

# Beyond the Timescape

## #Chapter 23: Single Saber Strike - Read Beyond the Timescape Chapter 23: Single Saber Strike

Chapter 23: Single Saber Strike

Xu Qing saw bright, golden light!

It came from the statues on the walls, as worn with time as they were. Every statue was a light source, filling the temple with incomparable radiance. However, the greatest source of light wasn't those smaller statues.

Instead... it was the huge, primary statue of the temple, the divine likeness whose hands held a huge stone saber.

Shaken, Xu Qing looked into the light at the temple, and saw that, at the temple door was a figure surrounded by a dark fog. It wasn't possible to make out any distinguishing features, but the figure seemed vaguely human. And as the golden light shone on it, it rippled and distorted.

Beyond it, outside the temple, was an even greater host of dark, shadowy forms. There had to be hundreds, and while some were vaguely human, others seemed bestial. They radiated an astonishing coldness that rushed like a wave to connect to the figure inside the temple.

As for the shadowy figure inside the temple, as the golden light shone on it, it threw its head back and released a howl that could shake one's soul. However, it didn't take a single step further into the temple.

It was as if it was now prohibited from doing so!

Xu Qing looked over at the saber-wielding statue, and suddenly noticed how life-like it looked. Then, to his astonishment, it stepped off of its pedestal and started walking. Overflowing with profound dignity and holiness, like a god from heaven descended into the mortal world, it strode toward the shadowy figure.

It lifted the saber, and swung it down.

That saber move was simple and unrefined, yet it contained a dao resonance that could shake heaven and earth.

Xu Qing didn't hear any sound, but his soul trembled as if it sensed mournful screaming emanating from the shadowy figure.

The fog surrounding it evaporated, revealing a rotting body draped with tattered clothing. Visible now was an old man with eye sockets that were nothing but gaping holes. A moment later, his body collapsed, dissipating as surely as the fog that had surrounded him.

The shadowy figures outside were also affected. The fog surrounding them began to fade, and because of the golden light, Xu Qing was able to see some of them clearly. One was a recognizable face.

It was... Captain Bloodshadow!

He was in the crowd, his gaunt face expressionless. As the golden light shone on him, it was like he became purified, and then vanished.

A few moments later, there was nothing out in the darkness of night. All of the shadowy figures had disappeared.

The light in the temple faded, and the shocking statue turned around and walked back to its place. Eventually, it stopped glowing and once again turned into a statue, standing there, looking at the main door of the temple, waiting and guarding.

Soon, everything was back to normal. However, Xu Qing still huddled in the stone crevice, panting, his eyes shining with disbelief.

The obviously dead Captain Bloodshadow still existed.

The obviously ordinary temple shone with shocking golden light at night.

The obviously unmoving statue became a god-like figure whose single saber strike was boundlessly majestic.

Before long, the sun rose, and a new day began.

It took a while for Xu Qing to settle his thoughts, whereupon he crawled out from the stone crevice. He looked at the light outside, then the statues on the wall, and finally the large statue with the saber. He wasn't sure what exactly the statue was, and whether it was alive or dead.

He had no idea how long ago it was when this temple had been in its heyday, or what it had been like back then.

But the events of the previous night had left him shaken.

That was especially true of the majestic energy that accompanied that saber strike. It had left a mark deep in his soul, ensuring that he would never forget it. What was more

unimaginable was there was actually an area in this dangerous forbidden region that darkness could not encroach upon.

Sergeant Thunder hadn't mentioned that to him, but then again... maybe the old sergeant didn't even know. For one thing, events such as last night's weren't exactly common. Furthermore, there weren't many people in the basecamp who stayed for prolonged periods in this forbidden region.

Therefore, even if such events did occur occasionally, few people would have been around to serve as witnesses. Any stories that people did tell would have eventually turned into nothing but legends.

Taking a long look at the statue, Xu Qing clasped his hands and bowed deeply.

Then, after some more thought, he took a candle out of his sack, put it in front of the statue, and lit it. Finally, he offered another respectful bow and then left the temple.

After emerging from the complex, he kept looking over his shoulder at it, hoping it would help him remember everything. And he couldn't stop thinking about that single saber strike.

In fact, as he was traveling back through the jungle, he found himself lifting his hand overhead and imitating the movement. With every attempt to copy it, he felt like the move was more and more familiar.

The cultivation of the Sea and Mountain Incantation involved imitating the image of the goblin. But now, Xu Qing was replacing the image of that goblin with the image of that single saber strike.

As he did, his cultivation base shot past the breakthrough point, and he entered the fourth level of the Sea and Mountain Incantation, all without Xu Qing even noticing what was happening!

Perhaps because of how he was imitating that saber strike, this breakthrough didn't just provide a boost to his power and speed. It also pushed him to a breakthrough in his psyche.

As a result, Xu Qing felt like he could think more clearly. And when he raised his hand overhead, it already seemed like it contained some of the fundamental nature of the saber strike.

It filled him with delight.

Two days passed. Perhaps it was because he was in the periphery of the forbidden region, or perhaps it was the shocking event that had played out in the temple, but either way, he didn't run into any grue footsteps.

And the mutant beasts were few and far between.

His cultivation base had reached a higher level, making it easier to keep himself safe. But he still was very careful and cautious.

He hadn't found the lifespan flower or the scar-removing crystal. But he'd harvested a good amount of seven-leaf clovers, so as soon as he returned, he would sell them for a hefty sum of spirit coins.

It was evening when he neared the edge of the jungle. And that was when he stopped walking and looked down at a plant near his feet. It looked similar to the lifespan flower, although based on what he remembered from the picture he'd seen, it was another kind of plant.

However, after some thought, he looked around guiltily as a plan formed in his mind, then reached down and harvested the thing. Finally, he ran out of the jungle and into the basecamp, shortly after sunset.

It wasn't late at night, so the camp was bustling. That was especially true of the feather-covered tents, which seemed filled with the sound of playful banter and spirited panting. Xu Qing ignored the sounds as he returned to the residence. As soon as he opened the courtyard door, he saw Sergeant Thunder walking out. *Read latest chapters at [n/ov\(e\)lbin\(.\)co/m](http://n/ov(e)lbin(.)co/m)*

The sergeant noticed how bedraggled Xu Qing looked, but didn't say anything about it. Instead, he looked relieved.

"You were gone a long time."

"I went to that temple complex." Moonlight mixed with the lamplight in the courtyard, allowing Xu Qing to see Sergeant Thunder's bloodshot eyes and exhausted expression. He clearly hadn't been sleeping much. Was it because...? When Xu Qing put the pieces together, he felt warmth in his heart.

"Temple complex?" Sergeant Thunder said, sounding surprised. He really hadn't envisioned Xu Qing going that far into the forbidden region. However, he didn't ask questions. Instead, he led Xu Qing into the kitchen, rolled up his sleeves and put some food on the table.

The food was hot, and clearly hadn't been touched. Xu Qing was taken aback. Obviously, Sergeant Thunder hadn't been sure when Xu Qing would return, yet had hot food ready for him the moment he got back. It was very telling.

The sergeant... had been preparing food every night, and waiting for him.

Xu Qing went to get the bowls and chopsticks. As usual, he set the table for three, with two sets opposite of his own. Then he sat down to eat.

It was delicious in a way that the taste buds might not be able to detect, but the heart could.

Sergeant Thunder didn't eat much. For the most part, he drank and watched Xu Qing, a smile on his face.

"Eat up," he said at one point. "You're still growing. If you don't get enough food, you won't grow tall."

Xu Qing looked down for a moment, then cleared his throat and obediently started eating some more. Then he started telling Sergeant Thunder about everything that happened in the temple.

Before, Sergeant Thunder had simply been sipping his alcohol. But after hearing the story, he took a deep breath and said, "I heard someone mention something like that before. But it was a long time ago. There may have been others who saw what you did. But like the Singing, it eventually turns into a legend. Now that I think about it, the stories always talk about it happening after the Singing."

Sergeant Thunder suddenly seemed wrapped up in his thoughts, as if he were recalling old sorrows.

Xu Qing could guess what he was thinking, and felt that he was to blame. He probably shouldn't have told the story.

Shortly thereafter, Sergeant Thunder regained his composure. Seeing Xu Qing looking glum, he smiled.

"You're too sensitive, Kid. I'm not as weak as you think I am."

He took another sip of alcohol, then changed the subject, going on to tell Xu Qing some funny stories about things that happened in the camp while he was gone.

Sergeant Thunder drank and talked. Xu Qing ate and listened.

It really did seem like the two of them were... family.

Later that night, the sergeant was still drinking as Xu Qing cleaned up. Finally, the old man smiled, got up, and went into his room.

Xu Qing went to his own room, and saw that the bedding had been changed. And instead of being rolled up at the bottom like he usually kept it, it was spread out over the bed. It also smelled like it had been aired out in the sun recently. [1]

He was about to sit down when he looked down at his clothes and hands and saw how dirty they were. Rolling the bedding back up, he sat on the wooden slats to work on his cultivation.

At dawn, Xu Qing opened his eyes.

He was about to leave when a thought occurred to him. Going into the washroom, he washed his hands. Given how unused he was to such a thing, it took some effort.

After his hands were clean and sparkling, he left the courtyard and headed toward the caravan.

He wasn't sure if he was going too early, but he really didn't want to arrive too late. If he arrived early, Grandmaster Bai might not have begun the lecture. But if he arrived late... then he would miss out on the first part of the class. Calculating the time on his fingers, he arrived at Grandmaster Bai's tent. As it turned out, he was just in time to hear the testing.

Feeling very excited, he stood outside the tent and listened carefully.

"Blue lotus flower syrup, also known as blue lotus syrup, is derived from the flowering buds of water lilies. It is an aromatic liquid created by a unique heating technique. It can stabilize the lungs, help control bloody coughing from fire-related techniques...."

It was the voice of the young woman. Xu Qing listened intently, hardly aware of the passage of time. Before he knew it, two hours had gone by. Suddenly, the tent opened, and Grandmaster Bai was standing there looking at him.

"Can I help you?"

Grandmaster Bai's gaze wasn't sharp, but it was imposing. Xu Qing instantly felt nervous. Quickly reaching into his sack, he pulled out the medicinal plant he'd harvested the day before. Keeping his head bowed, he said, "Grandmaster Bai, I... I wanted to ask whether or not this is a lifespan flower."

In response to his words, Grandmaster Bai stared at him blankly for a moment. Then an unusual expression flitted over his face. He looked at Xu Qing's hands, which seemed a lot cleaner than before, and then at Xu Qing's face which was taut with anxiety.

"It's not," he said.

Xu Qing quickly clasped hands, then hurried away, breathing a sigh of relief as he left the caravan area. Then he looked back and realized Grandmaster Bai was still looking at him.

The old man nodded. Xu Qing stopped walking, then clasped hands and bowed deeply before continuing on his way.

After Xu Qing disappeared, Grandmaster Bai went back into the tent. Inside, the guards, as well as his two apprentices, remained in place, motionless, as if they were made in stone.

Right in front of his seat, there was now a table spread with a variety of fine food and drink. On the opposite side of the table from Grandmaster Bai's seat was an old man in a violet robe, behind whom stood a servant in a gray garment.

Looking at Grandmaster Bai, the old man in violet laughed heartily. "Well, what do you think, Grandmaster Bai?"

Grandmaster Bai didn't seem at all surprised at the sudden arrival of this old man in violet. Nor was he worried that his people in the tent were frozen in place. Sitting down in his chair, he lifted one of the flagons of alcohol and took a drink. "What do you mean, 'what do I think?'"

The violet-robed old man smiled. "I'm talking about the Kid. Like I said last time, while I was waiting for you to show up earlier, I found a boy with lots of potential."

Grandmaster Bai gave a cold harrumph and glared at the violet-robed man. "Potential? The first time the child eavesdropped, it wasn't a big deal. But this time he pulled out some medicinal plant and asked me if it was a lifespan flower. Now I'm getting the feeling he's going to start bringing all sorts of random plants here as an excuse to eavesdrop. If not for your recommendation, I would have driven him away immediately."

The man in violet laughed again. "You have a mouth like a blade, but a heart like tofu. Given your foul temper, if you didn't think he has some potential, it wouldn't matter who introduced him to you, you wouldn't give him the time of day."

Grandmaster Bai gave another cold snort, and instead of offering a further explanation, asked, "You want to take him to Seven Blood Eyes, don't you? Taking him to that pestilent place would be a waste of a potential academic!"

Eyebrows twitching, the man in violet said, "Waste? I think not. Besides, what good is it to be an academic? In this world, everything is about your cultivation base."

"What good is it to be an academic??" Grandmaster Bai retorted heatedly. "Let me ask you: why did you come here and repeatedly beg me, an ordinary person, to go with you to Seven Blood Eyes?"

With an embarrassed smile, the man in violet said, "Oh, well, you're different, sir...."

"How am I different?" Grandmaster Bai snapped, glaring.

The man in violet suddenly smacked his own forehead. "Aiya. I completely forgot that I have something really important to do right now. I need to leave, Grandmaster Bai. I'll come back tomorrow and we can drink some more together."

He got up and prepared to leave, but at the last moment, looked back at Grandmaster Bai. When he spoke, his tone was very earnest. "Grandmaster Bai, if you really think the boy has potential, then teach him some more. Give him a chance. Maybe he can get to Seven Blood Eyes as an academic with a cultivation base."

With that, he left with his servant. After he was gone, everything in the tent returned to normal, with no one having any idea something strange had just taken place. The guards stood there, the young man was muttering anxiously, and the young girl looked pleased with herself like usual.

As for Grandmaster Bai, he sat there looking thoughtfully at the spot where Xu Qing had disappeared.

1. In China, the common way to clean your bedding (more specifically your comforter, which is often made of silk, but not always) is to hang it outside in the sun. When it comes to silk comforters, my understanding is that you can't wash them with water, so I guess there's really no other way to do it. Maybe it's also common to do that in other parts of the world, but not where I was raised. We would usually just wash it. In any case, the fact that he noticed his bedding had been hung in the sun comes across as very Chinese to me. ☹️

### Deathblade's Thoughts

Hey all: after a successful livestream test earlier today, I'm officially announcing that I'm going to do a celebratory livestream on Thursday 6/15 to go along with the public launch of this novel and a big mass release of chapters. Among other things, I'm going to be sharing some of my favorite comments from when the novel was in sneak peek. That includes this chapter and everything up to the chapters on Wednesday. There is still a chance to get some good comments into the mix!

### Chapter 24: Kid, You Answer

After reaching his residence, Xu Qing let loose a long sigh. He was worried he hadn't done the right thing in eavesdropping. However, it wasn't as though he had any other options if he wanted to sate his thirst for knowledge.

One thing was obvious: Grandmaster Bai had seen through his little scheme.

I should offer a payment.

The only question was what to offer, and whether it would be accepted. If not, would he ever get another chance like this again?



Worried that he might forget about this new idea, he took a bamboo slip out of his sack and used the iron skewer to carve 'Grandmaster Bai' on it.

After finishing, he looked it over, then added four more names. One was Sergeant Thunder, and the other three were people who had helped him back in the slums. Though that help had been minor, he wanted to remember it.

After finishing with the names, he took out another bamboo slip and started recording the contents of the lecture.

Then he took out the slip with the first lesson's information and reviewed it all. Only then did a look of satisfaction appear on his face.

I already know the details of twenty-seven types of medicinal plants.

Xu Qing was in a good mood, and it lasted all day, even through his daily cultivation routine.

The next day he got out of bed early and went out to buy some seven-leaf clovers. He also bought another plant that looked similar to a lifespan flower, then followed what was now becoming a routine as he went to Grandmaster Bai's tent.

He stood in the same spot as the day before, and just like the day before, he listened carefully to the entire lesson. Also similar to the previous day, Grandmaster Bai came out and asked what he was doing there. Xu Qing meekly held up the flower and asked the same question as the day before.

Grandmaster Bai looked at the flower and sighed. Shaking his head, he told Xu Qing all the information about the plant he'd bought.

Of course, that gave Xu Qing details about yet another medicinal plant. Feeling very pleased, and also deeply thankful, he bowed deeply then hurried away. Just like before, he looked over his shoulder to see Grandmaster Bai watching him. Yet again, they shared a nod.

Xu Qing was building memories he would never forget.

In this manner, half a month passed.

Every day, Xu Qing would go to Grandmaster Bai's tent with a medicinal plant in hand. He would listen to the lecture, then ask about the plant. As a result, he learned a lot about plants and vegetation, and in addition, learned about how different plants worked in combination.

He benefited immensely, and now had dozens of bamboo slips filled with information.

Grandmaster Bai never mentioned anything about his eavesdropping, and always patiently explained the details of the plants Xu Qing brought with him.

Eventually, the guards got used to seeing the kid in the fur overcoat showing up early in the caravan area. And Grandmaster Bai's two young apprentices were the same.

In fact, once when it was raining heavily, Grandmaster Bai and both of his apprentices assumed Xu Qing wouldn't come, only to have him show up in a woven rush raincoat. Neither wind nor rain could stop him. The two apprentices were deeply impressed by that.

As a result, when one day came in which Xu Qing uncharacteristically didn't show up, both young apprentices were craning their necks to look outside. They were actually surprised that the dirty little scavenger hadn't come.

But they didn't end up disappointed, as Xu Qing eventually did show up, exhausted.

The reason he was late on that day was that, in addition to attending lectures at Grandmaster Bai's tent, he also took time to go into the forbidden region and look for lifespan flowers and scar-removing crystals. Further, he honed his skills by hunting mutant beasts.

None of his efforts that day had gone smoothly. He had not found either of the two items he was looking for, and ended up having difficulty with some of the dangers in the forbidden region.

Despite being in the fourth level of the Sea and Mountain Incantation, and having the acute judgment and powers of observation normally reserved for long-time scavengers, not even he could avoid every dangerous thing in the forbidden region's periphery.

The day he was late, he ran into a mutant beast that had wandered out from the depths, and he barely made it out of the encounter alive. Only by running through the night did he manage to make it back to the basecamp by morning. He hadn't even rested, and had instead gone straight to the lecture.

That said, he had made some financial gains in recent days, specifically by selling more 'insurance' to Boneblade.

Boneblade was doing very well. After the first instance in which he bought insurance, he made it a habit. So far, he had never encountered the Fog of Confusion again, and thus Xu Qing had never needed to rescue him. But Boneblade seemed determined to keep it up. And because of that, others in the camp started to do the same thing.

For the sake of caution, Xu Qing refused most offers, with the exception of the small group he had saved in the past.

However, he still had a steady stream of profit. And thanks to earnings made from his forays into the forbidden region, life was good.

Sergeant Thunder couldn't go on missions anymore, so Xu Qing offered to pay more rent. Sergeant Thunder refused, but Xu Qing insisted, and after going back and forth about it, the sergeant realized he had no choice but to accept.

He spent most of the money on food, and thus, whenever Xu Qing came back from the forbidden region, there was always a hot meal waiting for him.

Sergeant Thunder even bought Xu Qing some new clothes.

They were so splendid that Xu Qing couldn't bear to put them on. He just folded them up carefully and put them in the cupboard. Occasionally, he would bring them out and look at them contentedly.

Xu Qing's favorite time of day was dinnertime.

Not only was the food delicious, but also, Sergeant Thunder was always there with him. The sergeant seemed like a grandfather in retirement, always ready to share the latest gossip about the neighbors, and explain the latest news of camp matters.

Crucifix and Graceful Raptor would return every once in a while, and they would join dinner, before heading out on more missions.

Xu Qing felt happier than he had in the past six years.

He had food to eat, clothes to wear, and Sergeant Thunder to keep him company. His cultivation base continued to improve, and his knowledge of plants and vegetation grew constantly. He cherished everything, and of course, whenever he listened to the lectures outside the tents, he paid very close attention.

It was on one bright morning that, as he stood outside the tent, he heard Grandmaster Bai testing his apprentices.

"Chen Feiyuan, tell me about nightcorpse morning glory." [1] Expplôre *uptodate* stories at [no/vell/bin\(.\)com](http://no/vell/bin(.)com)

Over the course of the last month or so, Xu Qing had learned that Grandmaster Bai's male apprentice was named Chen Feiyuan, while the female apprentice was Tingyu.

Upon hearing the question, Chen Feiyuan stammered some nonsense before finally closing his mouth.

Xu Qing couldn't see inside the tent, but occasionally when he'd been able to peep in through the flap, he'd seen Chen Feiyuan looking very despondent.

“You ignoramus!” Grandmaster Bai said harshly. “Tingyu, you answer.”

Unfortunately, Tingyu wasn't as prepared as she usually was.

“Nightcorpse morning glory, also known as poisonous mountain rootmottle... teacher, I... I forgot.” She trailed off into silence.

The tent was very quiet, apparently as Grandmaster Bai sat there with his fury simmering. Finally, he spoke, and he did nothing to hide the anger in his trembling voice.

“Kid, you answer.”

Outside the tent, Xu Qing's eyes went wide for a moment, and then he started talking without even thinking about it.

“Nightcorpse morning glory, also known as poisonous mountain rootmottle, refers to the stalk and root of feverfew veined turtledove chrysanthemums. It is a woody vine-type plant found in ravines of the Corpse Mountains, usually in chilly streams or jungle thickets. It's astringent but feels warm in the mouth. It also imparts a sensation of decay. It's particularly useful in protecting against drafts and inducing perspiration. That said, it's extremely poisonous, and is a typical example of the polarity of yin and yang in medicinal plants.” With that, Xu Qing closed his mouth.

Inside the tent, the two young apprentices seemed slightly upset at having been outshone, so Grandmaster Bai asked, “What are the symptoms of overdose?”

Xu Qing felt extremely nervous, but without hesitation, he answered, “Symptoms include stomach pain, dizziness, and hallucinations. If you don't start counteracting the poison within fifteen minutes, the result is death.”

“How do you counteract the poison?”

“You begin by inducing vomiting and pumping the stomach. Then you use a combination of egg whites and redthorn stamens, treating the symptoms at noon when the sun is bright. The treatment time should last for no more than an hour, and should continue for three days.”

During Xu Qing's explanation, Grandmaster Bai sat in the tent, his face completely expressionless. As for the two apprentices, they stared with wide-eyed shock.

“Why is it a good example of the polarity of yin and yang?” Grandmaster Bai asked.

“The polarity of yin and yang is expressed perfectly in the opposition between vitality and unhealthiness. Vital yang represents beneficial medicine. Yin unhealthiness represents dangerous poisons.” Xu Qing's answer came without even thinking. He had

learned this information recently, and had recited the details numerous times, until he remembered every bit perfectly.

“What can you do with this plant?” Grandmaster Bai asked.

“You could take nightcorpse morning glory and combine it with mindset leaf, which would double its yang efficacy. That would help treat damage to the soul, and also relieve some of the effects of mutagen. However, if you combine it with downy orchid, it would increase its yin efficacy. In fact, it would become so poisonous that, if an ordinary person consumed it, they would die within thirty breaths of time.”

“How do you deal with downy orchids? What are the uses of mindset leaf roots? How can you....”

Grandmaster Bai asked more questions in a rapid-fire manner, making Xu Qing even more nervous. However, he responded in kind.

For the time it takes an incense stick to burn, an old man and a young man went through an intensive question and answer session.

The questions Grandmaster Bai asked were all related to the content of the lectures in recent days. Thus, Xu Qing knew all the answers and was able to provide them quickly.

The two apprentices went from being shocked to looking shaken, and stared blankly at Xu Qing’s shadow silhouetted on the tent wall.

Finally, Grandmaster Bai asked a concluding question.

“Take three one-year-old nightcorpse morning glories, combine them with six three-year-old cloudpassing tufts, add in nine ten-year-old short-leaved kyllingas, and create a medicinal liquid. What does it do?”

Both of the young apprentices’ faces fell. This question was not about a simple description of plants, but rather a complicated mixture.

It was also the first question that Xu Qing couldn’t answer immediately. After thinking for more than thirty breaths of time, he took a deep breath and said, “Unhealthiness is difficult to suppress. Yang exhilarates, yin debilitates. Bringing in the cloudpassing tufts’ yang efficacy raises the short-leaved kyllingas’ detoxifying properties to an astounding level.”

After finishing speaking, Xu Qing stood there with his eyes wide, as if he had just realized something.

“And that,” Grandmaster Bai said coolly, “is seventy percent of the pill formula for a basic grandization pill. Combine those three medicinal plants, heat them for fourteen

hours, and you'll have the pill. I asked you a lot of questions. Now, do you have anything you want to ask of me?"

Xu Qing felt shaken. Over the past month or more, he had plenty of unanswered questions. After all, he had been eavesdropping. And though Grandmaster Bai hadn't prevented him from doing so, there was no way he could ever bring himself to interrupt the lecture with questions.

But now that Grandmaster Bai had given him the opportunity, he didn't hesitate.

"Grandmaster Bai, do flamerope hemp and yangseed needles work well no matter where they grow? I know they're similar, but how exactly do they differ?"

"Why can't you pick coffin-resting buds during the daytime?"

"The sap of mindset leaves obviously drives out unhealthiness. But why can't they be used together with lifesight branches, which also drive out unhealthiness?"

Xu Qing asked question after question, and Grandmaster Bai answered them all in detail.

It seemed as though there would be no end to Xu Qing's questions. Time passed, until it was far past when the lecture would usually end. From the expressions on the faces of the two apprentices, it was as if they were witnessing a freak of nature. Finally, Xu Qing looked up at the sun, and seeing how late it was, stopped asking questions.

As far as he was concerned, it was impossible to describe how much he had benefited this day. Many of his questions had been answered, and more than ever, he felt like he was gaining comprehensive understanding of the topic. And it only made his thirst for knowledge grow even more intense.

As he was preparing to leave, Grandmaster Bai said one more thing from inside the tent.

"From now on, don't stand outside the tent. And don't bring those random medicinal plants either. Henceforth, you'll be attending class inside."

1. Chen Feiyuan: Chen is listed #5 on the top 100 most common Chinese surnames. Fei means "fly" and Yuan means "source, origin." Madam Deathblade says that when she sees this name, it seems like "a mediocre guy, nothing special about him." 📖

Chapter 25: Dao of Poison; Corpse-Ravaging Powder

When those words hit Xu Qing's ears, his eyes widened even further. He had previously only dreamed of being able to go into that tent to listen to Grandmaster Bai's lessons.

Trying to mask his excitement, he clasped hands, bowed deeply, and said, "Many thanks, Grandmaster!"

He spoke the words in complete earnest. Only after a long moment passed did he rise from his bow and leave.

This time, he didn't look back to see if Grandmaster Bai was watching him. However, he did hear the grandmaster loudly criticizing his two apprentices.

He thrummed with excitement as he hurried back to the residence. When he broke the news to Sergeant Thunder, the old man was delighted. And seeing Xu Qing so happy made him smile even more broadly.

The old sergeant felt emotions tugging at his heart as he thought about how Xu Qing had been visiting the forbidden region so often lately. Although Xu Qing never said why he was doing it, Sergeant Thunder knew that at least one reason was to look for lifespan flowers. The Kid was devoted and loyal, and had literally saved his life. In the cold and bleak world they lived in, that was something worth treasuring. However, whenever Sergeant Thunder saw Xu Qing coming back exhausted and bedraggled so often, he felt bad.

And thus, Xu Qing's exuberance filled him with joy. Heading to the kitchen, he cooked a sumptuous feast for dinner, during which he repeatedly exhorted Xu Qing to show respect to his teacher, be deferential, and listen carefully to the lectures. Xu Qing, of course, took all the advice very seriously.

After dinner, Xu Qing went to his room, still feeling excited. Given that he couldn't stop thinking about going into that tent the next day, he wasn't able to sleep.

As he fretted about what could go wrong, and hoped about the things that could go right, he found himself thinking back to his time in the slums, when he and some of the other kids had met one of their scholar teachers for the first time.

Finally, he opened his trusty sack, pulled out an empty, brand-new sack, and dumped about half of his spirit coins inside, as well as a large collection of white boluses. Xu Qing knew that knowledge was priceless, and that even if he gave Grandmaster Bai all of his savings, it wouldn't count for much. But he had to think about Sergeant Thunder, so he held some back.

With that, he felt a bit more at ease. Closing his eyes, he started his breathing exercises and cultivation routine. Discover new chapters on [n0ve\(l\)bin\(.\)com](http://n0ve(l)bin(.)com)

That night passed very slowly for Xu Qing.

When the sun rose, he put on a fresh set of clothes, washed his hands, and walked outside.

He was about to step out the gate when Sergeant Thunder called for him to wait. The old sergeant had taken to sleeping in lately, but was up early today.

The sergeant again went into detail with many reminders of how to be a good student. Xu Qing didn't mind. He just nodded and listened carefully. Finally, Sergeant Thunder straightened Xu Qing's clothes, then offered him a sack. "You can't go into that tent empty-handed."

"I wasn't going to," Xu Qing said quietly, refusing to take the sack.

Sergeant Thunder glared at him briefly, but could see the determination in his eyes, and pulled the sack away. Then he went back into his room and came out with a jug of alcohol.

"I happen to know Grandmaster Bai likes to drink. Take this for him."

This time, Xu Qing didn't refuse. Taking the alcohol, he left the courtyard, walked a bit, then looked over his shoulder and waved at Sergeant Thunder. Then he hurried toward Grandmaster Bai's tent.

Watching Xu Qing leave, Sergeant Thunder smiled. The Kid's even happier than when I took him to harvest seven-leaf clovers.

Feeling both happy and nervous, Xu Qing walked up to the tent he had stood outside on so many occasions over the past month or so. Taking a deep breath, he knocked on the main tent flap.

"Come in," Grandmaster Bai said. Xu Qing looked down at his clothing, quickly adjusted the fold of his robe and smoothed out some wrinkles, then opened the flap. Inside the tent were the guards, plus Grandmaster Bai and his two apprentices.

As Xu Qing looked at them, they looked back.

Grandmaster Bai had a placid facial expression, but the two apprentices did not. The young man named Chen Feiyuan looked a bit resentful, while the girl, Tingyu, seemed curious.

Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed to Grandmaster Bai, then took out the sack he'd prepared along with the alcohol. As he'd learned in class in the slums, he bowed at the waist and offered them with both hands.

Though he was in a bowing position, he saw a bit of warmth in Grandmaster Bai's eyes.

Grandmaster Bai didn't touch the sack. But he did accept the alcohol. He even opened the jug and drank a sip in a formal way, like it was some sort of ceremony.



Then he put down the jug and said, "Let's begin."

As usual, he started with some testing. This time, Tingyu and Chen Feiyuan seemed on par with Xu Qing. They had done their homework, and answered all the questions correctly. Then they looked at Xu Qing.

He kept his attention on Grandmaster Bai as he answered all of the questions. Afterward, Grandmaster Bai nodded and started the lecture.

Xu Qing listened attentively. The opportunity to listen to Grandmaster Bai's lectures from inside the tent was precious to him, so he didn't allow himself to be distracted in the slightest. Chen Feiyuan and Tingyu were doing the same thing, which caused Grandmaster Bai to smile in his heart.

A dozen or so days passed. Xu Qing was already used to listening to lectures, and now that he was officially part of the class, he did not take it any less seriously. As a result, his base of knowledge grew.

That said, it only took a few days for Chen Feiyuan to go back to his old ways. In contrast, Tingyu kept pace with Xu Qing, and paid close attention in class.

After the lecture was over, she would even talk to him a bit. Most of her questions were about life in the basecamp, and though Xu Qing was reluctant to go into details, he did offer simple explanations.

As for Chen Feiyuan, he still seemed resentful of Xu Qing, and had hardly spoken more than a few words to him.

Xu Qing didn't care. He had never been great with social interactions, and always did his best to leave the tent as quickly as possible after the lecture. Then he would go into the forbidden region. However, now he had a new goal while there: to find plants and vegetation that he had learned about.

Before he had begun attending lectures, the plants in the forbidden region had all seemed the same. But things were different now.

Now Xu Qing frequently ran across plants he knew about, and seeing them in real life added to his depth of knowledge. However, as time passed, he came to realize that the vast majority of plants in the forbidden region were the unhealthy yin type that were poisonous. Vital yang plants were rare. As a result, his personal research into plants started to focus on poisons.

After harvesting numerous such plants, he started keeping them in a small hut in the same canyon where Squad Thunderbolt had harvested seven-leaf clover from. That place became his personal laboratory, where he focused on studying poisons.

Given that he was inherently capable of breaking down poisons within his own body, it gave him a lot more confidence in working with dangerous plants. After quite a bit of experimentation in different combinations, he eventually created a completely new and unique poisonous serum.

It was created by combining eight types of poisonous plants plus viper venom. It had violently corrosive properties, such that, after some testing and refining, Xu Qing found it could dissolve an entire mutant beast corpse in only five breaths of time. It only worked that well on corpses. When used on living beings, it wasn't as effective. Regardless, this poison serum was the first medicinal mixture Xu Qing had personally invented, and he was very pleased with it. After drying it in the sun to turn it into a powder, he decided to give it a name: Corpse-Ravaging Powder.

Vital yang plants were rare, but he did find some, and was thus able to experiment with combining the poles of yin and yang. As a result, he created a medicinal liquid using seven-leaf clovers to suppress mutagen.

He showed it to Grandmaster Bai and asked if it might help Sergeant Thunder with his condition.

Grandmaster Bai said that nothing other than a lifespan flower would do any good for the sergeant. Even the medicine he was already taking would slowly lose effectiveness.

He was absolutely right about that. Sergeant Thunder always took his medicine, yet he kept growing weaker and weaker. Xu Qing could only watch it happen.

On one particular day, the two of them were eating dinner when Sergeant Thunder seemed about to say something, then hesitated for a while. Finally he told Xu Qing that, for health purposes, he needed to leave the scavenger basecamp. In fact, he was already preparing to purchase a residency permit in a nearby city.

"Kid, I know your path is going to lead you far away from this little camp. You have a bright future. I don't want you sticking around with me while I grow old."

Xu Qing stopped eating and looked down for a long moment. Then he quietly said, "Are you going to come back?"

"Of course! I'll definitely come back to visit." Smiling, Sergeant Thunder reached out to tousle Xu Qing's hair. Inside, he sighed. The truth was that he didn't want Xu Qing facing the dangers of the forbidden region for his sake.

Xu Qing's instinct was to avoid Sergeant Thunder's hand. But he didn't. And thus, the sergeant tousled his hair and smiled again. "Besides, you can come visit me anytime you want."

Xu Qing nodded.

That night during Xu Qing's cultivation routine, he frequently looked in the direction of Sergeant Thunder's room. He felt glum, but kept it hidden.

Every day, he went to Grandmaster Bai's for the lecture, then spent as much time as possible in the forbidden region, looking for lifespan flowers.

Unfortunately, as Grandmaster Bai had said, such flowers could be encountered by chance but never searched for and found.

Deathblade's Thoughts

Thanks so much to God of Destruction Asura and Destroyerknife12 for the reviews. Y'all rock!

Chapter 26: The Dusk of a Person's Life

In the east of South Phoenix, it was already summer. Rainfall increased, and temperatures rose.

It was late in the morning and class was over. As Xu Qing walked out of Grandmaster Bai's tent, he looked up at the deep blue sky, squinted at the sun, and murmured, "It's the fifth month."

It was hard to believe, but he had been in the scavenger basecamp for two months already. When he thought back to the blood rain and the city ruins, and everything he'd experienced there, it seemed like such a long time ago. Yet the memories were clear in his mind. He was very different compared to two months ago in the slums. He had a cultivation base that continued to grow stronger, his knowledge of plants and vegetation grew, and all-in-all, Xu Qing felt like he was growing up. Thanks to Sergeant Thunder's amazing meals, which included a lot of meat, his previously scrawny frame was starting to fill out.

And thanks to his cultivation of the Sea and Mountain Incantation, his masculine blood pumped more vigorously than ever. Without any effort, he exuded a powerful aura that would seem penetrating to anyone in his presence. Perhaps thanks to how he'd been practicing the saber strike he'd witnessed in the temple complex, his eyes seemed to shine more brightly than the average person. And that effect only seemed to increase as he practiced the saber strike.

At the same time, his class attendance, and the knowledge he was picking up, made him seem like an academic.

Because of all that, Xu Qing had gotten into the habit of washing his hands. And though he still hadn't washed his face free of grime, it wasn't possible for the dirt to cover up his good looks. As a result, the ladies of the night in the feathered tents often batted their eyes at him and called out to him. He ignored them.

For days now, his mood remained glum. For one thing, he hadn't found a single lifespan flower. Worse, Sergeant Thunder was getting visibly older and weaker.

Eventually, Xu Qing stopped going to the forbidden region as often. After listening to Grandmaster Bai's lecture, he would go home to work on cultivation. Being able to sense Sergeant Thunder in the next room helped him stabilize his mood.

He cherished dinner even more nowadays.

On one particular night that was no different from the others, he ignored the surrounding scavengers as he headed toward the general store after class.

The girl he knew there was busy at work, but when she saw him, she immediately ran behind the counter and came out with a jug of alcohol. She handed it to him. She had long since gotten used to him coming at this time to buy alcohol.

"Thank you," he said quietly. He couldn't help but glance at the scar on her face. Despite how vicious it looked, the girl was generally optimistic.

Smiling, she made small talk for a few minutes until a customer yelled at her to come help him.

Xu Qing hefted the jug and turned to leave. When the girl saw that, she quickly said a few things to her customer, then ran to the door.

"Big Bro Kid!" she called.

Xu Qing stopped walking and looked over his shoulder as she hurried to him. As she neared, she held out her hand, and he saw that in her palm was a piece of candy.

"I can tell you've felt down recently," she said. "Whenever I'm sad, my momma would always give me some candy. I just had to eat it, and I'd feel better. This is my last piece of candy and... I want you to have it." She seemed worried he might refuse, so she pushed the candy into his hand and ran back to the shop. At the door, she stopped, looked back, and said, "Feel better, Big Bro Kid!"

He stood there awkwardly for a moment as she ducked back inside, then looked down at the candy. A moment passed... and he carefully put the candy away.

On the way back, the camp seemed louder than normal, which was when he noticed two caravans entering one after the other.

The lead caravan had fancy carts and strong, muscular horses, surpassing the quality of any of the caravans Xu Qing had seen up to this point. Among the members of the caravan were a host of guards, plus four or five middle-aged men who radiated intense spirit power fluctuations.

However, they weren't the most important people in the caravan.

As the carts proceeded, a group of young men and women appeared. Most looked to be sixteen or seventeen years old, and they strutted along in fancy clothing. All had fair skin, with the young men being handsome and refined, the young women elegant and beautiful.

These people clearly had extraordinary backgrounds. Disdaining the squalor and chaos of the basecamp, they had set up their tents outside. Their arrogant demeanor was plain for everyone to see.

Each member of the group had attendants, such that the group of only fifteen or so young ones had about a hundred people following them.

Behind them was a second caravan, and though it looked nice, it obviously wasn't as impressive as the first. Because of the high status of the group of young men and women, the second caravan didn't dare to overtake them. And thus, the members of the second caravan went their separate ways upon entering the camp, and kept a much lower profile.

Xu Qing merely glanced at them as he walked past.

Caravans came every few days, either to sell goods or to set up camp before entering the forbidden region. All kinds of people could be seen in such groups. That was just how life worked in the basecamp, and Xu Qing already took it as a matter of course.

Once back home, Xu Qing saw that Sergeant Thunder was in the courtyard doing some stretching. The sunlight shining down made the old man seem more than ever like he was in the twilight of his life. Xu Qing's mood sank again.

Seeing the jug in Xu Qing's hand, Sergeant Thunder smiled and said, "You bought liquor again? Excellent! You go straighten up the kitchen. I'm going for a walk to get some food for dinner."

Hands clasped behind his back, he strolled out of the courtyard.

This was their arrangement. Sergeant Thunder had to be the one to buy the food. Of course, Xu Qing demanded to pay a bit more in rent to make up for the cost.

Sergeant Thunder came back a bit earlier than usual. Xu Qing had just finished preparing the kitchen when the old man walked in with a bag of meat. Grinning at Xu Qing, he set about preparing dinner.

Like usual, Xu Qing just sat off to the side and observed, hoping to learn a thing or two. As he watched, something seemed off....

Normally speaking, they ate dinner a lot later than this.

Realizing that, Xu Qing's heart sank even further. However, he just watched Sergeant Thunder work. He thought about asking for details, but in the end, kept his mouth shut. Like usual, Sergeant Thunder cooked and talked at the same time.

It felt just like the chatter one would expect while preparing a family dinner. Even before the evening sun sank below the horizon, the food was finished. Putting it on the table, Sergeant Thunder looked at the glum Xu Qing and tousled his hair.

"Kid, I already bought my residency permit for Laughing Pines. Later tonight, I'll pack my luggage. I'm leaving first thing in the morning." He drank a big mouthful of the alcohol Xu Qing had purchased.

Xu Qing felt like didn't know what to do. Finally, he quietly said, "I didn't realize you'd be leaving so soon."

Sergeant Thunder chuckled. "I actually made the purchase a while ago. I just didn't tell you. Don't be so sad, alright? In this world, there's no banquet that lasts forever." He took another drink. "Come on. Eat up." Discover new chapters on [n0ve\(l\)bin\(.\)com](http://n0ve(l)bin(.)com)

Sergeant Thunder looked older than ever. Almost ancient.

Xu Qing quietly picked up his chopsticks and started eating. Though the food was probably delicious, to Xu Qing, it lacked flavor.

Sergeant Thunder saw this and sighed. However, he still smiled and went into the latest camp gossip. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, Xu Qing suddenly said, "Can't you wait until Crucifix and Graceful Raptor get back? It shouldn't be long now."

"Nope. When they get back, they'll act just like you. It'll just make things worse. Besides, they can also come visit me whenever they want."

Sergeant Thunder took out his pipe, loaded it up, then started smoking. The smoke spread, slowly making the room hazy. When Sergeant Thunder finished eating, he went to pack his luggage.

Xu Qing stayed behind, sitting at the table, looking at the food. He didn't feel hungry. For the first time, he didn't wash the dishes and clean the kitchen. Instead, he went to the sergeant's room.

"Do you really have to go?" he asked.

"You don't need to be so sad. I'm going to live in a city now! You should be happy for me."

Sergeant Thunder laughed heartily, then asked Xu Qing to help him fold clothes. Xu Qing first washed his hands, then started helping. With his help, Sergeant Thunder finished packing even more quickly. He didn't have much that he needed to take with him. Other than his clothing, he left everything to Xu Qing.

"The house is yours," he said.

"I'll pay rent," Xu Qing said, sounding very serious.

Sergeant Thunder smiled and didn't continue that topic. Instead, he pulled Xu Qing to a table off to the side, and they sat down. There, Sergeant Thunder told Xu Qing even more about the scavengers in the camp. And one key point he emphasized was the background of the camp owner.

"The camp owner isn't some random person. He's from the Golden Vajra Warrior Sect, the most powerful group in this region. They own dozens of cities and basecamps, and their patriarch is a Foundation Establishment expert. Going forward, be very careful around the camp owner."

By the time they reached this point in their discussion, it was getting late. Xu Qing could see that Sergeant Thunder was tired, so he got up and left. Sergeant Thunder watched him go and sighed.

That was the first night in a very long time that Xu Qing didn't practice cultivation. He sat staring out of the window into the night, until the horizon grew bright and the sun rose.

That was fast.

Feeling full of melancholy, he chose not to go out into the courtyard like he usually did. Instead, he waited until he heard the sound of Sergeant Thunder opening the main gate. Only then did he leave his room.

As the morning sun sent dawn rays over the land, the two of them stood in the courtyard looking at each other.

Sergeant Thunder smiled. "I'm leaving, Kid."

"I'll see you off."

"There's no need. You should get to class."

"I'll see you off."

"You—"

"I'll see you off." [1]

Sergeant Thunder seemed to realize he wasn't going to be able to dissuade Xu Qing, so he nodded.

And thus, the two of them walked through the basecamp while most of the other scavengers still slept. When they neared Grandmaster Bai's tent, Xu Qing ran over to it. Grandmaster Bai wasn't there, nor was Chen Feiyuan. Only Tingyu was present, studying a medicinal codex.

"Do you mind helping me ask for the day off?" he said. Clasp hands and bowing, he turned and hurried off.

Tingyu looked very surprised, and even walked out of the tent, which was when she saw Xu Qing and Sergeant Thunder walking off into the distance.

The morning light cast their shadows in front of them as they walked, further and further away.

Xu Qing carried Sergeant Thunder's bag on his back. He didn't say anything.

Sergeant Thunder had mixed emotions. Looking at the stubborn young man carrying his things, he tried to talk about some of the camp gossip. But after only a few sentences, he found he couldn't continue talking.

The two of them climbed the mountain where once they'd rested and looked down at the basecamp. Back then, Sergeant Thunder had led the way, and Xu Qing followed.

The former had looked as profound as a sword, the latter had seemed like a lone wolf.

This time, Xu Qing led, and Sergeant Thunder followed.

This time, the former looked like a mountain peak, the latter lurched like the fall of dusk.

Xu Qing reached out to steady Sergeant Thunder. And then he hoisted him onto his back, just like back in the forbidden region.

Sergeant Thunder could see the side of Xu Qing's face, and it made him sigh.

"You need to keep your eye on the other scavengers," he said quietly. "I know you've become very strong lately, but that doesn't mean you can underestimate them. Scavengers... well, they're outlaws. They'll try to get what they want by fair means or foul...."

"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.

“Another thing....”

Everything Sergeant Thunder said was filled with deep concern.

Xu Qing nodded as he carried the old man along. And he committed everything to memory.

Sergeant Thunder kept talking and talking. But he was old and weak, and eventually fell asleep.

When Xu Qing heard the snoring, he made sure to keep his footsteps quiet. At the same time, he tried to pick the best course to follow, to make the journey smooth. And thus, Xu Qing carried Sergeant Thunder through the wilderness, avoiding rough terrain, until evening came. As the waning light stretched their shadows out, Xu Qing spotted a city in the distance.

Around then, Sergeant Thunder woke up and noticed the city. He sighed. “We’re here!”

“Yeah,” Xu Qing said, his heart heavy. At Sergeant Thunder’s request, he put the old man down carefully.

Sergeant Thunder took his bag out of Xu Qing’s hand. He looked at the city gate, then back at Xu Qing. A moment of silence passed. Sergeant Thunder smiled. Reaching out, he tousled Xu Qing’s hair.

“Time to head back, Kid. If you miss me, come visit. I’ll be at No. 3 Clearwater Road in the south of the city.” Hefting his luggage, he walked toward the city gate.

Xu Qing felt like he had a thousand things to say, but wasn’t sure how to say them. So he just stood there mutely.

Just before entering the city gate, Sergeant Thunder stopped and looked back. Giving Xu Qing a profound look, he waved. Then the guards hurried him inside, and he was gone from sight.

Xu Qing stood there looking lonely for a long time....

The city gate closed for the evening, and his heart felt completely empty.

“Take care of yourself,” he murmured. Then he turned back, feeling bitter and lonely.

Night fell, covering him with darkness. Alone, he walked through the fields, around the rough terrain, and up the mountain. Further... and further away.

1. As I've mentioned before (and will again), “seeing someone off” in Chinese culture is very important. When you part ways, you should escort the departing person a certain distance. The farther you escort them away, the more respect it shows. In some cases, such as with family or close friends that you see all the time, this formality might be ignored. But even then, it will usually involve an exchange of “I’ll see you off” followed by “there’s no need.” In any case, the reality remains that “seeing someone off” is important, and how far you see them off is relevant. 📖

Deathblade's Thoughts

Thanks so much to jollysadness for the review! Much appreciated!

Chapter 27: A Stranger Like Jade

The howl of wolves echoed through the mountains, but then the sound faded into nothing, almost as though a fiercer animal had scared the wolves away.

As Xu Qing made his way through the darkness, he couldn't bury the sense of loss in his heart. Growing up as he had in the slums, he'd long since grown accustomed to goodbyes. But this was different. Deeper. The emptiness in his heart reflected itself in his posture. He looked bleak.

He took his time going back, and the sun was coming up when he caught sight of the basecamp. There didn't seem to be many lamps burning in the camp. From what Xu Qing remembered, no matter how late he came back from the forbidden region, there was always one lamp burning for him. But today, that one lamp was gone. And it would never come back.

His melancholy deepened as he entered the camp and walked through the darkness to the courtyard. Inside were a dozen dogs. They glanced at him quietly when he appeared.

He finally looked up and saw three rooms. And darkness. There was no sign of life. No light. No energy. The leftovers from the previous night were still on the table in the kitchen.

Xu Qing walked into the kitchen and looked at the three sets of bowls and chopsticks. After a very long moment, he sat down and started eating the cold food. He took a bite. Swallowed. Took a bite. Swallowed. After, he washed the dishes, straightened up the kitchen, and went back to his room.

Closing his eyes, he started a session of cultivation.

Outside of the courtyard stood the violet-robed old man and his servant. They could see everything.

After a moment of silence passed, the man in violet sighed. "What an affectionate and faithful boy."

"Master Seventh, should I give him an identity medallion?"

"Wait until after we get that cloudydream blossom from the forbidden region for Grandmaster Bai." With that, the man in violet faded into nothing. The servant nodded and did the same.

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The night passed.

The following morning at dawn, Xu Qing walked out and, out of habit, looked over at Sergeant Thunder's room. He quickly retracted his gaze. He didn't say much at Grandmaster Bai's lecture, and returned home in silence.

He ate dinner alone, though he made sure to put three sets of dinnerware on the table.

He couldn't help but occasionally look at the spot where Sergeant Thunder used to sit. Now... there was one less person and one less voice.

Eating in silence caused melancholy to again fill his heart, but eventually he shoved it down. After eating, he cleaned up, then got food for the dogs. He watched them eat, then went back to his room to meditate.

Days began to pass, all of them roughly the same. Soon, it was six days after Sergeant Thunder's departure.

Xu Qing had buried his sense of loss deep in his heart, and was now back to his usual detached self. However, if one looked closely, it was possible to see something much colder in that detached attitude. He only relaxed when listening to Grandmaster Bai's lectures. At all other times, he remained completely on guard. It wasn't an unfamiliar way of life for him. This was how he'd lived for six years.

As a lone wolf.

He worked even harder at cultivation, as if only like this could he return to that familiar lonely state sooner. On the evening of the seventh night, he experienced a breakthrough. Before, he had reached the fourth level with the Sea and Mountain Incantation. Now he was in the fifth.

As popping sounds rang out within him, the dogs outside sensed the increased pressure and terrifying aura, and they backed up, trembling.

The sounds of the breakthrough lasted longer than in the past. In fact, the entire process lasted longer. After about an hour, when all the filth had oozed out of his pores, his eyes snapped open. At the same time, the room glittered with a violet light.

The popping sounds still rang out, as though his bones were growing and his flesh was being torn and shredded. None of it was beyond what Xu Qing could bear.

After things went quiet, another hour passed. Finally, he stood up, whereupon his clothing seemed shorter than before.

Although he wasn't an entirely different person, he did seem more refined. That was especially true of his facial features, a result of his body being pure and free of mutagen.

His handsome features, combined with his cold, detached attitude, made him attractive in a way that the filth and grime couldn't cover up.

However, Xu Qing didn't pay attention to any of that. Going out into the courtyard, he did some tests to check how much faster he was now. And he threw some experimental punches, resulting in loud cracking sounds filling the air. From what he could tell, he was more than twice as strong as he'd been in the fourth level!

Even more shocking, when he threw punches, the spirit power fluctuations caused the image of a goblin to appear, its teeth bared to reveal sharp fangs. It looked almost like an evil ghost!

So, this is the power of one goblin?

As he looked down at his clenched fists, the surrounding dogs trembled.

According to the description, each level of the Sea and Mountain Incantation provided the strength of a tiger. Five combined created the strength of a goblin. And two goblins made a hobgoblin.

However, something about the description didn't seem right to him.

Given how strong he was, he was fairly sure he was at the level of seven or eight tigers. It was the same in terms of speed. And he was fairly certain that once he reached the sixth level, he would have the strength of two goblins, which was much earlier than normal.

It must be because of the violet crystal. And the saber strike from that statue in the temple complex.

Extending his right hand, he recalled the image of that statue. Energy swirled around him. He dropped his hand.

Still not quite there yet.

His version of that saber strike wasn't good enough yet. Just as he was about to go back into his room, he suddenly looked down and noticed his shadow. After the breakthrough, it was just like before; the mutagen flowed into his shadow, leaving his body absolutely pure.

As he looked at his shadow, a thought occurred to him.

I wonder if I can control my shadow...?

As the thought percolated, he continued to stare at his shadow, willing it to move. Unfortunately, even after expending a lot of effort, nothing happened. He sighed softly and, thinking he might be getting a bit too greedy, was about to give up when... his shadow's hand suddenly twitched slightly!

That sight caused Xu Qing's eyes to widen.

He definitely wasn't seeing things, as he was absolutely sure that his flesh-and-blood hand hadn't twitched. Only the shadow version of it. He tried again.

Time passed. And then, as Xu Qing himself remained absolutely motionless, his shadow... slowly raised its hand!

It only moved slightly, but that effort alone made Xu Qing feel like his head was about to explode. Only after a long moment passed did he regain his composure. However, his eyes were now shining brightly.

I can control it!

He looked back down at his shadow. Exercising that bit of control took a huge amount of effort, and while his mind had felt empty moments before, now he felt the pain of a headache. It was obvious that doing this was very taxing. However, he was confident that as he practiced, and as his cultivation base improved, he would gain greater and greater control.

And eventually, his shadow... could be used as a weapon to catch his enemies off guard!

I hope that day comes sooner rather than later.

Feeling like his head was splitting, he returned to his room and sat down cross-legged to meditate.

The next morning, he was only half-recovered, and felt quite dispirited. Trying to force himself into a better state of mind, he changed clothes and hurried to Grandmaster Bai's tent.

Chen Feiyuan wasn't there, and the grandmaster hadn't arrived yet either. But Tingyu was reading the same medicinal codex from before. When she saw Xu Qing arrive, she waved and called out a greeting, then went back to reading.

Mornings had all begun like this lately. According to Tingyu, the newly arrived group of young men and women included some friends of Chen Feiyuan's, whom he often went to see. Grandmaster Bai was busy with some important matter for the past few days, and usually arrived late, then left immediately after his lecture.

Xu Qing sat down off to the side, took out a bamboo slip, and started reviewing the previous day's lesson. A short time later, Tingyu suddenly stopped reading and looked at him.

"Why do you look different today?" she asked.

Xu Qing didn't look up at her. He just kept studying.

Tingyu's bright eyes opened wider as she looked even more closely at Xu Qing.

Then Grandmaster Bai arrived, and she didn't say anything further. However, throughout the lecture, she kept looking over at Xu Qing.

Grandmaster Bai was usually very strict, but he seemed to have something on his mind, and only offered some minor admonitions to Tingyu for her lack of attentiveness. After finishing the lecture, he reminded them of what he would test them on the next day, then hurried off.

Xu Qing stood and prepared to leave. However, before he could get outside, Tingyu jumped in his way. Frowning, he looked at her.

Lifting her chin, she glared back. She had a very pretty face, with eyes that sparkled like the stars and moon.

"I figured it out," she said. "You're taller."

"Sure," Xu Qing replied, nodding. Then he tried to walk around her, except she once again moved to block his way.

Looking at him curiously with her sparkling eyes, she said, "Kid, you come here every day with that dirty face of yours. I just realized I don't know what you actually look like. And now I can tell you're different from before. Nope. This isn't going to work. I'm going to wash your face and see the real you."

Pulling a handkerchief out of her sleeve, she started moving toward him.

Xu Qing put his hands up defensively, and was about to flee in the opposite direction when Tingyu gave a cold snort.

“I helped you ask for the day off, Kid. You owe me a favor!”

Xu Qing stopped moving, which was when Tingyu jumped toward him. At the same time, she sent spirit power fluctuations running through the handkerchief to turn it damp. Then she started rubbing his cheek.

Instantly, the fair skin on his cheek was revealed. However, Xu Qing had no patience for this, and decided to force his way to freedom. Follow new stories at [no/v\(e\)lb/in\(.\)com](http://no/v(e)lb/in(.)com)

“Kid!” she shouted, “I’m your elder sister!”

The term ‘elder sister’ was obviously an important one, and it caused Xu Qing to freeze in place. [1]

Then, Tingyu’s eyes became like crescent moons filled with both beauty and craftiness. Moving with lightning speed, she started rubbing at the rest of Xu Qing’s face.

Xu Qing wanted to shove her away, but because of how she’d called herself his elder sister, he didn’t.

And thus, as Tingyu scrubbed and wiped, Xu Qing’s real face was fully revealed. Toward the end, her movements slowed, and her eyes grew wide. Stepping back, she looked at his face. And somehow, at that exact same moment, a ray of sunshine hit his face.

This was the first time Xu Qing’s face had been washed clean in the last six years, and he wasn’t used to it. As Tingyu stared, he walked around her and dashed out of the tent.

He wasn’t used to the sun being so warm when hitting his face. In fact, he felt naked.

Outside, he squatted, scooped up some mud, and rubbed it on his face. Only then did he breathe a sigh of relief. Feeling much better, he settled back into his detached self, and headed to the forbidden region.

After he was gone, Tingyu took a very deep breath. Hunh. He’s pretty good-looking.

Pulling aside the main tent flap, she looked at him disappearing in the distance, her face slightly flushed. She looked around to see if anyone had noticed what just happened.

He’s better-looking than Chen Feiyuan. Actually, no. Chen Feiyuan can’t even come close to comparing to him!

1. As I'm sure many of you know, forms of address in sects and organizations often mirror familial terms. Elder brother/sister, junior brother/sister, and even things like aunt/uncle are commonly used. However, these forms of address do not correlate exactly to the way they're used in families. For one thing, romances between sect brothers and sisters is a common thing. Also, they're very important in establishing hierarchical relationships. In a formal classroom or sect situation, the status of a person with the higher social standing would be something to take fairly seriously. For more details on my view of this subject, you can check out chapter 9 of my non-fiction reference guide [Understanding Chinese Fantasy Novels](#). 📖

## Deathblade's Thoughts

Thanks you Pacificstar, purplish, and Skyllax for the reviews. Very much appreciated!!!

## Chapter 28: You Don't Need Light to Travel the Night

That night, Tingyu, who had grown up in the Violet Lands without any understanding of the hardships of life, had a dream about Chen Feiyuan making things very hard for Xu Qing. It made her furious. When she woke up in the morning, she was in a very unusual mood. After arriving at Grandmaster Bai's tent, she sat in her usual place to read her medicinal codex, but just couldn't concentrate. She found herself constantly looking up at the entrance of the tent.

Eventually she caught sight of... Chen Feiyuan.

She blinked suddenly as she recalled the dream from the previous night.

Pushing his way through the tent entrance, Chen Feiyuan yawned and rubbed his eyes, then prepared to sit next to Tingyu. Before he could, she pushed his seating cushion out from under him.

Chen Feiyuan stared down in shock. "What are you doing?"

Not even bothering to look at him, she pointed to Xu Qing's usual spot and said, "You sit over there."

"But, why?" Chen Feiyuan asked, not moving an inch.

She glared up at him. "Why? Because you don't study hard. And you're always asking for time off. Having you next to me is annoying. Is that enough of an explanation?"

During her rapid-fire response, Chen Feiyuan simply stared at her. After she finished, he muttered a bit and, obviously trying not to provoke her further, plopped down where Xu Qing usually sat.

After sitting there for a short time, Chen Feiyuan muttered, "Oh dear. Tingyu, you—"



“Don’t call me dear!” she snapped. “What would happen if someone overhears and gets the wrong idea?”

“Huh? I didn’t call you dear!” Chen Feiyuan looked utterly confused, but before anything else could happen, the tent flap opened and Xu Qing entered.

When Tingyu saw him, she smiled, causing two faint dimples to appear on her cheeks. Then she brushed off the cushion Chen Feiyuan had been about to sit on earlier.

“Little Junior Brother, you sit here,” she said.

Xu Qing looked startled. Chen Feiyuan stared in shock.

“What are you staring at?” Tingyu said. “Teacher’s going to be here soon. Hurry up!”

Xu Qing hesitated, first looking at Tingyu, then the spot where she was trying to get him to sit down, and then Chen Feiyuan. It really was time for Grandmaster Bai to arrive, so after a moment, he sat down next to Tingyu, right in the spot where Chen Feiyuan usually sat.

Looking embarrassed, Chen Feiyuan pointed at Xu Qing and was about to say something when Tingyu glared at him fiercely and barked, “Shut up!”

“I didn’t say anything!” he whimpered, looking like he was about to cry. As far as he was concerned, all of this was very unfair, and he was about to say something when the tent flap opened and Grandmaster Bai walked in.

Chen Feiyuan had no choice but to bite his tongue and sit there fuming. Opposite him, Tingyu seemed very happy, and Xu Qing looked profoundly uncomfortable.

After taking a few steps inside, Grandmaster Bai noticed where Xu Qing was sitting. He looked at Tingyu, and then the hapless Chen Feiyuan. Smiling faintly, he sat down and began the testing.

As usual, Chen Feiyuan stammered his way through his answers, and got thoroughly berated by the grandmaster. Tingyu looked very pleased with herself as she answered her questions, and then looked at Xu Qing with anticipation.

He answered his questions perfectly, and even asked some very meaningful followup questions.

During the entire testing part of the class, Chen Feiyuan looked very depressed. After the lecture was over, he was the first to hurry out of the tent, feeling very discriminated against.

Xu Qing, meanwhile, felt uncomfortable during the entire class. When it was over, he stood, bowed to Grandmaster Bai, and then made to leave. Before he could get out, Tingyu said, "Little Junior Brother, why is your face dirty again?"

Rising to her feet, she pulled out her handkerchief eagerly. Xu Qing, however, made it out of the tent and vanished. After he was gone, Tingyu seemed hurt. Turning to Grandmaster Bai, who was just sitting there enjoying the show, she said, "Teacher, why is the Kid always so dirty? I just want to help him out."

Grandmaster Bai threw his head back and laughed. Then he patted her head and said, "Because, to people who lead bitter and dangerous lives, attracting attention isn't a good thing."

Tingyu nodded thoughtfully.

Xu Qing couldn't hear Grandmaster Bai, but he was thinking the exact same thing. Back in the slums, he had learned that the less attention you attracted, the safer you were. If everyone around you was dirty, and you weren't, that made you like a torch on a moonless night. And then things got more dangerous. From the time he was small, he had always avoided attention. People who didn't were either stronger than everyone else, or they didn't live very long. It was for that reason that he didn't make it a habit of bathing; it made it easier for him to blend into his surroundings. He was like a skilled hunter in hiding who revealed their ability only in the moment of attack.

Right now, he was heading into the forbidden region, and he did the same thing there. Once he was in the jungle, he picked up a handful of rotten leaves, crushed them into a paste, and covered himself with it. With that natural disguise on, he headed into the forbidden region.

Though Sergeant Thunder had already moved away to the city, Xu Qing hadn't given up on his hope of finding a lifespan flower.

His advancements in cultivation base made him stronger, and he had a lot more experience now. Plus, he knew a lot more about plants and vegetation. That, coupled with his general vigilance, ensured that he encountered few dangers in the periphery of the forbidden region.

Nowadays, he didn't limit his explorations to the area leading up to the temple. Instead, he ventured past it into the deeper jungle. The further in he got, the more dangers there were. But such training improved his battle prowess, and also helped him with his knowledge of plants.

Similar to what he had found elsewhere, there were a lot of medicinal plants in the interior of the forbidden region, though most of them were unhealthy yin plants, full of poisons. The more poisonous plants he was able to study, the more his knowledge of plants and vegetation veered in the direction of poison. As he made more progress, he

refined his poison powders into a few different varieties. New novel chapters are published on [novelbin.com](http://novelbin.com)

It was for that reason that he'd purchased a coat that had a lot of pockets. In each pocket he put a different type of poisonous medicine.

What was more, he started using that pair of black gauntlets he found in Captain Bloodshadow's sack. The more he fought with them, the more familiar he became with their usage.

The gauntlets made his fist attacks even more powerful, and also added a measure of protection against poisons. Now, his signature weapons included the gauntlets, the dagger Crucifix had given him, and his trusty iron skewer.

The sun was setting by the time he finished his day of training and poison concocting. Leaving his laboratory in the canyon, he organized all his weapons and poison powders, then started running toward the temple complex at top speed.

It had become a custom of his to visit the temple to look for scar-removing crystals before returning to camp. Though he had yet to have any success, he had asked around and knew more about what to look for. He knew that they formed naturally and glowed with seven colors. They were rare, but people did find them occasionally. Thus, he didn't give up on his search. And this time...

When he got to the temple complex, it was bathed in an evening glow. Perhaps because of that reason, he immediately noticed a stone statue off in the distance, and the seven-colored glow coming from its forehead.

Eyes narrowing, he quickly scanned the area to check the traps he'd set up. None had been sprung. Jumping up to the rooftop of a nearby temple, he crouched and observed the area further.

After confirming that the area was safe, he sped toward the statue.

Once in front of it, he looked up and saw that, in a crack in the forehead, there was a seven-colored crystal, growing naturally. Before, that statue had been ordinary in nature. But in this mysterious temple, the strange passage of time ensured that, on this day, it was different.

Xu Qing quickly harvested the crystal, then searched the area hoping to find more. As luck would have it, he found five more.

When he was finished, he stood looking at the crystals in his hand, and he let loose a long sigh. He had long been searching for both lifespan flowers and scar-removing crystals, and now he had finally found at least one of those two things.

Carefully putting the six crystals away, Xu Qing looked around at the temple complex, then bowed deeply at the waist. After that, he sped off into the jungle.

Before long, he was leaping from treetop to treetop. As night fell, the roar of the beasts rose into the air. Xu Qing maintained the same pace the entire time.

At one point, as he landed on a branch and prepared to launch himself into the air, a giant horned anaconda exploded out of the dirt below, shooting up with a gaping maw toward Xu Qing.

This serpent was much larger than the one he'd fought in the camp, but Xu Qing's facial expression didn't change at all. He just reached out and flicked his finger, hitting the anaconda on the top of the head. [1]

A thump rang out, and then the anaconda shrieked. It couldn't even come close to standing up to Xu Qing's strength, and exploded into a mass of flesh and blood.

However... its gallbladder was left intact. Xu Qing reached into the mist of blood, grabbed it, and sped off.

It was just before the break of dawn when Xu Qing left the jungle and got back to the basecamp. It was still dark, but there were some lamps and fires in the camp as Xu Qing made his way through it. He had been very excited to find the scar-removing crystals, but the closer he got to his residence, the more his mood sank.

The only thing waiting for him in the dark were a few of the stray dogs. When they noticed him, they wagged their tails. He walked into the courtyard, looked at Sergeant Thunder's old room out of habit, then went to the kitchen. He heated up yesterday's leftovers to fill his stomach, then went back to his room.

He sighed.

I wonder how Sergeant Thunder is doing in that city. He should be fine. If I can't find that lifespan flower soon, maybe I can buy one with spirit coins.

Closing his eyes, he started cultivating.

The next day, he went through his usual routine.

Tingyu seemed to be acting more normal, though she did save the same spot for him. Chen Feiyuan had accepted his fate, and just glanced helplessly at Xu Qing sitting where he used to. After the lecture was over, Tingyu didn't bring up face-washing again. It seemed Grandmaster Bai's explanation had sunk in.

Xu Qing noticed that. Bowing his head, he clasped hands to Grandmaster Bai and took his leave.

Outside the tent, he rubbed his sack, within which were the scar-removing crystals, and headed toward the general store where that girl worked.

Upon nearing, he noticed that there was a group of strangers gathered around the store! They wore unusual clothing, including black cloaks embroidered with blood-colored suns. However, most noticeable was the somber, desolate, and bloodthirsty aura they emanated.

1. He fought the giant horned anaconda in chapter 7 📖

### Deathblade's Thoughts

I don't usually translate the post-chapter notes from the author, as they're usually not relevant. But in this case I'm translating a little story he shared. Enjoy.

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Author note:

I'd like to share a true story with all of you. I'm not sure why I still remember this incident to this day. I guess there were a lot of reasons why it was so memorable. I even recall going home and asking my mom and dad for advice....

It was when I was in fourth grade, and my desk mate was a girl. One morning, she seemed to really have it out for me. I just remember that I said to her, "Oh dear. So-and-so, can you let me borrow your homework for a minute?"

She glared at me and snapped, "Don't call me dear! What would happen if someone overhears and gets the wrong idea?" After that, she looked past me to a boy in the front row....

It's a true story. Years later at a class reunion, I mentioned this story to my old deskmate, and she claimed it never happened....

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My translation of this humorous section is tweaked slightly so that it makes sense in English, but I think it conveys the thought and feeling. The story is funny but also pretty corny. When I shared the Chinese version with MDB via a text message, she responded like this: 😊😊😊

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Also, many thanks to Kylix for the review!

Chapter 29: The Sorrow of Parting

The black-cloaked men were tall, but their faces were concealed in hoods, making it impossible to make out their features. However, the cold glitter of their eyes was visible, and it made the surrounding scavengers tremble inwardly.

These black-cloaked figures seemed indifferent to life in general, as if they completely lacked humanity, and were nothing more than killing machines. As they stood there, the heat of the sixth month seemed to be driven away by them, making the area around the general store sinister and cold.

Xu Qing didn't know who they were, but he quickly learned by listening in to the hushed reactions of the surrounding scavengers.

"It's a law enforcement team from the Church of Departure!"

"The Church of Departure... they're all lunatics! They hardly ever show up at scavenger basecamps. What are they doing here?"

"I heard they came looking for someone. They already searched the other cities and basecamps in the area, so now they're here."

Hearing the talk, Xu Qing's eyes narrowed, and he surreptitiously took out his iron skewer. Eyes cold, he observed the general store. Only a moment later, three people walked out.

First came two people, one tall, one short.

The tall one stood as straight as a blood-splattered sword. He wore clothing different from the law enforcement team outside. His cloak was blood-red, and was embroidered with a black sun. Furthermore, his head wasn't covered, revealing black hair and the angular face of a young man. The moment he appeared, the black-cloaked members of the law enforcement dropped to one knee in unison, and bowed their heads.

This scene caused Xu Qing's eyes to narrow. The aura pulsing off of this red-cloaked young man reminded him of the powerful beasts he'd encountered out in the jungle.

The short individual next to the tall young man was none other than the girl Xu Qing had come to see. She grinned from ear to ear as she clasped the hand of the young man next to her.

Given the age difference between the two of them, he was apparently her older brother. And though his expression was generally cold, when he looked down at the girl, his eyes softened. At the same time, there seemed to be an indelible sadness in his expression. Apparently, he was thinking back to loved ones lost in a catastrophe.

Behind the two of them was the owner of the general store, who followed obsequiously while quietly offering flattering words.

Upon seeing all this, Xu Qing put away his iron skewer and patted the bag of crystals, trying to decide what to do.

Right then, the girl happened to notice him in the crowd.

She quickly said a few words to the young man next to her, who turned to look at Xu Qing. Then the girl pulled her hand away and ran over.

The scavengers around Xu Qing edged away from him, allowing the girl to run up to him.

“My big brother came to get me!” she said. Anticipation gleaming in her eyes, she continued, “Do you want to come with us, Big Bro Kid?”

Xu Qing shook his head.

The girl looked disappointed. However, she quickly put a smile back on her face and said, “That’s okay. When I grow up, I’ll come back and see you. I told you I was going to pay you back for saving my life, Big Bro Kid. And I will. I’m leaving with my big brother, and he treats me great. He gives me anything I need. Do you have a big brother too?”

The girl kept talking and talking, until her brother cleared his throat.

“I have to go, Big Bro Kid,” the girl said, gazing at Xu Qing. Over the past two months, he was the only person she’d gotten to know. And now she didn’t want to say goodbye.

Xu Qing pulled out one of the seven-colored crystals and handed it to her. “This stone can get rid of scars. Take it.”

The girl looked surprised, but took the stone. She seemed like she had more to say, but then her brother called to her. With a final look at Xu Qing, she ran to her brother with the crystal in her hands. The black-cloaked men clustered around them. Looking back at Xu Qing, she waved.

He waved back. Thinking about her constant optimism and smile, he watched her leave.

“Please... stay safe,” he murmured. Then he turned and went back to his residence.

Life went on. He cooked by himself. Ate by himself. Cleaned up by himself. Meditated. Went to class. Just like that, seven days passed.

He was living now just as he’d lived back in the slums. Furthermore, he had come to the realization that Grandmaster Bai... wasn’t going to stay in the camp forever. That fact had become more than obvious a few days before when Grandmaster Bai’s convoy started to pack up.

As the grandmaster had mentioned before, he came from the Violet Lands. And from what Xu Qing had heard, the Violet Lands... were in the middle of South Phoenix.

Early in the morning, Xu Qing arrived at Grandmaster Bai's tent, only to realize there were no guards there. Neither were Chen Feiyuan and Tingyu present.

The only person in the tent was Grandmaster Bai.

Xu Qing knew what was coming.

Grandmaster Bai gave a very detailed lecture, and Xu Qing paid very close attention. Time flew by. When it was over, Grandmaster Bai looked at Xu Qing standing there silently, and he sighed.

"I'm leaving," he said. "Before I go, I want to explain something that you'll find very helpful in the future. Due to an oath I took, I can't explain directly. Whether or not you understand what I'm about to tell you will depend on your personal fortune." Grandmaster Bai gave him a meaningful look.

Xu Qing looked back at him.

The moment their eyes met, Grandmaster Bai started speaking in a quiet voice.

"Kid, I want you to think back to the medicinal plants from the lessons I taught to you on the third day, the seventh day, the eleventh day, the fifteenth day, the seventeenth day, and the nineteenth day. That's six lessons. Identify the proper plants, and then, using the ratio of 1:2:4, add in the proper amount of seven-leaf clover and refine the mixture at high heat. By doing so, you can produce a pill that everyone in this world needs. A pill equivalent to pure spirit coins. You can concoct... a white bolus!"

Hearing this, Xu Qing's eyes went wide. He was not the same person he was two months before when he first started listening to Grandmaster Bai's lessons. Given everything he'd learned, he knew how valuable pill formulas were. Usually, they were kept under the control of the great clans and organizations, and were considered priceless resources. That was especially true... of white boluses, which might as well be considered a currency of their own. That pill formula was so valuable it defied description. Normally speaking, it would never be revealed to anyone.

Someone who could concoct white boluses wouldn't need a very high cultivation base. They could live a great life just with that ability.

This was an incredible favor!

Xu Qing trembled as he looked at Grandmaster Bai. Seeing his white hair and the kindly expression on his face, Xu Qing thought back to everything from the past two months.



How he had eavesdropped outside the tent, how he had attended class. How Grandmaster Bai had taught him so attentively. There was so much he wanted to say. So many words of thanks. So much gratitude. And he didn't want to say farewell.

But all he could do was incline his head to his teacher, a man who seemed so strict, yet was so kind at heart. Clapping hands, Xu Qing bowed as deeply as he could.

"Thank you... Teacher." Explôre [uptodate stories at no/vel/bin\(.\)com](http://uptodate.stories.no/vel/bin(.)com)

Sergeant Thunder felt like family to him. But Grandmaster Bai felt like a true teacher and Master, and was just as important to Xu Qing.

Grandmaster Bai looked at Xu Qing's deep, formal bow, and he smiled. Despite how Xu Qing hid it, the grandmaster could see how emotional he was. He chuckled.

"Kid, I'm doing this because you're a good student. And you're smart. Also, I really hate those old fogies who make rules about giving out pill formulas.

"But sometimes, my status makes it impossible for me to do what I really want to do. This isn't the first time I've helped someone learn the dao of medicine, and even some pill formulas. I've been all over South Phoenix, and I've taught a lot of people. We humans shouldn't let our medicine skill decline because of matters of status.

"Finally, there's one more thing I want to tell you. Remember this.... The world is a tavern for living beings. And the timescape is an old guest. As long as we don't die, we'll meet again. I hope that when we do, you'll have made something of yourself."

Grandmaster Bai's words seemed very profound, especially the last part. In all Xu Qing's years, this was probably the most meaningful thing he'd ever heard, and he committed it to heart.

Later that day as Grandmaster Bai's caravan left the camp, the grandmaster gave Xu Qing a medicinal codex to study. Xu Qing walked the caravan out of the camp, then watched it go off into the distance. He noticed that Tingyu kept looking over her shoulder at him.

Soon, the caravan disappeared into the evening.

Xu Qing stood there for a long time, his shadow growing longer, until finally he went back into the camp.

For some reason, only a few people leaving made the camp seem very different.

It didn't look different. It was still dirty and filled with all kinds of people. There were old folks yelling, kids crying, burly men laughing, and women whispering. Under the setting sun, life pulsed.

But it felt different.

As Xu Qing walked amidst all that, he headed, not to his residence, but to the general store where the girl used to work. Finding the new assistant there, he purchased some alcohol.

Then he returned home. That night, he didn't eat anything.

He just looked at the empty kitchen, then at the jug of alcohol. Finally, he lifted it and took a drink.

The hot, spicy liquid poured down his throat and into his stomach, where it seemed to explode into the rest of his body. Before, Xu Qing had never liked the taste of alcohol, but tonight was different.

He took another drink.

Then another, and another.

Soon, his head began to swim. He thought about his six years in the slums. He thought about Sergeant Thunder walking into that city. He thought about Grandmaster Bai leaving with his caravan. He thought about the girl leaving.

And he especially thought about what the girl had asked him.

"Do you have a big brother too?"

Xu Qing held the jug of alcohol as he leaned against the wall and looked up at the moon.

"I do," he murmured. "But I don't know where he is."

Outside was the violet-robed old man and his servant, listening in.

"The world is a tavern for living beings," Xu Qing continued. "And the timescape is an old guest. As long as we don't die, we'll meet again."

Deathblade's Thoughts

The chapter title is a relatively obscure idiom that literally means "farther than a flying goose can see," which poetically refers to the sorrow of parting.

Thank you to RoguePrimum and Bhelliom Rahl for the reviews. You guys are awesome!

Chapter 30: An Unexpected Gift

It was a dark night with no stars, only a moon faintly visible through the drifting clouds. It was very windy. However, the wind didn't interfere with the flowing moonlight. The pure white light was like a river flowing into the human world. It fell onto the scavengers, and onto Xu Qing's courtyard, where two people stood outside his door.

One was Master Seventh, clad in his violet robe, his hands clasped behind his back. The moonlight illuminated his wrinkled face as he muttered to himself, apparently trying to make a decision about something.

To the side, his servant waited patiently.

As far as the dogs were concerned, these two didn't even exist. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary to them. Things were quiet, except for the faint sound of laughter and shouting coming from the outer ring of the camp.

There was no more speaking from inside the room, only the sound of breathing exercises. Some time passed, enough for an incense stick to burn.

Then Master Seventh sighed. Instead of opening the door, he turned to leave. Reaching the gate, he stopped and said, "Give him the identity medallion."

"What color?" the servant asked.

"The most common one. Explain the basics, but no more than that."

Master Seventh walked out of the courtyard.

The servant's eyes narrowed, and his heart pounded. He had been with Master Seventh during the entire time in the scavenger basecamp, and had been there on numerous occasions to observe the one called the Kid.

When Master Seventh talked to Grandmaster Bai about him, the servant knew the boy had an amazing opportunity coming. That was why he had asked earlier about giving him an identity medallion. Specifically, that medallion qualified someone to enter Seven Blood Eyes. Anyone who possessed such a medallion could take a qualification assessment, and if successful, could join the sect.

There were different colors of medallions. The violet medallions were the highest, and were given to conclave disciples. Yellow were the middle rank, and were given to disciples of the inner sect. Last were the white medallions, which were the most common, and were given to ordinary disciples.

The servant had guessed that Master Seventh would bestow a yellow medallion, only to be told to give a white one. Furthermore... he had been instructed not to go into any details. This unusual turn of events not only got him thinking, but also, caused his heart to pound.

There's only one explanation. Master Seventh has taken a liking to the Kid. He doesn't just want to bring him into the sect. He wants... to take him as an apprentice? And so, he wants to test him? The first three highnesses all started out that way. Don't tell me the Seventh Peak is going to have a fourth successor apprentice?

The servant knew exactly how powerful the word 'successor' was. Whoever became a successor apprentice to Master Seventh would become the center of attention of all the powerful groups in the entire continent of South Phoenix.

Then again, that seemed somewhat far-fetched to the servant. After all, Master Seventh hadn't accepted any new apprentices for quite a long time.

Regardless, the servant knew he needed to pay close attention to this child. With such thoughts on his mind, he took a deep breath, gathered his thoughts, and then knocked on Xu Qing's door. When the thudding sound rang out in the room, the sound of breathing exercises ceased. A smile appeared at the corner of the servant's mouth, and then he faded from view. Astonishingly, when he reappeared, he was on the back side of the structure!

In the back wall of the room was a hole, dug out over the course of time and covered over with removable bricks.

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Xu Qing had just crawled out through the hole in the back wall, and had been planning to go around the side of the house and see who was knocking. However, before he could do anything, the servant appeared.

Xu Qing stopped moving and looked at the figure. His heart sank. In front of him was a middle-aged man in a long gray robe. He had ordinary facial features but an eye-catching pentagram tattoo on his forehead. The tattoo glittered with peaceful light that caused the glow of the moon to ripple and distort.

The man emanated such pressure that Xu Qing found himself gasping for breath. However, he still grabbed his iron skewer with his right hand and pulled out some poison powder with his left.

The man's sudden arrival was bizarre, to say the least, and from what Xu Qing could tell, the man was far, far stronger than the scarred girl's brother from a few days before. That was especially true of his gaze, which caused Xu Qing's flesh and blood to tremble. It was as if his body was screaming at him that this person standing in front of him was an extremely dangerous threat!

Xu Qing realized exactly what his body was telling him, and was completely on guard. At the same time, he prepared himself to take action.

He had long since thought through numerous scenarios in which he suddenly faced dangerous circumstances. And most dangerous of them all was a person who could slip past the dogs without them being alerted. Narrowing his eyes, he slowly backed away.

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“I have no evil intentions,” the servant said, smiling as he eyed the violent, wolf-pup-like Kid. He also realized that the hole in the wall was a backup plan the Kid had in place for emergencies.

He’s prepared for situations like this, and doesn’t get flustered when unexpected things happen. Also, he’s ready for a fight. No wonder Master Seventh has taken a liking to him.

The servant thought back to Xu Qing slitting Horsefour’s throat, and killing Fatmountain. Eyes shining with admiration, he pulled out a white identity medallion and tossed it to Xu Qing.

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Xu Qing didn’t attempt to catch it. Instead, he jumped backward while simultaneously tossing out a handful of poison powder and then chucking two daggers out in front of him. His eyes went wide when both daggers flew harmlessly through the gray-robed man and hit the wall behind him. As for the poison powder, it also went through the man, and slowly drifted to the ground.

Xu Qing’s nerves grew even more taut, and he prepared to flee.

However, the gray-robed man just smiled and began to fade from existence.

It started with his legs, then his torso. As his head disappeared, he said, “Kid, someone wanted me to give you that identity medallion. It qualifies you to enter Seven Blood Eyes. There’s a map on the back. You can go to any of the cities owned by the sect. Just show the medallion and you’ll be given a one-time free teleportation to the sect headquarters.”

Then the man vanished as if he’d never been there to begin with. Xu Qing, meanwhile, just stood there quietly for a long time. He could sense how powerful the man had been, and how weak he himself was.

Finally, he walked forward, retrieved his daggers, and then looked down at the identity medallion.

It was the color white, and the front side was carved with complicated decorative designs. As it reflected the moonlight, it seemed both profound and simplistic at the same time.

Xu Qing put on one of his fighting gauntlets to flip the medallion over. On the back was a map filled with hundreds of raised dots that represented cities.

Seven Blood Eyes....

Sergeant Thunder had mentioned Seven Blood Eyes to him, and he knew they were one of the largest and most ruthless organizations in South Phoenix. Countless people attempted to join their numbers every year. However, the Seven Blood Eyes was very strict about who they let in. And they most certainly did not let just anyone through the doors. First, you needed an identity medallion, which of course, was not something commonly handed out.

Xu Qing had no idea why he'd been given one. He didn't know that man in gray, and also didn't know if the medallion was legitimate. After mulling the matter over, he decided that, given how terrifyingly powerful the man in gray was, it seemed unlikely he had been playing some prank. In all likelihood, the medallion was real.

But why did he give it to me?

Xu Qing had no idea, but it wasn't lost on him what the man had called him. The term 'Kid' had different layers of meaning. Though it was a common noun that could be used on any young person, it had a more specific usage in this scavenger basecamp. Here, only Xu Qing was called the Kid. The fact that the man used his scavenger nickname indicated he knew something about Xu Qing. Also, he'd mentioned that 'someone' wanted Xu Qing to have the identity medallion. That meant the gray-robed man was working with someone else, and that person was probably of a higher rank.

Don't tell me it was Grandmaster Bai?

Xu Qing looked down at the medallion for a long moment, then finally picked it up.

The first glimmers of dawn were now visible. Xu Qing covered up the hole in the back wall, then went to feed the dogs. So far the dogs hadn't been any help to him, but feeding them had become something of a habit over time.

As he saw them jostling for food, he was about to leave to listen to Grandmaster Bai's lecture when he suddenly stopped in place, then sat down.

Yet another habit....

So he sat there until the sun was high and bright in the sky. Only then did he walk out of the courtyard to stroll through the camp.

Though he knew the camp well, right now it seemed somewhat unfamiliar. Neither Crucifix nor Graceful Raptor had been back in a while. After walking around a bit, he decided to go visit his laboratory in the canyon. Though the forbidden region was a

dangerous place, it also held a lot of memories. Besides, he figured he might as well take a shot at concocting a white bolus, and so, he made his way out of the camp. Before he stepped out of it, though, he heard someone calling out to him.

“Kid. Kid!”

He recognized the voice. Turning, he saw an old man with a full head of white hair running toward him.

He was one of the scavengers Xu Qing knew. No one knew his real name, and everyone called him Ol’ Stony. He was one of the handful of people Xu Qing had saved when carrying Sergeant Thunder back to the camp on his back. Later on, the man had come to buy insurance from Xu Qing, just like Boneblade did.

“Hey, Kid!” the old man said excitedly. “I got a big job!”

He then launched into an explanation. Somehow, Ol’ Stony had convinced the newly arrived group of young men and women to hire him as a guide. They wanted to go to the temple complex in the forbidden region. Before going on the trip, he wanted to buy insurance.

“Same deal as before, okay?” he said with a smile. “Five white boluses, and if I don’t get back in a week, then you come rescue me. Alright, Kid?”

“A week?” Xu Qing said, surprised.

Ol’ Stony sighed. “Yeah. Those spoiled brats from the Violet Lands are dead set on staying in there a week. They’re paying me really well, so I’m going to risk it. After this mission, I’m going to retire.”

As a longtime scavenger, Ol’ Stony knew that staying in the forbidden region that long was tremendously risky. And the difficulties with mutagen would be even more problematic. But the payment was high enough that he could finally buy a residency permit for a city. Thus, he had come to Xu Qing with enough white boluses to buy insurance.

Xu Qing frowned. He had no interest in continuing with the ‘insurance’ arrangement, and right now, he wanted to focus on researching white boluses. However, that was when he noticed Ol’ Stony’s look of anticipation, and his white hair. It reminded Xu Qing of Sergeant Thunder. A moment later, he nodded.

“This’ll be the last time,” he said.

After Ol’ Stony gratefully handed over the white boluses, Xu Qing ran out of the camp toward the forbidden region.

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As it turned out, the Fog of Confusion had indeed risen up in one large section of the forbidden region. And it was spreading....

Outside of the fog, near the Poisonous Dragon Pond area, a terrified scavenger hid inside a tree crevice, shaking from fear.

In the area were four figures, their eyes icy cold as they searched for someone.

The fog's coming!! All I have to do is hold on long enough for the Kid to come save me!

The person hiding in the tree crevice was none other than Boneblade, the very first scavenger to buy insurance from Xu Qing.

\*\*\*

Xu Qing, who had just entered the jungle, stopped in place.

The fog's coming.

He could sense his shadow twisting and rippling as the wisps of fog became clearer and clearer up ahead.

He hesitated briefly, then hurried forward through the jungle. He still wanted to get to his laboratory in the canyon, and knew that with the help of his shadow, he would have plenty of time to reach it.

The truth was that though the Fog of Confusion was dangerous, that applied to mutant beasts as well. Therefore, traveling through it was quite safe for him. Of course, that was all assuming he didn't get lost, and the mutagen didn't get too intense.

Xu Qing sped up as he moved through the jungle.

Two hours later, the fog seemed to be getting closer, and Xu Qing reached the marsh with the nightlizard skin.

Standing next to a big tree, he looked north.

That's where the Poisonous Dragon Pond is...

He had heard a bit about that area, mostly from Boneblade. And that was because every time the man bought insurance, he designated the rescue location as the Poisonous Dragon Pond.



After thinking about the matter, Xu Qing remembered that Boneblade had actually bought insurance from him only two days ago.

Although the insurance time limit hadn't been reached, since the fog had arisen, he decided he might as well go in and check. With those thoughts on his mind, he sped into motion, leaping through the treetops toward the Poisonous Dragon Pond.

As he neared, his eyes narrowed, and his expression turned into one of vigilance. He also started moving more stealthily.

He saw someone up ahead. *R*read latest chapters at [n/ov\(e\)lbin\(.\)co/m](http://n/ov(e)lbin(.)co/m)

It was a man in a black leather jerkin, with a vicious mask on his face. In his hand he held a long sword that glittered brightly as he searched the area for something. He pulsed with extraordinary spirit power fluctuations, reminding Xu Qing of the Squad Bloodshadow member he had fought some time ago, Flamecrow.

Xu Qing watched him for a moment, then went around him. However, not long after that, he saw a second person dressed the same, and with a similar cultivation base.

They're not scavengers.

Maintaining full caution, he continued to circle the area until... he saw Boneblade!