonishingly faster and more deadly. Now that the skewer was covered with lightning symbols, it burst with power that shocked even Xu Qing. And its speed surpassed that of a Foundation Establishment cultivator with a single life flame, and approached the level of one with two flames. Although it wasn't exactly the same as two flames, when combined with Xu Qing's cultivation base, it made his battle prowess reach an amazing level.

In addition to that, Xu Qing could clearly sense the abilities of his shadow. He had the ability to control its power to devour other shadows, and had tested it on a giantfang shark. After his shadow devoured the shark's shadow, the shark viciously bit itself in half.

It was a bizarre sight that left Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior astonished, and also musing that he was glad he was a spirit automaton with no shadow. The only downside was that the devouring process was slow.

In addition, the shadow could also produce shadow eyes, much to Xu Qing's delight. Under his control, the shadow could produce over a hundred shadow eyes, and when attached to different sea beasts, they gave Xu Qing the ability to see far and wide. For the most part, he attached shadow eyes to nocturnal sea beasts. That way, he had a better chance of finding ghosts haunting the night. Another month passed.

On one particular night as Xu Qing was monitoring things through his shadow, his heart thumped as he focused on one shadow eye in particular.

Through that eye, it was possible to see countless ghostly specters rising up from the water in one particular region of the sea.

“Countless ghosts haunting the night!”

Chapter 174: The Moment Arrives!

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing put away his dharmaskiff and entered the profound radiance state. His life lamp erupted volcanically as he moved with astonishing speed in the direction of the shadow eye.

The shadow eye was attached to a fish called a moonglow seabass. Such fishes reached a length of thirty meters and had huge heads that made up about ninety percent of their body. They had tiny fins and tiny tails, and their mouths weren't capable of ever closing fully, making them look anything but intelligent. They didn't swim very fast either. Because they were attracted to light, whether sunlight or moonlight, they generally stayed on the surface of the water, despite being able to dive down to the seafloor. Normally speaking, they would just float on the surface, unmoving as if dead.

Moonglow seabasses were definitely one of the more unusual creatures in the Forbidden Sea, as they were usually surrounded by all sorts of injured sea beasts. They weren't creatures injured by the moonglow seabass. Instead, they treated the fish like a giant rag to clean their wounds. The entry for moonglow seabasses in the Seven Blood Eyes sea annals explained that the mucus they secreted had healing properties, and because of that, they played an important role in the balance of nature in the Forbidden Sea.

Xu Qing flew along at high speed, guided by his shadow. After traveling for about two hours, he saw numerous ghosts floating up into the sky in the distance.

It was indeed an instance of countless ghosts haunting the night.

The area in question was large, stretching several thousand meters from one end to the other. That was different compared to the last time Xu Qing had encountered ghosts haunting the night. Obviously, each instance wasn't the same.

All of a sudden, he started worrying about whether his idea was going to work or not. He had no idea if his theory had merit, but after the work he had put in so far, he wasn't going to give up now.

He waved his hand, and his dharmaskiff appeared, rumbling as it splashed down into the water. As waves rolled out, his shadow retracted its shadow eye.

Xu Qing stepped down onto the dharmaskiff, then piloted it toward the ghosts. As he looked at them, strange sounds reached his ears. It didn't sound like music at all, but rather, the piercing howls of evil ghosts, like weeping or the cry of wolves.

Xu Qing slowed his dharmaskiff down to a halt right in the middle of all the ghosts. Then he produced the recording bottle, opened it, and sent some dharma force into it.

Thread-like streams of light floated out of it, spreading out as the bottle's sound-capturing ability was activated.

With that, Xu Qing looked up into the dark sky and the ghosts floating up into it. He heard their strange sounds, and thought back to the first time he had encountered this phenomenon. Taking control of his thoughts and emotions, he forced himself to calm down.

Instead of rejecting the sounds as vicious, he accepted them. He tried to sync himself with the sounds, and gradually, as he grew more and more calm, time passed. Before he realized what was happening, it was the next day.

When the first rays of dawn spread out, and the sea breeze brushed against his face, he slowly opened his eyes. Deep therein was a profound sadness that he slowly forced into the depths of his heart.

It was daytime. The ghost-haunting event was over.

The night went by quickly.

Thinking back to the previous night, he remembered how, as he slowly sank into a state of deep calm, the sounds had changed. He clearly remembered hearing a beautiful symphony.

He had dreamed. This time, he didn't dream about Grandmaster Bai's lessons. Instead, he dreamed that he was eating snake with Sergeant Thunder in the scavenger basecamp.

Eventually, Xu Qing looked down at the recording bottle. As he picked it up, he heard the same sounds from the night before. They were such a perfect copy that if he closed his eyes, he felt like he was once again watching countless ghosts haunt the night.

Mixed emotions filled him as he again felt like he was dreaming. This time, the images that he saw were of himself, walking out of the scavenger basecamp with Sergeant Thunder on his back. He could even hear the old man's reminders.

"You need to keep your eye on the other scavengers.

"Don't forget to feed the dogs every night. You can trust them more than anyone else in the basecamp.

"Remember to eat well. And don't eat cold food. Warm it up first! You're still growing, so don't get lazy about that kind of thing.

“If you do, you’ll regret it when you get older. Oh, right. Remember to sleep in bed. And use the bedding! Don’t be afraid of getting it dirty. Just wash it if you need to, and hang it in the sun to dry.”

Xu Qing shivered. The sea breeze blew, stirring his robe and hair, but it couldn’t dispel the sadness he felt from those memories.

Time passed, and eventually he sighed, looked down at the bottle, and whispered, “I still haven’t found a lifespan flower.”

It took a while for him to get his emotions under control. When he finally did, his eyes glittered sharply with determination.

I’m too weak. I need to get stronger!

Looking around, he realized he was in a very remote location. Flying up into the air, he checked the area to make sure he was alone. Then he dropped back down to his dharmaskiff and looked out at the sea.

“Shadow, call the giant and the dragon chariot.”

The early morning sun was soft on the surface of the sea. The dark water looked like a huge slab of mysterious black jade. As the sun touched it, it seemed partly rotten or decayed. Perhaps in the past, the sea had seemed profound because of its boundless majesty. But now it seemed putrid, thanks to the aura exuded by the terrifying entities that slept on the seafloor. Such as the giant pulling the dragon chariot.

The shadow didn’t hesitate for the slightest moment. It didn’t understand what exactly Xu Qing was doing, and wanted to transform into the shape of a question mark. But instead, it acted docile and obedient, like any other living being that was terrified of dying

As soon as Xu Qing issued his order, the shadow immediately opened its mouth and emitted a loud sound.

“C-c-crunch. C-c-crunch.”

A sound like the grinding of teeth echoed out over the water. It wasn’t extremely loud, but there was something unique about it, as if it was a signal meant to attract the attention of specific entities.

As Xu Qing waited, maintaining full vigilance, the wind started to blow. Ripples spread out over the calm surface of the water, gradually growing larger and larger until they were waves. Black spray from the waves drifted along with the wind.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing’s attention was focused on his snakeneck dragon, as he looked through its eyes to what was happening beneath the surface.

It took time. Perhaps it was because Xu Qing had traveled so far away from the last spot where he saw the giant and the dragon chariot. Or perhaps it was because the giant had moved to a distant location. Either way, it took an incense stick’s worth of time. The waves grew higher. Then, through the snakeneck dragon, Xu Qing saw something massive moving through the water in the distance.

“It’s here.”

He felt nervous, but was filled with determination. Lighting his life flame, which caused his life lamp to shine brightly, he entered the profound radiance state.

As soon as he did, the murky darkness of the sea changed. He could see more clearly, and thus was able to easily spot the massive giant covered with countless tentacles.

Everything around Xu Qing moved in slow motion, with the exception of the giant. It was almost as if his profound radiance state was useless in the presence of the giant. It strode toward him, becoming clearer and clearer, the clanking sound of the chain echoing through the water. Behind the giant was the dilapidated bronze dragon chariot. Rust covered it, but it was still immensely large and ghastly in appearance. They were already as close as about 3,000 meters. The surrounding water didn't seem to provide any resistance at all to the giant's movement. And it emanated a profound and terrifying aura.

Xu Qing hadn't gotten this close before!

The first time, he had been about 30,000 meters away, and had barely been able to make out the engravings on the chariot. The last time, he was a few thousand meters away, and had a much higher cultivation base, so he had seen the images even more clearly.

Now, as the giant reached the 3,000-meter mark and got even closer, those engraved images became even clearer. At the same time, Xu Qing sensed a mountain-toppling, sea-draining pressure weighing down on his soul.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior shivered and flew into the depths of the iron skewer to fight back against the pressure.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing, his mind reeling, felt blood oozing out of his nose and eyes.

Only the shadow didn't seem affected at all. Apparently, the shadow had been truly cowed by Xu Qing's torment. Despite seeing that Xu Qing wasn't in a very good state, the shadow didn't dare risk doing anything against him.

Wiping the blood off his face, Xu Qing looked coldly at the shadow, but didn't say anything. Then he looked back out at the sea. After a moment of analyzing the situation, his eyes shone with determination.

"It's still a short distance away. There's no time to lose!"

Chapter 175: Where the Sun Reclined

Xu Qing gritted his teeth. Now wasn't the time to sit around hesitating. The question was whether or not the music from the countless ghosts haunting the night would work on the giant. If it didn't, then Xu Qing would have to think of a way to make his escape. Even if it was effective, he had no idea how long it would take to work.

Therefore, he waved his hand, causing the recording bottle to shine with glittering light. The same sound from before echoed out.

Xu Qing held his breath and looked at the giant and the dragon chariot.

The giant didn't seem affected by the sound at all, and continued to stride closer and closer to Xu Qing.

2,700 meters. 2,400 meters. 2,100 meters.

Xu Qing reeled as the pressure grew greater, weighing down on him, pushing down onto his lungs so hard he struggled to breathe.

Don't tell me it's not going to work.

Xu Qing looked at the dragon chariot and was now able to see the engravings even more clearly, including some written text. The text was hard to make out, but from what Xu Qing could tell, it contained holy content written by a king or emperor.

I can't give up now!

But then he coughed up a mouthful of blood and, looking regretful, sighed and prepared to leave. If the recording bottle wasn't going to work, there was no point in staying around. If the giant got any closer, then it would be difficult to get away safely.

However, just as Xu Qing was about to start moving backward, his pupils constricted.

The giant, which was only about 1,800 meters away, suddenly stopped moving. Then it tilted its chin up, revealing the black holes that were its eye sockets. It seemed like it was listening to something.

Xu Qing's eyes went wide, and his heart started pounding.

Then the giant subconsciously took a half-step forward, bringing it within 1,500 meters.

At that point, the pressure had reached a terrifying level. Xu Qing's mind spun and blood oozed out of his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was moaning from the pressure, and the entire dharmaskiff was creaking as though it might not hold out.

Thankfully, after the giant took that final half-step, it didn't move at all. It just stood there like a marionette with its strings cut. Then, the black holes that were the giant's eyes seemed to quiver, as if emotions did exist on its previously expressionless face.

As for Xu Qing, a crazy look appeared in his eyes as, without the slightest hesitation, he shot up into the air, putting away his dharmaskiff, but keeping the recording bottle out. Then he dove into the water and started moving toward the giant and the dragon chariot 1,500 meters away.

As he got closer, cracks spread out across his skin, wounds that immediately oozed blood. His soul trembled as though it might collapse, and his life flame whipped about as if it were being battered by a fierce wind. In fact, an ordinary life flame would have been extinguished. But Xu Qing had a life lamp, and because of that foundation, the flame couldn't easily be put out. In that critical moment, Xu Qing waved his hand, and a huge black umbrella appeared over his head. As soon as the umbrella appeared, black fire flowed out to surround him. As that protection surrounded him on the outside, the violet crystal regenerated him from the inside. But Xu Qing wasn't paying attention to such things.

Accelerating, he sped past the 1,500-meter-mark as he headed closer to the listening giant. Xu Qing was roughly at the level of the giant's waist. Compared to the giant in size, he was like a fly that could be killed with a single swat of the hand. An extremely disturbing sensation filled him.

The closer he got, the more clearly he could see the rotting flesh of the giant. And he could smell its stench. Furthermore, it was now possible to see the shocking wounds that covered it. From the nature of the wounds, it seemed they were made when the giant was trying to protect someone important. Seeing all this, Xu Qing was deeply moved.

His plan was working!

However, despite the external protections, and the violet crystal restoring him from the inside, his body was still teetering on the verge of collapse. And all of it was simply because of the aura exuded naturally by the giant. The two of them were poles apart.

Xu Qing moved in a blur toward the giant, and more specifically, the bronze dragon chariot. Closer and closer he got, until he was right in front of the imperial carriage. Though it was covered in rust, it still exuded the sensation of a monarch. Though it was dilapidated, its carvings were incomparably extravagant. Though it was a remnant of the ancient past, it still felt like something imperial.

Now, Xu Qing could clearly see the engravings, and they were instantly branded into the depths of his soul!

At the same time, he was filled with the urge to offer obeisance. That said, the sensation of danger coming from the giant prompted Xu Qing to ignore that urge. With that, he stepped forward onto the bronze dragon chariot.

This was where the sun reclined!

This was where an emperor sat!

This was a place ordinary individuals would never get close to in an entire lifetime.

The dragon chariot was so enormous that, as Xu Qing stepped onto it, he felt like he was entering a palace. In fact, opposite of him, there was an enormous imperial throne. Everything around him was decorated with auspicious designs. He saw broken lampstands. And even more shocking was that, on the walls were scribbled rows of text. They seemed to have been written in a hurry, perhaps by someone about to die, but not willing to let their legacy disappear.

As Xu Qing looked at the text, his mind felt like it was being struck by a hundred thousand lightning bolts which then coursed out with destructive power into every corner of his body. He shook violently as his eyes filled with blinding, golden light that gradually took the shape of a golden crow, its wings held tightly to its sides as it shot up to the highest heavens. The golden crow was so large that, even though its wings weren't spread, it filled half the sky, and its golden light made it seem like a god. Its aura surpassed anything Xu Qing had ever encountered. Both Joine and Flame Phoenix would seem like peasants in comparison. This was the imposing grandeur of an emperor or sovereign!

Whether it was the Seven Blood Eyes sea annals, or what Third Elder had told him, or what Xu Qing himself was able to see by looking at the images, they all indicated the same thing.

The sun of this world was an entity like an Ancient Emperor. The sun was not human, but rather, a divine bird. A golden crow! Hē would leave with the sunrise and return after the sunset. The sun's light warmed the lands before, and though it might not encompass all of Revered Ancient, at the very least, hē was a god to all living beings.

Xu Qing was shaken to the core, waves of shock battering him, his soul trembling, and his fleshly body quivering. It was a sensation difficult to put into words. He felt almost like he was inside of something not really true, like a myth. Like he had entered a world of the ancient past, before the broken face of the god arrived. And he was standing high above as all living beings offered worship to the sun's imperial carriage.

A whole series of feelings struck Xu Qing to the core. And the image he was seeing, of the golden crow flying to the highest heavens like an emperor and like a sovereign, was so clear he was able to see the feathers of its wings, which were still held tightly to its sides. All of the feathers rippled, thrumming with something like a dao resonance.

It was the same type of feeling he got back in the forbidden region by the scavenger basecamp, when he entered that temple and saw the golden statue wielding a saber. That saber strike had left him shaken, and had served him as a trump card ever since. However, his level had been too low at the time, and thus, he didn't have a full understanding of the move. In turn, that meant he couldn't unleash its complete potential.

And yet, that also went to show that Xu Qing's ability to obtain enlightenment surpassed that of ordinary individuals. In terms of aptitude, he was outstanding in Seven Blood Eyes. That said, if you included all of the countless species and sects in the Revered Ancient mainland, there were plenty of people who surpassed him. But for him to have acquired a saber move with dao resonance while in the Qi Condensation level proved that he had unusual powers of understanding.

Those powers of understanding were on full display again, as he immersed himself in the sight of the holy golden crow. He watched hīm fly to the highest heights. He watched hīm pierce the sky. He watched hīm rebuke the heavens.

Outside of Xu Qing's life lamp, an illusory figure appeared. As it became more and more clear, it came to resemble a golden crow. The image became rapidly clearer. In Xu Qing's eyes, he was watching the divine bird, the golden crow, emanating golden light that shone onto all heaven and earth. Then it spread its wings wide and flapped them.

Heaven and earth seemed like they might collapse, as intense rumbling sounds echoed out everywhere. It was like countless lightning bolts crashing at the same time, and it filled Xu Qing with profound astonishment. Though he felt like his mind was about to collapse, the golden crow outside of his life lamp coalesced even faster. At the same time, immense amounts of information flew from the golden crow he was seeing and into his mind.

That information was like a tempest, raging so wildly that Xu Qing had no time to ponder it. He was shaking, veins bulging out on his forehead, his eyes bloodshot as he accepted a new legacy.

Chapter 176: Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits

The spreading of wings was the imparting of a legacy. And then, shortly thereafter as Xu Qing was still reeling, the golden crow's wings flapped again. This time, it released a terrifying shockwave that caused all light to dim, and sent wild winds screaming everywhere.

Though Xu Qing didn't notice, blood was flowing out of his nose, and the recording bottle was weakening. At the same time, the giant stirred, as though slowly leaving its state of absent-mindedness.

Next, Xu Qing watched as the golden crow climbed higher. Then, the crow's wings spread again. This was the third time! This time, every feather radiated dazzling golden light. Along with the spreading of the wings, the sky seemed about to split open, and terrifying ripples spread out in all directions.

Then the sky did split open as a huge crevice opened up above, revealing another world. Xu Qing saw countless species of living beings, all of them strange-looking, and all of them howling. As they howled, the golden crow's mouth opened, and an echoing sound erupted into that world.

To Xu Qing's shock, black flames enveloped that world, assimilating everything in an instant. Countless drops of blood rose up into the air, converging into a golden liquid that shot into the golden crow's mouth. From a distance, it almost looked like the crow was drinking water.

Next, Xu Qing was shaken to the core as the golden crow suddenly looked around. Those bright, glittering eyes seemed capable of piercing through the River of Time. And they surpassed even the great dao of space.

From the most ancient time, and from the most boundless space, that gaze came to rest on Xu Qing. His mind vibrated as a gentle voice spoke to him.

“This is the life essence technique of an emperor. Of me. Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits.”

Terrifying levels of information poured into Xu Qing, making him feel like he was a little rowboat floating on the sea during a violent storm. Blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth, out of his eyes, out of his nose, and out of his ears. As that happened, Xu Qing's vision slowly collapsed, and he reverted to his normal state.

At the same time, he heard Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior wailing.

“Wake up, milord! The giant's rousing! We're finished! Oh, milord. Hurry and wake up!”

The recording bottle had ceased emitting any sound, and as the giant looked at it, it started to collapse. Emotions seemed to be stirring in the giant. Its chest heaved as though it wanted to breathe, and then the tentacles covering it started to sway. Its breathing contained unspeakable power that shoved the water away from it. And the astonishing tentacles were writhing.

It seemed that the sounds from the recording bottle had stirred the giant's memories, causing it to weep. And then it threw its hands wide, resulting in a tsunami on the surface of the sea. Waves surged out in all directions, some hundreds of meters tall, some thousands. From a distance, it looked like ripples spreading out on a pond, except vastly more terrifying. Then the giant started to turn around to look at the dragon chariot.

As it turned, breathing, the water around it boiled and evaporated, leaving the surrounding area empty. Xu Qing's eyes snapped open, and he heard the wailing of Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior. Then he saw the black, empty eye sockets of the massive giant. As the giant's face turned directly toward him, its breath swept over him.

The dragon chariot was made from special materials that wouldn't be affected by the giant's mere breathing. But Xu Qing was not. His flesh and blood immediately exploded with intense pain. His

face, chest, and abdomen were ripped into bloody shreds. The front of his arms and legs suffered similarly. The mere breathing of the giant was ripping him apart.

During that moment of crisis, a black umbrella appeared in front of him, blocking the giant's breath. As the umbrella trembled, Xu Qing reached up with a hand that was mostly bloody flesh and bone. Producing an entropic teleportation talisman, he crushed it!

Instantly, the glittering light of the teleportation talisman surrounded him and the umbrella. Then, rumbling sounds could be heard as he vanished.

After Xu Qing and the umbrella were gone, there was nothing to block the giant's breath, and it swept over the dragon chariot. When it passed, the giant looked mutely at the empty dragon chariot, then once again began to weep in grief. It didn't care whether or not Xu Qing escaped. It looked at the chariot, its emotions clearly having been provoked by the recording bottle, causing it to think of its master from the past. Weeping echoed out into heaven and earth.

Eventually, the giant squatted down in front of the dragon chariot. The weeping grew louder, as though the giant were defiantly trying to summon something. But in the end, there was no response. Its emotions began to die down, and it again returned to its previous state of blankness. Acting on instinct alone, it started slowly dragging the dragon chariot across the seafloor. The legacy had been passed on, and the giant would now go into a deep sleep from which it couldn't be awakened. A hundred years later, it would return.

However, the sea did not calm down. The tsunami that had been kicked up, as well as the winds, continued to sweep out.

At a location a few thousand kilometers away that was still not affected by the storm, Xu Qing appeared in a glow of teleportation light. After materializing, he fell down onto the water. As soon as the mutagen-filled seawater touched his wounds, more pain pierced into him. He could hardly see, but he waved his hand to summon his dharmaskiff, climbed on board, and then activated the defenses.

There he lay on the deck, trembling from head to toe, bleeding profusely.

The flesh had been shredded off of most of the front half of his body, leaving behind little but shattered bone. He looked extremely ghastly. In fact, if there were someone present to look at him, they wouldn't have been able to recognize who he was.

Vision swimming, he shakily produced massive amounts of medicinal pills that he began to consume. He also pushed the violet crystal to heal him. As the violet light spread out, he endured the pain. At the same time, his eyes shone with cold light as he looked at his shadow.

As the sunlight shone down, the shadow shivered obsequiously. It was very afraid. It had been there when Xu Qing got the life lamp, and had seen him injured. But that was nothing like this. So, not only was it afraid because of how Xu Qing had suppressed it in the past, but now it could see what indescribably crazy things Xu Qing was capable of doing. If he could treat himself this viciously, then it was only possible to imagine how viciously he could treat others.

Therefore, the shadow didn't dare to even think about trying to cause problems. It tried to send out fawning emotions, and even attempted to stretch out in a way that would block the sun from hitting Xu Qing.

Meanwhile, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior couldn't stop himself from shaking. Face pale and eyes wide with terror, he thought, Never in all my freaking years have I seen someone act so suicidal. Back in that unfathomable world we entered in the Merfolk Isles, I felt terror. But this was even worse than that!

The Fiendish Xu really is crazy. In fact, if he keeps this up, the day is going to come when he ends up killing himself. If he dies, then I'm going to die.... But if he keeps doing this and surviving, he's going to get more and more precious treasures. And if that happens, then it's entirely possible he might think I'm not useful anymore, and kill me.

What am I supposed to do?

The more the patriarch thought about it, the more scared he got. In fact, he was so scared that he uncharacteristically wasn't even paying attention to how the shadow was ingratiating itself to Xu Qing. The only solution he could think of was to work even harder to make sure the Fiendish Xu did well.

That caused the patriarch's eyes to turn bloodshot. He wasn't the type of person who liked taking risks. But as he thought about it, he realized that if he didn't put his life on the line, then his poor little life would end up lost.

However, there was something else that made him feel like he was in more danger than ever. Based on the ancient records and stories he had read, if someone learned too many secrets about another person, they almost always ended up dying horrible deaths.

That thought caused him to shiver even more. It was around then that he noticed the fawning shadow, so he quickly sent the iron skewer swirling around Xu Qing. Trying to look so protective that he would risk his life to keep his lord and master safe, he said, "Milord, I'll keep you safe while you recover. Leave everything to me!"

With that, he glared at the shadow. After all, he knew that the shadow was probably the biggest danger right now. Xu Qing took note of the shadow's fawning behavior, and the patriarch's efforts to watch over him. After casting a placid glance at the shadow, he looked at the patriarch.

The patriarch saw the expression of approval and very nearly started weeping out of excitement. In fact, all of his fears about death vanished, and he felt profoundly moved.

Trembling, he did something he rarely did and started talking without planning out his words first. "Milord!! Going forward, as long as I don't get killed, I'll always keep you safe. Your humble servant is even ready to self-detonate if necessary!"

Xu Qing nodded, then focused on his injuries. The truth was that he was actually trying to distract the patriarch and the shadow, just in case they were thinking of attacking him in his moment of weakness. He was ready to suppress the shadow or crush the patriarch's life essence spirit at a moment's notice.

He had been injured so badly that he had basically lost half a life. However, that also meant he still had half a life left. After his experience with the life lamp, and having witnessed the Captain's

craziness, Xu Qing wasn't too worried about his current state. Although he hurt from head to toe, and his aura was weak, his eyes still glittered with craziness and excitement.

It was worth it!

Struggling to the side where he could lean against the rail of the dharmaskiff, he ignored his injuries and started thinking about what he had risked his life to acquire. He knew that he had only been inside the dragon chariot for a few breaths of time. But he also knew that his life lamp now had the image of a golden crow attached to it. It wasn't just a mere outline. It was completely lifelike. Even on the Revered Ancient mainland, this was something precious.

An imperial-class legacy technique. Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits!

Chapter 177: Like a Devil or a Demon

So-called imperial-class techniques were secret magics created by Ancient Emperors and Imperial Sovereigns from the Revered Ancient of epochs past. Some were entire collections of techniques. Others were individual secret techniques.

Regardless, they were all astonishingly mighty.

And they were so mysterious and powerful that most people found them unimaginable, and of course, incomparably valuable. The fact that imperial-class techniques were extremely rare ensured that they were often kept as reserve powers for huge organizations. That said, the majority actually couldn't be cultivated, as they had very strict requirements. For example, they might need to be coupled with a bloodline power that was itself exceedingly rare.

In a similar vein, it was generally difficult for one species to cultivate and control a technique designed for another species. There were only a few that didn't have a bloodline requirement, and those were the most valuable. If a technique like that appeared in the world, people would either go crazy or turn despondent. They would go crazy out of envy, or be despondent because they couldn't get it.

Once an imperial-class technique formed a seed in someone, others couldn't get it, not even by killing that person.

If that person explained the technique, the other person wouldn't be able to remember it. And even if someone had a special way to preserve the memory of the technique, without the legacy seed in them, they wouldn't be able to cultivate it. The legacy seed was proof that the person who had it qualified to cultivate the technique.

Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits was like that.

Put precisely, Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits wasn't a martial technique, but rather, a secret magic!

Based on the description from the information Xu Qing had acquired, after cultivating the magic to the highest level, the cultivator could form the Golden Crow Emperor Body.

With the Golden Crow Emperor Body, the cultivator's fleshly body battle prowess would be at the level of an emperor, and they could transform into a golden crow and rebuke the highest heavens.

From the descriptions, and based on what Xu Qing knew about cultivation, he came to realize that Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits was a body cultivation secret magic.

The cultivation method revolved around studying the process of natural selection. By assimilating the essence blood of myriads of spirits, and absorbing them into one's body, it was possible to reshape the fleshly body, making it like a magical treasure. And the ultimate goal was to form the Golden Crow Emperor Body.

Because the magic had been created by the golden crow, it was not intended to be either good or evil. After all, to hīn, the world was a place where the weak were the prey of the strong, and one had to continuously evolve into being a stronger entity. By constantly absorbing the essence blood of myriads of living things, one could not only strengthen oneself, but also could absorb the innate abilities of other species! That aspect was extremely domineering.

Of course, there were limitations. In order to acquire the innate abilities of a species, one couldn't absorb simply a single individual. It required absorbing many, and preferably, individuals with high cultivation bases.

Xu Qing leaned against the side of the dharmaskiff, his eyes closed as he went through all of the information. As he did, his heart pounded. Sometime later, he opened his eyes, and they shone with astonishment.

An imperial-class body cultivation secret magic!

He was not unfamiliar with body cultivation.

The very first technique he had encountered on his path of cultivation was the Sea and Mountain Incantation, which was also a body cultivation magic. He had killed many enemies with it in the scavenger basecamp, and even after arriving at Seven Blood Eyes and getting other techniques, he still didn't give up on it.

Eventually, he had pushed the Sea and Mountain Incantation as far as it could go, which was the ninth level, which was its limit. The spectral drought demon that appeared behind him at that time had two fleshy lumps on its back that seemed like they would grow into wings eventually. However, it had never transformed after that, and it didn't seem like it would be easy to push it to a theoretical tenth level.

It had nothing to do with Xu Qing. He had no mutagen in him, and coupled with the violet crystal, he had cultivated the Sea and Mountain Incantation to an unheard-of level. His inability to achieve a breakthrough with it was a limitation of the technique itself. After all, it was nothing more than a common low-level technique. Because of that, Xu Qing had been forced to use the Seaforming Scripture to reach Foundation Establishment.

That said, he hadn't given up on his pursuit of body cultivation. After reaching Foundation Establishment, he had acquired some other body cultivation techniques, but none of them had worked out, and none seemed to correspond well to the Sea and Mountain Incantation.

Now, Xu Qing's eyes were shining brightly. As he reviewed the information from Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, and sensed the legacy seed of the golden crow attached to his life lamp, he felt incredible anticipation.

I wonder if my Sea and Mountain Incantation will improve now that I have Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits.

They were both body cultivation techniques, and thus it made sense to him that the blessings of the Sea and Mountain Incantation would bolster Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits.

Unfortunately, he was too seriously injured right now. It wasn't a good time for cultivation. Taking a deep breath, he ignored the pain and steadied his breathing, then poured dharma force into the violet crystal to focus on recovery.

In that matter, time slipped by slowly but surely. Ten days went by.

Day and night, the shadow sent out emotions of loyalty. During the day, it would try to block the sun, and during the night it would stand guard under the water.

Seeing that, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior chuckled coldly in his heart. The more you do that, the more the Fiendish Xu will want to suppress you. After all, you're giving the impression that you won't behave unless you've been beaten down. The best thing would be to not be so obvious. Show your loyalty in more subtle ways.

With such thoughts on his mind, the patriarch sent the iron skewer flying up into the sky, where he circled around slowly, keeping an eye on the entire area around Xu Qing. On a few occasions during those ten days, Xu Qing encountered dangerous sea beasts. However, both the shadow and the patriarch used a variety of methods to ensure that Xu Qing was always safe the entire time.

As for the sea beasts, Xu Qing didn't want them killed. He had the shadow bind them and keep them underwater, almost like sheep in a pen.

As the violet crystal worked to heal him, he eventually reached a point of seeming relatively normal, other than still being quite pale. At that point, he decided the time had come to start cultivating Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits.

Sitting down cross-legged beneath the morning sun, he reviewed the information that he had been studying for the past ten days.

“Nine firmaments forge the emperor's body; the golden crow assimilates myriad spirits; innate abilities are recovered from myriad species; mine own life glorifies the vault of heaven!!”

He performed an incantation gesture, then put his thumbs together in front of his dantian region, spreading his other fingers out like wings. Looking up at the sun, he took a deep breath. Instantly, the spot he was looking at seemed to grow blurry, and an intense heat appeared there that only he could see. Streaming down from the sun, it entered his body.

The golden crow attached to his life lamp opened its eyes and spread its wings. Lifting its head it opened its mouth and consumed the warmth from the sun. As that warmth flowed inside, its eyes opened further, but not all the way. Only a crack, within which glowed brilliant light. This was the first step in cultivating Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits. It was activating the legacy seed of the golden crow.

And the method to awaken it was to bring in some of the sun's aura, then nourish it with blood.

Next, the golden crow shivered and became like a black hole, while Xu Qing started withering. He shook, his energy and blood trembling as wisps of it entered the golden crow. In the blink of an eye,

he looked like a desiccated corpse. His arms became limp, his face sank in, and he shrank so much that his clothes seemed empty.

However, his expression was not one of panic. Given all the research he had done into Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits over the past ten days, he knew exactly what was happening. As he remained calm, the golden crow within him absorbed his energy and blood.

Though he became so withered it looked terrifying, the golden crow eventually reached a critical point and struggled to open its eyes.

The legacy seeds of imperial-class techniques didn't just immediately activate. The cultivators needed to take the initiative to activate them. And that was because legacy seeds took a lot of power. Normally speaking, people wouldn't attempt it alone. Usually they would have the help of a powerful organization, who would spare no cost to help them.

For example, the requirements of energy and blood for Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits were so incredible that ordinary cultivators wouldn't be able to meet them. And if they failed in their attempt, they would be in danger of being killed.

But because Xu Qing was already at a shocking level of body refinement, and had powerful energy and blood, he was able to last much longer than any ordinary person. Even still, he was reaching the point where he felt like he might not be able to continue. He saw how withered his body was, to the point where he looked like a corpse. However, his eyes glittered as he activated the Sea and Mountain Incantation, causing the spectral drought demon to appear behind him. It roared to heaven, the cracks that covered it flowing with molten lava. It emanated a shocking aura, and a powerful aura of energy and blood.

Then, a tremor passed through it as streams of energy and blood erupted out of the drought demon and pierced into Xu Qing, heading right to the golden crow.

The golden crow shivered. As it absorbed more and more, its eyes opened further. The drought demon began to wither, and after about ten breaths of time, it collapsed, turning into a haze of energy and blood that shot into Xu Qing to the golden crow.

The golden crow shook as it tried harder to open its eyes. However, it seemed that the energy and blood Xu Qing was capable of providing wasn't sufficient. It just wasn't enough to fully open the golden crow's eyes.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing extended his right hand and put it onto the deck. Instantly, a gravitational force popped into being, causing Joine's flesh to emerge from the middle of the dharmaskiff. When that flesh flew over to him, it emanated a terrifying power of energy and blood that filled Xu Qing.

After the golden crow consumed it, the crow's eyes opened all the way, and it let loose a piercing cry filled with a dao resonance that shook everything.

Waves spread out from the dharmaskiff, creating something like a small-scale tsunami.

From the sky, the sea surrounding Xu Qing looked very strange. The waves were making a very specific image. It was the image of a huge eye. The golden crow's eye! And Xu Qing's dharmaskiff was the pupil of that eye.

As he sat on the deck, he looked like a corpse, but his eyes shone like the stars, and his hair drifted in the wind. All in all... He looked like a devil or a demon!

Chapter 178: Sweeping the Sea, Sealing a Dragon!

Rumbling sounds rolled out over the sea. As the waves crashed, Xu Qing sat on his dharmaskiff trembling from head to toe, his breath coming in ragged pants, and the coldness in his eyes transforming into madness. The reason was... he was hungry! More hungry than he had ever been before. One reason for that hunger was that his withered fleshly body needed to be replenished in order to return to normal. The violet crystal couldn't help out at all in that regard. It could speed up recovery from injuries, but it couldn't create energy, blood, and nutrients out of nothing.

The other reason for that hunger was right behind Xu Qing. There was nothing in the air behind him. But both Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior and the shadow were both very nervous, as they knew that right behind Xu Qing lurked something extremely vicious and dangerous.

Xu Qing also knew that there was something behind him.

Put precisely, the patriarch and the shadow were both tense with fear because, beneath Xu Qing's clothing, right on his back, was a magical totem tattoo.

The moment the eyes of the golden crow opened, an image appeared on Xu Qing's back that looked exactly like it in every aspect. And it pulsed with a hair-raising aura.

This was the second phase of activating the legacy seed!

During the ten days in which Xu Qing studied the legacy information about Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, he came to find that activating the legacy seed involved two phases. The first phase was stimulating the seed, causing a totem tattoo to appear on one's body.

The second phase was making that tattoo visible as a projection of energy and blood. Once that was done, the legacy seed was considered fully activated. The second phase needed massive amounts of energy and blood, and also resulted in extreme hunger!

As Xu Qing panted for breath, he turned his bloodshot eyes to Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior.

The patriarch shivered. The look in Xu Qing's eye made it seem like he was getting ready to devour someone. The patriarch immediately revealed a projection of himself, making sure to keep himself mostly transparent to reinforce the fact that he had no energy or blood.

Xu Qing looked away from him to the shadow.

The shadow also trembled.

"Bring them up here," Xu Qing said, his voice faint and raspy. The shadow didn't hesitate for a second. It slid down into the water, and a moment later, dragged up a huge armored mackerel.

As Xu Qing eyed the fish, the tattoo on his back shimmered as though it wished to manifest itself, but couldn't. What did happen was that a host of illusory golden feathers shimmered into being behind him, making two wings. As they swayed, they created a gravitational force that locked onto the armored mackerel.

Instantly, the 300-meter-long fish trembled as all of its energy and blood were sucked out of it. They converged into a 30-meter sphere of rippling blood that collapsed in on itself until it created a tiny point of golden liquid. The golden wings swayed as it absorbed it.

At the same time, Xu Qing waved his hand, causing black balefire to sweep over the armored mackerel and extract its soul.

The shadow couldn't restrain itself, and greedily devoured the mutagen and spirit power that remained behind. Then the shadow dragged up a second sea beast. Then a third. A fourth....

During the previous ten days of study, Xu Qing had intentionally kept a group of twenty-three sea beasts confined in the water beneath his dharmaskiff, that way, once his tattoo manifested the golden wings, he would be able to have instant access to nourishment. As the wings absorbed the energy and blood, they became more and more corporeal. At the same time, Xu Qing replenished himself, and became less and less withered. He was starting to recover.

Now he could clearly sense that his fleshly body power had progressed past its previous point of stagnation. He was stronger and faster. He also had a new level of perception. That perception was apparently a resonance with magical techniques, allowing him to tap into some of the abilities he knew without using incantation gestures.

Unfortunately, after performing some tests, he wasn't able to use it properly.

I wonder if this is one of those innate species abilities mentioned in the Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits description. And I haven't assimilated enough living beings to use it.

Right now, his hunger was only partially abated. After some thought, he stood, put away his dharmaskiff, and dove directly into the water.

Once under the surface, rumbling sounds surged out as he entered the profound radiance state. The tattoo on his back radiated an awe-inspiring aura that made the pressure he exuded even more powerful. Off to the side, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior crackled with electricity, and the lightning symbols on the iron skewer glittered. The shadow spread out in all directions as well, resembling a ghastly tree, its over one hundred eyes open and looking in all directions.

Xu Qing's overall battle prowess vastly surpassed what he was capable of before. Though the Forbidden Sea was still a place where caution was needed, he was strong enough to be virtually all-powerful in most situations.

Rumbling swept through the sea as Xu Qing vanished into the distance and began slaughtering every sea beast he encountered.

He needed many more sea beasts, and a lot more blood, to sate his hunger and complete the second phase of the legacy seed activation.

Half a month passed.

In a remote part of the Forbidden Sea, seawater exploded as a 500-meter long bluegreen dragon jumped up into the air. It had a terrifying aura and appearance; even when its mouth was closed, its razor-sharp teeth were still plainly visible. These dragons were simply a nightmare for most trading ships and cultivators who traveled the Forbidden Sea. [1]

The Seven Blood Eyes sea annals went into a lot of detail about bluegreen dragons. They were apex predators in the Forbidden Sea and were known for being vicious and terrifying. What was more, their mutated cultivation base gave them shocking battle prowess.

This particular bluegreen dragon was an extraordinary specimen. As it leaped into the air, it was possible to see two balls of red fire burning within it. That indicated that this bluegreen dragon had reached the level of two life flames. As the sea exploded around well over a thousand meters in each direction, its normally cold and indifferent eyes actually brimmed with fear. And looking closely, it was possible to see a totem mark on its abdomen.

That mark looked exactly like a tree, with over a hundred blinking eyes on it. They almost looked like mouths as they devoured the bluegreen dragon's shadow.

Then, a host of lightning bolts shot up from the water, within the middle of which was a black iron skewer. It moved with astonishing speed as it stabbed directly into the bluegreen dragon. A boom rang out as the spot where the dragon had been stabbed exploded. The intense pain caused the dragon to attempt to open its mouth and howl in pain.

However, it couldn't open its mouth!

Instead of a howl, it could issue little more than a muffled grunt. And that was because a young man stood in its mouth. He wore a violet daoist robe as he stood between two of the dragon's teeth, his hair dripping wet.

As the bluegreen dragon thrashed, his hair whipped about, spraying water like black ink. Water flowed down his face, accenting his delicate features and fair skin. He was so handsome as to be beautiful, with eyebrows like willow leaves, a body like a jade tree, and long black hair that was both wildly unkempt and stunningly breathtaking. His eyes contained something fiendish. And that fiendishness wasn't just visible on his stunning face. Instead, his entire person exuded it.

At the moment, he had one hand on the bluegreen dragon's upper teeth, while his feet were planted like nails into its lower teeth. Using his power alone, he was preventing the dragon from opening its mouth!

This young man was none other than Xu Qing. For half a month he had been hunting and killing sea beasts. The totem tattoo on his back was very close to being complete, having absorbed quite a bit of energy and blood.

Thanks to the nourishment, Xu Qing had recovered. He was now vastly stronger and faster than before, to the point that he was able to contend with a bluegreen dragon using fleshly body power alone.

As his cold eyes flickered, black balefire erupted out to cover the bluegreen dragon that he had been chasing for half a day. At the same time, countless golden feathers materialized behind him, rippling as they sent out a gravitational force to absorb the dragon. The bluegreen dragon thrashed as it splashed back down into the water. However, that was when a snakeneck dragon appeared, slamming into the bluegreen dragon and stopping it from sinking down.

Although the snakeneck dragon collapsed, it created enough of a delay that the balefire covered the entire bluegreen dragon. Also, Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits was fully unleashed.

A howl barely managed to escape through the bluegreen dragon's teeth as countless amounts of energy and blood were sucked out of it and absorbed into the wings.

Its soul then appeared within Xu Qing, serving as kindling as he opened his 47th and 48th dharma apertures!

His dharma force surged, and nourishment from Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits swept through him. Cracking sounds filled his body, causing him to become even more good-looking, and at the same time, boosting his fleshly body power!

I only need a few more sea beasts to finish the second phase of Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits. At that point, the totem tattoo will fully manifest, and this imperial-class technique of mine will be mine permanently.

Xu Qing then sped off into the distance, leaving behind the desiccated corpse of the bluegreen dragon to sink to the bottom of the sea. As the shadow raced to follow him, it sent out emotions of frustration.

It felt that it had been too slow in consuming the dragon's shadow. The dragon had been killed before the shadow even finished. Unexpectedly the shadow was sending these emotions to the patriarch, who didn't take the opportunity to try to mess with the shadow. Instead, he was looking at Xu Qing, his long hair and violet robe rippling. The patriarch's mind was spinning.

He had witnessed Xu Qing unleash slaughter. He had witnessed Xu Qing go crazy. He had witnessed Xu Qing cause members of the opposite sex to swoon. And he had witnessed Xu Qing getting stronger and stronger the entire time. All of it caused a specific thought to occur to him.

Chapter 179: Big Bro Xu Qing!

While Xu Qing sped through the Forbidden Sea, absorbing one sea beast after another, some distance away from him, three enormous warships made of black wood sped through the dome of heaven. They exuded an aura of ancientness, and almost looked like three enormous trees. The glittering black light they exuded kept the ships' aura locked down and virtually undetectable. At the same time, they would make it difficult for anyone to see who was on the ships.

The truth was that it was a disguise ensuring that no one knew these were Seazombie warships.

The ships were powered by mutagen, and because they could constantly absorb mutagen from their surroundings, they could fly for shockingly long periods of time. There were over a hundred Seazombie cultivators on the ships, although most of them were only in the Qi Condensation level. There were four, though, who pulsed with the aura of Foundation Establishment. Those four weren't ordinary Foundation Establishment cultivators. They all had life flames.

The strongest among them wore a white robe. Though he wasn't in the profound radiance state, he radiated the obvious aura of two life flames. He was in charge of these warships, and as he stared off into the distance, his gray pupils pulsed with intense coldness. In fact, his entire person radiated frigidity, as though nothing around him were possibly worth him paying attention to.

Standing next to him was a young woman. She was also a Seazombie, and had once been human. She had clearly been beautiful in life, and even after having been zombified, she was an important person. Because of that, she didn't radiate any of the aura of zombie poison, and had fair skin without any necrotic patches. She was actually good-looking, and even a bit cute. Her eyes seemed

livelier than the average Seazombie, and if she was standing in a crowd, it wouldn't be immediately apparent that she was a Seazombie at all. She currently had an arm wrapped around the white-robed Seazombie's arm.

"Big Bro Xu Qing," she said, pouting a bit, "tell me! Come on, please! How'd you find me, huh? I was very careful to stay in disguise."

The white-robed Seazombie shook his head slowly, but seemed to be having trouble resisting the young woman's pleas. Then she took out a black stone and handed it to him. He took it.

Looking at her, he said, "Third Princess, knowledge is priceless. And since you value knowledge so much, I, Xu Qing, will tell you the answer to your question. Before I was a Seazombie, I was a disciple from the Seventh Peak in Seven Blood Eyes. Thanks to a little technique I learned back then, I was able to deduce your identity.

"Princess, your father the king is very anxious, which is why he posted the mission to find you and bring you back. Please, Princess, don't make this hard for me. The return journey won't take long. On the way back to our ancestral land, don't throw things around randomly. If you provoke someone you shouldn't provoke, it could lead to trouble."

Grinning shyly, the young woman said, "Aw, fine. But don't forget, Big Bro Xu Qing, you promised that you would be my special dao protector when we got back. I like your personality, Big Bro Xu Qing. You're special. I can tell. You know, I can't believe you dared to make me pay you a mutation stone just to answer my question. Not one other member of our species would do something like that.

"All those things you say, such as 'knowledge is priceless' and 'respect knowledge,' well... I just really like that. They're very unique."

The white-robed Seazombie clasped his hands behind his back and stared off into the distance. "I, Xu Qing, am a person who never goes back on his word. As long as you help me complete this mission smoothly, Princess, then I won't stop at just being your dao protector. I'll even be your consort, if you wish. And if I, Xu Qing, go back on my word, then let me be poisoned with the most deadly poison, and struck by heavenly lightning five times in a row!"

"You'd really be my consort, Big Bro Xu Qing?" Third Princess asked, her eyes lighting up.

"Absolutely!"

The white-robed Seazombie cleared his throat.

Meanwhile, in another part of the Forbidden Sea, Xu Qing shivered, and his eyes shone with vigilance as he slowly backed up.

Further ahead of him on the seafloor was a shocking group of ghostly figures moving through the water toward a city. The enormous city was full of buildings, as well as countless shadowy figures moving about through them. Xu Qing heard the hustle and bustle you would expect in a city; there were even vendor stalls and carts that the ghostly figures shopped from.

At a glance, this place looked just as big and bustling as the Seven Blood Eyes capital city.

The sight of it caused Xu Qing's heart to pound. It didn't matter how much he had advanced in cultivation base and battle prowess, this scene still filled him with dread. What he was looking at was a ghost city.

And what caused him to fear it weren't the ghosts, but rather the city, which was an entity unto itself. That was why, without any hesitation, he backed away from it. The ghost city didn't seem interested in him, and had no intention of pursuing him. However, Xu Qing didn't have any desire to test that out. Picking another direction, he started moving, and only when he was some distance away did he breathe a sigh of relief.

The seafloor is a dangerous place. Given the level of my cultivation base, I need to be careful about exploring down so far.

This was the second entity Xu Qing had run into recently that left him palpitating in fear. The first time, he had seen an enormous head rise up from the water, then splash back down, as if it were playing. And it had cackled with laughter. That time, just as this time, he immediately fled. There had been no conflict, and yet Xu Qing didn't dare to stay around such beings for long. And he had the feeling that if he ran into a third such entity, it would lead to true danger.

Therefore, he left the seafloor, went back to the surface, and got onto his dharmaskiff. There, he had the shadow and his Forbidden Sea dragonwhale keep watch.

I'm almost finished with the second phase of Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits. Going forward, I need to be more careful.

Sitting down cross-legged, he sent his senses down toward his Forbidden Sea dragonwhale.

His life essence dragon no longer resembled a snakeneck dragon. Instead, it had changed into something more like a bluegreen dragon. After having hunted and killed that bluegreen dragon, he had applied that enlightenment to adjust his Forbidden Sea dragonwhale.

Unfortunately, I've only killed one, so my imitation isn't perfect.

Xu Qing closed his eyes. Seven days passed in a flash.

He had been out at sea for months now, and had no idea how the war was going back at the Merfolk Isles. However, his identity medallion indicated that his ranking had dropped from the fifties to past a hundred. That seemed to indicate that the war was raging.

However, Xu Qing wasn't worried about that right now. For the past week, he had been completely focused on Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, to the point where it was almost complete.

I just need one more Foundation Establishment sea beast, and then the legacy seed will be fully activated!

Xu Qing's eyes shone with anticipation as he sent his bluegreen dragon down into the water to search for more sea beasts. The shadow also sent out quite a few shadow eyes to help in the search, and Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior joined the bluegreen dragon.

In the middle of that search, Xu Qing suddenly looked up into the sky. It was evening, and as the sky turned as red as autumn leaves, he saw three enormous black trees flying through the air in the distance. They looked like strange warships. He couldn't sense any fluctuations coming from the

ships, nor could he see who was on them. Thinking back to the sea annals in Seven Blood Eyes, he didn't remember seeing anything like this mentioned. Therefore, he had no way to know where these ships were from.

It looked like they were just going to pass by, but he kept his guard up nonetheless, and also activated his dharmaskiff's defenses. He even sank down below the surface of the water. That way, if they were planning to just pass by, then it was more likely they would leave him alone. And if they did attack, he would be ready to either fight back or flee.

However, even as he sank below the surface of the water, the hand of a woman reached out from the lead ship. It was as fair as white jade, and held a black pearl, within the depths of which was sealed a magical symbol. Then she released the pearl, and it shot with lightning speed toward Xu Qing.

Xu Qing's pupils constricted, and he sent his dharmaskiff shooting away in the opposite direction.

Except, to his shock, the magical symbol in the pearl glittered, and the pearl suddenly blinked out of existence, then blinked back into existence right in front of his dharmaskiff.

It happened so quickly that Xu Qing couldn't react. His dharmaskiff slammed into the pearl and exploded into countless pieces. Huge waves splashed out everywhere, and then wreckage floated up to the surface.

From a distance, the flotsam and jetsam roughly corresponded to the shape of a dharmaskiff.

Up in the sky, Third Princess leaned over the rail of the warship, a grin on her face. "Aiya! That was too easy! It exploded with one hit! So boring. The waves were pretty though."

Next to her, the white-robed Seazombie was holding his breath, and had a strange look on his face as he looked down at where the dharmaskiff had exploded. After a long moment, he exhaled and said, "Third Princess, what are you doing? I just want to finish this mission. Why are you causing so much trouble?? Can't you be a bit more low-key? What happens if you provoke some fiendish, monstrous, murderous killer? What then?"

Feeling very depressed, the white-robed Seazombie produced an apple and took a bite.

Smiling up at him, Third Princess said, "What's the big deal, Big Bro Xu Qing? It was just a boat from Seven Blood Eyes. And all it took was one strike of my damned father's divine lightning to destroy it. Who cares?"

The white-robed Seazombie shook his head. He felt like explaining more, and also lecturing her about the way she talked about her father the king, but in the end he kept his mouth shut and piloted the ship onward. As the three tree-like warships passed overhead and disappeared into the distance, the waves dispersed the scattered remnants of the dharmaskiff.

Meanwhile, another dharmaskiff sped along under the surface. It was smaller than the previous one, but looked more vicious, almost like a sealizard. And it was following the three warships!

The boat that had exploded was the external shell that Zhang San had specially crafted to distract enemies. Currently, Xu Qing stood on his actual dharmaskiff, an unsightly expression on his face. As he looked up toward the surface, his eyes burned with killing intent. [1]

"Seazombies?"

Chapter 180: The Golden Crow Cometh

The moment the black pearl shot down from the warship, Xu Qing had sensed unique mutagen fluctuations that led him to the conclusion the operators of the ship were most likely Seazombies. He didn't have even the slightest favorable impression of such creatures. He had killed too many.

What had just happened was definitely an unexpected disaster. Although that black pearl hadn't been capable of truly hurting him, it did contain extraordinary levels of power. In fact, the attack was comparable to one from a cultivator with a life flame!

And the magical symbol it contained was profoundly mysterious.

Thinking back, Xu Qing remembered seeing the magical symbol flash, and then the pearl had moved so quickly it was like a teleportation. In fact, it was so fast that he hadn't been able to react in time to avoid it.

With that ability, that pearl is on the level of two or even three flames. That thing... is a real treasure!

Xu Qing's eyes turned cold.

A cultivator who could casually toss out items like that either had an extraordinary cultivation base or an extraordinary background. In this case, he had the feeling it was the latter.

And that means they probably have a dao protector.

As he sped along in his sealizard dharmaskiff, he kept his eyes glued to the three black ships flying along overhead. Given that he wasn't sure if there was a high-level expert on those ships, he wasn't going to casually launch an attack.

As was his practice, he would follow and observe, like a hunter searching for weak prey to pounce on.

On the lead warship, the white-robed Seazombie sighed. As he stood looking down at the sea below, he felt very annoyed. And that was because he could sense that there was an aura locked onto the three warships. And that aura... was very familiar.

"Don't be upset, Big Bro Xu Qing," Third Princess said. "I'm already being low-key. I was going to throw out three of those divine lightning pearls, but instead, I just threw out one...." She glanced at the white-robed Seazombie, but seeing that he was ignoring her, she stepped over and shook his arm gently. "Alright, fine. I won't throw out any more pearls. Don't be mad, Big Bro Xu Qing. Why are you frowning so hard? What are you thinking about?"

When the white-robed Seazombie heard her call him Xu Qing, he sighed again, then turned to look at her. "I'm trying to figure out a way to make sure he doesn't kill you, and at the same time, prevent him from realizing what I did. If he does, he might really flip out."

"I'm not really sure what you mean, Big Bro Xu Qing...." Third Princess smiled sweetly, but seemed genuinely confused by his words.

The white-robed Seazombie waved his hand dismissively. Inside, he was bemoaning the fact that, because Seazombie merit points were so hard to acquire, he had accepted this mission to find Third Princess. Not only had he successfully found her, but he had also won her affections.

Now all he had to do was get back to Seazombie territory, turn in his merit points to acquire a high-level zombie heart, and then use the trust he had earned from Third Princess to get into the Seazombie ancestral sanctuary. Then he could wrap up his second major escapade.

He was almost done with the first part of this plan, and was now only about a month away from Seazombie territory. Unfortunately... this Seazombie princess just had to go throwing those lightning pearls around.

Just as the white-robed Seazombie was about to sigh again, he looked down at the water and made an expression of surprise. Xu Qing's aura, which had been locked onto the ships, had vanished. Apparently, he wasn't following them anymore.

What's going on? Don't tell me the brat has changed his ways. Or did something else come up that he needed to handle?

The white-robed Seazombie kept his eyes on the sea as the warships continued on their way. Another three days passed, at which point he was convinced Xu Qing wasn't following them.

Weird.

He was curious what happened, but at the same time, breathed a sigh of relief. Truth be told, he wasn't worried about Xu Qing learning of his plan with the Seazombies. Instead, he felt a bit guilty at having used Xu Qing's name.

Ah, it doesn't matter. I'm just doing this to make sure he finds a daoist partner. Besides, it's simply the right thing to do. As his superior, I need to care about his personal life. In fact, he should be thankful that I'm personally trying to make sure he gets a girl.

As he continued to convince himself that he was right, the white-robed Seazombie sent orders to speed up.

Xu Qing's sealizard dharmaskiff... was still there under the surface of the water! However, it was now covered over by his shadow.

Three days ago, he'd come to realize that someone was observing him. Therefore, he pretended to leave, then disguised his dharmaskiff with his shadow, using it to make his aura seem just like Forbidden Sea mutagen.

Then he followed and observed. This time, no one noticed him, which meant he was truly hidden from them.

Furthermore, it also gave him some important information. For instance... he now knew that there were no Gold Core cultivators on those three warships. And it was most likely that there were no three-flame cultivators either. If there were, they would be able to detect his aura, and would likely have long since dropped down to deal with him. He had learned other things during the past three days. For instance, he had figured out a way to pierce through the warship's external disguise if he needed to. And he also determined how fast they could go.

With all the things he had learned, he was convinced that the three warships did not contain any truly dangerous experts.

In that case....

Killing intent swirled in Xu Qing's eyes. For one thing, he was angry about that black pearl. Also, he needed more fuel for his dharma apertures, and didn't see any reason to let these Seazombies get away. Another reason... was that his progress with Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits had been interrupted by these Seazombies. And therefore, they were going to become nutrients to help him complete it. That was only fair.

On the evening of the third day, when the night was dark and the moon wasn't shining very brightly, Xu Qing stood on the deck of his dharmaskiff and began a double-handed incantation gesture.

His dharmaskiff rumbled as wings stretched out from its sealizard form, and it shot up out of the water. As it flew up into the air, its sealizard mouth opened wide, and a golden convergence of light appeared, then became a beam that shot out at top speed.

That golden light was, of course, the attack of godliness that Xu Qing's dharmaskiff was capable of. The instant it appeared, wild colors flashed in heaven and earth, and the wind screamed. The light stabbed through the darkness of night, moving at a shocking speed as it carried holy might... right into the second of the three black warships. It smashed through the warship's defenses as if they didn't exist, and in the blink of an eye, hit the ship itself. As the warship trembled, and even started to bend, the sea beneath it exploded as a 900-meter-long bluegreen dragon shot up, roaring, to attack the lead warship.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing himself flew off of his dharmaskiff, his life lamp erupting volcanically, sending flames all around him as he shot with incredible speed toward the final warship! Without any hesitation, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior sped toward the second warship, which was sustaining the attack of godliness.

All of this takes a bit of time to describe, but actually happened in the time it takes a spark to fly off of a piece of flint!

As rumbling sounds echoed out in the sky, Xu Qing arrived at the third warship. Without pausing for a moment, he unleashed all the power of his fleshly body power to slam into the ship's defenses. Cracking sounds erupted out as the shield began to crumble. A moment later, it exploded, and Xu Qing stepped onto the ship.

There were over thirty Seazombies aboard, but other than a single early Foundation Establishment cultivator with one life flame, they were all in the Qi Condensation level. All of them looked shocked, and yet to Xu Qing, they were moving in slow motion. Even the Foundation Establishment Seazombie was slow to ignite his life flame.

Xu Qing glanced them over coldly, then unhesitatingly stepped toward the Foundation Establishment Seazombie.

Terror and despair filled the Seazombie's eyes as Xu Qing reached out and put his palm on the Seazombie's forehead.

Rumbling filled the air as the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture went to work! At the same time, the totem tattoo on his back transformed into countless feathers that enveloped the Seazombie. In

the blink of an eye, both techniques were used, turning the Seazombie into a desiccated corpse. His soul had been extracted, and his fleshly body was drained of blood. The wings consumed the sphere of blue blood, whereupon the totem tattoo surged with heat and power.

Earlier, Xu Qing had been just on the verge of completing the second phase of the legacy seed activation. With that Seazombie's blood, Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits... was complete!

A cry rang out to the highest heavens from behind Xu Qing. Then the feathers around him ignited with black flame. The countless feathers of black fire converged behind him, becoming like a sea of flames that was fully thirty meters from end to end, and cast darkness all around him.

Another cry rang out, this time more clearly. And it came from the black sea of flames. The moment the cry could be heard... the sea of flames rose towering into the sky, where it took the shape of a divine bird wreathed in darkness!! It was as if it had been born in the flames, as if it had taken shape in the ancient past. It made it seem like the dark night around it was boiling!

From a distance, that divine bird had a head like a crow, a body like a crane, a tail like a phoenix, and three long legs with claws on the ends! [1]

As it flew up into the sky, black fire flowed over it, converging on its tail, where it fanned out into a spectacular circular tail of flame! It was very beautiful, but even more than that, profound and mysterious.

It circled overhead, then dove toward Xu Qing. As it neared him, it seemed to view him as a familiar friend, spinning around him almost as if it were dancing. It spread fire wherever it flew, surrounding Xu Qing with fiery brightness.

At that moment, just about all of the Seazombies on the three warships looked over at him, and their eyes stung. It was almost as if, in this moment, Xu Qing, with the golden crow circling around him, had become an entity no one dared to look at!