

Beyond the Timescape

#Chapter 21: Thirsting for Knowledge - Read Beyond the Timescape Chapter 21: Thirsting for Knowledge

Chapter 21: Thirsting for Knowledge

That night, Xu Qing dreamed.

This was his first time in six years sleeping in such a luxurious room. It was his first time being comfortable, without the cold biting at him. And thus, it was one of the first times in a long time that he'd dreamed.

In his dream, the world wasn't a brutal place. The god's broken face didn't hang in the sky, and his father and mother were there with him. So was his older brother. Without a care in the world, he headed to class with his friends. Afterward, he returned to a warm home, where he had a hot dinner with his family. Then he went to sleep feeling wonderful.

Even in the dream, he couldn't quite make out the faces of his family. He tried, but it was like they were covered by a concealing mist.

Early in the morning, he woke up, opened his eyes, and lay there in bed staring at the ceiling. He felt warm as he slowly emerged from his dream, and then he looked around....

The room was built from gray bricks and tiles. There was a desk and a bed, as well as a washroom. The floor still radiated a bit of warmth, left over from the fire in the stove last night. There was a woven rush mat on the floor, and there was even a bookshelf, though it was empty.

Everything was simple, but to Xu Qing, it was extremely luxurious.

Taking a deep breath, he went to the washroom. After carefully putting his hands into the basin, he watched the muck slowly slide off of them before quickly pulling them out of the water. After looking down at them, he wiped them on his sides to get them dirty again.

Then he looked in the mirror. He saw his overcoat, his long black hair, which was an absolute mess, and his face covered with dirt. He also saw his sparkling eyes. After looking at himself for a while, he peered out the window, and his eyes turned cold.

The snowstorm had passed, and the sun had risen, casting light over the lands to melt away the last snowfall of winter.

Off in the distance, the melting snow in the trees revealed green buds, which indicated that spring... was finally here.

He walked out of his room and, as was his custom, looked over at Sergeant Thunder's room. The dogs in the courtyard didn't get up, but they wagged their tails in greeting.

I've got things to do, he thought, and his eyes filled with determination. Opening the courtyard gate, he walked out into the camp with a clear idea of where he was going.

It was dawn, and there weren't a lot of scavengers up and about.

He headed toward the caravan area. The guards watched him but didn't block his path. Eventually, he reached the physician's tent, whereupon he heard someone reading aloud from a book.

After hesitating a moment, Xu Qing quietly stood outside the tent and listened.

The caravan guards looked at him curiously, then most of them looked away. A few kept their eyes on him.

Xu Qing ignored them. As he listened to the sound of reading from in the tent, he became thoroughly entranced. And eventually, he realized that it wasn't just someone reading, but rather, the sound of some sort of test being administered.

It was the girl he remembered seeing. She was saying, "Golden twistgrass, also known as three-leaf pearls or cold-dispelling grass, is a sedge plant known by the common name short-leaved kyllinga, and is useful from root to tip. It's a perennial herb that grows in forested mountains and damp wilderness regions. In South Phoenix, it can be found in the southern prefectures of Rising Nether and Widespirit. It can diffuse the lungs and relieve coughing, can clear heat and resolve poisons, can dissipate blood stasis and reduce swelling, is effective against venomous snake bites, can be used to treat injuries from falls, fractures, contusions, and strains. It works well in combination with...."

At first the girl spoke with confidence, but the further along she got, the more hesitant she became.

"It works well in combination with what?" Grandmaster Bai asked in a strict tone.

"It works well in combination with rhino-fire blossoms when refined into a medicine, taking the yang and converting it to yin. It can be used to create a comprehensive poison-preventing liquid that's a major ingredient in grandization pills." The young woman almost sounded scared, and spoke in a rapid-fire manner that ended with her taking a long breath.

Xu Qing stood outside the tent, listening closely.

Next came the young man, who spoke even more hesitantly than his counterpart. "Paleback root, also known as... uh, well, it's a rubber plant of the spurge family, with pale roots. It's s-slightly astringent and bitter, and is native to... well, anyway, it can calm the f-five yin organs, and..." Toward the end, he trailed off, obviously having forgotten the information.

Inside the tent, the young man looked extremely nervous, and even glanced at the young woman, hoping she would help him out. She obviously knew the details, but didn't say anything, until the young man appeared to be on the verge of tears.

Meanwhile, Grandmaster Bai, who was sitting in front of them, suddenly looked toward the outside of the tent. One of the guards looked at him meaningfully. Grandmaster Bai thought for a moment, then shook his head.

Turning his attention back to the stammering young man, he snorted coldly. "Tonight you'll copy the Classic of Plants and Vegetation ten times in a row!"

The young man really did look like he was going to cry, but he didn't offer any retort. Instead, he hung his head despondently.

After testing both of his apprentices, Grandmaster Bai proclaimed that he was about to begin his daily lecture. For some reason, his voice seemed louder and clearer than usual.

The young man didn't notice, but the young woman did, and seemed a bit curious. Blinking a few times, she looked to the side, and saw the shadow of a scrawny figure standing outside, silhouetted by the morning sun.

Outside the tent, Xu Qing listened attentively to every word spoken by Grandmaster Bai. Fearful that he might forget something, he committed everything to heart. To him, knowledge was a priceless treasure that he had long hoped to acquire.

Time slipped by. Grandmaster Bai lectured for longer than usual, perhaps twice as long. It was late in the morning by the time he finished, and there were scavengers now lined up outside seeking treatment. That was when Grandmaster Bai said, "Would the young man outside the tent please step inside for a moment?"

Xu Qing emerged from his daze in a start. Feeling a bit guilty all of a sudden, he took a deep breath, opened the tent flap, and quietly stepped inside. Normally speaking, he wouldn't be so nervous. However, he'd originally come to ask some questions, only to end up eavesdropping outside the tent. In the scavenger basecamp, many people would react negatively to such behavior.

Seeing how nervous Xu Qing was, Grandmaster Bai calmly said, "Can I help you?"

Off to the side, the young woman looked curiously at Xu Qing. She recognized him, and it only took a moment to recall that he had brought an unconscious old man to them on his back.

“Well met, Grandmaster Bai,” Xu Qing said, inclining his head. Then, remembering how Sergeant Thunder had acted before, he clasped hands and bowed deeply. After a moment of hesitation, he said, “I wanted to know a bit more about lifespan flowers.”

Then he took out the five white boluses he’d been given by Boneblade, and placed them in front of Grandmaster Bai. Even one such pill was precious, but Xu Qing felt that one wasn’t enough to compensate for listening in on the class. In fact, five of them probably weren’t enough, so he also took out ten spirit coins and put them next to the pills. Only after this did he feel a bit more at ease.

Grandmaster Bai gave him a long, close look, then turned to the girl. “Tingyu, you explain.” [1]Geett the *latest novels* on [no/v/elbin\(.\)c/om](http://no/v/elbin(.)c/om)

The girl sat up straight, a solemn expression on her face as she said, “Lifespan flower, also known as life-extending flame and god-spirit weed, is a mutated variety of a god-type vegetation known as a regeneration tree. There are actually seventy-three known mutations, but only the first type can be used in medicines. They grow randomly in forbidden regions, without any specific habitat pattern. They’re extremely rare. They can be used to regrow severed limbs, reinvigorate life force, and treat any injury other than those to the mind.”

After finishing with the explanation, the girl pulled out a book, flipped through it, then held up a page with a picture on it. “This is what it looks like.”

The picture depicted a flower that looked ordinary other than the sawtooth edge to its leaves. There was also a strange marking in the middle of the flower.

Xu Qing looked closely at the picture, committed the details to memory, then bowed deeply to Grandmaster Bai and the girl. Finally, he turned to leave.

Before he could walk off, Grandmaster Bai casually said, “It’s the kind of plant that can be encountered by chance but never searched for and found. They usually grow in places where large mutant beasts can be found. Be careful.”

Xu Qing once again clasped hands and bowed, then raced back through the camp to his room.

Once inside, he pulled out a blank bamboo slip and used his iron skewer to inscribe it with both the description provided by the girl and the image of the lifespan flower itself. After that, he went on to write down as much information as he could remember from what he’d heard in the lecture.

After looking at the bamboo slip covered with text, he felt content, and put it away as surely as if it were a precious treasure.

I hope I can go back again and hear more.

He put some thought into a good way to return later and listen to more of Grandmaster Bai's lessons, then cleared his mind and started his cultivation routine.

That night, he waited in the courtyard for Sergeant Thunder to return, whereupon he mentioned that he was making a run into the forbidden region. Sergeant Thunder seemed like he wanted to say something in response, but chose not to. He just nodded and offered some suggestions based on his experience.

At that moment, he seemed like an old grandfather offering advice to his grandson before sending him out into the world. In fact, he spent almost the whole night offering advice. Xu Qing committed everything to memory. Finally, Sergeant Thunder gave him an animal skin sack which contained some medicinal powder that Graceful Raptor had left behind.

After making sure he knew how to use it, Xu Qing said his farewells and headed out. Speeding through the morning light, he arrived some time later at the periphery of the forbidden region.

When he stepped through the boundary, he felt himself cut off from the warmth of the sun. Icy coldness pierced him, and he narrowed his eyes and looked around vigilantly. Then he shot into the depths of the forest so quickly he left behind a string of afterimages.

A moment later, there was no sign of him.

This was his second time entering the forbidden region jungle, and he felt a lot more at ease this time. It was very different from his first time.

That said, he was more cautious than ever. And as he moved, he kept an eye on the flowers and plants around him, hoping to spot a lifespan flower. Eventually, he reached the muddy marsh, and remembered what Graceful Raptor had taught him there. After covering himself in mud, he continued on.

Before long, the day had gone by.

During the entire time, he never encountered the Fog of Confusion, and by being careful, he was able to go around any large mutant beasts.

He eventually reached the spot where they'd fought the black-scaled wolves. Everything looked mostly the same. Even the defenses they'd erected were in place. However, the wolf corpses had already decomposed, leaving behind nothing but bones.

He checked the bones for signs that the meat had been torn off of them by teeth, but found no such evidence. Apparently, they'd rotted naturally. He breathed a sigh of relief. If nothing else, it seemed to indicate there were no dangerous mutant beasts around. With that, he found a suitable place in the area to hunker down for the night.

He settled on a hollow inside a huge tree. As darkness fell, and he huddled in the tree, he looked ahead to the canyon with the seven-leaf clover, and beyond it, the temple complex.

He had other goals on this journey other than simply looking for lifespan flowers. He also wanted to find one of those scar-removing crystals for the girl in the general store.

"Tomorrow," he murmured, "I'll see what's out there."

1. Ting means "pretty, attractive, graceful" and Yu means "jade." This does not come across as a surname combined with a given name. It could be a nickname, or it could be her given name used without the surname. It's impossible to tell. That said, it doesn't come across as a daoist name. Madam Deathblade says it sounds "cute and pretty." ☞

Chapter 22: Temple Complex

Xu Qing wasn't unfamiliar with nighttime in forbidden regions. Whether it was the city ruins, or this jungle, it was roughly the same. He had lived for upwards of two weeks in the former, and had spent a number of nights in the latter.

As he huddled in the tree hollow, he kept his eyes half-open as he quietly performed breathing exercises, absorbing the mutagen-heavy spirit power. Once the spirit power was inside him, he cleansed it with the Sea and Mountain Incantation, allowing the pure spirit power to spread through his body, while the mutagen entered his shadow.

He had already become used to the difference in cultivation that his shadow provided. He wasn't sure if it was because of his shadow, or the general danger in the forbidden region, but regardless, he had no choice but to maintain a high level of concentration. And thanks to that concentration, his cultivation progressed rapidly.

Right now, he wasn't far from the fourth level of the Sea and Mountain Incantation.

It's like a grindstone.

He wasn't sure exactly how grindstones worked, but he remembered a blacksmith back in the slums talking about how you needed to work a knife against one to get it truly sharp. Right now, the dangerous forbidden region had become his personal grindstone.

After working under the influence of that grindstone, Xu Qing completed a full cycle of cultivation, then opened his eyes. Looking out of the tree and into the night, he heard mutant beasts roaring. It sounded like the howling of devils.

A sinister coldness was ever-present, seeping into everything. And even hidden in the tree, Xu Qing was no exception.

It was very cold.

It reminded him of his time in the city ruins, and before long, he also felt a similar sense of loneliness. That said, he was used to loneliness. After a short time, he closed his eyes again and started another session of cultivation.

In that manner, time passed.

He had selected a very safe place to settle down. However, about halfway through the night, in the middle of his cultivation, he heard footsteps outside. It sounded chaotic, like there were numerous people walking around outside.

Xu Qing looked suspiciously out of the tree, but other than the trees, there was nothing else outside in the darkness. His heart sank further as he realized that the mutant beasts outside had grown silent. That put him even more on the alert. He thought back to the Singing and the footsteps from before. However, these footsteps seemed different.

It doesn't sound like the Singing. There's no song at all.

Having come to this conclusion, he remained quietly in place, even masking his breathing.

The footsteps grew clearer, and eventually, it sounded like a group of people approaching.

At the same time, a coldness arose, so intense that Xu Qing worried it might freeze him where he hid. He wasn't unfamiliar with this type of coldness. Whether it was the time he heard the Singing, or occasions in the city ruins when the grues came out.

However, this seemed different than when he heard the Singing. Back then, he felt like his soul was frozen, but right now, though it was uncomfortable, he could at least still move.

This is something like the grues in the city ruins!

Having reached this determination, he gripped his iron skewer tightly and took a deep breath. Trying to stop his heart from pounding, he closed his eyes tightly.

Don't look at them. Don't touch them. Don't get close to them.

After he closed his eyes, the footsteps became more urgent, and closer. It was like a host of people were milling about the tree.

Xu Qing was shaken, but he forced himself not to open his eyes and look at whatever was outside.

Eventually when the sun rose into the dome of heaven, the footsteps faded into the distance.

It was daytime.

However, Xu Qing still didn't open his eyes. He waited for a moment before looking out of the tree hollow. To his shock, he found that the opening had been sealed over with ice.

Seeing that sunlight shone through the ice onto his face, he exhaled a shaky breath, then clenched his hand into a fist and punched the ice, shattering it.

Xu Qing climbed out into the open and looked around. All the wolf bones he'd seen the night before were gone. In their place... were a mass of footprints.

Human footprints.

There were so many that there had to have been hundreds of people in the area.

Xu Qing had never heard of a situation in which hundreds of people would enter a forbidden region together.

And what was even more unusual was that... they were actual footprints, not shoe prints.

Eventually, he looked away from the footprints, feeling a new sense of understanding about the grues in forbidden regions. Thankfully, it was now daylight, which meant there was less danger to deal with. And Xu Qing wasn't about to give up on his search. He continued on.

Several hours later, he reached the spot where he and Squad Thunderbolt had harvested seven-leaf clovers in the canyon.

Just like before, the sunlight couldn't penetrate the leafy canopy of vines that stretched over it. The entire place was filled with a floral fragrance, and seemed completely different from the dangerous world outside of it. It was almost like a paradise. Upon reaching the harvesting spot, Xu Qing breathed a sigh of relief. Then he looked beyond it to the distant temple complex.

He rested only a moment before retracting his gaze and continuing onward at top speed.

The jungle past the canyon was even thicker, with less sunlight making its way through the canopy. But perhaps because the ancient temple complex still radiated a bit of its former might and glory, the area seemed less dangerous.

The surrounding jungle also seemed a bit warmer.

In fact, as Xu Qing got closer to the complex, the jungle trees seemed more like ordinary trees from the outside world. They didn't seem twisted and dark. He even spotted some seven-leaf clover, which he harvested.

Everything about this area was surprising, but he didn't let his guard down.

Another two hours went by, and evening was about to fall. That was when Xu Qing emerged from the jungle proper and saw the temple complex in front of him.

There were still trees in the area, but not many. The sunlight that hit his eyes was dazzling, but he still saw the numerous temple structures. They were round, and all of them were dozens of meters tall. Most of the stone walls were crumbling and covered with moss, but a few of the buildings were relatively intact. The entire place contained an air of grandeur.

Stepping inside, he heard the sound of gravel crunching beneath his feet. And for some reason, he felt like he was looking around at an immense kingdom. Everything was in ruins, but it all had an aspect of profound age to it. It almost seemed like the ruins were trying to explain their history to him.

Walking a bit further in, he found himself in front of a crumbling statue. Most of the bottom of the statue had been crushed into rubble, but the head and shoulders were intact.

Even still, the statue loomed ninety meters in the air. Back when it was whole, it must have been at least 600 meters tall. Standing in front of it, Xu Qing felt miniscule.

The wind sounded like a lonely flute that cut this area out of space and time. Whatever glory this place had once embodied, it was now a thing of the past.

He looked at the statue for a long time. He thought back to the slums outside the city ruins, and wondered what they would be like when people came back years later to explore them. Would those people be like him now, carefully entering the forbidden region and peering into the ancient past?

After a while, Xu Qing left the statue to look around the rest of the temple complex. However, he didn't find the special crystal Sergeant Thunder had mentioned.

Before leaving, Sergeant Thunder had described it in full, which was how Xu Qing knew it glowed with a seven-colored light. Apparently, they were natural objects that didn't conform to any specific pattern in terms of where they appeared.

After a fruitless search, he was feeling a bit disappointed, and headed to the top of one of the larger temples to look around.

Behind him was the jungle of the forbidden region, which seemed to go on without end. After calculating the date, he realized that this was the fourth day since Boneblade had bought 'insurance' from him.

He hadn't noticed any fog in the jungle the day before, and it didn't seem like there was any today. So, he wouldn't have to do any rescuing.

On the other side of the temple complex... were the true depths of the forbidden region.

Looking up, he saw that there was still some daylight left. That meant there was some time to explore deeper into the forbidden region, then come back to the temple to rest.

Having made his decision, he jumped off the temple and continued onward to explore. As soon as he was in the jungle again, his nerves felt stretched taut, and he put himself on full alert. After all, this place would be full of more hazards than the outside areas.

In fact, only about an hour later, he was back in the temple, his expression grim and fearful.

On the upside, his sack was absolutely full.

He had barely gone 500 meters into the jungle before finding a large patch of seven-leaf clovers. Much to Xu Qing's delight, it had obviously been a long time since anyone harvested from that location. As a result, the harvest would fetch quite a sum.

However, as he began picking the clover, he sensed the surrounding mutagen getting stronger. If it wasn't for his shadow being able to absorb the mutagen, it would have been difficult to make much progress at all.

And that was when, far off in the distance, he saw the same type of gruish jellyfish he'd seen before. Except it wasn't just one jellyfish, it was about ten. They were smaller, but at the same time, emanated an intense coldness. Most of them seemed to be hanging from trees asleep, but the mere sight of them caused Xu Qing to creep away quietly.

The further he got into the jungle, the more he got the sense he was being watched by countless avaricious eyes lurking in the depths of the jungle. It caused a prickling sensation on his neck and back. And that was only the outside part of the forbidden region depths. It defied imagination to think of what terrifying things might exist further in.

Not daring to explore any further, he'd hurried back to the temple complex. It was only after reaching the complex that the prickling sensation on his back faded away. The complex itself was a border that marked the truly deep parts of the forbidden region.

Xu Qing took a deep breath and used the last bits of evening light to find one of the intact temples to hole up in for the night.

Inside, he found a wall crevice into which he crawled. Sergeant Thunder had mentioned that this place was a safe place to find refuge.

Xu Qing looked around the temple. It was large, with an enormous statue, a divine likeness, bearing a saber. It stood in the position of honor, surrounded by other life-like statues on the walls. However, all of them were eroding in the sands of time.

That said, there weren't many mutant beast droppings or footprints. If there were none, or if there were many, that would be an abnormality, and he would have picked another location. As long as those signs were few, it meant this place was relatively safe.

The temple complex was in the middle of the jungle, but was in something of a clearing, so it made sense that the surrounding mutant beasts wouldn't come in very often.

Soon, night fell.

As the howl of beasts drifted in the night air, Xu Qing started his breathing exercises.

Time passed. As he had guessed would be the case, a few mutant beasts came into the temple complex. But those he did hear were far away. However, just like the night before, about halfway to morning, he heard the chaotic sound of gruish footsteps!

This time, they were just outside the temple!

They're back?

He frowned, wondering why these footsteps had appeared twice, both near him. He felt very uneasy, but considering the previous experience, he decided the best thing was to keep his eyes closed.

However, instead of the footsteps eventually going off into the distance, they seemed to grow more numerous.

As they gathered, sinister coldness spread. It made it seem like a whole army of grues was gathering to attack the temple.

Xu Qing's heart sank, and he gripped his iron skewer tightly as he thought of ways to escape if things got too dangerous. [Visit novelbin.com for latest novels](#)

However, that was when the footsteps outside ceased, and everything became incomparably quiet.

The silence didn't make Xu Qing feel like he could breathe easily. It was like the quiet before a storm, and it caused the hair to stand on end. He felt convinced that the grues were simply hesitating about whether to enter.

And then, in complete silence, one of the grues finally did walk into the temple. Xu Qing could hear the footsteps on the stone floor tiles.

His heart leapt into his throat. But then, a murmuring sound drifted through the temple, something that sounded incredibly holy. Streams of golden light seeped out of the walls, filling the temple with light, and covering Xu Qing. Now, his closed eyes perceived, not a world of pitch black, but one of radiance.

And the golden radiance grew so intense that his eyes hurt. Then, for the first time since encountering grues, he opened his eyes.

Deathblade's Thoughts

Thanks so klaxon12, bulletstorm, and Daoist_Egodeath for the reviews. You guys are awesome!

The surgery went well and I'm all good. I'm still taking it easy today. That said, I might (MIGHT), try to do a short livestream test on my YouTube channel later today. That's right, I do have a YouTube channel, although it's pretty much dead, and I haven't posted anything for a long time. I want to do a live stream event on 6/15 when this translation goes public and I drop a ton of chapters all in one day. To make that happen, I need to do a test livestream ahead of time. So if you're interested, subscribe to my channel and keep an eye out for that livestream. If it does work well, then I hope to do that cool event on 6/15, talking about the translation, sharing some of my favorite comments from the time it was in the Sneak Peek section, and... who knows, maybe some other cool stuff.