

Timescape 241

Chapter 241: The Deceptive Seventh Peak

The golden crow raged with a sea of flames, causing the countless faces on the ghost umbrella to scream in high-pitched tones. They tried to fight, but it was useless. In the blink of an eye, the golden crow was in their midst. The shrieking became more shrill, and then the entire umbrella burst into flames. The grue faces inside fought among each other to flee, but were unable. In the blink of an eye, they were incinerated by the golden crow.

At the same time, it looked like Sima Ru's mist form was about to be dispelled by the explosive fire. But Sima Ru was no ordinary person. Despite being shocked at what was happening, she swept toward Xu Qing from all directions, piercing through the fire and transforming into a host of grue faces that snapped at him with bared teeth. Sinister wind blew, hoping to extinguish his life flames.

Eyebrows rising, Xu Qing let all his dharma apertures burn bright. There didn't seem any point in deception right now. It would be hard to defeat Sima Ru using the battle prowess of four flames. Therefore, 90 dharma apertures raged to life. Of course, Xu Qing's dharma apertures weren't like those of ordinary people. Each one contained a 1,500-meter spirit sea. Shocking spirit seas like that would create a terrifying dharma force. And with that dharma force under his control, his life flames would be incomparably astonishing.

As for the sinister wind... it could eradicate countless life flames that existed, but not Xu Qing's. As his life flames burned in shocking fashion, the incoming grue faces were rendered powerless. That wasn't to mention Xu Qing's fleshly body power, which, thanks to his cultivation of Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits, had caught up to his cultivation progress.

His energy and blood surged, sending blood-colored light into the sea of flames, which spread out. Agonized shrieks erupted as the grue faces were wiped out of existence.

Every single one vanished, turning into a mist that spun backward, where it converged into a ball. Then, a terrifying aura spread out from it, along with a howl. Shockingly, the mist then transformed into a three-headed beast. It looked like a tiger, with two heads in the front and one where the tail would normally be. Wild, freezing winds swept around the ghost tiger as it lunged toward Xu Qing.

It moved so quickly that, in the shortest of moments, it was closing in on its target. What was more, hosts of souls spilled out of it, which transformed into tiger-assisting ghosts that joined the swirling whirlwind. [1]

Xu Qing's eyes shone coldly as he took a step forward. Right in front of the ghost tiger, he waved his right hand, causing balefire to erupt out and cover his fist.

As rumbling sounds echoed out, the ghost tiger suddenly dodged to the side, then lunged forward with its mouth open dramatically wide, as if it could devour anything and everything.

Xu Qing placidly performed an incantation gesture with his right hand, then extended his finger. Fire roiled out of him to form a bluegreen dragon that was far larger than the ghost tiger. The dragon opened its mouth, then viciously chomped down on the tiger. A boom rang out as the tiger exploded with a scream.

But Sima Ru was no ordinary opponent. After being destroyed by the bluegreen dragon, the tiger collapsed into a mist, which then transformed into a third type of grue. It looked like a pitch-black rakshasa with wings. After forming, it howled at Xu Qing and rushed toward him.

However, a moment later a black lightning bolt suddenly shot out from the cloud overhead. As it sped toward the rakshasa, a shadow spread out over the ground.

Sima Ru in rakshasa form looked surprised. She managed to dodge the iron skewer, and even avoid the shadow. But she couldn't get away from Xu Qing. Moving forward with unstoppable momentum, he grabbed her rakshasa form by the neck and slammed it viciously into the wall.

A boom rang out as the wall collapsed. As the rakshasa reeled, massive amounts of balefire poured out of Xu Qing's hands. He was already starting to assimilate her! In fact, as he did, his 91st dharma aperture started wriggling as though it might open soon.

As Sima Ru in rakshasa form struggled, Xu Qing slammed her into the ground. The rakshasa collapsed.

As the mist spread out again, the golden crow let loose a cry and shot toward it, hoping to devour it.

But that was when the mist converged, transforming into a fourth state! It was a bloated giant fully 300 meters tall. It looked massive, and incredibly heavy, as it tried to crush the golden crow by sitting on it.

It didn't qualify to succeed at such an effort. The golden crow's eyes shone as it started devouring it. At the same time, Xu Qing strode forward, his eyes shining as he looked at Sima Ru's fourth state.

Even just absorbing a fraction of the rakshasa had almost opened one of his dharma apertures, and therefore, Sima Ru was a precious treasure as far as he was concerned. Upon nearing the struggling giant, he erupted with balefire and immediately began assimilating it.

Fear appeared in the eyes of Sima Ru's struggling giant form.

As the golden crow absorbed it, the shadow shot forth, and the iron skewer closed in excitedly.

A bewildered look appeared in Sima Ru's eyes, and then, without the slightest hesitation, she self-detonated. A massive boom rattled out. A self-detonation backed by the power of four and a half flames was immense as it swept everywhere.

As the giant exploded, a black arm bone appeared and shot toward the exit of the Violent Crimes Division!

That bone was the nucleus of the clone Sima Ru had created. Now that she knew how terrifying Xu Qing truly was, she had no interest in continuing the fight. She only wanted to escape.

She had chosen the right moment to do it. The shocking power of the explosion would make it difficult for anyone to pursue her. Sadly for her, she completely underestimated Xu Qing's abilities.

Xu Qing's shadow shot under the explosion and closed in on her with blinding speed.

In that last critical moment, Sima Ru's black bone shone with dark light. Realizing that she couldn't escape, she spun in place and sent her bone form shooting viciously toward Xu Qing's head. As she moved, the bizarre nursery rhyme echoed out around her.

“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.”

The incoming attack surpassed the level of four flames, and as it neared, Xu Qing’s eyes narrowed. Suppressing any thoughts of revealing how many flames he actually had, he took out a jade pendant. That jade pendant was the Nascent Soul defense shield Master Sixth had given him. He had almost completely drained it during the battle with the Seastars, making it much less effective than then. There was no way it could stand up to a Nascent Soul attack. But it was still mighty, and there was a bit of power left in it.

Sima Ru’s grue attack slammed into the shield, and it was like an egg being thrown against a boulder. The arm bone cracked, and a scream rang out from inside. Then Xu Qing reached out, grabbed the arm, and sent balefire raging out to assimilate it.

Massive soul power surged out of the bone and into Xu Qing. Without hesitation, he sent it rushing toward his 91st dharma aperture, which instantly opened.

While Xu Qing was absorbing the bone, the golden crow was also devouring it. The shadow helped itself, and the black iron skewer also stabbed into it. Wild, piercing screams rang out. Then the bone shattered and turned into ash. Before it did, Xu Qing managed to open his 92nd dharma aperture!

Then he looked back at the spot where the bone had turned into ash. The ash wasn’t moving, but there was a scrap of divine will left in it. The divine will formed into a very faint, semitransparent version of Sima Ru in her white gown. It looked like she would flicker out of existence at any moment.

As she looked at Xu Qing, she was visibly surprised.

“Your Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits is superb. You’re not at all like the description the sect provided me! You tricked all of the cultivators who came here. And you don’t have two life flames. You have three! Beyond that, your dharma apertures are astonishing. They’re all 1,500 meters! That puts your battle prowess, not at the four-flame level, but closer to five flames!

“If you ever ignite four life flames, you’ll be like a second Master Shengyun, except that you don’t have a life lamp! You’re far too deceptive! You’re... the number one chosen of this generation in Seven Blood Eyes!”

Sima Ru had come here thinking she could crush Xu Qing, then take her little brother away. How could she have imagined how profoundly deceptive Xu Qing actually was? Obviously, if he had used his true five-flame power, he could have crushed Sima Ling in an instant. Instead, he drew out the fight to give people the wrong impression.

Don’t tell me he was actually after me? Did he do all this on purpose to lure me here? That caused Sima Ru to think back to how he had instantly started absorbing her as soon as he laid hands on her. It was the most humiliating thing she had ever experienced, and it caused killing intent to burn in her eyes.

“Now I know how deceptive you really are. My true form will be out of seclusion soon. Then I’ll come and crush—”

Xu Qing shoved his hand out, and Sima Ru’s divine will collapsed into nothing before she could finish speaking.

Looking at the spot where she had disappeared, he thought, You’re wrong. I’m not the number one chosen in Seven Blood Eyes.

He couldn’t help but think back to the miserable state Huang Yikun was in after going to the Seventh Peak. Forget people from outside the sect. Even Xu Qing himself thought that people from the Seventh Peak were just too skilled at being deceptive. Take the Captain for instance. Though Xu Qing had his violet crystal that gave him powers of regeneration, the Captain obviously had some terrifying entity sealed within him.

Little did Xu Qing know that Master Seventh was atop the Seventh Peak, looking down at the Violent Crimes Division in Harbor 176, feeling very exhilarated. The Captain squatted behind him eating apples whole, one at a time. Off to the side, Third Highness held a fruit basket, and was giving one apple after another to the Captain.

“Hey, Third Sib,” the Captain said, “how did you manage to seduce that girl from Supreme Arbiter? Give your Elder Brother some tips!”

Third Highness grinned. “I didn’t do anything special. I’m just dashing, that’s all.”

“Like hell! Even if you were more dashing than you already are, you couldn’t measure up to little Ah Qing. Hey, I just remembered something.” Grinning enigmatically, the Captain continued, “A while back, the old man went to Revered Ancient. After he’d barely been back a year, you stepped off of a ship onto a harbor here. And you had a white identity medallion. You were only about thirteen, but you were already at the one-flame level. And all you wanted was revenge. Does that mean you originally come from Revered Ancient? Did you cause some trouble in the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society back there...?”

Third Highness’ expression didn’t change. Smiling, he said, “Seems it’s impossible to pull the wool over your eyes, Eldest Brother. That said, I’m curious. Eldest Brother... how many times have you restarted your cultivation?”

The Captain blinked a few times, then smiled. “Take a guess.”

Third Highness smiled. Not saying anything further, he offered another apple to the Captain.

The Captain took it and looked in the direction of Harbor 176. He sighed. “Little Ah Qing really is good at being deceptive. He actually has three flames!! I think there’s more he’s being deceptive about, though. I don’t even know if I could kill him if we ended up fighting each other. But if the thing inside me actually wakes up one day, then, oh Master, you can’t save Xu Qing but ignore me! You need to treat everyone fairly! After all, I am your most favorite and beloved apprentice!”

As for Second Highness, she wasn't paying attention to what was happening below, nor was she listening to her Elder Brother, Junior Brother, or Master. She was focused on sending messages through her identity medallion. She looked unusually bashful.

Master Seventh glanced at her. This girl! Fortune really does favor the fool!

Then he looked at Big Sib and Third Sib. Though he tended to scold them relentlessly, he was actually very proud of his apprentices. After all, he had selected them after searching far and wide for the very best candidates. Only after carefully observing them, and weeding out any who weren't the best of the best, did he end up with the ultimate wolves among even the most ultimate wolves.

Each and every one of his apprentices could surpass the highnesses from the other mountains by a wide margin. His apprentices could crush the others if they wanted, at any time. That was how he searched for apprentices. He didn't just want any old chosen cultivator.

What made him even more proud was that his apprentices were all worthy of carrying on his traditions. Like him, they all excelled at deception. They would never reveal their secret weapons and big secrets. And when other people thought they had them figured out, the reality was that they were just falling for the deception.

This Fourth Sib is a natural-born deceiver. I didn't have to teach him a thing. He's amazing. In a chaotic world with danger everywhere, and the future uncertain, it's only natural to be deceptive!

Also... while chosen disciples weren't common in the past, now they're being born all the time. And not just among us humans. Among the countless nonhuman species as well. It just goes to show that a great era is upon us. A great era. Great destined opportunities. And of course. Great danger!

Chapter 242: Killing on a Moonless Night

Everyone in the Seven Blood Eyes capital city had settled into silence. They breathed. They waited. And their eyes glittered with increasingly intense trepidation and alarm. Everyone was wondering what exactly was happening in the Violent Crimes Division in Harbor 176.

The Seven Blood Eyes Formation could not crush Sima Ru, but it could keep making it impossible for anyone to see what was happening inside the division.

Normally speaking, the only people who could see through the formation were the high-ranking members of Seven Blood Eyes, as well as the echelon highnesses. Except... Master Seventh prevented them from doing so. The only people capable of observing events inside the division were those from the Seventh Peak.

Therefore, the only thing non-Seventh Peak cultivators could see was Sima Ru entering. Then, not long later, the isolating barrier faded away and everything went back to normal.

The next day....

In an unusual break from the norm, the chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition stopped issuing challenges.

The Violent Crimes Division constables returned to their positions, and operations began as usual. Just like always, they tracked down Night Dove operatives and sent prisoners to Xu Qing.

Sima Ru was nowhere to be seen, and her little brother Sima Ling was still imprisoned.

The bone ship in the harbor had lost whatever force was holding it together, and it collapsed into nothing.

The chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition were shaken so deeply that they lost any desire to challenge the other mountain peaks. What was the point? No matter what other challenges they won, the Violent Crimes Division in Harbor 176 was like a sharp spike piercing toward their hearts.

Sima Ling had obviously been crushed by the Violent Crimes Division. Huang Yikun from the Dark Serenity Sect had challenged the Seventh Peak, only to go missing. And before going missing, he had told everyone he was going to take care of Xu Qing.

All of these things... revolved around Xu Qing!

To the chosen from the Seven Sect Coalition, the Violent Crimes Division in Harbor 176 was as dangerous as a dragon's pool or a tiger's den. It was incomparably mysterious, and at the same time, unimaginably perilous!

The Seven Sect Coalition had arranged for them to come here and methodically issue challenges to crush the spirits of the Seven Blood Eyes disciples. The goal was to make sure that all disciples in Seven Blood Eyes felt fear and reverence for the coalition.

At first, the visiting chosen had done exactly that. Their constant challenges left the Seven Blood Eyes disciples morose and alarmed. In fact, some of the disciples had even started trying to ingratiate themselves with the visiting chosen.

But now, even as those chosen tried to intimidate the local disciples, they were being intimidated by the Violent Crimes Division!

"Just what is Xu Qing's real battle prowess level?"

"Sima Ru went in there and never came out. It wasn't her true form, but she still had four-flame battle prowess. She could crush all of us as easily as turning over her hand. But she got crushed in the Violent Crimes Division!"

"Is the Seventh Peak... the real nucleus of Seven Blood Eyes?"

"It's too bad our Elder Brother Master Shengyun left...."

The Seven Sect Coalition chosen were shaking in their boots. At the same time, the Seven Blood Eyes disciples were getting very excited at how things were playing out. Xu Qing and the Seventh Peak were really in a league of their own.

It was like a beam of light was suddenly shining down onto the darkness that had enveloped the hearts of the disciples from the various mountain peaks. Before, the mainland chosen had seemed unstoppable. But now, things were different. At the same time, the local disciples were feeling increasing reverence for both the Seventh Peak and Master Seventh.

What was more, rumors were starting to circulate that Seven Blood Eyes was undergoing a big transformation, and that soon, there would be a sect leader in charge!

Right now, Seven Blood Eyes had peaklords, but not a sect leader.

The disciples of each mountain peak would follow the orders of their peaklord, and didn't ever pay much attention to the other mountain peaks. Everyone was independent and only worked together on special occasions.

But now... the Seven Sect Coalition's visit had become like an iron hammer, striking Seven Blood Eyes from all directions. Furthermore, the visit made it seem like a storm of troubles was on the way. The disciples felt immense pressure from the outside. However, that pressure seemed to be forging Seven Blood Eyes into something different, getting rid of the dregs that had built up over years, and making the sect stronger.

The visiting nonhumans and the Seven Blood Eyes allies were now able to see that with their own eyes, and were also seeing how popular the Seven Blood Eyes' patriarch was. He was actually using the Seven Sect Coalition to refine and temper his own sect.

The Seven Sect Coalition wasn't blind to this fact either, and as a result, they didn't urge their visiting chosen to issue more challenges. That said, a new series of instructions was sent by the coalition.

According to the new instructions, adjustments needed to be made to the peaklord arrangement, especially when it came to the Seventh Peak. Furthermore, all of the highnesses of the various mountain peaks, especially the Seventh Peak, were to be sent to the Revered Ancient mainland for assigned duties.

Sir Bloodsmelter ensured that all the new instructions were bogged up in formalities. However, the Seven Sect Coalition was very insistent. They continued to send more messages, which became increasingly threatening. Eventually, they outright stated that if their new instructions were not obeyed, the Seven Sect Coalition would enforce them with violence.

In fact, the patriarch of the strongest group in the coalition, the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect, powered up his sect's taboo magical treasure in an awesome display of intimidating force.

When the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect powered up their taboo magical treasure, some of the other sects followed suit. The Second Peak's supervisory sect, Spiritgloom Valley, and the Sixth Peak's supervisory sect, the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect, also did the same.

In addition to all that, more orders came down, demanding that Seven Blood Eyes send half of the Seazombie's wartime reparations to the Seven Sect Coalition, and set up Foreign Affairs Ministries on all of the islands that had been taken in the war.

The department was called Foreign Affairs, but it might as well have been called the Supervision and Investigation Ministry. At the top level, it supervised the patriarch, and at the bottom level, it investigated disciples. Overnight, Seven Blood Eyes suddenly seemed extremely unstable.

Xu Qing wasn't paying much attention to all that. For one thing, he knew that the leadership of Seven Blood Eyes had all started out like venomous bugs in a jar, and had carved out a bloody path to the top. There was no way they would be unable to deal with a crisis like this. In addition to that, he knew that when it came to inter-sect relations, you couldn't just look at the surface. There was too much at stake to put much stock into whatever rumors were floating around.

"The Seven Sect Coalition is also made up of disparate parts," Xu Qing murmured. His encounter with the House of Grue Hunters had made that clear to him.

Xu Qing's attention was focused mostly on his beetle research and on tightening the net around Night Dove.

Thanks to the curfew and recent raids, Night Dove's operations were severely limited. The final big crackdown came a few days later in the middle of the night.

Night Dove's five main headquarters in Seven Blood Eyes had been identified.

The most elite constables from all seven of the Violent Crimes Divisions would join forces, becoming five sharp blades that mercilessly attacked those five headquarters. At the same time, even more Violent Crimes constables would spread out into the capital city to enforce the curfew, and catch any Night Dove operatives who fled from the headquarters.

As the night wind blew, Xu Qing emerged from the Violent Crimes Division in Harbor 176, followed by the shadowy forms of several thousand Seventh Peak constables. Then, Xu Qing issued his orders.

"The Violent Crimes Division shall go to war tonight!" he said, his voice ringing out, somber and desolate. "Afterward, there will be no Night Dove in Seven Blood Eyes!"

"Yes, sir!" the thousands of constables shouted. With that, Xu Qing's deputy directors led their teams out into the night.

It was windy, and dark clouds made it a moonless night.

All the businesses near the Violent Crimes Division were closed, even places like inns that were usually open at night. Everyone huddled in alarm as they looked out at the shadowy forms of the Violent Crimes constables racing through the night.

Xu Qing led the way, his hair streaming behind him as he raced along. All of a sudden, he thought back to his second night in Seven Blood Eyes, back when he had first joined the sect.

Back then, he had been carefully walking along when a group of Violent Crimes constables raced by. He remembered how he had been so on guard, but at the same time, envious of them. [1]

Now, he was leading thousands of constables on a nighttime raid.

Three years, he thought, speeding up.

The constables he led all looked at Xu Qing with zeal and fervor. That was just how things worked in a chaotic world. The weak venerated the strong.

At the same time... the things Xu Qing had done as he walked his path gave them something to imitate. Three years ago, Xu Qing had been just like them. An ordinary constable. Three years later, he was now the director of the Seventh Peak's Violent Crimes Division!

The wind blew harder.

Before long, Xu Qing spotted a mansion off in the distance. It had once been a business run by the Fourth Peak, but had later been purchased by a private party and converted into a brothel. The curfew had put it out of business, and now it looked dark and empty.

"Attack!" Xu Qing said coolly. The thousands of constables behind him rushed toward the mansion, bursting with killing intent. Moments later, rumbling booms rang out as

Night Dove operatives fled in all directions, only to be surrounded and attacked by Violent Crimes constables. In the blink of an eye, the sounds of slaughter filled the night, accompanied by the stench of gore.

Xu Qing didn't do anything. He simply hovered in midair and watched coldly. At the same time, he kept an eye on the reports coming in from the attacks on the other Night Dove headquarters.

"Director Xu, things went smoothly at the third headquarters. We're doing a final sweep right now!"

"Things went well at the second headquarters. We killed the Foundation Establishment chief and are currently wiping out the remaining operatives."

"The fifth headquarters is secure!"

"We need backup! A cultivator from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect is present in the fourth headquarters, along with a three-flame Night Dove operative!!"

Just as Xu Qing was reading that last message, he saw a distress signal light up the sky in the distance. He burst into motion with explosive speed, heading in the direction of the distress signal. The golden crow manifested around him, its wings unfurling, and its tail leaving behind clouds of sparks.

From a distance, it looked like Xu Qing was cloaked in flames as he shot forward with unstoppable force!

Chapter 243: A Saber Takes Heads in the Night

Xu Qing moved with shocking momentum, accompanied by the golden crow. He headed directly toward the distress signal, peerless, bewitching, leaving behind flames in the sky. As he closed in on his destination, incomparable fire burned in heaven and earth, sending out intense waves of heat toward the fifth Night Dove headquarters. Rumbling echoed out left and right as a sea of flames covered everything. Fleeing Night Dove operatives screamed in agony as they were reduced to ash. Crashing sounds could be heard as entire buildings collapsed.

This area was in the district administered by the Fifth Peak. The headquarters itself was a huge, three-story tower that supposedly sold spell formations. Though it didn't maintain any official ties to the Fifth Peak, the reality was that it did have some business connections with the disciples there.

Xu Qing wasn't sure if the Fifth Peak knew that this place also had ties to Night Dove. Nor did he care. After this night, the place wouldn't exist.

As he arrived, and the sea of flames he brought swept over everything, the Violent Crimes constables who had the place surrounded excitedly bowed in greeting.

Some distance away, the collapsing buildings revealed two locations where fighting was playing out. In one of them, seven or eight deputy directors had used the sect's grand spell formation to trap a Night Dove operative. The operative was an old man in a fancy black robe with age spots all over his face. His eyes radiated fury, and as he fought back, his three-flame power was clearly extraordinary. Normally speaking, he could have easily slaughtered the one-flame deputy directors.

But thanks to using the sect's spell formation, they were able to stay alive and also prevent him from fleeing.

Unfortunately, there weren't many deputy directors to begin with, and the power of the spell formation that they could summon wasn't enough to fully crush the Night Dove operative. All of the deputy directors were injured. That said, Seven Blood Eyes disciples were born of ferocity, and wouldn't back down just because of some simple injuries.

In the other location where fighting was playing out, a two-flame Violent Crimes director, backed by the support of several hundred constables and the Fifth Peak spell formation, had trapped a single opponent. He wore a golden daoist robe, and looked to be about eighteen or nineteen years old. He was handsome, with eyes like stars and a very extraordinary disposition. Nine flying swords swirled around him, sending pulses of sword energy in all directions. Shockingly, he had the power of three life flames, and he looked very angry as he battered at the spell formation trapping him.

The Seven Blood Eyes Formation wouldn't work on this person, and thus the director had to rely on the Fifth Peak itself. With hundreds of constables also helping to power the formation, they were just able to contain the young swordsman. However, given how pale they were in the face, it was obvious they wouldn't be able to sustain the effort much longer.

Xu Qing arrived like a lightning bolt from heaven. As the sea of flames roiled around him, he looked over at the three-flame old man in the black robe, as well as the disciple from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect.

The latter was stunned to see Xu Qing present, as he knew how terrifying he was. And he grew more alarmed when he realized Xu Qing was ignoring the Night Dove operative and heading in his direction. The sword energy coming off of his flying swords suddenly grew unstable.

"Xu Qing," he blurted, "I was just passing through! Your subordinates attacked Night Dove and then dragged me into this. I have nothing to do with Night Dove!"

Meanwhile, the director of the Third Peak's Violent Crimes Division wiped blood from his mouth and said, "Director Xu, when we showed up and surrounded the place, this guy was in the middle of negotiating something with the Night Dove chief. I don't know what they were talking about, but he definitely wasn't just passing through!"

Xu Qing nodded and strode forward. He waved his hand, and the Violent Crimes constables restraining the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect disciple were pushed away by a gentle force. The spell formation also ceased functioning.

The young man's face flickered dramatically as he said, "Xu Qing, my Elder Brother is Master Shengyun! If you hurt me, he'll kill you! I—"

Xu Qing's face was completely expressionless as he arrived right in front of the young man, ignoring the flying swords that swirled around him. Xu Qing moved so quickly that the sword disciple couldn't track his movements or react. In the blink of an eye, Xu Qing reached out, grabbed the young man's throat, and smashed him into the ground.

A boom echoed as cracks spread out on the ground. At the same time, the young sword disciple bled profusely from the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Two of his life flames instantly went out. In his

shock, he tried to control his flying swords and send them shooting toward Xu Qing, but he was too slow.

Xu Qing lifted him up and threw him backward. Cracking sounds rang out from inside the young man, and at the same time, he let loose a miserable shriek. Numerous bones within him were now shattered, and his final life flame went out. As he flopped on the ground, coughing up blood, he was obviously seriously injured.

Xu Qing didn't need to issue orders. The Violent Crimes constables in the area immediately pounced on the young man and placed shackles on him to seal his cultivation base.

Meanwhile, the old Night Dove operative surrounded by the deputy directors suddenly used some sort of life-saving technique. Booms rang out as a huge shockwave swept out, stunning everyone around him. Then he threw out an identity medallion, which shattered but somehow loosened the effects of the sect's grand spell formation.

Using that opportunity, the black-robed operative fled with terror in his eyes. Strangely, the direction to which he fled was none other than the sect's mountain peaks.

Xu Qing turned and looked at him coldly. He had no idea who this person was, but he could sense the fluctuations of a disguise. What was more, he had obviously used an identity medallion to negate some of the effects of the spell formation.

Though the formation was only being used by deputy directors, who couldn't unleash its full might, it was still something formidable. Because of that, it seemed to indicate that this person... was actually a Seven Blood Eyes disciple. There was no way that Night Dove could operate in the Seven Blood Eyes capital city without working with Seven Blood Eyes disciples. Xu Qing was fully aware of that, but at the same time, wasn't interested in uncovering every detail. There wasn't any point.

After noting the direction in which the 'old man' fled, Xu Qing expressionlessly stepped up into mid-air. Then he lifted his right hand over his head, whereupon the shadowy image of a heavenly saber appeared. The saber was shockingly powerful, and as soon as it appeared in the open, wild winds screamed, and a desolate aura spread out everywhere. Everyone who could see it was visibly shocked.

In fact, there were some Seven Sect Coalition disciples who recognized what it was, and let loose exclamations of surprise.

"Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber!"

As those cries of shock rang out, Xu Qing sped up, heading directly toward the three-flame 'old man' from Night Dove. Blinding light erupted from the saber as it slashed down, moving with such incredible speed it could slice stars and sever moons. From a distance, the majestic might of that saber caused the dome of heaven to change color, and filled the night with the radiance of glittering heavenly bodies.

One solitary saber descended, shaking everything in all directions.

The fleeing 'old man' looked completely astonished as he tapped into all of the power his life flames could muster. However, none of that was enough for him to flee the saber. As the saber light glittered, his eyes lit up with despair.

“I had no idea you knew the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber...” he murmured. A blood-red line appeared on his forehead, then stretched down to his nose and his lips. It went through his chin, down his chest, and then the rest of his body. Blood sprayed everywhere as he was sliced completely in half. Then the two halves of him flopped onto the ground, surrounded by gore.

Given the current level of Xu Qing’s cultivation base, his Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber was even more deadly than before. One strike was enough to kill a three-flame opponent. Everyone who saw it was struck speechless.

Meanwhile, not far away, there was a team of Violent Crimes constables stopping anyone on the street to make sure they weren’t fleeing Night Dove operatives. Despite the curfew, there were still some people who, for various reasons, needed to be out and about.

At the moment, one such person was standing near the Violent Crimes constables. He was a young man of about thirteen or fourteen years of age, and he was so nervous he was trembling. He had arrived in Seven Blood Eyes the day before, and had just passed his assessment earlier that day and been assigned to the Sixth Peak. He had his identity medallion in his hand, and it indicated he was to check in for duty with the Sixth Peak’s Violent Crimes Division.

On his way back from the assessment, he was stopped by some Violent Crimes constables. And as they inspected his identity medallion, he heard a scream and looked up to see that Night Dove operative being cut in half by a saber!

He was shocked, but at the same time, the saber move filled him with a deep longing and an indescribable reverence.

Seeing the look in his eye, one of the constables looked over his shoulder and then said, “That’s Director Xu Qing from the Seventh Peak’s Violent Crimes Division. He’s the top figure in all of Seven Blood Eyes’ Violent Crimes Divisions.” Then he waved at the other constables and continued, “This kid’s with us. Calm down, you’ll scare him. We need to focus on catching the Night Dove fugitives. The exalted Xu Qing’s orders are to wipe out every last Night Dove operative before the sun rises! As for you, boy, hurry on your way. It’s not safe out tonight.”

The other constables raced off excitedly into the night. Meanwhile, the young man stood where he was, looking up at the heavenly saber slowly fading out of existence.

I wonder when I’ll be like that, he thought. Then he hurried on his way. A seed had been planted in his heart, a seed that would urge him to become a powerful expert as well.

Chapter 244: Dealing With Society

One saber slaughtered three flames!

Of course, any of the chosen from the seven sects could unleash similar battle prowess. After all, the difference between three flames and four was so far that the four-flame level could almost be considered a higher cultivation realm altogether. As long as a three-flame cultivator didn’t have an imperial-class technique or life lamp, or some other technique that could span entire levels, then the two levels were poles apart. That included both speed and strength.

And yet, Xu Qing's actions still caused waves of shock to fill the hearts of the Seven Sect Coalition disciples.

For one thing, none of them had paid very close attention to him early on, only to have him gradually turn into a massive threat. A lot of that had to do with the way Sima Ru went missing. That incident caused everyone to pay very close attention to Xu Qing. In fact, though most of them were loath to admit it, his actions had, beyond the shadow of a doubt, made him a consummate cultivator second only to Master Shengyun.

Another reason they were so shocked was that his use of that saber went to show how unbelievably deceptive Xu Qing was. It was the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber! Though it was only considered an imperial-class technique after someone gained enlightenment of a specific number of moves, no one had any way of knowing exactly how many moves Xu Qing could unleash. Even if it was only one, it was still enough to strike fear in their hearts.

After all, it was very difficult to force enlightenment of the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber. It came down to one's perception and comprehension, and that was the same no matter which sect you came from. In fact, there were some sects in the Revered Ancient mainland who specialized in saber arts, and they would use a person's ability to gain enlightenment of the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber as a basis to judge their cultivation aptitude. In some ways, the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber was a standard used to define who was 'chosen' and who wasn't. None of the Seven Sect Coalition chosen could meet that standard other than Master Shengyun. All of them had attempted enlightenment of that saber technique in the past, but had failed.

Therefore, seeing Xu Qing unleash the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber to slaughter a three-flame Night Dove operative left them with very mixed emotions.

As for the various visitors and allies present, they learned something new about Xu Qing after seeing him use that saber. They found out that he was both decisive and intelligent.

Night Dove had been present in Seven Blood Eyes for years, and they were like wild grass that would be incinerated in a wildfire, only to proliferate when spring came. But on this occasion, the fact that the Violent Crimes Division spent two months focused completely on exterminating Night Dove revealed... that something different was happening. And it was no small thing.

There were obviously people in Seven Blood Eyes who offered protection to Night Dove. After all, there were matters of profit to be considered. The only real question was how many people in Seven Blood Eyes were secretly helping Night Dove and making money as a result. No one knew. When truly attacking Night Dove, one had to have supreme confidence. The nonhuman cultivators knew that, and were now very curious to see if the Violent Crimes Division's actions against Night Dove would harm the sect's financial interests and cause internal chaos.

Regardless, Xu Qing acted very decisively. He had obviously been aware that the three-flame Night Dove operative was really a disciple of Seven Blood Eyes. But instead of digging to find out more details, he had simply killed him with a single saber strike. He never gave him the chance to reveal who he was. And given how badly mangled his corpse was, there was no way to deduce his true identity.

That saber strike hadn't just killed the disciple in question. It had also served to sever his connection to whoever backed him.

Xu Qing used that saber strike to send a message to whoever was still hiding in the shadows. And that message was: the Violent Crimes Division isn't going to dig further.

In an ordinary, flourishing world, that would be the wrong thing to do. But in a chaotic world, it was the smart decision, and would result in the least amount of negative repercussions. In fact, it was essentially a favor to whoever remained in the shadows. Xu Qing had handled the matter expertly.

Even Sir Bloodsmelter marveled in admiration. He wasn't worried about the sordid elements in the sect. He was fully aware that there was good and bad in everything in the world. When the sun shone the brightest, it cast the darkest shadow. And in many things, there wasn't just black and white, there was also gray.

Xu Qing had long since come to understand that. After arriving at Seven Blood Eyes he had encountered many situations in which ruthless characters hid behind gentle dispositions. And he had also seen what happened when people didn't realize that. As a result, he had not wasted any time learning the proper way to act.

After this incident, none of the nonhuman species would ever forget Xu Qing's name. And though they were struck by fear, they wouldn't reveal how they truly felt about him. Now they all knew that Xu Qing had impressive battle prowess, was ruthless, could be extremely deceptive, and was also very intelligent. Unless you struck like lightning to kill someone like that, you would fail, and then suffer as a result. Unless there was some amazing profit to be had, or some astounding enmity to address, no one would risk attacking someone like him. In fact, it would make more sense to make friends with him. Life was complicated in that way sometimes.

It was also for this same reason that, after the night of activity, when the net had been fully tightened on Night Dove and Xu Qing got a name list, his request to the sect about what to do next was approved.

That name list came in the form of an account book for the sales of living treasures. Books like that were often the key to operations such as this one. But they didn't always serve as a way to keep records. They could also be viewed as a system of checks and balances. After all, they could be left out for others to find....

To some extent, a book like this was almost like a 'taboo treasure.'

Xu Qing was fairly certain that it had been purposely left out for him, as it contained detailed records of everyone from the Seven Sect Coalition who had purchased living treasures. To Xu Qing's surprise, not every sect was on the list.

The sects that had never purchased any treasures were: Spiritgloom Valley, the supervisory sect to the Second Peak; the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect, supervisory sect to the Sixth Peak; the Dark Serenity Sect, supervisory sect to the Seventh Peak; and the Heaven-Fate Pavilion, supervisory sect to the Fifth Peak.

The sects which had made plenty of purchases were the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect and House of Grue Hunters, as well as the Fourth Peak's supervisory sect, the Lunisolar Dao Palace.

Whatever chosen from the former two sects that remained in Seven Blood Eyes had already been arrested, which left only the chosen from the Lunisolar Dao Palace.

When Xu Qing thought about the wealth of resources he had acquired from Sima Ling's ring of holding, he felt the urge to immediately go out and arrest the chosen from the Lunisolar Dao Palace. But he didn't want to act rashly, and therefore asked permission from the sect first. Unless there was a potential for incredible profit, he wasn't the type of person who would overstep his authority. He had no idea who this person was connected to, or their role in the Seven Sect Coalition, so it seemed smarter to deck himself out in a tiger skin before going to enforce the law.

When he sent his request to the sect, the answer that came back was simple.

“Arrest him!”

Having received that answer, Xu Qing left the Violent Crimes Division early in the morning.

The slaughter in the night had swept through the city like a fierce wind, driving away the forces of evil.

In Seven Blood Eyes, there were laws in place to protect mortals. Therefore, the Violent Crimes Division's actions not only didn't harm the mortals, but actually helped them to feel safer.

As Xu Qing walked down the street, he caught sight of the cart he used to frequent for breakfast. There, he got a bowl of soup and a few pastries to eat. At the urging of the proprietor, he got three eggs. Putting down a few spirit coins, he took his leave.

That particular cart had never been very popular. It was just one of many places to eat breakfast in the city. But it had changed in the past year. Violent Crimes Division constables on patrol often went there, and as a result, business had been good. Perhaps because of that, no one had ever dared to cause problems for the proprietor.

The proprietor knew exactly why all of that was happening. After clearing the table, he looked at Xu Qing walking away in the distance, and sighed. He remembered the first time Xu Qing had shown up three years ago, looking cautious and on guard. And the proprietor remembered how satisfied Xu Qing had always looked after having a bowl of soup.

It's been three years, and the young man has grown up. Not only that, he's become someone very important.

Then he looked around at the other customers eating breakfast, all of whom reeked of blood yet were staring in awe and reverence at Xu Qing walking away. He smiled and shook his head.

Xu Qing made his way down the street, walking neither too fast nor too slow. He had an extraordinary cultivation base, and much authority in the sect, yet as always, he preferred sticking to the side of the street in the shadows.

After enough time passed for an incense stick to burn, the sky was bright and there were a lot of pedestrians on the street. That was when Xu Qing arrived at a large, two-story mansion. All visiting sects had been given special lodgings for their stay in Seven Blood Eyes, and this was where the Lunisolar Dao Palace was staying.

The place pulsed with the power of spell formations, and when Xu Qing sensed them, he calmly said, “I hereby request that the sect's grand spell formation suppress this location.”

Given that Xu Qing was on an official law enforcement mission, the sect's grand formation instantly unleashed crushing power. As it rumbled in the area, all the spell formations protecting the Lunisolar Dao Palace's mansion ceased functioning.

Cries of alarm rang out from inside.

Xu Qing's expression was placid as he pushed the main door open and saw dozens of alarmed people rushing in his direction.

Those in the lead were two men and a woman.

The woman wore a long white gown, cut in the style of palace attire. However, it didn't have any complicated designs on it. It was dyed to look like the setting sun, and had clouds embroidered on it. The woman emanated the aroma of medicine, and she had elegant good looks. Though her eyes glittered, and though she was moving with the crowd, she didn't look the least bit alarmed.

Next to her was a young man in a yellow jerkin. He was good-looking, with freckles, and bright, clear eyes that were currently fixed on Xu Qing.

On the other side was another young man who wore a sky-blue daoist robe with red cloud designs on it. From the way the clouds seemed to float across the robe, it seemed to have a spell formation in it. This young man looked pale in the face, and was clearly alarmed. And when he noticed Xu Qing, he started breathing heavily.

Behind this group of three were ordinary disciples from the Lunisolar Dao Palace, and all of them seemed very nervous.

Further back, Xu Qing noticed three middle-aged cultivators. Though they weren't speaking, from the fluctuations they radiated, they were Gold Core cultivators.

Xu Qing took the scene in, then looked at the young man in the blue robe and said, "Are you Zhou Qifan from the Lunisolar Dao Palace?" [1]

Chapter 245: Analyzing the Revered Ancient Game Board

Struggling to control his breathing, the young man in the blue daoist robe grimly said, "Xu Qing, this place is a mobile headquarters of the Lunisolar Dao Palace. And that means you're on our home turf! What business do you have here?"

The truth was that ever since the destruction wreaked upon Night Dove the previous night, plus Xu Qing's slaying of the black-robed man with a heavenly saber, and the way he crushed the disciple from the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect, this young man had started feeling very nervous. He knew full well that he was the only person left who had done business with Night Dove. In his anxiety, he had asked some fellow daoists from Spiritglom Valley and the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect to accompany him. Just in case.

Seeing Xu Qing show up, and also call him out by name, left Zhou Qifan feeling very downcast.

Xu Qing had read Zhou Qifan's file before leaving Violent Crimes and knew that he liked to keep a low profile. In fact, other than issuing a single challenge to the Fourth Peak, he hadn't done much. After hearing his identity confirmed, Xu Qing nodded.

“On the authority of the sect, I’m here to arrest Zhou Qifan for consorting with Night Dove.” As the words left his mouth, Xu Qing took a step forward with blinding speed and reached out to grab Zhou Qifan.

Zhou Qifan’s eyes glittered coldly as a rumbling sound echoed out, and the red clouds on his robe erupted, turning into numerous red threads. Flying out, they made a spell formation that viciously crushed down toward Xu Qing. At the same time, Zhou Qifan backed up.

“Dharma Protector Zhang. Fellow Daoists! Please help!”

As Zhou Qifan yelled those things, Xu Qing’s right hand made contact with the spell formation of red clouds. A boom rang out as the golden crow appeared behind him and smashed into the spell formation. It collapsed, and the golden crow gobbled up the red clouds.

The dharma protector behind him hesitated briefly, then sighed and started walking forward. But then Xu Qing waved his hand, and the sect’s spell formation swept toward the man. He didn’t resist at all, and thus, the formation shoved him a good distance away. He didn’t want to end up like the dharma protector from the House of Grue Hunters. What was happening was no surprise to him. He knew that Seven Blood Eyes was out arresting people, and obviously, fighting back wouldn’t do any good.

Although being driven away would involve a loss of face on his part, he knew that Zhou Qifan would only be arrested, not hurt. There just wasn’t any need to risk his life to prevent that from happening. In reality, he was actually happy to let the spell formation push him away.

Meanwhile, the two chosen from Spiritgloom Valley and the Heavenmirror Treasure Sect took one look at Xu Qing and backed away. None of them offered Zhou Qifan a bit of help. The reality was that they hadn’t come here with the intention of backing him up. The Seven Sect Coalition was an alliance, not a unified sect. They knew why Xu Qing was here, and also knew that interfering wouldn’t change the end result. So why do something to get on Xu Qing’s bad side?

They had responded to Zhou Qifan’s invitation simply to give him face. They had never had any intention of putting their lives on the line. Xu Qing was a rising star right now. Besides, conflicts between sects didn’t necessarily affect personal relationships. If they had a chance to sow some good will with Xu Qing, it made sense to take it. As they backed up, they clasped hands politely to Xu Qing, making it obvious that they weren’t taking Zhou Qifan’s side.

Seeing all this, Zhou Qifan’s face fell, but he didn’t say anything. None of this was much of a surprise to him. Truth be told, if the two people he’d invited did jump in to help him, he would have been happy. But even if they didn’t, it still aligned with his overall goal. After all, there would now be witnesses to spread word of his arrest.

That way, once he was imprisoned, he wouldn’t have to worry that his life was in danger. His sect would obviously lose face, and that would anger the leadership and hopefully prompt them to interfere sooner.

Everyone present had their own goals and strategies at work.

Xu Qing took a second step forward, his golden crow coalescing behind him. As Zhou Qifan glared at him, Xu Qing lifted his right hand and prepared to deliver a crushing blow.

“I’ll go with you!” Zhou Qifan said loudly. He figured things had gone far enough. He didn’t want to get beaten into the ground and then dragged away like a dead dog. That would have been far, far too embarrassing. At the same time, he couldn’t simply give up instantly.

Xu Qing’s eyebrows shot up.

Seeing that, Zhou Qifan’s spirits lifted a bit. Keeping the stubborn angry look on his face, he took a deep breath and quickly said, “I did buy some living treasures, Xu Qing. But not for myself. I don’t do that type of thing. I purchased them for someone else in my sect. In fact, I already made arrangements for the living treasures to be integrated back into society. Furthermore, I created a name list to make things easy for you. Considering the hour, I think the delivery should be happening right now.”

An odd expression could be seen on Xu Qing’s face as his identity medallion vibrated. Scanning it, he saw a new message from the Violent Crimes Division.

“Director, someone representing Zhou Qifan from the Lunisolar Dao Palace arrived with a name list of living treasure purchasers, as well as a commendation medal to be awarded to the Violent Crimes Division for taking care of Night Dove. In the commendation medal are 2,000,000 spirit stones, as well as a medicinal pill that we were told is an aperture-opening pill.”

Zhou Qifan sighed in relief as he watched Xu Qing checking his message. However, he made sure to look as angry as possible.

Xu Qing looked up at Zhou Qifan for a long moment, then lowered the hand he had raised moments before.

“Let’s go,” he said, then turned and walked away.

Snorting coldly, Zhou Qifan lifted his chin, looked around at the other disciples present, then hurried after Xu Qing.

Eventually, they reached the cell block in the Violent Crimes Division. When Zhou Qifan saw Sima Ling in one of the jail cells, gasping for breath, he breathed a sigh of relief inside.

It’s a good thing I reacted quickly. Otherwise, things would have turned ugly for me.

Then he noticed Huang Yikun in another cell, as well as Master Shengyun’s Junior Brother. That caused his heart to pound. After all, though he had assumed Huang Yikun’s disappearance had something to do with Xu Qing, the miserable state he was in made Zhou Qifan even more convinced that he had done the right thing. Finally, he noticed that he himself was being restrained with eighteen dharma shackles, whereas Sima Ling and Huang Yikun both had twenty.

It seems this Xu Qing is actually pretty reasonable.

Zhou Qifan was feeling very pleased at how he had managed to deescalate the situation. He had done everything he could, both above board and otherwise, and in the end, he did manage to save some face as a result. Unlike Sima Ling, he had come of his own accord. He had cooperated. As a result, he didn’t lose much personal face. His sect certainly lost face, but that was different.

What was more, his accommodations actually weren't very bad. It wasn't lost on him that Sima Ling and Huang Yikun were staring begrudgingly at the table, chair, and rug he had in his cell. He actually felt a bit smug.

Meanwhile, Zhou Qifan's arrest ensured that absolutely no challenges were being issued anywhere in the sect. At the same time, Seven Blood Eyes' celebration at having won the war continued.

As for Xu Qing, now that he had thoroughly taken care of Night Dove, he was preparing to take a trip outside the sect.

His destination? Forbidden by the Phoenix.

He had purchased just about every type of poisonous plant and poisonous medicine available in the sect, yet had still reached a bottleneck in the evolution of his beetles. After the sixteenth generation, they weren't changing. And that affected his plan with the taboo poison pill. His progress was at a standstill.

Based on his analysis, it was because the poisonous plants he had access to were just too weak. He needed more dangerous poisons for his beetles to absorb. That was the key to breaking through that bottleneck.

And the most suitable place in the area to look for poisonous plants and medicines was Forbidden by the Phoenix.

Besides, he remembered the Captain mentioning there being a Supreme Vastness daoist temple somewhere in there, so he planned to go check it out. Having settled on a plan, he spent a few days doing research into Forbidden by the Phoenix. Considering how close it was to the sect, and how the First Peak used it as a training ground, it was obvious that the First Peak knew more about it than anyone else. As a result, there was a lot of information to be had.

That said, Xu Qing didn't trust the people from the First Peak, and felt it was better to buy multiple sets of information, then compare them to each other. What was more, he could tap into sect files and also reports from the Intelligence Division.

After getting about a hundred different sets of information, he felt that he had a good overview.

He had already identified several locations where poisons were common, as well as some places where poisonous items could be purchased from grues.

Xu Qing went over the information a few times to make sure he understood everything. Then he started getting together all of the items he would need for his trip. In some cases, he purchased things secretly. Also, he went to the Night Dove prisoners he had locked up and extracted some heart-blood from all of them. Considering that there were several thousand prisoners, that blood ended up filling eleven bottles, which he then put into his bag of holding.

Based on what he had read, there were gruish areas in Forbidden by the Phoenix where heart-blood was used like currency.

As Xu Qing made his various preparations, visitors continued to show up in Seven Blood Eyes.

People from different sects came and went, ensuring that the sect was a very bustling place. In fact, a particularly powerful group of people arrived that instantly became a subject of discussion among

the disciples. It was one of the big groups from the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture in the Revered Ancient mainland. It was... the Daoist Rite of Departure!

South Phoenix had the Church of Departure, but in reality they were actually just a branch of the Daoist Rite of Departure from the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture. Of course, the arrival of people from the daoist rite was a very important thing for the Church of Departure.

The group from the Daoist Rite of Departure consisted of five people.

Xu Qing didn't personally go see them, but after looking through the file he saw that these five were all deacons in the Daoist Rite of Departure, which meant that they were roughly like the echelon highnesses.

What was more, when examining the images of the five deacons, his hands suddenly trembled. Then, a strange look of reminiscence appeared on his face.

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Her older brother?

One of the five deacons from the Daoist Rite of Departure was a person Xu Qing had seen in the scavenger basecamp. It was none other than the older brother of that little girl with the scarred face. [1]

I wonder how she's doing nowadays.

He remembered the little girl, her face smudged and dirty, but always smiling in the wind and snow. In fact, he remembered the snowflakes drifting about when she handed him a piece of candy.

"Big Bro Kid, whenever I'm sad, my momma would always give me some candy. I just had to eat it, and I'd feel better. This is the last piece of candy and... I want you to have it. Feel better, Big Bro Kid!"

Xu Qing sat there silently thinking about the last thing Grandmaster Bai ever said to him.

"As long as we don't die, we'll meet again."

A few more days passed during which he made a few more preparations for Forbidden by the Phoenix. Then, late at night, Xu Qing left Harbor 176, taking the path past the First Peak toward Forbidden by the Phoenix!

As Xu Qing made his way out of the sect, the moon shone down on a pavilion atop the Seventh Peak. There, a wrinkled old man wearing a black robe, with strange light flowing in his eyes, sat across from Master Seventh. The two of them were playing Go.

The old man was actually the patriarch of Seven Blood Eyes, Sir Bloodsmelter. That glittering light in his eyes was actually evidence of his immensely high cultivation level. He was in the first step of the Void Returning level, which was called Space-Shattering 1,000 Daos.

Each stream of light flowing in his eyes was a great dao.

There was someone else in the pavilion other than the two men playing Go. The third was a middle-aged woman dressed in palace attire. She seemed unusually elegant, but her face was expressionless

as she served tea to the men. If Xu Qing was here, he would recognize that woman. She was Ding Xue's aunt. [2]

Sir Bloodsmelter lifted his cup and took a sip of tea, all while looking at Master Seventh, who was staring thoughtfully at the board, trying to decide what to do next. Sir Bloodsmelter smiled.

“Little Seventh, if we think of the situation with the Seven Sect Coalition like a game of Go, then what's their next move? They made a big fuss that everyone could see. Their aggression toward us couldn't be more obvious. But what's their real goal?”

Plastering a confused look onto his face, Master Seventh replied, “I can tell you're testing me, Patriarch. Unfortunately, your humble son-in-law is a bit of a dunce. So I'm not sure how to answer.”

Sir Bloodsmelter smiled and shook his head. “Always the deceptive one, aren't you?”

Master Seventh also smiled. Apparently, he'd figured out the best move, as he picked up a game piece and put it on the board.

“On the bottom half of the board,” Master Seventh said softly, “I could take these seven pieces, but it wouldn't do much overall. But on the top half of the board, taking this one single piece would win me control of this entire area. It's similar to how the Seven Sect Coalition is making such a fuss in the south. The truth is that their real goal is in the north. For a long time now, the Seven Sect Coalition has been coveting the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River. If it weren't for the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society keeping the seven sects in check and thwarting their every move, things wouldn't have reached this point. Everything is about to come to fruition. Pissing off Supreme Arbiter is going to make things much easier.”

Chapter 246: The Ghost Wards of Forbidden by the Phoenix (part 1)

There were many forbidden regions in the continent of South Phoenix, but there was only one forbidden ground. And that was Forbidden by the Phoenix. It covered more than half of South Phoenix, and it was only because of the Mountains of Truth and other special reasons that it didn't cover even more of the continent. Even still, it continued to expand year by year. In fact, many portions of it had already overtaken the Mountains of Truth. If things continued in this manner, then in a few thousand years, all of South Phoenix would be Forbidden by the Phoenix.

One big difference between forbidden regions and forbidden grounds were the inhabitants. Forbidden regions usually contained beasts and grues. Sometimes they also had mysterious entities sealed in them. But forbidden regions didn't produce intelligent species. Only forbidden grounds could do so.

One example of that was Forbidden by the Zombie in the Forbidden Sea. That was where the Seazombies had come to be, and it was why they lived so close to Forbidden by the Zombie. Similarly, there were species associated with Forbidden by the Phoenix. [1]

However, because Flame Phoenix was friendly with humans, the species born within Forbidden by the Phoenix lived in harmony with them.

At the same time, it wasn't unheard of for humans to explore Forbidden by the Phoenix, whether to acquire resources, hunt beasts, or the like. Humans would usually leave the intelligent species alone, but sometimes those species were willing to trade with humans.

That was how the ghost wards came to be.

As the name suggested, ghost wards were walled cities where ghosts and monsters would gather for commerce.

Truth be told, the inhabitants of the ghost wards weren't unique to Forbidden by the Phoenix. Many forbidden grounds had such beings. From the outside, the ghost wards didn't look much different from regular cities. But inside, the inhabitants were freakish and grotesque. And most of them were grues.

Normally speaking, they traded goods that humans rarely encountered, and most of them were of the unhealthy yin variety.

Xu Qing's first goal in Forbidden by the Phoenix was to find one of the ghost wards.

Ghost wards don't have fixed locations in Forbidden by the Phoenix. They appear and disappear randomly. Finding one is going to require a bit of luck....

Currently, Xu Qing was slipping through Forbidden by the Phoenix like a specter, moving at top speed.

He would occasionally leap into the air and occasionally randomly shift directions. Sometimes he would fly to the top of a tree and take a look at his surroundings, and sometimes he would scatter poison powder on himself.

If any disciples from the First Peak were here to observe Xu Qing, they would be astounded at how he moved with such practiced ease. The reason he would occasionally leap into the air was to avoid beasts hiding on the ground. The reason he would change directions randomly was to avoid dangers like spider webs or beasts on the prowl. The reason he would fly to the treetops was to scout the way ahead and make sure he didn't get turned around in the jungle. And the reason he wasn't flying was that there was no cover in the sky, and he had no idea what dangers might be lurking unseen.

Even given Xu Qing's current level of battle prowess, he was being just as vigilant as he'd always been when traveling in forbidden regions. That level of vigilance was part of his blood now, and would never disappear.

It doesn't matter what type of forbidden region you're in, you should never go around slaughtering things randomly. The scent of blood will attract even bigger and fiercer beasts.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing suddenly shot his hand out and grabbed a strange looking bug that had just flown out from the dirt. It was about three inches long, and resembled a fish, except with a long stinger tail. It had flown out upside down, and had been preparing to use its stinger as a weapon to stab Xu Qing in the neck.

It's a terrestrial stickleback.

Crushing the fish-like bug's head, he tossed it into his bag of holding. Randomly slaughtering things wasn't a good idea, but selectively killing and harvesting was different. The terrestrial stickleback's tail contained a powerful poison that could be very dangerous to cultivators without life flames.

Even though this was Xu Qing's first time in Forbidden by the Phoenix, he was familiar with the various types of plants and vegetation that could be found here. He had also done a lot of research into the types of beasts present.

The first humans to find ghost wards had to rely completely on luck. But after trade was established, the ghost wards started giving out ghost flutes.

I need to find an empty area, then use three logs to create a triangle design and set up three candles in the corners. Finally, if I play the ghost flute at exactly fifteen minutes before midnight, a ghost ward should appear.

He had read all about the process of finding ghost wards, and had made sure to come equipped with candles. Thankfully, ghost flutes could be purchased in the sect.

Looking up at the sky to check the time, he eventually came to rest on a large tree. After looking around, he murmured, "This place should work."

Waving his hand, he sent the black iron skewer out. It zipped back and forth like lightning to chop down three trees. Rumbling sounds echoed out as they fell to the ground. The tree he'd been standing on was one of them, and as it fell, he floated up into the air. Then he waved his hand, causing the three resulting logs to form a triangle.

Then the iron skewer flew back to him. Inside, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was looking around vigilantly. Obviously he was working hard to demonstrate his loyalty.

After making some adjustments to the triangle, Xu Qing landed in the middle. Taking out three white candles, he put them on the logs, then waved his hand to produce a flute made from a bone.

With the flute in hand, he looked up to the sky and waited for the right time.

Before long, it was fifteen minutes before midnight. Without any hesitation, Xu Qing lifted the ghost flute to his lips and gently blew on it.

An ear-piercing sound erupted from the instrument, almost like the cry of an owl. As the sound filled heaven and earth, a sinister wind picked up. The wind blew the three candles, causing them to flicker, while simultaneously filling the area with frigid coldness. Frost appeared on the ground, covering dirt and plants alike. The candles' flames turned green, and at the same time, a sound rose up like faint whispering or muttering. It wasn't possible to hear words being spoken, but it was like countless individuals engaged in a muffled conversation. As the sound entered Xu Qing's mind, his heart pounded and... a fog built up.

The fog came suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere, billowing and roiling with such thickness that the trees in the surrounding jungle quickly disappeared.

Shortly thereafter, a city appeared in the fog. The city walls were gray, as were all the buildings inside. The architecture seemed ancient, as if this city had been buried in the sands of time for ages.

The city... was bustling. It was possible to see countless figures floating about inside of it, packing the place. There were all types of creatures. Some were headless, some had the bodies of beasts, some were tall and burly, some were extremely thin, some had mouths so huge they had to hold their own chins up, and some seemed to pulse with evil. There were also countless shops lining the streets, the proprietors of which were all vicious grues.

Any mortal who saw a place like this would be scared witless. It was definitely a city of ghosts. Perhaps there were living beings inside, but if so, they were hiding their auras and instead made sure to pulse with mutagen.

That related to one of the rules for ghost wards. Though humans were allowed to go inside for business purposes, they were required to have very strong mutagen, to the point where they were like a human on the verge of experiencing mutation. Another rule was that the countless grues who filled this ghost city were supposed to stay quiet. Talking wasn't allowed.

The most unusual thing about the city was that, in the very center of it, floating high overhead, was a gigantic head. It looked like the head of a middle-aged man, except with no hair on it. In that respect, it looked like the head of a monk. Its eyes were closed, and it didn't move at all. Surrounding it were countless chains that seemed to be keeping it suppressed and sealed. Shockingly, a close inspection of those chains would reveal that they were actually made from skinless arms!

Furthermore, standing guard at each of the four city gates were enormous, burly figures with heads the size of babies, naked to the waist, with 15-meter-long ghostheaded greatsabers slung over their shoulders. Two such guards stood at the gate in front of Xu Qing. [2]

As Xu Qing took all of this in, he kept his expression neutral. However, his heart was pounding. Although he had read about the ghost wards of Forbidden by the Phoenix, this was his first time seeing one in person, and it reminded him of the ghost cities he had seen at the bottom of the Forbidden Sea. [3]

Well, this is obviously a ghost ward, right?

Instead of rushing inside, he took a minute to look around. Off to the side, the candles were flickering wildly in the sinister wind.

Xu Qing wasn't in a hurry. By the time he finished studying his surroundings to his satisfaction, the candles were about to blow out, and the city was starting to fade. At that point, he reached out to his shadow and drew on its mutagen.

Instantly, mutagen filled him, causing his skin to turn black, and becoming so strong it seemed like he might mutate at any point. When he was virtually surrounded by a cloud of mutagen, he started walking toward the ghost ward.

Each step took him some nine meters forward, and thus, within only a few breaths of time, he reached the city gate.

When he arrived, the burly fellows with the sabers on their shoulders looked down at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing didn't stop walking. He just let them look at him as he entered the city.

After he entered, they looked away. At the same time, the fog surrounding the city grew even denser, to the point where it was the only thing visible. Apparently, when outsiders came into the city for business, the outside world was cut off. The only thing visible was the moon, which was now an odd green color as it shone down. All of that was in line with what Xu Qing had expected. His expression was the same as ever as he started walking down the street amidst the crowds of grues. He was strolling along with ghosts.

Around then, the nose of the huge monk's head twitched, as though it were sniffing out a scent. It almost seemed like it was about to open its eyes.

Chapter 247: Getting Tangled Up with an Evil Spirit

Somewhere in Forbidden by the Phoenix, Xu Qing stood in the middle of the triangle of logs, looking at the spot where the ghost ward had just disappeared. There was nothing left of the candles which had been burning on the logs, other than some candle wax which had seeped into the dry bark.

He sent some dharma force into his bag of holding, and sure enough, the items he had purchased were still there.

Items purchased from ghost wards can't be brought out into the day. You can only use them at night.

That was something he had learned in his research of ghost wards. Thinking back to everything that happened in the ghost ward, he started to speculate about the giant monk's head.

"It mentioned golden crows," he murmured.

He could only guess that the monk's head must be from some nonhuman species that the golden crow assimilated in the past. After thinking about it for a while, he stepped out of the triangle of logs and started moving through the jungle.

As for the details of the ghost ward and that giant head... he could always come back later to investigate further, when he was stronger. Putting the matter aside, he accelerated through the trees.

Finding a ghost ward was only one of the things he had come to Forbidden by the Phoenix to accomplish. He was also hoping to harvest some specific poisonous beasts, plants, and vegetation.

If everything goes smoothly, I might be able to get my beetles to break through their bottleneck in development. And if they experience some growth, it will help my plan of concocting that taboo poison pill.

As he sped through the jungle, he kept an eye out for the poisonous plants he needed.

Just like that, a day went by.

Forbidden by the Phoenix was a lot less dangerous during the day than the night. Xu Qing made sure to stay near the periphery. That, coupled with his battle prowess and cultivation base, ensured that though he did encounter some beasts, he was able to dispatch them easily.

He found some of the medicinal plants he was looking for. Despite him staying in relatively safe surroundings, some of the plants he encountered were dangerous. As evening fell, he spotted a meadow full of bright red grass that filled him with a sense of danger.

The red grass wiggled in gruish fashion, and as Xu Qing looked closer, he noticed that each stalk of grass had an eye on it, all staring at him maliciously.

Xu Qing shivered. It felt like his skin was crawling. Backing up quickly, he lit his life flames and used his life lamp to block the malicious intent.

After leaving that area, he looked down at himself and found that, unbeknownst to him, an eye had started growing on his forearm. Rather, it was half of an eye, as it hadn't finished growing yet. And

it wasn't open. However, the eyelids were clearly visible, as were the eyelashes. And it looked exactly like the eyes on those red blades of grass.

Unfortunately, not even balefire seemed enough to wipe the glue-like eye out of existence. By using his shadow, Xu Qing could remove the eye. But once his shadow went back to its normal position, the eye would grow back.

It was still growing, and Xu Qing got the sense that it would only take a few more days before the eye could open. He had no idea what would happen when it did. After some consideration, he used Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits on the eye, and managed to assimilate it.

"Forbidden by the Phoenix really is a dangerous place," he murmured. After finishing with his arm, he closely inspected the rest of himself and found a total of thirty eyes.

None of them were close to being completely grown. In fact, most were little more than seeds. But what chilled Xu Qing to the bone was that the eyes weren't growing on his skin, but rather, in his internal organs. If he hadn't taken the time to inspect himself and find them, and they finished growing and opening, the result would surely have been horrific. Thankfully, he was able to expunge them the same way as the first.

As evening fell and darkness spread, he grew more cautious. Eventually, he found a tree hollow that he could burrow into for safety.

I found most of the poisonous plants I wanted. Now I just need to find the poisonous beasts....

He had no intention of being out in the open at night. After all, the beasts he sought weren't nocturnal.

While he waited for the midnight hour to come, he would feed some of the unhealthy yin poisons he had harvested to his beetles. At the same time, he set up some spell formations around the tree, and also scattered poison powder everywhere. Feeling secure, he closed his eyes to meditate. As the night grew dark, and he heard strange cries out in the jungle, he thought back to years ago when he had hid just like this in that ruined city.

I wonder when I'll be strong enough... that I won't need to fear forbidden regions and forbidden grounds.

Time passed and the midnight hour grew near. Frigid energy abounded in the area, and as Xu Qing exhaled, white steam emerged from his mouth. It had been a long time since he felt cold like this. Xu Qing had always hated the cold. Ever since reaching Foundation Establishment, his cultivation base and battle prowess were high enough that he rarely felt cold. But tonight... he experienced that feeling once again.

Something's off here. Xu Qing's eyes glittered as he realized that the temperatures in other parts of the forbidden ground weren't as low as right here.

He ignited his life flames and entered the profound radiance state, then emerged from the hole in the tree to look around. Instantly, his face fell.

Off in the distance in the jungle was a huge mass of fog, slowly spreading out. The same ghost ward he had visited the previous night was appearing right in front of him! Except, Xu Qing hadn't set up the logs or played the ghost flute. Without hesitation, he started moving in the opposite direction.

However, as the ghost ward took shape, the giant monk's head appeared, bound by chains made of arms. Turning to look at him, it again spoke in a voice that boomed like thunder.

“A golden crow assimilated my species! All golden crows shall die!”

The head lunged upward, causing the arm chains to stretch longer and longer. Yet they couldn't hold the head back.

The head strained forward, flying out of the city and smashing into the surrounding jungle, crushing trees as it started rolling toward Xu Qing like a gigantic ball. It spun in a blur, smashing trees left and right, and causing the arm chains to twist and distort. Behind it, the entire ghost ward trembled and shook.

The sight of it caused Xu Qing's pupils to constrict, and filled his heart with a sense of impending crisis. With his life flames and life lamps burning brightly, and the golden crow pushing him from behind, he fled with lightning-like speed.

Behind him, the mountain-like head continued to roll in his direction.

Meanwhile, a piercing cry rang out from the depths of the ghost ward as countless ghost hands stretched out toward the head.

From a distance, it was possible to see Xu Qing fleeing, chased by the giant head, with the chains stretching out taut, and the ghost hands chasing the head.

“All golden crows....” the giant head howled furiously.

“Shall...”

“DIE!!!”

As it screamed the final words, it leaped into the air again, as if hoping to smash down onto Xu Qing and crush him. However, at this point, the chains couldn't stretch any further, and finally, the head slowed to a halt.

Just as the ghost arms were about to arrive and grab the huge head, it let loose a monstrous cackle and then exploded. The blast caused the huge head to transform into countless smaller heads, which rained down onto the ground and started chasing Xu Qing. Because the smaller heads weren't being restrained by the chains, they moved with incredible speed. In the blink of an eye, a few dozen of them were rolling toward Xu Qing with their mouths wide open.

Xu Qing spun in place, his eyes burning with killing intent. At the same time, the golden crow behind him shot forward, and his iron skewer sped toward the heads. The golden crow let out a piercing cry and then viciously absorbed the heads, while the iron skewer pierced through one after another, transforming them into ash.

However, nothing corporeal resulted. It was as if the heads were mere illusions, and didn't really exist. In fact, moments after transforming into ash, the heads would form back together, unharmed. One of them even appeared right beneath Xu Qing, and before he could react, it bit deeply into his calf.

His life flame erupted, sending the head tumbling away from him, but it wasn't hurt. As it chewed, it said, “Yummy, yummy, yummy! So weeaaaaak!”

Xu Qing's face was grim. He knew that the golden crow wasn't weak. Rather, his cultivation base wasn't strong enough to release the golden crow's full potential.

Looking down at his calf, he saw the missing chunk of flesh the head had bitten off.

He was used to devouring others; this was his first time being in the reverse situation.

As for the head which had bitten him, it licked its lips and then gave a bizarre grin. Then, just as it was about to rush back toward him, one of the ghost arms grabbed it and dragged it back to the ghost ward. Other heads were also being grabbed by ghost arms, but some managed to lunge toward Xu Qing and snap at him.

Xu Qing's expression was unsightly as he glared at the nearest head. Though his life flame power couldn't harm it, his eyes still shone with cold light. The shadow seemed to realize what he was thinking, and stretched out to absorb the mutagen from the head. Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior, not wanting to be outdone, stabbed right toward it. The head was so vicious that, without hesitation, it started snapping at the shadow and the patriarch.

A moment later, the head collapsed, and beetles poured out of its eyes. They were Xu Qing's beetles, which he had released in the chase earlier. However, they didn't do any good.

When a head was destroyed, it would simply form back up again. And there were lots of heads in the area.

Realizing that fighting wasn't doing anything, Xu Qing frowned in frustration and tapped into all the power of his cultivation base to simply flee.

And thus, the night passed.

The chase went on during that time. He never gave the pursuing heads a chance to surround him. And slowly but surely, the ghost arms did their work.

As the light of dawn appeared on the horizon, Xu Qing exploded one of the heads, and it turned out to be the last one. All the other heads had been captured by the ghost arms. Then the sun came up, and everything disappeared.

Xu Qing stood there in the jungle, his eyes gleaming with a vicious light as he looked back in the direction where the ghost ward had appeared. His clothes were in shreds, and though his flesh was mostly healed, bite marks were still visible everywhere.

What is that giant monk head? Smashing the smaller heads didn't do any good. They just form back up again. Only the ghost arms can control it. It's like the ghost arms are its jailers, and the monk head is a prisoner that broke out of jail to chase me.

Glancing down at the bite marks, the vicious look in his eye grew more intense. I have to think of a way to kill it.

Off to the side, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior snorted coldly. Biting me is one thing. But how dare that giant head bite the Fiendish Xu! It's done for!

Chapter 248: There's Always a Reason a Wolf Looks Back

As the sky grew bright, the jungle became normal again. Xu Qing quickly found a tree which he ascended. There, he sat down cross-legged to meditate and recuperate. It was late in the morning when he finally opened his eyes and looked in the direction where the ghost ward had appeared the

previous night. Eyes burning with animosity, he got to his feet and started moving through the jungle.

He wasn't searching for the animals he'd hoped to find. He was looking for something else. Eventually, about an hour later, he spotted a valley. Entering the profound radiance state, he searched the place. From above, it was shaped like the character 凹, with only one way in and out.

After confirming that the area was unoccupied, Xu Qing looked at the three sides of the valley, then launched a fist strike at a nearby boulder. A boom rang out as the boulder exploded, leaving behind a large cave.

Xu Qing looked around more, then did the same thing a few more times. Shortly thereafter, he had excavated a few dozen caves in the valley walls. Next, he did the same on the valley floor.

After calculating the time, he entered one of the caves, then took out an iron box from his bag of holding. It was none other than the wish box with the taboo poison pill in it. Opening the wish box, he placed it down in the cave. Instantly, the aura of the poison pill began to spread out. Flying back, Xu Qing then started piling rubble from the destroyed boulders into the cave entrance, creating a wall.

Although the rubble couldn't completely seal the cave entrance, based on what Xu Qing knew of the pill, as long as there was no strong wind, the pill's aura would remain inside the cave for at least a day.

Eventually, when there was only a small portion of the wall left to complete, Xu Qing waved his hand. The wish box flew out, and he quickly sealed the cave, then moved on to the next cave. His plan was to fill each cave with the aura of the taboo poison pill, and thus, fill the entire valley. He continued working.

Off to the side, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior watched Xu Qing, and his eyes slowly filled with a malicious glint. Inside, he mused that it was bad enough to provoke people, but what was really a bad idea was to provoke the Fiendish Xu....

In that manner, time passed.

Night fell, and it was around the time the midnight hour was approaching that Xu Qing finished his work. He had dug out about sixty caves, and now, all of them were filled with the aura of that poison pill. By extension, the valley itself was fully infected. Thankfully, Xu Qing had already built up some resistance to the poison. Even still, he had been forced to leave the valley a few times and let the violet crystal heal him.

Now that the work was done, he looked at the valley and felt pleased.

Even after all the work, the resistance he had built up would only sustain him for the time it took half an incense stick to burn. After that, he had to rely on the regeneration properties of the violet crystal. Anything else that got hit with that poison would be in very bad shape.

Let's see how long that big head can take it!

He left the valley and went some distance away, where he felled three trees and put the resulting logs into a triangle shape. Then he put three white candles on the logs. He was worried that the

giant head from the ghost ward wouldn't come looking for him this night, and thus, planned to bring it to him. All he had to do was wait for the right time. However, events quickly proved that Xu Qing had been overthinking things. Around fifteen minutes before midnight, but before he could light the candles, a frigid white fog started building up in the area.

"It's here," he murmured, narrowing his eyes as he looked off into the distance.

As fog spread through the jungle, the familiar ghost ward started to take shape. This time, there were a lot more chains binding the monk head than before. The ghost ward was obviously keeping it suppressed much more strongly. And yet, that didn't stop the ghost ward from appearing in the open due to the giant head. Clearly, the extra attempt to suppress it wasn't doing much good.

The moment it appeared, the monk's eyes opened and locked onto Xu Qing.

"All golden crows shall die!"

Just like the previous night, the giant head lunged forward in Xu Qing's direction, causing the arm chains to start stretching out.

A moment later, it smashed down into the jungle, felling trees and causing cracks to spread out in the earth.

Xu Qing entered the profound radiance state and started fleeing, making sure to plaster a terrified look onto his face. Although it seemed unlikely the giant head could think clearly enough to realize it was being tricked, Xu Qing wanted to make sure he had really hooked the giant head, so he yelled, "Why won't you just die? What do you want??"

The giant head rolled toward him, laughing madly as it picked up speed. The ghost ward trembled, and then a host of ghost hands shot out in pursuit of the head.

Things were playing out very similarly to the previous night as Xu Qing dashed into the valley. The giant head seemed supremely confident in being able to get at Xu Qing now that he was in the valley. Either that, or it just wasn't thinking clearly. Without pausing at all, it rolled right into the valley after him, howling along the way.

But as soon as it was inside, the howling ceased.

Rumbling sounds filled the valley as the rolling head spun off to the side. Instead of the half-witted expression on its face, it now looked terrified. Large portions of its skin were now rotting. However, no blood seeped out. After all, the head didn't have any blood in it, but rather, some other special substance. That said, it didn't matter how special that substance was, it couldn't stand up to the aura of a poison pill from a previous epoch.

As the head tumbled to the side, Xu Qing's hands flashed in a double-handed incantation gesture, and then he shoved his hands out. In response, a huge bluegreen dragon appeared behind him, which smashed down onto the valley.

RUMBLE!

The valley collapsed, and the aura of the poison spill exploded out in all directions.

The giant head simply couldn't escape it. As it was infected, the terror on its face grew more intense. Finally, a popping sound rang out as the head exploded into numerous smaller heads which tried to race away from the poison.

However, the power of that poison pill was terrifying. Just leaving the area of effect didn't mean that the poison would just go away. Although the poison wasn't necessarily very fast-acting, it was clearly potent. And though the giant head was bizarre, it obviously could be poisoned.

Killing intent burned in Xu Qing as he flew forth, lifting his right hand to summon the heavenly saber, which he slashed down toward the heads. Everything shook as the golden crow rose up as well, surrounded by black flames that burned everything they touched.

Neither the shadow nor Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior dared to do anything. Both were too scared of the poison. The beetles, on the other hand, were more used to the poison, and raced out to start devouring the heads.

Xu Qing unleashed a second slash of his saber, causing intense rumbling sounds to echo out. Meanwhile, the heads screamed shrilly as they fled.

The monk's head was really a strange thing, as the smaller versions it had broken into could actually break into even tinier versions, which was exactly what happened.

Seeing that, Xu Qing didn't keep attacking. Instead, he took out a magical device he had acquired from Sima Ling that specifically targeted grues.

It was a beautiful crystal pagoda, and it was simple to operate. All you had to do was pour dharma force into it. Xu Qing activated it, then threw it toward one of the tiny heads. Having been split off twice, this head was clearly weak. As soon as the crystal pagoda reached it, the thing was sealed inside. Xu Qing waved his hand to collect it, then turned and started moving in the opposite direction.

He knew that the poison pill was terrifying, but what he had used just now was simply the aura of the pill, not the actual pill itself. There was a big difference. As such, he wasn't sure exactly how strong it was.

However, considering that the monk head had split itself into even smaller parts to flee, it seemed likely that it would survive. Therefore, after successfully retaliating for the previous night, Xu Qing chose to leave. Having acquired a specimen, he could study it later and figure out a way to actually kill the monk's head.

Maybe once I'm finally able to study the inside of the taboo poison pill, I can use that to kill the thing!

Suppressing his killing intent, he made his way off into the distance.

A few days passed.

He had no way of knowing how things ended up for that monk's head. But the ghost ward never appeared again. Nor did he use the ghost flute to check on it. Until he was sure he could kill that thing, he didn't see the point. However, he did take out his bamboo slip and carve 'Monk's Head' on it.

At that point, he focused all of his energy on searching for the poisonous beasts he needed. The search method was simple. He had his shadow infect other beasts with shadow eyes, which allowed him to widen his search perimeter. As time passed, his search efforts yielded good results, and he found all of the poisonous beasts he needed.

At the same time, he used the poisons he had bought, plus the ones he was harvesting, to constantly transform his beetles. Thanks to that, the beetles were getting stronger and stronger. That said, each transformation took more time, so Xu Qing was thinking of heading to the Supreme Vastness daoist temple in the ruins, to hopefully gain more enlightenment of the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber.

Just as he was thinking that, his shadow sent him some joyful emotional fluctuations.

“... idiot... close... please praise....”

“Idiot?” Xu Qing said, surprised.

“Milord, milord,” the patriarch said, coalescing in the open, “Little Shadow is trying to say one of its shadow eyes spotted the idiot from the First Peak somewhere close by. It looks like he’s up to something.” The patriarch happened to leave out an explanation for what the shadow meant by ‘please praise.’ [1]

You want Fiendish Xu to praise you? Oh, silly shadow. With me here to translate for you, don’t even dream of it!

Chapter 249: Sorry to Disturb You

“Wu Jianwu?” Xu Qing said, as he squatted at the top of a tree. His eyes glittered.

Wu Jianwu had provoked Xu Qing out of nowhere out on the Forbidden Sea. Later, he had seemed absolutely terrified of Xu Qing, and didn’t seem threatening at all. In fact, when Xu Qing killed Wu Jianwu’s attendant, Wu Jianwu took the initiative to pay the fine. [1]

After thinking about it, Xu Qing decided there was no need to go see Wu Jianwu. Instead, he would go directly to the Supreme Vastness daoist temple.

Except then he asked, “What’s he doing?”

The shadow stretched out into a number of different shapes. Apparently, the scene visible to it through its shadow eye was too complicated to convey easily, so finally it split itself apart into a handful of different images. There were about a dozen of them, and they all depicted beasts of some sort. Each beast was different, but they all had one thing in common: they had swollen bellies. Then the shadow created an image of Wu Jianwu, sitting next to one of the beasts and rubbing its belly.

Xu Qing hadn’t been particularly curious about what Wu Jianwu was up to, but upon seeing these images, he was completely taken aback.

Off to the side, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior gasped and said, “What’s this all about? What’s the idiot doing? And what’s going on with those beasts’ bellies. Are they pregnant?” The patriarch’s soul body shivered, and his expression was one of complete incredulity. “Milord, should we go take a closer look? I have the feeling that... the idiot is up to something big!!”

Xu Qing thought about it. He wasn’t an inherently curious person, but the images were so bizarre that he couldn’t resist the urge to see with his own eyes.

“Lead the way.”

The shadow excitedly pointed in the direction to go. Xu Qing followed immediately, and they disappeared into the jungle.

Before long, Xu Qing found himself looking at a mountain. It was actually part of one of the branches of the Mountains of Truth that stretched into Forbidden by the Phoenix.

Xu Qing studied it, then sped up the mountain and over it to the other side. There, hidden amidst lush plants and vegetation, was a crevice.

It was only about three meters from top to bottom, and was naturally formed. Based on its location, it wasn't easy to spot. In fact, without the shadow leading the way, Xu Qing would never have found it.

As he stood in front of the crevice, an odd expression appeared on his face. The fact that this place was so well-hidden went to show how careful Wu Jianwu had been in selecting it. After considering the matter further, Xu Qing cautiously entered the crevice, still following the lead of his shadow. The crevice led deeper into the mountain than he'd expected. As he got further in, the air turned more humid, making it seem like it led to a river inside the mountain. The path split numerous times, making the entire thing like a huge labyrinth. Without his shadow, Xu Qing would have had a very hard time finding his way.

Before long he reached the end of the path. Astonishingly, it overlooked a huge cavern. Hanging from the ceiling just inside was a bat, which was the creature that the shadow had been viewing the area through.

As Xu Qing neared, he looked down into the cavern at an incomparably bizarre scene.

There were over twenty beasts in the cavern. They included wolves, tigers, and other strange creatures, and all of them had been sealed in place. They lay there with their bellies swollen as if they were pregnant.

A pond had been hewn out in the cave, within which was some sort of liquid that let off a strong medicinal liquid aroma.

Wu Jianwu, his face battered and bruised, squatted next to the pond, filling a stone bowl with liquid. Then he walked over to a huge bear with a swollen belly, who he started to feed the liquid to. The bear looked furious, and seemed to want to struggle free. But it was sealed in place and couldn't fight back. It couldn't even get to its feet.

Wu Jianwu's expression was one of tender kindness as he fed the bear and simultaneously rubbed its belly.

"It's normal to have a bit of a reaction," he said softly. "Just hold on a bit longer. The rest of my life depends on you. The little ones will be born soon. Once the little ones are out, I'll be a force to reckon with. Then I'll make sure Master Shengyun knows what a real chosen is like! Who is the greatest chosen of all time? Only the great and amazing Wu Jianwu!"

The way Wu Jianwu was grinding his teeth seemed to scare the bear, and it started to struggle even harder to get free. Wu Jianwu patted it softly.

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“Be good now,” he said, making sure to keep his voice soothing. “Don’t wriggle around. It’s not good for the little ones! Those little ones need to be born without a hitch. If you serve me well, I’ll take good care of you.”

Seeing all of this, Xu Qing’s eyes widened.

Off to the side, Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was suddenly struck with inspiration, and took out a jade slip to record what was happening. Perhaps because he was so astonished by what he was seeing, he made a noise.

That, in turn, caused Wu Jianwu to realize someone else was present, and he spun around, a vicious look on his face.

“Heaven and earth are my bedside; I’m on to you, don’t think you can hide!”? Even as the words left his mouth, he saw Xu Qing standing there with a look of shock on his face. “Xu Qing?”

Wu Jianwu was absolutely shaken, and couldn’t fathom how Xu Qing had found him despite all the effort he had put into finding a good hiding spot. Looking down at the animals with the swollen bellies, and then at the expression on Xu Qing’s face, he gasped.

“You don’t understand, Xu Qing.”

“Sorry to disturb you,” Xu Qing said. Looking deeply at Wu Jianwu, he turned and walked away. There was no question in his mind that Wu Jianwu was off in the head.

Seeing that reaction, Wu Jianwu was suddenly so nervous and scared that, completely forgetting to speak in poetry, he ran after Xu Qing, shouting, “Xu Qing, it’s not what you think!”

Wu Jianwu felt both anxious and humiliated. Ever since he got that bottle from the wish box, he had been depressed for a long time. But he had never been able to make himself throw it away. [2]

After doing a lot of research, he had pieced together enough clues to determine the identity of the almighty being that had put that bottle in the wish box. It was a nonhuman cultivator who was a follower of Ancient Emperor Dark Serenity.

When the First Peak suffered defeat at the hands of Master Shengyun, Wu Jianwu had sworn an oath that he would teach Master Shengyun a lesson. Therefore, he had come to Forbidden by the Phoenix in the hopes of reestablishing a bloodline from a previous epoch. The reason he didn’t want to do it in the sect was because he needed to maintain face. And of course, he was worried that people in the sect would get the wrong idea about what was going on. He also had to guard against spying. Therefore, he had come to this secret location, a place where he could never possibly have expected Xu Qing to find him.

If Xu Qing went back to the sect and spread rumors about what he’d seen, Wu Jianwu knew his reputation would be destroyed. He could just imagine everyone in the sect staring at him. The thought caused his scalp to tingle so hard it felt like it would explode.

Seeing that he couldn’t catch up to Xu Qing, he called, “I’ll pay money, Xu Qing! Don’t tell anyone about this!”

“Everyone has their own way of living,” Xu Qing called back. “It’s fine.”

“It’s really not like that!!” Wu Jianwu’s face was nearly purple as he screamed, “I’ll give you 300,000 spirit stones! Xu Qing!!”

Xu Qing had just stepped out of the crevice and onto the mountain when he heard that. He stopped in place.

A moment later, Wu Jianwu rushed out of the crevice and shoved a pile of spirit notes in Xu Qing’s direction.

“Take them, Xu Qing. You have to take them. Otherwise I can never rest at ease. It’s really not what you think. I... I... I....”

Xu Qing took the spirit notes and nodded earnestly. “I didn’t see anything.”

Yet Wu Jianwu still seemed worried. “What are you doing in Forbidden by the Phoenix, Xu Qing? If you need any help, just say the word.”

“Looking for poisonous substances.”

Hearing that, Wu Jianwu blurted, “Poisonous substances? Hey, I know this area like the back of my hand. I can help!”

“That won’t be necessary.” Xu Qing turned to leave.

“Don’t go, Xu Qing! Just wait here for a minute. This mountain has a place with exactly the kind of poison you’re looking for. I’ll go harvest it for you!!” With that, he rushed back into the crevice.

He really was going to harvest some poison for Xu Qing. Without doing that, he wouldn’t be able to rest at ease. In fact, he didn’t even wait for a response from Xu Qing. In his rush, he didn’t notice that an eye was now attached to his shadow, and was watching his every move.

Xu Qing looked down at his shadow, which quickly created an image for him to look at. It depicted Wu Jianwu frantically rushing back to the cavern. Then it revealed Wu Jianwu diving into the pond there and swimming down into its depths to a tunnel. Into the tunnel he went, and then he popped out in a large open area. There was a huge lake there. However, the way the shadow depicted the lake, it looked like a human face. And the way the liquid moved, it seemed viscous.

After reaching the lake, Wu Jianwu dug something out, put it in a stone bowl, and then turned around. The images portrayed by the shadow weren’t very comprehensive, so Xu Qing wasn’t quite sure what to make of them. Eventually, Wu Jianwu returned.

“Is this the kind of thing you’re looking for, Xu Qing?” Wu Jianwu handed him the stone bowl.

Xu Qing looked at it, and his eyes narrowed. Inside of the bowl was something that looked frozen. It seemed liquid, yet not liquid. It was blue, and crystalline, and emitted a fragrant aroma.

“Immortal ice?” he murmured.

He had read about immortal ice in the medicinal codex from Grandmaster Bai. It wasn’t a poison medicine, but rather, a very rare substance usually used as a catalyst. Based on the description

written by Grandmaster Bai, Xu Qing was certain that immortal ice was somehow connected to the 'immortal energy' mentioned in many ancient records.

"There's a strange lake beneath this mountain," Wu Jianwu explained. "There's a lot of this stuff in it. I took some of it away, but it usually melts within an hour or two. There doesn't seem to be any way to preserve it, so I could never bring it back to the sect. It's harmless to humans, but one time when I gave it to a beast, the thing rotted away and died instantly. That's why I was thinking it's probably some kind of poison."

"Take me to this lake," Xu Qing said.

Wu Jianwu immediately led the way. Right now, he would agree to anything that Xu Qing asked for. Normally speaking, he wouldn't ever tell people details of this secret area he'd found, but now he wasn't hesitating at all. Before long, the two of them reached the lake.

Chapter 250: Big Changes to Emperor-Receiving

A massive blue lake stretched out in front of Xu Qing. The water was extremely clear, but close examination revealed that it was actually frozen. A chaotic tangle of colorful plants grew on the lake shore. Even the ceiling of the cave was covered in moss. There was clearly a lot of moisture in the air.

Xu Qing looked around. Whether it was what he could see or what he could sense, nothing about the area seemed dangerous. However, he remained on guard as he carefully approached the lake and looked down into it. When he saw what lay at the bottom of the frozen water, he frowned slightly. The lake floor was covered with an assortment of bones. There were bones of both men and women, all humans, and they were scattered everywhere, seemingly a reminder of some sort of tragic event.

"I found this place by accident," Wu Jianwu said. Seemingly worried Xu Qing might be getting the wrong idea about his intentions, he continued, "I've been here a few times and never ran into anything dangerous. The bones down there don't have any sort of mutagen in them."

Xu Qing nodded. After looking more closely at the lake, Xu Qing thought back to the description of immortal ice from Grandmaster Bai's medicinal codex and realized that the frozen substance here differed slightly from the description he was familiar with.

It was more fragrant.

That fragrant aroma was stronger the closer you got to the edge of the lake. It was sweet, even unctuous; the longer the aroma stayed in your nostrils, the worse it smelled. That did not match what he had read about immortal ice.

Xu Qing's guess was that years ago, before changing into its current form, this place had been a normal pond infused with immortal energy. Most likely, this lake was indeed like the description from the medicinal codex, in that it had been formed by immortal energy. However, during the process of transforming into immortal ice, something different happened. Perhaps this was a mutated variety of immortal ice.

Xu Qing wasn't sure of the exact details, but he was certain this stuff was worthy of further research.

He was just about to start collecting some specimens when he noticed something at the bottom of the lake and exhaled in surprise. His life flames ignited, and his cultivation base erupted with power, causing a sea of flames to spread out around him.

Wu Jianwu's eyes widened, and he backed up a few steps, unsure of what was going on. "What's wrong?"

Meanwhile, Xu Qing focused the power of his life flames on his eyes, causing them to glitter more brightly than stars as he stared at the lake. Among the bones and rubble on the lake floor was a stone that seemed very familiar to him.

Noticing Xu Qing's gaze, Wu Jianwu quickly said, "What are you looking at? Is there something good down there? It's too bad this lake is so bizarre. I wouldn't dare go down inside. In the past I was thinking of trying to fish out the bones, but I wasn't—"

All of a sudden, the stone that Xu Qing found familiar wriggled, then shot out of the lake as if it had been grabbed by an invisible hand. Dripping water, it shot toward him and then hovered right in front of him.

Wu Jianwu gasped.

After closely examining it, Xu Qing realized why it seemed familiar to him. It had the aura of the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber.

Astonishingly, this stone contained the divine resonance of the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber! Intrigued, Xu Qing took the stone. Around the same time, his shadow returned to him. The shadow was what he had used to take the stone from the lake.

Looking back into the lake, it was now possible to see that, buried in the ground beneath the spot where the stone had previously lay, was a stone stele. As the water rippled, the silt atop the stone stele stirred, revealing some calligraphy and an image.

Xu Qing looked more closely.

"Immortal Bathing Cistern of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan?" When Wu Jianwu read the calligraphy, he let loose a cry of surprise.

Xu Qing was also stunned. Next, his gaze slid from the calligraphy to the image, which was actually a map of the continent of South Phoenix.

The Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan was identified. Of course, that area was now called the Violet Lands. The map also showed the location of the Immortal Bathing Cistern. And not too far away from it was another location: Crown Prince's Mansion.

That was the same location as the ruins of the Supreme Vastness daoist temple that Xu Qing planned to go to next.

The history of this lake was now clear. And the name Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan caused memories to stir in Xu Qing. The first place he had heard about that kingdom was in the Violet Lands, when Chen Feiyuan explained the details of the eight great clans. That was when Xu

Qing had learned the long history of the place in South Phoenix, and how it had been ruled by a fantastic bloodline. [1]

They can form symbiotic relationships with magical treasures....

It made him think of how Chen Feiyuan had seemed both strong and weak at the same time.

At this point, Xu Qing harvested some of the mutated immortal ice. Then, without any hesitation he left the cave.

Wu Jianwu escorted him back to the crevice. Once outside, Wu Jianwu stood there looking at him, rubbing his hands together anxiously. He looked like he wanted to say something, but was hesitating to open his mouth.

"I'm not going to tell anyone," Xu Qing said. "Don't worry." Giving Wu Jianwu a long look, he turned and became a bright beam of light that shot off into the distance.

Wu Jianwu remained standing there alone, looking depressed and wondering if he'd handled everything correctly.

After a long moment passed, he gritted his teeth.

Stop overthinking things. Xu Qing is overbearing, but I'm pretty sure he's the kind of person who keeps his word. Worst case scenario... I'll just stay away from the sect for a while. I'm not going to give up until the little ones are born!

Wu Jianwu had clearly been deeply affected by the defeat at the hands of Master Shengyun. Eyes bloodshot, he turned and went back into the cave to take care of the beasts with the swollen bellies.

It was late. The moon hung high over Forbidden by the Phoenix, making the trees seem like evil ghosts. Strange howls mingled with the shrieking of beasts.

Xu Qing sped through the pitch black jungle, leaping through the trees at top speed. He had no intention of spreading rumors about Wu Jianwu.

In this chaotic world, different people had their own way of living, and though Wu Jianwu apparently had some very strange hobbies, it wasn't Xu Qing's business. What was more, Wu Jianwu had taken him to that immortal ice. There were all kinds of weird things in the big, wide world.

Wu Jianwu is definitely up to something big, though. Shaking his head, Xu Qing cleared his thoughts and eventually found a tree hollow he could stay in for the night. After checking the area for safety, he set up some defenses, then crawled inside.

Once secure, he took out the immortal ice he'd harvested.

Enough time had passed that much of the immortal ice had melted. Based on what Wu Jianwu had said, it wouldn't last much more than about two hours.

Taking out a bottle, he opened it and released the beetles onto the immortal ice. They immediately started feeding. As he observed them eating, he didn't see anything special happening. However, he let the beetles devour all of it.

After it was gone, Xu Qing observed the beetles for a short time, then put them back into the bottle, then put a special mark on the bottle. Maybe after they had time to digest the immortal ice, something would happen.

Having accomplished that, Xu Qing took out the stone he'd acquired with the divine resonance of the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber. As he sought enlightenment from it, the image of a slashing saber appeared to him.

A tremor passed through him and he closed his eyes.

And thus, the night passed.

The next morning at dawn, he opened his eyes. The first thing he did was look down at the stone.

This stone gave me a much deeper understanding of the Supreme Vastness Solitary Saber. Xu Qing was very pleased at how much he'd benefitted. Next he checked on the beetles that had consumed the immortal ice. Based on his blood connection to them, he could sense that the beetles were in a state similar to drunkenness. They weren't moving around very much. However, their auras were changing.

Xu Qing was excited about that. However, he couldn't tell what specifically about them was changing. For now, he didn't want to disturb them. Putting the bottle away, he made sure to take note of the location of the lake, then crawled out of the tree hollow and continued on his way.

His plan was to go to the ruins of the Supreme Vastness daoist temple and see if he could find a destined opportunity to gain enlightenment of a second saber move. If that didn't work, he would continue studying the stone he had found.

The edge of the stone is sharp, similar to a saber. It must be connected to the Supreme Vastness daoist temple. Maybe it's part of a divine likeness!

Ten days passed.

Xu Qing kept traveling the entire time. Occasionally he would stop to harvest poisonous plants or other items. He kept a close eye on the beetles that had consumed the immortal ice. They still seemed to be in a dormant state.

How long is it going to last? If he wasn't able to sense that they were alive, he probably would have assumed they were dead. I guess I'll just have to wait and see.

Further ahead, past a downward slope, he spotted some ruins. It looked like an old city that had long since been sinking into oblivion.

It was currently noon, and the bright sunlight shone through the leafy canopy, creating a mottled atmosphere as Xu Qing sped through the trees.

As he looked at the ruined city, the dappled sunlight made the place look incredibly ancient. From his current position, he was able to spot a magnificent temple in the middle of the city. He could only make out the basic shape of the structure, but could already tell that it was profoundly ancient.

“Finally here,” he murmured, then sped down toward the ruins.

After enough time passed for half an incense stick to burn, he was in the ruins.

A vast distance away, near the Forbidden Sea on the Revered Ancient mainland, a shocking event played out that shook heaven and earth. It was something so dramatic it caused astonishment among all of the powerful groups in the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture.

For the first time in two hundred years, the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect of the Seven Sect Coalition activated their taboo magical treasure!

Apparently, they were planning to absolutely exterminate Seven Blood Eyes!

Seven days previous, the Seven Sect Coalition yet again sent orders to Seven Blood Eyes, only to have Sir Bloodsmelter drag things out and not follow instructions.

One day previous, the highest authoritative body in the Seven Sect Coalition, their senate, passed a measure to deal with the situation. Then they sent an envoy to Seven Blood Eyes to explain.

According to the measure, Sir Bloodsmelter and the seven peaklords had one day to report to the coalition for punishment. If they didn't comply, then Seven Blood Eyes would be destroyed, and all disciples from there would be executed.

All nonhumans and visitors to Seven Blood Eyes had three days to leave, otherwise they would be punished along with the sect.

It caused a huge stir. Many nonhuman visitors packed up and left, as did everyone who had come from the Seven Sect Coalition. As for Seven Blood Eyes, everything suddenly seemed very unstable, and everyone was trembling in anxiety.

The next day, when Sir Bloodsmelter still refused to follow orders... the Seven Sect Coalition was enraged, and the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect unleashed their taboo magical treasure.

A blood-red beam of light shot out of the Seven Sect Coalition, rising into midair to create a blood-colored seed. Then... it shot to the north!

Except, Seven Blood Eyes was to the south, not the north!

Within the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, there was a mountain range and a river that intersected to divide the prefecture into east, west, south and north. The mountains were called the Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains, and the river was the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River.

The Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains connected the south and the north, while the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River connected east and west. In the middle, where they met, which was also the very center of the Emperor-Receiving Prefecture, there was a sect.

That sect was the Young Arbiter Sect. The Young Arbiter Sect didn't have many direct dealings with the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society. However, everyone knew that the Young Arbiter Sect had been set up by the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society to keep the Seven Sect Coalition in check, sort of like a henchman.

The sect headquarters of the Young Arbiter Sect was a huge dam that impeded a tributary of the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River that should have eventually reached the Seven Sect

Coalition's port. That blockage caused problems for the Seven Sect Coalition when it came to purging mutagen from spirit energy, and had a big negative influence on the coalition.

To the Seven Sect Coalition, the Young Arbiter Sect was like a fish bone stuck in the throat. They had repeatedly requested that the dam be opened, but the Supreme Arbiter Immortal Society always intervened and made harsh demands.

The Seven Sect Coalition couldn't target the Young Arbiter Sect militarily unless they were confident they could defeat them instantly. Otherwise, any such efforts would be foiled. Furthermore, because of the delicate balance of power, it wasn't possible to power up a taboo magical treasure without everyone becoming suspicious.

Other groups in the area were more than happy to see humans fighting each other, and did everything they could to stir up trouble in that regard. When the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect powered up their taboo magical treasure, and used it to create a blood-colored seed, they were actually targeting... the Young Arbiter Sect! The blood-colored seed moved with incredible speed, piercing across a vast distance to land right in the middle of the Young Arbiter Sect.

The Seven Sect Coalition had obviously been pretending to advance along one path while secretly going along another.

Though it had seemed that tensions with Seven Blood Eyes had been growing, the reality was that it was a smokescreen! They had just needed an excuse to activate their taboo, and thus get rid of that fish bone stuck in the throat!

As soon as the blood-colored seed landed, a massive gruish blood tree sprouted up in the middle of the Young Arbiter Sect. The tree pulsed, causing a vast number of cultivators in the Young Arbiter Sect to die instantly. As their blood was sucked into the tree, the survivors were seriously injured, and blood sprayed out of their mouths. The tree pulsed again, sending out heaven-rending, earth-crushing power, crushing the ground, and causing countless structures to collapse. That included the dam.

Without the blockage of the dam, the waters of the Everlasting Immortal Profundity River flowed through the Supreme Arbiter Salvation Mountains without anything to stop them. The third pulse of the tree caused flowers to bloom all over it. At the same time, an ancient voice spoke from within.

"The Young Arbiter Sect killed disciples of our coalition. The evidence is clear. The Young Arbiter Sect shall be wiped out of existence!"

Blood-colored light rose into the dome of heaven, creating a spell formation. Within it, over a hundred figures appeared, all of them bursting with astonishing auras and towering killing intent!

All of it happened too quickly.

In order to intimidate Seven Blood Eyes earlier, the Seven Sect Coalition had activated three of their sects' taboo magical treasures. At this moment, only the Soaring Cloud Sword Sect activated their taboo magical treasures. But then, an instant later, all six of the other sects also did the same. In the blink of an eye, the sky above the Seven Sect Coalition completely transformed.

Everything under heaven shook violently!