

Timescape 231

Chapter 231: Xu Qing's Name

The moment the voice rang out, an indescribable force swept down from the spell formation, creating a massive, invisible hand that shot toward Sima Ling's shocked dao protector. As rumbling sounds echoed out, the dao protector, who had moments ago been insufferably arrogant, was shoved by the hand right onto the ground. Given that he had a Gold Core cultivation base, he struggled mightily, but it was to no avail. As he was crushed into the ground, he howled, "Is this a rebellion, Seven Blood Eyes? How dare—"

"Pipe down!" Xu Qing said coolly. Next, the spell formation rumbled again, releasing not crushing might, but a force of expulsion.

The old dao protector couldn't stand up to the force battering him. His heavenly palaces trembled, and his expression became one of humiliation. He, a mighty Gold Core cultivator, was being crushed and expelled. It was infuriating, but he could do nothing as he was thrown outside of the sect.

Ignoring the dao protector, Xu Qing shot toward the fleeing Sima Ling. Unleashing a palm strike, he sent Sima Ling screaming through the air until he slammed into a nearby building. As he did, one of his four life flames went out.

"Xu Qing!!!" Sima Ling howled, his hair disheveled, and his entire person radiating madness. Thanks to the poison throwing his grues into chaos, he was, for the first time ever, starting to wonder if he was going to die.

That said, Sima Ling was a ruthless person; as madness filled his eyes, he bit the tip of his tongue and spat out a mouthful of blood at Xu Qing. In midair, the blood transformed into a host of imps, all of them radiating a vicious, gruish aura. Shrieking, they shot toward Xu Qing. As they moved through the air, they became a diamond-shape mark that pulsed with sealing power.

"Nether-Sealing Dao!" Sima Ling screamed viciously. His hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, causing the imps to accelerate. Even if Xu Qing suddenly fell back, there was no way he could avoid them. And so, the sealing mark surrounded him, and in the blink of an eye, duplicated itself over and over again, making a diamond-shaped shell around him.

With Xu Qing inside, Sima Ling raised both of his hands and shouted, "Detonate!"

The shell started to collapse, but only by about thirty percent. Then Xu Qing's hand stretched out and stopped the process. Eyes cold, he looked down at the raving Sima Ling, then flew down. Before Sima Ling could react, Xu Qing reached out and grabbed him by the neck, hoisted him up, then slammed him ruthlessly into the ground.

The ground quaked, and cracks appeared. Sima Ling shivered, and blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth. The rest of his life flames went out, and he went unconscious. The grues within him suddenly went out of control, and it looked like they were about to devour his body. But then a soft light radiated out from him, and they were quelled.

Looking over Sima Ling coldly, Xu Qing said, "Put twenty dharma shackles on him and lock him up."

"Yes sir!"

The surrounding Violent Crimes constables were clearly enlivened by what they had seen. Even the constables from the other peaks were looking at Xu Qing with utmost respect and admiration. The directors from the First and Third Peaks both breathed sighs of relief and bowed to Xu Qing.

As a group of constables put shackles on Sima Ling, Xu Qing looked around and said, "Arrest all Night Dove operatives here. If anyone resists, kill them."

The constables spread out, and soon screams and shrieks filled the night.

Xu Qing didn't participate in what happened next. As long as none of the Seven Sect Coalition's chosen appeared, he didn't need to. The Violent Crimes Division was accustomed to dealing with Night Dove. It took them half the night to wrap everything up.

The operation ended up spreading through the entire capital city. A vast number of Night Dove operatives were arrested, although many of them resisted and died fighting. By the time dawn came, Xu Qing was back in his dharmaskiff resting. At that time, he sent out a message to the Violent Crimes Division.

"Hang the heads of all slain Night Dove operatives on the city walls."

That was how the Night Dove operation had ended back when he first joined the Violent Crimes Division. Now that he was a director, he felt like it was a good tradition to maintain.

By the time it was light outside, the city wall had about a thousand Night Dove operative heads hanging from it. Everyone who saw the appalling sight was shaken. There was no hiding what happened the previous night. The story was already spreading through Seven Blood Eyes. All visiting species, all allies, all Seven Blood Eyes disciples, and everyone from the Seven Sect Coalition was filled with astonishment when they heard.

Of course, what surprised them wasn't that the Violent Crimes Division had taken action against Night Dove, and hung over a thousand heads from the city wall. Rather, the shocking news was that... Sima Ling from the House of Grue Hunters had also been arrested and locked up.

Not even his dao protector had been able to save him from that fate. The director of the Seventh Peak's Violent Crimes Division had used the Seven Blood Eyes Formation to drive the dao protector away.

The challenge that had been issued to the Third Peak was dropped. After all, Sima Ling couldn't show up to fight. It was a huge deal. After all, the Seven Sect Coalition's challenges to Seven Blood Eyes had earned them massive prestige. The matter was like a massive slap to the face.

The first thing that happened was that Xu Qing's information was instantly compiled and sent to all of the chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition. All of them wanted to know what this 'envoy disciple' from Seven Blood Eyes was like. He was the director of the Seventh Peak's Violent Crimes Division, had been placed in the echelon but not appointed to the position of highness, and had somehow defeated Sima Ling, who was in the great circle and had four life flames.

Actually, they weren't the only ones. Many Seven Blood Eyes disciples, and especially the highnesses from the various mountain peaks, were all astonished. Although Xu Qing had done some amazing things, they were all relatively minor when considering the overall state of affairs. But this time, he had done something absolutely sensational.

And thus, everyone was scrambling to learn more about Xu Qing.

The afternoon after the conflict between Xu Qing and Sima Ling played out at Harbor 79, a person arrived to examine the aftermath.

He wore a fancy golden garment, and had a silk belt with a spider motif. A seven-colored umbrella floated above his head, casting brilliant light around him, making him seem like the child of a god.

He was none other than the person who had defeated the First Peak's second highness with a single blow, and had stood toe-to-toe with a Gold Core elder. He was the number one chosen in the Seven Sect Coalition, Master Shengyun from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect.

After arriving at Harbor 79, he stood on the shore, closed his eyes, and cast his senses out. He stood in the sea breeze like a beautiful statue, radiating an extraordinary aura and scintillating light.

Behind him stood three old men, all of whom were Gold Core experts that Patriarch Soaring Cloud had assigned as his dao protectors. They were delighted to have such an assignment, and were actually honored to accompany him as he grew into his own. All of them had respectful expressions on their faces, and they kept their heads bowed.

Eventually, Master Shengyun opened his eyes. "Two life flames. Imperial-class technique. A poison that can threaten Gold Core cultivators with heavenly palaces. A magical device with a spirit automaton.... Interesting. With strength like that, it's no wonder he sent Sima Ling tumbling. Also, his imperial-class technique seems somehow familiar..."

After sensing his surroundings briefly, he had described the fight almost as if he had witnessed it personally. There was no way that he had some ability to look back in time. It was just that... his intuition and senses were so advanced that all he needed were tiny clues to come to correct conclusions. It was a terrifying level of skill.

Behind him, a strange cry rang out as a green-bodied red-tailed bird appeared. As it cried out, a greedy look appeared in its eyes as it inhaled deeply as though it was looking for some aura in particular.

"Golden crow?" Master Shengyun turned to look in the direction of Harbor 176, his eyes gleaming.

"So, someone relatively interesting does exist in Seven Blood Eyes. Sadly, he's too weak. Don't be anxious, my little ravagemist bird. Let that golden crow grow up a little, and then you can eat it to grow stronger. It'll be yours sooner or later." [1]

Turning, Master Shengyun left the area.

Throughout the afternoon, a lot of people came to Harbor 79. By evening, numerous people had investigated the area, hoping to dig up as much information about Xu Qing as they could.

“He joined Seven Blood Eyes three years ago, and existed like a venomous bug in a jar. In the Qi Condensation level, he slaughtered all of the cultivators on an entire island. It was a bloodbath!”

“During the war between Seven Blood Eyes and the Seazombies, he completed a lot of missions. He slaughtered numerous Qi Condensation Seazombies, assimilated their souls, and opened lots of dharma apertures. He’s now at the two-flame level, and apparently, he cultivates Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits! Also, he has some shocking poisons!!”

“The Seazombie dao child Vastworld put out a bounty for him.... However, Vastworld never responded to any messages people sent him about that. People have their speculations, but most people don’t think Xu Qing could beat Vastworld. That said, it seems Vastworld was hit by Xu Qing’s poison and his golden crow technique!”

“This Xu Qing... is probably one of the top disciples in Seven Blood Eyes. That said, he’s not one of their highnesses, just an echelon cultivator!”

“The most important thing is that, before that incident with the zombie ancestor statue, no one had even heard of him. That includes most of the people in his sect. This guy really is a master of deception!!”

The more information people dug up about Xu Qing, the more shaken they were. Almost overnight, Xu Qing’s name spread like wildfire, both among the visiting nonhuman species, and all of the disciples from the various mountain peaks.

Eventually, as the Seven Blood Eyes disciples realized that Xu Qing was from the Seventh Peak, they felt it made sense. Cultivators from the Seventh Peak were known for being deceptive. That was just how they operated....

You just never know what freaks might be hiding out among the Seventh Peak disciples.

Chapter 232: God of Wealth from Revered Ancient

The chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition were even more deeply shaken. For one thing, most of them were jealous. After all... imperial-class techniques could be encountered by chance but never searched for and found. And such techniques that were suitable for humans were as rare as phoenix feathers or qilin horns. That wasn’t even to mention... that this was Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits!

Years ago, the president of the Seven Sect Coalition himself had acquired the legacy of Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, and therefore, all disciples in the Seven Sect Coalition were familiar with it. And the more familiar someone was with that technique, the more envious they would be of someone who had it. Thus, they elevated Xu Qing to be alongside the highnesses of the various mountain peaks in terms of his importance.

However, not one other chosen stuck their head out to help out the House of Grue Hunters. All of them knew that there was no way the matter was over yet, and that things were probably going to get even more complicated. No one was going to make a move until the House of Grue Hunters and

the Dark Serenity Sect decided what to do. After all, the Seventh Peak's supervisory sect was the Dark Serenity Sect. Huang Yikun was the chosen from the Dark Serenity Sect, and he had an extraordinary cultivation base. What was more, he had not yet issued any challenges, as he was taking his time to find the best opportunity.

As everyone was waiting to see what would happen, Huang Yikun happened to be reviewing Xu Qing's information on a jade slip. He smiled.

I've finally found my opportunity. Going around issuing challenges along with everyone else is no way to show off how amazing the Dark Serenity Sect is. I'd originally been planning to wait until all other challenges had been settled, and then make a move. But now it seems I won't have to do that. This Xu Qing seems like he has potential. It'd be a pity to destroy him. I'd much rather recruit him. That said, if he refuses to cooperate, then I guess I'll have to end him.

Chuckling, he took out a transmission jade slip to send messages to the other chosen.

"I'm going to handle the situation with Xu Qing. The rest of you just wait and see how it plays out."

While the Seven Sect Coalition chosen, the Seven Blood Eyes disciples, and the members of the nonhuman species were all paying close attention to the matter, Xu Qing himself was sitting cross-legged in his dharmaskiff.

His expression was the same as ever, completely placid.

He was well aware of what was going on outside. From the moment he chose to take action, he'd known there would be ramifications. Though he didn't like to make himself the center of attention, given the circumstances, he'd had no choice. His hand had been forced, and thus he revealed his imperial-class technique and his special poison. He had a lot of secrets, and the reality was that not revealing them would cause people to speculate about him, and would lead to further disadvantages.

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By selectively revealing certain things intentionally, it made it easier to keep even deeper secrets hidden.

My first layer of secrets consists of my poison and the imperial-class technique. The second layer is my life lamp. The third is my shadow and its ability to absorb mutagen. The fourth is the violet crystal.

Xu Qing took some time to think about the whole situation, then he extended his right hand, within which appeared a blue ring. There was a glittering green gemstone inset in the ring, making the thing look absolutely extraordinary.

This was Sima Ling's ring of holding. It was different from a bag of holding. Rings of holding were more valuable and had a larger capacity. Furthermore, the fancy gem made it obvious that this ring was incredibly valuable.

Sima Ling was now a prisoner of the Violent Crimes Division, and according to the division's rules, all of his personal items could be confiscated and disposed of however the division saw fit. Of course, those rules had to be applied judiciously. For instance, though Yanyan had been arrested, Xu

Qing didn't go to the extent of taking away her ring of holding. He simply put it into storage. Then, after she was released, she got it back.

However... Xu Qing didn't feel that Sima Ling needed to be shown the same courtesy. Therefore, he was now studying the ring closely, and examining the sealing mark that kept it closed. This ring of holding was designed so that only the person connected to the sealing mark could open it. But that wasn't going to pose an obstacle for Xu Qing.

"Wipe the seal out for me," Xu Qing said quietly.

His shadow had simply been waiting for the word. It stretched out, and a moment later, the ring of holding was inundated with corrosive mutagen. It didn't take long for the sealing mark to start fading away. After it was wiped out completely, it was easy for Xu Qing to send some dharma force inside to inspect the contents.

Despite his experience and willpower, when Xu Qing saw what was inside, his eyes began to shine. It contained entire stacks of spirit notes! Upon taking inventory, Xu Qing inhaled sharply.

"9,300,000!!" he murmured.

His eyes went wide and his heart started racing. This was a huge sum to come across, such that even Xu Qing, who was usually so calm and collected, instinctively looked around nervously.

And Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior, who normally wasn't prone to outbursts, shouted, "That's a freaking lot of money! This guy wasn't a chosen. He's obviously a nouveau riche playboy from Revered Ancient!!"

Xu Qing's heart wasn't just pounding because of the spirit stones. There was also a jade box with two pieces of flesh from a godly entity, each of them roughly the size of a head. Given the strong level of godliness, it seemed to Xu Qing that they were both from the great circle of Foundation Establishment.

Those would make a great power source for my dharmaskiff!

Xu Qing continued to examine the contents of the ring.

He soon found that it contained four finger-sized crystals, all of which exuded powerful fluctuations. Sealed within them was some sort of mist. Taking them out to examine them, he realized that the swirling mist inside formed distinct images. One was a headless ox, one was a distorted ball of black hair, and one was a hand. Sealed in the final crystal was an eye. Just looking at the collection, Xu Qing was shaken, as he could sense a strong grue aura.

Disciples from the Third Peak make deals with grues, and it's the same with the House of Grue Hunters. These sealed items are actually grues....

After some thought, Xu Qing realized why Sima Ling didn't use any of these things.

He had been hit by Xu Qing's poison, causing the mutagen within him to rise rapidly. Because of that, the sealed grues became unusually aggressive. If Sima Ling had brought them out under those circumstances, he probably wouldn't have been able to use them against Xu Qing, and would instead have made things worse for himself.

There were more things in Sima Ling's ring of holding. There were five medicinal pills that Xu Qing, given his skill with plants and vegetation, was very excited to see. Simply inhaling their

fragrance caused his dharma apertures to stir vigorously. What was more, it seemed like his 84th dharma aperture, which was unopened, seemed to quiver.

A medicinal pill for opening dharma apertures?

Xu Qing struggled to breathe steadily, and his eyes shone brightly.

He currently had 83 dharma apertures open, putting him only 7 away from being able to ignite three life flames!

Sima Ling's ring of holding didn't just contain those items. It also had about seven or eight magical devices. However, after examining them, Xu Qing realized they were all designed for use in controlling grues, and needed to be combined with special techniques to work properly. There were some jade slips, but they were all protected by warding spells. From what Xu Qing could tell, those spells were placed by the sect to prevent their techniques from being revealed to outsiders. He tried breaking them with his shadow, but it didn't work well. There were a bunch of other random objects. After rifling through them, Xu Qing's eyes narrowed as he noticed a wooden box off in the corner of the ring's dimensional space. It was black and exuded a strong mutagen aura. However, there was no sign of it containing a grue.

Something dead??After some thought, he opened the box.

The moment he did, spectacularly strong mutagen poured out. It vastly exceeded any mutagen from a forbidden region, such that any mortal who touched it would instantly experience mutation and then die. Even average cultivators who encountered it would immediately find their mutagen levels skyrocketing.

In Xu Qing's case, his shadow just started devouring it madly. Eventually, the mutagen coming from the box was significantly reduced, whereupon the shadow burped and shrank back to its spot.

There was still mutagen coming out of the box, but nothing like before.

The object in the box that had previously been exuding such strong mutagen was a palm-sized chunk of metal. It was rusty and didn't look special at all. However, Xu Qing's expression flickered when he looked at it, as he could sense an astonishing will contained in the piece of metal, something that imparted the same feeling as staring up at the river of stars in the dome of heaven. It was as if something was imprisoned inside. And the force keeping it imprisoned was mutagen!

Upon studying it more closely, Xu Qing found that this mutagen was different from the mutagen he was familiar with from the forbidden regions he'd been in. In fact, this piece of metal actually resembled a very small forbidden region.

The mutagen was coming from it!

In other words, if this piece of metal were much, much larger, it would turn into a region of its own. It would be a forbidden region!

"What is this thing?!" Xu Qing breathed, looking confused.

Meanwhile, the shadow, sensing that there was still mutagen coming out of the piece of metal, stretched out. After covering the piece of metal, it shivered, then sent out strong emotional fluctuations filled with deep longing.

"Fragmented... piece...."

Xu Qing slammed the lid of the box shut.

After the mutagen was cut off, the shadow seemed almost frantic. However, because of the violet light in Xu Qing's chest, it didn't dare to act out of turn.

"What is it?" he said.

"Allow me, milord! I'll handle this!" Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior immediately manifested a projection of himself and squatted next to the shadow. This was the opportunity he'd been waiting for.

The shadow's eyes burned with animosity as it glared at the patriarch. It had regained much of its intelligence, and thinking back to everything that had happened, it had long since come to despise the patriarch. As far as it was concerned, the patriarch was its enemy. Furthermore, it needed to be very careful. Otherwise, it would do all the hard work, and the idiot patriarch would get all the credit.

Meanwhile, the patriarch was chuckling coldly in his heart. However, he was careful to keep an amiable look on his face.

"Come, my beloved shadow. Come, come. Let's have a nice little chat."

The shadow seemed inclined to refuse, but without something to possess, it had no ability to communicate properly. And considering how coldly Xu Qing was looking at it, it knew it had no choice. Though it wasn't happy about the situation, it had to start explaining things to the patriarch.

After the process was done, the patriarch looked incredulous. Voice trembling, he quietly said, "Milord, I was wrong. This guy isn't a nouveau riche playboy. He's a freaking god of wealth! According to Little Shadow, this thing... is a fragmented piece of a taboo treasure! The shadow is convinced that if it absorbs enough of it, then it can... unleash some of the power of the taboo treasure!"

Chapter 233: You Can't Get Rich Without Ill-gotten Gains

"Taboo treasure?" Xu Qing said, looking stunned. He had never heard the term before and had no idea what it was.

After some more communication between the patriarch and the shadow, Xu Qing was able to get an idea that taboo treasures were things that existed on a higher level compared to ordinary magical treasures. As for how the shadow knew this, the patriarch asked a series of complicated questions, and came to the conclusion that the shadow wasn't sure how it knew. At the same time, the shadow continued to release strong emotional fluctuations of longing. It deeply desired to consume the item.

Xu Qing thought about it for a bit, but in the end, decided not to grant the shadow's request. He wouldn't do that unless he was absolutely confident in the outcome. For all he knew, the shadow might turn on him during the process. As the shadow looked on reluctantly, he put the wooden box away.

After, he looked at the shadow and said, "If you behave, I'll think about giving it to you later."

The shadow emitted fluctuations of excitement. Off to the side, the patriarch felt shaken, and realized he needed to be even more careful about dealing with the shadow. He also needed to take steps to make sure the pesky shadow didn't succeed in earning favor.

Ignoring the patriarch and the shadow, Xu Qing continued to go through Sima Ling's ring of holding. However, after examining all the miscellaneous items, he didn't find anything valuable.

Finally, he went back to the five medicinal pills. After smelling them again, his eyes filled with determination, and he put one in his mouth. It melted, and then a tremor passed through him. He could already sense that a very powerful and violent force was converging in him. It wasn't soul power, but rather some other high-level force specifically designed for opening dharma apertures. As it converged, his unopened 84th dharma aperture stirred even more dramatically than before. Then, all of a sudden, the violent force shot toward that dharma aperture, and it opened.

Xu Qing shivered, and his eyes lit up with delight.

A single pill actually opened one of my dharma apertures!

This result was far superior to the soul pills he'd purchased at the black market. In fact, other than Bai Li's high-level soul pill, these were the most effective pills he had ever consumed. Without the slightest hesitation, he consumed the second pill. Moments later, he shivered again.

His 85th dharma aperture had opened!

"The second was just as effective!" he murmured. Xu Qing could tell that these were some very precious pills, and it also gave him a good sense of how wealthy the Seven Sect Coalition chosen were.

There are still three more.

Eyes glittering, he consumed the third pill. Soon, his 86th dharma aperture opened. Not stopping there, he consumed the other two pills. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, his 88th dharma aperture opened. His dharma force now flowed through him like a fire dragon, fierce and burning.

I only have two more dharma apertures to open before I get my third life flame!

His eyes shone with anticipation.

Over the course of the following few days, he collected more soul pills from places in Seven Blood Eyes, as he prepared for that breakthrough with the final two dharma apertures. Unfortunately, getting soul pills was something that took time, and he couldn't quite get enough.

As far as the two chunks of flesh with godliness, Xu Qing did some experiments and decided that they weren't good enough for personal use, and that it was best to use them in his dharmaskiff.

Right now, though, he left his berth and went to the nearest Violent Crimes Division cell block. There were a lot of Night Dove inmates, and though most of them had weak cultivation bases, there were many of them. With that many to work with, he could probably open one or both dharma apertures. Furthermore, during the process of refining souls, he would also be able to get used to the poisonous properties of the taboo poison pill. He could also see if he could get the poison pill to work with his black beetles. It was a new conundrum, and if he wanted to make progress, it was going to take a lot of experimentation.

In that matter, time slipped by slowly but surely.

Seven Blood Eyes was still in a period of celebration. Nonhuman envoys arrived on a daily basis, and the entire port was bustling. However, the moods of the Seven Blood Eyes disciples continued to sink.

Although Xu Qing's actions had changed things for a few days, the challenges from the Seven Sect Coalition soon continued. It seemed the Seven Sect Coalition wanted this state of affairs to continue for at least three months. As for Master Shengyun from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect, he didn't issue any further challenges, and took up residence on the First Peak.

His seven-colored wind-chanting lamp that could shake heaven and earth kept the First Peak disciples completely stifled, and also cowed all of the nonhuman envoys and allies.

The Seven Sect Coalition's attitude was clear. This beat-down wasn't just a simple reminder, it was a clear warning. Seven Blood Eyes was not to harbor any thoughts of being independent. What was more, rumors were spreading that, after the period of celebration, the seven peaklords were going to be replaced by the Seven Sect Coalition.

On the one hand, Seven Blood Eyes had won a clear victory against the Seazombies. But now they were being crushed by the Seven Sect Coalition. And the Seven Blood Eyes patriarch didn't seem to be doing anything about it.

Xu Qing could feel the pressure building in the sect. However, he got the feeling there was more going on than what was visible on the surface. That was especially true considering what the Captain had seen in the Sixth Peak. Xu Qing got the feeling the sect was waiting for something in particular. [1]

It doesn't matter too much. The sect leadership will decide how to make the next move. Xu Qing shook his head and focused on his own cultivation. The Captain was back in the sect, and he had sent a voice message to Xu Qing asking what he was up to.

Though Xu Qing had been refining souls nonstop, he hadn't been able to open the next dharma aperture. That said, he had made some progress in his research on the taboo poison pill. And he was building up enough of a tolerance that he was certain he would eventually be able to reconcoct it. He also attempted to force his black beetles into the pill. However, the process was so difficult for the beetles that not one of them ever survived. Each and every one died.

Xu Qing wasn't discouraged. As he sat there cross-legged in the cell block, he took out all of the bottles he used to store the black beetles in.

After his previous work with them, he had a total of eight.

However, the attempt to get the beetles into the pill killed all of the beetles in the first bottle. Opening the second bottle, he performed an incantation gesture and pointed out. In response, the beetles flew out and surrounded him. If there had been onlookers, they would have been shocked. After all, these beetles were such a threat that even a Gold Core expert would be leery of them.

Xu Qing still didn't think they were effective enough, though. Opening the wish box, he sent the beetles streaming toward it in a black cloud. As the cloud neared, it began to collapse as the beetles rotted and died. Frowning, Xu Qing continued experimenting. He soon went through the third bottle, then the fourth and fifth....

The tiny beetles died one after another, until he reached his final bottle. Not a single beetle had survived. Xu Qing sighed. He didn't dare to continue experimenting with his final bottle, as he needed those beetles to breed more.

With that, he arranged for more inmates to be brought to him to feed the beetles. As the beetles fed, Xu Qing continued working on getting used to the poison pill. Simultaneously, he added medicinal plants into the beetle's diets that counteracted poisons. He also put in some of his own blood. After all, he had already built up some resistance.

Seven more days passed.

Eventually, his work paid off. He was finally able to get eight black beetles to survive the process. Though they came out weak, Xu Qing was still excited at the results. This first group of survivors would be the starting point to raise a new generation of even stronger beetles. What was more, even though the beetles were weak, they had transformed, and were now less dark than before.

If I keep this going, I should be able to eventually raise some beetles that are completely resistant to the taboo poison pill. And if I can get them to breed inside that pill, then they'll absorb the pill's qualities and become even more astonishing.

As Xu Qing's heart filled with anticipation, it was evening outside. As the red glow in the sky deepened, an uninvited guest suddenly appeared outside the entrance of the Violent Crimes Division.

He was a young man of about seventeen or eighteen years old, clad in a violet daoist robe inlaid with gold. His sleeves were decorated with a gobblewock motif, and his right hand was covered with a red glove. [2]

As he walked along, his daoist robe emanated powerful dharma force fluctuations that made his handsome features seem even more extraordinary. That said, though he was handsome, he had a rather large nose that disrupted the delicacy of his face, and made him seem unusually domineering. As he approached, the pebbles on the road outside the Violent Crimes Division began to float up and swirl around him, creating something like a tempest. Especially noteworthy was the fact that the glow of evening seemed to darken because of his presence. Within that growing darkness, the glove he wore seemed extremely bizarre and fiendish.

The Violent Crimes Division disciples on duty at the entrance noticed him immediately, and their expression turned very serious, as if they were facing a big enemy. But as the young man neared, the tempest surrounding him reached the on-duty disciples, shoving them backward until they bumped into the gate itself.

One of them, veins bulging on his forehead, shouted, "Halt! Who goes there!?"

The violet-robed young man lifted his hand, revealing a violet pearl that shimmered and then shot toward the on-duty disciples.

"Calm down. Just give this pearl to Director Xu Qing. Tell him that I wanted to give him a destined opportunity."

Chapter 234: Condescending

Xu Qing didn't like being interrupted in the middle of cultivation or research. But when he looked down at the violet pearl the Violent Crimes Division constable had delivered to him, a serious look filled his eyes. Though he wasn't familiar with the aura the pearl emitted, it caused the golden crow on his back to stir abnormally. In fact, it soon manifested behind him, then gazed at the pearl with deep longing.

Looking thoughtful, Xu Qing left the cell block and went to the reception hall, where he saw the young man in the violet robe.

He stood with his back to Xu Qing, looking at a painting on the wall that depicted evil ghosts fighting over food. Though the young man wasn't in the profound radiance state, his 120 dharma apertures burned with intense heat.

To the Qi Condensation disciples present, it looked like the surrounding air was rippling, as if this place was the young man's home turf. Xu Qing, meanwhile, was unaffected. In fact, as he stepped into the reception hall, the ripples vanished.

"Xu Qing?" the young man said, turning and looking closely at him.

Xu Qing didn't like it when people looked at him this way, but he forced such feelings away and looked calmly at the visitor.

"The power of two flames combined with Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, plus your deadly poison and that body of yours. Xu Qing... you're a big fish in a little pond here in Seven Blood Eyes. This place doesn't suit you." With that, the young man sat down in the seat of honor. His every movement was very natural, as if he believed it was a given that he should sit in that position.

As he sat down, though, he completely failed to notice that, right in the air behind him, an apple had suddenly appeared. And then, some invisible person noiselessly took a bite out of the apple. No sound could be heard.

An odd expression appeared on Xu Qing's face as he noticed the apple. But he quickly looked away. Not saying a word, he waited to see what would happen next.

"You won't get far here," the young man continued. "You're in the echelon, but aren't one of the highnesses. And you only got into the echelon by performing an amazing service. There's really no need for you to have any fondness for a sect like this. I'm sure you know who I am. I'm Huang Yikun from the Dark Serenity Sect. You can address me as Eldest Brother." As his words echoed about, he seemed to be scrutinizing Xu Qing even more closely.

A bite mark appeared in the apple behind him, as though the invisible person had been about to take another mouthful, but then stopped in the middle. Apparently, this person wasn't very happy with what he'd just heard.

Xu Qing pretended to not see the apple. He knew exactly who this visitor was. Though he had never laid eyes on him personally, the sect's files contained an image of him.

Huang Yikun put his gloved hand onto the table in front of him and leaned forward slightly. Looking Xu Qing in the eyes, he slowly said, “Xu Qing, I appreciate you for who you are. And I’d like to give you a chance to leave this sect and join a greater sect. Of course, the prerequisite is that you swear loyalty to me.”

Xu Qing frowned.

A chunk disappeared from the apple behind Huang Yikun, as the person eating it started viciously chewing.

Huang Yikun noticed Xu Qing’s frown, but didn’t seem bothered by it. “Xu Qing, you do know what a supervisory sect is, don’t you? You cultivate an imperial-class technique called Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits. Surely you’re aware that the president of the Seven Sect Coalition also gained enlightenment of that very same imperial-class technique. The venerable president gained a very thorough enlightenment. Whatever destined opportunity you ran across, it was obviously random chance, and there’s no way you could compare with the president’s level of enlightenment. Am I right?”

Xu Qing didn’t say anything.

“Therefore, if you join a supervisory sect, your Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits will rise to an even higher level. Remember, the president comes from the Dark Serenity Sect. And the Dark Serenity Sect’s Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture was actually modeled after Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits by the president.”

An arrogant look appeared on Huang Yikun’s face as he tilted his chin up and continued, “Furthermore... the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture cultivated by your subsidiary sect is a low-level version.” As the words left his mouth, Huang Yikun lifted his right hand and slowly removed his glove.

As he did, a shocking aura erupted from his hand. The five fingers of his right hand were all violet, and looked like they were made from raw crystal. They were marvelous in appearance and they emanated shocking fluctuations. All the light in the area seemed to dim, as though the five fingers were sucking it in.

Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed. He could sense how extraordinary those fingers were, and he also sensed that they caused the golden crow tattoo on his back to stir dramatically. At the same time, the balefire within him seemed like it was being pulled toward the fingers.

That said, in Xu Qing’s opinion, Huang Yikun... probably shouldn’t be showing off his five fingers like this.

Behind Huang Yikun, the floating apple trembled, as though the hand holding it were excited. At the same time, two shining eyes were revealed, and they were fixed on Huang Yikun’s right hand.

Seeing Xu Qing’s odd expression caused Huang Yikun to feel very pleased with himself. At the same time, he felt both disdain and envy deep in his heart. The pleased feeling came from the fact that he loved showing off the five fingers that he had created with a lifetime of wealth and cultivation. People were always amazed to see them. The disdain came because of the fact that Xu Qing was still just a fish in a pond. Even if he got some destined opportunity, he still didn’t know

enough about the world to make it worth it. And the envy came because of that destined opportunity.

That said, Huang Yikun kept his true feelings hidden. Moving his dazzling fingers back and forth rhythmically in front of him, he said, “See, Xu Qing? This is the result of my cultivation of an ancient Dark Serenity technique. It’s called the Dark Serenity Fingers.

“Each of these five fingers was created with a combination of my dark technique plus countless precious materials. All I have to do is touch someone with one of these fingers, and I’ll be able to influence their soul and control their very life or death. This is what the Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture really looks like.

“If you swear loyalty to me, then when we get back to the sect, I’ll personally help you request assistance from the patriarch. With his help, you might be able to cultivate two fingers like this, maybe even more! Combined with Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, this technique would be able to unleash true strength!”

Xu Qing looked long and hard at the five fingers. He also noticed that no further bites had been taken from the apple. Whoever was holding the apple was obviously completely focused on Huang Yikun’s five fingers. Finally, Xu Qing looked at Huang Yikun.

Although the technique seemed useful, he didn’t see any need to combine it with Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits.

The only reason Huang Yikun believed what he did was that the president of the Seven Sect Coalition only received a scrap of enlightenment of Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits. Otherwise there would be no need to combine it with anything else. Based on what Xu Qing knew, Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits was about being utterly domineering. Combining it with some other technique made it completely soulless.

Seeing that Xu Qing hadn’t said a single word, Huang Yikun laughed coldly in his heart.

“You’re probably not convinced,” he said. “You probably think I’m not worthy of your loyalty. Well, I don’t expect an answer from you immediately. In a few days, I’m going to challenge all three highnesses from the Seventh Peak.”

He stood, clasped his hands behind his back, and slowly walked past Xu Qing as he continued, “Remember, Xu Qing, it will only be a few more days before I issue that challenge. Once it’s over, and you’ve seen me defeat all three highnesses, I’ll come back. Then you can give me your answer. This is your destined opportunity. You’re on your own now.”

Without sparing a backward glance, Huang Yikun left the Violent Crimes Division and strolled off into the evening.

After he was gone, the Captain’s voice rang out, sounding very happy. “Hahaha! Things are always the funnest around you, little Ah Qing. When I saw that guy chortling around on his way here, I had to come see the show. How could I ever have guessed that I would get to see such a lovely treasure! This is the first time I’ve ever run into anyone that likes to show off so brazenly.... What an unexpected but pleasant surprise. I’m really not used to this. It took a lot of effort not to break off one of those fingers right here and now.”

“I think you mean it took a lot of effort not to bite?one off, right?” Xu Qing said calmly.

“Director Xu, as the grand highness of the Seventh Peak, I have to give you some constructive criticism. Is that really the way to talk to a grand highness?” Another bite disappeared from the apple.

Xu Qing looked down at the Captain’s shadow.

It revealed a limp, hobbling figure, with a somewhat swollen head. It looked like the shadow of someone who had been beaten up violently.

After a moment of silence, Xu Qing said, “Captain, did you get into some trouble recently?”

The apple went still. “Are you kidding? No way! After I went invisible that one time, I just got used to it. Well, I think we’re done here. Huang Yikun is going to challenge the Seventh Peak, huh? I need to go chat this over with Second Sib and Third Sib.”

As he spoke, the apple floated toward the exit. But then it stopped. “Oh right, little Ah Qing. I actually came to tell you something. As you know, the Seven Sect Coalition sent their chosen to challenge all the mountain peaks in Seven Blood Eyes. Though it seems like we’re on the losing side, which is a bit humiliating, everything is going according to the old codgers’ plans.

“They want the ordinary disciples to feel animosity toward the Seven Sect Coalition, and at the same time, weed out disciples who aren’t loyal. So don’t even think of running off. Otherwise, when the time comes for my big upcoming plan, I’d be forced to go out looking for you, and that would be far too annoying.”

After the apple was a good distance away from the Violent Crimes Division, a flicker of surprise could be seen on the Captain’s bruised and swollen face.

Can he really see me? There’s no way. The old man gave me this invisibility treasure, and throughout all the years, no one has ever seen through it other than a few sect uncles and the patriarch. It’s impossible to see through it. Totally impossible....

The Captain gritted his teeth in pain.

Sixth Sect Uncle is too vicious, that rotten fogey. All I did was bite a statue! Does that really deserve a beating like this...? As soon as I got back, the first thing he did was drag me over and thrash me.

Viciously taking a bite out of his apple, the Captain hurried on his way.

Back in the Violent Crimes Division, Xu Qing was lost in thought. What the Captain had just told him fell right in line with his previous suppositions. Obviously, the sect was waiting for something.

Are they just buying time??Eventually, he put such thoughts aside. It wasn’t his place to worry about those things. Going back into the cell block, he went back to work on his cultivation.

Days passed. After the big Night Dove crackdown, the rest of the Night Dove forces in the city did their best to stay in hiding. At the same time, the Violent Crimes Division prepared for an even bigger crackdown. The purpose was to track down any Night Dove operatives that had slipped through the cracks. However, there were things that needed to happen first.

And one of them was a curfew!

“Seven Blood Eyes is instituting a curfew for one month. Any suspicious people found lurking around at night will be arrested.

“At the same time, the Violent Crimes Divisions from all the mountain peaks will raid any Night Dove safe houses in their jurisdictions.

“The time has come to get justice for all of our fallen comrades. Night Dove is going to be destroyed! Constables can keep any loot they find. The divisions issue the order, the bureaus carry out the commands, and the squads execute judgment. Let the final operation against Night Dove begin!”

After Xu Qing issued the orders, all seven of the Violent Crimes Divisions fell upon the capital city like fiends. Slaughter spread, and blood sprayed left and right.

Violent Crimes constables were everywhere on the streets. Following the orders from the division, they went to all Night Dove safehouses and either killed or arrested the operatives there. Miserable screams and agonized shrieks rang out. In some cases, the Night Dove operatives ran out onto the street, only to be chased down by Violent Crimes constables.

Occasionally, constables would shoot signal fireworks up into the air to request backup. When that happened, the vice-directors would answer the call. If they couldn't handle the situation, their commanding director would step in. If a director ran into trouble, he would send a request to Xu Qing, who would assume responsibility.

However, during the night the operation was carried out, Xu Qing never had to step in. And that was because Yanyan had taken the initiative to join the operation. She had a huge octopus to help her, and it crushed anything in its path. Whenever a signal shot up into the air, she and her octopus would race to the scene. When she showed up, she would always offer the same explanation.

“There's no need to bother Big Bro Xu Qing with something as trivial as this. When you have a chance, let him know that I came to help out.”

On one occasion in which she rescued the new vice-director from the Seventh Peak, who was a one-flame cultivator, he clasped hands to express his gratitude.

“Many thanks, Your Majesty Yanyan.”

Upon hearing that, Yanyan's eyebrows shot up. “I'm your director's fiancée! Call me Sister-in-Law!”

The vice-director was absolutely stunned. Clasping hands hesitantly, he said, “Many thanks, Sister-in-Law!”

Yanyan smiled happily, then tossed him a precious medicinal pill.

“Rest up. My husband is the director of the Violent Crimes Division. Since I'm the lady of the house, it's only natural that I take care of the underlings. It was no trouble at all.” Just then, Yanyan spotted another signal flare, and raced off in that direction.[1]

Chapter 235: Amazing Developments

The slaughter was carried out through the night. It was a war between the Violent Crimes Division and Night Dove. All of the visiting nonhumans and allies were watching very closely.

The reality was... because of the Violent Crimes Division's curfew, the slaughter was even more dramatic. Meanwhile, word about 'Sister-in-Law Yanyan' quickly spread through Violent Crimes. Before long, everyone knew that if you simply addressed her as Sister-in-Law, she would give you medicinal pills and sometimes even spirit stones. Whenever true danger arose, she would be the first to show up on her octopus. Not even a Gold Core cultivator could stand up to her. Because of Yanyan helping, there were very few casualties in the Violent Crimes Division.

The opposite was true for Night Dove. Their casualties were shocking. Over 4,000 Night Dove operatives from all over South Phoenix were snared in the crackdown, and virtually all of them were either captured or had their heads hung on the city wall.

By dawn, the city was functioning as usual. However, there were many locations where blood was still splattered on the streets. Because of the slaughter, the Violent Crimes Division became the talk of the sect.

Most Night Dove operatives were Qi Condensation cultivators, but it was the same with Violent Crimes. However, to the visiting nonhumans, though the Seven Blood Eyes disciples were mostly low-level cultivators, they were also like venomous bugs in a jar, and were brutal down to their core.

That brutality caused many of the nonhumans and allies to look more highly on Seven Blood Eyes. That was especially true when you considered that, if the low-level disciples like this climbed the ranks, then the high-level disciples would be even more impressive. After all, only the ultimate wolf could rise to the top of the pack. At the same time, many onlookers were planning on keeping a close eye on Xu Qing.

However, Xu Qing was simply too skilled at maintaining a low profile. After his fight with Sima Ling, he never showed his face in public, and rarely even left the Violent Crimes Division cell block. Thus, people had a hard time observing him.

What was more, thanks to Yanyan taking part in the night crackdown, Xu Qing didn't need to lift a finger.

He wasn't sure what to make of the situation with her. She had come looking for him on numerous occasions recently, but he had always refused to see her. Eventually, she'd given up, and he'd assumed she wouldn't bother him again. As such, it had been a complete surprise to find out she was suddenly helping with the fight against Night Dove. He obviously heard about what she was telling everyone. But considering how much help she was providing, he decided not to bicker over such things.

Right now, he was waiting for his final two dharma apertures to open. Then he could ignite his third life flame. He also wanted to see how powerful his next generation of black beetles were.

Furthermore, he wanted to wait for the Violent Crimes Division to continue tightening the net on Night Dove, and eventually figure out where their main headquarters was. When that happened, he would finally take action.

Thus, Xu Qing remained out of sight, working on improving his battle prowess and cultivation base.

It wasn't possible to raid all of the Night Dove safe houses in a single night. The process continued over multiple nights.

As that happened, the Seazombies finally paid their wartime reparations!

Marquis An of the Seazombies, who had a Nascent Soul cultivation base, arrived in the city, where he would remain for a full sixty-year-cycle, with only one chance to ever go outside. Along with him came the Gold Core boy Ying Ling, as well as... Vastworld, who would serve as a royal hostage. [1]

Vastworld had no desire to come to Seven Blood Eyes, but he had no choice, as only someone in the Seazombie echelon could serve as a royal hostage. His heart overflowed with humiliation and madness, but he had to endure it. At the same time, he hated Xu Qing down to his bones, but couldn't do anything about it.

The arrival of the Seazombies sent the sect's celebration into a fever pitch. Bells filled the air, and Sir Bloodsmelter's face appeared in the dome of heaven, looking down on everything below.

The peaklords appeared, representing Seven Blood Eyes to receive the Seazombie procession. Countless nonhumans and Seven Blood Eyes disciples looked on as the humiliated Seazombie Marquis An handed over the official documents of surrender, as well as the reparations. He also provided a jade slip with the dao oaths of the Seazombies in the Gold Core level and higher.

Finally, the Seazombies in their ancestral land... began preparations to send their zombie ancestor divine likenesses to Seven Blood Eyes. There were still two peaklords stationed in the Seazombie ancestral land, and they were taking the lead in the process. The primary work involved moving the statues from their original positions to a huge teleportation portal.

The entire purpose of that portal was to send the statues to Seven Blood Eyes as battle trophies.

Although it was common knowledge that removing the divine likenesses from Seazombie territory would cause them to lose their special properties, they were still precious to the Seazombies, and thus, it made sense that Seven Blood Eyes wanted them. Anyone else in their position would do the same thing.

Because of the great distance involved, and because Seven Blood Eyes didn't want to make an intermediary stop in the Merfolk Isles, they were building a special teleportation portal to ensure that the statues would go directly to South Phoenix. When the actual teleportation itself occurred, it would happen quickly. According to calculations made by various individuals, the statues would arrive... right when the celebration was ending.

The event became a spectacle that everyone was paying attention to. What was more, the challenges being issued by the Seven Sect Coalition temporarily stopped.

Now that the Seazombies had paid their reparations, the wartime rewards were finally being distributed. With that reward, and the amount Xu Qing had received from Sima Ling, he was unprecedentedly rich.

He felt much more happy than normal, and it wasn't just him. All the disciples who had taken part in the war got their rewards. As a result, everyone was buying cultivation resources and supplies to improve battle prowess.

However, that joy only lasted for a few days, until the Seven Sect Coalition started issuing challenges again.

This time, the challenges didn't just come from the chosen. With the exception of Huang Yikun from the Dark Serenity Sect, all of the other chosen had come with retinues that included dao protectors and other outstanding individuals from their sects. Such people weren't as famous as the chosen, and thus, they started issuing challenges to disciples who didn't rank among the highnesses. Though both sides had wins and losses, the Seven Sect Coalition usually came out on top.

No one challenged Xu Qing.

Because of all the Night Dove safe houses that were being raided, and how many operatives were being arrested, Xu Qing was getting close to opening his 89th dharma aperture. After buying a vast quantity of poisonous plants, he was starting to experiment with concocting the taboo poison pill. At the same time, he had successfully produced a third generation of black beetles. The third generation only had six beetles in it. They were so few in number it wasn't possible to see them. The only reason Xu Qing would sense them was the resonance between them and his blood. Furthermore, the third generation were very faintly colored, and were also much smaller than before. That said, the effects of their poison was more dramatic, and they had also picked up some of the characteristics of the taboo poison pill.

Treating the six beetles like precious treasures, Xu Qing carefully inserted them into some Night Dove cultivators to feed. This time, he changed his feeding method by infusing the Night Dove operatives' bodies with all sorts of medicinal and poison plants for the benefit of the third generation. Xu Qing went about it all in a very academic fashion. He observed things carefully and kept careful notes. He was very pleased whenever he saw good results.

That said, to the Night Dove cultivators in the cell block, life was like a living hell. All of them had done cruel things in the past, but as far as they were concerned, they couldn't hold a candle to Xu Qing. They had inflicted sadistic punishment on disobedient living treasures, and had even toyed with them in various perverted ways. Therefore what was happening... was just the cycle of karma.

Bloodcurdling screams echoed out of the cell block, over and over again. Although the Violent Crimes constables had grown used to the situation, none of them dared to get too close.

Furthermore, because Xu Qing was in charge of this Night Dove operation, and because of how he had crushed Sima Ling and set up the curfew, things were different. It wasn't like before, when the other Violent Crimes Divisions wouldn't give him prisoners after he ran out. The other Violent Crimes Divisions sent him new prisoners on a daily basis. Beyond all that, the capital city was currently locked down, so the Night Dove operatives couldn't flee. They could only hide and wait to be arrested.

It was easy to imagine how stunning of a loss this was going to be for Night Dove's operations on South Phoenix.

Xu Qing's research was bringing results. What was more, he wasn't wasting any of the Night Dove operatives' souls. Though the souls were weak, there were a lot of them, and he used every single one to help with his dharma apertures.

Because of the screams coming out of the cell block, it wasn't long before people all through the city were talking about how vicious he was.

Master Shengyun stood in the middle of a huge fighting arena on the First Peak. Voice cool, he said, "You're all weak. Too weak."

He sounded disappointed. Shockingly, eight of the First Peak's highnesses were sprawled on the ground at his feet. Wu Jianwu was one of them. All had pale faces, and were coughing up blood. They looked shaken as they stared up at Master Shengyun, who looked spectacular bathed in the moonlight.

His seven-colored umbrella seemed to block out the sky, and the chanting of the wind echoed everywhere. Behind him was the green-bodied red-tailed ravagemist bird, its head thrown back as it let loose a piercing cry, dark winds sweeping left and right around it.

Not too far away was the First Peak's grand highness, who had just emerged from seclusion. His face was pale, and there was blood at the corners of his mouth. He had just broken through to the Gold Core level, but before he had a chance to stabilize his heavenly palace, he had to come out and fight. There was no other option, as the stabilization process would take too long, and he had no basis upon which to ask for more time.

The First Peak... had been routed by Master Shengyun.

The grand highness lost, but what was even more humiliating was that Master Shengyun had demanded that all nine highnesses fight him at once. They all lost. It was just too difficult of a fight.

"This place is boring," Master Shengyun said, his face expressionless. For a moment, he looked over at the Seventh Peak, but then he shook his head. Turning, he flew off the First Peak and headed in the direction of Forbidden by the Phoenix. His three dao protectors followed him dutifully. "The little sparrow knows not to stick his head out. He's not stupid after all. Well, I just hope he grows up soon. That way, he can make a delicious snack sooner rather than later."

As Master Shengyun disappeared over the horizon, the moon shone down on the Seventh Peak, where Huang Yikun from the Dark Serenity Sect walked haughtily up the stairs.

"Today, I, Huang Yikun, hereby challenge the Seventh Peak!"

Chapter 236: The Loving Seventh Peak

At long last, a chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition had come to challenge the Seventh Peak, which up to this point, remained unchallenged.

The person to do it was Huang Yikun from the Dark Serenity Sect! He wore his violet robe inlaid with gold, and as the moonlight shone on him, he looked unusually extravagant. His expression was haughty as all four of his life flames burned brightly, as though he had an entire world burning

within him. Especially noteworthy was his red glove, which bent light toward it, such that all the moonlight in the area seemed to sweep toward his hand. All of it made him seem like the most dignified and imposing thing on the Seventh Peak.

“So this is the miserable Seventh Peak? Pitiful.”

He slowly walked up the stairs, looking like he was merely going for a walk on a moonlit night. That said, he had an odd feeling. The Seventh Peak seemed too quiet and peaceful. There were no lamps lighting the path, and he didn't detect any disciples about. It was as if the entire mountain was empty.

It was very different from how the challenges had gone on other mountain peaks. From what he had been told, there had always been lots of disciples present to watch things play out. He had sent a formal letter of challenge earlier, and had expected crowds to show up to watch. But at the moment, not a single person could be seen.

“They must be sore losers who can't stand being beaten in public.” Huang Yikun sneered as he reached the halfway point up the mountain and slowly took off the glove. That was the location where his first challenge was supposed to be met.

The Seventh Peak's third highness.

Huang Yikun had planned things out carefully. He was going to start with the third highness, then go to the second, and finally end the night's fighting with the grand highness.

And now, at long last, he saw someone.

It was a young man on a boulder, leaning up against the bosom of a beautiful woman.

He wore a violet daoist robe, and had a tall white hat, upon which was embroidered the character 'forbidden.' He looked unhealthily skinny, as though he was drained from enjoying too much wine and women. He was none other than Third Highness, surrounded by a handful of nonhuman handmaidens who were all massaging him, all the while giving him flirtatious looks and moaning softly....

Upon noticing Huang Yikun, Third Highness looked up; the dark circles under his eyes were clearly visible as he smiled broadly. “You're finally here. I've been waiting for so long!”

Huang Yikun stopped walking and looked at him. Something really seemed off here, and thus, a look of extreme caution appeared in Huang Yikun's eyes. He just now realized that he couldn't assess the third highness at all. The 'forbidden' character on his hat seemed to be a sealing mark, and for some reason, it caused a chill to run down Huang Yikun's back. He felt like he was being stared at by a viper. And that look imparted a sense of deadly crisis. He usually only got that feeling from dharma protectors, and it caused him to struggle to control his breathing. Then he glanced at the handmaidens, and realized that he recognized the one upon whose bosom the third highness lay.

His eyes widened. This girl... was a chosen cultivator from the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society! She was one of the three who had come to visit Seven Blood Eyes recently, and she had a four-flame cultivation base. However, she didn't seem icily arrogant when she looked at the third highness. Instead, she seemed cute and even adoring. [1]

Huang Yikun inhaled sharply. He suddenly got the feeling that he had been negligent in issuing his challenge. Taking a few steps back, he chuckled dryly.

“I’m actually not fully prepared tonight. Let’s forgo the duel. I’ll take my leave now.”

He turned to leave. But then, Third Highness suddenly vanished from where he had been laying and appeared right in front of Huang Yikun, whose arm he grabbed.

The speed with which he moved was so incredible that Huang Yikun’s pupils constricted. And the fact that he had grabbed his arm caused Huang Yikun’s face to fall. Most alarming of all was that Huang Yikun was powerless to resist. He was a scrawny chicken compared to this person! Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead.

“What are you doing?” he said.

“Calm down,” Third Highness replied, smiling. “How much money did you bring with you?”

Huang Yikun’s jaw dropped.

Third Highness looked back at him, eyebrows dancing. “You’re quite the shifty character, aren’t you? Okay, fine. Let me explain. I doubt you can beat me in a fight. But I know you’ve worked hard over in the Dark Serenity Sect. Since we’re all on the same side, we shouldn’t give each other a hard time. Therefore, let’s talk business. I’m not going to try to scam you. The going rate is 10,000,000 spirit stones. Pay that, and I’ll admit defeat. Don’t worry, I’ll make it look really good. You can go out and tell everyone I lost to you. You can even record some images for proof. Just like that, you’ll be free to go. Sound good?”

Huang Yikun’s eyes went wide, and without even thinking about it, he shook his head.

Third Highness was smiling as though he were in the middle of a business negotiation. Even upon seeing Huang Yikun shake his head, he continued to smile. However, the words he spoke next caused Huang Yikun to reel.

“You don’t agree? That’s fine, we can still negotiate. Those are some nice-looking fingers you have. You can pay your debt with one of those.”

Before Huang Yikun could even struggle, a cracking sound rang out as Third Highness ripped off one of his fingers....

A miserable shriek rang out of Huang Yikun’s mouth. Then, Third Highness waved his hand, and a massive force slammed into Huang Yikun, sending him flying backward until he slammed down onto the stairs. When he landed, blood sprayed out of his mouth, and his ashen face filled with astonishment. Just when he was about to look back over his shoulder, Third Highness’s chuckling voice reached his ears.

“You win. Now, let me see you out.”

Shivering, Huang Yikun looked down at his dazzling hand. Instead of five fingers, he now had four; intense humiliation swept through him.

“This is outright robbery!!” he blurted. He was so furious that his vision swam. And when he thought about how he had put a lifetime of work and resources into those five fingers, only to have lost one in an instant, his heart dripped with figurative blood. That said... he didn't dare demand it back. Third Highness was simply too terrifying.

Boiling with rage, he was just about to fly off into the night when he remembered that flying was prohibited on the mountain peaks in Seven Blood Eyes. Feeling more forlorn than ever, he realized he would have to walk all the way down. He had no desire to stay on the Seventh Peak any longer...

However, along the way, he ran into someone.

Sitting cross-legged on a stone bench was a tall young woman. She wasn't just tall. She was so well-built that her muscles seemed to ripple with explosive power. It was even possible to see veins snaking across her skin. Stabbed into the ground next to her was a gigantic greatsword that was terrifying to behold. It was about three meters tall and a third of a meter wide. Pitch black, it emanated a horrifyingly baleful aura. This was the second person Huang Yikun had written a formal letter of challenge to. The Seventh Peak's second highness.

Seeing her sitting there, Huang Yikun's heart skipped a beat and he stopped walking. The moment he did, Second Highness opened her eyes, looked at him coldly, and then erupted with a towering power of energy and blood that formed a tempest around her.

Her fleshly body is a half step into the Gold Core level!!!?When the wind brushed against him, his dharma apertures quivered. This second highness seemed exceptionally vicious. Huang Yikun was scared out of his mind. How could this be happening? Is she even human? Is this some freaking nonhuman innate ability? Some body cultivation thing? I didn't even think you could reach this level with the fleshly body. This isn't the power of a life flame. She's not nourishing her fleshly body with her dharma apertures. This is straight body refinement!! I've never even heard of someone in the Seven Sect Coalition doing something like this!

Huang Yikun shivered as Second Highness approached, surrounded by a tempest of energy and blood. Already, Huang Yikun knew that there was no way he could beat her in a fight.

“Wait a second, I—”

Before he could finish speaking, she was upon him, her greatsword swinging through the air.

Intense booms rang out. After the time it takes an incense stick to burn, Huang Yikun slammed into the ground some distance away, blood spraying from his mouth, his body covered with bruises. Though rage filled him, he didn't dare do anything but flee.

His right hand was missing another finger. Now he only had three left.

At the summit of the Seventh Peak, inside a building, two figures sat across from each other. It was Master Seventh and his servant, both of whom were watching events unfold.

After a while, Master Seventh sighed. “As usual, Third Sib is just trying to make some money. He's willing to debase himself just to get some stupid finger!

“And Second Sib. Well. All she knows how to do is be reckless... Ai. At least she’s lucky. Last month she sent me a message. She said she ran into one of the Pengbird people, a Gold Core expert who specialized in fleshly body cultivation. He was just flying along when Flame Phoenix happened to be passing by and ran into him. The Pengbird fell out of the sky, dead. As a result, Second Sib just so happened to get his gold core and consume it before it exploded. Thus, she achieved a breakthrough.... She didn’t suspect anything, but let me ask you. Do you?”

The servant was shocked inside, but didn’t say a word.

Huang Yikun raced urgently down the stairs, coughing up blood. When he looked at his remaining three dazzling fingers, he wanted to weep.

I shouldn’t have issued those challenges. These people are vicious bullies! A fleshly body half a step into Gold Core? Even in the freaking Seven Sect Coalition nobody would dare to challenge someone like that. I admitted defeat, but she still beat me up!

These Seventh Peak highnesses are all villains. And they’re profoundly deceptive. I couldn’t even assess that viper of a third highness. If you said he was in Gold Core, I’d believe it. And that second highness is just downright terrifying. Each one ripped off one of my fingers!!!

Enraged, bruised, and humiliated, Huang Yikun finally reached the foot of the mountain. He was just about to leave when he looked up and saw a young man on the path in front of him.

The young man wore a gray robe and was eating an apple. Waving, he smiled. “Yikun! What are you doing here? Oh, did Second Sib beat you up?”

“Who are you?” Huang Yikun said, shivering as he realized that this person in front of him seemed even more terrifying than the third and second highnesses. In fact, when looking into his eyes, he almost didn’t seem like a human, but rather, like a grue wearing human skin as clothing.

The Captain looked in surprise at Huang Yikun. “You don’t recognize me? I’m good friends with your older brother Huang Lingfei. He never mentioned me?”

Seeing how nervous Huang Yikun was, the Captain sighed. Putting an expression on his face that made it seem like he wanted to join forces to fight a common enemy, he said, “Calm down. You got beat up by both Second Sib and Third Sib, huh? Those two are out of control.”

The Captain shook his head and took out a few medicinal pills.

Huang Yikun cautiously accepted them. He wanted to just keep walking, but at the same time, he didn’t dare. He had already guessed who this person was.

“Grand Highness?”

“You don’t have to call me that,” the Captain said with a brilliant smile. “It’s too formal. Just call me Eldest Brother. You see, I’m very different from Second Sib, Third Sib, and that other guy.”

“Eldest Brother...” Huang Yikun murmured hesitantly.

“That’s better! Now, don’t worry. I’ll escort you down the mountain. Come on.”

Trembling, Huang Yikun said, “No, that’s okay. I can see myself—”

“Oh, sure thing. I won’t?escort you down. But, one more thing. Those medicinal pills I just gave you are expensive. I hate to be a pain, Junior Brother, but can you give me one of your fingers to compensate?”

The Captain licked his lips, and a blue light flashed in his eyes. Within his pupils it was just barely possible to see an image of his face, eyes closed, but expression incomparably hungry.

When Huang Yikun sensed the immense hunger coming from the Captain, he was filled with the profound urge to flee. As the Captain took a step forward, Huang Yikun took a step back. But before he could even begin fleeing, his vision swam, and then he heard a cracking sound. Now he had two fingers instead of three.

The Captain had bitten a finger off.

The pain prompted Huang Yikun to scream in agony and run for his life.

Watching him go, the Captain chewed on the violet-gold finger. Smiling faintly, he murmured, “That kid wasn’t fun at all. Definitely not like our little Ah Qing.”

Atop the mountain peak, Master Seventh watched everything play out, then nodded in satisfaction. “Of all my apprentices, Big Sib is the most reasonable.”

The servant wasn’t sure what to say. How exactly had Grand Highness been reasonable...?

“That said,” Master Seventh continued, “it’s not exactly fair. Big Sib, Second Sib, and Third Sib all got fingers. But Fourth Sib didn’t get anything.” He waved his hand.

As the terrified Huang Yikun raced away from the Captain in terror, a wild wind suddenly swept him up. Scared witless, he could do nothing as he was tossed in the direction of Harbor 176. A moment later, he slammed onto the ground in front of the main entrance of the Violent Crimes Division there. As his head spun and his vision swam, and before he could even get his bearings, he heard the crisp, clear voice of a young woman speaking curiously.

“Who are you? Why’d you jump out in front of me? Are you trying to ambush me? Hmph! People who sneak around are always up to no good. Crush him, Stinker!”

All of a sudden, Huang Yikun was seeing things crystal clear, and a sense of extremely disturbing danger filled his mind. However, he had no time to flee.

A huge tentacle appeared, backed by Gold Core might that could crush any obstacle. As the tentacle wrapped around him, the Gold Core aura caused blood to spray out of his mouth, and then he lapsed into unconsciousness.

In his last moments of lucidity, he heard the voice of that young girl speaking into his ear.

“Not bad. Not bad at all. I’ll give this guy to Big Bro Xu Qing to experiment on.”

Chapter 237: Having Eyes for Someone

In the Violent Crimes Division cell block, Xu Qing was hunched over a Night Dove cultivator, trying to figure out why a certain poisonous plant had caused such a change in color to his black beetles.

If I can figure out the reason, I should be able to counteract the medicinal effect, and then use that to make the beetles a bit tougher.

Bloodcurdling screams rang out constantly, but that didn't influence Xu Qing's studying. He was completely focused. After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, he extracted the dead cultivator's soul. He looked like he might have some inspiration, but only a moment later, he frowned and looked at the door.

It opened, revealing the bashful face of a beautiful young woman. She looked to be about sixteen or seventeen years old, and wore a green jerkin. She had dimples when she smiled, and her fair hands were as delicate as jade. Wrapped around her right forearm was a little octopus. She was none other than Yanyan.

The octopus glared briefly at Xu Qing, then looked away, feigning as if it hadn't noticed him.

"Big Bro Xu Qing," she said happily in greeting. Rushing in, she glanced at the opened-up corpse, and her eyes lit up. "Big Bro Xu Qing, I don't want to interrupt. I'll just watch from the side, okay?"

Xu Qing frowned again, and opened his mouth to say no.

Seeing that he was about to refuse her request, Yanyan quickly said, "Big Bro Xu Qing, I just caught a criminal! I was hoping to learn a thing or two from you. Or maybe we could have fun together!"

At the same time, the octopus blew out a bubble, which floated off to the side and rapidly expanded in size. Inside the bubble was Huang Yikun. As soon as he appeared, countless tiny black beetles began to quietly swarm around the bubble. It seemed as though it would only take a word from Xu Qing, and they would immediately start burrowing into Huang Yikun's flesh.

Xu Qing recognized Huang Yikun and also noticed all of his fresh wounds. Before, he had five dazzling fingers, but now only the thumb and pinky finger remained. The other three were gone, such that his hand now resembled the character 六.

An odd expression appeared on Xu Qing's face. Then he noticed the black beetles seemed to be behaving oddly. An unusual gleam flickered in his eyes as he looked at Huang Yikun's hair.

As for Huang Yikun, he was now regaining consciousness, and at first he looked confused. But then he looked around and saw Xu Qing. He didn't say anything. He thought back to the things he'd said to Xu Qing only a few days ago, and then everything he'd experienced this night. He suddenly felt an unprecedented sensation of grief and indignation. Of course, he wanted to struggle free and escape, but there was no way for him to do so. Huang Yikun had no desire to speak.

But Xu Qing did. "So, you went and challenged the Seventh Peak?"

Huang Yikun shivered. He still didn't want to say anything, but then he looked around at the blood-soaked scene around him, and all the corpses with grotesque anguish on their faces. The mere thought of going through a night of torment caused his heart to weaken, and terror filled his eyes as he looked at Xu Qing and Yanyan.

It got worse when Yanyan started talking again.

“Big Bro Xu Qing, this is a really bad guy. He jumped out of midair and tried to ambush me. Oh, right. Forget about him, Big Bro Xu Qing. How come you never invited me here? I've been so bored lately. Anyway, after watching you have so much fun, I came up with some fun stuff of my own.”

Yanyan waved her hand, causing a large number of medicinal pill bottles to appear in front of her, within which were all sorts of poisons. Along with them was a huge wooden rack, which thumped down onto the ground. Astonishingly, the rack was filled with all sorts of bladed tools. Some were curved, some were straight. Some were long, some were short, and some had corkscrew shapes. There were dozens altogether, and they even included some metal hooks and various sawed instruments.

Xu Qing looked at the collection.

“Look how prepared I am, Big Bro Xu Qing. Why don't we apply the poison first, then cut out his dharma apertures and see what they look like? Also, how do we make his screams sound really good? Like the last few hundred of your test subjects?”

Yanyan's voice was so sweet and clear that one would expect her words to be equally charming. Instead, it was the complete opposite. What was more, her clear eyes, arching eyebrows, and fluttering eyelashes made it seem like she was very, very happy.

When Huang Yikun took all of that in, his heart started pounding. He looked at all the bladed instruments, then at Yanyan, and finally at Xu Qing, who was standing there looking thoughtful, and he suddenly wondered if he was in hell on earth.

“What do you think, Big Bro Xu Qing? It's a good idea, right?” Reaching over, Yanyan started picking through the bladed instruments as if looking for the perfect one. At the same time, she looked out of the corner of her eye and fawningly continued, “Where do we start, Big Bro Xu Qing? What if we cut out his tongue first? I'm thinking that might make his screams sound a bit better.”

Huang Yikun was tightly restrained, yet he was still shaking violently, and the terror in his eyes was so intense it had reached the point of being in despair. He was absolutely convinced that Yanyan was just outright insane, and that there were no limits to what she would do. He suddenly looked at Xu Qing with an ingratiating expression. As of now, he was convinced that this place was far more horrifying than the Seventh Peak.

“Where do we start, Big Bro Xu Qing?”

Yanyan bit her bottom lip and stared at Xu Qing. Her fair skin was a bit flushed, and her tender, rose petal lips were so delicate it seemed like they might start bleeding at any moment.

Xu Qing looked at her placidly. When she had suddenly started helping out the Violent Crimes Division, she had been overstepping her bounds, but he had let it slide. As for how she'd dragged Huang Yikun into the cell block, he was actually intrigued. Huang Yikun clearly had wounds from a very big sword, and he also had bite marks on his hand. That alone made it obvious he had challenged the Seventh Peak. He had heard the loud thump earlier, which seemed to indicate someone had thrown Huang Yikun over to the Violent Crimes Division. There had to be a reason that Huang Yikun had been able to leave the very pragmatic Seventh Peak with two of his fingers.

Xu Qing had a guess as to why. For one thing, it didn't seem likely that the Captain and the others from the Seventh Peak would throw a poisoned Huang Yikun to him. There was no need for that. But Huang Yikun indeed had been poisoned. It was on his hair.

Xu Qing had seen this type of poison before. It was basically the same kind that the young merfolk prince had used on him, except this one was designed to attract other poisonous creatures.

Furthermore, this was a much higher level of poison. Anyone who got within nine meters of him would be infected by it.

It was very hard to detect. In fact, it was only because of the strange behavior of the beetles that Xu Qing noticed it. At the moment, he couldn't even be completely sure of the precise effects of the poison. But based on his skill with plants and vegetation, he was certain that the poison would make it possible to track down and observe whoever had been infected by it.

Given all that, he now wanted to know who had put the poison on Huang Yikun. Obviously, Yanyan was the biggest suspect. Although Yanyan had seemingly surrendered, based on everything she'd said, Xu Qing felt... that there was no way that the black-garbed young woman who had attacked him so ruthlessly would be cowed so easily. Therefore, he didn't believe anything she said.

"Why aren't you saying anything, Big Bro Xu Qing?" She was now biting her lip so hard that blood seeped out, though that only made her bewitching face even more beautiful.

Xu Qing's expression remained the same as ever as his hand suddenly shot out and latched onto her throat. The move was so sudden, and so forceful, that bruises immediately appeared on her fair skin.

Pulling her close to him, he slowly said, "The reason I didn't kill you isn't because you have a nice grandma, but rather because you haven't crossed my bottom line. If you keep this up, you will."

Yanyan shivered, and the little octopus looked like it was ready to peel off her arm. Before it could, she quickly projected a message to it with divine will. "Don't do anything rash, Stinker."

Though Xu Qing was holding her tightly by the throat, she managed to force her head down, then stick out her tongue and lick Xu Qing's wrist.

Xu Qing frowned and threw her off to the side. She slammed into the wall and fell to the ground, blood oozing out of the corners of her mouth. And as she looked at him, it was impossible to read the look in her eyes.

"Oooh, that's right, Big Bro Xu Qing. This is the version of you I like the most. You changed before, and I wasn't happy about that. And when I'm not happy with you,

then I want to kill you. I knew you'd notice that poison, and knew how you'd react. It's exactly what I wanted to see."

Off to the side, Huang Yikun saw all this and started trembling even harder.

Yanyan was definitely off in the head. That had become clearly apparent to Xu Qing thanks to her glazed eyes and everything else she'd done had made it all clear. Glaring coldly at Yanyan for a moment, he then looked back at the trembling Huang Yikun and his two remaining fingers.

Huang Yikun shivered in grief; he was certain he knew what was going to happen next.

However, the person to take action wasn't Xu Qing. It was actually Yanyan. She flew across the room, and then two cracking sounds rang out as she ripped off Huang Yikun's thumb and pinky finger. Then she offered them obsequiously to Xu Qing.

To Huang Yikun's sorrow, he was actually getting used to this process. It didn't hurt as much this time.

Xu Qing took the fingers and looked coldly at Yanyan.

She could read the look in his eyes. Quickly backing up to put distance between them, she put her finger into her mouth and bit down hard, causing blood to flow. Trembling, she extended her finger to Xu Qing, her eyes filled with anticipation.

"Have a taste, Big Bro Xu Qing."

"Not interested," he replied coolly. He waved his hand, causing Huang Yikun to tumble into a nearby jail cell. At the same time, his ring of holding flew into Xu Qing's hands.

Sima Ling wasn't imprisoned in this location, which meant that Huang Yikun was the only chosen here. He had obviously been sneaking around the sect, and the punishment for breaking curfew was imprisonment.

Having accomplished these things, Xu Qing went back to his beetle research. He really wanted to raise his current generation of beetles to a higher level.

Meanwhile, Yanyan sat on the floor in a W position, sucking her finger and watching Xu Qing. Slowly, a happy smile spread across her face. [1]

Unbeknownst to them, up in the building on the summit of the Seventh Peak, Master Seventh had been watching. He saw everything Yanyan did, as well as Xu Qing's reaction. Now, an approving smile covered his face.

"Fourth Sib did great. I like his style. He reminds me of me, back in the day."

Upon hearing this, the servant bowed his head and said nothing. Inside, he was musing that Master Seventh certainly didn't seem to be on par with the Kid in terms of style. After all, there were a lot of female disciples who seemed to really like the Kid, whereas Master Seventh.... Well, the patriarch's daughter was a vice-peaklord, and she had been back in the sect for days now, yet hadn't

gone to see Master Seventh a single time. Deep conflict between daoist partners wasn't something that 'style' could remedy.

Chapter 238: Life Flames Illuminate Heavenly Palaces!

It was early morning. After a night of experimentation, Xu Qing now had three bottles in front of him that he was very pleased with.

He had done many, many tests to reach this point. It was the ninth generation of beetles. At this point, they definitely weren't black. They were semitransparent. In terms of the comparative reduction in size between the previous generation and this generation, it was like the difference between an egg and a peanut. Considering that the previous black beetles hadn't been visible to the naked eye, it made it even more clear how hard it would be to detect the new versions. If it weren't for the fact that Xu Qing's blood was connected to them, then even he would have a hard time spotting them, let alone other people.

In addition to that, the beetles' poison was vastly stronger than before. That was the result of the immense amounts of money he had spent to buy poisonous plants. When these beetles entered the body of an enemy and started chewing away and releasing poison, the damage would be many times greater than before.

It was the same with the mutagen. The beetles were very tough as well, thanks to the repeated exposure to the poison pill. In fact, that exposure ensured that the ninth generation of beetles had a very strong life force. It was so strong that they could survive inside of the taboo poison pill for several dozen breaths of time.

It's too bad they're not very intelligent. Otherwise, I might be able to get them to feign death. That would be a really good ability. They still haven't reached the point I want them to reach.... I really need them to be able to reproduce inside the poison pill. Until that happens, I won't be satisfied.

Sighing, Xu Qing quashed any feelings of satisfaction at his current progress. That said, he felt like his goal was attainable. After all, he had a lot of spirit stones, which meant he could still buy all sorts of expensive and rare poisonous plants. He just needed to keep doing more research.

Having reached this point in his train of thought, Xu Qing's eyes shone with anticipation. Next, he took out the two fingers and examined them. Off to the side, Huang Yikun was unconscious and sealed in a jail cell. He and Xu Qing were the only living people in the cell block.

Yanyan had finally taken note of Xu Qing's frown. And though she seemed reluctant to part with him, she had eventually left quietly. Once she was gone, Xu Qing had felt a lot more at ease. He didn't like strangers hovering around him.

Since Huang Yikun was unconscious, Xu Qing took out his identity medallion and sent a voice message. Then he opened the door of the cell block. The Mute was already outside and offered him a respectful clasping of hands.

Xu Qing examined him briefly. The Mute's cultivation base was progressing quickly. He was already in the ninth level of Qi Condensation, and would soon be in the tenth. Xu Qing tossed a medicinal pill to him. Xu Qing had taken note of how sincere and hard-working the Mute had been lately.

The Mute's eyes glittered as he accepted the medicinal pill. Then he looked at Xu Qing, awaiting orders.

Xu Qing pointed at Huang Yikun.

“Put twenty shackles on him and then toss him in with Sima Ling.”

The Mute nodded. Hurrying over, he grabbed Huang Yikun by the neck then dragged him forcefully out of the cell block. Only when he reached the main entrance did he handle him with some more care.

Xu Qing then looked back at the two dazzling fingers. They both emanated shocking fluctuations that caused his Balefire Soulswallowing Scripture to stir.

I wonder how to use these things. I feel like I can't use them to open dharma apertures. They seem more appropriate for advancing my techniques.

After mulling the matter over, he sent a voice message to the Captain asking for advice.

It didn't take long for the Captain to respond.

“Hahaha! Oh, little Ah Qing. So that idiot went over to you, huh? Well, I figured that would happen, which is why I left two fingers for you.

“Let me tell you, these Dark Serenity Fingers are amazing things. Huang Yikun really was a chosen, and he had massive perseverance and determination to form five of them.

“You see, the old man told me that they can totally transform our techniques. I still haven't figured out exactly how, but it shouldn't be long before I do. They're going to be a transforming force for our echelon techniques here on the Seventh Peak.”

Hearing that, Xu Qing decided not to worry about the fingers. Instead, he took out Huang Yikun's ring of holding.

Why do I get the feeling Huang Yikun is actually a bit poor?

Like Sima Ling's ring of holding, this one was sealed. Unlike Sima Ling's ring, this one had no jewel on it. It seemed much more standard.

The shadow didn't need any instructions. It flew out, broke down the sealing mark, and then sent some fawning emotions out. Obviously it was still thinking about Xu Qing's promise to give it the fragmented piece of the taboo treasure if it behaved well.

Suddenly, for the first time ever, Xu Qing gave an approving look to the shadow.

The shadow was stunned, and began to tremble in excitement, causing splits and cracks to appear in it.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was not happy at all. His body of lightning was also trembling, but in this case, it was because of a sense of deep foreboding.

Intentionally or otherwise, Xu Qing happened to look at the black iron skewer for a moment, then sent dharma force into Huang Yikun's ring of holding.

A moment later, an unsightly expression appeared on Xu Qing's face.

"Is this Huang Yikun a counterfeit chosen??" he murmured.

He glanced in the direction where the Mute had disappeared with Huang Yikun, his expression one of displeasure. All Huang Yikun had in his ring of holding were some random bottles, a few jade slips, and spirit notes worth less than 100,000. He had no magical devices, and nothing else similar to what Xu Qing had hoped to see.

This level of poverty was incredible. Virtually any Foundation Establishment cultivator in Seven Blood Eyes probably had more money than Huang Yikun.

Then Xu Qing looked back at the two fingers, and realized he had his answer.

Did he really spend his entire life savings just to cultivate those five fingers...?

Xu Qing thought back to when he'd first met Huang Yikun, and how proud he had been of those fingers. It seemed that, in all likelihood, this was the explanation.

I almost feel sorry for the guy. He just had to go and show off his fancy stuff in front of the Captain.

Xu Qing shook his head and then went through all the random bottles in the ring of holding. After examining them, he looked a bit more pleased.

Most of the medicinal pills were related to healing, but there was one bottle that contained some pills Xu Qing recognized. They were the same ones that Sima Ling had, designed to open dharma apertures.

Without any hesitation, Xu Qing inspected them for safety, then popped them into his mouth. He knew exactly how extraordinary these pills were; based on how he'd found them, he could only guess that these chosen kept them around to use in critical moments. However, he figured it would be better to use them immediately rather than save them for later.

The moment he swallowed the pills, rumbling filled his body, and his 89th dharma aperture, which he had already been battering away at with the souls he'd extracted recently, opened up. More dharma force swept through him.

There was still more power left from the pills, so he sent it to his 90th dharma aperture. The aperture shivered, and then a crack opened up on it. However, it was only about ten percent open.

As the medicinal strength continued to explode, the crack opened wider. Twenty percent. Thirty percent. Forty percent....

Xu Qing took a deep breath and beat at the dharma aperture with all of the force he could muster. Gradually, it was sixty percent open. At that point, the force of the medicine waned. He barely managed to reach seventy percent before the medicinal efficacy faded away.

Xu Qing's eyes were completely bloodshot. He could sense astonishing dharma force within that 90th aperture. The 29.5 apertures that formed the group after his 60th were all burning like stars. That fire wanted to form his third life flame, but the 90th aperture wasn't completely opened, and thus the process couldn't be completed. Xu Qing was already feeling very anxious. Being so close to his third life flame only made him more anxious.

"I'm going to open it today!"

Gritting his teeth, he took out his identity medallion and issued some orders.

“Bring all the Night Dove operatives we arrested to me!”

The constables of the Violent Crimes Division sprang into action, and began delivering numerous Night Dove prisoners to Harbor 176. The cell block there became like a black hole, gobbling up one Night Dove operative after another.

As evening came, brilliance spread out through the sky. Eventually, Xu Qing’s eyes snapped open, and violet light glittered. All of the dharma apertures from his 61st to his 90th were now opened, and they burned like raging furnaces.

Over the course of an incense stick’s worth of time, his third life flame took shape!

The moment it appeared, he felt like heavenly thunder was raging within him, causing him to shake from head to toe. Terrifying flame power swept out, incinerating the cell block around him, and turning the walls into blackened crystal. Of course, he had already put protective spell formations around, and the cell block had its own spell formation, so none of the fluctuations went out into the open.

As his third life flame burned, a heavenly palace started to become visible. It was only about ten percent of its full form, but it still looked magnificent, with dramatically beautiful architecture, decorated with auspicious beasts, and was partly illusory and partly corporeal.

Xu Qing’s guess was that heavenly palaces... had to do with Gold Core!

‘Life flames ignite to illuminate heavenly palaces.’

Xu Qing didn’t know all of the details of what heavenly palaces were, but he did know that ‘life flames ignite to illuminate heavenly palaces’ was a description of the process of rising from Foundation Establishment to Gold Core.

Three life flames....

As Xu Qing looked up, the golden crow danced in the air behind him, crying out noiselessly, its flaming tail combining with his life flames to cause a sea of flames to spread. Feather-shaped sparks swirled around him. If a painter were to create an artistic depiction of this moment, it would be immaculately beautiful.

And anyone present to observe would be completely shocked by the fact that neither the flames nor the golden crow emitted any pressure. And yet the golden crow’s mere gaze would be enough to shake a Foundation Establishment cultivator to the core.

What was more, Xu Qing’s gaze was just as exceptional as that of Master Shengyun!

He had three life flames, a life lamp, and an imperial-class technique.

That was... five-flame battle prowess!

When adding in his poison, it was possible a six-flame cultivator might fall to him. It was only natural that such power would be considered exceptional.

Chapter 239: Someone Comes from the Grue Hunters

When the shadow saw how terrifying Xu Qing was, it trembled. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior in the skewer was trembling even more.

“Incredible,” the patriarch said to the shadow. “If you live long enough, you’ll see everything! The Fiendish Xu is definitely the real deal. This is how novels are supposed to be written. With exceptional talent like this, he’s got to be the true main character. As for that Master Shengyun... he might also be. But probably from another novel. Of the two novels, which MC will be stronger?”

“... scared, scared, scared...” the shadow replied frantically.

In rare form, the patriarch didn’t respond sarcastically. In his opinion, the Fiendish Xu had only been making consistent progress and becoming more terrifying since taking the patriarch in. Hunh. Does that mean that I have the ability to propel people to greatness? I mean, it was after he became my lord and master that he really started his rise to prominence.

As the shadow and patriarch were marveling, they heard Xu Qing pondering his situation.

“I’m still too weak.” His eyes narrowed to slits, cutting off the violet glow within them. “I’m not at the same level as Master Shengyun, who crushed the First Peak....” He shook his head at the realization of how much he still needed to improve. “I have to take advantage of the time I have to ignite my fourth life flame. Then maybe I can see what’s beyond the level of 120 dharma apertures.”

Xu Qing found it odd that the chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition didn’t just advance to Gold Core after reaching 120 dharma apertures. In the jade slips he had read, there wasn’t much information about 120 dharma apertures. But now he realized that on the Revered Ancient mainland, it wasn’t that rare for people to reach that level. Although they were all chosen from top sects, the entire thing still seemed strange to him.

Furthermore, I still need my poison to be stronger. I need more poisonous plants to feed to my beetles. I need them stronger, and I need them to be able to survive long-term in the poison pill. And then there’s my Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber... I can’t let that destined opportunity slip through my fingers. I need to find another Supreme Vastness daoist temple to seek enlightenment in.

“Given all that, I really am just too weak,” he murmured. Sighing, he crushed any sense of pride at having reached the level of five-flame battle prowess.

Off to the side, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was gaping. After analyzing Xu Qing’s words, he came to the conclusion that Xu Qing wasn’t being sarcastic. He was absolutely serious. The patriarch felt dumbfounded.

This is too weak? This is freaking weak?? Then what’s strong? Could it be that the Fiendish Xu doesn’t exactly understand the meaning of the word weak?

The shadow was equally stupefied.

Xu Qing took a deep breath, and his eyes shone with determination.

Since I’m not strong enough, I can’t put myself too much out in the open.

After mulling the matter over some more, he looked over at the stunned shadow and patriarch
“Shadow, cover my life lamp. Add another layer this time. After that, cover up ten of my dharma apertures.” Looking around, he waved his hand, causing the surrounding fire to whip toward him, where it gathered into his palm.

There, it became a black fireball, emanating a terrifying level of power.

Xu Qing closed his hand into a fist, and the fire entered him. The surrounding cell block was no longer burning. There was nothing left behind but ash.

Next, Xu Qing took out a number of spell formations from his bag of holding, which he used to fortify the place again.

Given how many spirit stones he now had, he hadn't been stingy in purchasing supplies. Next, he issued another command.

“Keep bringing me Night Dove prisoners!”

Soon enough, the constables were yet again bringing prisoners to him. When they saw the wreckage of the cell block, they were shocked, but none of them dared to ask any questions.

Time passed. Three days went by.

The Seven Sect Coalition was still excitedly issuing challenges to Seven Blood Eyes. But the chosen from the seven sects were starting to get suspicious about something.

Huang Yikun was missing.

Before vanishing, he had told them two things. He'd said he was going to handle Xu Qing, and had specifically told them to wait and see how it played out. He'd said the same thing about going to challenge the Seventh Peak. Now, days later, nothing had happened on the Seventh Peak, and now Huang Yikun was nowhere to be found.

It was a very unusual situation. And what was even more unusual was that the Dark Serenity Sect didn't seem to care about the matter...

Now, the Seven Sect Coalition chosen kept glancing in the direction of the Seventh Peak and Harbor 176, their eyes full of misgivings. Oftentimes, when you don't have enough information, you can't reach any conclusion at all. These chosen weren't stupid, and they realized that. They felt that what happened on the Seventh Peak wasn't their business. And Xu Qing wasn't their concern. None of them wanted to get dragged into whatever was going on.

However, the dragon had nine sons and each was different from the others. There were some people who, seeing what was happening, simply couldn't let the matter drop. It went against their interests. After all, Xu Qing's actions against Night Dove were irritating to other chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition.

As it turned out, Sima Ling wasn't the only person from the Seven Sect Coalition who was involved in the trafficking of living treasures.

Though those people weren't happy that their interests were being harmed, they also needed to wait to see what the House of Grue Hunters planned to do. The House of Grue Hunters wasn't the most powerful sect in the coalition, but they were far more feared than the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect.

The House of Grue Hunters was famous for two things: watching out for their own, and making deals with grues. Because of that, few people would take the risk of offending them. Besides, considering they were always working with grues, most people thought of them as being lunatics.

The members of the Church of Departure were different types of lunatics. The Church of Departure had idealistic reasons for being so insane. But the House of Grue Hunters often behaved in a way that other members of the Seven Sect Coalition didn't understand. And disciples from there often thought in strange ways.

Therefore, there was no way the House of Grue Hunters would just let Sima Ling get crushed, and not do anything about it.

That was exactly how things played out. Five days later, a lone ship appeared on the Forbidden Sea beyond the Seven Blood Eyes port.

It was a bone ship, not very big, only about thirty meters long. It was long and slender, and almost looked like the entire thing was crafted from the arm bone of a gigantic beast. Despite it being the middle of the day, it was possible to see numerous semitransparent ghost arms sticking out of each side of the ship and paddling the water like oars. There had to be thousands of them, and they were in constant motion, sending the bone boat drifting closer and closer to Seven Blood Eyes.

Unlike the other ships that had come from the Seven Sect Coalition, the person piloting this boat was very polite, and stopped outside of the port. Then she stepped out into the open. She was a young woman in a long white gown. She looked young, and was very beautiful. However, her face was unusually pale, making a stark contrast with her black hair. It almost seemed like she hadn't been out in the sun in years.

She held an umbrella, and if one looked closely, they would see that the umbrella had countless grue faces on it. Some cried, some laughed, some bared their teeth. It was incomparably vicious looking.

Anyone who looked at it would feel flustered. As the young woman in white gently spun the umbrella, the faces on its surfaces trembled in fear.

"I'm Sima Ru from the House of Grue Hunters," she announced softly, "here to visit Seven Blood Eyes." Her voice was clear, like a frigid winter wind. [1]

Almost instantly, the spell formation opened, and the bone boat floated directly in and toward Harbor 176.

When it reached the shore, the young woman stepped lightly off the boat and then strolled... directly toward the Violent Crimes Division. Her hair was so long it brushed the ground behind her. And it writhed as if it were alive. Wherever it passed, tiny black balls with ghost faces on them would pop out. Bouncing along as if they were dancing, they followed her and sang a bizarre nursery rhyme.

"One, one, break your thumb and two, two, blind you with a screw.

"Three, three, crack your skull with glee and four, four, pour your blood on the floor.

"Five, five, keep you alive to six, six, trample you with kicks."

It sounded like a bunch of kids singing, but the words were sinister to the extreme. As a result, as the young woman walked along, everyone backed away from her.

And thus, she got closer and closer to the Violent Crimes Division.

As soon as she arrived, the chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition were notified, and all of them exhaled sharply. Immediately, the chosen started exchanging shocked voice messages.

“Sima Ru from the House of Grue Hunters is here! She’s Sima Ling’s blood sister. And she was the chosen dao child from the previous generation. I heard that after she reached Gold Core, she went into seclusion to try to break through to her second heavenly palace!”

“I can’t believe she’s here!”

“No, that’s not actually her. It’s her grue clone!”

“Oh, I heard about this clone. Back when Sima Ru was in Foundation Establishment, she used one of her own bones to fuse with a grue. Though it doesn’t have Gold Core battle prowess, it’s supposedly capable of crushing four-flame power.”

“I doubt it’s at the five-flame level, though. It’s more like battle prowess of four-and-a-half flames. But that extra half-flame of power is enough to crush four-flames.”

None of them dared to get close to Sima Ru. They all thought of the House of Grue Hunters as being full of lunatics. For all they knew, she might crush Xu Qing and then go on to crush them.

Meanwhile, back on the street in Harbor 176, Sima Ru walked along with the ghost face balls dancing behind her, singing their sinister nursery rhyme. Eventually, she reached the entrance of the Violent Crimes Division. Above her was a dark mist that took the shape of a vicious ghost face that glared at the entrance.

No one was standing guard at the door. The door was open, revealing the reception hall. Seated in the position of honor was a good-looking young man who stared at her expressionlessly.

Looking back at him, she smiled faintly. She carried herself very properly, making her seem like a girl from a wealthy, noble family.

“I’m here to take my brother home.”

Chapter 240: Nether-Sealing Blood

It was noon. Not a cloud could be seen in the dome of heaven, yet Sima Ru had a dark cloud overhead, within which crackled bolts of lightning. Her cloud resembled a vicious ghost face, bursting with ferocity; it seemed like all it would take was a thought from Sima Ru, and the evil ghost would rush into the Violent Crimes Division and pounce on Xu Qing.

There usually weren’t many people on the street outside the Violent Crimes Division. Right now, there were literally none.

As soon as Xu Qing got word that Sima Ru was coming, he’d sent all the constables home. And thus, the inside of the Violent Crimes Division was just as empty as the outside. Except for Xu

Qing. He sat in the reception hall in front of the painting of the evil ghosts fighting for food. Upon hearing Sima Ru's words, he looked up at her standing outside the main entrance. He didn't pay any attention at all to the ghost face above her, nor the singing balls. His eyes focused solely on Sima Ru, flashing as though they could pierce into her and read her inner qualities.

A clone?

A thoughtful look appeared in his eyes as he fiddled with the jade slip the Intelligence Division had sent him with information about her. It had a lot of details about her and her background.

"The most orthodox cultivation method in the House of Grue Hunters is tied to the blood. Cultivation techniques are only supplementary. There are four main types of blood that disciples can infuse into themselves. Each type has unique properties, and a unique way of affecting grues. Opinions differ regarding the origin of the bloodlines.

"The Sima family is associated with the Nether-Sealing Blood. It provides shocking advantages when sealing grues. Of course, none of these four bloodlines are on par with one of the most mysterious and legendary species native to Revered Ancient, the Gruewalkers.

"Sima Ru has exceptional talent. After accepting the Nether-Sealing Blood, she stood head and shoulders above her fellows. Years ago, she took a place among the echelon highnesses of the House of Grue Hunters. Though she wasn't rated number one, the others above her were all in the Gold Core level. Later, after dominating the members of the other bloodlines for years, she eventually broke through to Gold Core herself.

"Since then, she's been in seclusion. She herself has not come to Seven Blood Eyes. Instead, she's sent a peak Foundation Establishment clone, formed via bone cultivation. There are several grues sealed within the clone, and it has battle prowess that surpasses the four-flame level but doesn't reach the five-flame level."

While Xu Qing thought about everything he knew of Sima Ru, she looked at him in the reception hall.

"My little brother is naughty and mischievous," she said lightly. "I'm sorry for any trouble he caused, and I apologize for whatever he did wrong."

Behind her, the bouncing balls started imitating her.

"Apologize, apologize."

"Trouble he caused, trouble he caused."

They sounded like a host of children clamoring for attention. If that wasn't bizarre enough, the faces on Sima Ru's umbrella all started crying and laughing at the same time.

The Seven Sect Coalition chosen who were watching from a distance were all watching with bated breath. Truth be told, even in the coalition, the House of Grue Hunters was considered mysterious. Most of the time, the other sects tried to avoid them.

Xu Qing just looked at Sima Ru. Since this was his first time dealing with her, he had no idea how she usually behaved. But she had been very polite. She hadn't charged in, hadn't made unreasonable demands, and had even apologized on behalf of her brother. She hadn't acted overbearing like Sima Ling. It was hard to feel hostility toward someone like that, but Xu Qing wasn't any less on guard because of it.

"I'll have to check with my superiors about it," he said calmly. "Give me a few days."

Sima Ru nodded. Looking very poised, she softly said, "I can wait a few days. But my little brother can't. I'll provide compensation on his behalf. That said, there's also the issue of you hitting him. How do you plan to make amends? My little brother likes eyeballs. Maybe you can give him one of yours as an apology."

Sima Ru remained extremely polite in both her bearing and her tone of voice. She didn't seem angry at all, and seemed very heartfelt.

Xu Qing didn't say anything in response. At the same time, he looked away from Sima Ru. As of this moment he dispelled any thoughts of possibly freeing Sima Ling.

Meanwhile, Sima Ru drifted forward, through the main entrance of the Violent Crimes Division and into the courtyard. Along with her came the cloud, which roiled out to cover everything.

At the same time, the ghost-faced balls bounced along, clamoring as before, and yet again copying Sima Ru's words.

"Make amends, make amends."

"Make amends, make... huh—?"

In the middle of chanting, one of the ghost-faced balls bounced into a shady section, where it suddenly fell down, then disappeared as if it had fallen into a chasm. Its voice ceased.

At the same time as the ball vanished, the Violent Crimes Division's spell formation activated, cutting off the outside world, and sealing the place so that no one could see inside. There was also a crushing force that weighed down.

But then Sima Ru reached into her robe and pulled out a white identity medallion, whereupon the crushing weight disappeared. Her identity medallion was obviously nothing to sneer at. It came from a supervisory sect, and carried with it greater authority.

However, the function to seal off the entire division remained in place. Only the crushing weight that would normally hinder members of outside sects disappeared.

The grand spell formation that protected Seven Blood Eyes had its crushing power negated by someone from an outside sect. Imagine if some other person had the right to use your belongings any time they wanted. Not just that, but they could take them away at will, even if you were right there in front of them. And you couldn't say a thing. For all intents and purposes, those things might as well belong to the other person.

Inside, Xu Qing sighed. Now more than ever, he understood why the patriarch and the others were being so very secretive about their true plan.

There was no person in existence who would want to permanently be in such a passive position. Who would want someone else to be in control of their own disciples, or be able to give out identity medallions that would negate your greatest safeguards? In a chaotic world filled with people who acted like tigers, leopards, wolves, and jackals, who could possibly be willing to live in such ignominy?

Xu Qing even had the suspicion that if the Seven Sect Coalition leadership arrived, then the Seven Blood Eyes Formation... would obey them to crush people from Seven Blood Eyes.

Continuing to float toward Xu Qing, Sima Ru softly said, "I guess you used this spell formation to brush off my little brother's dao protector. Right?"

She was now right outside the reception hall. She didn't stop there. She floated inside. However, that was also when Xu Qing started moving.

He stepped forward, putting himself right in front of Sima Ru. Then, his face completely expressionless, he launched a punch at her. It was a blow that caused wild winds to spring up, and shook everything in the area. The explosive force was so intense that a sound like thunder boomed out.

Simultaneously, numerous eyes opened up in the shadows of the courtyard beyond. Then they turned into mouths that lunged toward the ghost-faced balls. At the same time, a black lightning bolt shot out from the periphery and headed straight toward the cloud above. In the blink of an eye, deafening booms rang out left and right.

In the face of Xu Qing's attack, Sima Ru shot backward, flying out of the reception hall and into the courtyard.

Now, a reaction could be seen on her previously expressionless face. Also, the eyes on the numerous grue faces on her umbrella opened. And they weren't looking at Xu Qing, but rather, at the ground of the courtyard.

The balls were nowhere to be seen. That caused Sima Ru's eyes to glitter with an unusual light. Then she looked back up at the person walking out of the reception hall.

Along with him came burning flames that took the shape of a golden crow. Within all the fire was Xu Qing, walking forward one step at a time. The fiery golden crow made him seem like a lord of flames. Its tail was like an imperial robe, surrounding him with grandeur. And as his hair whipped about, a sea of flames became his cloak. As he approached, the fiery cloak billowed, and the golden crow settled onto his head like an imperial crown. Combined with his stunning facial features, this version of Xu Qing seemed to walk with the momentum and gait of an Ancient Emperor strolling through the world of humans.

"Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits!" Sima Ru blurted. Then she blurred into motion, appearing right in front of Xu Qing, where she raised her right hand toward his eyes.

Xu Qing's expression was the same as ever as he lowered his head and head-butted her hand.

It was an attack method that Sima Ru was obviously not expecting. A boom rang out, and her hand exploded. Expression one of shock, she shot backward.

Xu Qing pressed the attack, moving with speed that surpassed hers. Upon reaching her, he reached out, grabbed a handful of her hair, and then slammed her down onto the ground. The ground cracked and shattered.

As for Sima Ru, she collapsed into a mass of mist that swept away from his hand. A shrill scream rang out as the mist then converged into a greyish shape that lunged back toward Xu Qing.

At the same time, Sima Ru's ghostly umbrella suddenly sent crushing weight toward him.

But how could some puny umbrella match up to the golden crow? The golden crow looked up, its eyes filled with disdain, then lunged forward.